

Argentine Cinema and National Identity

1966–1976

Carolina Rocha



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and
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(1966–1976)

Carolina Rocha

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*In memory of
Paulina Piselli (1937–2017)*

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When I was writing this manuscript, my mother passed away. She was a relentless supporter of my studies and research and was very proud of my Fulbright in Liverpool. This book is dedicated to her memory.

Introduction

In March 1966, an article about the Argentine School for Cinema in the daily newspaper *El mundo* urged Argentina to usher in a new era of filmmaking, one that would reflect its country's greatest hopes, fears, and ideas:

Desde fines del año 1957 recién ahora podemos ponerla en marcha después de tantas esperanzas acumuladas [...] Los países más adelantados, Francia, Italia, Rusia, Estados Unidos y Japón y otros envían sus ideas, muestran su país al exterior a través de ese vehículo que es la cinematografía [...] El cine argentino debe y puede manifestarse, convirtiéndose adentro del país en instrumento de opinión de todos los argentinos, puede y debe ser fuera de nuestro país el mejor embajador de nuestra industria.

[Since the end of 1957, it is only now that we can implement it after so much hoping [...] The most advanced nations, France, Italy, Russia, the United States, Japan, and others, send their ideas, showing their country abroad through the means of cinema [...] Argentine cinema can and must manifest itself, becoming a means of expressing the opinions of all Argentines within the country; outside of our country, it can and must be the best ambassador of our industry] ('Escuela,' 1966, 16)

Making Argentine cinema a distinctive brand and establishing a school for cinema in which directors, scriptwriters, and technicians could be trained meant greater professionalization for those involved in film production in Argentina.¹ It also constituted a precondition for representing Argentine-ness (*argentinidad*) on local and foreign screens.² Just as Andrew Higson explains that tracing the development of British nationhood corresponds to analyzing filmic production of the past (2000a, 35), so presenting the definition of Argentine-ness and its cinematic depiction in the decade 1966–1976 constitutes a central endeavor of *Argentine Cinema and National Identity*. This study aims to situate Argentine film during those years in its historical context, taking into account the overall landscape of filmmaking in Argentina. Similar to other media in the artistic domain—the visual arts and music—Argentine film was seen as a medium that would allow a dialogue with the

cinematographic productions of more technologically advanced countries (Giunta, 2008, 23).³ In 1966, Argentine cinema was therefore encouraged to create and circulate images about the nation, providing continuity with the blossoming film production of the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁴

Cinema played a central role in Argentine cultural life during the period 1966–1976 despite a highly volatile political background.⁵ This decade, which saw a succession of military and democratic administrations—none of which could finish out its term—ended with the *coup d'état* of March 1976.⁶ Thus, in these years, Argentina's political life was heavily influenced by the participation of the armed forces in civic affairs, the proscription and return of Peronism, and the upsurge in political violence.⁷ These events had a tremendous impact on nationhood and nation building, particularly because the *zeitgeist* was characterized by a demand for change that affected both Latin American nations and their cinemas. Ignacio del Valle refers to those processes:

A uno y otro lado del espectro político—aunque con connotaciones distintas—se invocaba la idea de ‘refundar’ la nación, de hacer una patria ‘nueva,’ de emprender una ‘revolución.’ El cine latinoamericano, que vivía entonces su propio proceso de renovación formal, temática y productiva, entroncó bien con ese anhelo renovador.

[At both ends of the political spectrum—albeit with different connotations—the idea of ‘refounding’ the nation, of making a ‘new’ *patria*, of starting a ‘revolution’ was invoked. Latin American cinema, which was experiencing its own process of formal, thematic, and productive renovation, merged well with that desire for renewal] (2010, 5)

Influenced by these epochal motivations, Argentine cinema was entrusted with the responsibility of representing the nation—both internally and abroad—precisely at a moment when Argentina was subject to centrifugal forces that jeopardized its viability and cohesion.⁸ Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Leonardo Favio, Manuel Antín, and René Múgica accepted that challenge and made the representation of Argentine-ness a central concern of their films.

To legitimate the different sectors' claims about the nation, governments from 1966 to 1976—which included the terms in office of Juan Carlos Onganía, Roberto Levingston, Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, Héctor José Cámpora, Juan Domingo Perón, and Isabel Martínez de Perón—saw film as a particularly important medium to nurture and control. An illustration of the prominence given to Argentine film production is the fact that three cinema laws were passed during this period: 16,955 (1966), 17,741 (1968), and 20,170 (1973). These laws attempted to change the main features of Argentine cinema which, for Pablo Piedras, was in a constant state of dependency and underdevelopment (2011, 45).⁹ While well-meaning, these pieces of legislation were nonetheless far from uniformly hailed. Problematic aspects of Law

16,955 that benefitted producers and directors at the expense of exhibitors and audiences were revised in Law 17,741, while others remained unchanged even in Law 20,170. Although the passing of these laws generated controversy, all three sought to guarantee a steady film production, privileging the representation of national themes through subsidies. Thus, as Andrew Higson explains, ‘in economic protectionism, cultural tradition, national identity, and cultural energy are assumed, negatively, rather than planned for and fostered’ (1995, 12). Indeed, the rationale behind the different laws that regulated film highlighted the urgent need for filmic products of quality in order to receive international recognition and gain access to different markets.

The state’s protectionism of the local film industry came with strings attached. Films were classified according to their content, a step that impinged on their release and distribution, and subjected to censorship. The Film Rating Board sanitized narratives that contravened the ‘desired’ version of what the nation ought to be. Here it is important to consider John Hill’s reminder of the cultural value of national films: ‘the case of a national cinema [...] is largely dependent upon cultural arguments. In particular, it is dependent upon a fundamental argument regarding the value of a home-grown cinema to the cultural life of the nation’ (1992, 11). While Hill was applying these concepts mainly to British cinema, the competing relationship between opposed sets of images can also pertain to Argentine cinema produced between 1966 and 1976, with the caveat that censorship was unevenly implemented and forcefully resisted by both those taking part in the creative process of filmmaking and progressive sectors of civil society.

One consequence of the state’s protection is that many critics and scholars have characterized the cinematic production of this period as propaganda. For instance, film director and critic Raúl Beceyro argues that ‘a partir de 1966 se le planteó al cine argentino un nuevo problema: ¿de qué manera escapar a la complicidad, si era posible?’ [from 1966, Argentine cinema faced a new problem: how, if at all possible, to avoid complicity?] (1997, 11). With the exception of directors engaged in political cinema, the accusation of complicity with the military authorities levelled at other filmmakers active in these years has had a significant influence on scholarly publications about the filmic production of this period, which has thus been overlooked and/or disparaged. One of the goals of *Argentine Cinema and National Identity* is to nuance those traditional views, providing a broader picture that illustrates the trials faced by actors, directors, producers, and exhibitors as well as the opinions of domestic critics and audiences.¹⁰

Of particular import in relation to the period 1966–1976 are three popular films directed by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson which paved the way for the two film genres that will be the focus of this study: the *gauchesque* and the historical film. In 1968, Torre Nilsson took a daring step when he chose to adapt Argentina’s epic poem, *Martín Fierro*, for the silver screen. When he received the Silver Seagull at the International Film Festival of Rio de Janeiro for his adaptation, he declared, ‘estoy convencido, que los temas argentinos, muy nuestros, han

sido hasta el momento increíblemente inexplorados. Y gustan, claro que gustan. Es un aporte nuevo, raro, fresco, a la cinematografía' [I am convinced that Argentine themes, very much our own, have been incredibly underexploited. And they are liked, of course they are liked. It brings something new, rare, and fresh to cinematography] ('Martín Fierro es el mejor,' 1969, 61).¹¹ While Torre Nilsson's assertion forgets other periods rich in films about Argentine history, such as the 1910s and 1940s (Jakubowicz and Radetich, 2006, 81; Lusnich, 2007, 28), his adaptation of *Martín Fierro*—which touched on a fundamental aspect of Argentine identity, the *gauchesque*—marked a distinct point in Argentine film history, putting an end to that absence of Argentine-ness in Argentine films. His belief in Argentine themes and his first-hand experience of the success of *Martín Fierro* drove him to produce and direct two historical films: *El santo de la espada* [*The Saint of the Sword*] and *Güemes, la tierra en armas* [Güemes, Land up in Arms] (throughout the book, films with an official English title appear in italics, titles that are translations are left in roman). His three films catered to the public's and the critics' thirst for motion pictures in which national identity was a central concern.¹² Whether the filmmaker promoted an Argentine cinema from altruistic love of his country or for his own personal benefit, in the late 1960s, he understood the importance of the domestic audience's support for Argentine cinema. In an interview, he held that: 'el cine argentino no es una responsabilidad de unos pocos hombres que lo hacemos, sino una responsabilidad del país todo' [Argentine cinema is not the responsibility of the few men who make it; it is the responsibility of the whole country] (Monteagudo, 1998, non. pag.). As if agreeing with Torre Nilsson, popular magazines, newspapers, and trade journals in the late 1960s and early 1970s were unfailingly supportive of Argentine cinema as a national industry with its own star system and as a valid source of work for technicians, cameramen, and those working in movie theatres as ticket sellers, ushers, and projectionists. It is that enthusiasm that this study hopes to describe while examining the imbrication of nationhood and national identity in the cinematic production of this period. *Argentine Cinema and National Identity*, then, examines Argentine cinema from 1966 to 1976 and explores the ways in which two genres—the *gauchesque* and historical—shaped, challenged, and reconfigured Argentine national identity during this unstable period.

In addition to political instability, economic conditions were also challenging as Argentina sought to maintain its industrial production while competing with other capitalist nations. One area of that competition was film, particularly Hollywood productions that attracted large Argentine audiences. To frame the way in which that rivalry was played out, this study owes much to Higson's concepts about national cinema as theorized in *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*. Higson lists the five economic policies adopted to compete with Hollywood productions: collusion, direct competition, product differentiation, production of art cinema, and regulation by the state (1995, 9–12). The three latter policies will inform the analysis of the Argentine films produced between 1966 and 1976 here. Product

differentiation—that is to say, producing films about specifically Argentine topics that could not be made by Hollywood, and the production of art cinema that was also commercially successful given the size and characteristics of the Argentine market—was the main strategy to which a group of Argentine filmmakers resorted to gain domestic viewers. These bottom-up tactics were complemented by the state’s regulation in the form of loans and subsidies for production as well as the classification of films between those for compulsory and non-compulsory exhibition. If, on one hand, censorship constituted an unwelcome imposition by a paternalist state, on the other, Argentine filmmakers and producers also responded to the emergence of new local social actors—youth, urban middle classes, and intellectuals—and were exposed to the movements for independence and liberation. These developments paralleled and mirrored a tumultuous decade worldwide.

The 1960s were, indeed, years of intense social change all around the world, as they were in Argentina. According to Sonya Sayres, during that decade, a ‘new fight emerged: the demand among workers, some middle class strata and youth for freedom from the institutions of the quotidian’ (1987, 3). These same calls were also frequent in Argentine society, which was polarized around the idea of national development and liberation: many intellectuals and politicians thought that capitalism and the traditions of Western Europe, namely Catholicism, were the solution to the many structural problems visible in the country, while others argued that Marxism would provide the remedy for the social inequalities of the region. These political debates spilled over into the cultural realm and particularly affected Argentine cinema. Political documentary and social filmmaking, which flourished independently from the state’s protectionism, were crucial modes of expression and mobilization in that decade. As Octavio Getino and Susana Vellegia put it, ‘el cine no sólo daba cuenta de la historia sino que se proponía actuar como un fermento de ella’ [cinema not only talked about history, but also proposed to act as its impetus] (2002, 12).¹³ Directors Fernando Birri, Octavio Getino, Jorge Cedrón, and Fernando Solanas saw film as a powerful medium to enlighten the illiterate rural masses as well as the students and working class who could develop class-based solidarity to fight for radical social change (Burton, 1986; King, 1990; Falicov, 2007; Lusnich and Piedras, 2011; Stites Mor, 2012). They sought to improve Argentines’ awareness of their own country and the region’s dependency and ‘backwardness,’ thus challenging the official discourse of progress.¹⁴ Consequently, their films were censored and only circulated privately in Argentina. This study, however, veers away from the consideration of militant, political, and independent cinema, which have been analyzed extensively. Instead, my investigation focuses on the examination of the Argentine film industry: its laws, challenges, and successes *vis-à-vis* foreign films that circulated in the domestic market. I also concentrate on the way in which a corpus of nine *gauchesque* and historical films/biopics depicted nineteenth-century founding fathers and *caudillos*. These films engaged with national concerns such as the birth of the Argentine nation and the

representation of the country's heritage. More importantly, they generated great interest during production, were reviewed and featured in newspapers and magazines, and were seen by solid numbers of spectators and discussed upon release as representative of Argentina and Argentine-ness, especially because some of the films were based on seminal Argentine poems and novels. The reception of these films is also, therefore, an area which this study explores in detail. To do so, I pay attention to the four areas of film reception—exhibition, audience, performance, and activation—identified by film scholar Robert Allen (1998, 13–21).¹⁵

Because of the importance of Argentine cinema in spreading nationalism, this study is predicated on two fundamental premises. The first is informed by the idea of nationalism as an ideology that sustains the formation and existence of the nation. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as 'an imagined political community' (1991, 6), that is to say, a social construct that integrates heterogeneous elements. For his part, film scholar Philip Schlesinger sees the nation as a communicative space (2000a, 19), an environment in which media shapes the discourses about 'us' and 'them': 'film studies' concern with the role of cinema in the nation is inherently internalist. Its central concern is with how—if at all—the production, circulation and consumption of the moving image is constitutive of the national collectivity' (2000, 24). While Schlesinger suggests that the nation is a monolithic unit molded by media images that distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, Higson proposes that the nation should not be seen as an entity devoid of tension. Rather, he holds that 'the "imagined community" argument [...] sometimes seems unable to acknowledge the cultural difference and diversity that invariably marks both the inhabitants of a particular nation-state and the members of more geographically dispersed "national" communities' (2000, 66). Higson's awareness of the variety of existing views at any given moment presents the nation as an amalgamation of different—and sometimes clashing—opinions. His concepts will guide my analysis of Argentine film during a tumultuous period, when diverse national projects competed among themselves to assert what Argentina should be and the images by which it should be represented. Higson's remarks about cultural difference and diversity are also pertinent to post-1966 Argentine cinema for two reasons. First, if on one hand most of the films to be studied were written and produced in Buenos Aires, thus asserting the cultural prominence of the metropolis over the rest of Argentina, on the other hand, they also depicted provincial lifestyles and rural landscapes as a way of showing the various aspects of the national being.

The second premise of my study, therefore, centers on the idea of nationalism as a fundamental part of the national culture disseminated through films. For Ernest Gellner, nationalism is a deep adjustment between polity and culture (1983, 35), holding that industrial societies that rely on a differentiated division of labor need culture as 'the necessary shared medium' that links citizens to the state through discourses that contribute to build the national (1983, 38). Although he takes a different position, sociologist

Anthony Smith stresses the relationship between nationalism and the past (1995, 3–23) and calls attention to the fact that one of the requisites of the nationalist message is the differentiation between its content and tone: ‘That message is certainly addressed to the imagination of the elite, but even more to the moral will, the emotions and shared memories of the masses’ (2000, 47). Both positions—the one represented by Gellner and the one put forth by Smith—will inform this study as I look at the ways in which different nationalist messages were conveyed through films.

Because of the political tensions of the period 1966–1976, more than one version of nationalism circulated in Argentine cinema. Argentina was affected by the Cold War order of the mid-1960s that pitted Marxism against capitalism. If Marxism was deemed—particularly by the armed forces and Catholic groups—a pernicious system that endangered Western values, Americanization through Hollywood films was seen as equally dangerous to Argentine culture. Even though there was a push for modernization among different local sectors, the imperative to resist external stimuli prompted an attention to domestic issues and a revaluation of Argentine tradition. Therefore, in the state’s protection of and incentives for Argentine films, we can clearly see the overlapping of what scholar Ian Jarvie calls ‘the defence argument’ and ‘the protectionist argument’ is evident (2000, 77). These arguments, which complement the nation-building discourse, justify the need for a national cinema as a way to shield Argentine culture from external influences and as a way to protect a developing industry from competition. I take these arguments into account as I pay special attention to the ways in which the Argentine state encouraged the production and dissemination of certain themes and messages that were transmitted within the Argentine communicative space. I also look at the way films were successfully sanctioned by the state, and thus disseminated forms of nationhood without alienating middle-class viewers.

The main questions of this study are: What were the challenges faced by Argentine cinema as a national film industry from 1966 to 1976? How did Argentine cinema build a sense of nationhood through films about its founding fathers and Argentine heritage? In what ways does this corpus of films help shore up Argentine identity? *Argentine Cinema and National Identity* investigates the way in which popular actors and actresses attracted the domestic audience and the way in which films consequently took on the mission of spreading values that would help unite a politically and culturally polarized country. I also consider the way in which Argentine filmmakers grappled with both censorship and increased competition from foreign films as well as from new technologies. One of these new technologies was the transition from black and white to Eastman color. Another important development was the introduction of television, which allowed the Argentine public to consume audiovisual products at home. I expand the knowledge of Argentine film production with particular attention to its dependency on state funding. Contributing to the revaluation of a corpus of films that has

received little academic attention, but was well-received by local audiences, I examine the impact of political events on Argentine cinema and the way in which films were consequently imbued with the mission of spreading values that would help unite a divided country.

This study fills several notable gaps in the existing bibliography. First, while there are many monographs about the history and development of Argentine cinema (Mathieu, 1974; España, 1984; Foster, 1992; Varea, 1999; Getino, 2005; Falicov, 2007; Stites Mor, 2012), with the exceptions of Ana López's article 'Argentina 1955–1976: The Film Industry and its Margins' (1988) and the excellent monographs by Laura Martins (*En primer plano: literatura y cine en Argentina 1955–1969*, 2001), Laura Podalsky (*Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955–1973*, 2004), and Claudio España (*Cine argentino. Modernidad y vanguardia (1957–1983)*, 2005), few works pay sufficient attention to the period selected for this study. Second, this study provides an in-depth examination of the cinema laws passed after 1966 and their impact on the Argentine film industry. Therefore my focus on the period 1966–1976 makes an original contribution to the study of Argentine cinema in the twentieth century. Third, in Section II, I group several films—many of which have never been studied before—and read them as examples of 'heritage films', that is to say, films that go back to national origins and traditions. Fourth, while some of the films analyzed in Section II and III have been studied in Estela Erasquin's monograph about mythic Argentine heroes and in articles by Tzvi Tal, Laura Radetich, Diana Paladino, and César Maranghello, there is no comprehensive study of them as popular films whose preproduction was closely followed by the media. Consequently, this is the first English-language publication that touches on key films by Argentine directors Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Leonardo Favio, Manuel Antín, and René Múgica, who were nationally and internationally known in the 1960s and 1970s, but have not previously been studied together. Fifth, I focus on these film's blending of features from popular genres, such as the biopic, the war film, and Westerns, and examine the way in which they sought to position themselves as high-quality films that successfully competed with Hollywood products in the Argentine market. *Argentine Cinema and National Identity* offers significant insights into the relationship between film and other cultural productions, thus complementing existing monographs about cultural studies and political formation of the 1960s and 1970s (Podalsky, 2004; Schmucler, 2007; Giunta, 2008). The scope of this study provides continuity to and dialogues with Ana Laura Lusnich's *El drama-folclórico: el universo rural en el cine argentino* (2007), Clara Kriger's *Cine y Peronismo* (2009), Matthew Karush's *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (2012), and Currie Thompson's monograph *Picturing Argentina: Myths, Movies, and the Peronist Vision* (2014).

In this volume, I combine two methodologies: those of a film historian and those of a film scholar. In Section I, I summarize the main political events in Argentina from 1966 to 1976 and the challenges and laws that influenced

Argentine cinema during this period. In this section I analyze a variety of primary sources that include film reviews published in several Argentine newspapers, news clippings from *Gente*, *La capital*, and *El mundo*, and film information found in *El heraldo* and *La gaceta*, two journals for Argentine film distributors. I gathered these materials during two research trips undertaken in the summer of 2011. I visited the Biblioteca Nacional de Argentina and the library of the Argentine Institute of Film (ENERC). I also collected news clippings from *La prensa* at the University of Florida, Gainesville. These sources provide quantitative data about the production, distribution, and reception of films, as well as quantitative information about directors, actors, and films. I argue that, on one hand, film production became a central area of concern for the state, which began passing laws and enforcing censorship on this cultural industry. Namely, the state sought to encourage the representation of national themes. Certain films received good reviews and enjoyed strong box office performances, a fact that made domestic cinema an integral part of the national culture. On the other hand, Argentine cinema was subjected to different and contradictory forces: there was also a push to compete with other cinemas and gain international markets.

In Section II, I provide close analysis of several well-received films to illustrate the way they competed with foreign productions for the Argentine audience and garnered prizes and recognition at international film festivals while also proposing civic models for the national community. The current interest in understanding the impact of globalization on national cinemas can be expanded by my examination of the ways in which Argentine cinema grappled with both censorship and subsidies while trying to relate to national audiences and participate in international film festivals. I study the literary adaptations of key *gauchesque* texts written from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1920s. The *gauchesque* is a literary genre that was organized around the *gauchos*, rural inhabitants of the *pampas*, who were seen as quintessential Argentines. For literary scholar Josefina Ludmer, the genre constitutes ‘a learned use of popular culture’ (2002, 3) for it is based on a ‘delinquent’ or vagrant *gaucho* who is recruited by force to join the patriotic army. In addition, the genre uses the orality of the *gauchos* (their colloquialisms and linguistic idiosyncrasies) by an educated author who seeks to include them into the modern Argentine state (post-1880) (2002, 8). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, five films were financed by the Argentine state: *Martín Fierro* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1968), *Don Segundo Sombra* (Manuel Antin, 1969), *Santos Vega* (Carlos Borcosque Jr., 1971), *Juan Moreira* (Leonardo Favio, 1973), and *Los gauchos judíos* [*Jewish Gauchos*] (Juan José Jusid, 1975). All these films were also directed by well-established directors. In this section, I offer close analysis of these five films, relying on film studies theories on the Westerns (Janet Walker), given that many films were set on the frontier; action films (Mark Gallagher and Yvonne Tasker), because of the many one-to-one combat scenes; and contemporary epics (Robert Burgoyne). I also survey the critical and public reception of these films and examine the ways

in which they contributed to nation building and the spread of nationalism. My analysis approaches these films as heritage films that resort to depicting Argentines' cultural and literary heritage. Finally, I look at the ways in which the main characters relate to the state, concentrating on a major feature of Argentine culture: the civilization-versus-barbarism dichotomy. Indeed, this dichotomy allows me to explore the position of each of the main characters in relation to the country's modernization, and his position in the nation-building process.

In Section III, 'Representing Founding Fathers,' I perform close analysis of the cinematic representation of Argentine historical heroes in *El santo de la espada* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1970) and *Güemes, la tierra en armas* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1971). Traditionally, these films have been read as products of the military government of Onganía given that *El santo de la espada* was made with state support and both had to have the approval of the Film Rating Board.¹⁶ I argue that such generalization does not take into account the political divisions in the armed forces and the different landscapes of production in which both films were made. Unlike previous analyses, I locate these films as part of what James Chapman has labelled 'a shift towards spectacle on a massive scale' (2008, 80). That is to say, these are films produced with large budgets, involving hundreds of extras, and expensive costumes in order to compete not only with foreign films but also with television programs as audiovisual forms. As examples of popular spectacle, *El santo de la espada* and *Güemes, la tierra en armas* share characteristics with several film genres: the biopic, the war film, and the epic. I rely on film studies theories on historical film (Robert Rosenstone and Pierre Sorlin), biopic (Dennis Bingham and George Custen), and war film (James Chapman and Paul Virilio). In addition to offering an exhaustive investigation of these films, I also look at the ways in which they portray or challenge contemporary versions of Argentine national identity. I also examine *Bajo el signo de la patria* [Under the Sign of the Homeland] (René Múgica, 1971) and *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (Manuel Antín, 1972), looking for the ideological representation of the founding father Belgrano and the *caudillo* Rosas. While at first these films may seem similar to Torre Nilsson's productions studied in Chapter 2, I argue that *Bajo el signo de la patria* and *Juan Manuel de Rosas* share features with historical films. I rely on Estela Erausquin's monograph about the Argentine founding father represented as hero in *Bajo el signo de la patria* and Laura Radetich's insights on the historical reconstruction that takes place in both of these films. In my analysis, I stress the features of the historical film genre present in these films, paying particular attention not only to their production and reception, but also to the ways in which they participated in disseminating ideas about the nation and its identity. Here I counter the argument that these films display an analogous version of nationalism as proposed by Erausquin and Radetich. I use primary sources (interviews, news reports, information from trade journals) to describe the ways in which these films sought to engage the Argentine audience and to

explain their reception. I complement my analysis with insights on war films (James Chapman and Paul Virilio). This framework allows me to distinguish variations in the representation of the lives of Great Argentine Men and explore, for instance, why filmmakers Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and René Múgica, who were recognized in Argentina and had numerous contacts in Cannes, decided to direct historical films that departed radically from their usual themes and techniques. My examination of the Argentine film production of the decade 1966–1976 surveys the challenges and accomplishments of a national cinematography to differentiate and successfully compete with foreign films in the domestic market. The founding fathers' biopics and the cinematic adaptation of *gauchesque* works show the crucial forms in which Argentine cinema attempted to build a national identity through a corpus of audiovisual images.

Notes

- 1 The Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (ENERC) was created in 1965 by Alfredo J. Grassi (1925–).
- 2 In *Bases de la argentinidad*, Enrique de Gandía presented Argentina's historical evolution and celebrated José de San Martín's deeds. More recently, Bruno Walter Berg traced *argentinidad* in the nineteenth century as a linguistic particularity of the Spanish of Argentina, which was first deployed in *gauchesque* works and then revived with the arrival of immigrants (1997, 23). Irma Lorini conflates *argentinidad* with 'la identidad de los argentinos' [Argentine identity], a topic that appeared in the work of Argentine intellectuals in the 1920s (1997, 73). Argentine sociologist Luis García Fanlo has defined the discourse about *argentinidad* as 'el que intenta responder a las siguientes interpelaciones: ¿Qué es ser argentino? ¿Cómo somos los argentinos? ¿Por qué los argentinos somos como somos?' [that which seeks to respond to the following questions: What is an Argentine? What are we Argentines like? Why are we Argentines as we are?] (2010, 25).
- 3 Andrea Giunta holds that 'para las instituciones argentinas, lo prioritario era tener *un arte de vanguardia* si se buscaba intervenir en la escena internacional había que presentarse con un arte distinto del que circulaba en los principales centros culturales, un arte diferente y, al mismo tiempo *actualizado*' [if Argentine institutions sought to participate on the international stage, it was fundamental to have *an art of the vanguard*; they had to do it with a different art from what was circulating in other cultural centres, a different art, and at the same time, *contemporary*] (2008, 27).
- 4 During the second Peronist presidency, film was protected by the state (Feldman, 1990, 37). After the mid-1950s, Argentine cinema became an industry protected by the state. As Argentine film scholar Clara Kriger correctly notes, after 1957 a new period in Argentine film history began (2009, 12). Ana López states: 'Although Argentine production had topped 50 films per year in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by 1957 annual production had dropped to 15 films' (1988, 93). One of the major dynamics of that

new period was Law 62/57 or Law 12,909, ratified in 1958, which sought to boost cinematic production. Law 62/57 attempted to reverse the decline by providing a framework for the protection of local audiovisual products, establishing a system of subsidies tied to the quality of films, and also contemplating the creation of the National Institute of Cinematography (NIC). This crucial law for both film production and circulation was implemented thanks to the support of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (term of office 1955–1958), who saw it as a means to defend a national cultural industry that was gradually losing importance for domestic audiences. Having deposed Juan Perón (1899–1974) two years earlier, Aramburu began a process of deleting the imprint of Peronism from audiovisual legislation and Law 12,909 was an integral part of that endeavor. His brief government, however, inaugurated a string of short presidential terms interrupted by military interventions that continued up until 1976. The creation of a film school was understandably delayed by more pressing political matters.

- 5 Ana Longoni explains the importance of 1966: ‘fue denominado por los medios locales “el año de la vanguardia” por la eclosión simultánea y vertiginosa del pop, los *happenings*, las ambientaciones y los objetos, el minimalismo, los comienzos de lo que años más tarde se llamará *conceptualismo*’ [local media called it ‘the year of the vanguard’ because of the simultaneous emergence of pop, *happenings*, exhibitions and objects, minimalism, and the beginnings of what, years later, would be called *conceptualism*] (2014, 40).
- 6 Longoni also mentions that a unifying objective in the 1960s and mid-1970s was the idea of revolution (2014, 21).
- 7 Jessica Stites Mor aptly asserts that ‘complicated relationships among film, the left, and Peronismo propelled film activism in the 1960s and 1970s as part of a set of central narratives of film activism and intervention in national politics’ (2012, 7).
- 8 Referring to British cinema, Higson states that ‘the unravelling of traditional ideas of British nationhood is increasingly a feature of historical work on the British cinema of the past’ (2000b, 35).
- 9 Journalist Fernando Ferreira also states that ‘la existencia de nuestro cine estuvo signada por la crisis’ [our cinema’s existence was marked by crisis] (1995, 16).
- 10 Higson defines ‘a national cinema as one that draws on indigenous cultural traditions, one that invokes and explores the nation’s cultural heritage’ (2000b, 36). He challenges readers to consider concepts such as tradition, indigeneity, and the national, and invites them to consider whether tradition is inherited or invented. These are valid notions that will be explored in Sections II and III.
- 11 Argentine films produced between 1950 and 1968 prominently centred on the representation of the present. A group of young filmmakers, known as the ‘Generation of the 1960s’, brought new topics and techniques, but their films, shaped by European influences, did not attract domestic viewers or represent domestic themes. According to Simón Feldman, ‘Algunas de las críticas que se hicieron a la generación hablaban de influencias “foráneas”: eran europeizantes, afrancesados o miraban demasiado a los realizadores de la que se

- llamó la “nouvelle vague” [some of the criticisms of the generation spoke of ‘foreign’ influences: they were European, French-leaning or looked too much to the filmmakers of what was called the ‘nouvelle vague’] (1990, 50).
- 12 Argentine historian Felipe Pigna holds that ‘la historia de un país es su identidad, es todo lo que nos pasó como sociedad desde que nacimos hasta el presente, y allí están registrados nuestros triunfos y derrotas, nuestras alegrías y tristezas, nuestras glorias y miserias’ [a country’s history is its identity, it is everything that has happened to us as a society since we were born until the present, and therein are recorded our successes and failures, our joys and sorrows, our glories and miseries] (2004, 18).
- 13 Patricio Guzmán and Julianne Burton explain that ‘in the 1960s and 1970s film-makers, film critics, and film reviewers on the left actively participated in the quest for a revolutionary cinema. But depending on the film-maker, the critic or reviewer, the term “revolutionary” lent itself to many interpretations’ (1987, 219).
- 14 Alfredo Grassi described Argentina in the late 1960s: ‘hoy está en expansión. Es un país en constante desarrollo’ [today it is expanding. It is a country in constant development] (1970, 37).
- 15 Allen defines exhibition as ‘the nature of the institutional apparatus under whose auspices and for whose benefit films are shown; the relationship between exhibition as that term has been used within the industry and other segments of the film business; and the location and physical nature of the sites of exhibition’ (1998, 15). For him, performance is ‘the immediate social, sensory, performative context of reception’ (1998, 18), while activation refers to ‘how particular audience groups make or do not make sense, relevance, and pleasure out of particular moments of reception’ (1998, 19).
- 16 In both films, the army is represented as a heterogeneous institution—with creole officers but *mestizo* recruits—far from being imperialist.

SECTION I

Argentine History and National Cinema, 1955–1976

In this section, I provide a brief account of political events in Argentina post-1955, after Juan Perón was deposed, up to March 1976, when a military *coup* took place. This period was marked by a succession of short-lived governments (both military and democratic), Peronism's prohibition of civil participation until 1973, and the emergence of new political actors such as the youth and women. Within this context, I stress the 'tradition versus modernization' dialectic and the discussion about Argentina's present and future. I then look at the ways in which Argentine cinema strove to become a national industry that could attract a domestic audience which was becoming more heterogeneous. I argue that Argentine cinema constituted a significant medium to develop cultural citizenship during this period, but one which experienced different demands. On one hand, the film industry appeared to be a central area of concern for the Argentine state, which passed laws seeking to encourage the production and consumption of national films. This protection, however, was fiercely resisted by local exhibitors, who considered foreign films more appealing and lucrative than domestic ones. On the other hand, Argentine cinema was subjected to distinctive and contradictory forces: protectionist legislation was, at times, accompanied by censorship that was detrimental to freedom of expression and creation, both of which were needed to successfully compete with other cinemas and gain recognition in and access to international markets. Lastly, this was a period 'when the filmmakers' sense of responsibility was radicalized, and when politics was conceived as the central axis of cultural practices' (Bernini, 2004, 156).

Political and Social Tensions in Post-1955 Argentina

To understand the political events of the decade 1966–1976, it is crucial to consider the *coup d'état* that ousted Perón and established the *Revolución libertadora*. In September 1955, a rebellion against the military leader was instigated by a coalition of Catholics, the urban middle classes, and the two different factions of the armed forces. General Eduardo Lonardi (1896–1956), who proclaimed the mantra ‘neither victors nor vanquished’ and was briefly in power until November of that year, led the more conciliatory of the military factions. The other, profoundly anti-Peronist, soon displaced Lonardi, ‘accusing him of complicity with the *nacionalistas* and of tolerating Peronism and workers’ movements’ (Senkman, 1984, 121). Both groups, however, blamed Peronists for being anti-nationalist, corrupt, and inefficient (Spinelli, 2005, 30). The armed forces that took over the country’s leadership sought to revert to the ‘true’ national being, particularly enforcing—albeit not immediately—the rights listed in the Argentine Constitution and hoping to unite groups as diverse as unionists, anti-peronists, and liberals.

The *Revolución libertadora* held that Peronism threatened the country’s true core values, and so a new vision was needed for Argentina. The Peronist national identity revolved around the perpetuation of the welfare state that had heavily benefitted the working class, integrating its members into the body politic as citizens. Nonetheless, the conditions that allowed the emergence of such a state post-Second World War—namely the demand for agricultural products and import-substitution industrialization—could no longer sustain domestic capitalist growth, and thus changes in the Peronist version of the Argentine national identity were also needed. Here it is important to take into account Jorge Larraín’s insight that ‘for identity to become an issue, a period of instability and crisis, a threat to old-established ways, seems to be required’ (2000, 8). While the crisis of Peronism ushered in the *Revolución libertadora*, Perón’s power—even in exile—as protector of the working-class masses, profoundly affected the mission of the ‘revolutionary’ government and its attempt to propose a new version of national identity. The working class’s loyalty to Perón and his postulates contributed to making him a constant referent in Argentine political life, a dynamic that further

complicated the process of legitimating the nationalism of anti-Peronists, and also upset the role and viability of political parties, such as the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) and the Socialist and Communist Party.¹ In other words, Perón, as the symbolic father of the *descamisados* [shirtless, a term used to describe Perón's followers], continued to be seen as a defender of the *pueblo*, the authentic bearer of the national essence.²

For the next two decades, Peronists and anti-Peronists hotly debated which side better embodied *argentinidad*.³ The coalition that ousted Perón believed that citizens needed to be 'reeducated' in democratic values (Spinelli, 2005, 66), implying that Peronism had veered away from the nation's foundational core.⁴ Yet the working class, union leaders, and other Peronist supporters saw the military authorities as dictatorial and unlawful. If Peronism was despotic and anti-national, the *Revolución libertadora* could also be seen in those terms for having interrupted a democratically elected government, especially after the harsh punishment received by General Juan José Valle.⁵ This infamous episode negatively impacted the government of President Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (term of office 1955–1958), whose administration became known as *la fusiladora* [the one who shoots]. Political legitimacy thus became a crucial factor that led to the reinstatement of the Constitution on May 1, 1956, provided it did not go against the political goals of the *Revolución libertadora*. This resolution, passed only eight months after the military government was installed in power, paved the way for the 1958 elections in which Frondizi (1908–1995) was chosen as president. Nevertheless, for the next 25 years, the armed forces reserved for themselves the role of guardians of political life, not only barring Perón as a presidential candidate, but also supervising the democratically elected governments of Arturo Frondizi (term of office 1958–1962) and Arturo Illia (term of office 1963–1966) and, later on, served in the military regimes from 1966 to 1973.

The armed forces' intervention in the country's political affairs coincided with developments in other parts of Latin America that encouraged the notion of sociopolitical change. The success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 rekindled the idea of a continental utopia, emphasizing the region's promise for a better future.⁶ Diana Sorensen explains that optimism throughout the continent was a central characteristic of the 1960s (2007, 16). The huge interest in change and development was also made explicit in President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in January 1961: 'To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge—to convert our good words into good deeds—in a new alliance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty' ('Inaugural,' 1961, non. pag.). For both Kennedy and the Latin American leaders and intellectuals participating in the Comisión Económica para Latinoamérica y el Caribe [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] (CEPAL), economic growth was a vital requirement for political stability and effective liberation.⁷

Nonetheless, the external push for modernization was also seen as an imposition that would further lead Latin America off its path. Aníbal Quijano

explains that modernization is always supported first by foreign players who manage to convince Latin American about the desirability of the modes of production and consumption of capitalist nations (1990, 9). In the late 1950s and 1960s, then, modernization in Latin America implied embracing capitalism and doing away with traditional economic forms. In Argentina, Frondizi's government was also guided by the sense of new possibilities. Rogelio Frigerio, Secretary of Socio-Economic Affairs during Frondizi's presidency, was a proponent of developmentalism, a political economic theory that sought to put an end to the country's economic dependency by stimulating its growth, and argued for a program of national expansion based on heavy industrialization which would, in turn, free Argentina from its need of imports (Szusterman, 1993, 79–81). Developmentalism was a crucial step toward a modernization that, once and for all, would make Argentina a truly powerful nation. As this was a national program, the state would oversee not only plans for development, but also the relations between international investors and the national bourgeoisie. As a result, funds were earmarked for higher education and anti-Peronist professors who had been exiled were allowed to return (King, 1986, 168). Developmentalism, however, opened the door to the massive entry of foreign capital, especially American.⁸

Parallel to this push for economic development, there was a renewed interest in the sciences and arts that would also confirm the country's artistic and intellectual growth. This focus took different forms. First, it sought to put an end to the isolationism of Argentine art. This goal was realized when in 1958, the Instituto Di Tella opened its doors to stimulate Argentine culture and its exchanges with the European art world (King, 2007, 61–69). Second, it sought to bring the arts and sciences to the masses. Culture was democratized in those years, particularly with the foundation of Editorial de la Universidad de Buenos Aires (EUDEBA), which had soon published 600,000 volumes of 20 classic works by Argentine writers (Sayago, 2008, 150).⁹ Needing to expand its readership, EUDEBA attempted to disseminate Argentine literary works at low prices (Terán, 1993, 71; Podalsky, 2004, 149–51). Third, science and technology aimed to play a significant role in modernizing Argentina.¹⁰ The creation of the first department of sociology at the University of Buenos Aires and the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) to support national development also date from this period. Referring to innovations in the arts, Andrea Giunta states that 'el año 1960 es, por varias razones, decisivo en el montaje de esa nueva escena. Las celebraciones del sesquicentenario de la revolución de Mayo generaron revisiones del desarrollo artístico nacional y estimularon, a la vez, el lanzamiento de programas abiertos a la renovación y el futuro' [for several reasons, the year 1960 is decisive in the layout of this new scene. The celebrations of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the May Revolution generated revisions of national artistic development and stimulated, in turn, the launching of programs open to renovation and the future] (2008, 33). In addition, new publications, such as *Primera Plana*, *Confirmado*, *Extra*,

and *¿Qué?*, appeared (King 1986, 168; Sidícaro 1993, 314; Podalsky, 2004, 19; Sayago, 2008, 122). *Pasado y Presente*, a communist magazine, was first published in 1963 (Vezzetti, 2009, 28). All these changes contributed to the perception that Argentina was being called to occupy its rightful place in the concert of other Western nations. To do so, the country had to be forward-looking and invest in its cultural growth.

Faith in progress reaffirmed and sustained Argentine nationalism. By pursuing its destined *grandeur*, Argentina would realize its true potential as a nation. One group that pushed for a nationalist ideology was Tacuara, named after the spears used by the *gauchos* during the War of Independence (Navarro Gerassi, 1968, 225). Tacuara's members, inspired by Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877) and Francisco Franco (1892–1975), rejected Jewish and left-wing sympathizers and were anti-American. At the end of 1960, they split into two groups: Tacuara, led by Alberto Ezcurra Uriburu who recruited middle-class youth, and the Guardia Nacional Restauradora [The National Restoration Guard], which grouped together members of the upper class (Navarro Gerassi, 1968, 228–29). Although these factions had followers, their impact was most visible in that they brought about a vision of what Argentina should be by resorting to certain guiding figures, such as Rosas, and equally refusing to align with either the United States or the USSR, thus recognizing the unmistakable Argentine essence as different from that of other countries.

Argentine nationalism was also affected by the events taking place in other parts of Latin America. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, nationalism was a driving force all over Latin America.¹¹ The establishment of a socialist regime in Cuba in the early 1960s radically altered politics in the continent, as it became another front of the Cold War. The ripples of the Cuban Revolution reached South America and polarized the population between those who supported a Marxist type of society and those who favoured capitalism as the basis for national development.¹² For the latter, industrialization and technology were the means to avoid an over-reliance on the primary sector—agriculture and cattle-raising, which had lost value in the years after the Second World War. Nonetheless, by the mid-1960s, the fear of Marxist contagion displaced economic development as the most pressing issue.¹³ The need to contain the revolutionary winds blowing in from Cuba demanded that even the Argentine armed forces prioritize a hemispheric ideology at the expense of nationalism (Rouquié, 1982, 143).

In addition to these different political stances, a key component of Argentine public discourse was the legacy and role of Peronism in Argentine civic life. Even though Frondizi continued the programs set forth by the *Revolución libertadora*, whose main feature was the political proscription of Perón and his representatives, he was plagued by the denial of legality to Peronism.¹⁴ Consequently, in 1962, he allowed Peronists to take part in the midterm elections, a move resented by the most intransigent among the anti-Peronist armed forces. This decision, along with a recession caused

by the implementation of austerity measures, led to Frondizi's overthrow.¹⁵ Vice President José María Guido (term of office 1962–1963) briefly took over the presidency and called for new polls, in which Arturo Umberto Illia (1900–1983) was elected with the support of only a quarter of voters. President Illia continued the modernization plan, which had been circulating since the mid-1950s. For instance, in his inaugural speech, he proclaimed: 'para universalizar la paz hay que universalizar el progreso y el bienestar' [to universalize peace, we must universalize progress and well-being] (quoted in Donatello and Mallimaci, 2013, 149). But a highly politicized labor force constantly challenged his economic guidelines, creating an impression of ungovernability and chaos.¹⁶ Moreover, Illia's characterization in the national media as slow and ineffectual did nothing to assuage the perception that he was inefficient, thus creating the conditions for a new *coup d'état*.¹⁷ In June 1966, General Juan Carlos Onganía (1914–1995) established the Argentine Revolution (1966–1970), a military government that used traditional forms of control, such as the curtailing of civil liberties and banning of political parties, with the goal of suppressing criticism in order to implement the country's modernization (Rock, 1987, 347). Here it is crucial to highlight that the emphasis on modernization and on isolating the spread of Marxism paved the way for a type of *conservative modernity* that, according to Francisco Colom González, 'intentó conjurar los peligros de unos procesos de cambio sobre los que se había perdido el control' [attempted to ward off the dangers of processes of change over which control had been lost] (2009, 17). It should be noted that while Colom González's term 'conservative modernity' refers to the secularization of values and the separation of church and state that took place in the nineteenth century, it is also germane to the mid-1960s in Argentina, when church and state established a new alliance to resist epochal changes. In so doing, these allies disregarded the pivotal feature not only of modernity, but also of democracy: that popular sovereignty is the only means of legitimating political power (Quijada, 2009, 232).

To reclaim legality, the Argentine Revolution aimed to suppress political dissent—seen as an obstacle to the country's progress—emphasizing national values. General Onganía attempted to enforce and legitimate a type of nationalism that aligned Argentina with Western values and Catholicism.¹⁸ To do so, he banned political parties, workers' right to strike, and freedom of speech, and put an end to the autonomy of universities (Sigal, 1991, 46).¹⁹ Books, radio programs, theatrical plays, TV programs, and films were prohibited or shut down (King, 1986, 173). Despite Illia's overthrow, developmentalism continued to be a guiding principle as Onganía followed 'a program for economic growth and modernization leading to a greater distribution of wealth and true social peace' (Burdick, 1995, 128). For John King, one of the consequences of modernization was the embrace of mass consumerism (1986, 168). Increased purchasing power also meant class mobility. During this period, the middle class became the backbone of modern Argentine society (Sidícaro, 1993, 340). In fact, 1960s political theorists José Nun and Samuel

Huntington stressed that the armed forces usually defended the interests of this class (quoted in Perina 1983, 13–15).

Despite the promise of economic modernization, however, Onganía's *revolución* was an authoritarian bureaucratic government. Guillermo O'Donnell defines it as the type of state established in Argentina in 1966, the product of the reaction of the hegemonic classes that faced, and felt endangered by, the demands of the working class (1982, 59), which revolved around higher wages and better labor conditions and implied a return to a statist and populist path like the one implemented by Perón before 1955 (O'Donnell, 1988, 45). World affairs, however, rendered impossible such a reversal that would privilege the living standards of the working class.²⁰ Thus, to control workers' demands in times of reduced purchasing power, an authoritarian bureaucratic state was required.²¹ A central aspect of the authoritarian bureaucratic state was its paternalism, a trait that had a long tradition in Argentine politics before and after 1955. Yet the originality of post-1955 paternalism lies in the fact that it influenced the range of topics to be discussed. After 1955, a sector of the armed forces created a discourse which articulated what was proper and what was unsuitable (Marxist and/or communist sentiment).²² Given the steady influence of Catholics first in Perón's overthrow and later in the ranks of the armed forces, these restrictions went beyond the debate of national politics to include morality and sexuality, family, religion, and national security (Avellaneda, 1986, 19).²³ Notably, restraints coincided with women's move away from traditional roles to become producers and consumers. Their entry into the labour force, their access to more education and contraceptives, and their imitation of foreign ways—miniskirts, blue jeans, the Beatles, and pacifism—affected traditional gender roles in Argentina and concerned those who saw the home as the rightful place for women.²⁴ Therefore, women in the public sphere were scrutinized by a morality police in the late 1960s (Feijóo and Nari, 1996, 11–12). As a result, censorship was eminently anti-modern, particularly for women's roles.²⁵

Paternalist repression was also enforced in the cultural realm. One of General Onganía's first decisions was to put an end to the 50-year-old tradition of autonomy in the universities.²⁶ In an episode known as *la noche de los bastones largos* [the night of the long sticks] in July 1966, many students were arrested and many professors who resigned or were fired left Argentina, diminishing the country's cultural capital at a time when it was sorely needed to aid in the modernization process. Another area in which restrictions took place was through the implementation of censorship. It is important to highlight here the contradictory notions that were guiding successive governments after 1955. These ideas simultaneously promised modernization, regulated discursive and social practices, and gradually curtailed constitutional rights. By February 1967, several months after the *coup d'état*, a climate of indifference prevailed in Argentine society, even among the nationalists who had supported the revolution (Botana, 1973, 31). The following year,

Onganía's policies met with considerable resistance from workers belonging to the Confederación General de Trabajadores [General Confederation of Workers] (CGT), and even his military colleagues objected to his methods (Sidícaro, 1993, 335). By 1969, Peter Ranis characterized Argentina as 'an advantaged society that, weighing all factors, ranks very high among the nations of the world,' but also considered it a case of 'arrested development' given the tensions deriving from the armed forces' conspicuous intervention in civic life and lack of compromise (1968–1969, 38).²⁷ Halted development paved the way for another change of authorities.

Political unrest and deteriorating economic conditions contributed to the end of the Argentine Revolution.²⁸ May 1969 saw the Cordobazo uprising: in Córdoba, politicized youth and unionized workers of the automobile plants, grouped in two unions, the Sindicatos de Medios y Afines del Transporte Automotor [Union of Means and Parts of the Automotive Transportation] (SMATA) and Luz y Fuerza [Light and Power], whose members came from a middle-class background, vigorously protested against the government. The revolt provoked serious damage in the city, particularly to foreign businesses, such as Xerox and Citröen (Brenan and Gordillo, 1994, 480–98). These foreign businesses in charge of supplying technology and heavy manufacturing along with foreign loans had constituted the pillars of Onganía's attempt to modernize Argentina (Burdick, 1995, 136). Consequently, they were seen as an obstacle to the resolution of the workers' plight and as a source of economic oppression. The Cordobazo showed that the economy was impacted by political decisions and vice versa. In other words, while Onganía led the Argentine Revolution, his Minister of the Economy Adalbert Krieger Vasena relied on foreign investments, which the politicized youth saw as examples of neocolonialism and imperialism. Beside more traditional groups—unions and political parties—dissatisfied youth and urban leftist *guerrillas* were now active on the national stage, demanding nationalist and anti-imperialist policies and proclaiming solidarity with Third World movements (Goebel, 2007, 357). Among the urban *guerrillas*, there were several groups: three Peronist ones—the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas [Peronist Armed Forces] (FAP), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias [Revolutionary Armed Forces] (FAR), and the Montoneros [named after nineteenth-century cavalry forces], made up of leftist Peronists and Catholics—and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo [People's Revolutionary Army] (ERP), a Marxist force that had evolved from the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores [Workers' Revolutionary Party] (PRT) (Rock, 1993, 214). The Montoneros embraced some of the tenets of the nationalist ideology (Rock, 1993, 218), alluded to the *ser nacional* [national being], and decried imperialist penetration; thus, for them, the Argentine Revolution had strayed from its patriotic path and they, not the armed forces, were the true defenders of the national being. When on May 29, 1970, the Montoneros kidnapped and killed former President Aramburu in retribution for the executions of Juan José Valle's

and the other Peronists' that took place during his term of office, Onganía's failure to control the *guerrillas* became apparent. A week later, he was ousted by the armed forces and Roberto Levingston, an expert in counterinsurgency, was designated president.

The early 1970s saw a succession of brief military and civil governments that alternated amid a climate of growing political division. Military presidents—Roberto Levingston (term of office 1970–1971) and Alejandro Lanusse (term of office 1971–1973)—and democratic presidents—Héctor Cámpora (term of office 1973) and Raúl Lastiri (term of office 1973)—witnessed the escalation of violence carried out by urban *guerrillas* and the deterioration of living standards.²⁹ Historian Valeria Manzano explains the impact of the unrest: 'Between 1971 and 1974 almost no sphere of social and cultural life remained untouched by the politicization process' (2009, 659). Therefore, in a last attempt to pacify the country, Perón was allowed to run for president—after being banned for 18 years—and was re-elected for a third term. Although his return was very much anticipated by unionists, politicized youth, and the working class, managing the conflicting demands of these groups proved to be a formidable task that eventually resulted in his break with the leftist youth (Wynia, 1984, 25). The day of his arrival back in Argentina was marked by fighting between the Peronist left and the Peronist right, in an episode infamously known as 'the massacre of Ezeiza.' This was much more than a generational disagreement, for it illustrated the rift between the ageing leader and the radicalized youth, causing even more sociopolitical instability. When Perón died in office in 1974, his third wife María Estela Martínez de Perón (aka Isabel) became president, but sharp divisions between the Argentine right and left and a rapidly declining economy—according to the Inter-American Development Bank, the country's GDP fell from 6.5 in 1974 to -1.3 in 1975 (Wynia, 1984, 25)—ushered in a new military regime in March 1976.

As this succinct overview shows, during the post-1955 period, competing notions of what Argentina as a nation was and should be conspired against any and every possible kind of consensus. The emergence of the youth and women as new social actors and consumers contributed to rapid change in a society that, at the same time, was being held back by the repressive measures of successive military governments. The push for modernization, necessary to expand the country's economy, moving it away from its dependence on the primary sector, was a goal shared by the different sectors, but it also generated fears and anxieties about women's entry into the labor force. For its part, a politicized working class demanded a good standard of living and remained faithful to Perón. Finally, the youth no longer respected the views of older generations and pressed for speedy changes in social relations. Hence a top-down approach in the mid-1960s was deployed to 'reorder' Argentine society, but political divisions between those who resisted and those who were loyal to Peronism further complicated that task. In addition, external factors, such as the need to limit Marxism to Cuba and a worldwide

economic crisis in the early 1970s, also influenced Argentine politics. The fact that every group—the armed forces, Peronists, the working class, union leaders, and radicalized youth—claimed to be the true representative of the national in an effort to authenticate its position, exacerbated rifts that resulted in open confrontations. Thus, the breakdown of the ‘imagined Argentine community’ impacted and was in turn swayed by several circulating versions of Argentine-ness. At a time of heightened passions around the definition of the national being, Argentine filmmakers had to tread lightly so as to not alienate any sector of the domestic audience. During certain administrations, in order to receive financial support from the Instituto Nacional de Cine [National Institute of Cinema] (NIC), producers and directors had to respect the limits on discursive practices and representations imposed by the authorities, as stipulated in the 1957 cinema law.³⁰ In the subsequent chapters, I examine post-1955 Argentine cinema.

Notes

- 1 Celia Szusterman states that ‘the *Libertadora* induced the “re-Peronisation” of popular sectors whose fervor for their leader had not been enough to provoke spontaneous mobilisations in his support’ (1993, 3).
- 2 Jorge G. Castañeda explains that Perón represented a virulent type of nationalism that was cast in his first election as he ran as a defender of Argentine-ness, as reflected in the motto ‘Braden o Perón’ (2006, 34). (Spruille Braden was the US Ambassador to Argentina.) Szusterman, however, provides evidence of diplomatic communications that showed that just before his removal from office, Perón was actively seeking US investments in Argentina (1993, 5–7).
- 3 Laura Podalsky speaks of the lack of consensus in these decades (2004, 6–7).
- 4 ‘Modern’ in this case means promoting the ideas of freedom, tolerance, science, progress, and reason (Larraín, 2000, 12).
- 5 Valle rebelled against the *Revolución libertadora* on June 9, 1956, and was shot along with other rebels. Szusterman indicates that ‘in an unprecedented move in Argentine politico-military history, the killings of June 9 underlined the audacity of the *Libertadora* in punishing dissent with a brutality that Perón never dared apply to his enemies’ (1993, 17).
- 6 John King notes that ‘the novelists that represent the ‘boom’ of the Latin American novel in this period—Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez amongst others—all reflect the optimism that a wave of social change could sweep through the continent’ (1990, 67).
- 7 In his inaugural speech in January 1949, President Harry Truman outlined a four-point proposal which mentioned underdevelopment and defined it as a danger to the stability of the Western Hemisphere. He also proposed development as part of a cooperative initiative (not neocolonial) based on science and technology (Latham, 2011, 10–11).
- 8 Portantiero explains: ‘entre 1960 y 1968 el monto total de las inversiones norteamericanas en la Argentina subió de 472 millones de dólares a 1,148

millones, lo que implica un incremento del 243%, mientras que para América Latina fue del 32%' [between 1960 and 1968, the total amount of American investment in Argentina increased from \$472 million to 1,148 million, which signifies a rise of 243% while the increase of American investment in Latin America was 32%] (1989, 309).

- 9 King characterizes the period 1955–1970 as ‘a movement from élite to mass culture, and an expansion of the market-place for cultural products’ (1986, 167).
- 10 The Academia Nacional de la Historia, created in 1938, first published its research journal, *Investigaciones y ensayos*, in 1966 (Goebel, 2011, 31).
- 11 For sociologist Ricardo Sidicaro, the two main features of modern Western countries in the second half of the twentieth century were the formation of a nation state and an industrial economy (2013, 129).
- 12 In 1964, the Brazilian president João Goulart, who favored radical changes, was deposed by a military regime that had the support of the United States. My own research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library suggests that the Argentine armed forces sought to present the 1966 *coup d'état* as a way to stop a communist threat in order to receive military aid and technology similar to that which Brazil obtained from the US. See my ‘La posición norteamericana respecto al golpe de Estado en la Argentina, 1966.’
- 13 Luis Donatello and Fortunato Mallimaci state that ‘a fin de que América Latina no deviniera en comunista, se proponían una serie de políticas que implicaban su desarrollo: el control de la natalidad, la urbanización de su población y la secularización de su cultura’ [so that Latin America would not become communist, a series of policies that implied its development was proposed: birth control, urbanization of the population, and secularization of its culture] (2013, 151).
- 14 For an intellectual response to Frondizi, please see Leonardo Candiano’s ‘David Viñas y la traición Frondizi. De *Contorno* a *Dar la cara*.’
- 15 During this period, the armed forces were divided into reds (*colorados*) and blues (*azules*). The main difference between them was in their involvement in military coups. The blues held that a prolonged intervention would damage the reputation of the forces (Rock 1993, 193–95). Curiously, Onganía, who staged a *coup* in 1966, was a blue supporter.
- 16 According to Antonius Robben, ‘On the economic front, almost 4 million workers participated in the occupation of eleven thousand factories during seven operations’ (2005, 34).
- 17 For more on this, please see Amadeo Gandolfo’s ‘*Tía Vicenta* entre Frondizi y Onganía (1957–1966).’
- 18 Donatello and Mallimaci point out a crucial paradox: ‘estas fuerzas universitarias católicas apoyarán primero el golpe de estado de Onganía, para ser luego reprimidas por la intervención a las Universidades Nacionales gestionada por funcionarios—también ellos—católicos’ [these Catholic university forces first support the Onganía *coup d'état* only to be repressed later, during the intervention of the National Universities implemented by fellow Catholic officials] (2013, 158).
- 19 For Alain Rouquié, Onganía’s coup was part of a Western and pro-American policy (1982, 134).

- 20 The return to a pre-1945 state of affairs was also unsustainable. Podalsky argues that 'despite its evident appeal to those elite sectors wishing to recuperate a lost utopia, the vision of Buenos Aires being promoted in the 1960s was firmly aligned with the middle class' (2004, 7).
- 21 Oscar Terán explains the emergence of different ideological trends: one that considered Peronism as 'un hecho maldito' [accursed event] and a liberal one that saw in the popular classes' support of Peronism a sign that the post-1955 governments lacked legitimacy (1993, 57).
- 22 In the first months of the dictatorship, *Marcha*, the Uruguayan weekly with a pro-Cuban, anti-imperialist leaning, was forbidden for publishing an interview in which Perón criticized Onganía (King 1986, 183). *Tía Vicenta*, another weekly that used humor and caricatures, was also censored (Sidicaro, 1993, 326).
- 23 Not all Catholics shared the same views. Some supported leaders who later repressed them. For more on this, please see Julio Pinto and Fortunato Mallimaci (ed.), *La influencia de las religiones en el estado y la nación argentina*.
- 24 Women working in the public administration were not allowed to wear miniskirts (Sayago, 2008, 135).
- 25 Colom González holds that, 'el sujeto moderno, libre del anclaje de la fe y la tradición, nació del proceso de pensarse soberano de sí mismo' [the modern subject, free from the anchoring of faith and tradition, emerged out of the process of imagining himself as sovereign of himself] (2009, 15).
- 26 For Aníbal Quijano, intervention in the universities is an example of modernity as a legitimizing ideological form that clearly goes against its discourse (1990, 15). That is to say, Onganía brandished the banner of modernization, only to resort to an authoritarian regime.
- 27 Some of the indicators that Ranis considered were: the population increase from 20 million (1961) to 22 million (1965), the fact that 48% of the Argentine population resided in cities (69% of men and 65% of women), which put Argentina at number four on the list of 125 nations, a literacy rate of 91%, and good access to medical care (one physician for every 660 people) (1968–1969, 21–23).
- 28 Quijano identifies the crisis of the capitalist society at the end of the 1960s (1990, 19).
- 29 Montoneros was involved in the resonant executions of Rucci, a unionist, in September 1973, and former Minister of the Interior Arturo Mor Roig, during whose tenure 17 terrorists were killed in a Trelew naval base in July 1974. For more on this, please see Pablo Giussani (1984, 71–100).
- 30 For more on censorship, please see my article 'Film Censorship in Argentina 1956–1976.'

CHAPTER 2

Argentine Cinema in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s

The following examination of Argentine cinema is guided by Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen's statement that 'both as an industry and a discursive practice, cinema is an adjunct of capitalism' (2006, 7). One important consideration to bear in mind is that during this period Argentine cinema did not enjoy a hegemonic position even domestically, since it competed with Hollywood films. To offset this competition, the Argentine state persistently sought to protect national film production through several laws, the most crucial of which was Law 62/57. Nevertheless, in the transition from the studio system to independent filmmaking, the Argentine film industry enjoyed uneven success in its attempt to gain a considerable share of the domestic market. Through trial and error, the state, directors, and producers came up with different solutions to strengthening the production and circulation of national films, which in many cases were resisted by exhibitors and distributors. Nevertheless, during this period, cinema constituted an important part of Argentine cultural life, as is evident in the opinions and debates that it generated. To understand the challenges and strengths of Argentine cinema, it is necessary to begin in the mid-1950s.

Around the middle of that decade, the regulation of Argentine cinema changed dramatically. The state allowed the entrance of unlimited foreign films even though Law 16,688 of 1950 stipulated the exhibition of national films for 26 weeks per year and left the remaining 26 weeks to the screening of foreign films (Kriger, 2009, 61–67). This legislation had two unexpected outcomes: one was a decrease in cinema attendance among the Argentine public (Falicov 2007, 29); the other, closely related to the diminishing audiences, was the bankruptcy of many Argentine studios that had financed and produced films in the previous decades; only a handful—Argentina Sono Film, Artistas Argentinos Asociados, and General Belgrano—remained in business (Maranghello, 1984, 94). Other factors that negatively affected the Argentine film industry were the considerable increase in production costs, the loss of other markets, and competition with foreign films ('La producción,' 1966, 93).¹ In addition, the *Revolución libertadora* adversely impacted film production as it emphasized a climate of disorientation, made even more

pronounced by tensions between Peronists and anti-Peronists (Martínez, 1961, 13). To counter these problems, in December 1955, Law 12,999 of 1947 was briefly enforced until a new cinema law was crafted.

The new law promulgated in 1957, Law 62/57 or 12,909, constituted a fundamental piece of legislation for an industry that was facing fierce rivalry from foreign cinemas. In the first place, this law—passed under a military government—provided a framework for freedom of expression in accordance to the rights listed in the Constitution. But Law 12,909 defined cinema in a comprehensive way as an industry, a business, an art form, a means of communication, and an educational medium (Maranghello, 2005, 218). It also established the NIC. Another positive effect of the 1957 law was the creation of a system of subsidies and loans for film production, which ‘by providing as much as 50 per cent of the production costs of national productions, [...] allowed directors to become their own producers and stimulated a series of independent productions’ (López, 1988, 101). According to Claudio España, Law 62/57 allowed the emergence of the producer-director who could lead his own project and was usually joined by an assistant producer (2005, 21).

The funds to promote national cinema, which came from a 10% tax that was added to the price of a movie ticket, dramatically increased national film production. Table 1 shows the way in which film production rebounded after its lowest point in 1957.

Table 1: Films Produced 1957–1967

Year	Number of Argentine films
1957	15
1958	32
1959	22
1960	31
1961	25
1962	32
1963	27
1964	37
1965	30
1966	40
1967	27

Source: Mariano Calistro, 1984: 114.

The new law also encouraged the exhibition of national films, among other measures, but this requirement, which had been implemented since 1948, was staunchly opposed by film exhibitors. Screening Argentine films left them

less time to show lucrative foreign films, leading to loss of revenue. Countries such as Mexico and France also protested the preference given to Argentine films, as they felt it was detrimental to their own cinemas. Nonetheless, this aspect of the law was supported by representatives of the different political parties, who agreed on the need to protect Argentine film production after the negative impact of the policies of the early 1950s. Finally, awards were also created to promote the industry.

A consistent and pronounced increase in national film production allowed certain directors to maintain continuity in their *œuvre*. Leopoldo Torre Nilsson (1924–1978) and Fernando Ayala (1920–1997) were two filmmakers who benefitted from state support and were active in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Torre Nilsson, son of Leopoldo Torres Ríos (1899–1960), who had steadily written and produced films since the 1920s, shot several films in the late 1950s and early 1960s: *Graciela* (1956), *El protegido* [The Protected] (1956), *El secuestrador* [The Kidnapper] (1958), *La caída* [The Fall] (1959), *Fin de fiesta* [The Party is Over] (1960), *Un guapo del 900* [A Bully in 1900s] (1960) which, according to critic José Agustín Mahieu, showed ‘una pauta de la madurez y las posibilidades inéditas de este realizador’ [a sign of the maturity and unusual possibilities of this filmmaker] (1965, 7), *La mano en la trampa* [The Hand in the Trap] (1961), and *Piel de verano* [Summer Skin] (1961). Torre Nilsson’s 1962 films, *Setenta veces siete* [The Female: Seventy Times Seven] and *Homenaje a la hora de la siesta* [Four Women for One Man], were selected to represent Argentina at the Venice and Cannes film festivals, respectively, but for the reviewer of *Tiempo de cine*, they were not worthy of selection (Salgado, 1962, 32). In general, Torre Nilsson’s films, which thematized the fall of the bourgeoisie (Martínez, 1961, 35) and were based on scripts written in collaboration with either his wife Beatriz Guido (1922–1988) or other screenwriters, made him an indisputable leader among young Argentine directors and earned him a well-deserved reputation abroad. In the early 1960s, he also financed the second feature-length film of David José Kohon (1919–2004), *Prisioneros de una noche* [Prisoners of One Night] (1962).²

Another filmmaker who became a key figure was Fernando Ayala. Like Torre Nilsson, Ayala was also very prolific, writing, producing, and directing one film per year between 1955 and 1960. Writing in the early 1960s, film critic Tomás Eloy Martínez said that Ayala’s cinematography was characterized by attention to both industrial and artistic demands as well as a political middle-ground stance (1961, 15). These features were evident in the films he directed in 1955–1964: *Ayer fue primavera* [Yesterday was Springtime] (1955) and the productions of Aries—a company co-founded with his friend, director Héctor Olivera—*El jefe* [The Boss] (1958), *El candidato* [The Candidate] (1959), both written in collaboration with David Viñas (1927–2011), and *Paula Cautiva* [Captive Paula] (1963), this last based on an adaptation of Beatriz Guido’s short story ‘The Representation.’³ Of those films, *El jefe* (1958) was the first Argentine film to receive funds after the passing of Law 62/57. It had a good

critical reception, earning three Silver Condors—Best Film, Best Director, and Best Actor (for Alberto de Mendoza)—the most prestigious awards of the Argentine Film Critics Association. Based on a short story by Viñas, *El jefe* presents the fraudulent activities of a gang leader, Berger (Alberto de Mendoza), who rules his associates with an iron fist and psychological manipulation. Set against the same background of political volatility as *El jefe*, *Paula Cautiva* is a love story between Paula Peña (Susana Freire), a member of the traditional landed elite, and Carlos Sutton (Duilio Marzio), an Argentine who migrated to the United States and briefly returns to Argentina on a business trip. The film addresses the issue of what kind of country Argentina is and how Argentines present it to foreigners. Considered by Claudio España as Ayala's best film, *Paula Cautiva* won a Silver Condor for Best Film. While Ayala's and Torre Nilsson's films received commercial and critical acclaim, another filmmaker was pushing boundaries in his depiction of national issues.

Fernando Birri (1925–) proposed a more radical way of understanding cinema and its social function. In 1962, he outlined his vision for a kind of filmmaking that would portray the underdevelopment of Latin American countries, aspiring to create

un cine que los desarrolle. Un cine que les dé conciencia, toma de conciencia; que los esclarezca; que fortalezca la conciencia revolucionaria de aquellos que ya la tienen, que los fervorice, que inquiete, preocupe, asuste, debilite a los que tienen 'mala conciencia' [...] que defina perfiles nacionales, latinoamericanos, que sea auténtico, que sea antioligárquico, antiburgués en el orden nacional y anticolonial y antimperialista en el orden internacional.

[a cinema that would develop them. A cinema that would give them awareness, that would enlighten them, that would strengthen the revolutionary conscience of those who have it, that would mobilize them, that would disturb, concern, frighten them, that would weaken those who have a 'guilty conscience' (...) that would define national and Latin American profiles, that would be authentic, that would be anti-oligarchy, anti-bourgeoisie in the national order, and anticolonial and anti-imperialist in the international order] ('Cine,' 1962, 1)

Birri believed that cinema was an ideal instrument with which to mobilize the poor masses and create a national and regional movement that would bring an end to the privilege of the upper and middle classes. According to John King, for Birri 'the enemies were North-American imperialism, multinational capital, the seamless diegesis of Hollywood cinema, the fragmentation caused by neo-colonialism' (1990, 68). Later in the decade his vision would serve as a powerful inspiration for other filmmakers, such as Octavio Getino (1935–2012), Fernando Solanas (1936–), and Gerardo Vallejo (1942–2007).

State support for film production stimulated the emergence of two types of filmmakers. The first type were independent producers, such as José Martínez Suárez (1925–), known for *El Crack* (1960) and *Dar la cara* [Responsibility] (1962); Manuel Antín (1926–), *La cifra impar* [Odd Number] (1962) and *Los venerables todos* [The Venerable Ones] (1963); and actor turned director Lautaro Murúa (1926–1995), *Shunko* (1960) and *Alias Gardelito* [Alias Big Shot] (1961).⁴ Both Murúa and Antín adapted literary texts and worked closely with writers: Murúa with Jorge Abalos, Antín with Augusto Roa Bastos and Julio Cortázar. The second type of filmmakers, known as ‘the Generation of 1960’, encompassed directors born in the late 1910s and early 1920s who modernized narrative styles, among them Simón Feldman (1922–2015), who made *El negocio* [The Big Business] (1959) and *Los de la mesa 10* [Those of Table 10] (1960); David José Kohon (1919–2004), director of *Tres veces Ana* [Three Times Ana] (1961) and *Prisioneros de una noche*; and Rodolfo Kuhn (1934–1987), *Los jóvenes viejos* [The Old Young People] (1962) and *Los inconstantes* [The Inconstant] (1962).⁵ On one hand, ‘the Generation of 1960’ shared similar professional trajectories: many began their career doing shorts and then moved to feature-length films (Falicov, 2007, 31). They were seen as proponents of *auteriste* cinema, that is to say, films following the French *nouvelle vague* of the 1950s, in which the director’s perspective prevailed. One of the most common critiques against this group was their imitation of foreign trends.⁶ On the other hand, ‘the Generation of 1960’ was not formally organized. One of its members, Simón Feldman, who had studied in France in the early 1950s, highlighted the group’s common traits despite the lack of a manifesto (1990, 50). Even though film critics referred to them as the ‘Generation of 1960,’ for Calistro, these directors resisted being grouped together as part of the same movement, only sharing the strategy of making low-cost films, and thus taking advantage of the credit lines available after the passing of Law 62/57. They also aimed to win awards at international film festivals as a way to attract domestic audiences (1984, 122). Nonetheless, Jorge Sala judiciously notes that some of the films of this generation presented formal innovations that ushered in cinematic modernity in Argentina, that is to say, they constituted a break with film narratives of the classic period (1930–1950).⁷ This stylistic renovation brought about a new optimism that was reflected, for instance, in a workshop organized by the Cultural Activities Department of the University of Buenos Aires and in an article, ‘Jornadas de nuevo cine argentino,’ that appeared in *Tiempo de cine*, a publication of the Cine Club (1961, 8). Yet, the films of the *nuevo cine argentino* failed to attract local Argentine cinemagoers. Many reasons contributed to this weak reception of films in the early 1960s.

The early 1960s saw a shift in the consumption of audiovisual products. First, an economic recession in 1960 and 1961 emptied Argentine movie theaters of viewers. Second, the first TV channels started to broadcast, enticing the public who used to frequent movie theaters—that is to say, those with disposable incomes—to buy a TV set. In a piece published in *Tiempo*

de cine in 1961, writer-director Adolfo Lavarello foretold the consequences of broader audiovisual options:

A mediados de 1962 entrarán en funcionamiento más de 30 canales de televisión en el interior del país [...], pero, el verdadero impacto para el cine será para esa fecha. ¿Cómo lo afrontarán los exhibidores? No es muy difícil la respuesta, conociendo un poco al país: Con un mínimo de salas con refrigeración o calefacción, muchas con equipos viejos, butacas incómodas y locales inhóspitos. Tampoco es muy aventurado predecir quien será la cabeza de turco frente a las salas vacías; el tan vejado, incomprendido y desconocido cine nacional.

[In mid-1962 more than 30 channels will begin broadcasting within the country (...), but the true impact for cinema will [become clear] around that date. How will the exhibitors face it? Knowing the country a bit, the answer is not very difficult: since a minimum of theaters have air conditioning or heating, and many have old equipment, uncomfortable seating, and inhospitable theaters, it is not too adventurous to predict who will be the sacrificial victim facing the empty theaters—the highly criticized, misunderstood, and unknown national cinema] (14)

Lavarello was correct in pointing out the impact of greater audiovisual choice, particularly if we consider that several films produced in the early 1960s—*Misión 52* [Mission 52] (Mario Sábato, 1962), *Mi novia es otra* [My Girlfriend is Someone Else] (Jean Jeabelli, 1962), *Disloque en Mar del Plata* [Chaos in Mar del Plata] (Conrado Diana, 1964), and *Sombras en el cielo* [Shadows in the Sky] (Juan Berend, 1964), among others—were not immediately released and some even remained unshown. Others were classified as B-films, thus not qualifying for release in respectable movie theaters. Yet others were co-productions that were never finished. Nevertheless, the state once again intervened in favour of national cinema.

Several actions were taken to encourage the consumption of national cinema, but received uneven support from the different stakeholders. First, a new piece of legislation was passed in 1960. Law 14,226 required the inclusion of 'live performance,' that is to say, short plays in which local actors performed. This stipulation was not new—Law 14,226 had also this requirement. It was strongly resisted by exhibitors as they were not allowed to pass the costs of the live performances onto the price of the movie tickets. Cine Callao defied Law 14,226, stating that it violated the right of freedom of business and property and that its facilities were not suitable for the type of performance ordered by the law. This movie theater was fined for refusing to provide the required live performances and threatened with closure. Acting on behalf of Cine Callao, the Sociedad Argentina Cinematográfica challenged in court the law's legitimacy, which was upheld in a 5-to-1 decision which cited the state's right to protect the unemployed, in this case actors (De Maio, 2010, non. pag.). This lawsuit exposed the tensions that protectionist

legislation generated among film exhibitors.⁸ Two other measures designed to protect the film industry met with the resistance of exhibitors' and the public alike. The first was Decree 2979/63, which established that one national film had to be released for every six foreign ones. This requirement was far from being either new or radical: the obligation to show a national film for every three foreign ones was established in 1951. Moreover, Decree 2979/63 did not differ substantially from similar laws. In Spain, for instance, the exhibition of a national film was needed for every four foreign ones (Calistro, 1984, 128). Nonetheless, thanks to the pressure of US distributors, the decree was not enforced in Argentina (Falicov, 2007, 34). Years later, in 1966, a different tactic was deployed to encourage the exhibition of domestic films: the NIC awarded cash prizes to the three movie theaters that showed Argentine films the longest—from 1,500,000 pesos for first place to 500,000 for third place. Thus, the policy of mandating the exhibition of domestic films was replaced by a less interventionist approach. The second measure that proved controversial was the classification of national films into A category (films whose exhibition in Argentina was mandatory and could be sent abroad) or B category (elective exhibition). This classification, which derived from Law 12,909 (aka 62/57) aimed both to select films according to quality and increase the market share of national films, which in 1961 amounted to only 5% (López, 1988b, 58).⁹ While there was consensus that the state's protection of the national film industry was certainly necessary, what caused divisions and tensions were the policies that favored Argentine directors and actors but were detrimental to local exhibitors. Other reasons for the decline of film releases from 32 in 1962 to 27 in 1963 included, according to journalist Antonio Salgado, high production costs, the implementation of censorship, the filmmakers' divorce from the national audience, and ignorance of the demands of this art (1964, 49). Therefore, around the mid-1960s, opinion articles and surveys showed a concern about the direction and place of Argentine cinema within the national culture.

Even though by 1964 national film production had reached its highest point of the period 1957–1967, there was a sense that Argentine film still needed to attain certain important goals. In 1964, the audience in the cinemas of Buenos Aires numbered 24,046,800, while in 1960 there had been 45,101,100 spectators. This drop of nearly 45% in just four years, which affected both foreign and Argentine films, spoke to an industry facing important challenges. Second, and corresponding to decreasing audiences, there were fewer movie theaters (195 in 1960 versus 154 in 1964) as many were forced to close ('Agoniza' 1969, 17). Consequently, Ideal Dománico, manager of the Hindu movie theater located in downtown Buenos Aires, alluded to the pending goal for Argentine cinema: attracting local audiences to ensure film showings at movie theaters ('Cine argentino versus,' 1965, 49). Besides capturing local spectators, the training of filmmakers was a pressing issue that would be partially solved by the creation of the Film School in 1966. In an interview, seasoned director Torre Nilsson highlighted the

fact that the authorities of the NIC prioritized the ‘fondo de recuperación industrial’ [industrial recuperation fund] and prizes for films without paying attention to the formation of young filmmakers. Explaining that weakness of the law, he held that ‘cuando llegó el momento de darles elementos a las nuevas generaciones, éstas llegaron con inspiración, con grandes posibilidades, pero tuvieron que depender de la gente de la industria que tenía el oficio’ [when the moment came to give the elements to the new generations, they arrived with inspiration, with great possibilities, but had to depend on the people in the industry who had experience] (Salgado, 1965, 4). Torre Nilsson was referring to the Generation of 1960, whose creative energy could not be sustained.

Although the Generation of 1960 had limitations, Alfredo Grassi, controller of the NIC between 1964 and 1966, argued for a hopeful outlook for Argentine cinema. In a 1965 editorial in *Revista de cine*, the NIC’s publication, Grassi held that ‘afirmar que el cine argentino enfrenta hoy un panorama alentador no significa pecar de optimismo’ [to state that Argentine cinema faces today an encouraging outlook is not to err on the side of optimism] (‘Sin pecar,’ 1965, 2). While he admitted that problems still existed, he remarked that ‘ha habido, a partir de 1964, una reactivación de la industria. Se ha salido de un estado de crisis y se ha vencido el espíritu de inercia y frustración’ [since 1964, there has been a reactivation of the industry. We have come out of a state of crisis and we have defeated the spirit of inertia and frustration] (‘Sin pecar,’ 1965, 2). Indeed, on one hand, Argentine cinema saw technical advances. For example, Eastmancolor was first introduced in the country at this time, and in 1965, many of the films released (45.69%), were in color, reaching an all-time high. In addition, reports about the NIC’s initiatives revealed the positive reception of free cinema classes (with a total of 736 students, 65% of whom were men aged 25–30), mentoring for scriptwriting, and the presentation of 180 scripts for four prizes (Grassi, 1965, 60). Furthermore, in 1965, Argentine film production was able to rebound with two types of film.¹⁰ The first type was comedies; three became smashing box office successes: *Fiebre de primavera* [Spring Fever] (Enrique Carreras, 1965), *Bicho raro* [Strange Bug] (Carlos Rinaldi, 1965), and *La mujer del zapatero* [The Shoemaker’s Wife] (Armando Bó, 1965). The second group encompassed artistic and experimental films, such as *Pajarito Gómez* (Rodolfo Kuhn, 1965), which was nominated for the Golden Bear at the Fifteenth Berlin Film festival, and won the Youth Film Award; *Nadie oyó gritar a Cecilio Fuentes* [Nobody Heard Cecilio Fuentes Scream] (Fernando Siro, 1965), which received a Silver Seashell at the San Sebastian Film Festival; and *Crónica de un niño solo* [Chronicle of a Boy Alone] (Leonardo Favio, 1965), which won a Silver Condor for Best Film and the FIPRESCI at the Mar del Plata Film Festival.¹¹ Of particular importance among these award-winning films is *Crónica*, Favio’s debut, which was shot in black and white and dedicated to Torre Nilsson. The film narrates the story of Polín (Diego Puente), a boy who runs away from an orphanage where children are verbally and physically

abused.¹² According to Miguel Ángel Rosado, Favio's film 'logra mantenerse en un plano de humanidad y calidez, manejándose con sobriedad más que elogiabile' [manages to stay on a plane of humanity and warmth, displaying a more than praiseworthy sobriety] ('Crónica,' 1965, 3). Favio, a Peronist, had spent part of his childhood in an orphanage similar to the one seen in the film.¹³ In an interview, he mentioned that during Peronism, childhood was protected and child abuse punished, and thus the harsh society in which Polín moves is non-Peronist.¹⁴

Despite the success of this handful of films, debate about the present and future of Argentine cinema involved different stakeholders. The opinions that appeared in the first issue of *Revista de cine* mentioned Argentina's cinematic mission of depicting national topics. Lawyer Bernardo Biederman, young scenographer Federico Padilla, writer Fermín Estrella Gutiérrez, member of the Cine Club Argentino Emilio Werner, and director Lucas Demare, among others, argued that Argentine cinema should concern itself with national events and topics as a way to find a unique market niche with its own features and style. Directors Mario Soffici and José Martínez Suárez agreed that Argentine cinema should strive to improve Argentine society and all aspects of its citizens' lives, while professor Oscar Nicolás Schiaritti declared that the current range of themes had little variation. For their part, writers Ulises Petit de Murat and Augusto Roa Bastos referred to the specific problems faced by screenwriters. Finally, Armando Bó noted that films had to interest the public ('¿A dónde va?', 1965, 4–5). The debate continued in the second issue of *Revista de cine*, which carried a lengthy editorial by writer Ernesto Sabato (1911–2011), who expressed dissatisfaction at the current situation:

Creo en el futuro de nuestro cine. Hay mucha gente joven con talento, mucha gente joven a punto de madurar para un cine adulto para un cine que sepa indagar la condición del hombre argentino de hoy. Para mí, el dilema del actual cine argentino es éste: por un lado, su origen vinculado al sainete (género muy respetable, por cierto), al teatro de revistas y a otros quehaceres similares. Se trata de un cine hecho por hombres inquietos, a veces grandes intuitivos, pero carentes del bagaje estético que posibilita la auténtica creación artística. Por otro lado, tenemos un cine excesivamente culto refinado hasta el artificio, que peca a veces de cerebralismo y de otras de esteticismo, bloqueando, si así puede decirse, la expresión más genuina del artista. Llegaremos a la mayoría de edad cuando estas dos corrientes se fundan.

[I believe in the future of our cinema. There are many young people with talent, many young people ready for an adult cinema, for a cinema that knows how to interrogate the conditions of today's Argentine man. For me, the current dilemma of Argentine cinema is this: on one hand, its origin related to the vaudeville (certainly, a very respectable genre), to a theater with sexual innuendo and sociopolitical critique, and other similar matters. It is a question of a cinema made by restless men, sometimes very

intuitive, but lacking the aesthetic baggage that makes possible authentic artistic creation. On the other hand, we have a cinema that is excessively refined in its artifices, that sometimes has too much rationalism and sometimes too much aestheticism, blocking, if we may say so, the most genuine expression of the artist. We will be of age when these two trends coalesce] ('Hace falta,' 1966, 6)

Sábato's views showed a lack of conformity with the two variants of Argentine cinema: the popular and aestheticized, those films that appealed to the domestic audience and those that were well-crafted but lacked spectators. Two interrelated points are noteworthy here. First, Sábato's opinion piece reveals the epochal impression that Argentine cinema was about to come of age—a notion akin to the idea of developmentalism and modernization *en vogue* in Argentina since the mid-1950s. Second, Sábato's words express his faith in the potential of domestic filmmakers to cater to the 'hombre argentino de hoy' [Argentine man of the time], which I interpret, following Podalsky, as the urban, middle-class population that consumed films. It is worth briefly pausing to unpack the factors to which Sábato was reacting in his piece.

Sábato, who sometimes moonlighted as a film critic, provided a comprehensive and candid assessment of Argentine cinema in the 1960s. First, he criticized a type of cinema that was oriented toward entertainment, particularly the fictional, unproblematic world of comedies, a genre that directors such as Enrique Carreras (1925–1995) and Fernando Siro (1931–2006) cultivated. These directors, who were both producers and scriptwriters, relied on simple scripts and popular local actors, such as Luis Sandrini (1905–1980), Juan Carlos Altavista (1929–1989), and singer Ramón 'Palito' Ortega (1942–), and equated enjoyable entertainment to a good business formula (Kuhn, 1986). Carreras may well have been one of the 'restless men' described by Sábato, as he usually directed three or four films per year and had a prolific production throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Although light and musical comedies were popular and appeased exhibitors because they generated profits, this type of filmmaking was not deemed a good role model for other Argentine films because of their limited circulation outside the national borders. Second, the term 'excessively refined cinema' may have referred to the adaptation of national and international literary works due to the lack of professional scriptwriters in Argentina. Like Sábato, Calistro considered that this trend amounted to an intellectualization of cinema whose reception among Argentine cinemagoers was uneven (1984, 118). Third, the complaint of 'too much aestheticism' could well have been a critique of the New Argentine Cinema that received awards at foreign festivals but was denied a warm acceptance in Argentina.

Besides the division between artistic and experimental, other areas of the film industry also needed improvement. First on the list was the number of Argentine films produced. An editorial in *Siete Días* presented a bleak outlook compared with past achievements: '56 películas en 1942, 22 en 1966 en un

¼ de siglo, la industria cinematográfica contrajo su producción a niveles inferiores al 50% [56 films in 1942, 22 in 1966; in a quarter of a century, the film industry's production shrank by more than 50%] ('¿Arte o industria?', 1967, 53). Second, not all films could be screened. In its first issue of 1966, *El heraldo del cinematografista* reported that 348 films were released in 1965 (108 fewer than in 1964), of which only 30 were Argentine, amounting to 8.62% of the domestic market ('En 1965,' 1966, 12). The wait for some films to be premiered continued in 1966, with 14 (a little over 30% of the Argentine films released that year) produced before 1964 ('Películas producidas,' 1966, 70).¹⁵ Moreover, as Table 2 shows, the three highest-grossing foreign films earned a total of over 124 million pesos while the three highest-grossing Argentine films earned a total of 6 million pesos, less than 5% of the total domestic market share.

Table 2: Total Box Office Takings by September 10, 1966

Film	Box office takings (pesos)
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	87,270,840
<i>Do Not Disturb</i>	19,443,410
<i>Dr. Zhivago</i>	18,886,970
<i>Del brazo y por la calle</i>	4,710,000
<i>Castigo al traidor</i>	769,390
<i>El ojo que espía</i>	379,500

Source: *El heraldo*, 21 September 1966: 381.

Political instability also impacted the Argentine film industry. At the end of July 1966, the civilian authorities were once again forcefully removed. Shortly after the military *coup*, Julio Godoy, production head and participant in the *cinemateca* of the official TV Channel 7, along with a group of armed civilians and several policemen, occupied the site of the NIC claiming that some employees had removed papers from the institution. This event showed the dissatisfaction of some sectors with the leadership of the institute and challenged Grassi's direction of the NIC. Consequently, he was first replaced by Colonel Oscar Vedoya from July 1–13, 1966 and later by Lt. Colonel Ridruejo, who took over the NIC as a general administrator.¹⁶ Despite the change in authorities, an editorial detailed the persistent problems of the institute:

En 10 años de existencia, el INC tuvo 9 presidentes o interventores: ninguno alcanzó a completar el mandato de 3 años. Ninguno de ellos logró atacar dos problemas básicos: 1) la creación de una empresa de estilo Pel-Mex que obtenga mercados de compradores para nuestras

películas 2) enfrentar con decisión la política crudamente mercantilista de los exhibidores que favorecen el drenaje constante de divisas mediante la importación indiscriminada de filmes extranjeros.

[In its ten years of existence, the NIC had nine presidents or auditors: none was able to complete his three-year term. None managed to tackle two basic problems: 1) the creation of a company similar to Pel-Mex that obtains markets for our films; 2) decisively challenge the exhibitors' extreme mercantilist policy, which favors the constant drainage of currency through the indiscriminate import of foreign films] ('Proceso al cine,' 1966, 53)

These comments illustrate the main challenges facing the Argentine film industry: how to reach wider domestic and foreign audiences.

Although the editorial was not particularly optimistic, certain steps were taken to advance Argentine film abroad given that the total population of Argentina, at a little over 22 million people in 1965, did not constitute a large enough market to recuperate film costs. Alfredo Grassi was a staunch proponent of the idea that Argentine cinema not only was a product for domestic consumption, but he also thought filmmakers needed to think of viewers beyond the national borders: 'podemos tener un cine [...] recibido con benéplacito entre nosotros, pero que al no intentar lo captación de otros espectadores fuere de los límites del país terminará desnutriéndose hasta tornarse híbrido' [we could have a (...) well-received cinema at home but, given that it does not seek to attract other spectators beyond our country's borders, it will end up lacking nourishment until becoming a hybrid] ('Conformarnos,' 1966, 1). Several initiatives were implemented to expand film collaborations. First, the NIC commissioned Miguel Ángel Rieta to tour Latin American countries; in his report, Rieta strongly advised the NIC to become the distributor of Argentine films abroad ('El cine argentino en Latinoamérica,' 1966, 90). Second, in August 1965, Grassi signed a friendly agreement with Spain as a first step in the process of paving the way for a new cinema treaty that would unite both countries and encourage the making and circulation of co-produced films. In addition, in order to encourage cinematic exchanges, Pío Cabanillas, the Spanish representative, and Grassi approved the establishment of a provisional quota for the circulation of Spanish films in Argentina and Argentine films in Spain. The formal agreement was signed later when Grassi and José María García Escudero, Director General of Spanish Cinematography and Theater, came up with a table that specified the percentages of each country's contributions, and was approved by the Unión del Cine Hispano-Americano [Union of Hispanic American Cinema] (UCHA) to regulate Spanish-Argentine co-productions ('Grassi se confiesa,' 1966, 309). The treaty was hailed as a crucial way not only to establish links with other film-producing countries, but also to develop a cohesive policy of agreements that would benefit Argentine cinema. Third, Argentine cinema was promoted abroad through treaties with other countries. At the end of

1965, Argentine filmmaker Rodolfo Kuhn, the Chilean Helvio Soto, and the Brazilian Leon Hirszman met at the film festival in Viña del Mar, Chile to discuss the shooting of a three-episode film with the participation of all three countries. This project strived to pioneer multinational films that would eventually include filmmakers from Perú, Venezuela, and Mexico ('El cine argentino en Latinoamérica,' 1966, 89). Fourth, in January 1966, an Advisory Commission for the International Promotion of Argentine Cinema made up of members of the NIC and representatives of producers (Luis Mentasti), directors (Román Viñoly Barreto and Rodolfo Kuhn), and actors (Susana Freyre and Nathán Pinzón) was created ('Comisión,' 1966, 22). Fifth, in March 1966, another agreement, allowing the exhibition of Argentine films as if they were national films (without paying taxes as other foreign films did), was signed with representatives of Chile. Furthermore, an informal pact with France was reached to intensify filmic exchanges between the two countries. These treaties contributed to raising awareness that the development of Argentine cinema entailed a diversification of the national production which, without sacrificing quality, would also aim to perform well among foreign audiences. Sixth, in June 1966, the NIC selected 11 films from 1965 and 1966—mostly comedies and dramas—for the *semanas de cine argentino* [Weeks of Argentine Cinema] to be held in Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Venezuela ('Semanas,' 1966, 17). While the promotion of Argentine cinema abroad was important, the main focus was its performance in the domestic market. In the following ten years, three cinema laws were passed by military governments. In addition, in 1968 a law regulating film censorship was also approved, and would remain in effect until 1994. Next, I analyze Argentine cinema during the military governments of Onganía, Levingston, and Lanusse.

Notes

- 1 According to Maranghello, in 1956, 576 foreign films were released in Argentina ('Cine,' 2005, 221).
- 2 Kohon also directed *Tres veces Ana* [Three Times Ana] (1961), *Los jóvenes viejos* [Young Old People] (1961), *Los inconstantes* [The Inconstant] (1962).
- 3 For Armando Rapallo, *Captive Paula* and *The Boss* were Ayala's best films (1993, 19).
- 4 *Alias Gardelito* garnered two awards from the Argentine Association of Film Critics: Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. *Shunko* received two Silver Condors for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Film awarded by the Argentine Association of Film Critics, and the Best Film Prize at the Mar del Plata Film Festival.
- 5 Ana López calls the Generation of 1960 'nueva ola' [new wave] (1987, 56–57) and John King 'new wave' (1990, 82).
- 6 In his review of *Homenaje a la hora de la siesta*, Antonio Salgado compared it with *La dolce vita* and *Heroica* by Andrzej Munk (1962, 32).

- 7 Jorge Sala states of *Los jóvenes viejos* that 'la presentación del filme pone ya sobre la palestra la reflexión sobre el tipo de relato que se dará a ver al espectador' [the film's presentation brings to the fore the reflection about the type of story that the spectator will see] (2012, 8).
- 8 Cinema in this period was plagued by lawsuits. For instance, in 1964 Pierre Bruno Hugo Fontana, aka Hugo del Carril, an actor who had been associated with Peronism, sued the NIC for his removal from the group representing Argentina at the Acapulco Film Festival in 1964 ('Niégase,' 1966, non. pag.).
- 9 This classification had been used in the early 1950s. For more on this, please see Kriger (2009, 75).
- 10 Ana Laura Lusnich refers to the industrial and independent modes of production and circulation (2011, 25).
- 11 Favio began his cinematographic career in 1957 as an actor in Enrique Carreras's *El ángel de España* [Spain's Angel] and worked on many of Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's films.
- 12 Favio, who also wrote the script of *Crónica*, states that 'mis personajes brotan de mi realidad' [my characters stem from my reality] (Schettini, 1995, 90).
- 13 In an interview, Favio stated that 'yo soy un peronista instintivo porque yo fui uno de los que recibió una pelota cuando era chico' [I am an instinctive Peronist because I was one of those who got a ball when I was a child] (Nahmias, 2005, 160).
- 14 There is a diegetic reference to the action taking place on July 26, 1963.
- 15 One of those films, an Argentine-American co-production entitled *Extraña invasión* [*Stay Tuned for Terror*] directed by Emilio Vieyra, would only be released in 1974.
- 16 Grassi personified the modernizing zeitgeist of the 1960s. In a March 1966 article in *Revista de cine* published by the NIC, Grassi explained his concept of Argentine cinema: 'cine planificado, cine pensado, cine hecho después de estudiar mercados [...] cine para el país. Cine para una América Latina de habla hispana que espera deseosa y algo decepcionada la consagración definitiva de un arte que en algún tiempo tuvo resonancia y predicamento [...]. Queremos un cine representativo de nuestro acervo, un cine que interese, un cine con estilo.' [a planned cinema, a well-thought-out cinema, made after studying the markets [...] a cinema for the country. A cinema for a Spanish-speaking Latin America that eagerly and somewhat disappointedly awaits the definitive consecration of an art that once had relevance and prestige. We want a cinema that is representative of our heritage, a cinema that interests people and has style] (1966, 1).

Argentine Cinema, 1966–1973

To solve the glitches of Law 62/57, another cinema law was passed in 1966. One of the problems of this law was that the percentage received by producers as loans/subsidies could well exceed a film's box office takings and total costs. For instance, *Del brazo y por la calle* [*Arm in Arm Down the Street*] received 8,582,794 million pesos from the NIC while, as shown in Table 2, its box office takings were less than 5 million. Similarly, *Castigo al traidor* [*Punishment to the Traitor*] had a pending balance with the NIC of 6,007,956 million pesos, but received only 981,176, still significantly more than its box office takings of 769,390 pesos ('Optimismo,' 1966, 381). This state of affairs had led Grassi to warn in February 1966 that the refunds from the NIC would be one of the main areas of change in the cinema law ('Recuperación,' 1966, 47). Consequently, it was promised that the eight films/producers that still needed to be paid would see their refunds in January 1967, provided that the NIC's takings were strong ('El resto,' 1966, 389). High subsidies had depleted the NIC's operational funds even though its revenue had consistently increased: according to Grassi, its income in 1963 was 300 million, 330 million in 1964, 440 million in 1965, and around 550–80 million in 1966 ('Grassi se confiesa,' 1966, 309).

Law 16,955—which amended that of 1957—was passed in September 1966, but without crucial input from those working in the Argentine film industry. Fundamentally, the new law sought to address the financial problems that were besieging the NIC, particularly the *fondo de recuperación industrial* [industrial recuperation fund]. The new law encouraged box office successes as film revenues could be used to finance up to 75% of future film productions, the reinvestment of earnings serving as an effective way to promote national films ('Nueva ley de,' 1966, 21). Nonetheless, the reinvestment of earnings was limited to what had been invested in film production, addressing the problem that some films received more funds than was spent on their production because of their solid performance at the box office.¹ This new law also contemplated the end of the live performances that had generated so much controversy. One aspect that the law regulated was the decisions of the panels in charge of selecting films, which could not be appealed. Moreover,

this law specified the creation of 20 different awards, which would replace the cash prizes, such as Best Feature Film shot in color and black and white, Best Short Film shot in color and black and white, Best Actor and Actress, and Best Adapted Screenplay. Of these prizes, perhaps the most curious was the one to reward exhibitors who showed Argentine films, which spoke to the difficulty of screening national films. The law also aimed to strongly support films for children. Finally, a general and an associate manager would replace the director in charge of the NIC. The law called for the creation of a Film Rating Board comprising the general manager, three members of the NIC, and one representative of producers and exhibitors each. The Board would classify films as category A—obligatory exhibition and all benefits specified in the law—or B—without obligation to be exhibited or benefits, but some of this films would be eligible for export. Law 16,995, however, was far from pleasing all sectors. In October 1966, the Association of Argentine Actors complained to the NIC authorities, saying that they had not been heard in the crafting of the law, whose modifications ‘no sólo no fueron solicitadas sino que concurren a agravar la crisis permanente en nuestro cine’ [not only were not requested, but also help to worsen the permanent crisis of our cinema] (‘Pronunciamiento,’ 1966, 411). In addition, those signing the complaint argued that the state decided films’ content and messages (‘Pronunciamiento,’ 1966, 411). Also pushing for the interests of its members, the Association of Argentine Distributors of Films (AADF) proposed the centralization of decisions related to cinema at the NIC, the implementation of higher quotas for the importation of films whose commercialization would help increase the promotion fund, and the substitution of the live performance for an Argentine short.

After the passing of the new law, one of the first tasks for the new NIC authorities was to balance the accounts. By September 1966, the NIC owed several producers who had not been paid cash prizes or the industrial recuperation subsidies (‘Optimismo,’ 1966, 381 and 389). A month later, the new authorities made a public statement saying that exhibitors owed the NIC 118 million pesos, corresponding to the 10% tax to promote Argentine cinema. Another 117 million pesos pertaining to the tax (15%) to build schools were also due. The statement asserted that ‘entre ambos totalizan 235 millones, cifra obviamente considerable que el estado no cobró hasta ahora por sus propias deficiencias de control y administración’ [both add up to 235 million, a considerable amount that the state has not yet collected due to its own shortcomings in control and administration] (‘Moratoria,’ 1966, 438). Only in March 1967 could the NIC begin to provide new loans for film productions (‘Comenzó,’ 1967, 131). This was possible thanks to increased revenue as a result of the strong box office performance of several films during the previous year. *Hotel Alojamiento* [Hotel Lodging] (Fernando Ayala), *Pimienta* [Pepper] (Carlos Rinaldi), *Cómo te extraño mi amor* [How I Miss You, My Darling] (Enrique Cahen Salaberry), *Mi primera novia* [My First Girlfriend] (Enrique Carreras), *Pampa salvaje* [Savage Pampa] (Hugo

Fregonese), and *Del brazo y por la calle* (Enrique Carreras) all did very well at the box office.² Nonetheless, an editorial in *El heraldo* continued to warn readers about problems affecting the Argentine film industry:

Si el conjunto no mueve precisamente al optimismo, su característica mayor—y en parte su disculpa—es la estrecha vinculación al desasosiego económico-político en que se está debatiendo el reemplazo de una ley inactual por otra (de emergencia) narcotizante y a la falta de visión comercial, planificación y elevadas miras de los mismos productores.

[If this ensemble does not precisely generate optimism, its main characteristic—and in part its apology—is the close connection to the economic and political instability in which the replacement of one old-fashioned law for another (urgent) narcotic one is being debated as well as the lack of commercial vision, planning, and the producers' lofty goals] ('Balance 66,' 1967, 14)

In 1966, two films stood out for their quality and the topics they depicted. *Castigo al traidor* (Manuel Antín) and *El ojo que espía* [*The Eavesdropper*] (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson) enjoyed moderate success among viewers and critics alike, but both represented Argentine filmmaking at film festivals. Released in May 1966, *Castigo* was nominated by the NIC to be Argentina's entry at the eighth Mar del Plata Film Festival. Based on a short story by Augusto Roa Bastos, *Castigo* deals with a man who meets his father's killer. *El mundo* praised Antín's film, stating that *Castigo* 'abre un rumbo diferente en la obra del más discutido (en alto nivel obviamente) de los realizadores argentinos. El estilo de Antín continúa extendiéndose en films enigmáticos que ahora, en su beneficio, han perdido hermetismo' [opens a new path in the *oeuvre* of the most polemical (at the highest level obviously) of Argentine filmmakers. Antín's style remains evident in enigmatic films that now, to his benefit, have lost their hermetic quality] ('Un Antín,' 1966, 15). For its part, Torre Nilsson's *El ojo que espía*, based on a script by Beatriz Guido, was a US-Argentine co-production financed by Columbia Pictures narrating the subversive political activities of Martín Casal (Statis Giallelis), a member of a traditional upper-class family. The review in *El mundo* stressed the film's importance: 'constituye, según se adelanta, el primero intento serio para que nuestro cine tenga una difusión en el exterior puesto que fue realizado en dos versiones en castellano y en inglés con el propósito de conquistar otros mercados para la exhibición de films argentinos' [it constitutes, as anticipated, the first serious effort to distribute our cinema abroad, given that it was shot in two versions (in Spanish and in English) with the goal of reaching other markets for the exhibition of Argentine films] ('Testimonio,' 1967, 17). For *El heraldo*'s critic, the film was mediocre, given that 'personajes y sentimientos no han sido tratados con la agudeza que las difíciles circunstancias aludidas requerían' [characters and feelings are not depicted with the sharpness that the difficult circumstances required] ('El ojo,' 1966, 362). Despite its weak

critical reception, *El ojo* was screened at several film festivals—Rio de Janeiro in 1965, Cannes in 1966, and the eighth Mar del Plata Film Festival in 1966 as an invited film. In 1967, it garnered two Silver Condors: one for best director (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson) and another for best film.

For Argentine cinema, 1967 was a year of paradoxes. On the one hand, the total number of Argentine films released that year fell from 34 to 27, a drop of almost 20% which put film production at the same level as that of 1963. This decrease went against the forecasts and optimism that Argentine cinema had generated in January 1967 ('Pronostican,' 1967, 78). On the other hand, the first semester of the year saw the release of 47% more films than in 1966 ('Primer semestre,' 1967, 280) and the total number of spectators in downtown Buenos Aires movie theaters reached 10,246,285, a number that would decrease in the next two years ('150.000 espectadores,' 1970, 15). The strong attendance positively impacted revenue: in the first four months of 1967, the NIC raised 18% more funds than in the same four months of the previous year, which amounted to an extra 28 million pesos earmarked for loans for future films ('18% más,' 1967, 217). This fresh solvency in turn allowed the extension of credit lines for new films:

El Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía, completado su saneamiento económico, está en condiciones de otorgar préstamos, aunque eso sí [...] con una cierta selección: preferirá los de temas importantes y dejará de lado los netamente comerciales, que pueden hallar financiación por otras vías; en todo caso, más adelante, robustecidos los fondos, también habrá créditos para ellos.

[Having completed its economic restructuring, the National Institute of Cinematography is now able to provide loans, though (...) with certain conditions: it will prefer those with important topics and will disregard those that are eminently commercial and can get funding from other sources; in any case, once the funds are robust, there will be loans for them, too] ('Ahora que,' 1967, 387)

Nevertheless, some of the first loans provided by the NIC went precisely to popular films, such as *¡Al diablo con este cura!* [To Hell with this Priest!] (Carlos Rinaldi) and *Tacuara y Chamorro* [Tacuara and Chamorro] (Catrano Catrani), both comedies with popular actors as the strategy was to orient production toward mass entertainment ('Pronostican,' 1967, 78). A drama, *Soluna* [Soluna] (Marcos Madanes), was also selected based on the 'criterio de no olvidar las realizaciones artísticas aunque se vuelque gran apoyo sobre los entretenimientos susceptibles de mantener una fuerte concurrencia de público al cine argentino' [guideline of not forgetting artistic works even while giving strong support to entertaining projects likely to maintain a strong audience showing for Argentine cinema] ('Comenzó a dar,' 1967, 131).

The most remarkable film of 1967 was *El romance del Aniceto y la Francisca* [Aniceto and Francisca's Romance] directed by Leonardo Favio. Shot in

black and white, *El romance* garnered four Silver Condors for Best Film, Best Actor (Federico Luppi), Best Actress (Elsa Daniel), and Best Supporting Actor (Edgardo Suárez).³ *Gente* described it as ‘una pequeña joyita que revela muchísima dedicación y talento en todo sentido, pero podría asegurarse que es casi incomprendible para el llamado “público grande”’ [a nice little jewel that reveals a lot of dedication and talent in every sense, but it could be stated that it is almost incomprehensible for the so-called ‘broad public’] (*‘El romance,’* 1967, 44).⁴ Indeed, *El romance* has original aerial shots and slow pans that show a mastery of camerawork, yet the film’s dialogues are sparse and simple, emphasizing the slow narrative. The lead actor, Federico Luppi, however, was deemed ‘excepcional, un actor cuya fuerza interpretativa es poco común’ [exceptional, an actor whose performative force is unique] (*‘El romance,’* 1967, 45).

One of the pending issues of 1967 was the change to the existing cinema law—Law 16,955—passed the previous year. A draft began circulating in January 1967, with provisions for film classifications, theaters, exhibition quotas, the *fondo de recuperación* [fund to recuperate costs], and refunds for those exhibitors who showed national films. According to *El heraldo*, exhibitors considered the draft deplorable, but producers indicated that while the document was far from perfect, ‘se extrañan de la reacción de los empresarios, que no retacearon su disconformidad’ [they (were) surprised by the reaction of the businessmen, who (did) not hide their displeasure] (*‘Reacciones,’* 1967, 35). The draft anticipated refunding producers up to 75% of the approved costs and trailers, while exhibitors would receive 7% of each theater’s earnings minus taxes only after 60 days. As the draft was being composed, Jorge Couselo wrote an opinion piece in July 1967 urging the authorities to consider cinema as both a cultural and economic product (*‘Romance,’* 1967, 270). Throughout 1967, there were meetings between Lieutenant Colonel Ridruejo, producers, and exhibitors regarding the branding of Argentine cinema abroad. In one such meeting, Ridruejo pledged his support for a promotional plan but indicated the need to research markets, set priorities, and concentrate on those markets most receptive to Argentine films (*‘¿Qué vendemos?’*, 1967, 216).

Given the budgetary constraints and the selection process, co-productions were seen as an alternative means to finance films.⁵ Ramón ‘Palito’ Ortega starred in *El rey en Londres* [The King in London], an Argentine-British co-production between Saga Films SA and Associated British Pathé Productions that was released in October 1966 with a provisional authorization from the NIC (*‘En Londres,’* 1966, 22).⁶ Shot in Eastman color with the participation of actress Graciela Borges, *El rey* follows a popular Argentine singer around London as he watches the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace and attends theatrical plays. The voiceovers of ‘the king’ and his partner Graciela provide additional explanation of the events they witness. The film was far from well-received, as the public protested it in some screenings. A filmmaker who engaged in co-productions with

more success was Enrique Carreras. His romantic comedy *Del brazo y por la calle* (1966), starring Rodolfo Bebán and Evangelina Salazar, was a Spanish-Argentine co-production. The film won a Silver Condor for Best Argentine Film in 1966 and received a Golden Shell for Best Film at the fourteenth San Sebastián Film Festival, while Salazar garnered a Silver Shell for best actress. Carreras also directed the co-produced *¿Quiere casarse conmigo?* [*Would You Marry Me?*] (1967) and *Este cura* [*This Priest*], also known as *Operación San Antonio* [*Operation San Antonio*] (1968), based on a script by acclaimed Spanish writer Alfonso Paso. Other co-produced films shot in 1966 and released in 1967 were: *Escándalo en la familia* [*Scandal in the Family*] (Spain-Argentina, Julio Porter), *La perra* [*The Bitch*] (Mexico-Argentina, Emilio Gómez Muriel), and *En la selva no hay estrellas* [*No Stars in the Jungle*] (Argentina-Peru, Armando Robles Godoy) ('Coproducciones 66,' 1967, 45).⁷ Co-productions released in 1968 were the Mexican-Argentine *La cama* [*The Bed*] directed by Mexican Emilio Gómez Muriel, based on a script by Alfredo Ruanova, with whom he had worked on *La perra*, and *Una sueca entre nosotros* [*A Swede Among Us*], also known as *Amor a la española* [*Spanish Love*] (Fernando Merino) with Argentine actress Erika Wallner.

Co-productions opened the door for much-needed exchanges with other Latin American countries and Spain. Perhaps as a result of the critical reception of *Castigo*, Antín received the offer to direct *El muerto* [*The Dead One*], based on one of Jorge Luis Borges's stories, in Brazil.⁸ In a cable to France Presse, Antín stated that 'el cine latinoamericano debe unificar sus esfuerzos para constituir un mercado común con producciones de alta calidad' [*Latin American cinema must combine its strengths to create a common market for its high-quality productions*] ('Manuel Antín,' 1966, 14). The idea of building a common market for Latin American films was also encouraged by the NIC. Leopoldo Torre Nilsson also resorted to co-productions with international partners. His *Homenaje a la hora de la siesta* [*Four Women for One Hero*] (1962) was an Argentine-Brazilian-French co-production which, despite representing Argentina at the Venice Film Festival in 1962, was far from being a solid film. Torre Nilsson also directed *El ojo en la cerradura* Columbia Pictures.⁹ Nonetheless, he expressed concerns about the system:

La co-producción ha sido simplemente un fenómeno [de] cofinanciación [...] La co-producción lleva en sí un germen nocivo. Por eso la solución tiene que ser una solución nacional [...] Los países] tienen que aprovechar la savia nacional para desarrollarse con los elementos que cuentan, sin la intromisión del capital o los elementos foráneos, siempre peligrosos.

[Co-productions have simply been a phenomenon (of) co-financing (...) Co-productions have a harmful side. That is why the solution should be a national one (...) Countries) must take advantage of their national vitality to develop with the elements they have, without the interference of foreign capital or elements, which is always dangerous] ('Leopoldo Torre Nilsson,' 1966, 49)

Despite these comments cautioning against co-productions, a year later Torre Nilsson made three more co-produced films, in association with American producer André du Rona. The first was *La chica de los lunes* [*Monday's Child*] (1967), shot in Puerto Rico with US actors in the lead roles—Geraldine Chaplin, Arthur Kennedy, and Deborah Reed—and an Argentine crew.¹⁰ Their second co-production was *Los traidores de San Ángel* [*Traitors of San Ángel*] (1968), Torre Nilsson's first color film, with actress Graciela Borges in a lead role, and the third was *Martín Fierro* (1968).¹¹ In March 1967, it was announced that Torre Nilsson would direct *The White Witch of Rose Hall*, which would be shot in Jamaica with a \$3 million budget. The film, based on the book by Derek Pousek, was the biography of Annie Palmer, a woman accused of murdering her husbands using voodoo rites ('Nilsson y la primera,' 1967, 111). This project, however, ended up being cancelled.

While co-productions were crucial for Argentine films to capture new markets, their entrance into other countries was riddled with difficulties. First, there was the perception that the Argentine was a kind of cinema that did not generate interest. In an opinion piece, Héctor Olivera, founder and business partner of Aries Cinematográfica, admitted that 'El cine argentino no interesa en el exterior' [Argentine cinema does not interest audiences abroad], but later added that 'lo único que interesa en América latina de nuestras películas es el sexo' [the only thing in our films that interests Latin America is sex] (Vertiz, 1967, 264). Olivera's remark was surprising given that one of Aries's productions, *Hotel Alojamiento*, was sold to Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Canada, the United States, Germany, and Venezuela, proving that Argentine films could be sold abroad. The publicity for *Hotel's* release in Venezuela did not mention its country of origin, but the film performed well nonetheless. In addition to Olivera, Armando Bó and Torre Nilsson both released films abroad. Despite these achievements, Sono Films called off business trips throughout Latin America since in 1967 it could only sell films to Uruguay; investing in capturing new markets proved onerous for Argentine producers. One of the issues faced by producers seeking to expand their audiences was whether to sell the rights to their films in a lump sum or to use percentages depending on the film's reception. The former was a way to avoid getting into checking accounts in a foreign country but this option had the downside that the selling price could end up being too low if the film did well, and the latter demanded time and trips to build a trustworthy network. Another factor to consider was the star power in each film. Lucio Vertiz noted that Isabel Sarli and Libertad Leblanc, two actresses with recognition abroad, did not enjoy a good reputation in Argentina, and actors such as Carlos Bala and Palito Ortega, popular in Argentina, struggled to attract crowds in other Latin American countries (Vertiz, 1967, 267).

Along with the push for co-productions, there was also an interest in representing national themes. In mid-1967, Torre Nilsson announced that he would direct *Martín Fierro*, Argentina's national poem written by José Hernández in 1872, with a total budget of 70 million pesos, of which du

Rona would supply half. Probably because of the topic, the film was not considered a co-production. Torre Nilsson had contemplated shooting *Martín Fierro* in the early 1960s as a joint endeavor between his production company, Angel, and Argentina Sono Films, but the project fell through. Years later, while directing two co-productions in Puerto Rico, he began to think again about shooting *Martín Fierro*. In an interview he admitted that ‘Beatriz Guido terminó por convencerme de que sólo contando la historia de Martín Fierro podría contar la historia de todos los argentinos que había querido y que era el modo más notorio de integrarnos al país’ [Beatriz Guido ended up convincing me that only by telling the story of Martín Fierro would I be able to tell the story of all the Argentines I have loved and that it was the most obvious way to integrate ourselves into the country] (‘Si no hago,’ 1967, 262). The film was one of the biggest commercial hits of the year with gross earnings of 200 million pesos.¹² A thorough analysis of *Martín Fierro* is presented in Section II, ‘The *Gauchesque*.’

Table 3: Most Popular Argentine Films in 1968

Film	Producer
<i>Martín Fierro</i> (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson)	Contracuerdo
<i>Un muchacho como yo</i> [<i>A Boy Like Me</i>] (Enrique Carreras)	Sono
<i>Psexoanálisis</i> [<i>Sex Analysis</i>] (Héctor Olivera)	Aries
<i>Lo prohibido está de moda</i> [<i>Forbidden Things are in Style</i>] (Fernando Siro)	European
<i>Digan lo que digan</i> [<i>Let Them Talk</i>] (Mario Camus)	Co-production with Spain and Sono
<i>Coche-cama alojamiento</i> (Julio Porter)	Sono

Source: ‘1968,’ *El heraldo*: 592.

Other important developments of Argentine cinema in 1968 were the role of political filmmaking and a new cinema law. The Cine Liberación group entered the cinematographic scene, initiating what Ana López has called a ‘film act’ that would encourage active participation in the decolonization process (1988b, 64) and John King has termed the ‘new Latin American cinema’ influenced by revolutionary ideas (1990, 66). Filmmakers Octavio Getino, Jorge Cedrón, and Fernando Solanas saw film as a powerful medium to enlighten the illiterate rural masses as well as students and the working classes who could develop class-based solidarity to fight for radical social change (Burton, 1986; Lusnich and Piedras, 2011). They sought to increase Argentines’ awareness of their own country and the region’s dependency and ‘backwardness.’ In May 1968, *La hora de los hornos* [*The Hour of the Furnaces*] (Getino and Solanas) was released.¹³ Getino and Solanas proposed

a ‘Third Cinema,’ which was associated with Third World countries and was different from the First Cinema, represented by Hollywood, and Second Cinema, *auterist* cinema. For Mariano Mestman, ‘el cine militante involucra en un lugar central la discusión sobre el desarrollo de un circuito popular de exhibición’ [militant cinema makes central the discussion of the development of a popular circuit of exhibition] (2001, 124). That is to say, given its social function, Third Cinema was not to be screened in traditional movie theaters, but rather in an alternative circuit, close to the masses. This was so because this new cinema, according to King, ‘grew up in imaginative proximity of social revolution’ (1990, 66). Thus, as befits radical change, new forms of production and exhibition were used.

The second development of 1968 was the passing of another cinema law, in May. Article 7 of Law 17,741 listed the features of national films: they had to be Spanish-language, produced by Argentines residing in Argentina, and shot at least 75% in Argentina and/or with a 75% Argentine cast, more than 60 minutes long, and shot in 35 mm. Article 8 listed the features of shorts: at least 30 minutes long, shot entirely in Argentina with a domestic cast, and without advertising. Article 9 mandated the NIC to classify films through the Junta Asesora Honoraria [Honorary Advisory Board]. Article 23 detailed the mandatory certificate for the exhibition of national and foreign films: ‘El instituto podrá negar este certificado por razones comerciales o por atentar contra el estilo de nacional de vida o las pautas culturales de la comunidad argentina’ [The institute may deny this certificate for commercial reasons or for conspiring against the national lifestyle or the cultural guidelines of the Argentine community] (‘Ley 17,741,’ 1968, 206). Article 24 defined the fund for the protection of national cinema. One of the most curious aspects of this law was Article 35’s statement that producers would receive subsidies proportional to their films’ performance abroad. Also, at a time when the Argentine state was seeking to protect the national film industry, the new law allowed the entry of foreign films at the discretion of the NIC.¹⁴ The law also regulated a new category called ‘special interest’ for domestic films. Finally, Article 40 indicated that the NIC would decide annually the amount of funding available for national and co-produced films.

Although the new law had been in preparation for more than a year, its passing had a mixed reception. For film directors Feldman, Carreras, and Demare, one positive aspect of it was the promotion of shorts and they thought that, overall, the law was an encouraging sign for the future of Argentine cinema though there were still details to be discussed. Producers Federico Nieves and Atilio Metasti also highlighted the protection of shorts, but Nieves noted certain ambiguous points that were concerning and Metasti singled out the power given to the NIC (‘Opiniones,’ 1968, 28). For *El heraldo*, the new law only benefitted producers and national laboratories (‘1968 fue el año,’ 1968, 591). It was not popular among exhibitors, who experienced diminishing numbers of spectators as a result of the compulsory showing of Argentine films, greater fiscal pressure, and an increase in the price of renting

movie theaters. All these circumstances contributed to cutting their earnings to 22.5% of the price of each movie ticket ('1968 fue el año,' 1968, 592). At the end of May 1968, two weeks after Law 17,741 was approved, a group of exhibitors met with Ridruejo to express their dissatisfaction with the new law. They also warned that they would contest it, citing its unconstitutionality ('Salas A al 50,' 1968, 223). As a way to placate the opposition, an advisory board was created to classify different theaters. Exhibitors also continued to push for an average number of spectators required for the continued screening of Argentine films, while producers understood that the average should be based on the price of a movie ticket ('Exhibidores,' 1968, non. pag.). In addition, from June to July 1968, three public debates were held to discuss the new regulation. In the final debate of August 1968, it was stated that 'la nueva ley, rigurosamente analizada por los abogados del quehacer cinematográfico, no responde, en la totalidad de sus aspectos a las necesidades y prospectos del cine nacional' [rigorously analyzed by lawyers specializing in cinema, the new law does not meet, in the totality of its facets, the needs or the directions of national cinema] ('Se realizó,' 1968, 9). According to the newspaper *La capital*, the most contentious aspects of the new law were Article 3, which contemplated the exclusion of certain films from exhibition, and Article 23, in which the Argentine lifestyle and the cultural features of the Argentine community were mentioned ('Se realizó,' 1968, 9). In August, Resolution 491/68 of the NIC decreed that Argentine films should be approved by the Ente Nacional de Calificación [National Film Rating Board] before being submitted to the Honorary Advisory Board, which would decide on their classification and mandatory screening. The National Film Rating Board was established in December, without representatives from either filmmakers or actors. For directors, the new law would have to strike a balance between industrial and creative aspects so that those receiving funds from the NIC could express themselves freely. Nonetheless, at the end of 1968, new credit lines for the film industry were established between the Banco Nación and the NIC ('1968 fue,' 1968, 591). One of the first loans under the new law went to Aries Cinematográfica for the production of *La fiaca* [*The Fiaca*] (Fernando Ayala).¹⁵

Film production in 1968 was characterized by the box office success of *Martín Fierro* and several comedies such as *Un muchacho como yo* [*A Boy Like Me*] (Enrique Carreras) and *Psexoanálisis* [*Sex Analysis*] (Héctor Olivera). These films were made possible thanks to the industrial recuperation fund and were aimed at large audiences as a way to recuperate costs ('1968 fue,' 1968, 592). Unlike the popular films of 1968, Juan José Jusid's debut *Tute cabrero* [*Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo*] stood out. Directed by Jusid, who had experience in advertising, *Tute cabrero* centers around three employees who must decide who will be fired from their downsizing company. For Juan Ignacio Torres, despite *Tute cabrero's* *costumbrismo*, its originality resides in unusual takes that allow for multiple interpretations (2010, 68). The film's script, originally written for TV by Roberto Cossa, had problems

that resulted in stretching situations and repetitions to the detriment of its dramatic development (M.A.R., 1968, 41).

Table 4: Most Popular Films in Argentina

Film	Country	Box-office takings
<i>Guess Who is Coming to Dinner?</i>	USA	81,707,060
<i>To Sir with Love</i>	UK	54,101,220
<i>Wait Until Dark</i>	USA	43,603,670
<i>Closely Watched Trains</i>	Czechoslovakia	39,255,960
<i>Life for Life</i>	France	39,000,000
<i>Martín Fierro</i>	Argentina	37,381,150
<i>Belle de Jour</i>	France	33,767,060
<i>The Graduate</i>	USA	30,000,000

Source: 'Los éxitos del año,' *Gente*, 2 January 1969: non. pag.

Although the NIC had more resources by the late 1960s, the workings of censorship were still a sore point for directors and producers. Leonardo Favio's *El dependiente* [The Shop Assistant] encountered problems with its release that exemplified some of the risks faced by independent productions.¹⁶ Produced by Contracuerdo—Torre Nilsson's production company—without support from the NIC, Favio's film was finished in 1968. It received the Cine Nuevo [New Cinema] award and an honorable mention from the Federation of Cine Clubs of Spain at the San Sebastián Film Festival and the award for best film at the International Film Festival of Cartagena, but it was only released in Argentina in 1969. While *El dependiente* also garnered the Best Actor Award for Walter Vidarte and Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Nora Cullen from the Argentine Association of Cinema Journalists, it enjoyed little success with either the public or critics. A review in *Boom* identified its weakness: 'la realidad está alejada de los personajes, sus trazos son demasiado gruesos, demasiado exagerados y grotescos como para sentirlos como reales' [the characters are too far from reality, the lines too thick, too exaggerated, and grotesque to feel them as real] ('Leonardo Favio,' 1969, 53). Initially, in June 1968, *El dependiente* was given a B rating that would have made its showing non-mandatory ('Inquietud,' 1968, non. pag.), but that decision was overturned in December 1968 by Ridruejo, who justified his move by mentioning 'la elección de recursos que incorpora a una línea argumental simple' [the choice of techniques that are added to a simple plot line] ('Ridruejo decidió A,' 1968, 259). With a simple *mise-en-scène*, *El dependiente* tells the story of Mr. Fernández (Walter Vidarte), a salesman who has been working in a hardware store for 25 years and is the owner's only heir. Fernández falls in love with Miss Plasini (Graciela Borges), a mysterious woman who lives with her mother (Nora Cullen). Both lead lonely lives isolated from the town, and

thus are socially awkward, borderline neurotics. As Mr. Fernández courts Miss Plasini, he learns of the existence of her mentally disabled brother who has been hidden since birth. Amid long silences and sparse dialogues, Miss Plasini indicates that she would like to flee her oppressive family life. Fernández offers her stability and love, but must wait for his boss Mr. Vila to pass away, so he can become his legal inheritor. When Mr. Vila dies unexpectedly, Fernández discovers that his newfound freedom comes at the expense of a sense of guilt at the demise of his boss. He marries Miss Plasini only to discover that she has now taken Mr. Vila's position of authority. This realization leads him to poison their soup. *El heraldo's* review highlighted the film's 'estimulante visión crítica de la vulgaridad moral y la chatura pueblerinas' [stimulating critical vision of moral vulgarity and small-town lack of perspective] (1969, 9). For his part, Leo Sala, reviewer for *Gente*, described it as 'realismo mágico de un mundo ingenuo con una anécdota brutalmente simple, pero, sin embargo, de una audacia increíble el tratamiento del montaje y en la dirección de los actores' [magical realism from a naïve world with a brutally simple story, but, nevertheless, with incredible audacity in the treatment of the montage and the direction of the cast] (1969, 32). As in *Romance del Aniceto y la Francisca*, Favio's portrayal of anonymous lives was created with great attention to the camerawork and the soundtrack.

By the end of the decade, the outlook of Argentine cinema was far from promising. Although in 1969 two films—Manuel Antín's *Don Segundo Sombra* and David José Kohon's *Breve cielo* [*Brief Heaven*—captured the critics' attention, viewing figures for Argentine films decreased for the second consecutive year. *Don Segundo Sombra*, a cinematic adaptation of the homonymous novel by Ricardo Güiraldes, received the Condor Prize in 1969. It also won the Best Director and Best Adaptation awards for Antín, Best Color Picture for Miguel Rodríguez, and Best Cinematography for Pochi Mopurgo from the Argentine Association of Film Journalists. It was nominated for the Palm d'Or in Cannes as well.¹⁷ For *Gente*, the film 'carece de nervio, de poesía, de esa inmensa fuerza que hay en la obra literaria' [lacks nerve, poetry, that immense force that can be found in the literary work] (Sala, 1969, non. pag.). However, it was recommended to viewers and was well received abroad despite its local theme.¹⁸ *Breve cielo* garnered the Best Screenplay award for David José Kohon—shared with Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares for *Invasión* [*Invasion*] (Hugo Santiago), Best Soundtrack for Astor Piazzolla, and Best Actress for Ana María Picchio from the Argentine Association of Television and Radio Journalists, also received the same award at the Moscow International Film Festival ('Sombra,' 1970, 152). The film critic of *La prensa*, J.P., characterized *Breve cielo* as 'una de las películas más auténticas y sinceras de los últimos años' [one of the most authentic and candid films of the last few years] ('Breve cielo,' 1969, 35). A week later, *Gente's* critic Edgardo Ritacco noted the marked difference in opinion between specialized critics and the public that 'fueron a verla 3,500 personas. Una cifra que está por debajo de la media que establece el cine.

Y todo quedó en la nada por más que la crítica fue excelente' [3,500 people went to see it, a number that is well below the established average and it all came to nothing despite the excellent reviews] (1969, 72).

In addition to these films, two others by independent directors deserve consideration. Ricardo Becher (1930–2011) and Alberto Fischerman (1937–1995), who had a background in advertising, released films that were very formally innovative: *Tiro de gracia* [*Coup de Grâce*] and *The Players versus Angeles caídos* [The Players versus Fallen Angels]. Nominated for the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, *Tiro de gracia* deals with a group of young people who lead aimless lives. J.P. stated that, 'El talón de Aquiles está en que a nadie le importan los personajes que carecen de relieve dramático' [Its Achilles heel is that nobody cares about the characters' lack of dramatic depth] ('Tiro,' 1969, 10). The film's release was possible thanks to the backing of Torre Nilsson's production company Contracuarto (Peña, 2000, 77). For Mercedes Halfon, the progressive spectators and critics of the late 1960s were harsh with this film because they disliked its depiction of class struggle. Reevaluating *Tiro* 40 years later, Halfon stresses its merits: 'La particularidad la marcaban las imágenes que se sucedían dentro de la cabeza de los personajes. Ahí el film arriesgaba todo y encontraba su radicalidad. Fue innovadora en muchos aspectos: se filmó en espacios reales y con casi todos no actores' [Its distinctiveness was based on images that were produced in the characters' minds. It was here that the film risked everything and where its radicalism lies. It was innovative in many ways: it was shot on location and almost all the actors were non-professionals] (2010, non. pag.). For its part, *The Players versus Angeles caídos* presents two groups of rival actors who engage in bets and games, trying to prove their superiority. César Maranghello characterizes the film as 'una parábola sobre el fracaso y el triunfo del actor' [a parable about the failure and success of the actor] (2000, 31). For film scholar Jorge Sala, 'hay una pérdida deliberada de la anécdota en función de la supremacía radical de lo reflexivo' [there is a deliberate loss of the story because of the radical supremacy of the reflexive] (2012, non. pag.). The lack of a linear narrative is detrimental to the film's coherence. Becher and Fisherman were members of the 'Group of 5' alongside Néstor Paternostro (1937–), Juan José Stagnaro (1938–), and Raúl de la Torre (1938–2010). They were close to the activities promoted by the Instituto Di Tella. For Néstor Tirri, this 'group' shared a utopia: 'filmar de otra manera de la que imperaba en los años cincuenta y sesenta en la Argentina' [shooting in a different way from the prevailing one in the 1950s and 1960s in Argentina] (2000, 9). While its members also carried out a market analysis of film production and collaborated on *The Players*, they lacked a unifying aesthetics. Nonetheless, as Rafael Filipelli asserts, 'El grupo de los cinco representa el último intento de hacer películas con un sistema de producción que no dependiera de la industria' [The Group of 5 represents the final attempt at making films with a production system that would not depend on the industry] (2000, 14). Finally, Hugo Santiago directed the French-Argentine co-production *Invasión* from

Table 5: Spectators and Number of Imported Films

Year	Total spectators	Imported films
1967	10,246,285	424
1968	9,300,168	411
1969	8,441,803	186

Source: 'La concurrencia,' *El heraldo*, 18 August 1970: 436.

a screenplay on which he collaborated with Jorge Luis Borges. Now a classic science fiction film, *Invasión* received a Silver Condor for Best Direction and garnered an honorable mention at the Locarno International Film Festival.¹⁹ According to Santiago, the film lends itself to different readings as it depicts a country occupied by imperialist forces (2002, 56).

Despite the formal originality of these films, by the end of the decade it was unquestionable that Argentine cinema was losing audiences. The loss of approximately 1.8 million spectators in just two years reduced the funds available for new films and had several causes. First, cinema was now increasingly competing with television for audiences. Second, the rising purchasing power of the middle class allowed for a diversification of leisure activities; as the number of cars increased, cinema attendance decreased for mobility allowed the enjoyment of other activities. These two causes were felt worldwide. A third cause, which affected only Argentina, was the implementation of new customs laws and taxes that had a significant impact on the entry of foreign films, reducing foreign releases from 424 in 1967 to 186 in 1969 ('La concurrencia,' 1970, 436). Jorge Sirlin, an exhibitor, explained that 'Antes se cobraba un derecho de importación por el número de copias que entraban al país, y a partir de junio último se cobra un tanto por ciento de lo que estime el importador que la película va a producir en el país' [Before, an import tax was charged based on the number of copies that entered the country, but since last June, a percentage of what an importer estimates the film will make in the country is charged] ('Agoniza,' 1969, 17). The bulk of foreign films released had been imported before the new customs regulations came into effect, that is to say, old and second-class films were shown in the best movie theaters. The new tariff came on top of the high taxes which the state was levying on film tickets. Therefore, the Association of Cinematographic Businessmen of Buenos Aires proposed that the state lower taxes by 15% so that this reduction could, in turn, be passed on to viewers. Both taxation and censorship were constraining the production and consumption of films in Argentina.

Despite the decline in audiences, 1970 looked more promising. First, exhibitors expected good performance from the 22 Argentine films that were ready for release by February 1970—which included films with popular actors such as Hugo del Carril, Luis Sandrini, Palito Ortega, Darío Vittori, Norman

Briski, and Nérida Lobato—and thought they would make a significant impact on box office revenues. Although censorship still affected approvals and classifications—particularly of films considered to be of a ‘dubious’ morality, such as *Ufa con el sexo* [Enough with Sex] (Rodolfo Kuhn), *Fuego* [Fire] (Armando Bó), and *Los neuróticos* [The Neurotics] (Héctor Olivera)—exhibitors did not see it as a huge handicap. They were, however, concerned by the fact that there were not enough Argentine films to release throughout the whole year (‘Los exhibidores,’ 1970, 57). As shown in Table 6, the number of foreign films in 1970 was more than double that allowed in 1969, even though still inferior to 1968.

Table 6: Number of National and Foreign Films

Year	Number of national films	Number of imported films
1967	27	N/A
1968	40	411
1969	31	186
1970	33 (28 new releases)	391
1971	35	372

Source: *El heraldo*, 24 July 1972: 239.

Second, the state continued to earmark funds for the production of feature-length films and shorts despite socio-economic problems. Early in the year it was announced that the NIC would produce 15 films, finance eight projects to acquire industrial equipment and strengthen the film school holdings, as well as supporting 20 documentary shorts and 35 shorts for a sum of 14,295,000 pesos (‘El INC,’ 1970, 370). The most important film produced with help from the NIC was Torre Nilsson’s *El santo de la espada*, which was released in March and immediately became an unprecedented national success with over 2 million viewers. Its analysis and reception are presented in Section III, ‘Representing the Founding Fathers.’ *Gitano* [Gypsy] (Emilio Vieyra, 1970), a popular comedy-musical starring Sandro, drew over a million viewers. Another comedy, *Con alma y vida* [With Soul and Life] (David José Kohon) received the Silver Condor for Best Film. The film, about a criminal and his lover, was written by Kohon and Norberto Aroldi, who also played the lead role. *La gaceta* rated it as very good in terms of box office performance and excellent for quality, describing it as ‘una película al día, con lo que demanda el espectador internacional de 1970’ [a current film with what international viewers of 1970 demand] (1970, 524).

These successful national films were accompanied by the unexpected strong performance of a couple of films by young filmmakers. In 1971, *Gente* reported that ‘el cine argentino prosigue en vías de desaparición. Raúl de la Torre y Néstor Paternostro con *Mosaico* demuestran que el cine argentino

no está muerto, que todavía puede reconciliarse la calidad con la aceptación popular' [Argentine cinema continues along the path to its disappearance. Raúl de la Torre and Néstor Paternostro show with *Mosaico* that it is still possible to reconcile quality with popular acceptance] ('Advertencias,' 1971, 23). De la Torre's debut film, *Juan Lamaglia y señora* [Mr. and Mrs. Lamaglia] won four Silver Condors (Best Film, Best Script for Héctor Grossi and Raúl de la Torre, Best Actor for José Soriano, and Best Actress for Julia von Grolman), the Opera Prima Prize at the Mar del Plata Film Festival, and the Prize for Best Latin American Film at the Cartagena Film Festival. In its first days, *Juan Lamaglia y señora* broke attendance records ('Juan Lamaglia hizo,' 1970, 244). *La gaceta* classified it as of very good quality and very good box office potential, but added that it was 'para selectivos' [for select viewers]. Its review explained that 'De la Torre no ha concesiones al entretenimiento convencional. Al contrario obliga al espectador a completar los fragmentos de una realidad que ha filmado como una especie de guía para comprender la mentalidad de la gente atada a la rutina' [De la Torre has made no concessions to conventional entertainment. On the contrary, he makes the viewer complete the pieces of a reality he has shot as a kind of guide to understanding the mindset of people tied to a routine] (1970, 240). For its part, *El heraldo* stated that *Juan Lamaglia y señora* was made 'con mucho empeño y rigor, con inusuales esfuerzos por parte de sus responsables' [with much determination and rigor, with unusual efforts from all those who participated] ('La importancia,' 1970, 277). The film's script was developed during an eight-month process in which Grossi and de la Torre, along with the actors in the leading roles—Soriano and von Grolman—collaborated in the writing of the script, improvising dialogues and situations ('Juan Lamaglia,' 1970, 14). *Juan Lamaglia y señora* tells the story of a middle-class couple living in a provincial town. Juan is a successful and charismatic businessman and Ana a traditional housewife. After eight years of marriage, their life together follows a routine that resembles that of the city in which they live (Zárate), that is to say, methodical and unproblematic—until Ana runs into an old flame and has an opportunity to be unfaithful to Juan. At the last moment, she changes her mind, but ends up leaving Juan anyway. When he finds out about her departure, he intercepts her flight and takes her home. For Armando Capalbo, de la Torre's film is saying that 'El único intento de rebelión está destinado al fracaso o, peor aún, al silencio' [The only attempt at rebellion is destined to failure, or even worse, to silence] (2000, 118).

Besides de la Torre and Paternostro, David Stivel (1930–1992), a young director who had been in charge of a successful TV program called *Cosa juzgada* [Res Judicata], directed his first feature film, *Los herederos* [*The Inheritors*]. The script was written in collaboration with Norma Aleandro and the cast was composed of actors of the Theater Group: Federico Luppi, Barbara Mujica, Emilio Alfaro, Norma Aleandro, Juan Carlos Gené, Marilina Ross, and Carlos Carella. Stivel's film was invited to and nominated for the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival, but

its hostile reception served as a wake-up call for Argentine films seeking recognition abroad, particularly because of the NIC's policy of only sending films to festivals if it felt that they were strong representatives. *La gaceta* blamed censorship for the fiasco:

El cine argentino—ahogado por una censura que impide hacer películas críticas por temor a que lleguen a ser subversivas, sin comprender la abismal diferencia que existe entre unas y otras—está limitado al entretenimiento, al escapismo y a algún ejercicio intelectual demasiado indirecto o demasiado hermético para resultar claro, valiente o efectivo.

[Argentine cinema—smothered by a censor that bans making critical films, fearful that they would be subversive, without understanding the huge difference between the two—is limited to entertainment, escapism, and any intellectual exercise too indirect or too hermetic to result in something clear, courageous, or effective] ('Ecos,' 1970, 374)

In 1971, Argentine cinema continued to face challenges: fewer films were produced (26, down from 40), but more were released ('Cine argentino,' 1972, 116). Among the releases were several historical films—Torre Nilson's *Güemes, la tierra en armas*, René Múgica's *Bajo el signo de la patria*, and Héctor Olivera's *Argentino hasta la muerte* [Argentine until the End]—that sought to repeat the amazing achievement of *El santo de la espada*. The first two will be analyzed with more detail in Section III. *El heraldo* gave *Argentino hasta la muerte* ten points for being a commercial film and eight for its artistic quality.²⁰ Critic M.R.S. described it as melodrama with a polemical historical background, that of the Paraguayan War, which was 'manejada por intereses imperialistas y brasileños' [planned by imperialist and Brazilian interests] ('Argentino,' 1971, 254). Other historical films included *El milagro de Ceferino Namuncurá* [The Miracle of Ceferino Namuncurá] (Máximo Berrondo), *Santos Vega* (Carlos Borcosque Jr.), and *Un guapo del 900* (Lautaro Murúa). Amid the climate of censorship and the encouragement of traditional gender roles, one film stood out, for defying both. Directed by Raúl de la Torre from a script by María Luisa Bemberg, *Crónica de una señora* [Chronicle of a Lady] featured Graciela Borges in the leading role of Fina, for which she won the Best Actress award at the San Sebastián Film Festival.²¹ The film revolves around Fina, an upper-class married woman whose life is a succession of social events and dress fittings, until the suicide of a close friend leads her to reassess her life and goals. She starts by becoming interested in the family businesses, but when her husband José (Lautaro Murúa) makes fun of her sudden interest, she finds a lover named Patricio (Federico Luppi), who eventually leaves her, accentuating her sense of loneliness. As she attempts to make changes in her life, she finds that her mother, mother-in-law, and church, all stress her maternal and lady-like roles at the expense of her personal fulfillment. Fina falls in love again, which finally seems to give new direction to her life, only

to find out that her new lover was her dead friend's *paramour*. Thus, she thought she was liberating herself in choosing sexual pleasure, but she was inadvertently following in her friend's footsteps. While screenwriter María Luisa Bemberg was not satisfied with the results of de la Torre's portrayal of Fina, *Crónica* constitutes a crucial film that not only continues the line of *Juan Lamaglia y señora* but also, and more importantly, displays the concern about the plight of women that would be a constant in Bemberg's cinematic *œuvre*.

Table 7: The Most Successful Films in Argentina 1970–1972

Film	Country	Spectators
<i>El santo de la espada</i> (1970)	Argentina	2,601,036
<i>Gitano</i> (1970)	Argentina	1,627,720
<i>El profesor patagónico</i> (1970)	Argentina	1,576,903
<i>Argentinitísima</i> (1972)	Argentina	1,552,350
<i>Love Story</i> (1970)	United States	1,502,219
<i>Z</i> (1970)	France	1,451,610
<i>Siempre te amaré</i> (1971)	Argentina	1,399,971

Source: 'Lo que se recaudó,' *El heraldo*, 21 May 1973: 169.

In 1972, several popular films touched on Argentine history and its geography. *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (Manuel Antín), which narrates the life of the Buenos Aires leader during the 1829–1852 period, will be analyzed in Section III, and *La maffia* [The Mafia] (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson). The latter, based on the story of the Galiffi family, who operated in Rosario in the 1920s, received four Silver Condor awards: Best Director (Torre Nilsson), Best Actress (Thelma Biral), Best Supporting Actor (Héctor Alterio), and Best Film. Despite these awards, *El heraldo* gave the film an eight for artistic value, due to the weakness of the script in depicting the relationships between criminals and the authorities and the accumulation of anecdotes stretching the plot, but it gave a ten—its highest score for a commercial film—for Alfredo Alcon's participation, the name recognition of Torre Nilsson, and scenes of violence and sex (A.E.O., 1972, 110). For its part, *Heroína* (Raúl de la Torre), based on the life of a young woman (Graciela Borges) who is psychoanalyzed, had a strong performance at the box office, with over 78,000 spectators in the first week. *Heroína* did better than De la Torre's third film, *Crónica de una señora*, with more than 1,000 viewers in the same period ('Heroína,' 1972, 214). For Adolfo Martínez, in *Heroína*, de la Torre showed that he was a careful observer of the Argentine upper middle class (2010, non. pag.).²² Finally, *Argentinitísima*, an Aries production that mixed folk songs from different parts of Argentina also performed well at the box office.

As Table 7 shows, in the early 1970s, four Argentine films not only performed exceedingly well, surpassing 1.5 million viewers, but also outdid a Hollywood blockbuster, *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller). Nonetheless, at the beginning of 1973, the NIC authorities drafted a new cinema law just before the military authorities were replaced by democratic civil government.

Notes

- 1 The example given was a film whose NIC-approved production costs ran to 13,933,746 pesos and which received a loan of 6,966,873 pesos. With box office takings of 95,422,690 pesos, it received a percentage of its earnings which amounted to 19,084,538 pesos ('Nueva ley 19,655,' 1966, 398).
- 2 Héctor Olivera stated that *Hotel Alojamiento's* box office takings amounted to 140 million pesos ('1967 puede ser,' 1967, 16).
- 3 The film competed at the San Sebastián Film Festival but did not receive any awards.
- 4 *El romance* was produced and distributed by Renacimiento Films, owned by Walter Achúgar who, together with Edgardo Pallero, sought to create an alternative circuit of distribution (Campo, 2010, 68).
- 5 The Mar del Plata Film Festival was the venue in which co-productions were discussed.
- 6 In 1966, the romantic musical comedy *Mi primera novia* [*My First Girl Friend*], directed by Enrique Carreras and shot in color, was very popular. The film, starring actor-singer Palito Ortega, American actor Dean Reed, and actress Evangelina Salazar, gave the film industry reason for optimism. An editorial highlighted Ortega's charisma and fame: 'Ya con categoría de astro, gravitará definitivamente para la obtención del presunto éxito. Su popularidad se mantiene, especialmente entre la gente joven. Es, en consecuencia, una figura que por sí misma puede determinar el destino de un filme' [Already a star, he will definitely gravitate toward obtaining a presumed success. His popularity holds up, particularly among young people. He is, consequently, a figure who by himself can determine the fate of a film] ('Mi primera,' 1966, 19).
- 7 *En la selva no hay estrellas* received an award at the Moscow Film Festival.
- 8 *El muerto* was finally released in 1975 as *Cacique Bandeira* [Bandeira Chief] and was a Spanish-Argentine co-production.
- 9 In an interview with *El mundo* on March 9, 1966, Torre Nilsson admitted 'es una fórmula para romper fronteras con el cine nacional' [it is a formula to cross borders with national cinema] (Couselo, 1985, 173).
- 10 *Monday's Girl* represented Argentina at Cannes in 1967.
- 11 In 1967, a news telegram from London anticipated that Leopoldo Torre Nilsson would direct *The White Witch of Rose Hall*, a film that would begin shooting in Jamaica with a budget of \$3 million. The book by Derek Pousek was a biography of Annie Palmer.
- 12 The other commercial hits of 1968 were: *Un muchacho como yo* (Enrique Carreras, Sono), *Psexoanálisis* (Hector Oliveira, Aries), *Lo prohibido está*

- de moda* [*Forbidden Things are In Fashion*] (Fernando Siro, European), the Spanish-Argentine co-production *Digan lo que digan* [*Let Them Talk*] (Mario Camus, Sono and Spain), and *Cochecama-alojamiento* [Car-bed Lodging] (Julio Porter, Sono).
- 13 In June, *La hora* [The Hour] was presented at the Pesaro Film Festival.
 - 14 A summary in *El heraldo* mentioned that two American representatives sought the approval of 200 films. Even though the matter was also discussed in the Chancellery, the NIC only approved 90 for the film board and 20 American films (“1968 fue,” 1968, 592).
 - 15 *La fiaca*, Ricardo Talesnik’s first play, was a huge success, winning the Argentores Award and was performed in Uruguay, Chile, and Spain.
 - 16 The film was based on a short story by Favio’s brother, Zuhair Jury, and was made without NIC funding.
 - 17 *Don Segundo Sombra* was not nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, given that this selection would have stopped it participating in other film festivals—and Don Segundo was ‘la carta del cine argentino para Cannes este año’ [Argentina’s cinematic card for Cannes for this year] (‘No va,’ 1970, 45).
 - 18 In an editorial from January of 1970, *La gaceta* informed readers that the reception of Antín’s film saw ‘elogiosas crónicas aparecidas en publicaciones madrileñas’ [admiring reviews in publications in Madrid] (‘Continúan,’ 1970, 2).
 - 19 The film’s success was evident from its release in France. A note in *El heraldo* mentioned that *Invasión* received ‘críticas favorables, algunas sumamente elogiosas’ [positive reviews, some highly complimentary] (‘Hugo Santiago,’ 1971, 69).
 - 20 *Argentino* generated anxiety about its historical rendition of the Paraguayan War. In February 1971, before its release, the board of the Institute of Cofraternity José Félix Bogado asked the Argentine government to supervise the shooting of the historical scenes so that ‘ningún factor negativo interfiera en las excelentes relaciones entre los pueblos hermanos’ [nothing negative interferes with the excellent relations among sibling nations] (‘Susceptibles,’ 1971, 70). Months later, *El heraldo* referred to an editorial piece that appeared in *La nación* concerning the state support of the film and its ideological subtext (‘Un extraño,’ 1971, 252).
 - 21 King et al. explained that in the late 1960s, Bemberg sent a play, that would be the basis for the script of *Crónica*, to a competition organized by *La nación* (‘An Argentine,’ 2000, 15–16).
 - 22 For an analysis of the role of psychoanalysis in *Heroína*, please see Maren Ahlzweig’s ‘Imágenes de la psiquiatría y la locura en el cine argentino de los años 70 y 80.’

Argentine Cinema, 1973–1976

As the *revolución argentina* came to an end in 1973, a new cinema law was signed on February 21. Law 20,170 of Promotion and Industrial Recuperation replaced Law 17,741 (implemented on May 14, 1968) and would remain in use until 1994. *El heraldo* decried the passing of this piece of legislation weeks before elections, which allowed the state to supervise all aspects of national cinema.¹ Among the changes in the new ruling, Law 20,170 gave the NIC director the authority to act as legal representative of the institute or to name employees on its behalf. Another change mandated that film classification be decided after a screening. Films should be rated on whether they could benefit from compulsory exhibition and/or be exported. Finally, they had to be assessed on whether they could be classified as ‘of special interest.’ The reference to national culture and values was deployed to further restrict themes and maintain control over national film production.

As a result of the transition from a military to a democratic government, the NIC authorities and those in charge of censorship changed. Before leaving his position as head of the NIC, the longest tenure up to that point, Ridruejo stated that ‘Tomé un cine que había perdido fuerza con películas que tenían problemas para exhibirse y muchas veces para recuperar el dinero invertido’ [I took over an industry that had lost its power with films that struggled to be shown and often to recuperate investments] (‘La familia,’ 1973, 169). Certainly, the backlog of films produced in the early 1960s effectively ended during his term, but the loans given by the NIC predominantly went to directors who had a record of box office successes, often at the expense of quality. Ridruejo admitted that ‘a partir de la última ley se propende a un cine de mayor contenido y tratamiento y a una mejor colocación de las películas en el extranjero’ [after the last law, the trend was a cinema of more/better content and treatment and a better placement of films abroad] (‘La familia,’ 1973, 169). The trend of more content, however, was limited to a few historical or heritage films. For Ridruejo, the two main strengths of his administration were the open lines of communication between producers, exhibitors, and distributors and a better knowledge of the cinematic market. Ridruejo was replaced as head of the institute by actor, singer, and director Hugo del Carril (1912–1989).

In his first meeting with the press, del Carril said, ‘tenemos que defender lo nuestro’ [we have to defend what is ours] (N.B., 1973, 46). To that end, he explained that a new law to privilege the stability of national production was necessary. He also talked about the Cámara de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina [Chamber of the Argentine Cinematographic Industry], which comprised producers (Atilio Mentasti, Héctor Olivera, and Juan Carlos Garate), independent producers (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Daniel Tinayre, and Luis Repetto), directors (Enrique Carreras, Fernando Ayala, and Enrique Cahen Salaberry), actors (Luis Brandoni and Jorge Salcedo), and representatives of writers, musicians, laboratory staff, and students of the Experimental Centre of Cinematography, all under the direction of Mario Soffici in his role as Deputy Director of Cinematography. The Chamber was responsible for supervising the artistic values of the films seeking funds from the NIC. Asked what kind of cinema he would favor, del Carril replied, ‘el cine nacional con temática nacional. Hay que entender por una buena vez que el cine no sólo es un negocio para ganar plata sino que es una manera muy importante de difundir nuestra cultura’ [a national cinema with national topics. It has to be understood once and for all that cinema is not only a business to make money but a very important way of disseminating our culture] (N.B., 1973, 46). Del Carril’s statement aligns with the content of Article 10 in Law 20,170, passed during the last months of General Lanusse’s government. There was a discrepancy, however, regarding what was national cinema: populist or liberal.

To prioritize national cinema, two measures were planned. First, the passing of a new law was required to replace the hastily approved Law 20,170. The Chamber of the Argentine Cinematographic Industry was responsible for drafting it. Second, del Carril intended to sign an agreement with Mexico and to strengthen a market of Spanish-speaking countries, like the Union del Cine Hispano Americano [Union of Hispanic American Cinema]. Del Carril’s resignation in early 1974 due to previous work commitments in Mexico and the US, however, left this last task pending. The political transition led to a healthy consumption of films by over 12 million viewers (‘El cine hizo,’ 1974, 17). One of the possible reasons for this increase was the 15% reduction in the price of a movie ticket mandated by Law 20,170. The Argentine films that did best at the box office were produced by Contracuarto and Aries; the former produced the acclaimed *Juan Moreira* (Leonardo Favio) and *Los siete locos* [*The Revolution of the Seven Madmen*] (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson).² The Junta Asesora Honoraria declared *Los siete locos* and *La revolución* [Revolution] (Raúl de la Torre) to be of special interest.³ *Juan Moreira* garnered the Silver Condor for Best Film and represented Argentina at the Moscow International Film Festival. The success of *Juan Moreira*, which will be analyzed in section II, particularly significant if we take into consideration that its box office takings were higher than the combined takings of the three most successful Aires productions of the year—*Los doctores las prefieren desnudas* [Doctors Prefer Them Naked] with 84,785 viewers, *Argentinísima 2* with 84,313, and *Los caballeros*

Table 8: Ranking of Argentine Films with More than 75,000 Spectators in the Best Movie Theaters

Film	Spectators	Ranking
<i>Juan Moreira</i>	319,809	4
<i>Los siete locos</i>	101,276	25
<i>Los doctores las prefieren desnudas</i>	84,785	34
<i>Argentinísima 2</i>	84,313	35
<i>Los caballeros de la cama redonda</i>	79,754	38

Source: *El heraldo*, 20 January 1974: 14.

de la cama redonda [The Knights of the Round Bed] with 79,754, see Table 8. While *Gente* followed the production of *Los siete locos*, a Contracuerdo film, with interviews with the director and main actors talking about their characters, its film critic was not satisfied with the result and rated it only as ‘good.’ Torre Nilsson had high hopes for *Los siete locos*: ‘espero que toda esa autenticidad golpee en aquellos que se sienten conformes con su vida, mirando desde la butaca mientras aseguran estar conformes con su suerte’ [I hope that all that authenticity crashes into those who are satisfied with their lives, watching from their seats while they make sure that they are satisfied with their luck] (AMP, 1973, 25). For its part, *El heraldo* gave the film a higher artistic score than commercial, predicting its success because of the outstanding performance of Alfredo Alcón and the quality of other cast members (Bidal, Renán, Alejandro, and Alterio). *Los siete locos* received two Silver Condors: Best Director (Torre Nilsson) and Best Actress (Thelma Biral). De la Torre’s fourth film, *La revolución*, did not perform well at the box office, but it presented an interesting parallel between developments at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the early 1970s. The film had a script by De la Torre in which the leading actors—Graciela Borges, Federico Luppi, Oscar Ferrigno, and Lautaro Murúa—collaborated. For *El heraldo*, the result was a good, but uneven product. As the reviewer noted of De la Torre’s direction: ‘esta vez, su estilo secuencial se vuelca en contra de la programación dramática y escenas que deberían ser dominadas por un clima interior aparecen artificiales y sin destino’ [this time, his sequential style plays against the dramatic program and scenes that should have been dominated by an interior climate appear superficial and aimless] (‘La revolución,’ 1973, 135). At the end of 1973, *Los traidores* [The Traitors] (Raymundo Gleyzer) was exhibited at the ninth Pesaro Film Festival. According to Getino and Vellegia, Gleyzer deployed traditional narrative structures similar to the critical realism of the early 1960s to represent political topics (2002, 53).

Despite changes in the NIC’s management, 1974 was a positive year for Argentine cinema. When Hugo del Carril resigned as the head of the NIC

in January 1974, the respected filmmaker Mario Soffici took over and made it known that first in his list of priorities was the passing of a new draft of the cinema law. Early in 1974, *El heraldo* announced the 'Plan de Realizaciones 1974' [Plan of Outcomes], which stated that 'es intención del actual gobierno poner al cine, como importante medio de difusión, en la vidriera internacional' [it is the intention of the current government to place cinema, an important means of dissemination, before the world] ('El cine argentino se pone,' 1974, 65). In 1974 there was a significant increase in spectator numbers (15,235,742) that amounted to a rise 25.9% on 1973 (12,074,910) ('Hablan,' 1975, 1). According to *El heraldo*, this was due to several factors: the 50% reduction in the price of movie theater tickets on Mondays and Tuesdays, a break in television programming from 8–11 p.m., a carefully planned array of films, and spectators' willingness to consume national cinema ('Llegaron las vacas,' 1974, 56).⁴ The three most viewed films were adaptations of literary works: *La tregua* [*The Truce*] was based on Mario Benedetti's novel, *La Patagonia rebelde* [*Rebellion in Patagonia*] was an adaptation of Osvaldo Bayer's book, and *Boquitas pintadas* [*Heartbreak Tango*] was a rendering of Manuel Puig's popular novel (see Tables 9 and 10). While the first and last centered on personal relationships, *La Patagonia rebelde* recreated historical events that took place in the Argentine south in the 1920s, when workers suffered savage repression by the military authorities. Because of its topic, the film met with a significant delay—two months—to be approved.⁵ *La Patagonia rebelde* was awarded a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. *La tregua* (Sergio Renán) was Argentina's entry at the Academy Awards for best foreign-language film and *Boquitas pintadas* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson) received two awards at the San Sebastián Film Festival. Other successful films of 1974 were *Quebracho* (Ricardo Wullicher), which won the Special Jury award at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, and *La Mary* (Daniel Tinayre).⁶

Table 9: Most Popular Argentine Films of the First Semester of 1974

Films	Spectators
<i>La Patagonia rebelde</i>	219,272
<i>Boquitas pintadas</i>	210,657
<i>Quebracho</i>	81,374
<i>Papa corazón</i>	69,519
<i>La gran aventura</i>	55,433

Source: *El heraldo*, 29 July 1974.

Not only was Argentine cinema being consumed domestically, but the NIC's goal of reaching foreign markets also became a reality. *Quebracho* was sold to the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, and Iraq for \$50,000 ('Quebracho vendido,' 1974, non. pag.).⁷ *La tregua*

Table 10: Most Popular Argentine Films of 1974 and their Rankings

Films	Spectators	Ranking
<i>La tregua</i>	414,636	4
<i>La Patagonia rebelde</i>	379,453	5
<i>Boquitas pintadas</i>	226,190	12
<i>La gran aventura</i>	220,640	15
<i>La Mary</i>	215,207	16
<i>Hay que romper la rutina</i>	175,714	19
<i>La madre María</i>	148,849	21
<i>Quebracho</i>	81,374	49

Source: *El heraldo*, 6–13 January 1975: 2.

was sold to Spain and *La Mary* was distributed in Italy and France (Bellon, 2014, non. pag.).⁸ The attention received by these films overseas prompted a bottom-down initiative. In October, a group of producers comprising Héctor Olivera, Juan José Jusid, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, and Bernardo Zupnik recommended the creation of Argencine, a company that would be responsible for promoting Argentine cinema domestically and abroad through advertisements, and eventually also the commercialization of Argentine films domestically and abroad.

Despite the positive performance of Argentine cinema, political events marred this achievement. President Perón died in office—on July 1, 1974—less than a year after his return to Argentina. During the presidency of his wife, María Estela Martínez de Perón, political turmoil became widespread, even affecting the film industry. The Grupo Cine Liberación presented a new project for a cinema law in August, but it was not implemented (Getino and Vellegia, 2002, 50). At the end of October, a terrorist organization issued death threats against directors David Stivel, Héctor Olivera, Juan Carlos Gené, Fernando Ayala, Daniel Tinayre, and Armando Bó, as well as actors Marilina Ross, Susana Giménez, Héctor Pellegrini, Isabel Sarli, and boxer-turned-actor Carlos Monzón.⁹ While all those named decided to stay in the country, the Argentine Association of Actors sent a telegram to President Martínez de Perón seeking security guarantees. The union expressed its indignation and some members even proposed to create a common fund that would pay for private protection for those threatened (*'Amenazas,'* 1974, 373). Given the tense atmosphere, the Silver Condor Awards, the most prestigious ceremony of Argentine cinema, were suspended between 1974 and 1979.

Change and continuity were also on the cards for the Argentine film industry for 1975. Regarding change, Soffici unexpectedly resigned from his position at the NIC in January 1975—exactly one year after he took over—and

Table 11: The Ten Most Popular Argentine Films of 1975

Films	Spectators	Ranking
<i>Nazareno Cruz y el lobo</i>	275,266	7
<i>La Raulito</i>	198,395	15
<i>Petete y Trapito</i>	142,961	27
<i>Maridos en vacaciones</i>	135,700	28
<i>Los irrompibles</i>	131,761	30
<i>Los gauchos judíos</i>	118,110	33
<i>Las procesadas</i>	100,253	44
<i>Las super aventuras</i>	99,546	46
<i>Los chantas</i>	93,992	49
<i>El pibe Cabezas</i>	88,951	53

Source: *El heraldo*, 29 January 1976: 4 (Año 75 Cine Arg).

was replaced by Juan Bartolomé Llabrés ('Nuevo director,' 1975, 1), who had a background in advertising. Pending issues were whether the Film Rating Board would become part of the NIC and the passing of a new cinema law ('El futuro,' 1975, 14). Problems with censorship continued. In March 1975, when the film *Mi novia el travesti* [*My Fiancée the Transvestite*] encountered problems with the Film Rating Board, an editorial in *El heraldo* characterized it 'un film paria en su propio país' [a pariah film in its own country] ('Nueva crisis,' 1975, 68). The piece also decried both the lack of respect for the freedoms specified in the Constitution and the unfair competition experienced by Argentine films from foreign counterparts which did not pay customs tariffs, and whose box office revenues thus represented pure profits. Perhaps as a result of the antagonism toward foreign films, there were only 253 releases in 1975, a number representing a middle point between the low of 186 in 1969 and the high of 411 in 1968. Other issues affecting national film production were high costs, spiraling inflation, and a lack of materials needed for film production.¹⁰ Despite these problems, the cinematic production of 1975 was healthy, with ten titles achieving good box office performances.

As shown in Table 11, the most popular film was Leonardo Favio's *Nazareno Cruz y el lobo* [*Nazareno Cruz and the Wolf*], based on a script by Juan Carlos Chiappe, who had worked on radio soap operas and had had a lasting influence on Favio. Indeed, in an interview published in *Gente*, Favio characterized Chiappe as the 'inventor de la tragedia popular en el país' [inventor of popular tragedy in the country] and told him that 'nadie como vos le habló al pueblo' [nobody talked to the people like you] (Serra, 1973, 115). This publication illustrates the way in which expectation for the film's release was built up during the preproduction stage. At the moment of its release, *El heraldo* and, more recently, film scholar Diana Paladino characterized

Nazareno Cruz y el lobo as ‘desbordante y desbordado’ [overflowing and above board] (2003, 295). The film used unusual cinematic techniques to emphasize the fantastical aspect of a popular legend about a seventh son who turns into a wolf, aiming at the spectacularization of a personal tragedy. As Paladino correctly notes, it is a polysemic film that allows several readings: ‘Para la clase obrera representó la ilusión de una posible conciliación, para la joven militancia fue como un símbolo de la resistencia, para los distraídos (¿solamente?) la tragedia de un hombre frente a la inexorabilidad del destino’ [For the working class, it represented the illusion of a possible reconciliation; for the young militants, it was like a symbol of resistance; for the distracted (only?) the tragedy of a man facing fate’s inexorability] (2003, 296). In *Nazareno Cruz y el lobo* Favio turned to the popular legend as a means of communicating with and bringing together the divided *pueblo*.

If Favio struck a chord with his folk tale, other important films of 1975 used realism. This is the case, for instance, of Lautaro Murúa’s *La Raulito*, which depicts the life of teenager María Esther Duffau (Marilina Ross) who passes for a boy to be able to wander around Buenos Aires and support the football club Boca Juniors. Another realist film was Juan José Jusid’s *Los gauchos judíos*, based on the book of the same name by Alberto Gerchunoff. The film broke records—attracting 352,939 spectators in its first week of exhibition with screenings in 35 movie theaters. It also captured the attention of foreign distributors: an American distributor offered \$80,000 to release the film in the US and the Spanish distributor Vicuña offered \$40,000 and a release in Gran Vía movie theaters, ‘hecho que hace muchos años que no ocurre con una película argentina’ [something that has not happened to an Argentine film in several years] (‘El fenómeno,’ 1975, 154). The film also received attention in Brazil and Japan and was screened at the San Sebastián Film Festival.¹¹ Finally, Torre Nilsson’s *El pibe Cabezas* [*Kid Head*], inspired by the life of Rogelio Gordillo, a 1930s gangster played by Alfredo Alcón, was also a realist film. In *El pibe Cabezas*, Torre Nilsson followed a similar line as he had in *La maffia*, but this time concentrating on a lone criminal whose *modus operandi* linked him to ‘delincuencia criolla, casi nómada, emparentada con cierta actitud del gaucho’ [creole criminality, almost nomadic, related in a certain *gaucho* way] (Couselo, 1985, 196). *El heraldo* predicted its probable success given the proven pair of Torre Nilsson-Alcón. Nonetheless, *El pibe Cabeza* encountered an unexpected challenge. Hours before its release, the NIC decided not to award it the *fondo de recuperación industrial*, but it could be used to fulfill the screen quota requirement (‘Le cortaron,’ 1975, 109).

In addition to the Film Rating Board and censorship, in 1976 a heightened climate of political violence affected several prominent actors and directors. Actors Héctor Alterio, Norma Aleandro, and Cipe Lincovsky went into exile (Falicov, 2007, 41). Octavio Getino was also persecuted. The legal case in which he was accused of allowing the exhibition of *The Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), which contained obscene scenes, was reopened on July 28, 1976. The charge against him was violation of the duties of a

public employee ('Proceso a Getino,' 1976, 210). When Getino, already in Peru, was cited for further questioning in this case, he remained abroad, and was thus declared to be in rebellion. His bank accounts were frozen, and a request for his extradition was issued. Other filmmakers met a harsher fate than judiciary persecution. Documentary maker Raymundo Gleyzer, who made *México, la revolución congelada* [*Mexico: The Frozen Revolution*] (1970), was kidnapped outside the Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina (SICA). Writer and screenwriter Haroldo Conti, who had been blacklisted since 1975, was arrested and disappeared in early May 1976.

The *coup d'état* of March 24, 1976 implied a new government and changed the outlook for Argentine cinema. With the return of military authorities, the censorship classification of the mid-1960s continued to be applied. There were attempts to suppress it from 1970 to 1973 but it was never done. Other issues besides problems with freedom of expression also besieged the Argentine film industry, which came to a near standstill by the end of that year. In March, the price of a movie ticket was debated. Due to inflation, movie theater owners asked that it be raised by 13%, but the state was considering authorizing an increment that would not allow recuperation of costs. Hence, an increase took several months to be authorized. The situation of the Argentine film industry was summed up by screenwriter José María Paolantonio: 'es difícil resolver los problemas del cine sin resolver fundamentales problemas del país. No somos una isla en medio de la tormenta' [it is difficult to solve cinema's problems without solving the fundamental problems of the country. We are not an island in the middle of the storm] ('Dos directores,' 1976, 65). Similar ideas were expressed by Juan José Jusid, who added that while problems were slowing down Argentine film production, foreign cinematographers 'seguirá[n] encontrando el campo más propicio para su actividad' [will continue to find the most favorable ground for their activity] ('Dos directores,' 1976, 65). Jusid was certainly correct if we consider that the ten most popular films in downtown Buenos Aires were all foreign, as shown in Table 12.

Several factors contributed to the crisis of the national film industry. One was its near paralysis. An editorial piece in *El heraldo* detailed that a film cost around 4,000 million old pesos to make, a sum that did not take into account the advertising campaign and the cost of producing copies. Moreover, a film had to attract an audience of at least 1.5 million spectators to recuperate its costs. The editorial also noted that 'cada vez es más difícil conseguir créditos' [every time, it gets harder to get loans] ('¿Adónde vamos?', 1976, 151). In an interview with *El heraldo* from August 1976, Torre Nilsson stated that 'hace falta una política cinematográfica. Si no, nadie va a filmar' [a film policy is sorely needed. Otherwise, nobody will shoot] ('Hace falta,' 1976, 234). Torre Nilsson also referred to the situation of the Argentine film industry as one of paralysis. Another reason for the dismal situation was a persistent economic crisis that prompted one in three viewers to stop attending cinema screenings ('De cada tres,' 1976, 275). As a result, the number of films produced also decreased. In September, *El heraldo* noted that the inactivity in the industry

Table 12: The Ten Most Popular Films of 1975 in Argentina

Film	Country of origin	Number of spectators
<i>Earthquake</i> (1974)	USA	538,987
<i>I am Losing My Temper</i> (1974)	France	466,310
<i>Scent of a Woman</i> (1974)	Italy	374,802
<i>Airport 1975</i> (1974)	USA	369,991
<i>Chinatown</i> (1974)	USA	341,733
<i>Amarcord</i> (1973)	Italy-France	288,454
<i>Nazareno Cruz y el lobo</i> (1974)	Argentina	275,266
<i>Murder on the Orient Express</i> (1974)	England	246,552
<i>Beautiful people</i> (1974)	South Africa	239,721
<i>The Return of the Pink Panther</i> (1975)	USA	231,957

Source: *El heraldo*, 29 January 1976: 4.

was remarkable given its past achievements (‘Nadie quiere,’ 1976, 251). Of the 12 films that were shot in 1976, nine had been planned in 1975 and only one remained in production. In November 1976, the newspaper *La nación* and *El heraldo* both printed an article entitled ‘Cine nacional, a crisis que se agudiza’ [National Cinema, a Crisis that Deepens], which listed the total number of Argentine films released in 1976: 18, of which only four passed the 1 million spectator mark (‘La crisis,’ 1976, 331). Consequently, by the end of that year, the national film industry almost came to a standstill. Despite the laws and the interest that the sector had received since 1967, by 1976 the military authorities no longer saw it as a crucial means of communication to build nationhood and represent Argentina around the world. As many artists, directors, and screenwriters went abroad to flee repression, the film industry entered a dark period of few productions—many of them light musical comedies with Palito Ortega that catered to domestic viewers—from which it would emerge only with the return of democracy in 1983.

The period 1955–1976, punctuated by three *coup d'états* and short democratic governments, constituted a time when changes in the political arena were sought but hard to implement due to a lack of consensus. This instability deeply affected the Argentine film industry at a time when it depended on state funding to compete with other cinemas. For their part, the military governments had understood the importance of Argentine cinema and regulated it with four laws: Law 12,909 of 1957 (aka 62/57), Law 16,955 of 1966, Law 17,741 of 1968, and Law 20,170 of 1973. While the first two encouraged the exhibition of Argentine films, the latter two emphasized the state’s control over content and subjected film productions to censorship and classification prior to release. Despite these policies, Argentine film

production recovered from an all-time low of 15 films in 1957 to an average of 31 films per year from 1957 to 1971. Nonetheless, the support of the local audience fluctuated wildly. The experimental films of the Generation of 1960 failed to attract spectators. Comedies and musicals were popular, but lacked prestige and were thus only for domestic consumption. Given the small size of the Argentine population, co-productions and quality films were seen as a means to reach other audiences, but met with uneven success. In the late 1960s, two genres, the *gauchesque* and historical films addressed the 'national topics' requirement and were well received, finding a market niche by depicting the Argentine heritage and the nation-building period.

Notes

- 1 For more on this, please see my article 'Film Censorship in Argentina.'
- 2 *El heraldo* reported that in its first two weeks, *Juan Moreira* was watched by 580,377 spectators while *El santo de la espada* attracted 584,692 viewers in the same period ('Último momento,' 1973, 186).
- 3 *Los siete locos* received the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and the award for Best Latin American Film at the fifteenth International Film Festival of Cartagena.
- 4 In 1973, exhibitors reached an agreement with the US Film Board to buy films at a fixed price which allowed them to lower the price of a movie ticket by 50%.
- 5 In a note that appeared in *El heraldo*, it was mentioned that the film was waiting the approval of the Minister of Defense and that the delay concerned not only the producers, but all those involved with Argentine cinema, given that the NIC proposed to classify it as 'of national interest' (*La Patagonia*, 1974, 214). The article asked 'qué seguridad tienen los productores argentinos que cumplen lo fijado por la ley—presentación de libros, etc, etc—especialmente cuando el libro es un "best seller" y el film se ajusta a él, o en otras palabras, que nadie puede decir que la película difiere del libro presentado. Ayala-Olivera tienen razón de estar preocupados por su millonaria inversión, pero el cine argentino debe estarlo aún más' [what guarantee do Argentine producers who comply with the law—submission of screenplay, etc., etc.—especially when the book is a best seller and the film follows it, or in other words, when nobody can say that the film differs from the book. Ayala-Olivera are right to be concerned about their significant investment, but Argentine cinema should be even more so] (1974, 147).
- 6 Beceyro classifies *La tregua* as an example of 'cine de autor' [auteur cinema] and explains that 'en 1974 un filme de Sergio Renán logra el milagro. El cine de autor consigue entonces una audiencia mayor y *La tregua* se convierte en uno de los grandes éxitos populares de la historia del cine argentino' [in 1974 a film by Sergio Renán performs a miracle. Auteurist cinema achieves a bigger audience and *La tregua* becomes one of the first popular successes in the history of Argentine cinema] (1997, 14).
- 7 Referring to *Quebracho*, Fernando Ferreira states that 'se prohíbe su exhibición

en todo el territorio nacional y la exportación de cualquiera de sus copias' [its release is forbidden throughout the entire national territory, as is the exportation of any of its copies] (2000, 206).

- 8 The producers of *Globus Baires* traveled to Europe and arranged the distribution of *La Mary* in France.
- 9 In addition to the censorship of local films, there were also attacks on movie theaters that screened 'subversive' films, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Norman Jewison, 1973) (Ferreira, 2000, 215).
- 10 As evidence of the chaotic state of affairs mentioned in the editorial, director Sergio Renán and the producers Tamames-Zemboirain desisted from shooting *Pase un día con su artista favorito* [Spend a Day with Your Favorite Artist].
- 11 *El heraldo* gave it nine points for commercial value and seven for artistic value, remarking that 'es un filme argentino para celebrar, porque por arriba de algunos defectos visibles subsisten orgullosos los resultados obtenidos con un esfuerzo no común en la producción nacional' [it is an Argentine film to celebrate, because even with some visible flaws, the pleasing results obtained with an effort not common in the national production are evident] ('Los gauchos,' 1975, 154).

SECTION II

The Cinematic *Gauchesque*

In this section, I study the 1960s and 1970s cinematic adaptations of key *gauchesque* texts written from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1920s. The *gauchesque* is a literary genre concerning the *gauchos*, rural inhabitants of the *pampas* who were recruited by force to join the patriotic armies and were seen as the quintessential Argentines. For literary scholar Josefina Ludmer, this genre constitutes ‘a learned use of popular culture’ (2002, 3), for the orality of the *gauchos* (their colloquialisms and linguistic idiosyncrasies) is used by an educated author who seeks to include them in the modern (post-1880) Argentine state (2002, 8). I first provide a brief summary of the evolution of the literary and cinematic *gauchesque* to introduce the five films with *gaucho* characters that were shot and released in the late 1960s and early 1970s: *Martín Fierro* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1968), *Don Segundo Sombra* (Manuel Antín, 1969), *Santos Vega* (Carlos Borcosque Jr., 1971), *Juan Moreira* (Leonardo Favio, 1973), and *Los gauchos judíos* (Juan José Jusid, 1975). As is advanced in the titles of the first four, these are *biopictional* films, a term coined by Janet Walker to refer to Westerns which focus on individual characters (2001, 14). I also do close analysis of these five films, relying on film studies theories on Westerns and concentrating on one of the main features of Argentine culture: the civilization-versus-barbarism dichotomy. Indeed, this dichotomy allows the exploration of these films and their interpretation of the nation-building process. Furthermore, following Pierre Sorlin, who suggests that ‘the success of a new film must be taken into account, although I admit the criticism is a very ambiguous one: bad films can be transformed by good publicity and vice versa, but we have no other method of assessment’ (2001, 36), I survey the critical and public reception of these films and examine the ways in which they contributed to nation building and the spread of nationalism. My analysis approaches these works as heritage films, that is, high-quality and mostly realist films that depict the cultural and literary heritage of Argentines.

While Argentine film produced after 1956 has traditionally been characterized by *auteurism* and modernity (Lusnich, 2007, 30), after 1968 several films depicted the national past as a way to strengthen Argentine identity.

As explained in the previous chapter, studios disappeared, leaving space to new production companies and independent producers, and allowing the emergence of fresh narrative forms. Nonetheless, because of the state's involvement in protecting and regulating cinema, through laws that encouraged the representation of national topics, Argentine cinematic production after 1968 returned to the country's foundational mythology. For Ana Laura Lusnich, many films presented 'el campo y sus habitantes como reservorios de los valores tradicionales del trabajo, la virtud y la familia' [the countryside and its inhabitants as reservoirs of the traditional values of work, virtue, and family] (2007, 33). But *gauchesque* films also show the disintegration of family and community as a result of the state's arbitrary orders, that is to say, compulsory service on the frontier and corrupt authorities.

Starting in the late 1960s, Argentine directors looked back to the nineteenth century as a source of inspiration. This return to the past coincided with the Argentine Revolution's emphasis on *el ser nacional* [the national being] as a defensive mechanism against foreign influences (Vázquez, 1967, 43). Reference to the behaviors and influences that shaped *el ser nacional* were evident in a speech by General Onganía published in *La nación* in July 1967:

Veneramos las tradiciones que forjaron los varones que hicieron nuestra patria, pero sabemos que la Argentina campestre, la Argentina fácil, el país de las vacas y el trigo ha quedado atrás. Constituimos hoy un país industrial, altamente diversificado y en extremo complejo que no puede continuar dando tumbos sin rumbo.

[We celebrate the traditions that were forged by the men who shaped our nation, but we know that the rural Argentina, the simple Argentine, the country of cows and wheat, has been left behind. Today we are an industrial country, highly diversified and so complex that we cannot continue wandering about aimlessly] (Sidícaro, 1993, 333)

Onganía's remarks conveyed the duality between what Argentina was and where it intended to go. From the late 1950s, both civil and military governments embraced developmentalism to expand the Argentine economy through industrialization and new services. Onganía's version of *argentinidad*—Argentina as a Western Hemisphere, Catholic country—which adapted to the new sociopolitical challenges of the late 1960s was not shared by right-wing nationalists, who challenged his transnational connections, particularly with the United States.¹ This division was further highlighted by the fact that the Argentine population was deeply separated between Peronists and his detractors, and also different types of nationalists (military, civilian, right- and left-wing), which rendered necessary a return to the national past that could help unite the Argentine population. The invocation of a glorious earlier period and the interest in *argentinidad* were two ways to do so. Regarding the first, in 1964 historian Tulio Halperín Donghi highlighted 'el hecho de que la Argentina sigue eligiendo como objeto de sus ilusiones la imagen rediviva de

un pasado que juega mejor que su presente' [the fact that Argentina continues to choose as object of its illusions the resurrected image of a past that works better than the present] (1995, 263). As a result of the official emphasis on the past and on nation building, the whole country adopted *argentinidad*: 'se abrió entonces un proceso de nacionalización o de "argentinización" de vastos sectores sociales de clase media, para los cuales la realidad argentina aparecía de pronto, como recién descubierta' [then began a process of nationalization or 'argentinzation' of broad social sectors of the middle class for whom the Argentine reality appeared all of a sudden as if recently discovered] (Getino, 1998, 53). That process of 'cultural discovery' of the national past had a real impact on the Argentine cultural production.

Music and film were the two cultural fields in which *argentinidad* was performed for mass consumption.² The depiction of national topics in film increased after 1968 with the passing of Law 16,995, which classified films as 'A' (high quality) or 'B' (of lesser quality) productions.³ Historians of Argentine cinema usually explain the emergence of *argentinidad* in films as a top-down process that was financed by the NIC and firmly controlled by the military authorities after 1966. My research findings diverge from this reading: two veteran Argentine filmmakers, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and Manuel Antín, undertook the shooting of quality films based on literary *gauchesque* works, *Martín Fierro* (1968) and *Don Segundo Sombra* (1969), respectively.⁴ These films were made possible thanks to private investors. Though their 'national' topic certainly helped fast-track the approval of these productions' scripts, their success both at the box office and among critics prompted the shooting of four other *gauchesque* films: *Santos Vega* (Carlos Borcosque Jr., 1971), *Juan Moreira* (Leonardo Favio, 1973), *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* [*The Return of Martín Fierro*] (Enrique Dawi), and *Los gauchos judíos* (Juan José Jusid, 1975). Although these films may be grouped together, they have significant differences. But what prompted this interest in the production and cinematic consumption of *gauchesque* films?

To understand this phenomenon, I propose to consider *gauchesque* films as heritage films. The term 'heritage films' was coined by Charles Barr in a 1986 publication to refer to high-quality British historical films of the realist mode produced during the period of the Second World War (1986, 11–12).⁵ Since then, the denomination 'heritage' has been applied to the production of other national cinemas. The *gauchesque* or Argentine heritage films of the late 1960s and mid-1970s are also historical/costume films. As such, they share the two features of the heritage genre identified by Andrew Higson: 'One central representational strategy of the heritage film is the reproduction of literary texts, artefacts, and landscapes which already have a privileged status within the accepted definition of the national heritage. Another central strategy is the reconstruction of a historical moment which is assumed to be of national significance' (1997, 27). Given Argentina's short national history, most of the *gauchesque* films of the period 1968–1975 are based on literary works written between 1870 and 1910, an era which loosely coincides with

the consolidation of Argentina as a nation. An important aspect of heritage films that also pertains to the Argentine *gauchesque* is the relationship to the present in the invocation of the past. Belén Vidal explains that ‘the heritage film touches areas of cultural anxiety about issues of identity politics, appropriation and misrepresentation, all the more marked in film nations shaped by colonial domination and post-colonial self-determination’ (2012, 3). Argentine heritage/*gauchesque* films both represented the Argentine past and challenged its traditions, pointing to the omissions and victims of the nation-building process. This interest in the past thus sought to strengthen Argentine national identity, particularly as Argentina was striving to maintain its financial and cultural independence.

The tumultuous political events of Argentina in the 1960s certainly generated concern regarding the country’s identity and role among other nations, and impacted Argentine film production. On the one hand, the depiction of the *gauchesque* at a time when the official Argentine discourse stressed modernization might have signaled the perils of losing contact with the country’s foundational myths, most of which involved rural characters. On the other, revisiting the native past was one of the goals of the decolonization and liberation movements of the early 1960s. Frantz Fanon (1925–1962), a theorist of liberation, held that a colonized society is presented by the colonists as devoid of values (1963, 7), and that in the fight between colonists and colonized, attachment to the land provides the latter with a universal value that sustains their struggle. As a society searching for self-determination in a bipolar world—divided into capitalist West and communist East—Argentina could well relate to Fanon’s belief that the land constituted a purer reservoir of the national. This revalorization of bygone rurality implied a renewed attention to a foundational period that saw the publication of crucial literary works.

The consolidation of Argentina in the mid-nineteenth century was inextricably linked to its rural past, which was eminently portrayed in Argentine literature. After years of internal strife, the final decades of that century and the first of the twentieth were a time of unprecedented national growth based on a solid economy that relied on agricultural exports. For instance, the area for cultivation increased from 100,000 hectares to 25 million between 1862 and 1914 and Argentine export revenues increased from US\$1 billion in 1886 to US\$4 billion in 1895, and to US\$15 billion in 1914 (De Lima-Dantas, 1985, 37). This remarkable progress was accompanied by a demand for more workers, paving the way for massive immigration wave from Europe which, in turn, fueled an amazing demographic boom over six decades: from 1.8 million in 1869 to 11 million in 1930 (De Lima-Dantas, 1985, 38). Even though there were some darker episodes during this period, such as the displacement and extermination of indigenous communities to keep up with the demand for land, compulsory military service for the rural poor, and deplorable housing for immigrants, these decades were unquestionably recognized as the Argentine Golden Age. The publication of key literary

texts—the two parts of Hernández's epic, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* in 1872 and *La vuelta* [The Return] in 1876; *Juan Moreira* in 1879; *Santos Vega* in 1885; *Los gauchos judíos* in 1910; and *Don Segundo Sombra* in 1927—helped further consolidate Argentina as a distinct and independent nation with its own literary canon. These works provided a unifying mythology built around the 'true Argentines,' the *gauchos*, and were crucial in shaping new generations of Argentine citizens. Anthropologist Ingrid de Jong explains that the period 1870–1920 was a time in which a national past was defined, in which Hispanic and indigenous features were deployed so as to make immigrants good Argentine citizens (2005, 406). Several decades later, the Argentine heritage films of the late 1960s and early 1970s were adaptations of these literary works of the foundational period. Because the literary and filmic texts all have *gauchos* as central characters, it is necessary to briefly analyze their importance as well as that of the *gauchesque*.

The *gauchos* were rural inhabitants of the River Plata region. The term, which seems to be a deformation of *guacho* [bastard], was attributed by the *puristas* to vagabonds and outlaws, or by the Romantics to those who represented the true Argentina and displayed wit, generosity, and common sense (Shumway, 1993, 85–86). The debate about the *gaucho* continued until very recently. For instance, in 1989 historians Jorge Gelman, on one side, and Ricardo Salvatore and Jonathan Brown, on the other, debated the *gaucho's* origins and role in a journal article. While the former proposed to investigate whether the *gaucho* was the result of the progressive expulsion of peasants from their lands and their flight from the massive conscription of soldiers before and after the May Revolution (1989, 741), the latter emphasized their natural mobility and independence (1989, 741). These differing opinions, which stem from an analysis of the same records, show that the *gauchos* retain the controversial status first attributed to them in colonial and post-independence times. For literary scholar Rosalba Campa, *gaucho* represents 'un holgazán gozador situado al margen de la sociedad' [a lazy enjoyer found on the margins of society] (2004, 312). Nonetheless, the *gauchos* acquired relevance in the successive military campaigns of the nineteenth century. They began to be commemorated as warriors in *gauchesque* poems and novels.

The *gauchesque* genre comprised literary works that centered on the *gauchos*. According to Nicolás Shumway, Bartolomé Hidalgo (1788–1822) was the first author who not only promoted the *gaucho* as a national type but also, and more importantly, imbued the word with populist tones that marked him as belonging to the rural lower class (1991, 65).⁶ While Shumway explains the two theories regarding the origins of the *gauchesque* (that it was an expression of the popular classes and a literary form produced by educated men), Josefina Ludmer stresses two key features of the genre: 'the fiction of the written reproduction of the Other's oral word as the Other's word' and 'the construction of the oral space' (2002, 55). For Ludmer, *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, published in 1872, constitutes the genre's initial work. Persecuted by

the government because of his political sympathies, author José Hernández (1834–1886) penned a poem showing his concern for the *gauchos*, who were victims of every type of abuse (quoted in Shumway, 1991, 288). Seven years later, when *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* was published, the writer's situation had changed and so had his view of the *gaucho*. No longer a victim of persecution, Hernández gave up the rebellion that runs through the first book, and in so doing, brought his *gaucho* into the sphere of legality (Ludmer, 2002, 43). Now considered a citizen, in *La vuelta* his knowledge of the countryside is seen as a valuable asset for a nation that relied heavily on agricultural exports (Shumway, 1991, 309). Nevertheless, inspired by Hernández's violent *gaucho*, other writers adapted this figure for a different genre: the *folletín*, the serialized novel. At the end of 1879 and through January 1880, Eduardo Gutiérrez (1851–1889) published in installments *Juan Moreira*, a novel about a *gaucho* who is betrayed and resorts to violence to avenge himself. Unlike Martín Fierro, Moreira was unable to accept legality; thus Stephen Hart proposes that his textual death could be interpreted as a 'cleansing of the body politic' (1999, 680). Hart explains that, 'ejected from the body politic, the gaucho functioned as a rhetorical figure in which the subaltern was given voice only to have it eventually silenced by death' (1999, 680). Despite its dark ending, *Juan Moreira* enjoyed such a wide circulation among a middle-class readership that it eventually was presented on the stage by the Podesta-Scotti theatrical company (Hart, 1999, 676).⁷ Hernández's character also influenced another type of *gaucho*, the *payador* [singer]. This character is the protagonist of the poem *Santos Vega*, which first appeared in 1885, written by Rafael Obligado (1851–1920). Obligado also presented his *gaucho* as a symbol of *argentinidad*. For Beatriz Sarlo, this poem inaugurated the topic of loss in Argentine literature, darkening the optimistic outlook for Argentina's future (1996, 3). The *gauchesque* poems and novels were well-liked and consumed among the popular classes, by native Argentines and immigrants, rural and urban (De Jong, 2005, 410).

From its beginnings, the *gauchesque* served as a potent symbol of Argentine national identity. First, it was a co-optation of the rural poor by members of the educated elite, who saw in the *gaucho* the potential to represent Argentina. The authors of *gauchesque* shared an essentialist *criollista* vision of national identity, particularly after large numbers of non-Hispanophone European immigrants arrived in Argentina. Decades later, nationalist writer Leopoldo Lugones (1878–1934) also drew inspiration from the *gaucho* and *caudillos* in *La guerra gaucha* (1905), which centered on the figure of Martín Miguel de Güemes.⁸ In a later essay, *El payador* (1916), Lugones compares Martín Fierro to Greek mythological heroes and seals the poem's status as a national classic (Romano, 1991, 127).⁹ When, in 1910, Argentina celebrated its first hundred years of independence from Spain, the first literary anthologies contributed to the canonization of some *gauchesque* works.¹⁰ Imbued with the festive atmosphere of the Centenary, even Russian-born Alberto Gerchunoff (1883–1950) penned a *gauchesque* work, *Los gauchos judíos*, composed of

vignettes of life among Jewish immigrants who had settled in the Argentine countryside. In the 1920s, the launch of the journal *Martín Fierro* further established the appropriation of the *gaucho* by urban writers, particularly after the publication in 1926 of Ricardo Güiraldes's novel *Don Segundo Sombra*, an evocation of times gone by and of the legitimacy of the *gaucho*, now become a mentor. This brief overview shows that by the 1920s, the *gaucho* had 'shed his heretic overtones, being transformed into an emblem of national identity that was available to everyone, disconnected from a particular political persuasion and increasingly devoid of the xenophobic resentment that had accompanied his rise as a symbol' (Goebel, 2011, 40). It was at this juncture that the *gaucho* was further popularized in films.

Almost parallel to the consecration of literary *gauchesque* works, Argentine cinema began representing the *gauchos*, in both silent and sound films, in the 1920s. Argentine scholar Elina Tranchini groups many of these films under the denomination of *criollismo*, explaining that 'el primer eje discursivo del criollismo fue el literario, el género chico y el zarzuelismo criollos, el circo criollo y el drama gauchesco' [the first discursive axis of *criollismo* was the literary, the minor genre and the creole *zarzuelismo*, the creole circus and the *gauchesque* drama] (1999, 113). The *gauchos* were first shown onscreen in two silent historical films directed by Mario Gallo: *Juan Moreira* (1909), starring Enrique Muiño (1881–1956), and *Güemes y sus gauchos* [Güemes and his *Gauchos*] (1910), which inaugurated the folkloric drama (Lusnich, 2007, 28). Another silent film, *Nobleza gaucha* [*Gaucho Nobility*] (Humberto Cairo, Eduardo Martínez de la Pera, and Ernesto Gunche, 1915), narrates the story of a peasant named María who is kidnapped and taken to the city by a rich landowner, Don José, despite the fact that she loves the *gaucho* Juan. Juan follows her to the city and recues her, but Don José pursues them, later dying in an accident. A third film, *Santos Vega* (Carlos de Paoli, 1916), was the first cinematic adaptation of Obligado's poem and a veritable success (Tranchini, 1999, 125).¹¹ The Golden Age of Argentine cinema (1933–1956), which coincided with the first decades of sound cinema in the country, was when the state acknowledged the *gaucho* as part of the national heritage (Félix-Didier and Levinson, 2009, 57). Two versions of the *gauchesque* poem *Juan Moreira* were shot in less than 13 years: the first directed by Nelo Cosimi in 1936 and the other by Luis Moglia Barth in 1948; the latter was the weaker (Jakubowicz and Radetich, 2006, 73).¹² In addition to starring in dramas, the *gaucho* was also a figure in lighter stories: Leopoldo Torres Ríos directed *¡Gaucho!* (1942), a comedy with a plot similar to that of *Nobleza gaucha*. That same year, *La guerra gaucha* [The Gaucho War] (Lucas Demare), a faithful adaptation of Lugones's text, was a resounding success and became a model for future first-class historical films (Félix-Didier and Levinson, 2009, 58–59).¹³ In 1947, Moglia Barth also directed a version of *Santos Vega vuelve* [*Santos Vega Returns*] permeated with supernatural overtones (Jakubowicz and Radetich, 2006, 73). Lusnich attributes this interest in biographical films set in the past and involving both popular heroes and historical characters

to the film policies under Perón, which discouraged films from depicting the present (2007, 32).¹⁴ The portrayal of *gauchos* in Argentine film stopped after the late 1940s. Only in 1961 did Rubén Cavallotti direct *El romance de un gaucho* [A Gaucho's Romance], based on a story by Benito Lynch (1885–1951) published in 1930. *El romance* was an isolated later *gauchesque* film, as was the comedy *Un gaucho con plata* [Gaucho with Money] (Angel Acciaresi, 1970).

Corresponding to the cinematic interest in the *gauchesque*, around the mid-twentieth century, the literary Martín Fierro was the object of new interpretations and editions. Ben Bollig judiciously notes that essayist Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (1895–1964) proposed that Hernández's protagonist was a representative of the 'intrahistoria' [interhistory], the inner history of societies (2012, 8). In the 1950s, writer Leopoldo Marechal (1900–1970) asserted that Martín Fierro was a symbol of the Argentine people, alienated from his own destiny (Romano, 1991, 128). In the following decade, a daring publishing move made books accessible to a mass reading public. The Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires (EUDEBA) published *Martín Fierro* with a cover illustrated by painter Juan Carlos Castagnino (1908–1972) that sold 170,000 volumes in just three months (Ulanovsky, 1997, 177). The publishers' goal was to reach the middle-class youth (Terán, 1993, 72). This interest in Hernández's poem may have paved the way for its first and, so far, only cinematic rendition.¹⁵ In the late 1960s, Martín Fierro was a representative of *argentinidad* that provided the basis for a national reimagining. This notion of *argentinidad* was full of democratic ideals put forth in the 1910s by the nationalists, who saw the *gauchos* and *caudillos* as the true Argentines.¹⁶ For instance, Alejandro Vázquez linked *argentinidad* to democracy, explaining the importance of 'libertad para la nacionalidad y libertad para el individuo, pero dentro de una estricta solidaridad americana' [independence for the nation and freedom for the individual, but within a strict Latin American solidarity] (1967, 167). The literary character Martín Fierro certainly epitomized the idea of freedom at a time of a profound schism in Latin America between the countries which were veering toward communism and denounced American imperialism, and those which sought to remain autonomous. The release of Torre Nilson's *Martín Fierro* inspired a corpus of films produced from the late 1960s to the early 1970s that constitute the filmic *gauchesque*. As in other types of heritage film, in the *gauchesque*, 'the past returns, in the film image as in other manifestations of contemporary culture, through reconstruction rather than preservation, mediated by generic motifs and textual references' (Vidal, 2012, 18). The reconstruction of times gone by allowed the reimagining of the Argentine national community through the visual. By depicting Argentine heritage and highlighting *argentinidad*, this type of cinema was, at first, consensus-seeking, in the sense that it served to build shared ties among domestic spectators. *Santos Vega* and *Juan Moreira* turned away from the realist mode of narration to stress the subversive potential of the *gauchos'* stories, absorbing some of the tensions of the Argentine community in the early

1970s. In doing so, these films were profitable and prestigious, and thus successfully carved themselves a *niche* in an Argentine domestic market inundated with foreign films.

Notes

- 1 Federico Finchelstein mentions that the right-wing movements, such as Tacuara, opposed the succession of civil and military governments (2014, 100–11).
- 2 Folk music became very popular. It vindicated ‘actors previously made invisible by the power structure (above all, Argentina’s indigenous population), and critical commentary on the socio-political conditions of his time’ (Vila, 2014, 14).
- 3 Belén Vidal points out that heritage films are also considered quality films (2012, 1).
- 4 Solanas and Getino refer to these quality films as ‘ilustración de consumo’ [culture for consumption] (quoted in Romano, 1991, 133).
- 5 Barr refers to wartime films such as *That Lady Hamilton* (Alexander Korda, 1941), *This England* (David Mac Donald, 1941), and *The Young Mr. Pitt* (Carol Reed, 1942).
- 6 Historian Ariel de la Fuente defines *gaucho* as ‘the poor inhabitant of the countryside’ (2000, 76) and explains that ‘labeling the majority of rural inhabitants of the provinces as gauchos or bandits was the product of their Federalist affiliation and participation in the rebellions against the authorities’ (2000, 77).
- 7 Guido Podestá also mentions the representation of *Juan Moreira* as a pantomime (1991, 7), but notes that Gutiérrez faced critiques for his narrative about an unredeemable criminal (1991, 10).
- 8 In his analysis of *La guerra gaucha*, Juan Carlos Ghiano notes that the work ‘exalta episodios que no fueron esenciales para la liberación de la patria, aunque colaboraran de manera eficaz en la defensa de la frontera noroeste’ [exalts episodes that were not essential to the liberation of the nation, even though they contributed effectively to the defense of the northwest border] (1967, 19).
- 9 For more on this, see Nathalie Fürstenberger’s ‘Güemes y los de abajo: fabricación y alcance del heroísmo en *La guerra gaucha*’.
- 10 In 1893, the Real Academia Española asked Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo to put together an anthology of Spanish-American works which first included *Martín Fierro* as an epic poem (Degiovanni, 2007, 55). Fernando Degiovanni explains the different approaches of two collections—la Cultura Argentina and la Biblioteca Argentina—in the first decade of the twentieth century as they decided on their lists (2007, 14–21).
- 11 Curiously, the role of the *gaucho* Vega was performed by Italian-born actor Ignacio Corsini (Tranchini, 1999, 131).
- 12 For Eduardo Romano, other films from Artistas Argentinos Asociados touch on the *gauchesque*, such as *Ya tiene comisario el pueblo* [The Town Already has a Police Chief] (1936), *Viento norte* [North Wind] (1937), *El cabo Rivero*

- [Sergeant Rivero] (1938), *Huella* [Trail] (1940), and *Fortín alto* [High Fort] (1941) (Romano, 1991, 109).
- 13 *La guerra gaucha* received three Silver Condors: for Best Film, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay. Paula Félix-Didier and Andrés Levinson note that surveys organized by the Film Museum in 1977, 1984, and 2000 found *La guerra gaucha* to be one of the most beloved Argentine films (2009, 52).
 - 14 Lusnich also mentions *Facundo, el Tigre de los llanos* [Facundo, Tiger of the Prairies] (Miguel Paulino Tato, 1952) as one of the biographical films of the late 1940s (2007, 46). Given that Facundo was also a *gaucho*, his biopic could certainly be included with other *gauchesque* films.
 - 15 Bollig mentions the cartoon version of *Martín Fierro* (Fontanarrosa, 2008) (2012, 15).
 - 16 Alejandro Vázquez relied on Ricardo Rojas's definition of *argentinidad*: 'el alma de la argentinidad vibraba entonces por instinto, y aunque los gauchos iletrados y los caudillos violentos no discernieran bien las doctrinas, eran ellos los que servían el destino esencial de nuestra nacionalidad' [the soul of *argentinidad* vibrated then by instinct, and even though the illiterate *gauchos* and the violent *caudillos* did not clearly understand its doctrines, it was they who served the essential destiny of our nationality] (1967, 164). Oubiña and Aguilar use the term *nacionalismo* to refer to the same phenomenon (1993, 92).

CHAPTER 5

Martín Fierro

The project of adapting *Martín Fierro* for the silver screen was spearheaded by Torre Nilsson, a seasoned filmmaker eager to leave his imprint on Argentine cinema. Despite César Maranghello's assertion that Torre Nilsson decided to shoot historical topics preferred by the Institute (2005a, 181), his *Martín Fierro* was the product of a long process influenced by certain developments in Argentine society. In 1959, the Martín Fierro Awards for the best radio and TV programs were established. Around that time, Torre Nilsson started thinking about adapting *Martín Fierro* to the screen:

Planeé por primera vez filmar *Martín Fierro* a fines de 1959. Diversas circunstancias determinaron que la cosa quedara en proyecto. Dificultades de adaptación. Falta de adecuada financiación. *Martín Fierro* no podía hacerse como un filme más, con dos meses de preparación, dos de filmación y uno de montaje.

[I first planned to shoot *Martín Fierro* at the end of 1959. Various circumstances determined that the project be cancelled. Difficulties in adaptation. Lack of adequate financing. It was no longer possible to make *Martín Fierro* as a film, which would need two months of preparation, two months of filming, and one month of editing] (Couselo, 1985, 177)

An additional problem that emerged was the issue of fidelity to the original poem. In a 1965 interview, Torre Nilsson confessed: 'El principal inconveniente es tener que ceñirme bastante a la obra original [...] Mi intención era ubicar a Martín Fierro en el año 1930' [The main obstacle was having to closely adhere to the original work (...) My intention was to place Martín Fierro in the year 1930] (Sanmaritano and Mahieu, 1965, 10). A year later, and after two co-productions, Torre Nilsson was even more convinced of the need to depict Argentine themes; preparations to adapt the poem began. Scriptwriters Beatriz Guido, Edmundo Eichelbaum, Héctor Grossi, Ulises Petit de Murat, and Luis Pico Estrada worked for six months on the poem's adaptation. In July 1967, Alfredo Alcón signed the contract to play the Argentine *gaucho*. Coincidentally, two months later, young director David

Stivel (1930–1992) directed a version of *Martín Fierro* with Federico Luppi as the lead for the TV channel 11.

For Torre Nilsson, the making of *Martín Fierro* represented an important challenge. In *El heraldo del cine*, he anticipated several aspects of his ambitious project: the film would be in color, shoots would go on as long as was needed, and actors would be chosen to match the ideals of 22 million Argentines ('Si no hago,' 1967, 262). The filmmaker was candid about his very high expectations for the film:

Si *Martín Fierro* no es mi mejor filme, me declararé temporariamente incompetente. Si no el mejor filme argentino, me arrepentiré de que no lo haya hecho otro director. Si no es el mejor filme de habla castellana, me arrepentiré de haberlo hecho.

[If *Martín Fierro* is not my best film, I will declare myself temporarily incompetent. If it is not the best Argentine film, I will regret that another director had not done it. If it is not the best Spanish-language film, I will regret having made it] ('Si no hago,' 1967, 262)

These objectives show the importance and anxiety that this film generated in Torre Nilsson, who admitted his interest in *revisiónismo histórico*, which he defined as 'el reverso de nuestros héroes, los fermentos sociales de nuestra barbarie' [the reverse of our heroes, the social ferment of our barbarism] ('Apertura,' 1968, 30).¹ This assertion proves his embrace of anti-liberal nationalism in open contrast to the liberal position that was a trademark of his late 1950s and early 1960s films, most of which were set in oppressive houses as a critique of the local bourgeoisie. Unlike the filmmaker's previous films, *Martín Fierro* demanded not only location shooting, but also numerous extras, making the production an expensive one. Given their considerable investment in the film, the producers aimed to recuperate costs by pleasing large audiences.

Martín Fierro was a carefully planned film which enjoyed a superb reception. With an approximate budget of over 100 million pesos, it was produced by Contracuerdo, a company owned by Torre Nilsson and American investor André du Rona. During shooting, Juan Carlos Neyra served as the historical advisor ('Martín Fierro y las estadísticas,' 1968, 30). Besides Alcón, the stellar cast comprised María Aurelia Bisutti (1930–2010) as Fierro's wife, Lautaro Murúa as Sargento Cruz, Graciela Borges as the Captive, Fernando Vegal as Vizcacha, and Walter Vidarte as Picardía. *Martín Fierro* was released on July 4, 1968, in the Atlas Cinema, one of the best movie theaters in Buenos Aires. *La gaceta* described its outstanding box office success during the opening week: 'la gente de la calle esa que rara vez se ocupa del cine, no cesa de indagar sobre los méritos del filme y expresa que "no se lo perderán"' [the people on the street, those who only rarely concern themselves with cinema, have not stopped asking about the strengths of the film and say that they 'will not miss it'] ('En el cine Martín,' 1968,

non. pag.). As shown in Table 4, *Martín Fierro* was the only Argentine film to be ranked among the most popular films of 1968. Film critic Salvador Sanmaritano explains:

llevar a la pantalla el máximo poema de nuestra literatura nacional fue la empresa más postergada de nuestro cine [...] Un acto de fe y valentía que el público ha recompensado con generosidad tal que *Martín Fierro* está a punto de batir todos los récords obtenidos por James Bond, novicias rebeldes y azucaradas y muchos otros mamuts imbatibles del negocio cinematográfico. Que eso lo haya logrado un filme argentino con un tema estrictamente nacional, es, algo que debe hacer pensar.

[the undertaking to bring the most important poem of our national literature to the screen was the most delayed of our cinema (...) An act of faith and courage that the public has generously rewarded in such a way that *Martín Fierro* is close to surpassing all the records set by James Bond, rebellious and sweet novices and many other unbeatable giants of the cinematographic business. That all this has been achieved by an Argentine film with a strictly national theme should give us pause for thought]² (1968, 40)

In 1969, *Martín Fierro* became the first film with record box office takings to be shown on TV, only nine months after its theatrical release.³ Despite this feat, critical reviews were mixed.

The evaluations—both positive and negative—were analogous in the different media outlets. The positive ones stressed the film's technical aspects. *La gaceta* gave it the maximum score for box office takings and quality, describing it as 'admirable esfuerzo y valiente desafío' [an admirable effort and courageous challenge] and agreeing with the category 'of special interest' bestowed on the film by the NIC ('Martín Fierro,' 1968, 349). Alcón's performance was unanimously praised, as was the scene with the *malón* [group of Indians riding], the rest of the cast's performances, the music by Ariel Ramírez, and the excellent photography. *Clarín* emphasized the reappearance of national topics in Argentine cinema and hoped that *Martín Fierro*'s success would encourage the production of similar films ('Martín Fierro,' 1968, non. pag.). Curiously, the negative reviews mentioned both the lack and the excessiveness of the fidelity to the original poem as well as the numerous scenes of calamitous poverty and harsh violence. K.S., who reviewed the film for *Análisis*, a weekly magazine, characterized it as a 'transcripción edulcorada' [sweetened transcription] ('Desafío,' 1968, 31).⁴ Nonetheless, sociologist Julio Mafud praised Torre Nilsson's film, noting its attention to the social spirit of the literary work (1968, 9). More recently, however, Bollig has observed that even in cases of 'infidelity' to the original literary work, the film shows consistency with the poem's themes (2012, 11). Another criticism pertained to the depiction of violence. J.H.S., reviewer for *La prensa*, stated that 'Se acumula sordidez, miseria, al punto que creemos que sobre más de

la mitad de la mugre y de la sangre que se exhibe' [Sordidness and misery accumulate to a point where we believe that more than half the dirt and blood are unnecessary] ('Martín Fierro y las,' 1968, 30). Eduardo Romano also mentioned the killing of animals and the savagery of the Indians as intolerable scenes of violence (1991, 141). Hernández's poem, however, includes episodes of cruelty and poverty, such as those that were singled out for critique: the beheading of the Indian, the poverty in the forts, and Fierro's violent nature (Sala, 1968, 49), but also, and more importantly, those episodes are crucial to understanding the conditions that Fierro faced and the importance of his narrative, which provides an underdog's perspective.⁵ Thus, certain reviewers' discomfort at the film's portrayal of poverty and violence speaks more to their desire to separate themselves from a humble past than to the violence on screen.⁶

Torre Nilsson's *Martín Fierro* also faced criticism from the Grupo Cine Liberación [Cinema Liberation Group]. In a short piece from October 1969, the Grupo asserted that the depiction of historical themes was part of the government's official policy. More specifically, the piece decries:

la interpretación oligárquico-liberal con su línea "Mayo-Caseros" y la interpretación neocolonial disfrazada de nacionalismo o desarrollismo, sostenedora de las tesis generacionales según las cuales el país se ha movido a través de la línea "Revolución-Organización-Desarrollo" son unánimes las tentativas de borrar al pueblo de la historia.

[the oligarchic-liberal interpretation with its 'Mayo-Caseros' line and the neocolonial interpretation disguised as nationalism or developmentalism, which support the generational theses holding that the country has moved along the 'Revolution-Organization-Development' line, are unanimous in their efforts to erase the people from history] ('Significado,' 1969, 82)

The Grupo Cine Liberación took issue with the fact that Torre Nilsson's film did not allude to the problems affecting Argentine society in the late 1960s. Certainly film historian Robert Rosenstone would agree that *Martín Fierro* lacked a subtext referring to the concerns of the time in which it was shot.⁷ The Grupo's critique, however, represents a political opinion that goes beyond the poem's artistic adaptation to the screen. It is important to note that the Grupo's appraisal of *Martín Fierro* resembles the British left's assessments of heritage films, which states that the recovery of an upper-class and European past was triggered by 'a nationalistic folklore from above' (Paul Dave quoted in Vidal, 2012, 14). The Grupo's piece also noted the support that Mitre's descendants gave to Torre Nilsson's *Martín Fierro* and argued that 'si [Hernández] hoy viviera sería un perseguido más entre tanto perseguido' [if he were alive today, Hernández would be one more persecuted among many] ('Significado,' 1969, 82). The Grupo equated Hernández with the victims of the 1956 massacre (in which several Peronist sympathizers were executed), those who were victimized between 1956 and 1960, and those who

took part in the rebellion in Córdoba in May 1969. Nevertheless, the assertion that Hernández would have been among these victims of persecution had he been alive at the time of the film's release, is a fruitless speculation. Hernández, who sided with the authorities in *La vuelta*, could have defended developmentalism. Although this stance did not gain traction with historians of Argentine film, the allegation that the film responded to the policies of the Onganía government has indisputably colored its interpretation and significance until the present. During the course of my research, however, I have found no evidence to sustain the claim that Torre Nilsson supported the tenets of the *revolución argentina*. Quite the opposite, opinions he expressed in several interviews published in the early 1960s indicate that he had thought about and worked on this project for quite some time, but only after 1966 did various elements come together to bring it to fruition. Moreover, the political developments during the first two years of the *revolución argentina* did not allow the government to focus on film policy. The 1966 cinema law was a long-expected change to solve the problems of the 1957 law, and by the time Law 17,741 of May 1968 was passed, *Martín Fierro* had already been shot. Furthermore, film histories of Argentine cinema have omitted the widespread interest among both the press and the public that surrounded not only *Martín Fierro* but also the other films that will be covered in this chapter. That attention, which translated into high media coverage, supported and helped create great expectations among domestic spectators, which in turn acted as a free promotional campaign.

Among the media outlets covering the release of *Martín Fierro*, particularly noteworthy is the coverage in *Gente*, which characterized it as a veritable national event.⁸ The magazine published a two-page report in which editor Carlos Fontanarrosa and three up-and-coming journalists—Samuel Gelblung, Víctor Sueiro, and Mario Mactas—discussed the film.⁹ While Sueiro described it as ‘una obra trascendente, con toda la fuerza necesaria’ [a transcendental work, with all the necessary strength] and Mactas thought that the film was ‘inteligente y respetuosa’ [intelligent and respectful] (*Gente de*, 1968, 46), Gelblung listed its weaknesses: long titles, poor lighting, shocking scenes, and an unfortunate soundtrack (*Gente de*, 1968, 46–47). Nonetheless, they all recognized the exceptional work of the actors and the filmmaker, Fontanarrosa admitting that Torre Nilsson ‘era quizás el único director argentino que podía tomar el poema y llevarlo a otro lenguaje’ [was perhaps the only Argentine filmmaker who could take the poem and carry it into another language] (*Gente de*, 1968, 46–47). The piece also contained information about ‘recaudaciones asombrosas’ [amazing box office takings]: in its first week, *Martín Fierro* was seen at Cine Atlas by 29,547 spectators with a net taking of 7,914,797 pesos and was exhibited in 17 other movie theaters, where it made 39,216,262 pesos. Of those 17 movie theaters, 90% continued to show the film for a second week. In Rosario, the film was released in the Gran Rex movie theater and three others—Echesortu, Opera, and America—and made 5,692,345 pesos. In Córdoba, it was shown in

the Gran Rex, where it made 2,966,179 pesos and in Bahía Blanca, it took 1,775,810 pesos in the Ocean cinema. The report noted that the film would be released in Tucumán and Santa Fe the following week ('Gente de,' 1968, 47).¹⁰ Finally, the article gathered several opinions: that of actress Milagros de la Vega ('Me pareció una película extraordinaria' [it seemed to me an extraordinary film]), that of Fred Still, the representative of Paramount in Argentina ('Creo que el gaucho de ustedes debió tener la misma dignidad, melancolía y grandeza que muestra la película. Es una verdadera figura épica' [I believe your *gaucho* must have had the same dignity, melancholy, and greatness that the film shows. It is a true epic figure]), and that of director Daniel Tinayre, who stated that 'quizá le criticaría el excesivo sadismo y crueldad de algunas escenas' [maybe I would criticize the excessive sadism and cruelty of some scenes] (1968, 48–49).¹¹ These different views attest to the fact that the film *Martín Fierro* constituted a prominent social event for Argentine cinema and, as such, was attended by the many different players of the national film industry: actors, distributors, and directors.

Martín Fierro was premiered outside Argentina almost immediately: on August 21, 1968. Two months later, it was released in the French Cinémathèque, at an event attended by Latin American intellectuals living in Paris: Argentine visual artists Raquel Forner and Leopoldo Torres Agüero and Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, among others. Again, *Gente* reported on the film's reception:

Los comentarios acompañaron la proyección. Alguna risa ex temporaria, exclamaciones de horror (varias). Una francesita bailarina, que nadie supo qué hacía allí, se levantó diciendo que ella no podía soportar estas cosas de indios salvajes. Fin y aplausos, no muchos.

[Comments accompanied the screening. Some out-of-place laughs, outcries of horror (many). A little French dancer—nobody knew what she was doing there—got up, saying that she could not take such savage Indian things. The end and some clapping, not much] ('Triunfos,' 1968, 21)

Despite this reaction, the magazine stressed its positive reception: 'Y los franceses dijeron que sí' [And the French said yes] ('Triunfos,' 1968, 21), and mentioned the dealings of the film's Argentine producer who was working on its commercial release, initially scheduled for January or February of 1969. In April 1969, *Martín Fierro* received the Golden Seagull at the second International Film Festival of Rio de Janeiro, in which it competed against *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), *Secret Ceremony* (Joseph Lose, 1968), *Teorema* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968), and *Joanna* (Michael Sarney, 1968). Talking about the award, Torre Nilsson considered that it was given to 'nuevo cine argentino, del que *Martín Fierro* es una síntesis' [the new Argentine cinema, of which *Martín Fierro* is a synthesis] ('Martín Fierro es el,' 1969, 61). The filmmaker's inclusive comment not only stressed *argentinidad*, but also paid homage to the Argentine film tradition. Continuing the

film's screening abroad, at the end of March 1970, Alfredo Alcón and actress Norma Aleandro traveled to Osaka, Japan. Despite *Gente's* solid report when *Martín Fierro* was released and the interest in the film's foreign markets, the magazine published a lukewarm review, rating it simply as 'good,' advising: 'puede y debe verse, pero no es "Martín Fierro": apenas un "western criollo" con pretensiones, bien filmado y sin ritmo' [it can and should be seen, but it is not 'Martín Fierro': only a 'local western' with pretensions to grandeur, well shot, but without rhythm] (1968, 57).¹² While the charge that the film was not a proper adaptation of the poem lacks substance, it is worth pausing for a moment to unpack this review and also consider the film's position as a national endeavor.

Martín Fierro: Argentine Western or 'Southern'?

Martín Fierro and the American Western bear certain—nuanced—similarities: the setting in the unpopulated frontier, the conflict between civilization and barbarism, and the depiction of social antagonism.¹³ Regarding the first, in both *Martín Fierro* and the Western, the frontier demarcates a rugged and untamed space of separation between progress and backwardness. Longshots of the landscape convey the idea of unclaimed territory. According to Philip Loy, 'traditional Westerns consist entirely of small towns and wide-open landscape' (2001, 126). In *Martín Fierro*, there are multiple shots of the *pampas* and the skies that denote an attention to the landscape which, for Romano, had not been prevalent in Hernandez's poem (1991, 137); small towns are not present in the film. Several scenes take place in *pulperías* [canteens], depicted as the main points of socialization and communal encounters, and the *penitenciarías* [prisons] and police stations which signal the presence of authorities. The second similarity pertains to the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. Bollig asserts that the fight between *Martín Fierro* and the Indian is tantamount to a typical Western scene (2012, 12). In order for that to be accurate, Fierro (Alfredo Alcón) would have to embody civilization and be opposed to the Indians' savagery. It is true that he finds himself on the side of civilization at the outset of the film, when he still is a law-abiding *gaucho*, but later his pilgrimage takes him away from his people, and he even rides into the heart of barbarism, the *toldería* [Indian village], a space of cruelty and archaisms.

Closely related to the civilization-barbarism conflict, we find the third broad similarity: tensions between different classes. In *Martín Fierro*, *gauchos*, such as Fierro himself and Cruz are exploited by the military and civil authorities (the judge) even though they own land, and receive no help from the *estancieros* [ranch owners]. Likewise, social divisions are notable in Westerns, particularly concerning the ownership of property. The 'haves-nots' constantly face threats and abuses from those with more financial power (banks) or more might (Indians who appropriate property) (McGee, 2007, 93–101). In *Martín Fierro*, although newcomers to the region—immigrants,



Alfredo Alcón as Martín Fierro.

women, and children—are taken as booty by the Indians, the main clash concerns those with property—*gauchos*—and the authorities.

Nevertheless, there are several differences between *Martín Fierro* and the classic Western. First, in the latter, the heroes represent progress and, according to Loy, work for peace and justice (2001, 112). While Fierro looks for justice in the first part of the film—based on *El gaucho Martín Fierro*—and in the second part—based on *La vuelta de Martín Fierro*— he looks for peace, he does not stand for progress. His nomadic existence speaks of a retreat from civilized life. In Westerns, small towns are islands of civilization in the desert, but in *Martín Fierro* the *estancias* represent the forefront of capitalist expansion.¹⁴ The second difference concerns the themes of these works. As explained above, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* is a nineteenth-century poem that exposed the disruptions caused by corrupt rural authorities who preyed on defenseless *gauchos*. The poem's popularity during a time of national growth revolved around the populist vindication of the *gaucho* and a return to an idyllic past (Shumway, 1991, 292). Released at a time of tumultuous social change, Torre Nilsson's film depicts the exploits of a mythological *gaucho* whose fictional life also reminded Argentines of their national identity. For their part, Westerns constituted a filmic genre whose golden age was the 1930s–1950s (Loy, 2001, 22). Made at a time of growth and development, Westerns looked back and celebrated American expansion as a sign of the country's manifest destiny (Loy, 2001, 80–83). In Argentina, however, the



Martín Fierro and Cruz in the *toldería*.

southern expansion was denounced early on as state encroachment for the benefit of a small group of large landowners.¹⁵ The third difference between *Martín Fierro* and Westerns concerns the theme of law and order. The opening scenes of *Martín Fierro* show the *gaucho* returning to his home as his voice-over explains that he was drafted against his will and forced to leave his family behind. The unjust treatment he received not only goes unpunished, but has also unleashed other painful occurrences—his family’s dissolution, his wife’s death—that leave him permanently displaced from his community. Westerns, on the other hand, had to pass the approval of the Production Code, and so they generally stress sacrifice, hard work, and the nurturing presence of family. In so doing, they ‘held up America as a noble land of equality, fundamental fairness, achievement and decency’ (Loy, 2001, 8). Westerns thus contributed to building the American nation by emphasizing moral values, while Torre Nilsson’s *Martín Fierro* focuses on the *gaucho*’s indomitable spirit to survive despite isolation and state-sponsored violence. Here it is important to note that some post-Production Code Westerns are ‘traumatic Westerns, [which] mark an obsessive return to troubling memories that refuse to dis/resolve’ (Loy, 2001, 21). Torre Nilsson’s film shows traumatic episodes that conspired against nation building and continue to affect the national psyche: the savagery of the natives, the corruption of the civil and lay authorities, the ineffective power of the government, and the tensions between *mestizos*, creoles, and recently arrived immigrants. That is

why, for Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, the original poem constituted a reaction: 'dar la espalda a la civilización que se había consolidado en falso' [turning its back on the civilization that had built on falsehood] (1958, 36). The denunciatory tone of the poem makes it into the film, presenting an unconstitutional society in which peaceful *gauchos*, like Fierro and Cruz, are deprived of their homes, family, and subsistence, forced into permanent displacement. In *Martín Fierro*—as in Hernández's poem—the issue of moral values is evident in the main character's wise teachings and Vizcacha's controversial advice. While the former appear at the film's end and may thus offer the advantage of concluding with morality, the latter is centrally placed, pointing to the persistence of problematic traits—such as personal gain, manipulation, and *viveza criolla* [creole wit]—in the national character. The dichotomy between morality and progress is not settled in *Martín Fierro*. A fourth dissimilarity between *Martín Fierro* and Westerns concerns the issue of voice. In the film, the oral register of the *gaucho*, a key feature of the *gauchesque*, takes two forms: voice-overs to tell Fierro's story and eight-syllable-versed *payadas* [ballads]. Both help to move the story forward and clarify the main character's motivations. In contrast, voice-overs are rarely used in Westerns; third-person narration prevails. These marked differences problematize the idea of considering *Martín Fierro* as a Western.

Nonetheless, *Martín Fierro* may be considered a type of Western if we concentrate on its narrative development. Scholar Michael Coyne has distinguished between two types of Western: community and odyssey. The first is characterized by the actions of a competent hero who resorts to violence in order to defend and protect his community. Odyssey Westerns are those in which the hero wanders a rugged terrain that represents his tortured soul (1997, 9); the lack of a specific point of anchorage emphasizes his unusual status outside of a community. *Martín Fierro* can be considered an odyssey Western whose protagonist roams the Argentine plains: first he returns to his former home, only to find it abandoned; then—through a flashback—he revisits his past as a conscript sent to the frontier, his desertion to join the Indians, his return to civilization to look for his sons, and finally his separation from his sons. The film also bears notable similarities with Westerns of the law and order cycle, which 'often contrasted the heroism and integrity of a solitary lawman or gunman with the avarice, cowardice and hypocrisy of their communities' (Coyne, 1997, 69). As noted by Mafud, in the poem (and also in the film), exemplified by the fatal duel with the *moreno*, a confrontation that allows Fierro to blow off some steam, society pushes him into delinquency and solitude (1968, 23). Fierro's killing of the *moreno* comes after many humiliations: conscription, years of unpaid labor, and harsh punishment for complaining about the government's false promises. Despite this crime, Fierro's heroism surfaces in the scene in which he saves the captive, risking his life to help her.¹⁶ What places him firmly on the 'good' side is the corruption and greediness of those who represent the law and have persecuted him. From the commander who enlists him to the

person in charge of payroll, to the judge who names Vizcacha as guardian of Fierro's younger son, all these representatives of power use it to benefit themselves and take advantage of others.

Independent of its classification as a Western (or a Southern), *Martín Fierro* occupies a prominent place in Argentine film history. It inaugurated a series of 'heritage films' which, in Vidal's words, present 'the ways in which national cinemas turn to the past at different moments in their history in search of their own foundational past' (2012, 3). Amidst the economic modernization of the twentieth century, the film reminded Argentines of the challenges and problems of a similar turning point during the nineteenth century. Torre Nilsson's *Martín Fierro* avoids presenting a reading of the past from a twentieth-century perspective, and its depoliticization during turbulent times was deployed to attract a wide audience. The film also incorporates several folkloric acts (Aguilar, 2002, 23), which was another point of nationalist interest for the Argentine middle and working classes in the late 1960s (Goebel, 2011, 161). The resounding success of *Martín Fierro* opened the doors for other high-quality *gauchesque* films.

Notes

- 1 Gonzalo Aguilar holds that 'revisitar el pasado, redefinir el panteón nacional, narrar una historia más auténtica, construir fábulas de identidad nacional son algunos de los deseos que la película de Nilsson venía a complacer' [to revisit the past, redefine the national pantheon, narrate a more authentic history, and build fables of national identity are some of the wishes that Nilsson's film has come to fulfill] ('Juan Moreira,' 2016, non. pag.).
- 2 Elina Tranchini mentions the 1921 *Martín Fierro* directed by Alfredo Quesada (1999, 125).
- 3 *Gente* wrote that the TV licensing deal was worth 4 million pesos ('1969,' 1969, 13).
- 4 Several decades later, cultural critic Eduardo Romano criticized both the film's fidelity to the original poem and certain uses of poetic license, such as the rearrangement of the verses and the introductions of characters who provided additional information (1991, 134–35).
- 5 Fierro explains the low points of his life as a persecuted *gaucho*:
 Vamos entrando recién
 A la parte más sentida
 Aunque es todita mi vida
 De males una cadena.
 [Now we are just coming
 to the saddest part
 even though the whole of my life
 is nothing but a string of troubles]. (Hernández, *Martín Fierro*, 935)
- 6 The writing of this chapter coincided with my watching the TV miniseries *The Tudors* (2007–2010), whose depiction of bloody death sentences and tortures, particularly in Season 3, are truly disturbing.

- 7 Rosenstone holds that 'The mainstream film tells history as a story, a tale with a beginning, middle, and an end. A tale that leaves you with a moral message and (usually) a feeling of uplift. A tale embedded in a larger view of history that is always progressive, if sometimes Marxist (another form of progress)' (2001, 51).
- 8 Ulanovsky describes *Gente* as 'informal y osada pero muy integrada en el sistema occidental y cristiano' [informal and daring but very aligned with the Western, Catholic system] (1997, 161).
- 9 For Ulanovsky, *Gente*'s content is 'un inapelable álbum de lo argentino' [an indisputable album of the Argentine] (1997, 163).
- 10 Six months later, *Gente* chose Alfredo Alcón and Leopoldo Torre Nilsson as 'Figures of the Year' for 1968 because of their involvement in *Martín Fierro* and summarized the film's achievements: 'ocho semanas en sala de primera línea de la Capital Federal y Córdoba, seis en Rosario y Bahía Blanca, cinco en Santa Fe, cuatro en Mendoza y catorce en Mar del Plata (el primer caso que registra la exhibición en la Perla del Atlántico), hicieron que esta película de una belleza plástica y de una dramaticidad desgarradora se transformara en el triunfo más resonante que registra el cine argentino' [eight weeks in first-class movie theatres in Buenos Aires and Córdoba, six in Rosario and Bahía Blanca, five in Santa Fe, four in Mendoza and 14 in Mar del Plata (the first recorded case of screening in 'the Pearl of the Atlantic'), made this film of visual beauty and heartbreaking dramatism the most resounding success ever recorded in Argentine cinema] ('1968: Las figuras,' 1969, 7).
- 11 The poem *Martín Fierro* has passages of even greater brutality than those represented in the film, such as the episode of the captive and the death of her son (1085-135).
- 12 Félix-Didier and Levinson also mentioned that in the 1960s the popular *La guerra gaucha* was seen as a type of Western (2009, 52).
- 13 The representation of violence could be one difference between *Martín Fierro* and the American Western. As Torre Nilsson states, 'no quise marcarla con ferocidad permanente, pues ésta era muy de *western*' [I did not want to make it with cruelty because that belonged very much to the Western] (Vieites, 2002, 90).
- 14 Adrián Veaute holds that 'en términos políticos, la civilización estuvo relacionada al liberalismo colonialista y el sometimiento de pueblos' [in political terms, civilization was associated with a colonialist liberalism and the subjugation of peoples] (2005, 105).
- 15 Ludmer states that 'el viejo gaucho de Hernández en 1879 queda legalizado como el trabajador de la riqueza agroexportadora' [Hernández's old *gaucho* achieves legitimacy in 1879 as a worker in the rich agricultural exports business] (1998, 2).
- 16 Mafud states that 'la ternura de Martín Fierro está siempre viva. Es tal vez lo que más nos afirma su sociabilidad profunda' [Martín Fierro's tenderness is always alive. It is perhaps that which tells us most about his deep sociability] (1968, 29).

CHAPTER 6

Don Segundo Sombra

In April 1969, director Manuel Antín (1926–) began shooting *Don Segundo Sombra*, an adaptation of the homonymous novel by Ricardo Güiraldes (1886–1927).¹ Although the Güiraldes family had jealously kept the novel's rights for years and rejected proposals for cinematic adaptations, a fortuitous meeting between Antín and Buvanahalli Chamne Gonda Ramachandra, Güiraldes's adopted Indian son, opened the way toward the novel's filmic version.² With an preliminary budget of 80 million pesos, the film had the total support of the Güiraldes family, who lent two *estancias*—La Florida and La Blanqueada, both in San Antonio de Areco—for the film's locations. Initially, Antín thought about casting either Alfredo Alcón or Hugo del Carril to play Don Segundo, but Alcón was already the face of *Martín Fierro* and had already signed to play San Martín in Torre Nilsson's forthcoming *El santo de la espada*. Del Carril also had previous commitments that prevented him from accepting this role. Consequently, in April 1969, Adolfo Güiraldes, the author's nephew, who had been hired as a consultant, was cast for the main role of Don Segundo. Güiraldes's grandson, Juan Carballido Almonacid, was chosen to play the adult Favio Cáceres. Both Güiraldes and Carballido Almonacid were non-professional among a select group of actors including Héctor Alterio (*gaucho* in black), Soledad Silveyra (Aurora), Luis Medina Castro (Antenor), Juan Carlos Gené (Don Sixto), and Fernando Vegal (Burgos).

For Antín, the shooting of *Don Segundo Sombra* constituted a novel challenge. Mariana Sánchez notes that while his first films belonged to the Generation of 1960 school, *Don Segundo Sombra* began a new creative stage for the filmmaker, characterized by rural productions like *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (1972), *Allá lejos y hace tiempo* [*Far Away and Long Ago*] (1977), and *La invitación* [The Invite] (1982). Antín explains that his first phase:

termina en el momento en que yo decido hacer *Don Segundo Sombra*, que ya no es una obra solitaria, sino un poco ajena también por sus problemas, por sus conflictos, por su desarrollo. Curiosamente descubro que al alejarla de mí produzco mi mejor obra.

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 HELIOS (EL PALOMAR) - SAN MARTIN (BURZACO) y AMBASSADOR (MAR DEL PLATA)

Promotional ad of *Don Segundo Sombra*.

[ends at the moment when I decide to make *Don Segundo Sombra*, which is no longer a solitary work, but rather a little foreign because of its problems, conflicts, and development. Curiously, I discover that in separating it from me, I produce my best work] (Sández, 2010, 14)

Like Torre Nilsson, Antín discovered in the countryside, the setting of *Don Segundo Sombra*, a world of which he was unaware, but one he found deeply inspirational (Sández, 2010, 68–69).

Released on August 14, 1969 in the Atlas cinema, *Don Segundo Sombra* was for the most part well-received. Antín mentioned that it was shown for 13 weeks, unlike his previous films, which were exhibited for a week only (Sández, 2010, 91). In *Gente*, Leo Sala wrote that Antín's *Don Segundo Sombra* was the most faithful document of the *gauchesque* ('Don,' 1969, non. pag.). Reviews in *Clarín* and *La prensa* also highlighted the film's fidelity to the novel, but listed certain flaws as well. For the reviewer of *Clarín*, two of the film's weaknesses were the voice-over that accompanies some scenes and the lack of integration of two episodes into the main storyline: the fight between Antenor Barragán and the *gaucho* in black, and the story of the blacksmith ('Imágenes,' 1969, non. pag.). After a complimentary summary of the importance of Güiraldes's novel, *La prensa's* J.P. noted Adolfo Güiraldes's weak performance and the film's slow rhythm: 'el resultado revela cierta frialdad no del todo equilibrada por la exactísima ambientación' [the result reveals a certain coolness, not at all balanced by the very exact setting] ('Don,' 1969, 11). Similarly, *Gente* recommended the film and rated it as very good, despite certain shortcomings, such as the absence of passion, which was perhaps as a consequence of Adolfo Güiraldes's lack of acting experience. Unlike *Martín Fierro*, *Don Segundo Sombra* was not characterized as an Argentine Western; nor were some of the flaws listed in reviews of *Martín Fierro*—frequent shots of the heavens, long titles, and scenes of violence—mentioned in the evaluations of Antín's work. The reviewer of *Radiolandia* held that *Don Segundo Sombra*

es una película que, por muchos motivos, enorgullece al cine nacional [...]. El cine Atlas vivió en la noche de la 'premiere' una de sus jornadas más inolvidables desde el estreno de *Martín Fierro*, una película que estuvo presente en el recuerdo de todos. Personalidades del cine, el arte, la literatura y el periodismo estuvieron presentes allí y brindaron su aplauso sin retaceos.

[is a film that, for many reasons, makes national cinema proud (...). The Atlas movie theater witnessed on the night of the premiere one of its most unforgettable days since the release of *Martín Fierro*, a film that was present in everybody's memory. Important people related to film, art, literature, and journalism were there and applauded warmly] ('Don Segundo,' 1969, non. pag.)

This review correctly summarizes the consensus around the film: it was a point of pride for Argentine cinema which indirectly signified a reappraisal of the novel within Argentine culture.³

The Grupo Cine Liberación recognized the crucial trend of depicting Argentine topics initiated by *Martín Fierro* and continued with *Don Segundo*, but had some strong reservations about Antín's film. The Grupo criticized it on ideological and meta-cinematic points, perceiving the film as a celebration of the upper classes: 'Llegó *Don Segundo Sombra* de

Antín-Güiraldes y la oligarquía argentina ¡al fin! encontró su digno filme y su cineasta' [Antín-Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* arrived and the Argentine oligarchy—at last!—found a worthy film and filmmaker] (1969, 81).⁴ The Grupo despised Antín's film, describing it as applauded by the Anchorena—a reference to a traditional Argentine landowning family—and made for the Sociedad Rural, the most important representative of agro-business in Argentina (1969, 82–84). For the Grupo, *Don Segundo Sombra* and *Martín Fierro* shared the same ideology, supported by liberals and nationalists alike in the late 1960s, that is to say, the idea that the country was built by certain individual heroes without the input of the masses and its neocolonial position was strengthened in the concert of nations (1969, 81–84).⁵ With these remarks, the Grupo conflated a film that brings to the fore the moral values incarnated by an experienced *gaucho* with an official celebration of Argentina's rural past. These charges, however, cannot be sustained, since the official policy of Onganía's government consisted of diversifying the Argentine economy and reducing reliance on the primary sector. In addition, the Grupo's criticism failed to consider that just as the young character in both novel and film accepts his identity and comes of age, in the late 1960s so too was Argentina expected to finally come of age and become a sovereign nation, independent of the policies of both the United States and the USSR.

Don Segundo Sombra garnered local distinctions and also faced several challenges. It was shown for 13 consecutive weeks in the Atlas cinema and other movie theaters and attracted 2 million viewers (Sández, 2010, 90). It received the Silver Condor for the Best Argentine film in 1970, though it was not as massively watched as *Martín Fierro*. In an interview, Antín highlighted the film's special status:

Me da la impresión de que en este momento existe en Argentina un incremento del nacionalismo. Me parece que el cine argentino que siempre tuvo mercados, por lo menos latinoamericanos, con el ejercicio de estos temas, al volver a ellos, una de las cosas que intenta es recuperar esos mercados. En festivales internacionales de Europa, al cine argentino se le acusaba de intelectualizado y europeizado.

[I am under the impression that at this moment nationalism is growing in Argentina. It seems to me that that Argentine cinema has always had markets for these topics, at least in Latin America, and in returning to them, one of the things it is attempting to do is recuperate those markets. At international film festivals in Europe, Argentine cinema was thought to be intellectual and European-like]. ('Admirable,' 1969, 59)

Antín's assessment correctly identifies the domestic audience's epochal demand for Argentine themes. While there is no data on whether *gauchesque* films were sold to other Latin American countries, news reports do show

that there was interest in capturing European markets by using the ‘national card,’ that is, by resorting to the production of unique, non-European films.

Don Segundo Sombra’s attempt to capture foreign markets was indecisive. Of its reception in Spain, *La gaceta* mentioned ‘elogiosas críticas aparecidas en publicaciones madrileñas’ [positive reviews which appeared in publications in Madrid] (‘Continúan,’ 1970, 2). In February 1970, it was announced that *Don Segundo Sombra* would not be Argentina’s nomination for the Academy Awards, given that this would have excluded it from being able to compete in other film festivals. The publication reported that Antín’s adaptation was ‘la carta del cine argentino para Cannes este año’ [Argentina’s cinema card to Cannes this year] (‘No va,’ 1970, 45). *El heraldo* reported that a subcommittee eliminated it from the French competition, however, ‘porque pese a su auténtica calidad es excesivamente localista y tememos que no sea comprendida por el público y por la crítica’ [because, despite its authentic quality, it is excessively localist and we are afraid that it will not be understood by the public and critics] (‘De cómo,’ 1970, 263). Gloria Alcorta notes that the film was exhibited at Cannes in the end, but its screening coincided with that of *Woodstock*, which received more interest (1970, non. pag.). Days later, another report in the same newspaper detailed the unanimous negative opinion of the film which appeared in the French press: ‘*Le monde* emplea la palabra “decepción”’ [*Le Monde* uses the word ‘disappointment’]. In addition, ‘*France-soir* comenta: [...] este tipo de cine es tan viejo como el mundo y esta obra torpe no resulta interesante’ [*France-soir* comments: (...) this type of cinema is as old as the world and this awkward work is not interesting] (Mendía, 1970, non. pag.). *Don Segundo Sombra* was exhibited at Cannes thanks to Argentine diplomatic pressure and reports mentioned that the Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974), a member of the competition jury, personally congratulated Antín (Alcorta, 1970, non. pag.).

Don Segundo Sombra begins with the eponymous *gaucho*’s arrival in a small town one evening. The camera captures hues of orange and yellow in the sky while his face is in shadow. This image freezes while nostalgic music is heard and the titles roll. The first shots show two *gauchos* side by side. One is the young Fabio Cáceres (Juan Carballido Almonacid) and the other is middle-aged (Adolfo Güiraldes). They shake hands as the camera focuses on the gray skies, conveying feelings of sadness, but also of restrained emotion. As the middle-aged *gaucho* rides along, the camera focuses on his young companion. His close-up is accompanied by a voice-over that explains his emotional state about this separation. Ludmer has alluded to the significance of the voice in the *gauchesque*, evident also in the film, in which ‘a heard voice and written word [...] recount his life with the master before transforming himself into the third master’ (2002, 260). In the film, voice is represented through the young character’s point of view. A long shot of the first *gaucho* during daylight shows a teenage boy (Luis de la Cuesta). Both seem to pass in front of the young *gaucho* who remembers a period in his life when he met Don Segundo and who later became his mentee. To emphasize the narration



Young Fabio in the *pulpería*.

from the perspective of the young man, the camera follows his younger self as the voice-over explains the circumstances surrounding his orphanhood. Lacking a strong paternal figure, the teenager seeks to be accepted into the masculine world of *la pulpería* [the canteen], for he lives with two single and unaffectionate aunts and refers to their house as *mi prisión* [my jail]. As one of the aunts chases him away with a broom, it becomes clear that neither of them have maternal feelings for the teenager.⁶ The sharp division between the masculine and feminine worlds also affects him: in the *pulpería*, he gets some validation; at home, he is constantly belittled. Thus, besides the transitional state of adolescence, the young boy also suffers from being displaced from these 'worlds' and lacks a powerful masculine role model with which to identify. It is at this juncture that Don Segundo appears in his life.

Antín's film reveals the difference in status between Don Segundo and the adolescent. While the latter supplies the *pulpería* with fish and makes some pocket money, the former is a respected patron. When he enters, a slow pan from his feet to his head emphasizes Don Segundo's height. His power fills the imagination of the teenager, who silently admires him while Don Segundo inquires about jobs in the area. When he is challenged by a drunken *parroquiano* [customer], the teenager quickly rallies to the newcomer's side, warning him about the man, who is waiting for him in a dark alley. But this treacherous surprise and the ensuing knife fight fail to disturb Don Segundo. This episode makes the youth realize the pettiness of the people surrounding him and provides him with the impetus to leave his suffocating community. To emphasize his lack of belonging, the film shows his uninviting and sparsely furnished room while a voice-over narrates his feelings of despondency. Even though the adolescent manages to flee, his arrival at the ranch, where other seasoned *gauchos* work, is far from easy: he

is first ignored and later mocked by these older hands, thus continuing to appear in an in-between state between childhood and adulthood.⁷ He must prove himself by working hard while he waits for Don Segundo's arrival. In contrast to the teenager, the experienced *gaucho* is well-received and inspires deference due to his skill in horse breaking. Despite the youth's humble position in this new masculine universe, his admiration for Don Segundo helps him to transition in this all-male environment, as he strives to live up to the experienced *gaucho*'s expectations.

Don Segundo Sombra has many elements of the heritage film. One is the coming-of-age story that sustains its narrative development. Talking about the British heritage film *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997), Sarah Neely asserts that it 'is structured as a journey to a "foreign" place that leads to self-discovery and an exploration of class and gender' (2005, 44, quoted in Vidal, 2012, 48). In Antín's film, the teenager's desire to embrace a life of freedom and mobility drives him to places he has never seen before—both literally and figuratively. His journey is as much geographical as psychological; it is a learning process that takes place in close proximity to the land. It is also a development that implies his becoming a young man and understanding his class position. Another important element of the heritage film visible in *Don Segundo Sombra* is its realism, to which some critics refer as the documentary-style filmmaking of *costumbrismo*. While some realist scenes certainly slow down the film's rhythm, they also show the teenager's immersion into the rural universe and his development as an aspiring *gaucho*.

Don Segundo Sombra's realism is enhanced by some unusual takes. For instance, when the adolescent asks for advice about where to buy horses, a bird's-eye shot captures the *gauchos*' living quarters, unobtrusively peeking into the familiarity and camaraderie that prevail in this space. In addition, an aerial shot of the youth's encounter with Aurora in the corn field produces the sense of prying into their intimate moment. These shots are complemented by ground-level ones and several close-ups that present the same event from different angles. The moving of the cattle is also filmed through aerial shots, which give a broader perspective on the immensity of the land. As the *gauchos* exhibit their skill in taming horses, folkloric music reinforces their traditional chores. Witnessing their aptitude, the youth learns about this manly task, which ensures his belonging to a masculine realm. Alternating close-ups of the teenager reveal his anxiety and embarrassment when he is still unable to subdue a horse on his own, while diverse close-ups of Don Segundo show the mentor to be attentive to his despondent mood. He urges his mentee to 'hacete fuerte' [toughen up] and helps him to train his horse as well as teaching him how to groom it with a sequence of brief and rapid shots accompanied by quick-tempo music. A static shot of the sunset further illustrates the tough *gaucho* life that requires hard work from dawn to dusk.

The film stresses movement and change as natural aspects of life. If the cattle drive takes *gauchos* to distant places, the voice-over informs us that the passage of time—five years—also brings about transformations, particularly

in the teenager, now a young man who has bloomed under his *padrino's* patient and wise tutelage. Maturity does not diminish his admiration for Don Segundo, as he continues to learn from him about other aspects of life, such as socialization at a town's dance, encounters with severe law officers, and oral traditions. Critics have rightfully noted that these episodes seem disconnected, but they provide glimpses into the varied ways in which Don Segundo instructs the young man. In the tale of Misery, for instance, his voice-over introduces the representation of the story, but the presence of a person helping the other actors with the lines may be confusing to viewers. The tale, represented as a play in the film, is about a pact that Misery seals with the Devil. The same actor that embodies the Devil in the play later shows up in the scene of the popular ball and challenges Antenor (Luis Medina Castro) to a duel over a woman. Observing this fight gives the young *gaucho* the opportunity to absorb the notion that manhood in the countryside is still asserted through physical violence. The camera captures his surprised expression from the point of view of the fallen *gaucho* as voice-overs reflect on the fleeting nature of life and the instability and problems brought about by relations with easy women.

Camaraderie between mentor and mentee is one of the prevailing tropes of Antín's film. When Don Segundo and the young man reunite with Don Sixto (Juan Carlos Gené), an acquaintance, they find him unwell. Unable to explain his unkempt appearance, they nevertheless accept his hospitality. During the night, they realize that Don Sixto is accosted by frightening nightmares involving the Devil. Don Segundo's calm wisdom helps avert a disaster before the young *gaucho's* shocked eyes. In another scene, as the young man's gaze becomes familiar with the sea, his reverie is interrupted by the arrival of his mentor, who then leads him to the cattle drive. This scene shows the way in which the once-rebellious youth has accepted his mentor's proven leadership. On another occasion, when the youth suffers an accident, Don Segundo gives him first aid. Male camaraderie goes both ways. The mentee also reciprocates: when he is offered a job offer that would separate him from Don Segundo, he declines it, choosing his *padrino's* proximity and companionship. The mentor-mentee relationship is also prioritized when the latter receives news of his biological father's passing: he perceives his inheritance of an *estancia* as a threat to his relationship with Don Segundo.

The film's final scenes revolve around several oppositions. One deals with the dichotomy between biological paternity and fatherhood. At first, the up-to-now nameless young character refuses to accept his new identity after his father's passing. His estrangement was a sign that his biological father had abandoned him, so young Fabio refuses to recognize blood ties. He considers Don Segundo to be his real father, the man who introduced him to 'las cosas de la vida' [the things of life] and has been a constant presence in his life over the last few years. Closely related to this, the second opposition concerns property titles: if Fabio accepts to become the owner of an *estancia* bequeathed to him by his biological father, it is because he has learned all



Adult Fabio and Don Segundo.

the tasks—no matter how menial—necessary to its running. His voice-over expresses doubts about claiming ownership of land without the proper knowledge and love for it. Thus, familiarity and a strong link with the plains constitute for him the requirements to assert legitimate rights over inherited property. The final dichotomy, which closes the film, revolves around the opposition between a sedentary life and nomadism, and implicates the main characters' different paths: while Don Segundo departs to continue a life in motion, with few possessions and attachments, Fabio is now a landowner who has adapted to his new title and sacrifices his most stable relationship—that with Don Segundo—to take up his responsibilities to his land. If, as Patrick McGee observes, regarding Western films, 'masculinity requires its identification with private property' (2007, 84), Fabio's acceptance of his paternal inheritance sets the stage for his becoming a man who owns land. Because of his close ties with Don Segundo, the mentor's departure constitutes an acknowledgment of Fabio's adulthood. Here it is important to remember that sociologist Harry Blatterer defines the process of being welcomed into society as full members as 'one of mutuality. It is a dynamic, intersubjective process of social recognition in which collectivities and individuals are inescapably implicated' (2007, 2). In learning how to be a *gaucho*, the young man also attains social respect.

Although *Don Segundo Sombra* has not been compared to a Western film, it is worth briefly analyzing common features and those that differentiate them. Both novel and film versions bear a striking similarity with this filmic genre. Indeed, Westerns, whose peak was in the 1930–1950s, have a nostalgic tone about American's westward expansion. Fabio's memory of the period of his life dominated by the presence of his mentor is also

imbued with nostalgia as *Don Segundo Sombra* revisits a crucial period in the life of Argentine society. However, by doing so from the perspective of an orphaned adolescent, neither the novel nor the film delves into the expansionist impetus that, in Argentina, systematically displaced the native tribes southward. While the film shares with traditional Westerns the issue of access to capital, it does not tackle the 'question of wealth and its relation to force and power' (McGee, 2007, 39). In Antín's film, the *estancias* are already fenced in. Thus, one central Western element that is missing in *Don Segundo* is the conflict generated by the expansion of capitalism; that is to say, progress is not resisted, nor does it lead to conflict. Nonetheless, Westerns and Antín's *Don Segundo Sombra* were produced in modern societies where the countryside and/or the Far West changed dramatically due to modernization. In the 1960s, 73% of the Argentine population and 69.9% of the American population lived in cities (Lindeboim and Kennedy, 2003, 16; US Census, 1960, xix). In that decade, the United States witnessed an unprecedented movement of population from the middle states to those in the West. Westerns continued to be shot, but the subtext changed: they no longer alluded to the continental movement westward; instead they tackled American expansionism in South East Asia. Antín's film, on the other hand, criticized by the Grupo Liberación for its lack of engagement with the issues of the time in which it was produced, was faithful to Güiraldes's melancholic tribute to the hardworking *gauchos* of the turn of the nineteenth century who were being replaced by sedentary workers. As a heritage film, *Don Segundo* stresses cultural authenticity in the process of identity building: like Fabio, Argentine viewers should remember their origins and pass them on to future generations. For that to happen, a stable image of the past is necessary. Consequently, the film *Don Segundo* evokes a society free of class tensions. Indeed, even at the end of the film, when Fabio becomes a rich property-owner, he is still indebted to the steadiest masculine figure in his life, a nomadic *gaucho* of mythic dimensions. In *Don Segundo*, the mentor's many qualities are recognized by his mentee. It is this admiration that facilitates the teaching which the seasoned *gaucho* imparts to Fabio, providing him with moral values and monitoring his experiential learning.

Don Segundo Sombra carefully avoids being considered a reactionary film. Antín's recreation of a 1920s novel does not speak to the tumultuous 1960s, when a majority of the Argentine youth challenged the moral values and guidelines of their elders. By referring to a past in which the *gaucho* embodied morality and responsibility, Antín's film stresses values associated with the national character, independently of political parties. Yet his depiction of Don Segundo is not an endorsement of paternal authority, which could have been interpreted as an alignment with the military government. It is worth remembering that Onganía had confronted rebel youths in the Night of the Long Batons and the Cordobazo uprising. Thus, a faithful adaptation of Güiraldes's novel resulted in a film that was certainly conservative, but which was also read as a unifying representation of the best that an Argentine

literary text had to offer to young generations. In contrast to *Don Segundo Sombra*, political overtones slowly pervade the next two *gauchesque* films to be discussed: *Santos Vega* and *Juan Moreira*.

Notes

- 1 Before becoming a filmmaker, Manuel Antín published several books of poetry, *La torre de la mañana* [The Morning's Tower] in 1945, *Sirena y espiral* [Siren and Spiral] in 1950, and *Poemas de dos mis ciudades* [Poems of My Two Cities] in 1952; a novel, *Alta de luna* [High Moon] in 1954 and *Los venerables* [The Venerable Ones] in 1955; and plays, *El ancla de arena* [The Anchor of Sand] in 1940 and *No Demasiado Tarde* [Not Too Late]. His first film, *La cifra impar* [The Odd Number] (1961) was based on a short story by Julio Cortázar ('Cartas a mamá') [Letters to Mom] which, according to Sanmaritano, 'lo ha colocado en un preponderante lugar dentro de la reciente promoción de realizadores' [has placed him in a predominant place among the most recent cohort of filmmakers] (1962, 4).
- 2 The book's rights were sold for 3 million pesos and 20% of the film's profits.
- 3 The reviewer of *La razón* explained: 'El saldo es positivo y conforta la presencia de temas esencialmente criollos en la pantalla local como este relato de tan hondo vigor humano' [The balance is positive and the presence of thoroughly creole topics on local screens, such as this narrative of deep human energy is comforting] ('Digna version,' 1969, non. pag.).
- 4 The Grupo may have been referring to a very positive article by Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979) that appeared in *La prensa* (Sández, 2010, 37).
- 5 Goebel explains that 'in the 1960s nationalism was part of the ideology of radical groups of both right and left which did not necessarily use the denomination "nationalist"' (2011, 109).
- 6 For Juan Pablo Spicer, the teenager relies on his *picardía* [wits] (1993, 366).
- 7 Spicer proposes that the adolescent embarks on a journey toward manhood (1993, 361).

CHAPTER 7

Santos Vega

On July 22, 1971, *Santos Vega*, a film produced and directed by Carlos Borcosque, Jr., a 28-year-old former assistant director, was released in Buenos Aires. Two weeks before, it had been pre-released in the city of Bragado, where it was shot during March and April 1971. Like *Don Segundo Sombra*, the crew also included a historical advisor, but *Santos Vega* did not have financial support from the NIC, despite its 'Argentine' topic. Its total cost of 100 million pesos was similar to previous *gauchesque* films. *Santos Vega* was based on Arturo Pillado Matheu's adaptation of both Rafael Obligado's poem and Ricardo Gutiérrez's novel. The lead role was played by José Larralde (1937–), a singer of folk music who recorded his first album in 1967 and had enormous success with his concerts.¹ Although Larralde had had offers for film work, this was his first cinematic role. He agreed to incarnate a singing *gaucho* because, in his opinion, *Santos Vegas* had 'cosas que decir y cosas a las que servir' [things to say and things to serve]. He also said, 'me interesa que se salve la película en sí, pero que se salve para el país, para mostrarlo en el comienzo de su tradición' [I am interested in saving the film for itself, in saving it for the country, to show it in the beginning of its tradition] ('La vergüenza,' 1971, 47).² *Santos Vega* is thus a heritage film, characterized by a strong desire to represent a foundational past.

The film's reception differed from those of the two previous *gauchesque* films. J.H.S., reviewer for *La prensa*, pointed out that 'el héroe legendario no está' [the legendary hero is not there] ('Santos,' 1971, non. pag.). Similarly, *Clarín's* reviewer noted the one-dimensional characters: 'No hay aquí personas de cuyas esencias y conductas se remitan a un desarrollo. Hay solo tipos fugazmente contactados' [There are no characters whose essence and behaviors show development here. There are only loosely connected types] ('Santos,' 1971, non. pag.). J.C.F. listed technical flaws, such as an overreliance on zooms and the slow narrative rhythm ('Santos,' 1971, 59). Other problems identified were a weak script and poor performances from the supporting cast. Unlike *Martín Fierro* and *Don Segundo Sombra*, *Santos Vega* did not have success at the box office, nor did it receive any awards. Nonetheless, among its strengths were Larralde's performance and the

film's musical score. Similar to *Güemes, la tierra en armas*, *Santos Vega* mixes narration with folkloric music, a combination that was far from accidental. María del Carmen Feijóo and Marcela Nari explain:

During the 1960s, inheriting a revisionist tradition in history, an interest in the promotion of folklore began to develop, in some cases taking the form of archaism and in others that of political critique. The didactic use of history was expressed as a nationalist restoration (though not only of Peronist inspiration, since it also recalled 19th-century figures such as the *caudillos* and their *militias*) as a key element of the popular movement. (1996, 11)

Santos Vega's soundtrack certainly contributes to the depiction of a popular nineteenth-century figure known for his wit and musical talent.

Santos Vega presents many similarities with the Western. First, Borcosque's film is again set in the unpopulated *pampas*. The opening scenes capture the immensity of the plains and the movement of cattle across them. The film's location is close to the frontier which separated lands appropriated by the state from those of the Indians. It is an area over which military and civic authorities ruled with little supervision. Second, after the long *payada* ballad that introduces the protagonist, Vega begins to experience problems with the representatives of progress and the modernizing state.³ First, a judge (Alfredo Iglesias) who feels threatened by Vega's promise to kill judges (in the thirteenth minute of the film) makes inquiries about his whereabouts. Ignoring his secretary's warning—'Señor, no nos metamos con él: es un gaucho pobre' [Sir, let's not get involved with him, he's a poor *gaucho*]³—he orders a group of his men to find Vega. The film shows the unchecked power that the state's representatives used for personal matters, many times harassing the *gauchos*. In one scene, a party of three militia men abuse their power, mistreating a woman in front of her children and placing a knife at her husband's throat, just because they have been sent to requisition their horses. This incident is followed by several reverse shots stressing the oppositional stance between the militia men and Vega, whose intervention puts an end to this outrageous abuse. Vega's interference only makes the judge angrier and even more determined in his pursuit, describing Vega as a 'gaucho sucio' [dirty *gaucho*]. Thus, civilization does not appear to be the opposite of barbarism, but rather to encompass exploitation and despotism, and to challenge the progress and peace that the state purports to uphold. Vega's defense of the ill-treated family constitutes the excuse needed for the judge to order his arrest. Even though a young boy warns him of the upcoming militia's arrival, Vega refuses to flee, saying, 'Hay que saber plantarse cuando uno tiene la verdad' [One has to be firm when one holds the truth]. His confident stance contrasts with the militia's lack of courage; when Vega defeats them easily, the cowards run away.

Vega's legendary status as a gifted performer figures prominently in the film. It opens with a voice-over that anticipates both his skill as a *payador*

[singer] and his mythological status as a *sombra* [shadow] that still plays guitars. His fame as a singer is well-known by the *gauchos*.⁴ In addition, the voice-over also emphasizes the relationship between the performer and the land: his belonging to a special geographical area stresses his origins as a true Argentinian. Nonetheless, the *sombra* mentioned at the beginning also alludes to Vega's continuous movement, which facilitates his unforeseen arrival at unexpected times and places as well as his sudden departures. His on-screen appearance highlights the mythic dimensions of his persona. A tall and well-built *gaucho* blocks the *pulperia's* door, in a scene reminiscent of Don Segundo's entrance, but unlike that *gaucho*, Vega hopes to assert his talent as a singer. In his first *payada*, he describes himself as 'un cantor que canta a la vida' [a singer who sings to life] and as someone 'con un corazón partido y un alma dolorida' [with a broken heart and a wounded soul]. Further encouraged to tell his story, he mentions the lack of justice, the loss of a love, and the endless abuses he has endured, all 'cosas que por ser plebeyo padece el gaucho argentino' [things the Argentine *gaucho* suffers because of his plebeian origins]. With this generalization, he strives to connect with the audience, which is made up by other *gauchos*. His narration not only identifies the oppressors of his class, but also eloquently states his goal.⁵ Vega's—and the *gauchos'*—enemies are foreigners, judges, and corrupted men who go against God's natural order, denying them their 'pan diario' [daily bread]. It is in the pursuit of restoring his social class's right to a free existence that Vega has given up the sedentary life. For the *payador*, freedom is a right worth fighting for, to avoid exploitation, either by private employers or by the state's compulsory drafts. As Vega sings, zooms onto the listening *gauchos* capture their support for his ideas.

Vega's expressive skills and singing serve to emphasize his place not only among his fellow *gauchos*, but also among women. A party provides him with the occasion to meet a young girl named Petrona (Ana María Picchio) who shyly welcomes his seduction.⁶ But her cousin Baldomero (Hugo Larralde) is also interested in her and warns the *gaucho* singer to leave her alone. When Vega replies that he will ignore this advice, a fist fight ensues, from which he emerges the winner. But Baldomero does not give up: he accosts Petrona and follows Vega across the prairie. The popular *gaucho* is warned again about his rival's treacherous ways, this time by a friend who tells him that, as the unifying voice of the common people, he should not jeopardize everything for a woman. In a poignant song, Vega expresses his bitterness about his unattainable love. Next, he encounters Baldomero's father, a militia man who had been sent earlier to arrest him. Once again, there is a fight which Vega wins and shows his clemency. Nonetheless, father and son unleash their hatred of Vega on Petrona, whom they mistreat. She confesses her fears to the singer-*gaucho*, who proposes that they elope. The tension between those who support Vega and those who conspire against him reaches a peak. One night, Vega and Petrona are intercepted by a group of men sent by Baldomero. In the skirmish, Petrona is fatally wounded, a development for which Vega's

enemies—the judge and Baldomero—blame each other while a grieving Vega is briefly incarcerated, and freed by his friend Carmona who risks his life doing so. Vega fights Baldomero during daylight—in stark opposition to the latter’s treacherous nighttime attack. He defeats him and, this time, kills him.

Despite his victory and the support of his fellow *gauchos*, staying around is not an option for Vega. His errancy allows the film to be considered an odyssey Western (Coyne, 1998, 7). The scenes of Vega in his old age clarify the image at the film’s outset of a lonely, aged figure riding alone. The final song is the same one that opens this film about the memory of a great *gaucho*, giving the film a circular narrative, highlighting its tone of resigned sadness. Rosalba Campa rightly notes that the literary Vega is ‘una figura perteneciente al pasado, reducida a un estatuto fantasmal’ [a figure who belongs to the past, reduced to a ghostly status] (2004, 325). The film illustrates the phantasmagorical feature of the singer-*gaucho*, a characterization not found in the novel. *Santos Vega’s* ending thus bears a striking resemblance to Antín’s *Don Segundo Sombra* in stressing the remembrance of a gifted and valiant *gaucho*. Nonetheless, while *Don Segundo* stages a private memory (that of Fabio), in Borcosque’s film, Vega’s deeds, memorialized in melancholic songs, have a public circulation.

Santos Vega is an unusual heritage film in which realism is blended with fiction. After Vega’s departure from the area where Petrona lived, the film jumps in time to show him as an elderly rider roaming the plains with his guitar. His song frames a three-minute flashback to the times when he met his love, he had the support of other *gauchos* and helped them when the authorities abused them. In this recollection, the talented *gaucho* was part of a community—a variant of the Western (Coyne, 1997, 7). The film’s final part, however, revolves around Vega’s meeting with Juan Sin Ropa [Naked John] (Walter Vidarte), who challenges him to sing and, upon defeating Vega, characterizes him as a ‘viejo, solo y derrotado’ [old, alone, and beaten]. This setback explains his status as an errant soul who wanders in the ‘patria of Echeverría’ [Echeverría’s land].⁷ This nod to the homeland and one of the foundational Romantic writers of nineteenth-century Argentina served as a potent reminder for viewers in the early 1970s of the process of nation-building through nineteenth-century literary texts. While this evocation may be construed as conservative, it fulfills an important task in this heritage film. As Vidal explains, ‘The need to recuperate the *lieux de mémoire* that could ensure the continuity of the national past becomes especially acute at a time of progressive disintegration of narratives of nation and empire’ (2012, 56). At the time of the film’s release, the linking of place and memory stressed the deep connection between land and cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, *Santos Vega’s* final song, with references to the *gaucho*-singer and his determined search for freedom in his own homeland and the lack of justice (both human and poetic), is a sign of Borcosque’s transgressive poetic license. In Argentina in 1971, Vega’s desire for freedom was shared by the national audience as the military authorities continued to rule without

a clear exit plan. In this sense, Vega's quest was comparable to the popular demand, in 1970, for a prompt return to democracy. Moreover, Borcosque's *Santos Vega* stresses the use of memory to reverse the effects of defeat: Vega is alive in the mind of so many of his fellow *gauchos* despite having being overpowered, just like Perón, who was forced into exile—a wandering life—after the *coup d'état* that ousted him in 1955, but continued to be a presence in the minds of his political supporters. While this aspect of *Santos Vega* was not mentioned by reviewers at the time of the film's release, the potential for a political subtext pitting *gaucho* against the establishment was, nonetheless, present. As we will see, this aspect is even more prominent in Leonardo Favio's *Juan Moreira*.

Notes

- 1 Referring to Larralde's popularity, Borcosque stated: 'sólo al ver las cifras, los Lococo [Clemente and Francisco, film producers] decidieron estrenar mi película en el Iguazú y en un lanzamiento amplio por los barrios' [just seeing the numbers, the Lococo decided to premiere my film at the Iguazú (theater) and with a broad launch in the neighborhoods] ('La vuelta,' 1971, non. pag.).
- 2 In 1967, a dramatic version of *Santos Vega* by Carlos Alberto Giura was performed at the San Martín Theatre with the title *La guitarra del diablo* [The Devil's Guitar] was awarded second place in a competition celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. At that time, the reviewer of *La prensa* declared: 'La obra de Giura constituye un fervoroso canto de amor a la patria, a la tradición y a las características fundamentales del hombre auténticamente argentino en la figura poética y valiente de Santos Vega' [Guira's play constitutes a fervent love song to the fatherland, to tradition, and to the fundamental features of the authentically Argentine man in the poetic and courageous figure of Santos Vega] ('Versión,' 1967, 26).
- 3 In Gutiérrez's novel, Santos Vega was the son of a rich *hacendado* [ranch owner] and his mother was also the owner of a profitable *estancia* (*Santos*, n.d., 49–51).
- 4 Gutiérrez's text presents Vega as an artistic man: 'Así aquel tipo nacido para el arte, como Santos Vega, va juntando en su corazón todo el odio que a él le arrojan los que se creen sus superiores' [Hence that man born for art, like Santos Vega, goes on collecting in his heart all the hatred thrown his way by those who believe themselves superior] (*Santos*, n.d., 5).
- 5 Pablo Vila details the importance of Atahualpa Yunpanqui's *El payador perseguido*, a long work which was started in the mid-1940s but only finished in the 1960s, and which became an example of the militant song of the 1960s (2014, 179).
- 6 Petrona is the second woman with whom Santos Vega falls in love (Gutiérrez, *Santos*, 224–26).
- 7 Esteban Echeverría (1805–1851) was a nineteenth-century Romantic writer who penned 'The Slaughterhouse,' a short story that illustrates the opposition between civilization and barbarism.

CHAPTER 8

Juan Moreira

Preproduction for *Juan Moreira* took a long time. The film was first announced in October 1966, when director-producer Héctor Olivera anticipated its shooting with Leonardo Favio as director and Alcón as the protagonist ('1967 puede,' 1967, 16). In February 1969, Favio announced that he would start shooting *Moreira* in color, with many actors including the Japanese Toshiro Mifune (1920–1997) (Mactas, 1969, 18). The delay resulted in a change: the main role was offered to actor Rodolfo Bebán. In an interview from May 1972, Favio mentioned that shooting was set to start on May 29, stating that 'esta película no es más a menos épica, *Juan Moreira* es testimonial y, desgraciadamente, también de mucha actualidad. *Moreira* es el principio de una época, también de una raza y, por qué no de una mentalidad' [this film is not more or less an epic, *Juan Moreira* is symbolic and, unfortunately, also very current. *Moreira* is the start of an epoch, of a race too and, why not, a mentality as well] ('Favio ya tiene,' 1972, non. pag.). The film was supposed to be released on October 11, 1972, but further delays meant that shooting finally began on June 12, 1972, in Lobos, Buenos Aires. The stages of the production were reported in the local press—particularly *Gente*—with numerous photos. The shoot finished at the end of October 1972. *Juan Moreira* was based on the adaptation of Eduardo Gutiérrez's nineteenth-century novel by Zuhair Jury, Favio's brother. It was produced by Alberto and Tito Hurovich, who joined forces with José Parada to create Centauro, a production company that agreed to invest 150 million pesos in *Juan Moreira*, whose total budget was 240 million pesos, making it the most expensive Argentine film ever ('Su Juan,' 1982, non. pag.). For Alberto Farina, *Juan Moreira*, shot in color, represents the beginning of a new phase in Favio's *œuvre*: that of the cinema-spectacle (1993, 17).

Amid high expectations, *Juan Moreira*'s opening was a veritable event. The film was released in the Atlas and Callao cinemas in downtown Buenos Aires, and another 50 movie theaters around the country, on May 24, 1973—the day before the inauguration of Héctor Cámpora (1909–1980), a Peronist who had won the national elections in March, which put an end to seven years of military government.¹ Long queues of spectators were visible in the large

cities. By June 10, 1973, *Juan Moreira* had been seen by 580,377 spectators while *El santo de la espada* was seen by 584,692 viewers, which included 300,000 students, in a comparable period ('Lo de Juan,' 1973, 186). *Gente* ran a report which gathered several viewers' reactions. One young couple admitted, 'Vinimos a verla porque es argentina. Y lo demostró de pies a cabeza. Y sobre todo en este momento en que el país comenzó una nueva etapa. Muy buena película' [We came to watch it because it is Argentine. And it showed it all the way through. And particularly in this moment in which the country began a new period. A very good film]. Two other young viewers made similar comments: Mónica de Jesús characterized it as 'la mejor película argentina que vi en mi vida. Una película de exportación que va a dar mucho que hablar' [the best Argentine film I have seen in my life. A film to export which will surely give people a lot to talk about]. Pedro B. also stressed the 'national flavor': 'Una película netamente nacional [...] por fin llegó el buen cine para nosotros, sin tener que pedir películas al extranjero' [A distinctly national film (...) at last we have good cinema for us, without having to ask for foreign films] ('Estamos viendo,' 1973, 14). *Juan Moreira* benefitted from the domestic audience's strong support for Argentine cinema.

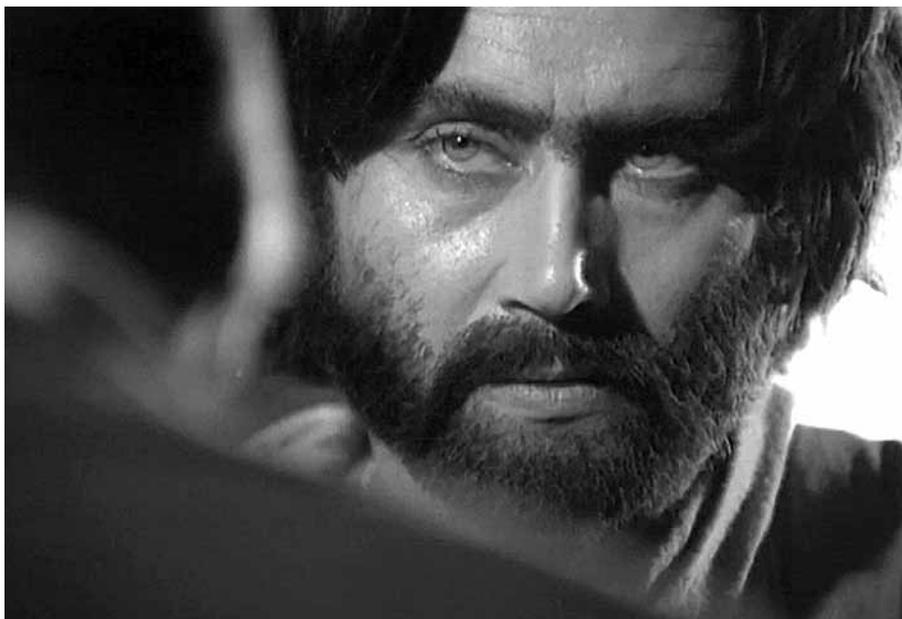
The film quickly garnered positive reviews. *Clarín's* film critic stated that it was 'una visión delicada, intensa y lírica. Absorbente y a veces maestra. En todo caso de una jerarquía desacostumbrada en el cine argentino' [a delicate, intense, and lyrical vision. Absorbing and sometimes masterful. In any case, of an unusual scale in Argentine cinema] ('Juan Moreira,' 1973, non. pag.). *La nación's* verdict was that 'la película se impone como una realización muy digna' [the film stands out as a very dignified work] ('El calvario,' 1973, non. pag.). *El heraldo* gave *Juan Moreira* an 8/10 rating for commercial interest and a 9/10 for its artistic qualities, calling it 'el más maduro y acabado trabajo de Leonardo Favio' [the most mature and polished work by Leonardo Favio] (1973, 185). *Juan Moreira* was shown for 20 consecutive weeks in Argentina and reached an audience of 6 million people. According to Gonzalo Aguilar, 'Ir a ver a *Juan Moreira* era como asistir a un *western* pero nacional' [Going to watch *Juan Moreira* was like attending a national Western] ('Juan Moreira,' 1973, non. pag.). Its success at the box office was accompanied by critical acclaim: Favio's film received the Silver Condor for Best Film from the Argentine Film Critics Association in 1974. Despite its participation in multiple film festivals around the world (Moscow, Berlin, San Sebastián, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, Havana, Asunción, among others), it did not win any festival awards. Nonetheless, Alicia Aisemberg notes that in *Juan Moreira*, Favio incorporated new techniques that had previously been reserved for elite films, deployed popular traditions, and sought to appeal to massive audiences (2011, 631).

The *gaucho*-state opposition constitutes *Juan Moreira's* central theme. In the novel, Moreira resorts to violence to avenge the injustices he has endured: Sardetti's unpaid loan, Lieutenant Francisco's harassment, and the betrayal of his *compadre* Giménez.² For Ludmer, Moreira not only

continues with the rebelliousness of *La vuelta de Martín Fierro*, but also radicalizes it, giving way to an anarchist and nationalist position (1998, 3). In addition, Moreira ‘rompe con el pacto económico y ataca directamente al poder’ [breaks the financial pact and directly attacks power] (1998, 5).³ Favio’s film is also imbued with this mutiny. Ludmer holds that ‘Favio defendió y a la vez condenó al Moreira gaucho de la política liberal de fin de siglo, justo en el momento de la violencia política argentina y desde el populismo peronista’ [Favio simultaneously defended and condemned the *gaucho* Moreira for the liberal politics of the turn of the century, precisely at the time of Argentine political violence from Peronist populism] (1998, 13). For her part, Graciela Villanueva shrewdly notes the political motives that underpinned Favio’s *Juan Moreira*: after years of an authoritarian regime, the *gaucho*’s political drives are highlighted as the personal ones are diminished (2005, 1171). In an interview, Favio denied that his film had a political dimension, stressing that it told a story, but nevertheless alluded to the political conflicts between those who supported Mitre and those who supported Alsina (Giménez Zapiola, 1972, 59). Years later, Raúl Beceyro explained the political dimension of the film, stating that it addressed the Montoneros, rebels active at the time it was released, through a mechanism that was outside the film (1997, 115–16). Unlike the other *gauchesque* films, *Juan Moreira* presents the *gaucho*’s belief that politics may redeem him for his criminal past, only to be harshly betrayed.

Juan Moreira centers on a mythical *gaucho* known for his ferocity. Like *Santos Vega*, Favio’s film begins with the death—this time physical—of the eponymous hero. The first scenes show that Moreira’s memory still generates passions and uprisings, while his widow Vicenta (Elcira Olivera Garcés) recognizes his corpse. From this sequence, the film goes back in time to Moreira’s life. He is first shown patiently waiting in an office. Numerous extreme close-up shots of his face reveal his handsomeness which is also a feature of Gutiérrez’s novel and the tense wait to which he is subjected. These images convey an oppressive atmosphere: as Moreira waits in a judge’s office, he longingly looks out through a barred window, watching his fellow *gauchos* going about their normal activities. This introduction sets him apart as he must answer to the lieutenant-major (Eduardo Rudy) for his dealings with Sardetti, a bar owner from whom he is asking the repayment of a loan. A fixed medium shot captures his conversation as if the camera were spying on a private dealing. The authority of the judge is stressed when he talks to the *gaucho*: both men are standing in the waiting room and the former quickly loses his temper before the *gaucho*’s stern defense of his case. In a scene of shot reverse shots, the judge presents Moreira with a receipt bearing his signature, but the *gaucho* adamantly denies that it is his as he does not know how to write. His complaints land him in the *cepo* [stocks] after a cruel beating.

Like *Martín Fierro*, in Favio’s film, Moreira first abandons and then returns to ‘civilization.’ Disappointed with the authorities and their brand of justice,



Close-up of Juan Moreira (Rodolfo Bebán).

he flees across the frontier.⁴ Though he is welcomed by the Indian chieftain, he is as shown alone during his time living in the tribe. As an observer, he reflects on the status of the Indians, whom he describes as ‘como parias en su tierra [...] pucha, pregunto yo, no son mortales los indios?’ [like pariahs in their lands (...) wow, I ask, are the Indians not men?]. Rejecting passive acceptance of his fate, his voice-over announces his decision to go back and fight for his property and his family. But, just like Torre Nilsson’s *Martín Fierro*, in Favio’s film, Moreira finds only the empty shell of his house. David Oubiña and Aguilar correctly assert that Moreira ‘es un exiliado en un mundo en extinción’ [is an exile in a disappearing world] (1993, 105). After killing Sardetti, he is reunited with Vicenta but the meeting is bittersweet as it proves the impossibility of their family, a decision that is illustrated when Moreira cries as he holds his sleeping son. Thus, he is pushed to lead an itinerant life. In a popular rural gathering, he meets Julián Andrade (Jorge Villalba), who soon becomes his *compadre* [partner]. Their friendship is consolidated when a drunken Moreira kills Juan Cordoba, one of Mitre’s men, and Andrade escapes with Moreira. Further distancing him from his previous life, Moreira has to flee. A voice-over conveys his description as it appears in police documents and a transition focuses on an old woman’s narration of Moreira’s first crime. For Alberto Farina, this judicial ‘voice’ offers a counterpoint (1993, 40). It is the legal voice that characterizes the rebelling *gaucho*. Leaving a trail of blood, Moreira cements his mythical status

as the musical score goes into a crescendo. He is reunited with Andrada, who has also been a victim of injustice due to his association with Moreira. Like Vega's and Sombra's, Moreira's reputation is spread orally by the *gauchos* who sing that his sorrows are dedicated to the poor.

Moreira's participation in civilized life is far from smooth. Because of his charisma, he is co-opted by politicians who seek to benefit from his popularity among the *gauchos* and the lower classes. In exchange for their vote, he is promised a pardon for his criminal past. To seal his status as an insider, Dr. Marañón (Carlos Muñoz) presents him with a silver dagger. As part of a political recruiter-cum-politician's detail, he takes part in political meetings, portrayed as superficial circus acts. Violence, however, continues to abound in Moreira's new *métier*. When his assignment is changed and he is set to kill political adversaries, El Cuerudo (Edgardo Suárez), one of his *compadres*, breaks from the group, refusing to participate in murders. This scene, which takes place under the rain, forebodes the beginning of the end: forces beside Moreira's talent and will are at play. When Moreira visits Marañón, he is shot by another of his men, whom he guns down in self-defense. Favio explains: 'Moreira no toma conciencia del juego hasta el final, si es que llega a tomar conciencia' [Moreira is not aware of the game until the very end, if he ever is aware] (Giménez Zapiola, 1972, 59). Just like El Cuerudo, who considers the implications of losing Dr. Marañón's support, Moreira appears to have few options.

Unlike the other *gauchesque* films, *Juan Moreira* presents elements of *auteurism*. Moreira's feverish state as a result of his gunshot wound sets the stage for an exploration of his conscience. In dream-like scenes, he faces Death (Alba Mujica), a recurrent theme in Favio's films (Farina, 1993, 30). Similar to *Santos Vega*, in which the singer-*gaucho* met Juan Sin Ropa, Death addresses Moreira, who forcefully resists her entreaties.⁵ His innocence is brought to the fore when he warns her: 'me voy a hacer chiquito para que no me encuentres' [I will make myself small so that you cannot find me]. Moreira's resistance gives way to a passive acceptance of his destiny when he allows Death to take him. Nonetheless, he manages to convince her to play cards with him, a game that he apparently wins only to realize, when Death mentions a smallpox outbreak, that she has taken someone else in his place. The camera focuses on a picture of a child, Moreira's son and Death's latest victim. The funeral for Moreira's son, depicted as the little angel, is attended by military men seeking the criminal *gaucho*. Consequently, the father is not allowed to say farewell to his only son, as Moreira's voice-over explains, referring to his dirtiness and embarrassment. This is a moment of epiphany for Moreira: the promised pardon is taking too long.

Moreira's rejection of the criminal life is far from easy. Once recuperated, he presses Dr. Acosta (Pablo Cumo) for his promised acquittal in a tense exchange which ends when the famous *gaucho* leaves the politician's home, physically breaking free from the illegal ties that bound him. In a scene that stresses his sense of liberation, he dictates his letter to Laura (Elena Trittek), a

trusted prostitute, confiding his reasons and swearing allegiance—along with that of his followers’—to Dr. Marañón and the political party he represents, thus changing sides. The scenes in the brothel provide a much-needed respite for the *gaucho*. Nonetheless, Moreira is characterized in a *payada* as chameleonic, switching political colors. Sensing the critique of Moreira, Andrade stops the song. This episode signals the way in which forces are beginning to conspire against Moreira and his men. First, Andrade recognizes a paid criminal in the brothel, a man hired by Acosta to kill Moreira. Second, Marañón warns Moreira to lie low during the elections as there is a risk of political intervention. The tension is palpable on election day as the camera pans from one tense face to another. Provoked, Acosta’s hired criminal meets Moreira in daylight for a duel in which he is killed. But the election’s results are properly celebrated: a medium shot captures Moreira in the house, while his followers and the *gauchos* enjoy popular entertainment outdoors. A new thunderstorm forebodes imminent doom and divides the *compadres*: while El Cuerdo stays with a *chinita* [young rural peasant], Moreira and Andrade seek refuge in a brothel.

Moreira’s downfall is part of a political pact. The result of the election tainted by the accusation of fraud is used as the reason to make Dr. Marañón hand Moreira over to the Buenos Aires police. First, hand-held cameras are deployed for El Cuerdo’s arrest, which leads to his confession of Moreira’s whereabouts. Second, Andrade is brutally beaten and taken from the brothel, which is quickly occupied by the police, who besiege Moreira and the prostitute. Attentive to her safety, the rebel *gaucho* seeks a truce and releases her. The camera captures his indecision as he slowly considers his options while soft music is heard in the background.⁶ With a shout of ‘Aquí está Juan Moreira, mierda’ [Here comes Juan Moreira, shit!], he takes on the men waiting to capture him as the music becomes more prominent.⁷ A bloody and wounded Moreira finally emerges from the brothel. His steps toward the wall that separates him from freedom are captured in slow-motion, focusing on his suffering expression.⁸ The film emphasizes his martyrdom: dressed in white, Moreira’s walk resembles the passion of Jesus Christ.⁹ The score stresses his daring attempt to flee (Oubiña and Aguilar, 1993, 101). In that sense, Lieutenant Chirino’s act of injuring Moreira from behind lacks heroism and is presented as a betrayal, but a treachery that the wounded *gaucho* avenges before dying. A final piece of poetic license allows him to stand up and, dagger in one hand and poncho in the other, ready himself to attack whomever may come. His frozen image in white, contrasting with a dark background, signals his transformation into a mythical figure.

Juan Moreira’s genre is different from the other *gauchesque* films as its status as a heritage film is somewhat problematic. On the one hand, it is a quality film with a number of breathtaking shots of the *pampa* and its narrative is told mostly in the realist mode, recreating a specific historical period the late 1800s. On the other hand, there are scenes that break with realism: the dialogue with Death constitutes a surrealist element that, while it enriches the

plot, creates distance from the traditional heritage film. In addition, Moreira is an anti-hero. Certainly, he is a victim of the harassment of several authorities that represent civilization, which leads him to live temporarily with the Indians, among whom he finds refuge.¹⁰ Nonetheless, what separates *Juan Moreira* from the other *gauchesque* films is the main character's open embrace of the criminal life, which does not allude to a period of national greatness, but rather to one of divisiveness and antagonism. Here it is important to note Raggio's assertion that 'Moreira se convierte en un símbolo no sólo del gaucho desplazado [...] sino de todos los desplazados por el sistema' [Moreira becomes a symbol not only of the displaced *gaucho*, (...) but also of all those displaced by the system] (2011, 89). Certainly, Favio's film depicts a criminal defeated by authorities who engage in illegal activity and abuse their power. Thus, the film is not set in a period of national greatness that could instill generalized pride in the audience. As discussed before when mentioning the film's reception at the time of its release, *Juan Moreira* was praised for its national theme, which corresponded to a political moment in which there was a heightened sense of national crisis—and also renewal—in Argentine politics. Consequently, the film spoke to middlebrow Argentine sensibilities.

Unlike the other *gauchesque* films, *Juan Moreira* does not have many Western elements.¹¹ It does not offer an idealized version of the Argentine past that could provide viewers with a roadmap for the new challenges facing the nation in the 1970s. While it is true that the civilization versus barbarism dialectic appears as the film's subtext, Moreira's unlawful deeds do not present him as a proponent of progress, rather he represents unchecked violence. His 'community' is composed of other *gauchos* and his *compas*—a shortened form of the word *compadres*, but which can also mean *compañero*, in allusion to Peronism. On the other hand, Moreira and his followers have certain qualities, like integrity and protection of the weakest, which are not seen in the authorities. Consequently, *Juan Moreira* reveals that civilization is full of barbarism and the barbaric shows signs of civilized behavior. This is another point of difference between *Juan Moreira* and Westerns. For Loy, the latter, 'with few exceptions, projected the federal government as a dependable ally of the average citizen and an unrelenting foe of those who terrorized the common man' (2001, 85). Thus, the restoration of order brought about by Moreira's downfall is hollow as the wrongs that led him to criminality remain unpunished. In this sense, as Marcelo Tabarozzi explains, 'el tiempo representado apunta a traducir una vivencia popular y a plasmar, a través de la construcción de una espera histórica, una posibilidad de ser nunca resuelta, o posible solo en un plano épico' [the represented time points to the translation of popular experience and, through the creation of a historical wait, to the possibility that there will never be a resolution or that one is only possible on the epic plane] (2005, 5). This historical wait for a time of justice further distances *Juan Moreira* from the Western, in which resolution usually takes place in the past to illustrate the values that anchor North American society. Finally, in *Juan Moreira* the erosion of the masculine

roles of breadwinner, protector, and father conspires against considering it a Western. If 'in Westerns, the traditional role of father as an authority figure for the family and defender of the family unit was constantly reinforced' (Loy, 2001, 109), in Favio's film, Moreira appears unable to shield his family from disintegration. From the outset, the film characterizes the *gaucho* in his relation—or lack thereof—to the law, waiting for the lieutenant-major, being tortured, and leaving his family. Once Moreira returns from beyond the frontier, Vicenta has accepted the protection of another man and little Juan has been told that his father is dead. The lowest point in Moreira's personal life comes when, even though he has been working to receive a pardon that would allow him to circulate freely, he cannot attend his son's funeral due to his status as an outlaw.¹²

One area in which Favio's *Juan Moreira* resembles some Westerns lies in pointing to fault lines in the building of the national community. Like *Martín Fierro*, *Juan Moreira* could be seen as resembling a traumatic Western. *Juan Moreira*'s finale, in which law and order are imposed, is riddled with issues that taint the process and shed a negative light on the authority of the militia. In doing so, the film does not suggest an idealization of the past, but rather points to the persistent flaws in the development of the Argentine nation, particularly in what pertains to the state's monopoly of violence. That is to say, the state's legitimation of violence to impose law and order smacked of protecting certain interests to the detriment of those of the individual, of the many 'Juanes.' *Juan Moreira* stages the plight of the Argentine 'underdogs': those whose stories had to be forgotten or omitted to prioritize the process of nation-building. Thus, Raggio correctly asserts that 'el film puede ser leído en una nueva clave interpretativa, como crítica de la historia y del discurso historiográfico oficial' [the film can be read in a new interpretative key, as a critique of history, and of the official historiographic discourse] (2011, 89). This innovative message, which touches on the construction of history, would later be deployed in Argentine cinema to revisit the years of the military dictatorship (1976–1983).¹³

Nonetheless, one feature of *Juan Moreira* problematizes the issue of the *gauchesque*. In Favio's film, the main character, the criminal *gaucho*, is denied his voice. Unlike in *Martín Fierro* or *Santos Vega*, where the voice of the *gaucho* is heard through his songs, or in *Don Segundo Sombra*, where voice-overs accompany flashbacks and allow the articulation of the young *gaucho*'s thoughts, in Favio's film Moreira is not given the opportunity to tell his side of the story. The film's short dialogues certainly contribute to informing the viewer about the main character's intentions, but Moreira's story is an interpretation by the filmmaker. Several shots reinforce the fact that Moreira is narrated and told. For instance, Raggio astutely observes that the several scenes in which the *gaucho* is seen through a barred window emphasize the point that the *gaucho* is limited by the civilized spaces of houses and offices (2011, 39). The final scenes in the brothel, where his imprisonment is shot through a bird's-eye view, and he tries to reach the wall that separates him



Juan Moreira's closing scene.

from the plain (slow motion, frontal shots) also stress that he is seen, rather than given the opportunity to let his voice be heard.

With *Juan Moreira*, the biopictional films about *gauchos* come to an end. Of them, only *Juan Moreira* presents a challenging memory. The defeated is ready to stand up and deliver a final blow, but seeks the public's engagement in the dissemination of his daring attitude. Contrary to this, in *Martín Fierro*, Fierro's and Cruz's sons will circulate the memory of their father and their father's friend. In *Santos Vega*, Vega's beauty and musical talent live on as part of his legend while in *Don Segundo Sombra*, it is Fabio who passes on the memory of the *gaucho* who taught him rural tasks and ways. Thus, Favio's film, particularly the final frozen image of Moreira ready to fight holding his poncho in one hand and his dagger in the other, appears as a potent memory that hopes to stimulate the national imagination. At the time the film was released, the image of a standing man ready to fight appeared in marked contrast to the shots of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's posthumous photos that showed him lying on a stretcher. Moreira's final-shot portraiture allows us to consider the film a historical epic which 'celebrate[s] the heroic male body, a figure of physical prowess, who must prove his courage and skill' (Thompson, 2011, 46).¹⁴ In this sense and in contrast to the other *gauchesque* films, *Juan Moreira* may be considered an epic film which sought to appeal to Argentine viewers by presenting the *gaucho's* search for freedom and dignity as a model for the national community at a time of bipolarization between

capitalist West and communist East.¹⁵ In Favio's film, Moreira appears as the capable anti-hero who subdues several militia men in his attempt to escape. Even when fatally injured, he summons his physical force to dispose of his attacker.¹⁶ The last frozen image of his daring figure ready to fight further highlights his epic personality. In an interview with Adriana Schettini, Favio said that myths remain alive in people's memory (1995, 136). Thus, the standing Moreira constitutes a powerful memory destined to elicit an emotional response from the audience.

In addition to its well-crafted qualities, *Juan Moreira* enjoyed great popularity as a result of extra-filmic elements. Chief among them was the long-awaited return of Juan Perón in 1973, after 18 years of exile. Despite his advanced age, the former president was an icon of the national revolution for which both left- and right-wing groups had been working underground. Consequently, Moreira and Perón were rebel figures in their own way. Talking about rebel figures in popular culture, Mark Gallagher asserts that they 'permit viewers to entertain fantasies of antisocial or autonomous behavior while reaffirming viewers' own (unrebellious) social positions' (2006, 10). *Juan Moreira* certainly emphasized autonomy and antisocial behavior, particularly for the young militant sympathizers for whom he stood as a symbol of resistance. Argentina's political events would soon show the inconvenience of such fantasies and actions when, on June 20, upon his arrival to Argentina, Juan Perón publicly broke with the leftist youth. Amid this climate of political and social unrest, a more inclusive version of the *gauchos* was shot.

In 1974, two *gauchesque* films were released. The first, on May 9, 1974 was *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* directed by Enrique Dawi and starring folk singer Horacio Guarani (1925–). Because of this film's similarity to both *Martín Fierro*—content wise—and *Santos Vega*—in the choice to cast a popular singer—it will not be analyzed here. The second *gauchesque* film, *Los gauchos judíos*, added the depiction of the Jewish community and its integration into Argentine culture, and hence provides a new take on the genre.

Notes

- 1 Out of the 50 movie theatres, 40 were located in Buenos Aires.
- 2 Upon learning of Vicenta's union with Giménez, Moreira states: 'Ahora he de pelear para defender mi vida, porque quiero vivir para vengarme de los que me han insultado en mi desgracia, aprovechándose de una mujer desvalida' [Now I am going to defend my life because I want to avenge those who have insulted me in my misfortunate, taking advantage of an unprotected woman] (Gutiérrez, *Juan Moreira*, 117).
- 3 Unlike other *gauchos*, such as Martín Fierro or Santos Vega, Moreira was a well-off character in Gutiérrez's novel: 'Moreira poseía una tropa de carretas, que era su capital más productivo y en la que traía a la estación de tren grandes acopios de frutos del país que se le confiaban conociendo su

- honradez' [Moreira had a fleet of carts, which was his most productive asset and in which he delivered to railway stations large amounts of indigenous fruit that were entrusted to him because of his honesty] (Gutiérrez, *Juan Moreira*, 5).
- 4 Favio's admiration and rapport with Torre Nilsson is well-known given that the latter hired Favio for many of his films and Favio dedicated his first film, *Crónica de un niño solo*, to Torre Nilsson. This scene's similarity to *Martin Fierro* (1968) may be an homage paid to Torre Nilsson, who initiated the *gauchesque* films in the late 1960s.
 - 5 Farina notes that this scene was influenced by Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007) (1993, 28).
 - 6 Hugo Biondi states that: 'en *Juan Moreira* la música se constituye en un valor en sí misma. Tiene una potencia arrolladora' [in *Juan Moreira*, the soundtrack constitutes a veritable asset. It has an overwhelming power] (2007, 67).
 - 7 For Marcela Raggio, 'todos los personajes de Favio están condicionados por un determinismo social, histórico o individual' [all of Favio's characters are conditioned by social, historic, or individual determinism] (2011, 91).
 - 8 In a wink to a previous *œuvre*, this scene resembles the ending of *El romance del Aniceto y la Francisca*, Favio's second film.
 - 9 Raggio calls attention to Favio's use of Christian imagery in his films (2011, 84–86). Oubiña and Aguilar mention the tragic character of Moreira (1993, 99).
 - 10 In this part, Favio's film deviates from the novel in which Moreira tricks Coliqueo (Gutiérrez, *Juan Moreira*, 121–25).
 - 11 Oubiña and Aguilar consider *Juan Moreira* a Western or 'film-llanura' [prairie-film] (1993, 98).
 - 12 The death of his son constitutes a blow to the *gaucho*, and stresses that with Moreira's death, his whole class of *compadres* disappears.
 - 13 The most important film that continues this line is *Los hijos de Fierro* [Fierro's Sons] (Fernando Solanas, 1974). Others are *La historia oficial* [The Official History] (Luis Puenzo, 1983) and *Verónico Cruz* (Miguel Pereira, 1988).
 - 14 Oubiña and Aguilar do not consider the fight epic (1993, 103).
 - 15 Favio mentions Moreira's turning into an epic (Schettini, 1995, 127).
 - 16 In the novel, Moreira's last action is described as follows: 'aquel hombre excepcional levantó su brazo armado aun por la daga, y amagó una última puñalada' [that exceptional man raised his arm, armed still with a dagger, and attempted a final stab] (n.d., 211).

CHAPTER 9

Los gauchos judíos

In early 1974, preproduction for *Los gauchos judíos* began. It was to be the third film directed by Juan José Jusid (1941–), a young and up-and-coming filmmaker who had directed two other films, *Tute cabrero* (1968) and *La fidelidad* [Fidelity] (1970), that revolve around turning points in the lives of middle-class characters.¹ Jusid was himself the son of a ‘progressive’ Jewish family (Nuñez, 1994, 8). *Los gauchos judíos* was an adaptation of the homonymous short story collection by Alberto Gerchunoff (1883–1950), with a script by his daughter, Ana María Gerchunoff, Jorge Goldenberg, Alejandro Saderman, Oscar Viale, and Jusid himself.² Jusid also produced the film along with Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and the brothers Mario and Norberto Kaminsky. The cast was composed of first-class performers: José Soriano, Dorat Baret, Victor Laplace, China Zorrilla, Osvaldo Terranova, Luisina Brando, Jorge Barreiro, and Arturo Maly. Jusid described the film as a choral one, that is, lacking protagonists. In addition, the film had remarkable costumes designed by Margarita Jusid and a musical score interpreted by Gina María Hidalgo (1927–) based on songs written by Gustavo Beitelman.³

The production was not without several challenges. With 100 actors, two advisers—one for Jewish and liturgical matters and another for creole and *gauchesque* details—the film’s shooting began in April 1974 in an area owned by the Argentine army in Campo de Mayo. At first, it was estimated that the film would be finished by January 10, 1975, but the production faced certain problems. First, Rajil, the town in which Gerchunoff’s short stories are set, no longer existed. Jusid and his team had to wander around Villaguay [in the province of Entre Ríos] for three months to reconstruct it (*‘Los gauchos judíos: paisanos,’* 1975, 52). Second, because the film was shot in Campo de Mayo, a set recreating a rural town had to be built, but a fire in November 1974 destroyed it. An investigation of the site showed undisputable traces of foul play, which resulted in questions of whether this criminal act was motivated by anti-Semitism. Because the sets were uninsured, the producers had to pay to rebuild them. This unexpected obstacle delayed shooting for at least two weeks. Asked about other threats or problems, director Jusid explained:

No, de ninguna manera. El libreto fue presentado al Ente de Calificación en la época en que Bordo estaba al frente de la censura y lo aprobó sin problemas. Más: yo noté un clima de gran simpatía por el proyecto, porque casi por primera vez se trata en nuestro cine el tema de la colonización y la inmigración.⁴

[Not at all. The script was presented to the Films Rating Board at the time when Bordo was in charge of censorship and he approved it without problems. More: I perceived an atmosphere of great sympathy toward the project, because almost for the first time, our cinema was dealing with the topic of colonization and immigration] ('Donde,' 1974, 32)

Almost confirming Jusid's words, the army promised 24-hour surveillance of the sets and provided conscripts to help rebuild them. The shoot finally concluded on February 12, 1975.

Despite the fact that *Los gauchos judíos* experienced some problems on its release, it was well-received. Jusid's film premiered on May 22, 1975, in the Callao and Broadway movie theaters in Buenos Aires. *La opinión* reported that incidents took place in the Broadway cinema during the first showing: first, a bomb threat forced an evacuation, and then several people vandalized the theater ('Hubo,' 1975, non. pag.). Two days later, it was announced that Miguel P. Tato, in charge of the Film Review Board, had ordered the removal of a scene in which a *gaucho* kills his son, arguing that the expurgation was necessary for the film to be faithful to Gerchunoff's work ('La fidelidad,' 1975, non. pag.). The reviewer for *La última hora* harshly criticized this censorship ('Belleza,' 1975, non. pag.).⁵ Nonetheless, *El heraldo* reported a strong box office performance: in its first week, the film was screened in 35 movie theaters before a total of 352,939 spectators, and in the second week, it was showing in 30 movie theaters ('El fenómeno,' 1975, 154). *El heraldo* gave *Los gauchos judíos* a nine for commercial value and a seven for artistic significance. *La nación* highlighted the film's harmony and use of humor as a unifier ('Gerchunoff,' 1975, non. pag.). In *La opinión*, Agustín Mahieu also mentioned the use of humor, noting that 'la epopeya tiende a expresarse en una clave risueña y optimista' [this epic tends to be expressed in an agreeable and optimistic tone] ('Humor,' 1975, non. pag.). However, the reviewer for *Mayoría* and Mahieu for *La opinión* critiqued the choreographic scenes ('Poblando,' 1975, non. pag.) and the variety of anecdotes ('Humor,' 1975, non. pag.), which they deemed detrimental to the film's unity and rhythm.

The screening of *Los gauchos judíos* in Entre Ríos was an occasion full of extra-cinematic significance. Jusid's film was also released in Paraná—capital city of the province where Gerchunoff's text was set—in an event attended by authorities, politicians, union leaders, and the general public, which was organized by the Argentine Delegation of Israeli Associations (DAIA in Spanish) and attended by its president, Nehemías Reznick. According to *La razón*, in his speech, Reznick alluded to external actors who, through a variety of means, were sowing the seeds of anti-Zionism: 'para dividir a la familia

argentina' [to divide the Argentine family] ('Los gauchos,' 1975, non. pag.). Given this context, the Jewish community welcomed a film that portrayed Jewish immigrants in a positive light. For his part, the president of the local DAIA, Samuel Aizicovich gave a speech in which he emphasized the impact of the Jewish colonization in the development of the province as well as the recent contributions of younger Jewish generations.

The Jewish community, quite visible and culturally engaged in Argentina, was very involved in the film's production and consumption. Jusid reported that during production, he received unsolicited advice from multiple members of the Jewish community ('*Los gauchos judíos: paisanos*,' 1975, 52). Once the film was released, opinions among the Jewish community were divided. For instance, the newspaper *La opinión* published two contrasting views. On one hand, historian and journalist Daniel Muchnik penned an emphatic account of his family's arrival to Entre Ríos, which bore little resemblance to the film's scenes of harmonious welcome to the colonies: 'mi bisabuelo y los otros gringos que los acompañaban carecieron de la más mínima atención del gobierno provincial' [my great-grandfather and the other immigrants who came with him lacked even minimal attention from the provincial government] ('Con un planteo,' 1975, 18). Muchnik's comments do not allude to the film's qualities; rather, his critique of the plot ignores the fact that the film was based on a text written by Gerchunoff. The lack of historical authenticity is harshly condemned without taking into account that both Gerchunoff's short stories and Jusid's film are artistic endeavors, not historical treatises. On the other hand, journalist and theatrical producer Kive Staiff (1927–) started his opinion piece by mentioning that he was born in the Jewish colonies and describing them with a wealth of details. He goes on to remind readers that Gerchunoff left the colonies at the age of 12 and wrote *Los gauchos judíos* when he was 27, and could not have written in a different way, admitting that, 'Si yo hubiera sido él, si lo fuese ahora, haría lo mismo' [If I had been him, if I were him now, I would do the same] ('Sudor,' 1975, 18). While Staiff declined to comment on Jusid's film, his strong support of Gerchunoff's memories greatly contrasted with Muchnik's views. More recently, film scholar Tzvi Tal has noted that Jusid's film was populated with stereotypical characters involved in predictable conflicts (2010, non. pag.).

Nevertheless, months after its release, *Los gauchos judíos* continued to receive accolades. The film's promotional flyer—designed by producers Mario and Norberto Kaminsky, along with Jusid and Daniel Verdino of the agency Casares, Grey and Associates—was awarded second place in an international competition organized by *The Hollywood Reporter*. Julio Tanjeloff an Argentine living in the United States, created a company to distribute *Los gauchos judíos* in the United States (Nuñez, 1994, 18), where it was screened in October 1975, with a strong box office showing. Jusid held that 'es paradójico que esto ocurra tan lejos, mientras en nuestro país estamos esperando que se reconozca al film la recuperación industrial especial que se merece' [it is paradoxical that this is happening so far away, while in our

country we are waiting to receive the special industrial recuperation that the film deserves] (*Los gauchos judíos también*, 1975, non. pag.). A month later, *Los gauchos judíos* was sold to Japan. Consequently, Jusid's film achieved the kind of international circulation that the NIC had been encouraging since the mid-1960s.

From the opening scenes, *Los gauchos judíos* seeks to provide an idyllic view of the Argentine past. The film begins with a brief introduction of the situation of Jewish people in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, which explains their migration to Argentina. A frontal shot of a locomotive approaching a station, where a group of notables and a small band await the immigrants, establishes the setting in Argentina. The existence of the locomotive signals a country that has begun its modernization process and that, as such, is receptive to foreign ideas and the influx of immigrants. A pan of the numerous windows of the train shows the immigrants' admiration and surprise as they take a first look at their new homeland. Their chaotic arrival is framed by a voice-over corresponding to a young Gerchunoff (Gustavo Luppi) which explains that 'aquí como en la tierra prometida, nos esperaban la alegría y la paz' [here, as in the promised land, joy and peace are awaiting us].⁶ The solemnity of this crucial beginning is softened by two strategies that are deployed throughout the film: humor and music/dance. Indeed, humor first appears when the camera captures the reaction of a local policeman at one of the newcomers' 'strange' custom of kissing men. In the following scene, Klezmer music and choreographic steps are used to show the immigrants arrival to their first living quarters in a warehouse. Alternating bird's-eye and ground shots reveal their unpacking and settling in.

The film presents both Argentines and Jewish immigrants in a celebratory tone. The difficulties that immigrants faced when adapting to a new land without a good command of the language are explained by a voice-over that lists the many tasks they had to undertake in the new environment. Their status as learners is highlighted with the mention of a talented local man, Remigio Calamaco (Luis Politti), who teaches them their different tasks. The voice-over is also careful to avoid overarching generalizations when he states that the anecdotes he tells are based on his memory. His narrative recounts that Jewish immigrants left behind a dark and uncertain past and became *gauchos* in sun-drenched shots that convey their gratitude for their change in fortune. Their process of adaptation is further emphasized when some of them consume their traditional leica cake while drinking *mate*. Jewish women are as engaged as men in all chores. For instance, a young woman named Myriam (Alejandra Da Passano) helps the creole Rogelio (Raúl Lavié) with the birth of a foal. In another scene, Jewish women bring in the harvest in a choreographed dance that revels in the fertility of the land as María (Gina María Hidalgo) sings her praises of the fertile land. Thus, the film presents the Jewish colonization as a well-choreographed spectacle.

Los gauchos judíos also touches on less positive experiences. From the beginning, local characters Bara (Arturo Maly), a Jewish neighbor, and

Montero (Jorge Barreiro), a landowner, resent the Jewish immigrants' arrival, in a departure from Gerchunoff's memories. Bara and Montero hate that the immigrants pay local laborers for their work, and set a fire that destroys their first harvest, curiously mirroring the arson attack against the filmic set. Bara later gives orders to poison the waters of a pond, an act that kills the immigrants' cattle. Parallel to these man-made developments, mental and physical illnesses also affect some characters: one woman, Brane (María Rosa Gallo), is traumatized by her past experiences of pogroms and fears that her son Gabriel (Victor Laplace) will be killed. When he reassures her that he is safe, Brane starts hearing noises and later dies in an accident. For her part, young María is told that she has a weak heart that endangers her life when she becomes pregnant. In both cases, Dr. Yarcho (José Soriano) offers his sympathy and support to these families. Both anecdotes show the way in which Jewish immigrants rally around those in need and face the cycle of life with deaths and births in their new homeland. A similar joint effort is seen when Gabriel, depressed after his mother's death, wants to give up his plot of land and work as a hand. This time it is the *gaucho* Calamaco who, with his son Juan (Adrián Ghio), comes to Gabriel's help, tilling his land so that he does not lose it.

Los gauchos judíos also presents the leisure and social events of the rural community. May 25 is commemorated with traditional activities and festive socialization, serving to show the local code of honor and Jewish reciprocity. Calamaco's son Juan wins a horse race but his rival accuses him of pushing him. To defend his honor, he resorts to a knife fight. Juan is disoriented by his opponent's use of his poncho, drawing jokes from those watching the fight. Unable to stand his son's lack of courage to strike a lethal blow, Calamaco intervenes: he hugs and kills Juan both for his damaged honor and inability to win. This is the scene of filicide censored at the film's release. The terrible injustice is somewhat avenged by Gabriel's intervention: he follows the *gaucho* who accused Juan and makes him confess that he lied. While this action does not change the fact that Calamaco murdered his own son, it restores his honor within a community he considered his family and which, in turn, saw him as an invaluable member—as evident in Gabriel's loyalty to both Calamaco and his son for their help. Another instance of communal participation is the wedding of Raquel (Dora Baret) and Pascual. This marriage, arranged by their parents, is the occasion for a well-attended social gathering and the unusual presence of a photographer specially hired by the groom's father. Nonetheless, the nuptials are disrupted when the slow-witted Pascual is unable to dance with his bride. His place is taken by Gabriel, and the mutual attraction between him and Raquel surprises the guests. When Raquel and Gabriel elope, the community is sorely divided between those who accuse the bride of being an adulteress and those who blame Pascual for his passivity. The rabbi intercedes, asking him to divorce his bride and thus reestablish her honor despite their brief marriage. While the resolution of this case reinstates order in the rural Jewish immigrant community, another couple, Myriam

and Rogelio, a *gaucho*, run away because the Jewish bride was unsure of her parents' reaction to a mixed marriage. Marriages, both endogamous and mixed, are presented as a threat to the stability of the Jewish community.

Los gauchos judíos closes with a young Gerchunoff watching Gabriel and Raquel ride away from the town of Rajil. Their departure marks an ending for the narrator. In a scene reminiscent of *Don Segundo Sombra*, the young male narrator brings to an end his recollections about the Jewish colony in which he spent several years. While *Los gauchos judíos* was written before *Don Segundo Sombra*, and so the cinematic adaptation of these works was reversed: Güiraldes's novel was adapted five years before *Los gauchos judíos*. Nevertheless, both films present the view of young narrators and resort to voice-over to guide their remembrances. The commemorative tone is also evident in both films, but the focus of the celebration is different: *Don Segundo Sombra* centers on the skills and mentorship of a *gaucho* while Gerchunoff's work revolves around a minority group which 'engrandecieron a nuestra nación' [made our nation great].⁷ For Degiovanni, Gerchunoff's nostalgia encompasses both the uncontaminated Argentine countryside and the hard-working Jewish immigrants who adapted to a new homeland (2000, 370). Both aspects make it into the film: the Jewish settlement of Rajil is both a blank slate for immigrants to leave their imprint on their new homeland and also a place to prosper and flourish, overcoming adversity and divisiveness. Thus, Jusid's film also touches on the key concepts of territory, nation, and citizenship that literary critic Saúl Sosnowski has identified as the key topics of Jewish-Latin American writers (2000, 264). By returning to a foundational past in which tolerance prevailed over pettiness, Jusid's *Los gauchos judíos* stood as a crucial role model for an Argentina that, in the mid-1970s, was being torn apart by ideological divisions.

Notes

- 1 For María Nuñez, '*Los gauchos judíos* significó en principio el pasaje de los ambientes urbanos a los escenarios rurales; el abandono de los espacios reducidos y el reemplazo de un número relativamente pequeño de personas por grandes movimientos de masas' [*The Jewish Gauchos* meant at first the passage from urban to rural settings; the shift from reduced spaces and the substitution of a relatively small number of people to big movements of the masses] (1994, 16).
- 2 A week before the film's release, the publisher Aguilar launched the eighth edition of Gerchunoff's text.
- 3 For instance, Biondi mentions, 'Hasta 1974, la música de cine de mayor costo económico había sido la banda sonora de *Los gauchos judíos*' [Up until 1974, the most expensive movie soundtrack was that of *Los gauchos judíos*] (2007, 95).
- 4 The NIC invested 60% as a recuperation fund of the 400 million budget ('El fenómeno,' 1975, 154).
- 5 The episode appears in Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos* (1950, 73–79).

- 6 In Gerchunoff's text: 'donde el cristiano no nos odiará, porque allí el cielo es distinto, y en su alma habitan la piedad y la justicia' [where the Christian will not hate us because the sky is different and in his soul peace and piety coexist] (1950, 30).
- 7 Fernando Degiovanni holds that *Los gauchos judíos* expresses the assimilationist policies of an immigrant who was integrated into Argentina's intellectual and cultural elite (2000, 367).



The emergence of the *gauchesque* film genre was a result of Torre Nilsson's initiative and his intuition that it was high time for Argentine literary poems to be adapted to the silver screen. His premonition was proved to be correct by the strong domestic reception of the film and its circulation, albeit limited, abroad. During a period of heightened politicization, his representation of the rebel *gaucho* did not offer a commentary on Argentine society in the late 1960s. The same impulse of centering in the past is visible in Antín's *Don Segundo Sombra*. Hence, it is no coincidence that the Grupo Cine Liberación saw both films as idyllic representations of bygone times that refused to engage with the pressing challenges of the late 1960s. Nonetheless, for Torre Nilsson and Antín these films represented a marked change from their more intimist films of the early 1960s. Both invested considerable energy in these *gauchesque* productions which stand as part of Argentine heritage, that is to say, realist films of quality that were necessary for the consolidation of Argentine cinema around national themes. The huge media coverage of both films attests to their significance in Argentine cultural life and their box office takings demonstrate that they were eminently supported by domestic audiences. Nonetheless, as *Don Segundo Sombra* showed, these films did not encounter a positive circulation abroad.

The other three *gauchesque* films show some differences from *Martín Fierro* and *Don Segundo*. *Santos Vegas* and *Juan Moreira* focus on rebel *gauchos* who are oppressed by the authorities. While also part of the Argentine heritage genre, they are more film-spectacles, that is to say, they incorporated few non-realist scenes and strong scores to accompany the narration, thus becoming more artistic adaptations of the literary works. Because of Leonardo Favio's Peronist sympathies and the return of Peronism to Argentine politics, *Juan Moreira* enjoyed remarkable success as its protagonist became a metaphor for the Peronist resistance. Finally, *Los gauchos judíos* also owes much to Torre Nilsson, who was one of its producers. Unlike the other *gauchesque* films, which focused on male characters, *Los gauchos judíos* is a choral production that shows the role of immigrants in the formation of modern Argentina, their efforts at assimilation, and their contributions to the national character. Because of a visible climate of anti-Semitism, Jusid's film uses humor and choreography as a means to lighten the message and focus on immigrants' impact on the development of Argentina. As will be seen in Section III, Argentine cinema's interest in nation building in the late 1960s and early 1970s also involved the depiction of nineteenth-century national heroes.

SECTION III

Representing Founding Fathers

One of the ways in which Argentine filmmakers in the late 1960s and early 1970s created a sense of nationhood amid the deteriorating economic conditions and political unrest of those years was by depicting the heroic deeds of the nation's founding fathers. In this section, I examine two films by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, *El santo de la espada* (1970) and *Güemes, la tierra en armas* (1971), that deal with the brave actions of José de San Martín (1778–1850) and Martín Miguel de Güemes (1785–1821), respectively, during the wars of independence in South America.¹ I also analyze *Bajo el signo de la patria* (René Múgica, 1971) and *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (Manuel Antín, 1972) and explore the production and reception of these films as examples of what Higson calls 'quality films,' that is to say, films produced thanks to the support of state regulation and for middle-class audiences. These films also constitute cinematic products that resorted to product differentiation given that their topic—the representation of the Argentine founding fathers—did not compete directly with Hollywood films. In other words, *El santo de la espada* (henceforth *El santo*), *Güemes, la tierra en armas* (henceforth *Güemes*), *Bajo el signo de la patria* (henceforth *Bajo el signo*), and *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (henceforth *Rosas*) focus on Argentina's founding fathers in order to attract domestic viewers. More importantly, because of their exploration of Argentine history, these films engage with both past and contemporary forms of national identity.

My analysis will approach these films as historical and a blend of several subtypes: the biographical film, the war film, and the epic. Biographical films or 'biopics' represent the lives of great men. Dennis Bingham, who has studied the Hollywood biopic, asserts that the genre is linked to the studio era (2010a, 11) and that the 1970s was 'the weakest [decade] for biopics' (2010a, 24). This assertion is crucial to understanding that these four films constituted part of an original Argentine trend of making films that were unlike those produced in Hollywood. The biopic is also 'a prestige genre, with films made in hopes of winning awards and earning respect' (Bingham, 2010b, 77).² Winning respect for Argentine film production was also a long-desired goal of the NIC authorities in the 1960s; thus the biographical genre was

embraced by some Argentine filmmakers, whose previous films had been more experimental. These historical films also deploy features of the war film, a genre that was used prominently in the 1960s and 1970s to represent the experiences of the first and second world wars and Vietnam. The themes of heroism, sacrifice, and patriotic virtue are also found in the depiction of the nineteenth-century war of independence waged against Spanish forces in what today is Argentina. As war films, they are examples of visual memorials: 'In the absence of the personal witness, as most veterans are now dead, the arts provide this service' (Kelly, 2004, 28). Remembering those who made great sacrifices in the violence that led to the nation's foundation constituted an attempt to unify the Argentine national community in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

El santo, *Güemes*, *Bajo el signo*, and *Rosas* are also examples of the epic genre. This is a genre traditionally associated with the great feats and myths of antiquity and the Roman Empire, and has been expanded to encompass films set in more contemporary periods that present heroic deeds and impressive achievements of both individuals and collectivities. The epic not only deals with national heroes; it also requires enormous sets and many extras, and offers astounding sights. Because of the amount of human effort involved in producing this type of film, by the early 1960s, Hollywood deemed them too expensive (Burgoyne, 2011, 5). While some Hollywood war films inherited elements of the epic, epics were mainly produced in Europe after the mid-1960s.³ In Argentina, epics about the national past were produced from 1970 to 1972. Dina Jordanova describes the features of epics of national pride: 'these epics are usually produced and publicized with the ambition to showcase glorious national history; such projects remain of utmost significance within the context of the producing nation and are mostly suited for internal usage' (2011, 113). In addition to portraying a celebrated past, Robert Burgoyne identifies the rise of freedom, particularly during times of crisis, as a central element of this genre, which is a 'vehicle of national ideology and aspirations' (2011, 6). Consequently, the topic of self-determination figures prominently in these films released in a turbulent period (1970–1972).

Here it is important to briefly reflect on the relationship between historical films and national cinemas. In *Waving the Flag*, Higson mentions several strategies to which national cinemas resort in order to compete with Hollywood. One of them stresses 'cultural specificity' (1997, 4–5), that is to say, finding a niche that Hollywood has not yet addressed. This approach clearly applies to *El santo*, *Güemes*, *Bajo el signo*, and *Rosas*, which deploy the cultural specificity of nineteenth-century leaders to win a considerable share of the domestic market. Furthermore, Higson points to narratives that represent the nation: 'many films [...] explore narratives of nationhood, and in many cases they will imbue the experience of a shared culture with a profound sense of tradition and invoke a collective memory of an undisputed national past' (1997, 7). In a politically unstable Argentina, these historical films constituted an excellent way to bring together the diverse members of the

Argentine community. Discussing American biographical films in the 1930s and 1940s, Marcia Landy writes that ‘historical films employed major stars and celebrated significant events in the building of national identity. These films frequently served as a form of collective morality as well as source of morale’ (2001, 8). The casting of local stars to shore up national identity is evident in all four Argentine historical films. Moreover, by engaging with the national past, these films disseminated a sense of nationhood in Argentina at a time of political crisis. My analysis underscores their representation of the birth of the Argentine nation, addressing matters such as the right to self-government, the contrast between a country’s political and economic independence, and Argentina’s role in Latin American politics, which were of interest to viewers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As historical films, they not only describe bygone times, but also constitute important reflections on the society and times in which they were produced.

Notes

- 1 For Gustavo Aprea, these films present elements of school textbooks (2012, 5).
- 2 At the time of writing, two British biopics competed with each other in several categories at the 2014 Academy Awards: *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014) and *The Theory of Everything* (James Marsh, 2014). While the former won an Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay, the latter won an Oscar for Best Leading Actor.
- 3 For more on epics produced in Europe, please see Mark Jancovich’s ‘An Italian-made Spectacle Film Dubbed in English.’

Looking for a National Hero

After the box office success of *Martín Fierro* (1968), Torre Nilsson searched for a project that could be as appealing to Argentine viewers as his adaptation of the country's national poem.¹ According to Mónica Martín, he looked for 'alguien con quien la gente se pudiera identificar' [someone with whom people could identify] (1993, 201).² He found that hero in José de San Martín. The subject of *El santo*, the general was an icon of *argentinidad* that not only allowed viewers' identification but also, and more crucially, referred to the birth of the nation.³ Furthermore, in the early 1960s, historian Enrique de Gandía (1906–2000), who co-founded the Instituto Sanmartiniano with José Pacífico Otero in 1933, explained San Martín's significance as a leader who 'no vino a América atraído por la independencia, en la cual nadie pensaba, sino que el trajo la idea de la independencia al Nuevo Mundo. No es el hombre movido por causas ya existentes. Es el hombre que crea esas causas' [did not come to America attracted by independence, which nobody was thinking about; instead he brought the idea of independence to the New World. He is not a man moved by existing causes. He is a man who creates these causes] (1964, 4). This characterization of San Martín's qualities seems to match Torre Nilsson's own groundbreaking talents.

His choice of San Martín was not necessarily a safe one, however. As Diana Paladino and César Maranghello quite lucidly assert, 'En 1969, encarar la vida del General San Martín era todo un riesgo' [In 1969, representing the life of San Martín was a veritable risk] (2010, 24). Films had to pass through two rounds of evaluation: first, the NIC had to provide a certificate of exhibition and then the Film Rating Board had to approve its content. Torre Nilsson may have identified with San Martín's battles in facing the many hurdles that his project had to overcome, but his selection of this founding father also served another purpose. Martín Kohan holds that San Martín 'es un objeto a invocar para validar y validarse' [is an object to invoke to validate and self-validate] (2005, 46). For Torre Nilsson, making a film about a founding father meant choosing a venture that would set him apart from his fellow Argentine filmmakers while also solidifying his dominant place within Argentine cinema.⁴ His desire for respectability

among his peers and the Argentine public spurred him to undertake a monumental project.⁵

San Martín's indisputable status in the national pantheon provided an opportunity to revisit national history and identity. For Kohan, San Martín represents

tres aspectos medulares de su condición de héroe nacional: en primer lugar, las representaciones de la historia patria; en segundo lugar, los ajustes de la identidad argentina; en tercer lugar, la resolución de los conflictos entre un nosotros y otro, al que se puede refractar o incorporar según el caso.

[three key aspects of his condition as a national hero: in the first place, the representations of national history; second, the adjustments of Argentine identity; and third, the resolution of conflicts between an us and other, which can be refracted or incorporated depending on the case] (2005, 20)

The founding father's multifaceted character allowed the exploration of national history and identity. Nonetheless, because this celebration of the heroic deeds that led to the Argentine independence was shot under a military government, *El santo* has been harshly criticized or ignored altogether. Such criticism overlooked the intrinsic elements of the film and its place within Argentine film history. To redress these critiques, it is vital to examine *El santo's* preproduction, casting of local stars, and reception to shed light on the strategies deployed to appeal to Argentine spectators in spite (or because) of the political division prevailing at the time it premiered.

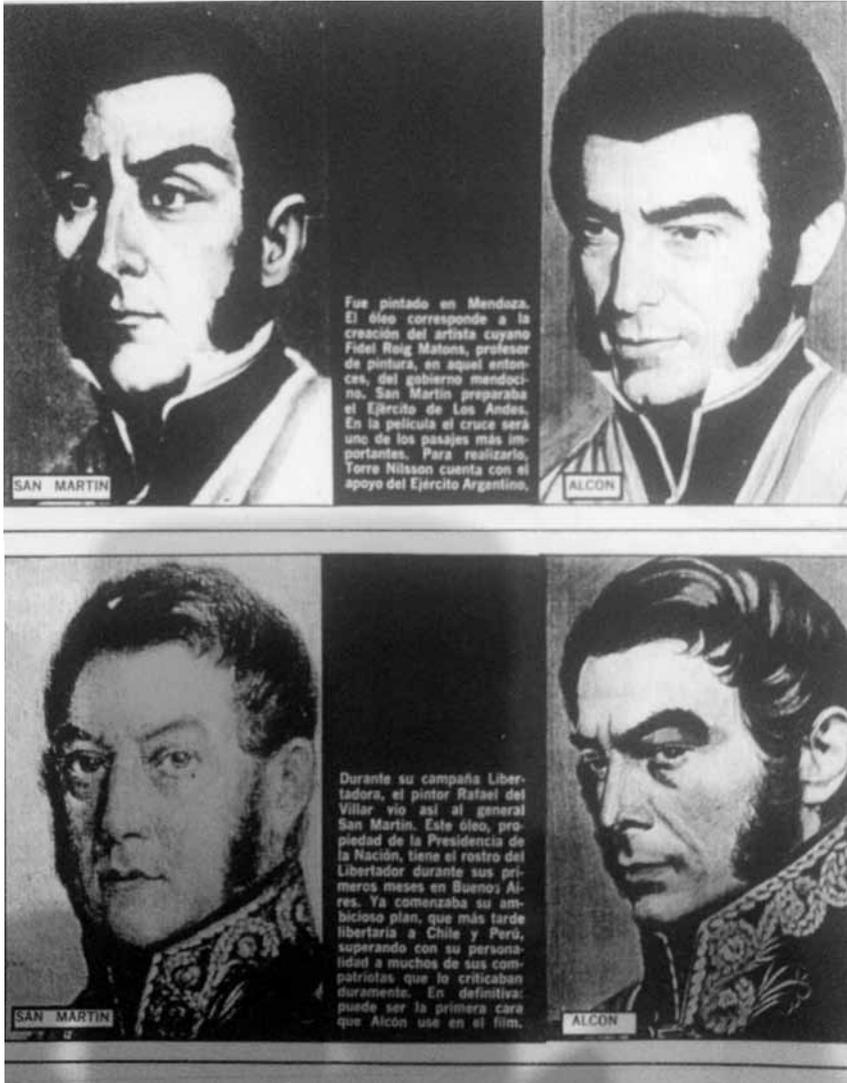
El santo: Preproduction, Casting, and Reception

From the outset, *El santo* was a film that demanded careful preparation and a significant amount of capital.⁶ It took five months of archival research to design the uniforms and costumes of civilian and military figures (Martín, 1993, 202).⁷ The Argentine army provided 700 men, 120 of whom traveled with their horses and uniforms from Buenos Aires to Mendoza (Martín, 1993, 202). In addition to the representation of national heroes, the film also portrayed 120 other historical figures: different military leaders, soldiers, elite ladies, peasants, and freed slaves ('La cara,' 1969, non. pag.). Torre Nilsson worked alongside a military advisor, Andrés Fernández Cendoya, who managed more than a thousand extras in both rehearsals and shoots.⁸ On-location shootings in the Andes exposed the film crew not only to the effects of high altitude (dizziness and lightheadedness) but also very low temperatures. Moreover, filming the movement of men and animals in that inaccessible area required the use of helicopters. Even though the producers tried to control the costs as much as possible, the film's final price tag was 234 million pesos, of which 120 million was part of a loan from the Municipal Bank ('Gente,' 1970, 78). The remaining funds were made up from the exhibitors' advance and the private resources of producers Marcelo Simonetti and Torre Nilsson (Martín, 1993, 204).



‘San Martín y señora,’
Gente, 28 August 1969: 46.

The film’s casting showed the producers’ and director’s desire to engage the national audience by offering a credible representation of historical characters with a cast of popular actors. The main actors—Alfredo Alcón (1930–2014), who was to play San Martín, and Evangelina Salazar (1946–), who would take on the role of San Martín’s wife, María Remedios de Escalada—were nationally recognized.⁹ Lucy Fisher and Marcia Landy explain the importance of casting local stars and their role in shaping the national imagination: ‘The link between the star’s image and screen roles has been intimately tied to questions of national imaginary, of how the stars embodies and also alters characteristics associated with questions of political identity, value and attitude’ (2004, 1). The lead actors in *El santo* had performed roles that were related to the national imaginary without aligning with the politics of the 1960s. *Gente* mentioned that Alfredo Alcón was cast as San Martín because he was director Leopoldo Torre Nilsson’s favorite actor. Previously, he had been superb as the quintessential mythological Argentine *gaucho* in Torre Nilsson’s *Martín Fierro* (Barreiro and Paganetti, 1969, 16). Consequently, he embodied the Romantic idea of a man fighting for his freedom, which would also be germane to his performance of General San Martín. To adequately represent the widely recognized face of the founding father, Alcón had to



‘¿Qué cara de San Martín usará Alcón?’, *Gente*, 28 November 1969: 26–27.

wear a wig and a plastic prosthesis to make his straight nose resemble that of San Martín (‘La cara,’ 1969, non. pag.). These changes aside, the 39-year-old Alcón was in good physical shape to bring to life the 34-year-old Argentine liberator. In November 1969, *Gente* published an article with four different faces of General San Martín and the possible transformation that Alcón’s face would undergo in order to resemble the General.¹⁰

Well before *El santo*’s release, journalistic reports on Torre Nilsson’s film contributed to build interest. In October 1969, *La prensa* informed its readers



‘Con un “Alcón” en las alturas,’ *Gente*, 30 October 1969: 17.

about the progress of the shoot—then in its ninth week—and announced the film’s release with an illustrated advertisement. *Gente* also devoted column space between July and November 1969 to reports on the film’s progress and anecdotes involving the cast. *Gente* strove to present Alcón as a veritable leader with some of San Martín’s qualities, describing his routine: ‘El día de Alfredo Alcón, durante los veintitantos en que se filmó el cruce de los Andes y las batallas de Chacabuco, Cancha Rayada y Maipú, no era lo que se dice un remanso de paz’ [Alfredo Alcón’s day, during the 20 days or so in which the crossing of the Andes and the battles of Chacabuco, Cancha Rayada, and Maipú were shot, was not exactly a piece of cake] (Barreiro and Paganetti, 1969, 17). The report continued, detailing the early hours at which Alcón woke up and the time it took to apply his makeup and drive to the set, as well as wait for the shooting to begin. The actor’s self-sacrifice, concentration, and discipline, which resembled those of San Martín himself, were all mentioned and captured in photographs.¹¹ For her part, the 23-year-old Salazar, who

had quickly achieved national and international recognition in roles as pure and abnegated heroines, had to wear a long, dark wig to look like Remedios. The report presented a crucial parallel between Salazar's personality and that of the historical character she was about to play: 'a pesar de la gran responsabilidad, Evangelina Salazar pasó con entusiasmo por las distintas facetas de su maquillaje, con el fin de componer con la mayor veracidad posible la personalidad de la esposa del héroe' [despite the great responsibility, Evangelina Salazar enthusiastically endured the different stages of her makeup, with the goal of giving life to the personality of the hero's wife as realistically as possible] ('La cara,' 1969, non. pag.). The main actors were imbued with their characters' sacrifice and patriotic responsibility.

The lead actors and other members of the production team considered their involvement in *El santo* to be an honor, given the subject matter and the expectations surrounding the film. For instance, Alcón admitted that impersonating San Martín was a considerable challenge, saying that the role 'es el más cansador, el más comprometido. No es un personaje cualquiera. No se me va a juzgar solamente por mi actuación. Conseguir conformar a todo el mundo haciendo de San Martín va a ser muy difícil' [is the most tiring and the one that has required the most commitment. It is not just any character. I will not be judged only for my acting. Trying to please everybody as San Martín will be very difficult] (Barreiro and Paganetti, 1969, 18). Even veteran screenwriter Ulises Petit de Murat (1907–1983) —who had won a Silver Condor, the highest award given by the Association of Argentine Film Critics, for the film *La guerra gaucha* (1942)—felt the enormous responsibility of the film *El santo*:

Es una búsqueda ansiosa del otro San Martín. Búsqueda que, por otra parte, se remonta a mi infancia. Este es un primer intento por penetrar su misteriosa psicología y el fondo de su genio tan particular. Pero por lo menos no estará rígido en su vestidura de bronce y mármol. Fue un acto de amor de todo el equipo.

[It is an anxious search for the other San Martín, a search that, on one hand, harks back to my childhood. This is a first attempt to penetrate his mysterious psychology and the depth of his unique genius. But at least he will not be rigid in his bronze and marble clothing. It was an act of love on the part of the whole team] (Ammi, 1969, 69)

Petit de Murat's words are particularly interesting in that they refer to both the myth of a founding father known by all Argentines since childhood and to the desire to humanize the hero, making him accessible to the national audience.

Given the importance of its subject matter and the logistics involved, expectations of the film's final cut were high. Part of *El santo*'s appeal was the fact it was a costume drama adaptation of a true story that involved careful historical research to recreate the hairstyles, clothing, and artifacts of the 1810s.¹² Not only did some of the location shoot take place in remote areas, such as the Andes Mountains, at an altitude of more than 3,000 meters, but

the production also involved 2,000 extras (as members of the creole upper class, and as Spanish and 'revolutionary' soldiers) as well as many animals—horses and donkeys. Despite the public's and critics' anticipation, it was screened privately for President Onganía, who requested some changes.¹³ For instance, Remedios could not kiss San Martín on the lips nor appear pregnant, San Martín could not lower his eyes in his meeting with Bolívar (to avoid showing him in a subservient position), and finally a scene in which the Chilean flag is raised was omitted (Martín, 1993, 206).

Released in March 1970, *El santo* had, for the most part, a positive reception. *La gaceta* gave it a rating of five (outstanding) for box office and quality, and mentioned the 'caudal sin precedentes de notas en periódicos, revistas y programas de radio y televisión para crear una expectativa sin comparación posible en torno a su estreno' [unprecedented flow of reports in newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV programs to create incomparable expectancy around its release] (1970, 178). For *El heraldo*, the film got a five for commercial attributes and 3½ for artistic value (out of 5). *Crónica* used the headline 'El San Martín de la Esperanza' [The San Martín of Hope]: 'del que dependen muchas cosas fundamentales para la industria, para sus realizadores y para que estas gestas colosales de nuestra historia también puedan ser recogidas por nuestro cine' [on which many fundamental things depend for our industry, for its producers and so that these colossal deeds of our history can also be adopted for our cinema] (1970, non. pag.). Thus, it is not surprising that the first review published in *La prensa* hailed *El santo* as 'una hazaña de la cinematografía argentina' [a great feat of Argentine cinematography] (P.J., 1970, 11). For its part, *Clarín* noted that such an enterprise could not have been possible without economic support from the (film) law.

El santo's remarkable box office success was a welcome triumph for Argentine cinema. In only six days, the film made 70 million pesos, almost 30% of its production cost ('Gente,' 1970, 78). No doubt this was helped by the fact that its release was preceded by a special promotion for school-age children.¹⁴ According to Cristina Mucci, *El santo* was the most popular film in Argentine film history, and its strong reception meant that its production costs were recouped in ten days (2005, non. pag.). For Octavio Getino, the public who supported it expressed its will of upward mobility and national affirmation (1998, 54). Three weeks after the film's release, an article entitled 'La espada, el temple y el valor de la crítica' [The Sword, the Temper, and the Value of Criticism] stated that

El santo de la espada en la zona céntrica llega tercero en el ranking de salas. Es el superfenómeno destinado a cambiar todas las chances del cine argentino porque jamás había ocurrido que en una cuarta semana una película se exhibiera en tantas salas simultáneamente y mantuviera en cines de estreno céntricos—Atlas y Callao—un porcentaje que la lleva a permanecer en cartel sin la menor discusión.

[*El santo de la espada* has reached third place in theater rankings in the downtown area. It is a super phenomenon destined to change all future opportunities for Argentine cinema because never before has a film been shown in so many theaters simultaneously and remained in exhibition in such central theaters—the Atlas and Callao—in its fourth week, a percentage that means there is no discussion about it remaining on the billboard] (1970, 220)

The exultant tone of this piece alludes not only to the records that Torre Nilsson's film was breaking, but also the fact that *El santo* was pleasing exhibitors who were usually reluctant to offer Argentine films, since they often generated weaker box office returns than Hollywood films.¹⁵

Nonetheless, *El santo* also received negative critiques. A review in *La nación* criticized its plot, dialogue, and performances, stating that 'el filme no va más allá de una revisión elemental, ingenua, con reminiscencias de lámina escolar' [the film does not go beyond a basic, naïve revision, with reminiscences of school pages] ('Evocación de la,' 1970, non. pag.). The reviewer for *Análisis* held that the film represented a significant change in Torre Nilsson's filmic trajectory. *Gente's* critiques of Evangelina Salazar's impassive performance, the absence of warmth in Alcón's stern general, and the length of some of the scenes are surprising given its 'promotional campaign' chronicling the film's production (Erausquin, 2008, 146).¹⁶ It should be noted that film scholars Mary Joannou and Steve McIntyre have identified the length of biographical films as one of the reasons why spectators in general do not favor this genre (1983, 147). These comments seem to address a mismatch between the expectations generated by the film in the media and the final product. Consequently, some of the critiques of *El santo* were related to the biopic itself.

El santo's international release also met with mixed assessments. In Spain, it received lukewarm reviews,¹⁷ but had a warm reception at the Film Festival of Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia:

El público asimiló perfectamente el espíritu del personaje y el ideal que alentó la gesta libertadora [...] El aplauso fue general y sostenido. Constituyó de verdad una sorpresa, pues no cabía suponer que personas tan ajenas a la problemática histórica de América Latina pudieran mostrar acercamientos hacia sus protagonistas, sobre todo en el caso de San Martín, de tan severo estilo de vida y tan poco profuso a los esplendores.

[The audience perfectly understood the spirit of the character and the idealism that motivated the liberation campaign (...) Applause was general and sustained. It was a veritable surprise, because it was not possible to imagine that people so removed from the historical reality of Latin America would show sympathy for its protagonists, above all San Martín, whose lifestyle was so austere and free from luxuries] ('Optima,' 1970, 424)

This success abroad was a long-held goal for Argentina cinema, for it

meant new markets and audiences. The film's merits were also recognized by an important Latin American filmmaker, the Brazilian Glauber Rocha (1939–1981) director and founder of Cinema Novo lauded it as a great epic (Tal, 2005, 173–74).¹⁸ Given the power of cinema, Rocha saw the epic as irrevocably linked with didacticism: both could spark a much-needed revolution that could enlighten the lower classes and de-alienate the middle sectors.

Despite its domestic popularity and exhibition abroad, *El santo* has been either overlooked by film scholars or seen as a product of an authoritarian government, given that it was shot and released during the Onganía dictatorship (1966–1970). Fernando Peña holds that the film 'no resiste un análisis medianamente serio, pero tuvo un éxito que aseguró la carrera cinematográfica del realizador' [does not stand up to a moderately serious analysis, but had a success that ensured the cinematographic career of the filmmaker] (1993, 30). Raúl Beceyro also refers to the director's complicity with the regime in power (1997, 10). Similarly and more recently, Ignacio del Valle mentions the genre of historical drama which includes *El santo*: 'El auge de este último puede entenderse, por lo tanto, como una forma de eludir la contingencia de parte de los realizadores que se mantenían dentro de los cauces permitidos al cine por el régimen' [The prominence of the latter (the historical drama) can be understood, therefore, as a way of escaping constraints for the filmmakers who accepted the cinematic channels allowed by the regime] ('La actualización,' 2010, 244). This comment does not take into account that the representation of a founding father is both a political and an artistic endeavor that cannot neglect taking into account the ideological environment in which the film was made. More fundamentally, San Martín's portrayal in *El santo* engages in no uncertain terms with issues related to both national identity and the mission of a national cinema. Therefore, the circumstances surrounding its production and consumption deserve careful examination.

It is important to consider the film's production timeline alongside the political developments. Preparations for *El santo* began in late 1968 with the writing of the script.¹⁹ The casting was finalized in June with the signing of Evangelina Salazar for the role of Remedios and the film's shooting began on July 18, 1969. Two months earlier, in May 1969, a revolt known as El Cordobazo in which students and workers battled against the police in the city of Córdoba. This movement of opposition delivered a blow to Onganía's government. As historian Michael Burdick explains, 'Politically, el cordobazo exacerbated the divisions within the army, and within days the entire cabinet of President Onganía resigned' (1995, 147). Consequently, by the time *El santo* was released on March 25, 1970, Onganía's term in office was coming to an end due to the increased resistance from both the labor sector, which was pushing for better salaries, and the urban guerrillas, whose armed violence was escalating. These challenges compelled General Roberto Levingston (1920–2015) to replace Onganía as head of the country on June 18, 1970. Given this context, it is pertinent to ask—in light of some film critics' assertions—how much influence a president who was confronting such

serious problems—and/or the authorities of the National Institute of Cinema (NIC)—had on the production of this film. While the military authorities demanded several cuts (Martín, 1993, 202; Paladino and Maranghello, 2010, 37), the film's main narrative remained unaltered. Finally, it is also necessary to take into account the film's popular reception. At the time of its premiere, *El santo* pleased a wide spectrum of viewers: from army generals to members of the public whose sympathies ranged from the far left to the far right. Either as a vehicle or a challenger (or both) of the military establishment, *El santo* was a crucial nation-building cinematic work that was widely consumed by Argentines. In what follows, I present a close analysis of the film, examining its engagement with national history and identity.

El santo de la espada

As a biopic, *El santo* presents a combination of traditional and original cinematic techniques. One of the traditional biopic techniques identified by George Custen is a title that introduces a special period in the main character's life (1992, 51). Even though the founding father's legacy transcends those years, the film's title refers to the ten years (1812–1822) that San Martín spent battling Spain for the independence of the United Provinces of the River Plate.²⁰ *El santo's* opening *in medias res* constitutes an original technique. Accompanied by a small group crossing the Andes, General San Martín, dressed in civilian clothes, meets his faithful assistant Olazábal, who informs him that he still has a mission to fulfill. A disillusioned San Martín tells the soldier that he is tired of being called a tyrant and an ambitious plotter, and hopes to return to Buenos Aires. As the camera pans the Andes from right to left, San Martín admits in a voice-over: 'He depuesto la insignia del mando supremo para siempre. Diez años que comienzan cuando volví a la patria que había dejado siendo un niño' [I have given up the badge of supreme leadership forever, [after t]en years that began when I returned to the motherland that I had left as a child]. These lines help contextualize, giving the date, 1822, and both the circumstances of the founding father's life and the process of liberation in South America. Furthermore, they frame San Martín's standing: after years of military campaigns, his participation in the independence process is marred by miscommunication and false accusations. Corroborating the general's words about his career, a dissolve takes spectators back to 1812 Buenos Aires when he first arrived in town and is interviewed by the members of the Triunvirato [Triumvirate], to whom he conveys his willingness to serve in the fight for independence. The scene details his past military experience in Spain and the qualities that marked him as an effective leader: courage, commitment, capacity, and discipline. When asked by Bernardino Rivadavia, a member of the Triumvirate, why he is leaving behind such a brilliant military career in Europe, San Martín replies—as the camera closes in on his face—that he has given up his fortune and personal ambitions for the benefit of his country's freedom.

San Martín's sacrifices to liberate the Spanish colonies in South America guide his depiction in *El santo*. The film focuses on the principles and personality that steered the general in his mission in Latin America. In one scene, San Martín stands alone as he is interviewed by the Triumvirate. He is shown as a military man without local connections, as his past army career (in which he performed remarkably well fighting for Spain) is examined. His loyalties and true motivations are a matter of concern given that he had left his homeland as a boy and served in Spanish regiments for more than 20 years. At 34, he gave up all that he had accomplished in Europe to start again in a land he barely knew and chose a radically different cause from the one he had supported so far. The film strives to preserve San Martín's agency and make him accessible to the audience. His voice-over explains that the validation of his military rank that took only eight days and he was entrusted with the task of creating a new regiment of grenadiers. As befits a man on active duty, the general is shown training this newly formed militia. This is seen through the admiring perspective of Remedios de Escalada (Evangelina Salazar), whose gaze momentarily aligns with that of the viewers. Like the young patrician, the spectators appreciate San Martín's expediency and mastery in accomplishing his first mission. The introduction of Remedios five minutes into the film provides important clues about the general's personal life. He seems to be smitten by her, but harbors doubts due to her youth, as conveyed in a short exchange with a colleague.²¹ In the following scenes, however, the general is portrayed as a man in love, who asks for Remedios's hand, even though he has only a partial salary to support her.²² Estela Erasquin observes that, 'al presentar al decidido y apuesto oficial enamorado, el film propone conciliar, para el gusto del público, el romance con la acción espectacular' [by presenting the decidedly good-looking military man in love, the film proposes to combine romance with spectacular action in order to appeal to the audience] (2008, 145). Indeed, the romance places the loner San Martín within a family and depicts him as integrated into the social life of the upper-class creoles. More importantly, his marriage, which takes place in the first ten minutes of the film, establishes his heterosexuality, an important feature for the founding father who, as a leader in an all-male institution, was immersed in a homosocial environment.²³ Nonetheless, even in the first months of his married life, the film presents the general choosing the call of duty over personal life. His inability to be a family man may be problematic. On the one hand, his zeal and dedication to the liberation is not diminished by his new marital status, a standard representation of responsible men in war films. On the other hand, if he cannot find time for his family life, how deep is his commitment to it and to his young bride?

San Martín's relationship with Remedios could be construed as one in which she metaphorically represents the fledging Argentine nation. For instance, in one scene, the general is about to leave home to deter the landing of the Spanish forces in the Parana River in a mock operation before attacking Buenos Aires. When his new wife asks him if he could not have sent someone

else in his place, he replies: 'Mira, si a tu Buenos Aires, le pasa lo mismo que a Montevideo' [Consider, if your Buenos Aires has to undergo the same situation as Montevideo].²⁴ The parallel between Remedios and Buenos Aires gives San Martín the impetus to protect both by courageously fighting against the *godos* (Spanish soldiers). This dialogue takes place before the battle of San Lorenzo, in which the general came close to losing his life. The clash was shot with aerial views of the cavalry under his leadership charging at full speed against the Spanish forces. This scene also illustrates that all acts of patriotic heroism risk the hero's loss when San Martín's horse is killed and traps the general under its weight. When he returns to Remedios's side, she seems to sense the danger that her husband experienced, but the general soothes her: 'Su Buenos Aires puede dormir tranquila, la están velando los Granaderos de San Martín' [Your Buenos Aires can sleep peacefully; she is being protected by San Martín's grenadiers]. The feminization of Buenos Aires, evident in the use of the feminine adjective and direct object pronoun is mirrored by Remedios in the first part of the same scene: before her husband's arrival, she could not sleep calmly. Once again, the Remedios-Buenos Aires parallel is underlined to show San Martín protecting both.

El santo alternates between a third- and first-person narrator. Usually, the third-person narration shows San Martín in action, meeting other military leaders, making myriad decisions, and planning for the crossing of the Andes. The first person, that is to say, San Martín's voice-over, is usually deployed in moments of calm to provide insights into his thoughts. For instance, on one occasion, the general expresses his frustration at the way the process of independence is being handled from Buenos Aires, asking rhetorically, '¿Hasta cuándo esperaremos para declarar la independencia? ¿No es ridículo acuñar moneda, tener pabellón y hacer de la guerra un rey del cual hoy se depende?' [How long will we wait to declare independence? Is it not ridiculous to mint money, have a flag, and make of the war a king on whom we still depend today?].²⁵ These questions frame his uncharted path and his place in 'monumental history' which, according to Landy, 'relies on a vision of the past during moments of crisis and heroic conflict, and it reveals a penchant for the actions of heroic figures' (2001, 3). It is the way in which the founding father reacts to problems that shows his commitment to the liberation of South America and his formidable strategic planning.

El santo also presents San Martín as a multilayered person. While for Erausquin, 'el héroe de Torre Nilsson es, verdaderamente, un santo' [Torre Nilsson's hero is truly a saint] (2008, 146), as the title suggests, San Martín's virtuosity is limited to his role as a military strategist and visionary leader. He believes in training and planning, and he respects the other generals (Manuel Belgrano, Martín de Güemes, and Bernardo O'Higgins); but he is also aware of the criticisms directed at him—that he is ambitious, cruel, and a thief—which gradually start influencing his decisions, perhaps culminating in his resolution to leave Simón Bolívar to bring to an end the independence of South America without his assistance.²⁶ Argentina's founding father

is unduly maligned when the film presents him sacrificing his comforts and personal life. He is depicted as unable to hear and heed the advice and wishes of his young wife, who repeatedly asks him not to exert himself too much and to spend more time with her. The 'saint of the sword' seems to have been a poor husband.

Here we also must consider Remedios's characterization, which alternates between activity and passivity. For Tzvi Tal, the film 'reinforced the traditional view of the hero's wife as a quiet, supportive helpmeet' (2004, 25), in line with the gender roles encouraged by the military regime in the late 1960s, when the film was shot. Several crucial aspects should be noted now about the relationship between San Martín and Remedios in *El santo*. First, the age difference between her and San Martín was considerable: 19 years. She was 15 years old when she married the 34-year-old San Martín. The first 35 minutes of the film present her as imbued with agency: it is she who invites the general to a gathering at her home, stating that she would like to discuss with him a project to obtain arms and money for his campaign. When San Martín asks her father for her hand, he is told that 'así como la ve, todavía, una niña [Remedios], tiene una voluntad muy firme en todas sus cosas' [even though she still is a child, she has a very strong will in all things]; thus, despite her youth, it is Remedios who makes the decision to accept his marriage proposal. Later in the film, when she is living in Mendoza, she spearheads the donation of jewelry to help cover the expenses of the crossing of the Andes, an act that confirms her own commitment to the liberation cause. Despite her agency, in *El santo* she is also treated as *una niña* [a child] by both her father and her maid. In that sense, and as I have mentioned above, the film shows San Martín as a father figure to his wife: attentive, protective, but also in control of their decisions. Second, Remedios was a traditional upper-class *porteña* [native of Buenos Aires]. In *Remedios de Escalada de San Martín: Su vida y su tiempo*, historian Florencia Grosso explains the situation of Argentine women in the nineteenth century: 'Motor del hogar, sacrificada y esforzada trabajadora, no se conocían jamás sus nombres y solamente brillarán por sus propios maridos. Ellas han sido apenas sombras' [Driving force of the home, sacrificial and zealous workers, their names were never known and they will only shine because of their husbands. They have been only shadows] (2013, 12). Remedios suffered from tuberculosis for several years, a fact that must have left her housebound. In this context, is it credible that an experienced military leader could have been influenced by such a young spouse? That is to say, would not the founding father be seen as an unreliable career officer if he had paid attention to an unproven woman? Thus, the role left to Remedios was that of the liberator's friend and wife, a witness to his struggles and frustrations, a domestic anchor for the seasoned fighter. This portrayal is in line with the norms for women of her time. This begs the question of how we should interpret the critiques of Salazar's performance as a sweet and docile Remedios (Erausquin, 2008, 144). More importantly, did the film propose women's return to such traditional roles as homemaker, as Tal suggests? To

answer these questions, it is appropriate to consider Robert Rosenstone's insights about historical films and apply them to *El santo*.

El santo de la espada as a Historical Film

In 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Post-literate Age,' Rosenstone mentions two approaches to understanding historical films. The implicit approach deals with historical films as if they were adaptations of real-life events and, thus, how faithfully the filmic rendition resembles versions of the past (2001, 51). *El santo* not only received state funds but also was shot with the participation of a historical consultant and several divisions of the Argentine armed forces in order to ensure a faithful historical representation. While the film's flaw could perhaps be the inclusion of too many historical facts, which detract from presenting a more compelling portrayal of the Argentine liberator, historians, film critics, and spectators alike are almost unanimous in the opinion that *El santo* offers a historically accurate vision of San Martín's ten-year career fighting first for the liberation of what today is Argentina, and later, for Chile and Peru.²⁷ The film's fidelity to historical events is one of its unquestionable strengths. For instance, the president of the Board of Historical Studies of Mendoza, Edmundo Correas, reported that:

Las juntas de estudios históricos del país en su reciente sesión plenaria decidieron otorgar un voto de aplauso al director y los realizadores y colaboradores de la película *El santo de la espada* por el bien logrado esfuerzo que ella significó para el recuerdo de nuestro héroe máximo.

[the country's boards of historical studies decided at their recent plenary session to award a vote of approval to the director, producers, and participants in the film *El santo de la espada* for what their well-achieved effort means for the memory of our supreme hero] (1970, 5)

One reason for the undisputed assessment of *El santo* as a quality historical film could be found in the subject matter itself: San Martín's place in the pantheon of founding fathers is undeniable, despite the many ideological waves throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century Argentine history (Hourcade, 1998, 73). Michael Goebel describes the consensus among Argentine historians from both the Academia Nacional de la Historia and the Instituto Rosas, saying that 'the figure of San Martín in particular was revered unanimously' (2011, 53). This shared view of the main character also influenced the film's reception. The armed forces and the Peronist Youth movement, in opposition in the late 1960s and early 1970s, found common ground in *El santo*.²⁸

The explicit approach stresses that like other cultural products, historical films reflect the values and idiosyncrasies of the time in which they were made. The only two academic references dealing with *El santo* (in more

than footnotes), Tal's and Eurasquin's, belong to this approach. Tal cites historians María del Carmen Feijoo and Marcela Nari's article tracing shifting Argentine gender roles in the late 1960s, suggesting that the film stresses a patriarchal order of respect and obedience such as the one sought (but not attained) by General Onganía.²⁹ This reading does not consider the fact that the film was based on a book by writer and historian Ricardo Rojas.³⁰ Published in 1933, *El santo de la espada* represents the San Martín as a romantic hero fighting for the liberation not only of his *patria*, but also of the continent.³¹ Eduardo Hourcade notes that Rojas's book was an immediate success: 'dejó acuñada una metáfora imborrable para la reflexión sobre San Martín' [it left an indelible metaphor for reflection on San Martín] (1998, 88). Therefore, the San Martín portrayed in the film is one that was created decades before the tumultuous 1960s.

In *El santo*, Rojas not only provided a biography of the founding father, but also and more importantly, an expression of *argentinidad*. Considered 'the essential Argentine' by Ismael Moya, Rojas, along with Manuel Gálvez (1882–1968) and Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), was part of the Centenary Generation, intellectuals who had witnessed the celebrations of 1910, when Argentina commemorated its first hundred years as an independent nation (Goebel, 2011, 36). Decrying what they perceived as the corrupting influence of immigrants on the nation, these cultural nationalists favored the role of *gauchos* as the embodiment of *argentinidad*.³² As Jeane DeLaney explains, '[cultural] nationalists believed that certain individuals—by virtue of their intuitive powers and heightened sensitivity—could see beyond surface phenomena to understand the occult forces shaping the nation, and thus help guide it back to its true course' (2002, 647). Rojas emphasizes what makes San Martín truly unique: 'hay algo adicional que excede al adocenado jinete de las estatuas ecuestres' [there is something more that exceeds the familiar rider of the equestrian statues] (1940, 9). The hero could not only see what others failed to distinguish, but also and more crucially, he could provide a moral compass to guide future generations. It is, then, Rojas's imprint that shapes the depiction of San Martín as a remarkable leader, capable of seeing what others could not: Belgrano's value, the importance of Güemes's *montonera gaucha* [*gaucho* rebellion], and the need to liberate all South America. Rojas's influence is also evident in San Martín's concern for the unity of the nations that had formerly been Spanish colonies. Rojas, who believed in the union of Latin America, stressed San Martín's generosity in freeing other nations besides Argentina and saw it as proof of the general's South American vision. Nonetheless, Torre Nilsson's representation is a matter of interpretation, too. James Chapman clarifies that:

The radicalization of French film culture following the upheavals of 1968 and the ascendancy of high theory in journals such as *Screen* after circa 1970 signaled a rejection of the Bazinian orthodoxy in favor of the idea

that all film was merely a 'representation' or 'construction' and had no claim to objective reality. (2008, 59)

Drawing on this insight, I now turn to an analysis of the explicit approach and of *El santo* as an interpretation of the Argentine foundational pantheon.

The explicit approach of *El santo* is also illustrated by Erausquin, who agrees with the 1970s critiques by spectators who labeled the film a 'solemn pastiche' of interest only to Argentines even though her interpretation of San Martín as a tragic hero (2008, 146) places the founding father in the pantheon of world leaders, rendering his life an example of the universal desire for freedom and self-definition. This view fails to take into account that the subject matter is inextricably related to the definition of what Argentine cinema should be. In other words, the criticism leveled at the film—that it does not present a topic that is sufficiently appealing to foreign audiences—does not see national cinema, particularly that of a peripheral nation, as competing on an unequal footing with Hollywood's mega-productions. In addition, the criticism that the film was only for the consumption of Argentina's domestic audience sets the parameter that Argentine cinema needs to be of interest to foreign audiences as well, ignoring the fact that the intended audience of every national film industry is, precisely, the domestic one. While Torre Nilsson has been accused of opportunism in accepting funds from the NIC and resources—ranging from historical and military consultants to uniforms and horses—from the armed forces, as a historical film, *El santo* celebrated the birth of the Argentine nation and highlighted San Martín's moral values, his sacrifices, and his commitment to freedom. Hence, the film provided a model of morality and citizenship for a nation at odds with itself. More crucially, *El santo* resonated with Argentine viewers as San Martín represented an archetypal liberator that both the Argentine left and right respected.

If we return to the issue of investigating what Torre Nilsson's film says about the late 1960s in Argentina, there are several aspects worth exploring. First, *El santo* presents glimpses of the intertwined church-state-army nexus that bore striking similarity to the late 1960s. Paladino and Maranghello note that in Torre-Nilsson's film there are more references to religion—San Martín's wedding, a convent, and a crucifix—than in previous films about the founding father (2010, 35). Nonetheless, there is one crucial exchange between San Martín and Fray Luis Beltrán (1784–1827) that has escaped the interest of film scholars. Beltrán, a priest who joined the independence movement, was placed in charge of producing armaments for the campaign in Chile. In *El santo*, he appears using the Franciscan cloak and encouraging men to work hard. San Martín calls him 'Captain,' explaining that despite some opposition, the priest has been promoted with a military rank. The general also tells Beltrán: 'No es de anti-católicos luchar por la revolución' [It is not anti-Catholic to fight for the revolution]. In the early 1970s, such an assertion was anything but innocent in Argentina. Throughout Latin

America, some Catholic priests opted to play a vital role in the (future) socialist revolution organized in the Movement of Priests for the Third World (MPTW) that emerged in the late 1960s (Burdick, 1995, 137). The MPTW was left-leaning, while more traditional Catholic groups sided with Onganía's government. Burdick explains this division:

On one side, the colonial legacy of liberal capitalism with its structures of domination and exploitation was represented by a coalition of traditional elites, the military government, and many members of the church's hierarchy. On the other side, the progressive clergy with their proposed vision of the 'new man' and the 'new society.' (1995, 140)

In *El santo*, San Martín's reassurance to Fray Beltrán about his revolutionary role could be interpreted as promoting not only the political revolution, but also the plight of the dispossessed as the MPTW was doing. This position contrasts sharply with that of right-wing Catholics who supported Onganía's regime.

Another aspect of the church-state-army relationship concerns San Martín's belonging to the Lautaro lodge. The lodges were anti-clerical associations. Nora Barrancos writes: 'Las logias masónicas, debido a su porosidad reclutadora y a las fórmulas rituales que empleaban constituían refugios para el oficio de la verdadera religión de la fraternidad a través de un estilo que pretendía la laicidad pública' [Due to their porous recruitment and the ritual formulas that they used, the masonic lodges constituted refuges for the exercise of the true religion of fraternity in a style that public secularism hoped for] (2007, 55). Paladino and Maranghello note that San Martín's participation in this secret organization is omitted from Torre Nilsson's film (2010, 35). This omission de-emphasizes San Martín's secularism at a time when Catholicism was promoted by the government. Burdick explains that 'Military lodges were not uncommon in the Argentine armed forces, but for the first time religious orthodoxy became a unifying factor' (1995, 128). Given Onganía's unshakable Catholicism and his excellent rapport with Monsignor Antonio Caggiano (1889–1979), the fact that the founding father's membership of an anti-clerical association was not presented in the film could have been due to the director's self-restraint, a form of self-censorship. As all Argentine films had to be approved by a Film Rating Board in which Catholics were the majority, drawing a veil of silence over the general's involvement in an anti-clerical lodge could have been a strategy to avoid delaying or jeopardizing the film's approval.

The second issue that resonated at the time of the film's release was the country's lack of resources. In *El santo*, San Martín mentions the lack of resources to support the fight for independence. In another scene, Belgrano informs him that 'la miseria nos acosa' [misery overwhelms us]. Later, when San Martín prepares the army that will cross the Andes, he confides in Remedios, 'Estoy rodeado de miseria. El mes que viene no voy a tener ni un cuartillo para dar al ejército' [I am surrounded by misery. Next month I will

not have even a penny to give to the army]. On another occasion, he lists all the things—from horses and food to arms and tents—that he needs to supply his troops. Aware of these needs, Remedios organizes a donation of jewelry to be used to buy supplies for the army. The ladies' sacrifice is complemented by San Martín's order to reduce military salaries and his address to the people of Mendoza, urging them to make sacrifices in the name of the nascent *patria*: 'seamos libres y lo demás no importa nada' [let us be free and the rest does not matter at all].³³ In the late 1960s, despite the expansion of the Argentine middle class, the upper and lower classes were still separated by a considerable gap in income and resources, and poverty affected vast sectors of the Argentine population that lived without running water or electricity. Consequently, the efficient allocation of national resources was still a pending matter in the early 1970s. San Martín's call 'seamos libres,' [let us be free] serves as a crucial unifying goal for a society that, both in the nineteenth century and in the early 1970s, was highly polarized. The prioritization of political freedom functioned as a common middle ground between right and left.

Third, and related to the previous point, *El santo* underscores San Martín's fight for political independence and nation building, in which the army played a central role. Even with the weak support of the civilian authorities, who send him military titles, but are unaware of or disinclined to fund his liberation campaign in Chile, San Martín is presented as an efficient planner whose 'real talent is the ability to convey that there is order in what is otherwise chaos' (Braudy, 2003, 235) and who believes in discipline and training and carefully studies every detail of the crossing of the Andes. His genius consists, then, in persevering in the face of adversity, laying out a network with other generals, and moving forward with this strategy for war. After each battle, scenes capture the general avoiding the celebrations and honorary titles; instead, as a true strategist, he starts planning his next move. Thus, San Martín is not portrayed as bloodthirsty: he only authorizes a death sentence by firing squad when he sees evidence of the condemned's atrocities.

Fourth, the film also illustrates his most famous act of selflessness when, at the pinnacle of his career and fame, he renounces his military position, clearing the way for Simón Bolívar's indisputable leadership. The general's management style and the role of the army in nation building could be compared with/contrasted to Onganía's style of leadership and that of the guerrilla group the Montoneros, Onganía's political antagonist in the late 1960s. While Onganía was described by his detractors as rigid and dictatorial, the Montoneros also resorted to a military organization, as historian Vicente Massot explains:

fueron a la Guerra—*civil, prolongada, integral y revolucionaria*, como se cansaron de definirla en sus libros, proclamas y congresos—y para ello formaron ejércitos con sus estados mayores, divisiones, batallones, compañías, pelotones, grados jerárquicos, insignias y uniformes, plenamente consciente de lo que hacían.

[they went to war—*civil, prolonged, total and revolutionary*, as they became weary of defining it in their books, speeches, and conferences—and for that, they organized armies with their chiefs of staff, divisions, battalions, companies, platoons, hierarchical titles, insignias, and uniforms, totally aware of what they were doing] (2013, 13)

Thus, the military organization that in *El santo* is used to wage war against foreign oppressors was similar to the one deployed by both the armed forces and guerrilla groups in the 1970s, the difference being that the enemy in the latter conflict was an internal one.³⁴

Finally, Torre Nilsson's film was relevant in the early 1970s for its depiction of continental liberation. *El santo* exemplifies the redirection of San Martín's energies toward the emancipation of other Latin American 'brothers.' He is also shown as a leader who takes special precautions not to appear as a conqueror of other nations. As soon as he liberates Chile, he returns to Buenos Aires. Nonetheless, San Martín's liberation of Argentina, Chile, and Perú was an important step for the continent's political emancipation, a fact that was recognized by more political filmmakers. In 1968, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino provided a revisionist interpretation of Argentine history in their documentary essay, *La hora de los hornos* [The Hour of the Furnaces] (1968). Influenced by Peronist ideology, they understood the relevance of San Martín as an icon of liberation that could be deployed for economic independence.³⁵ Del Valle states that 'Solanas y GCL plantean la idea de la actualización del mito —"nuestra lucha y la de San Martín son la misma"' [Solanas and the Grupo Cine Liberación shared the idea of actualizing the myth—'our fight and San Martín's are the same'] (2010, 10). Colonial domination and the union of Latin America are themes that appear in both *La hora de los hornos* and in *El santo*, but while Torre Nilsson's film emphasizes political liberation, Solanas and Getino's documentary stresses economic independence, still an unresolved issue in the late 1960s. Consequently, the film seems to ask viewers: What are Argentines in the early 1970s doing for their fellow *tucumanos* or *mendocinos*? How are the filial relationships between Argentines and their Latin American 'brothers' (Chileans, and Peruvians) in the 1970s? And, by extension, in what ways are other Latin Americans defending the freedom obtained in the nineteenth century and the rights of equality and fraternity that underpinned the wars of independence?

By presenting the challenges that San Martín had to overcome to make possible the birth of the Argentine nation, *El santo* allows a comparison with the trials that Argentine society experienced in the early 1970s. In the film, some of those tests were the weakness of the central bureaucracy established in Buenos Aires and the discord of the population who supported different political sides. The distrust of the first 'independent' authorities is shown in *El santo* when Rivadavia and other creoles criticize the political authorities for their lack of efficiency. The division in the population is seen in

another scene where, during a theatrical representation, both a royalist and San Martín are informed of the defeat of Manuel Belgrano's troops, showing the political and ideological rift between members of the same social class. Even with an idealized look to the national past, *El santo* presents the different political sides, alluding to the tumultuous times in which the Argentine nation was forged. The five points that I have discussed illustrate the ways in which *El santo* engaged with matters that were not only central to Argentine society of the time in which it was released, but also crucial to interrogating versions of nationhood that Argentines were considering and also Argentina's role within South America. Fighting for independence is *El santo's* main theme, particularly after the first 40 minutes, when war begins to dominate the screen. Thus, it is necessary to briefly analyze *El santo* as a war film.

War in *El santo*

The first shots show soldiers waiting for the return of a seasoned and successful general who has valiantly led men in war for ten years. One important dimension of *El santo* as a war film, therefore, is consideration of the successive tests that the general had to face to attain the goal of continental independence. In the film, San Martín must overcome his weak health, the granting of titles but little financial support for his campaign, and long periods of separation from his family. Despite these major challenges, he recruits and trains soldiers, and wisely plans his following moves. Patriotism leads him to prepare and manage armies and gives him a reason to fight. His mission is an epic one for the number of obstacles that he faces. Yet San Martín is also seen as laying the foundations of new countries. *El santo* paints the conditions in the nascent Argentina in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when almost everything was lacking, except the generosity that spurred upper-class women to donate their jewelry and the determination that drove men from different social backgrounds to join long and uncomfortable military campaigns and fight bloody battles to liberate South America. Closely related to the generosity of men and women in the 1810s, *El santo* interrogates viewers about the extent to which the general's successors and the citizens of the other Latin American nations that he liberated have been able to make the most of the hard-fought political freedom he bequeathed to Argentines, Chileans, and Peruvians. John Belton states that 'The war film mediates our relationship to war, helping to prepare us for it, reconcile us to victory or defeat, and adjust us to its aftermath' (2012, 218). Argentine society at the time of *El santo's* production needed a strong sense of direction that could help avoid its disintegration. In portraying ambitious plans of the past and their realization despite multiple challenges, the film sought to motivate domestic viewers to continue the task of nation building. San Martín's accomplishments as shown in the film illustrate that, figuratively, no mountain is too high to be crossed with the proper amount of organization, extreme discipline, and relentless commitment.

The legitimacy of war is also a topic addressed in *El santo*. As a warrior, San Martín is relentless against the Spanish forces but unwilling to participate in internal conflicts. In a crucial scene, he affirms that he would never raise his sword to fight for or against his 'brothers.' He is concerned about the emerging nation's slow fall into anarchy and civil war, and, to avoid taking sides, he prefers to return to Chile, even though he has to be carried on a stretcher—due to poor health—in order to continue his liberation campaign. In the final leg of this campaign, he takes great care not to appear as an oppressor. For instance, in one scene, when asked why he is not attacking Perú, he replies that he is waiting for an invitation—this comes when the governor requests that he and his men protect Lima after the retreat of the Spanish troops. Arriving as a liberator, San Martín is offered special lodgings and custody, but he declines, choosing instead the company of his faithful assistant and sleeping in the military barracks. As Belton asserts, 'the battlefield is a world in which the laws, beliefs and behavior, and morality of civilization are suspended' (2012, 196). But the home front also provides important clues about the different sides' relation to beliefs and moral values. Once in Perú, the general is advised to harshly subdue the pockets of resistance, but he rejects imprisonments and executions. When Lord Cochrane urges him to attack the port of El Callao, San Martín disagrees, basing his decision on the Spaniards' lack of supplies. Instead, he waits for their surrender, which eventually saves hundreds of lives. His final voice-over explains, 'la causa que defendí es la del género humano' [the cause that I defended was that of mankind], closing the chapter of his participation in the wars of independence in South America and retiring from public life. San Martín's voice-over justifies his involvement in war, universalizing the reasons for his fight for freedom.

At the end of *El santo*, San Martín's commitment to liberation and continental unity are tested once again. First, military victories lead to a cult of personality that the general does not condone. For him, success was made possible thanks to the joint efforts of the many men who started their military career under his orders and followed him all the way to Perú. Thus, he avoids celebrations and tributes, preferring to let others enjoy them. Second, being away from his family seems to become more difficult to bear, particularly when he receives news of Remedios's declining health and thinks about all the projects that he had to put aside in order to conclude the liberation of South America. Third, in his meeting with Bolívar (Héctor Alterio), San Martín prioritizes the still unfinished project of liberating Perú and Bolivia, urging his Venezuelan counterpart to eliminate the royalist resistance. While the meeting with Bolívar appears friendly, San Martín informs the general that he will be leaving the command of the army so that Bolívar can lead it in the completion of emancipation.

El santo's ending moves away from the theater of war to focus on the general's personal life. His voice-over asserts his desire to be a common man dedicated to his *estancia*, wife, and child, but this wish for simplicity after

ten years of war is not fulfilled. Once in Mendoza, news of Remedios's death reaches him, altering his plans. He briefly visits her tomb in Buenos Aires, before departing for Europe with his young daughter Mercedes. Once the nation's freedom is ensured, he gives up his role as founding father to become his daughter's father. More importantly, the film closes with San Martín's explicit wish to avoid further tributes. His 'testament' seems to underscore his selflessness and desire for anonymity. On one hand, the film appears to respect the founding father's wish for simplicity and rejection of accolades; on the other, *El santo* activates the remembrance of the general's heroic deeds and his indisputable place of honor in Argentina's national pantheon.

Notes

- 1 In early 1969, *Gente* mentioned the popular reception of *Martín Fierro* (1968) as one of the factors that made *El santo de la espada* possible: 'Este éxito le permite a Torre Nilsson trasladar a la pantalla de plata la vida del general José de San Martín, con el mismo equipo de guionistas, técnico y artístico de Martín Fierro y con su insuperable protagonista: Alfredo Alcón' [This success allows Torre Nilsson to present the life of General José de San Martín on the silver screen, with the same team of screenwriters, technicians, and artists as *Martín Fierro* and with its incomparable protagonist: Alfredo Alcón] ('1968: Las figuras,' 1969, 7).
- 2 In an interview, Torre Nilsson admitted that he sought a box office success ('Gente,' 1970, 78).
- 3 Asked which type of audience Torre Nilsson thought about when making *El santo*, he replied, 'Pensé en el país' [I thought about the country] ('Gente,' 1970, 76).
- 4 In 1967 Torre Nilsson did two co-productions with André du Rona, but quickly stopped making films with international financing. As a long-time player in the film industry, Torre Nilsson thrived on taking risks.
- 5 *La gaceta* referred to the director's prestige as one of the selling points ('*El Santo*,' 1970, 178).
- 6 For Miguel Ángel Rosado, Torre Nilsson opted for the 'big spectacle' in both *Martín Fierro* and *El santo de la espada* (1992, 144). Laura Radetich also states that Torre Nilsson, 'que conocía el rigor de la censura decidió obedecer los mandatos y contó la historia que los generales querían escuchar, eliminó todos los aspectos controversiales de la vida del prócer y se ajustó a los lineamientos del autor original que junto a Mitre fueron los que dieron forma al panteón nacional de los próceres' [who knew the severity of censorship, decided to obey orders and told the story that the generals wanted to hear, omitted all the controversial aspects of the life of the founding father and adapted to the ideas of the original author who together with Mitre shaped the national pantheon of the founding fathers] (2006, 60).
- 7 Bruno Ramírez explains that 'historical films that are conceived and carried out as serious attempts to explore the past through cinematic dramaturgy do, in fact, call for considerable research' (2014, 45).

- 8 While the presence of a military advisor is another point that led Argentine critics to deride *El santo*, such advisors, whether military or historical, were and are still called to help in different films. For instance, Robert Rosenstone mentions the case of Louis Gottschalk of the University of Chicago who, in 1935, wrote to the president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: 'If cinema art is going to draw its subjects so generously from history, it owes it to its patrons and its own higher ideals to achieve greater accuracy. No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticize and review it' (2001, 50).
- 9 Salazar began acting in TV series in the early 1960s. In 1965, she was the female lead in a box office smash, *Mi primera novia* (Enrique Carreras). A year later, she had the main role in *Jacinta Pichimaguida, una maestra que no se olvida* [Jacinta Pichimaguida, a Teacher Who Cannot be Forgotten], which was also a hit. That same year, she was the protagonist of *Del brazo y por la calle* (Enrique Carreras), for which she won the Best Actress Award at the San Sebastián Film Festival, an honor that made her known throughout Spain. For his part, Alfredo Alcón had a solid career in theater, TV, and cinema. With Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, he starred in the popular *Martin Fierro* (1969), and *Güemes la tierra en armas* (1973), and they would work together again in *La maffia* (1973), *Boquitas pintadas* (1974), and *El pibe Cabezas* (1975).
- 10 Bingham states that 'The actor, whose stock in trade is embodiment, behavior and expression, is the focal point of the invention, the element that literally gets the most attention' (2010b, 77).
- 11 Years later, Alcón distanced himself from his roles as San Martín and Güemes: 'Yo filmé mucho con Torre Nilsson. De sus obras me gustaron algunas, otras no. No me gusta el Nilsson del *Güemes* o *San Martín*' [I worked a lot with Torre Nilsson. I liked some of his films but not others. I did not like Nilsson's *Güemes* or *San Martín*] (Ferreira, 1995, 186).
- 12 The opening credits list the many institutions that helped as consultants and extras: the Instituto Nacional San Martiniano, the Comando en Jefe del Ejército Argentino, the Regimiento de Granaderos a Caballo, the Dirección de Estudios Históricos, the Comando de Instituto Militares, the Armada Nacional, Gendarmería Nacional, the IV Brigada Aérea, the Compañía de Ingenieros de Montaña, the I Regimiento de Infantería de Patricios, the Comando Brigada de Infantería de Montaña, Regimiento de Infantería de Montaña General Las Heras, the XIV Batallón de Arsenales José María Rojas, and the Escuela de Policía Vucetich.
- 13 The cuts were made in scenes where Remedios called her husband José, instead of 'mi General,' and where San Martín suffers from stomach ache during the crossing of the Andes.
- 14 Torre Nilsson made an agreement with the distributor who charged half the ticket price for elementary and secondary school students (Radetich, 2006, 60).
- 15 Two contemporary American blockbusters were *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964) and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965), which in April 1966 had been screened for 15 and 48 weeks respectively.

- 16 As a comparison, the American biopic *Patton* (Franklin Schaffner), also released in 1970, was 172 minutes long while *El santo de la espada* ran to 120 minutes.
- 17 *El santo* was also released in Spain with the title *Estirpe de raza*. The reviewer for the Spanish journal *ABC* stated: 'El espectador queda sin saber quién fue realmente José de San Martín [...] El resto es una sucesión pomposa e infantil de acontecimientos' [The spectator leaves without knowing who José de San Martín really was (...) The rest is a pompous and childish succession of events] while the newspaper *Madrid* considered it a 'digna y valiosa reconstitución de una página de la historia de América' [a worthy and valuable rendition of a page of America's history] (1970, non. pag.).
- 18 As a way to justify Rocha's (perhaps misguided) support of the film, Tal explains that the Brazilian filmmaker was not cognizant of the school of historical thought (2005, 174).
- 19 In December 1968, Torre Nilsson mentioned that he had just finished the scenes of the crossing of the Andes and the battle of Maipú, and that he expected to start shooting in March 1969, though he admitted that the cast was not complete, despite the fact that many people were eager to participate in the film: 'Hay muchos que se ofertan, me paran por la calle' [There are many who propose themselves, they stop me in the streets] ('Larga charla,' 1968, 14).
- 20 Here the film departs from Rojas's book, which is divided into three parts covering three periods: 1778–1816, 1816–1822, and 1822–1850.
- 21 Nora Barrancos explains that in the nineteenth-century it was not unusual for men to marry younger women, with an average age difference of 13 years (2007, 64).
- 22 Mr. Escalada mentions that San Martín only had two-thirds of his salary as it is well known that he donated the other third to cover the expenses of the independence process.
- 23 As a military man, San Martín mostly interacted with men who were his superiors, peers, and subordinates.
- 24 Montevideo had already been besieged by Spanish naval forces.
- 25 These lines were written by San Martín in a letter to the Mendoza representative, Godoy Cruz. See Ricardo Levene, *El genio político de San Martín*.
- 26 Tzvi Tal observes that the film 'reinforced the social and political status quo, recycling sacred myths concerning personal sacrifice, patriotism, and decorum' (2004, 25).
- 27 For more on San Martín's life in the years 1812–1822, please see John Lynch's 'San Martín: Argentine Patriot, American Liberator.' See also Ricardo Rojas's *El santo de la espada*.
- 28 Gonzalo García states that in the 1970s, the Peronist Youth would challenge Lanusse's professionalism, chanting: 'Generales de cartón, generales son los nuestros: San Martín, Rosas, Perón' [Cardboard generals, generals are ours: San Martín, Rosas, Perón] (n.d., non. pag.).
- 29 Here I am referring to El Cordobazo, the uprising that took place in May 1969 and visibly shook Onganía's regime.
- 30 Born in Tucumán in 1882, Rojas had access to a solid education and was

- particularly interested in the legacy of Spanish colonization and indigenous topics. In 1908, he was assigned to visit European centers of learning to conduct research on the teaching of history. Upon his return, he published *La restauración nacionalista* (1908) which, according to Luis Emilio Soto, ‘propone una terapéutica que exalta los valores vernaculares, partiendo de su íntimo conocimiento del pasado’ [proposes a remedy that exalts native values, departing from his intimate knowledge of the past] (320). Rojas penned *La Argentinidad* in 1916. He coined the term ‘Eurindia’ (1924) to denote Latin America. He served as Chancellor of the University of Buenos Aires 1926–1930 and after the 1930 coup that deposed President Hipólito Yrigoyen (1927–1930), he denounced the authoritarian government and was imprisoned in Ushuaia (Delaney, 2002, 628).
- 31 Rojas described San Martín’s continental plan in 1812, saying: ‘Él quiere unir a todos los americanos en un pensamiento común “la independencia de América”’ [He wants to unite all (Latin) Americans around the same thought: (Latin) American independence] (1940, 57).
- 32 Rojas’s celebration of the *gauchos* was not, however, a sign of an egalitarian ideal. As Delaney notes, ‘it could be argued that in exalting the Argentine folk as avatars of *argentinidad*, Rojas dignified the common people by granting them a central role in the historical evolution of the nation. He was, however, unwilling to grant these same individuals the status of full, participating citizens. Instead, for Rojas, the masses or folk served as passive—and unthinking—vessels of an indefinable spirit or essence’ (2002, 653).
- 33 This sentence is part of a longer allocution that can be found in Arturo Capdevilla’s *El pensamiento vivo de San Martín* (34–35).
- 34 Pablo Giussani writes: ‘Gran parte de la violencia que ensangrentó a la Argentina en los últimos años 60 y en la década del 70 fue una contienda entre dos simétricos totalitarismos militares que asimilaban toda actividad política a las leyes de la guerra y que mantenían utilitariamente regimentadas a sus respectivas civilidades en papel de escuderos’ [The majority of the violence that bloodied Argentina in the last years of the 1960s and in the 1970s was a battle between two symmetrical military totalitarianisms that reduced all political activities to the laws of war and keep their followers pragmatically regimented in their role of squires] (1984, 85).
- 35 Tzvi Tal states ‘el gobierno peronista traspasó el acento a los símbolos de la lucha por la independencia, a los que eligió—para comodidad de sus objetivos—del Panteón Nacional que había sido consolidado por el discurso oligárquico’ [the Peronist government shifted the emphasis to the symbols of the fight for independence, that those were chosen— to conform with its objectives—from the national pantheon that had been established by the oligarchic discourse] (2005, 171).

CHAPTER 11

Güemes, la tierra en armas

After the huge popularity of *El santo*, Torre Nilsson decided to make another film in the same line of biopic/historical films that had proven so successful at the box office: *Güemes, la tierra en armas*.¹ To do so, he expanded on the life of a secondary character who appears in *El santo*, who was also a veritable founding father of Argentina: Martín Miguel de Güemes (1785–1821), an upper-class creole born in what today is northern Argentina. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Güemes restlessly fought for the liberation of his *patria chica* [little fatherland] from Spanish rule, leading armies of *gauchos*. Starting in 1814, he supported San Martín's military mission, protecting the northern border from Spanish troops. In 1815, he became the first elected governor in what is today Argentina, a position he held until his death. He was acutely aware of the need for political organization by means of a constitution so that the liberated areas would not fall into anarchy. Torre Nilsson, who had enjoyed remarkable success with *Martín Fierro* and *El santo*, here undertook a project that not only coincidentally depicted *gauchos*, but also included a founding father.² Yet Güemes's portrayal posed an important challenge as the filmmaker admitted: 'considero que Güemes es una de nuestras figuras históricas poco conocidas' [I believe Güemes is one of our lesser known historical figures] ('Ante,' 1971, non. pag.). Almost 30 years later, historian Luis Colmenares issued a similar statement (1998, 7).³ On the one hand, the public's lack of familiarity with the *salteño* [inhabitant of the province of Salta] leader gave the filmmaker freedom in his depiction, given that he did not have to compete with an image of the *caudillo* already set in the minds of Argentine spectators. On the other hand, because of Argentines' unfamiliarity with Güemes, Torre Nilsson faced the task of making him relevant to twentieth-century, urban, middle-class viewers: 'Considero que al mismo tiempo de recordar hechos históricos, la película es de gran actualidad porque presenta la lucha del pueblo por afirmar su independencia y buscar justicia. Güemes fue uno de los primeros caudillos populares' [I believe that although the film revisits historical events, it is very relevant as it presents the people's fights to assert its independence and seek justice. Güemes was one of the first popular *caudillos*] ('Ante,' 1971, non. pag.). The

director took special care to address the public's lack of knowledge about Güemes and to present his enduring relevance for spectators at the beginning of the 1970s.

Güemes's script was a combination of literary text and historical research. The film is based on the homonymous play by Juan Carlos Dávalos (1887–1956), one of Güemes's great-grandsons. The film's script was the result of a collaboration among Ulises Petit de Murat, Beatriz Guido, Luis Pico Estrada—all seasoned screenwriters—and Rodolfo Mórtola. Of particular importance among those involved in the writing of the script is Ulises Petit de Murat, who had won a Silver Condor—together with Homero Manzi⁴—for the screenplay of *La guerra gaucha* (Lucas Demare, 1942), set in the same region and period as *Güemes*.⁵ In an interview, Torre Nilsson mentioned having consulted several sources, including Bernardo Frías's biography of Güemes, documents in the Archivo General de la Nación, and papers owned by the general's descendant Luis Güemes ('Ante,' 1971, non. pag.). If these historical resources attest to the filmmaker's concern to learn about the film's subject matter, they did not limit his representation of the general. The film's review in *La nación*, nonetheless, highlighted the constraints of representing the life of a real-life historical figure:

no cabe duda de que la posibilidad de recrear la trayectoria del legendario héroe norteño dentro de una estructura que responde a las exigencias de la continuidad argumental y de la unidad dramática está tremendamente restringida, sobre todo si se tiene el propósito de mantener una línea de extremada fidelidad a la documentación histórica.

[there is no doubt that the possibilities for recreating the trajectory of the legendary northern hero within a structure that responds to the demands of the continuity of the plot and dramatic unity are highly restricted, above all if the goal is to maintain a line of extreme fidelity to the historic documentation] ('Evocación,' 1970, non. pag.)

Despite the reviewer's apprehensions, the film compresses much of his historical information about his supporters, antagonists, and other social actors—at times, perhaps, at the expense of clarity.

Here we should pause briefly to consider the assessment of historical films. The issue of fidelity to the past *en vogue* in previous decades has been displaced by consideration of the mechanism at play in historical reconstruction. Pierre Sorlin asserts that as recreations of the past, 'historical films are all fictional' (2001, 38). That is to say, even when filmmakers strive for a truthful depiction of the past based on historical documents, what is represented in their films is not the actual past, but a version of it as conceived by the team involved in the film's production. In addition, one of the subtypes of the historical film that informs *Güemes* is the biopic, which, according to Bingham, 'finds itself in a liminal space between fiction and actuality' (2010, 7). Thus, the delineation of a real life is not only compacted

in biopics but also, and more importantly, rendered *cinematic* by the imprint of those involved in the making of the film.

Like *El santo*, the shooting of *Güemes* demanded a huge production and hundreds of non-professional actors along with local stars.⁶ Preparations for the film began in September 1970 ('Martín Güemes,' 1970, 81). Because of the number of extras, horses, and uniforms needed, the film cost much more than *Martín Fierro* (Martín, 1995, 209).⁷ The costumes alone had a price tag of 10 million pesos, which amounted to 8% of the total budget ('La ropa,' 1970, non. pag.). Torre Nilsson acknowledged that *Güemes* was made possible by reinvesting earnings from *El santo* and that therefore 'se ha solicitado muy poca ayuda oficial' [we applied for less support funds] ('Güemes: reencuentro,' 1971, non. pag.). The film was shot on location in Salta, with some scenes in the picturesque, yet not easily accessible, Quebrada de Humahuaca, demanding extra logistical arrangements. Like *El santo*, the film's shoot was accompanied by a promotional campaign in the main dailies. In January 1971, *Clarín* reported on 'el fervor con que se está encarando y desarrollando el trabajo' [the passion with which the work is being handled and developed] ('Güemes: reencuentro,' 1971, non. pag.). *Gente* also accompanied its preproduction with several articles and pictures.

In the cast of *Güemes*, Torre Nilsson gathered seasoned performers. He selected Alfredo Alcón for the male lead role. Having incarnated both Martín Fierro and San Martín, Alcón blended elements of these previous characters to compose Güemes and admitted that 'Este caudillo es un personaje tan rico, tan vivo, tan caliente, que no cuesta mucho querer ser Güemes' [This strongman was such a rich character, so alive, so engaged that it does not take much to want to be Güemes] (Martín, 1993, 211). For *La nación*, Alcón was able to infuse his character with force and passion, achieving 'una digna caracterización física' [a dignified physical characterization] ('Evocación,' 1971, non. pag.). Alcón's Güemes is a tall and well-built man, with abundant dark hair and a thick mustache and beard, both features of potency and virility. Güemes's facial hair is unusual for army generals who usually keep their faces clean shaven, a difference that I will address later when I discuss the general's physical description. In addition to playing the northern leader, in few scenes Alcón appears as San Martín. The female lead roles are played by Norma Aleandro (1936–) as Macacha Güemes, the general's courageous sister, and Gabriela Gili (1945–1991) as Carmen Puch, Güemes's beloved wife.⁸ This was Aleandro's fourth cinematic role.⁹ For her part, Gili had played the leading female role in a very popular soap opera, *Yo compro esta mujer* [I Buy this Woman] (1968).

Güemes enjoyed a strong reception. It was released on April 7, 1971, in the Atlas cinema and 45 other movie theatres in different neighborhoods in Buenos Aires and the provinces. Its premiere was a veritable spectacle in which ox-carts circulated along Lavalle Street in downtown Buenos Aires and numerous local celebrities were present. This cultural event was also attended by the Panamanian and Indian ambassadors. The film was nominated for

the Golden Prize at the Moscow International Film Festival. Though *Crónica* reported that there was less applause than for Torre Nilsson's previous two films, the review in *La razón* praised the director, the main actor, the dynamic script, and the remarkable scenes of war ('Lúcida,' 1971, non. pag.). For *Radiolandia*, Güemes was 'una producción que necesariamente debe incluirse entre lo mejor del cine argentino de los últimos tiempos' [a production that should necessarily be included among the best of recent Argentine cinema] ('Admirable,' 1971, non. pag.). The film had some rough transitions between scenes—the result of being edited in only a few weeks—and a certain repetitiveness in the several battle sections. For Erausquin, the film's didactic goals conspire against its quality (2008, 167). The review published in *La nación* also praised the director, the cinematography, and the musical score, but pointed out the lack of a unifying theme: 'Güemes pasa por el film como un ser misterioso, enigmático, que el propio film no se atreve a esclarecer' [Güemes appears in the film as a mysterious and enigmatic being that the film itself dares not clarify] ('Evocación de,' 1971, non. pag.). My close analysis of this remarkable film includes its biopic features and a discussion of two axes that run through it: the role of women in the fight for independence and the general's status as a martyr.¹⁰ This latter allows an exploration of *Güemes* as a blend of the epic and war films. These axes constitute strategies to address the audience's unfamiliarity with this founding father and to present a coherent depiction of a nineteenth-century general.

Güemes, the Biopic

Güemes encompasses the early life of the founding father, but mainly focuses on his adult years. Multiple opening shots of *gauchos* riding at full speed and holding long lances during the day give way through a dissolve to the *montoneras*, army-like formations of nineteenth-century riders. Thus, the past seems to collapse with the present and vice versa. The next scene is set on the evening of June 7, 1821, when Güemes (Alfredo Alcón) is unexpectedly surrounded by Spanish soldiers, whom he courageously faces even though they outnumber his detail. He is wounded in the skirmish, but manages to escape in the hope of reaching 'his people.' A cut takes viewers to a scene in which the infant Güemes cries loudly, a trait that earns him the nickname 'Tiger.' The two scenes are connected by his ferocity. The film jumps in time, first to his childhood, where he is seen learning oral traditions and the taming of horses from his father's manager, and later to his adolescent years, showing him and his friends as they throw rocks at Spanish soldiers overseeing a group of prisoners. These short scenes, which end in minute six of the film, present the founding father as deeply engaged with the customs of his native land and rejecting the yoke of colonial oppression. The next part is explained by his voice-over, narrating both his early training in the army at the age of 14 and his adolescent experience in Buenos Aires, which transitions smoothly to his adulthood, also in Buenos Aires.¹¹ Creole lawyer



Güemes with Chiclana.

Feliciano Chiclana (1761–1826) (Armando Etolaway) asks him about the position of the northern provinces regarding a possible rebellion against the Spanish Crown. The young and ardent Güemes replies that, based on his knowledge of the locals, the area appears ready for the fight for freedom.

From the beginning, the film exhibits the paradoxical status of Güemes and his sister Macacha (Norma Aleandro) as educated creoles who love their native land. Their father's *métier* as a treasurer of the Spanish Crown gave him a comfortable lifestyle and allowed him to provide his nine children with access to a good education.¹² The Güemes children explored the rugged northern terrain and developed strong links with it and its people. This commitment to both the land and its humble inhabitants is seen when the two Güemes siblings ride horses, a skill that will not only prove useful to both of them in their adult life, but also keeps them attuned to the local customs. Güemes and Macacha take part in the simple celebrations of the less affluent, wearing ponchos and bowler hats and are equally comfortable in this environment and the elegant ballroom. Their open-mindedness to both worlds—the educated and the poor—continues throughout the film as conversations in *cabildos* [town halls] and grand houses are interspersed with location shots of the siblings enjoying the outdoors and mingling with the locals. Their bi-cultural belonging constitutes a strategy that allows viewers in the 1970s—mostly urban—to identify with them: they are not so exotic and barbaric if, in addition to enjoying the vernacular forms, they are also at home among the sophisticated elites. I will expand on this when I deal with

Macacha's character, but what is worth highlighting here is that in Güemes's case, his ties with common folks allow him to relate to them and recruit them for the liberation cause. Moreover, his access to a broader perspective helps establish his role as a leader who knows that the aspirations for freedom must be carefully channeled in order to avoid anarchy. Güemes's similarities with and differences from the *gauchos* are stressed when one of them says, 'nosotros no tenemos la culpa de que usted hable tan lindo, capitán' [we are responsible for the fact that you speak so well, captain]. His educated background justifies his leadership and earns him respect.

The film demonstrates that Güemes's command is not necessarily accepted without challenge and mistrust. For instance, when he lists the financial and social consequences of colonial oppression at a meeting of notables, his views are seen by his older interlocutors as an expression of his youth. When he follows orders not to fight against the Spanish royalists, his *gauchos* perceive the down time as an imposition of the Buenos Aires authorities. These contrasting portrayals of the general help to depict him as a 'moderate' rebel, willing to listen to others and be part of a larger collective effort. Despite these qualities, in November 1810, he and his *gauchos*'s heroic participation in the battle of Suipacha—the first victory of the patriotic liberation forces—is ignored in the report of the clash drawn up by the official envoy of the Buenos Aires revolutionaries. Shortly after, a scene depicts Macacha informing her brother, who is stationed in Tucumán, about unfavorable rumors that are circulating in Salta concerning his character and actions courting a young married woman. In the next scene, summoned by his superiors, possibly as a result of the rumors, Güemes leaves for Buenos Aires dressed in civilian clothes. Although he has been slighted and is clearly reluctant to interrupt his military actions against the Spanish troops, he is a disciplined soldier and follows orders to travel south.

The Buenos Aires interlude gives Güemes the opportunity to establish his hard-earned rank and to make a crucial new acquaintance.¹³ In one scene, he meets General San Martín (also played by Alcón). In shot reverse shots, San Martín confides in the northern leader his plans for the liberation of Perú and asks for his help, which Güemes enthusiastically agrees to provide, showing, as historian Lucía Gálvez asserts that, 'El futuro libertador se apoyaba en el joven salteño' [The future liberator relied on the young man from Salta] (2007, 82). Vindicated, his rank recognized, and in possession of fresh orders, Güemes returns to the north and meets General Belgrano (Alfredo Iglesias), who had censured his licentious behavior.¹⁴ The film shows Belgrano's contrition and his willingness to work alongside Güemes, who graciously accepts his apologies and prioritizes Argentina's liberation.

Once back in his native land, Güemes quickly reasserts his authority and rank. He first meets with Macacha, who celebrates his homecoming and expresses her belief that the armies will be ready to follow him. Next, a cut exposes the mood of the Spanish side: upon hearing a report about Güemes's troops, the Spanish general Pezuela (José Labernie) asks, 'Teniente Coronel?

¿De qué tolería me habla? Esos son indios.' [Lieutenant Colonel? Which tribe are you talking about? These are Indians]. Despite this arrogance, the film makes a point of showing that Güemes's army is composed of enlisted men wearing uniforms and holding military ranks in addition to the *gauchos*.¹⁵ The battle of Tuscal de Velarde exposes the difference between the armies. The Spanish troops fight following traditional formation and with modern weapons—cannons and rifles—while the army led by Güemes charges the enemy full-speed on their horses at the shout of '¡Adelante, mis gauchos!' [Forward, my *gauchos*!]. What Güemes's army lacks in materiel is compensated for by the sheer courage and determination of its members. Once the chaos of the battle is over, a slow pan captures the casualties and the *gauchos*' hurried collection of the enemy's arms abandoned on the battleground. Contrasting with this silent scene, the next focuses on Güemes's victorious army as extradiegetic music by folk singer Mercedes Sosa (1935–2009) celebrates their success, highlighting that 'toda la tierra está en armas para correr al invasor' [all the land is up in arms to fight the invader].¹⁶

Güemes emphasizes that the battle for independence left no one untouched and that the general's armies were supported by an impressive collective effort. In a conversation between two Spanish generals, the participation of creole women in espionage is mentioned as well as the punishment that two female 'spies' will face for aiding the creoles' side. Indian servants are also seen as active participants in the independence effort as they pass information about military actions to other humble informants. To highlight the relevance of this cooperative work, there is an extremely long shot of a man against the background of uneven terrain relaying information that will allow Güemes to be prepared for the enemy's next move. Every contribution to the war is put in perspective: no matter how small, it is seen as valuable and important for the larger cause. The reliable network of spies working for the cause is matched by Güemes's unconventional tactics of attacking the enemy at full speed and in unexpected ambushes that surprise and disconcert them. These assaults eventually push the Spanish troops to retreat from Jujuy and Salta, giving a new victory to Güemes who cements his leadership and authority in the region when members of the town hall offer him the position of governor.

In Torre Nilsson's film, Güemes's new title comes with additional responsibilities. The most immediate is that he must demand the people of Salta to make further sacrifice and contribute so that the war against the Spanish Crown can proceed. Assuming the leadership of the area also implies abiding by more traditional urbane customs than those which the *caudillo* has used in the countryside. For instance, at the inaugural ball to celebrate his governorship, the attendees wait for the governor to start dancing. Unaware of this social convention, a richly dressed Güemes is informed by Macacha that he should invite a lady to dance. The general stands out not only because of his attire but also his impressive height, connoting his special status as a military and civilian leader. His social interactions are interrupted by two

men who previously had a property dispute to inform him that they have amicably solved their differences. This episode reveals that the governor must oversee a broad range of issues, not just the direction of the war. His duties are multiplied. He must be ready for war, but also lay the foundations for new legislation, paying attention to the area's resources and subsistence. On one occasion, when he surveys the material destruction brought by war, he renews his pledge to fight off the Spanish forces in order to restore the region's economy.

In *Güemes*, the main character's time as governor serves to show his personal life. He finally has the opportunity to meet his Spanish brother-in-law Román (José Vides Bautista). He also encounters Carmen Puch (Gabriella Gili), a blond-haired, blue-eyed young woman with whom he quickly falls in love. Güemes's proposal to Carmen is similar in tone to his acceptance of the governorship: he lists the privations and sacrifices that are part and parcel of the life of a warrior of independence. Despite their bleak future, a besotted Carmen asks him for a *patria*, a sign of her trust in his ability and also of her commitment to his mission. Several scenes later, a montage of a close-up of a baby, a shot of a pair of military boots leaving a room, and a close-up of a pensive Carmen conveys the idea that the governor has seen his baby son, but has to leave him to take command of his troops. His departure saddens his young wife, shown crying silently while she rocks their son's crib. The general's role as a father is further stressed in a subsequent scene in which he finds two orphaned boys amid the devastation caused by a Spanish raid and quickly takes them in as his soldiers. Güemes is shown as both a private and public father who looks after his people. The 'adopted sons' will reappear later, conveying valuable information to Güemes about the size of the Spanish army that has invaded Salta. The boys have been trained as spies to serve the liberation side.

Güemes's paternalism and wisdom are displayed when a new Spanish army again invades northern Argentina. The film dramatizes the events that took place in 1818 when General Pezuela is replaced by General de la Serna (José Slavin) who, recently arrived from Europe and full of bravado, announces his wish to reach Buenos Aires and thus put an end to the independence movement. Given this threat, Güemes's allies consistently harass and attack the advancing Spanish forces that, nonetheless, manage to arrive in Salta where, in a surprising turn of events, they are welcomed by the civic authorities. For Güemes, this amounts not only to a personal betrayal, but also treason against the cause of independence. In response, he orders that the population move south in an exodus and destroy the crops and all property that they cannot take with them. The film conveys that the exodus is equally painful to those who leave behind their property and their dead and to Güemes himself, who witnesses the human cost of the war. Nevertheless, his decision to displace so many proves wise when, despite the size and equipment of the Spanish troops, the invaders find themselves besieged inside Salta without provisions. Unable to survive, they

must retreat to the north without having fought a single battle, an indisputable psychological triumph for Güemes.

The creoles' achievement is short-lived, however. Once the Spanish leave Salta, Güemes returns as governor with the intention of creating an army— independent from the national authorities—that would eliminate once and for all any risk of future Spanish invasion. To this end, he instructs all able-bodied men to enlist, a decision that is met with some resistance as the local population is impoverished after years of ferocious hostilities that have caused great loss of human life and greatly damaged the local economy. The pockets of opposition finally close in on the general: one night, while he visits his sister, he is surrounded by Spanish forces. In a repetition of the opening scene, Güemes realizes that he has been betrayed when a small detachment of the Spanish army ambushes him. Wounded, he manages to ride away from the disloyal city. His commitment to the cause of independence is shown when, despite his agony, he rejects an offer to switch sides in exchange for medical attention, in effect signing his death certificate and making himself a sacrificial victim. As Gálvez explains, 'fue el único general que se sacrificó y murió peleando por la libertad de su tierra' [he was the only general who sacrificed himself and died fighting for the freedom of his land] (2007, 14). This chronological analysis of the film will now be complemented by an examination of two aforementioned axes which show the creative liberties taken by the scriptwriters and the film director.

The Role of Women in the Fight for Independence

One of the innovations of *Güemes* is its staging of the independence process in northern Argentina as a comprehensive endeavor supported by the brave work of several prominent *criollas*. Reviews of *El santo* had criticized Torre Nilsson for the characterization of San Martín's wife as submissive and traditional. The director and his writing team seem to have taken this critique to heart and radically changed their approach to the representation of women in *Güemes*, in which women of all classes are seen to participate in all aspects of the fight for independence. Some gather information about Spanish troops to pass along to Güemes and his allies, while others cook. The film shows that collaborating with the war effort made them vulnerable. Two captured 'spies' receive the harsh punishment of 200 lashes. While this chastisement is not shown, in another scene, a woman tied to posts dies of injuries sustained at the hands of the Spanish, who suspected her of collaborating with the independence movement. Other women help the cause by following Güemes's orders to migrate, even though in doing so, they must uproot their lives and face poverty. Thus, women are seen as agents who take part in the revolutionary movement as well as victims of the war.

Of the women presented in *Güemes*, two deserve particular attention: Juana Azurduy (1780–1862) and Macacha Güemes.¹⁷ Juana was married to the guerrilla Manuel Ascencio Padilla (1774–1816). Both were educated

creoles—Juana was a former nun and Manuel was a landowner—living in what is now Bolivia and who joined the independence process in 1809. From 1811, they had been part of the Auxiliary Army of the North and received orders from General Belgrano. According to Mónica Martín, Azurduy's casting was decided unexpectedly. Torre Nilsson had hired singer Mercedes Sosa to perform two of the film's songs, but 'su rostro indígena le despertó tantas resonancias que sobre el pucho ordenó *A Mercedes además la quiero de actriz. Tiene que ser Juana Azurduy*' [her indigenous face awoke in him so many resonances that he decided on the spot that 'I want Mercedes as an actress, too. She has to be Juana Azurduy'] (1993, 210). While one can detect a certain historical guilt in the filmmaker's decision to present an ethnic Azurduy, Sosa was, in the early 1970s, the face of the *nueva canción latinoamericana* [new Latin American song], a popular trend of performers including Jorge Cafrune (1937–1978) and Violeta Parra (1917–1967).¹⁸ A very popular singer since her discovery in 1965, Sosa was a representative of 'deep Argentina,' that is to say, the marginalized north. Consequently, her inclusion may have also been a way to attract a wider public as folk music was popular (Feijoó and Nari, 1996, 11).

Although Azurduy only appears in a few short scenes, her role is significant, demonstrating leadership and courage. In the first scene, she proposes to attack a Spanish battalion at nightfall, but her husband Manuel (Armando Yapura) disagrees, saying that the men will do a better job if they sleep longer. The small army of *gauchos* led by Azurduy and her husband are betrayed and attacked, proving Azurduy's gut feeling to have been correct. She is seen valiantly fighting with a sword, but Manuel is killed and his head mounted on a pike. Juana then commands the *gauchos* to rescue it. In the film, she lovingly kisses it and supervises Manuel's burial. In her final scene, Juana is dressed in military uniform and is decorated by General Güemes. Illa Carrillo Rodríguez rightly notes that

In this sequence, Azurduy appears as a resilient woman whose entry into the political brotherhood of the embryonic Patria entails donning the sartorial symbols of quintessential (military) masculinity and sublimating 'feminine,' private emotions—the pain for her husbands and children's deaths—into a masculinist, patriotic ethos of courage (2014, 240).

Slightly canted and reverse shots of the military leaders are used in the scene in which Güemes addresses Azurduy as Lieutenant Colonel, officially recognizing her merits and presenting her as a crucial part of the independence army.

Another strong female character is Macacha Güemes. Early in the film, she is seen riding with her brother and, later the same day, leaving an upper-class ball given for another party in which the popular classes celebrate. These signs of transgression prefigure others: even though she is a staunch supporter of independence, she marries a Spaniard. Marriage and motherhood, however, do not stop her wandering across enemy lines and involving herself in revolutionary activities. First, she visits her brother, unchaperoned,



Güemes with Macacha.

in Tucumán to report the disparaging rumors about him that are circulating in Salta.¹⁹ Later, she crosses enemy lines to pass him information about the Spanish army. In a third scene, she rides at night to report to Güemes about the retreat of de la Cerna's troops even though she is pregnant and not feeling well. Macacha acts as her brother's eyes and ears when he is not present and complements his work. Like her brother, she relates to the locals, helps the poor, and cheers up and encourages wounded soldiers. Her diverse roles speak to adaptability and service on the home front. Her riding alone and crossing enemy lines, her initiative to gather and relay information, and her words in favor of the liberation all contribute to characterizing her as being as firmly committed to the independence cause as her brother. However, in one scene, when she displays too much resourcefulness, her brother reminds her of the need to obey his orders and continue with her not-very-glamorous-yet-essential tasks of taking care of the injured, feeding the children (future soldiers and/or citizens), and mending the *gauchos'* ponchos. These traditional female chores are considered by Güemes to be essential to the war effort and remind viewers that the fighting affects everyone: not only the soldiers who participate in the battles, but also the wider community, those who nurse the wounded, bury the dead, and help reprovision the troops.

Macacha is also located at the intersection of several privileged groups. Her upper-class education in Salta and her marriage to a Spaniard provide her with access to both the authorities who favor independence and the royalists. In one scene, she is introduced to the Spanish general de la Cerna, who notices

her discomfort when she hears him disparage the creole revolutionaries. Nonetheless, he is eager to make her acquaintance and even attempts to flirt with her before rebuking her for being the sister of a traitor. Macacha holds her ground and reminds him that she is the wife of a Spanish citizen. This scene is significant for two reasons. First, it exposes some of the prejudices that the real Macacha must have endured in her 'privileged' life while also living for years under the domination of Spanish troops during the successive invasions that Salta underwent. Second, it establishes her privileged position as a conduit for communication between both sides. When General de la Cerna later realizes that in anticipation of his and his army's arrival, the locals have destroyed crops and water supplies and killed their cattle, he remembers Macacha's husband and calls him to take a letter to Güemes. Consequently, Macacha serves as a much-needed liaison between adversaries.

Macacha's main contribution, then, is her ability to cross borders, which gives her an unusually broad perspective. As discussed above, she is seen participating in the social life of both the upper and lower classes, and preferring the latter. Later, she appears in the countryside among poor children, and also next to her brother at the inaugural gala. When he inquires why the ball has not begun, she is the one who answers him. All of these scenes demonstrate that she is at ease in many different *milieus*. Her freedom to mingle enriches this character, who is portrayed not only as fully informed about all aspects of the process of independence, but also as an autonomous female. Twice in the film, she acknowledges her husband's consent and support, which provides her with an uncommon degree of autonomy, and places her always in physical and mental proximity to her brother. I will return shortly to Macacha and Güemes's close relationship, but now I proceed with the examination of another important role played by Macacha.

In *Güemes*, Macacha is also intercessor between the *caudillo* and Carmen Puch (Gabriela Gili). One day, while riding with her brother, Macacha follows his gaze as he briefly sees a young lady dressed all in white. She is aware of his interest and tells him that Carmen admires him. The subsequent scene shows the two women walking by a riverside being surprised by Güemes's arrival. A point of view shot closes in on Carmen's adorable face: with blue eyes and blond hair, she looks angelic. The next scene shows Güemes and Carmen enjoying a picnic during which he proposes, mentioning the tumultuous times in which they are living. They are later seen dancing as if to indicate that they have married. The brevity of these scenes (they last less than two minutes) suggests that the fight for self-determination overshadowed the founding father's personal life. When Carmen next reappears, she is shown for mere seconds with their first-born son. She will again be seen fleetingly when, years later, Güemes plays with his two sons, closing the depiction of his family life in the film. Her short screen time responds to the conventions of the war film noted by John Belton: 'Women pose a variety of threats to men in war films. The mere appearance of a wife onscreen introduces an emotional element that is often realized in terms of the man's vulnerability'

(2012, 200). Carmen's presence is kept to a minimum to avoid affecting the founding father's dedication to his fight for freedom. Carmen's domesticity offers a stark contrast with Juana Azurduy. Curiously, the scenes of Juana's decoration and Carmen rocking the crib are juxtaposed as if to emphasize the multiple roles of women during the wars of independence. They are both also represented as ethnically different: Carmen is a white, upper-class creole while Juana is a dark-skinned warrior, conveying differences in strength and socially imposed roles.

A Martyred Hero

The second axis that informs *Güemes* is the main character's agony. Güemes's injury frames the depiction of his life, from the first scene and featuring in one of the concluding ones. Güemes's enemies wound him, debunking his reputation as an invincible warrior. Nevertheless, in his final days, he shows his undiminished mental strength and commitment to the cause of liberation. He orders that he be moved by his faithful men to a safer location. Even in unbearable pain, he is aware of his surroundings and those who are by his side until his final minutes. For instance, when he realizes that Dr. Castellanos (Rodolfo Brindisi) is attending him, he remembers that the doctor is to be married that day. He then asks why his usual doctor—Redhead—has not been called and his men hesitate to admit that he was unreachable given that the royalists have taken control of the area.²⁰ This news disappoints Güemes, who declares that this is the eighth invasion suffered by Salta.

In *Güemes*, the *caudillo's* pain parallels the continued incursions endured by his province. Earlier, I mentioned that a facet of the leader's identity is his love for his native land, a topic on which I shall elaborate further here. His affection for the land extends not only to the rough landscape, but also its fauna—especially the horses—and inhabitants, both his upper-class peers and his humbler neighbors. This connection is found in the cult of the Pachamama practiced in Salta as well as in other Andean areas, which stresses that 'all human beings are connected to the soil' (Matthews-Salazar, 2006, 71). The Güemes-land symbiosis is also exemplified when the leader decries the economic consequences that years of war have had on his region. The film's circularity stresses the never-ending Spanish raids. Therefore, because of Güemes's strong rapport with the land, the bullet that penetrates his body could be construed as an allegory of the Spanish infiltration of northern Argentina. If the founding father is weakened by an injury, so too are Salta and its population every time they face a new Spanish invasion. Yet the land is also personified in the spirit of the *gauchos*, who descend from the same mother earth as Güemes. These brothers share the same determination to keep on fighting the Spanish enemy.

Inextricably linked to fighting until the end, another of Güemes's identity traits highlighted in the film is his willingness to sacrifice himself for the cause of liberation. Scholar Cornell West defines identity in relation to death



Güemes in his final hours.

and explains that 'it is because we have, given our inevitable extinction, to come up with a way of endowing ourselves with significance' (1992, 2). As *Güemes* shows, it is the goal of liberating the *patria* that gives direction to the general's life and it is this goal that is postponed when a critically injured Güemes learns that the Spanish have again occupied the city of Salta. He laments, 'Otra invasión ... ¿no se cansarán nunca los desgraciados? Llevan roída esta provincia hasta el esqueleto' [Another invasion ... Will these wretches never get tired? They have gnawed this province to the bone]. In these lines, the province of Salta appears personified and degraded by Spanish exploitation, a matter that concerns the general even on his deathbed. In a key scene, he asks Macacha to deliver news of San Martín's advances. His sister replies, 'si son buenas' [if they are good], to which a hopeful Güemes replies, 'tienen que serlo' [they have to be]. He also spurs his sister not to give up, a command that he also delivers to his men. As the general gradually loses consciousness, a potent voice-over speaks of 'toda la tierra en armas' [the whole land up in arms] in which men and women are united to expel the invaders who oppress them and their land. Güemes's demise injects the film and his deeds with a sense of direction. Mónica Silveira Cyrino holds that 'In the modern epic film, the hero must be sacrificed not just to protect his family and friends but also to liberate his entire society and to restore his people's endangered freedom' (2011, 32). In *Güemes* the death of the hero stands as a powerful challenge to his society and his people to continue his fight and free themselves from the Spanish armies.

The film's ending also affects the characterization of this biopic about a martyred hero. Bingham holds that 'biopic's audiences expect results—artwork painted, songs written, battles won, scientific breakthrough made—in short, accomplishments that justify the film's production' (2010a, 46). But in *Güemes*, the dying general admits, 'No puedo descansar. No he hecho nada todavía. No estuve con Belgrano ni en Tucumán ni en Salta. No estuve ni el Vilcapugio ni en Ayohuma' [I cannot rest. I have not done anything yet. I was not with Belgrano either in Tucumán or in Salta. I was not in Vilcapugio or Ayohuma]. These words, however, leave out his numerous accomplishments of arming and successfully leading his *gaucho* militias for years. In addition, his patriotic virtue revolves around his contribution to a pre-national cause, that is to say, supporting the organization of the former Viceroyalty of the River Plate into a political unit with a constitution. Therefore, if as Bingham holds, 'the classical biopic is about values and endorsement—a free pass to the cultural pantheon' (2010a, 53), *Güemes* exposes the admirable deeds that make the *salteño* general a true founding father. Erausquin believes that his portrayal in the film is unconvincing, although she does note the character's qualities of integrity, courage, honesty, leadership, and charisma (2008, 168). Most of these qualities are evident in the leader's final hours when he rejects two offers of medical attention and endures a painful death.

While the film highlights the general's self-effacement, it also shows his transcendence. In his final moments, Torre Nilsson's *Güemes* asks that his death not be announced. These words suggest a humility that has surpassed the general's life and shaped the historical memory about his role in the formation of Argentina. Contemporary historians such as Colmenares and Gálvez concur that *Güemes*'s actions were first acknowledged by Bartolomé Mitre (1821–1906), a liberal statesman, who wrote the initial histories about the Argentine founding fathers. Yet in the late twentieth century and early decades of the twenty-first, *Güemes*'s importance remains unfamiliar to most Argentines (Colmenares, 1998, 326; Gálvez, 2007, 15). I have found no documentation suggesting that Torre Nilsson chose *Güemes* as his subject because 1971 was the sesquicentennial of his death. However, several publications about the *salteño* general coincided with the film's release, such as *Historia de Güemes* by Atilio Cornejo, which first appeared in 1946 and was reprinted in 1971, as was *La gloria de Güemes* by Martín Figueroa *Güemes*, first published in 1955. In addition, Jacinto Yaben's *Los capitanes de Güemes* was published in 1971, and between 1971 and 1972, the last three volumes of *Güemes*'s life written by Bernardo Frías were finally published—the first three tomes having appeared in 1902, 1907, and 1911 respectively (Colmenares, 1998, 8–9). Thus, Torre Nilsson's film could be seen as part of a broader campaign of dissemination of the *salteño* leader's achievements.

Besides portraying and celebrating the general's courageous deeds, *Güemes* also projects the founding father's mission as one that has lived on after his death. The film's voice-over foretells a whole land up in arms that will rise to fight against oppression. By casting respected actor Alfredo Alcón, who had

played San Martín, and by framing the general's death as that of a martyred hero, Torre Nilsson elevated Güemes to his rightful place in the pantheon of Argentine founding fathers. The final voice-over appeals to the community, to the anonymous and suffering faces of men, women, and children, boosting their morale to fight against present and future oppressors. So far I have addressed *Güemes*'s two organizational axes: the role of women in the struggle for independence and Güemes's martyred status, but what remains to be seen is the way in which these axes sought to make connection with Argentine audiences of the 1970s.

Güemes attests to an epochal trend that highlighted Argentine women's contributions to the nation-building process and to national culture. Sociologists Feijoó and Nari explain that during the 1960s, middle-class women succeeded in attaining freedoms that were not available to previous generations of Argentine women (1996, 8). If Argentine women were more visible in both previously male-dominated professions and more traditional ones, their public roles were part of wider societal changes. Feijoó and Nari also state that 'the expansion of public opportunities for women in politics, education, and work can be understood in the context of the mobilization and radicalization of Argentine society as a whole' (1996, 12). These changes were accompanied by women's participation in cultural production. In 1969, historian Félix Luna (1925–2009) teamed up with composer Ariel Ramírez (1921–2010) to produce a cantata entitled 'Mujeres argentinas' (Feijoó and Nari, 1996, 11). Sung by Mercedes Sosa, the cantata is a set of eight pieces that honor and celebrate eight prominent Argentine women, from nineteenth-century militia leader Juana Azurduy to twentieth-century poetess and educator Alfonsina Storni. Two years later, in *Güemes*, women are portrayed from home-bound Carmen Puch to openly militant Juana Azurduy, with a mid-point represented by Macacha. By featuring and commemorating women who took part in the independence movement, *Güemes* presents an inclusive view of the nation-building process. Macacha's roles in the private and public sphere are stressed throughout the film.²¹ Norma Aleandro's performance imbues this character with both strength and sensibility.²² As I have argued before, Macacha's courageous participation in the independence movement put her on equal footing with her brother, as recognized in her nicknames 'madrecita de los pobres' [mother of the poor] and 'ministra sin cartera' [minister without a position]. Thus, as a maternal and public figure, Macacha embodied a positive role model for Argentine women in the early 1970s. Moreover, *Güemes* also depicts those unnamed women who took part in the independence process. From the humble Indian house servant to the upper-class *criolla*, the film captures multi-class female involvement in the fight for independence. While most women did not participate in battles, they were involved in the gathering of intelligence and the provisioning of troops. As the film also shows, siding with the independence forces could earn them harsh punishment, albeit less severe than that imposed on men (the firing squad). The presentation of women as active participants in the

process of liberation also frames that conflict as one of basic rights: men and women fought together to reclaim their freedom from the shackles of Spanish colonialism. In this regard, the nineteenth-century women depicted in the film could be considered pioneers for the female political militants of the late 1960s/early 1970s, who faced the relegation of topics related to gender equality in the prioritization of national liberation.²³

Closely related to women's participation, another axis (Güemes's brotherhood with the *gauchos*), which I develop elsewhere, proves a fruitful avenue for the exploration of the sociopolitical issues of Argentine society in the early 1970s.²⁴ On the one hand, the idea of brotherhood could have been deployed to strengthen the military establishment and Onganía's relationship with his brother in arms, other generals. Here it is important to consider Tzvi Tal's opinion of *Güemes*: 'La versión de Torre Nilsson expresaba las preferencias de los generales, que se proponían permanecer en el sillón presidencial por un tiempo indefinido' [Torre Nilsson's version conveys the preferences of the generals who put themselves forward to sit in the presidential chair for an indefinite period of time] (2005, 175). This statement, however, does not take into account the fact that the Argentine army was divided into Reds and Blues from the late 1950s. Moreover, between the end of 1970 and January 1971—when the film was written and produced—Onganía's political control had come to an end. A downturn in the economy and heightened armed violence at the hands of the guerrillas led to his being replaced by General Marcelo Levingston.²⁵ On the other hand, the idea of brotherhood could have appealed to the leftist guerrilla militants. According to historian David Rock, 'The Montoneros sought to exploit history for political purposes. Their own crude versions of historical revisionism contained a much stronger emphasis on the role of the "masses"' (1987, 218). Thus, the idea of brotherhood could also have been deployed to attract leftist militants, notably the Montoneros, whose name was taken from the nineteenth-century federalist cavalry militia, the *montoneras*.²⁶ Whereas the term *montoneras* does not refer only to Güemes's armies, they certainly were a precursor of those from which the leftist militants adopted the name. In addition, Rock explains that the Montoneros valued strong leadership: 'Among the great historical heroes of the Montoneros was José Artigas, the leader of the independent struggle in Uruguay. In [*El Descamisado*] Montonero publications depicted Artigas as the patriarchal landowner who was the 'defender of the poor' (1987, 219). Like Artigas, Güemes was also a defender of the underprivileged *gauchos*, a trait that may have endeared the northern general to Argentine leftist militants.

Nonetheless, the representation of a close rapport between the general and his *gauchos* seen in *Güemes* precedes the tumultuous 1970s. Here it is crucial to remember that the film is an adaptation of a play written by Juan Carlos Dávalos, which was first performed in 1926 and first published in 1935. Dávalos was not only a fellow *salteño* but also, and more importantly, a descendent of Güemes. As such, he sought to exalt the heroic deeds of both the most prominent *salteño* general and the people of Salta, an intention that

has led Marcela Sosa to assert that in the play, 'La figura circular de los gauchos reunidos en torno a su general, en el desenlace, es un símbolo de la imagen identitaria que traza de sí la cultura salteña en la que confluyen por igual historia, tradición y poesía' [The circular figure of the *gauchos* gathered around their general at the end is a symbol of the identitarian image that the *salteña* culture has of itself in which history, tradition, and poetry meet] (2003, non. pag.). Sosa's remarks also pertain to the film in that close-ups on the dead general alternate with those on the *gauchos* in the concluding scenes of the film. Besides Dávalos's influence on the cinematographic book, it is also relevant to highlight Ulises Petit de Murat's role as a scriptwriter because of his previous participation in the cinematographic book of *La guerra gaucha* and his prominent role in the film industry as a critic. For Julia Bermúdez, Petit de Murat's scripts 'resaltan las gestas, epopeyas y próceres de nuestra historia, que exaltan el coraje del gaucho y honran al ser argentino' [highlight the deeds, epics, and founding fathers of our history, which exalt the *gaucho*'s courage and honor the Argentine] (2012, 18). Petit de Murat thus glorified Argentine nationhood as a result of the fraternal union of leaders and the masses, all representatives of *argentinidad*. Brotherhood also extends to non-*salteño* viewers. As I argued earlier, Güemes was shown as part of the educated creole elite. As such, he was trained in and lived beyond his *patria chica*, an experience that must have broadened his horizons and, as illustrated in the film, allowed him to meet and socialize with fellow independence leaders, such as San Martín. As a fighter for the birth of the Argentine nation, Güemes is considered a founding father whose relevance transcends that of his area of origin and who is relevant to all Argentines.

Güemes's fight for an independent and sovereign nation resonated deeply with the leftist Peronist youth who believed that Argentina was being torn apart by its alignment with the United States and other capitalist Western nations. In the context of national liberation, they resented neocolonialist policies, as became evident in El Cordobazo. Güemes defended the northern border from Spanish advances, a strategy that could be read in the early 1970s as protecting the Argentine nation's integrity from Marxist infiltrations. It should be remembered that in 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (1928–1967) was captured and assassinated in Bolivia while leading the Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia [National Liberation Army]. Regardless of whether Argentine viewers in the 1970s were concerned about neocolonialism or Marxist infiltration, the period was one of heightened anxiety about the legitimacy of Argentina as a nation, as had been the 1820s, when after ten long years of war, the idea of a 'nation' was still a utopia. The previous parallel between Güemes and Guevara leads to the discussion of the film's second axis: the martyred hero.

The martyred hero is the quintessential sacrificial victim of war. In her article 'Sovereignty, Identity, Sacrifice,' Jean Bethke Elshtain holds that 'the death of a warrior *pro patria* was interpreted as self-sacrifice for others, a

“work of *caritas*” (1991, 550). In *Güemes*, the general’s death is framed as his ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom (when he valiantly faces the besieging Spanish forces and is wounded in the melee) and honor (when he rejects the Spanish offer of medical treatment). The hero’s death not only respects real events but also fulfills a generic requirement. As Silveira Cyrino explains, ‘it is a common strategy of the modern epic film to use this kind of polarizing “us vs them” imagery to encourage the viewing audience to identify with the chief hero figure(s)’ (2011, 26). This ‘us vs them’ imagery is deployed to show the untold effects of Güemes’s passing, most notably the *gauchos*’ orphanhood. The film captures the general in a static portraiture shot that closely resembles that of the dead Che, lying on a stretcher. Both Güemes and Guevara sport dark hair and a beard, are seen lying horizontally, and are surrounded by several people, though in Che’s case those around him are his captors. Beside the physical resemblance between leaders, their martyrdom was also inspirational for the leftist guerillas. Despite their death, Güemes and Guevara represent the triumph of the will, which, in the former’s case, appears as the command that is passed to the land and its inhabitants to continue. This determination to awaken others to fight is also a topic that may have resonated with the leftist guerrillas. As Giussani explains, the Montoneros’ revolutionary narcissism was based on heroism and martyrdom (1984, 43). In spite of these potentially subversive topics, *Güemes* did not encounter problems with censorship. In the next two chapters, I will discuss two other historical films: *Bajo el signo de la patria* and *Juan Manuel de Rosas*, which center on the representation of another national hero, Manuel Belgrano (1770–1820), and the controversial ruler Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877), respectively.

Notes

- 1 Mónica Martín hints that Leopoldo Torre Nilsson’s main motivation for making *Güemes, la tierra en armas* was the fact that he had already spent all the profits from *El santo* and needed another blockbuster to maintain his jet-set lifestyle (1993, 207).
- 2 *Güemes* concludes a trilogy of films concerned with the nineteenth-century foundational Argentine past.
- 3 On June 9, 2016, the Argentine Senate approved a law to commemorate Güemes’s death with a national holiday to be celebrated every June 17 (Sued, 2016, non. pag.).
- 4 According to Marcela Sosa, Homero Manzi and Ulises Petit de Murat planned to adapt Davalos’s *La tierra en armas* for the cinema in 1941, but the project fell through (2003, non. pag.).
- 5 *La guerra gaucha* was wildly successful (Thompson, 2014, 124). It won three Silver Condors: Best Director, Best Film, and Best Screenplay (for Homero Manzi and Ulises Petit de Murat).
- 6 The film’s producer was Torre Nilsson’s brother-in-law, Juan Carlos Ciancaglini.

- 7 Estela Erausquin explains that the costumes worn by Norma Aleandro also demanded a great deal of attention (2008, 167).
- 8 Norma Aleandro and Alfredo Alcón were a real-life couple for four years, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.
- 9 She had participated the year before in *Los herederos* (David Stivel, 1970), which she also co-wrote. This film had a mixed reception abroad but the same cast had good ratings in the TV program *Cosa juzgada* (1968).
- 10 I address a third axis in my article 'La representación de un líder popular: Güemes, la tierra en armas.'
- 11 Both Luis Colmenares and Lucía Gálvez describe how during the English invasions, Güemes took part in seizing an English ship, the first such seizure effected by riders (Colmenares, 1998, 20; Gálvez, 2007, 45).
- 12 Martín's education seemingly gave him the skills to manage his provinces' accounts (Colmenares, 1998, 19).
- 13 According to Colmenares, because Güemes had been promoted while on the field, he needed to validate his rank in the Army Joint Staff (Colmenares, 1998, 49).
- 14 Gálvez claims that Güemes became sentimentally involved with Juana Inguanzo, the wife of one of the *caudillo*'s subordinates (2007, 73–78). In the film, this character is shown only briefly and her name is not mentioned, so few spectators would be aware of the nature or extent of Güemes's transgression.
- 15 By 1818, Güemes had an army of 6,610 men, and organized the Command in Chief, artillery, and cavalry. In addition, the army had a gun powder and bullet factory, a hospital, and a tailor's shop (Colmenares, 1998, 99).
- 16 Historian Aníbal Aguirre Saravia sees Güemes as 'el símbolo de toda una provincia que se levanta contar el invasor español aun poniendo en peligro sus intereses económicos' [the symbol of a whole province that rises against the Spanish invader, even jeopardizing their own economic interests] ('Martín Güemes,' 1970, 82).
- 17 Both are mentioned by Barrancos (2007, 85–86).
- 18 In the late 1960s, Mercedes Sosa was admired by young people and intellectuals (Braceli, 2003, 131).
- 19 Barrancos holds that women were accompanied in public, a custom that was maintained well into the twentieth century (2007, 71).
- 20 The true cause of Redhead's unavailability was that he was traveling with Belgrano, who was sick.
- 21 In 1995, one of the main streets in the bourgeois area of Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires was renamed in her honor. There is also a Centro Cultural Macacha Güemes in the city of Escobar, Gran Buenos Aires. In 2011, Ana María Cabrera published a historical novel entitled *Macacha Güemes*.
- 22 While not a star proper, her work in television, theater, and cinema—as an actress in the popular *La fiaca* (Fernando Ayala, 1969) and as script-writer for *Los herederos* (David Stivel, 1970)—marked her as an independent and resourceful woman, qualities that she displays in her interpretation of Macacha. Today, Norma Aleandro is considered the Great Dame of Argentine cinema. She starred in Argentina's first Academy Award winning

film, *La historia oficial* [*The Official Story*] (Luis Puenzo, 1983) and in the Academy Award nominated *El hijo de la novia* [*Son of the Bride*] (Juan José Campanella, 2001).

- 23 Feijoó and Nari state that ‘While the image of a combative, loose haired Evita Perón was being developed—eventually to evolve into the image of the Montonera Evita—with enormous success among militant women, the specific gender component of her struggle was being neutralized’ (1996, 21).
- 24 See my article ‘La representación de un líder popular: *Güemes, la tierra en armas*.’
- 25 Pablo Giusani refers to the army’s division: ‘Después del Cordobazo, sin embargo, comenzó a cobrar insistencia en el seno del ejército argentino una corriente militar liberal que, con Aramburu como figura alternativa, se fue distanciando de Onganía en busca de una apertura política’ [After El Cordobazo, however, a liberal military group began to rise within the Argentine army and, with Aramburu as an alternative, started distancing itself from Onganía in search of political change] (1984, 33).
- 26 The word can refer both to *montón* (crowd) or *montados* (mounted).

Bajo el signo de la patria

The success of Torre Nilsson's historical films inspired other filmmakers to tackle the depiction of key Argentine figures. In the late 1960s, actor-director René Múgica (1909–1998) was approached by retired general Alberto Lorenzo, a liaison of Brigadier González Filgueiras, chairman of the Instituto Nacional Belgraniano [National Belgranian Institute] (INB).¹ González Filgueiras wanted to make a film to celebrate the bicentennial of Manuel Belgrano's birth but time restraints meant that it was not possible. Nonetheless, Múgica continued with the project of making a film of the founding father's life. Manuel Belgrano (1770–1820) was an economist, lawyer, leader in the war of independence, and the designer the Argentine flag. In an article from June 1971, five Argentine historians offered positive views of him. Ernesto Fitte, winner of the National Award of History in 1967, characterized Belgrano as 'uno de los personajes más limpios de nuestra historia' [one of the most spotless characters in our history] (Sainz German, 1971, 80). Historian Félix Luna (1925–2009) concurred: 'Buena imagen la de Belgrano. Nadie ha hablado mal de Belgrano; se le habrán criticado algunas decisiones, algunas actitudes, pero nunca se lo enjuició negativamente' [Belgrano's image is good. Nobody has talked badly of Belgrano; some of his decisions and attitudes may have been criticized, but nobody ever has judged him negatively] (Saenz Germain, 1971, 81). A well-respected patriot in the Argentine independence process, Belgrano took part in military campaigns in Paraguay and in northern Argentina, spreading revolutionary ideas against Spanish domination.

Belgrano experienced setbacks in his first armed campaigns. Historian Enrique de Gandía (1906–2000), the first president of the INB, mentioned that Belgrano was aware of his limitations when he wrote to a friend: '¿A qué nos hemos de engañar? ¿De dónde ni cómo había de ser yo un general?' [Why deceive ourselves? Where and how was I to be a general?] (Saenz German, 1971, 80). Belgrano's vulnerability and frankness were precisely the traits that Múgica considered most appealing about the founding father: 'siempre me fascinó ese general resistido por sus compañeros, frágil de salud, pero capaz de encabezar una carga y derrotar, a puro coraje, ejércitos más numerosos

y disciplinados que el suyo' [he always fascinated me, this general who was resisted by his fellowmen, in fragile health, but able to lead a charge and vanquish, with courage alone, armies with more men and discipline than his own] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 44). These characteristics are evident in *Bajo el signo de la patria* (henceforth *Bajo el signo*), which focuses on his leadership of the Army of the North in the early 1810s, when he faced health problems and a lack of the resources needed for military success.

Bajo el signo's production entailed serious preparations. The film's script was written by Múgica and Isaac Aisemberg (1918–1997), whose participation was questioned because 'un judío no podía escribir sobre la patria y la bandera' [a Jew could not write about the homeland and the flag] (Peña, 2003, 188). Despite these objections, Aisemberg wrote the cinematographic book, but signed it with the pen name Ismael Montaña.² He relied on traditional historical sources, such as Bartolomé Mitre's *Historia de Belgrano*, originally published in 1887, and the memoirs of José María Paz (1791–1854) and Gregorio Aráoz de Lamadrid (1795–1857), both prominent veterans of the wars of independence. Jonathan Stubbs notes that preproduction research is a means to assert the legitimacy of a project (2013, 34). In addition, a report during production stated that 'mostrar estos hechos con absoluta fidelidad se ha transformado en febril obsesión del equipo' [showing these facts with absolute faithfulness has become the team's obsession] ('Filme,' 1970, non. pag.). Lastly, the initial credits acknowledged the support of the INB, lending authenticity to the portrayal of Belgrano's campaign. The contribution of the Argentine army and the provinces in which the film was set was also recognized. The shoot began in December 1970 in Campo de Mayo, Buenos Aires, and also Salta and Jujuy, where the crew encountered several challenges, such as bad weather and the logistics of working with numerous extras (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 43). Like Torre Nilsson's historical films, *Bajo el signo* also included a large cast of both professional and non-professional actors.³ *La prensa* announced that the film would feature 2,500 soldiers and 700 horses, with a budget of approximately 180 million pesos ('Filme,' 1970, non. pag.). Ignacio Quirós's (1931–1999) performance as Belgrano was noteworthy: 'al decir de su equipo técnico, su trabajo es uno de los más logrados de su carrera de actor' [according to (the film's) technical team, it is one of the most accomplished of his acting career] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 44). Other professional actors were Enrique Liporace, Héctor Pellegrini, and Leonor Benedetto. The final scenes were recorded in mid-March 1971 and the film was released two months later, on May 20, 1971, in the Monumental movie theatre in Buenos Aires.⁴ Produced by Mundialcine and classified by the NIC as 'of mandatory exhibition,' *Bajo el signo's* premiere was preceded by a promotional campaign: in March 1971, *Gente* proclaimed its forthcoming release in a report with numerous images despite setbacks, such as climatic problems and loss of equipment (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 43).⁵ Even though the film had a quick postproduction, it enjoyed a warm reception from the public and critics alike.

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El Gral.
MANUEL BELGRANO
 interpretado
 magistralmente por
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BAJO EL SIGNO DE LA PATRIA

en EASTMANCOLOR

Dirección:
RENE MUGICA

Estreno 20 de Mayo en los cines **MONUMENTAL** - PUEYRREDON - ROCA - ARGOS
 GRAN SAVOY - MAJESTIC - FENIX - LOPE DE VEGA - BUEN ORDEN - RIALTO - EL NILO - ODEON - ALBERDI
 AUTOCINE AEREO TODO - SARMIENTO (Villa Ballester) - ATENEO (San Martín) - OCEAN (Santos Lugares) - REX (Lanús)
 PALACIO DEL CINE (Lanús) - GRAN LOMAS (Lomas de Zamora) - GRAN SUD (Temperley) - GRAN ADROGUE (Adrogué)
 SAN MARTÍN (Burraco) - RIVADAVIA (Quilmes) - BANFIELD (Banfield) - SAN MARTÍN (Ramos Mejía) - REX (Haedo)
 SAN MARTÍN (Mordón) - GRAN ITUZAINGO (Ituzaingó) - GRAN MERLO (Merlo) - URQUIZA (Caseros) - MITRE (Avellaneda)
 OCEAN (Mordón) - GRAN ITUZAINGO (Ituzaingó) - REGINA (Munro) - SUPER (Boulogne) - AVENIDA (Vicente López)
 SARANDI (Sarandí) - PUEYRREDON (Wilhe) - VIRREYES (Virreyes) - DELTA (Tigre) - MONUMENTAL (Moreno)
 BRISTOL (Martínez) - CALIFORNIA (Beccar) - OPERA (Mar del Plata) - GRAN RINCA (La Plata) - OCEAN (Barracas)

Promotional ad *El heraldo*.

Bajo el signo generated excitement and great expectations.⁶ *El heraldo del cine* rated it 9/10 for commercial appeal and 7/10 for artistic interest, highlighting that 'es un retrato emotivo, patriótico' [it's a touching and patriotic portrayal] (1971, 282). For M.R.S., Múgica's greatest accomplishment was his natural

portrayal of Belgrano, bringing the hero closer to the audience ('Bajo,' 1971, 282). The reviewer for *La prensa* praised the film, referring to it as an 'encomiable muestra de cine argentino' [laudable example of Argentine cinema], and mentioned the audience's boisterous clapping ('Bajo,' 1971, non. pag.). For *Clarín*, *Bajo el signo* strove to be 'un espectáculo entretenido que interese por sí mismo, aparte de lo que signifique en cuanto a evocación histórica' [an entertaining spectacle that is interesting in itself besides what it means as an historical evocation]. Despite these positive critical reviews and its popularity, the film was neither nominated for any award nor did it enjoy significant box office success (Erausquin, 2008, 123).

Bajo el signo is the object of mixed opinions among film scholars. On the one hand, Fernando Peña characterizes it as 'un film que evita toda tentación triunfalista y simplificadora' [a film that avoids all triumphalist and simplified temptation] (2003, 191). On the other, Erausquin sees it as propaganda for the Onganía regime: 'Con la consciente complicidad del director (René Múgica) o no, el film debió servir al gobierno de Onganía para representar la honra militar y el amor a la patria, mostrando la simbiosis perfecta de religión y espíritu marcial' [Whether the director (René Múgica) was fully complicit or not, the film had to serve Onganía's government by representing military honor and love of the homeland, displaying the perfect symbiosis of religion and martial honor] (2008, 115). This comment ignores the historical fact that Onganía had been deposed in May 1970, months before the shoot even started. While it is true that *Bajo el signo* insists on the religious aspect—perhaps as a strategy to please the Catholic members of the boards in charge of evaluating it and approving its release—its depiction of the military is far from complimentary and unproblematic. The first scenes show an army devoid of discipline, organization, and drive, a message that may have been hard to swallow for General Levingston (term of office June 1970–March 1971) and General Lanusse (term of office March 1971–May 1973). Nonetheless, this background allows the crucial participation of Belgrano, whose figure, as Radetich has rightly points out, develops *in crescendo* (2006, 62).

In *Bajo el signo*, Múgica attempted to distance himself from Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's recent blockbusters: *Güemes* (1971), his second historical film, was released a month before *Bajo el signo*. In an interview, Múgica stated, 'Si bien esta película es de las llamadas "históricas," es decir, con un fuerte contenido épico, los personajes no son esquemáticos, acartonados' [Even though this film is one of the so-called 'historic' genre, that is to say, it has a strong epic content, the characters are not schematic or stuffy] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 45). With this statement, Múgica highlighted how his film differed from Torre Nilsson's *El santo*, which was criticized for providing a 'bronze-like' interpretation of San Martín, that is to say, stressing his qualities as a stoic hero and downplaying his human attributes. Despite Múgica's comments, Erausquin disagrees, stating that in *Bajo el signo*: 'Al director solo le interesa la figura del héroe como ejemplo de jefe, que organiza y lleva finalmente al triunfo a su tropa y a todo el pueblo con

él' [The director is only interested in the figure of the hero as an example of a leader who organizes and ultimately leads his troops and all the people with them to success] (2008, 116). Erausquin's views stress the similarities in the representation of the founding fathers: the will of a driven leader and the homage paid to his humble followers. Múgica admitted that his representation of Belgrano was constrained by two facts: 'esta película va a ser exhibida en las escuelas primarias de todo el país y no queremos dar una imagen negativa de Belgrano o del país en esos años' [this film will be exhibited in elementary schools across the whole country and we do not want to present a negative interpretation of Belgrano or the country in those years] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 44). The filmmaker's words are particularly interesting in that they reveal his intention to attract a broad audience by highlighting Belgrano's achievements and a positive image of the nascent Argentina. There are, however, two remarkable differences that distinguish *Bajo el signo* from Torre Nilsson's historical films. First, while Torre Nilsson represented only historical characters, Múgica incorporated several fictional ones (Colonel Bedoya, Lieutenant Lucero, Juana Azurmendi, and Zaldivar de Frías) as a way to emphasize the implications of the war of independence. Second, and related to these fictional characters, *Bajo el signo* can be considered an anti-war historical film that is, nonetheless, also a powerful epic. I first present an overview of the film and then analyze these innovations.

Bajo el signo

Bajo el signo covers Belgrano's participation in the Army of the North during several months in 1812 and early 1813.⁷ By 1812, the process of independence, which had begun in 1810, was slow, even experiencing some major military hold-ups, such as the relentless movement south of the Spanish forces and the subsequent retreat of patriotic armies from Jujuy. In *Bajo el signo*, poorly provisioned and disciplined patriotic troops are seen waiting for the arrival of General Belgrano (Ignacio Quirós). Some militia men call him 'doctorcito metido a general' [a little lawyer playing at being a general] as they are aware of the difficulties he encountered in his previous mission in Paraguay.⁸ This contempt for the newly appointed leader extends to general Juan Manuel de Pueyrredón (Rodolfo Machado), who sends General José María Paz (Martín Adjemian) to meet him on his behalf. Contrasting with Pueyrredón's fitness, the first shots of Belgrano show him drowsing in a carriage and accompanied by his doctor, whose presence alludes to his poor health. Moreover, the general's dark clothes are covered with dust, presenting him devoid of affectation and suffering the usual discomforts of those traveling by carriage at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, conscious of the importance of appearances, Belgrano decides to ride his horse to perform the expected role of an army general. His effort, however, does not afford him the recognition of the welcoming platoon as a slow pan of the men shows them to be unenthusiastic, with ripped and dirty uniforms.

In *Bajo el signo*, Belgrano faces several challenges. One is to make do with minimal financial support. Before leaving, Pueyrredón briefs his peer on the low-quality and infrequent food, the poor state of the arms, and the overall unpreparedness of the soldiers. Belgrano's second challenge involves asserting his leadership among men with more military experience. Even though Erausquin states that 'desde el comienzo, el héroe aparece con las virtudes propias de un jefe, un general que impone respeto y va a lograr que lo sigan debido a la fuerza de su ejemplo y a su habilidad de persuasión' [from the beginning, the hero displays the virtues of a chief, a general who imposes respect and whose men will follow him due to the strength of his example and his persuasive skills] (2008, 117), the men whom Belgrano has to lead consider him an outsider due to his education and profession. Given their lack of respect for his rank, he quickly reminds them that he was appointed by the Buenos Aires authorities and emphasizes that they should follow his orders. While he encourages his closest officials to make recommendations, he also urges them to invent what they lack and gives them specific instructions to establish a new camp, seeking to renew their commitment to ending the Spanish forces' dominance.⁹ Thus, he literally and figuratively puts the army in motion.

Throughout the film, Belgrano's identity and affiliation are frequently tested.¹⁰ His military failure in Paraguay casts his new mission in the north as one that will also probably be doomed. In addition, in an encounter with a *gaucho* leader, his *porteño* diction and lighter complexion force him to clarify that because of his mother's place of birth, he is half *santiagoense* [from the province of Santiago], a regional affiliation that immediately wins him his interlocutor's trust. He then mentions the multiple origins of his men and the shared idea that drives them: 'peleamos para que esta tierra sea libre' [we fight so that this land will be free]. In another scene, when the Bishop of Salta accuses him and his men of being heretics who defend the principles of the French Revolution, Belgrano forcefully asserts his identity as a practicing Catholic.¹¹ Even among his men, he has to explain his orders, issued by the Triumvirate to retreat to Córdoba, instead of fighting the Spanish enemy.¹² Nonetheless, he grows with each successive challenge that comes his way. He goes from a sick and lonely leader to one who gets to know his men and earns their respect and support. He is also shown as a pious Catholic, a strong defender of education, and the creator of the national flag.

Because *Bajo el signo* shows Belgrano not only as a general, but also as a true founder of the Argentine nation, the film has elements of a biographical picture or biopic. Belgrano's entry into the cultural pantheon begins with his coming of age as a military leader and a statesman in 1812, when he achieved an unexpected, remarkable success. His central role gives important clues about his thoughts and intentions. For instance, twice he expresses concern about not having seen any schools in the many leagues that his army has traversed. His interest in the education of the future citizens complements the building of the nation, initially undertaken by the army. As Erausquin

notes, 'A Belgrano le importaban los símbolos y la educación cívica' [Belgrano was interested in symbols and civic education] (2008, 118). This characterization as an organizer of the upcoming Argentine nation places him in the group of 'idols of production,' a term coined by Leo Lowenthal to refer to captains of industry, the military, and other members of conventional ruling elites (quoted in Custen, 1992, 33). The notion of 'idols of production' aptly describes Belgrano as one of Argentina's founding fathers, that is to say, as a producer of an independent nation.

Bajo el signo is also a war film, albeit a non-traditional one. Dana Polan notes that the war film is 'a construction rather than a direct and innocent expression of a national will about war' (2004, 54). In *Bajo el signo*, Belgrano's development as a military leader exposes the war of independence as a construction, an endeavor that has to be continuously promoted. He takes over the Army of the North at a low point and must rekindle the vision of political freedom that will only be possible if the colonial armies are defeated. This rationale reveals the logic of the war but, alongside Belgrano, several fictional characters help provide a panoramic view of the human cost of this armed conflict. *Bajo el signo* challenges the use of military action, particularly through the fictional characters.

The Cost of War

Bajo el signo is an anti-war film. James Chapman defines this type of film as 'one that expresses, through either its content or its form, the idea of war as a moral tragedy and a waste of human lives' (2008, 117). From the outset, Múgica's film depicts the implications of a bloody and cruel struggle. An opening pan shows several corpses scattered across a desert-like landscape as the soundtrack conveys doom and neglect through repetitive, haunting drums. Low storm clouds deprive the area of light, stressing the notion of a forsaken territory, which encourages viewers to consider the region's importance and contributions to the war of independence. Despite the fact that *Bajo el signo* captures the brutality of armed conflict, the shots seemingly change as the film begins. A close-up of two dark faces belonging to natives in the army contrasts with the blazing sun. These soldiers silently witness several conscripts, who have been found guilty of desertion, being summarily shot. Other shots display the troops' worn and torn uniforms, their mismatched or improvised shoes, and their overall demoralization, evident in the fact that they leave their arms unattended as they nap during the day. Patriotic soldiers and officials appear thirsty and many complain about the heat, calling attention to the oppressive conditions of the area and the discomforts of their deployment. These initial scenes provide an opportunity for Manuel Dorrego (Néstor Zembrini) to criticize the troops' quality, implying that they are resistant to discipline. When Lieutenant Colonel Cornelio Zelaya (Enrique Liporace) interrupts a game of cards, it becomes clear that the rank and file of the Army of the North lacks discipline. *Bajo el signo* also reveals divisions

among military leaders. Some, like Francisco Fernández de la Cruz (Ricardo Passano Jr.), adhere to military discipline and codes of conduct, even though they resent that this means they must shoot deserters; others, like Dorrego, fraternize with the troops and are more laid-back. Despite these differences, the dismal state of the army is quickly set right by Belgrano's leadership.

Bajo el signo presents the general's multiple tasks as a military leader. He must not only swiftly address the lack of weapons, food, and trained troops but also, and more importantly, he must awake the collective will to fight a war necessary to free the territory from colonizers. One of his first instructions regards reprovisioning, which imposes a burden on both friend and foe. In one scene, Colonel Bustos (Juan Carlos Lamas) turns up at a rural wedding with the order to requisition cattle. His arrival interrupts the joyful and carefree dances of the humble couple and their guests. The home owner, Nemesio Luna (Tito Rinaldi), first implies that the colonel is trespassing; then he agrees to 'donate' some cattle to the independence cause as he talks about his neighbor's sons who enlisted in the patriotic armies and died far from their native land. He calls them *changos* [youth], and Bustos replies that, as they died fighting for their homeland, they were not youth but true men. This statement reflects that participating in combat is a dangerous rite of passage. In another scene, Colonel Zelaya arrives at the house of a wealthy Spaniard who loudly objects to the requisition, calling it 'pillage' and labeling the military men sent to carry it out 'seditious.' When he makes the *faux pas* of mentioning his close association with the Spanish general Goyeneche and offers to bribe them, Zelaya orders him shot, an action that takes place off-screen.

These incidents involving those who support and oppose the independence movement set the stage for a discussion about the emerging nation. During a break in their march, Belgrano's men describe the feelings of the population: first, they were exploited by the Spaniards and now they are equally oppressed by the patriots. Some declare that shooting 'enemies' is not the way to gain supporters for their cause. Thus, the issue of how the patriotic forces should distinguish themselves from the royalist oppressors constitutes an opportunity to consider the identity and qualities for which the patriots are fighting. This conversation allows Belgrano to hear different views and to make explicit his loyalty to the shared homeland: 'Hemos nacido en esta tierra. Esta es nuestra tierra. Nuestro país' [We were born in this land. This is our land. This is our country]. These assertions, which demonstrate his patriotic pride and attachment to the land, are linked to the reasons for war listed by Burgoyne: 'the desire for affiliation, for recognition of death, being willing to die for that identity, or being willing to kill others for it' (2004, 66). Another important feature of the emerging nation that appears in *Bajo el signo* is Catholicism. At one point, Belgrano learns that his cause and men are portrayed as heretical. In one crucial scene, he faces the Bishop of Salta during a mass, making a public statement about his Catholic faith and emphatically ordering that Spanish sympathizers who resort to calling

the patriots heretics be shot without hesitation. Despite these challenges, the peak of the general's mission occurs when he bears the Argentine flag on horseback during the celebrations of the second anniversary of the revolutionary break from Spain on May 25. The flag is the first potent symbol to distinguish patriots from colonial masters. More importantly, the flag serves as a sign of unity, a first element of the nation that will be forged by the war of independence.

Bajo el signo deploys many of the semantic elements of the war film. The first is training and preparation for combat. Belgrano tirelessly focuses on the various matters necessary to succeed in combat. He directs one man to spy on the Spanish enemy, assigns another one to draw maps, and delegates the training of men to veteran officials.¹³ He also entrusts his loyal doctor (Redhead) with the task of putting together a military hospital and discusses the need for military tribunals with an experienced official so that men are properly heard when facing an accusation. In addition, he observes Baron Holmberg (Reinaldo Mompel), the Triumvirate's specialist in weaponry, and motivates the men in the infantry and artillery to be the best they can be. Another element of the war film is the existence of opposing armies that meet in numerous battles. *Bajo el signo* slowly builds to the climax of these confrontations, highlighting the cruelty of the Spanish forces on two occasions. The first takes place when Colonel Bedoya (Aldo Mayo) is captured and tied to a stake. When he refuses to betray the coordinates of the patriotic armies, the Spanish general orders that he be tortured. As Bedoya attempts to flee, he is shot, a lesser evil than being viciously tormented. On another occasion, Lieutenant Lucero is wounded and apprehended. Also tied to a stake, he dies without receiving medical care. On the other hand, when Belgrano's men capture a high-ranking Spanish official, the Spanish general Pío Tristán (Ariel Absalon) sends his counterpart a letter and money, asking for humane treatment of the official. Belgrano returns the money, requesting a respectful handling of the many prisoners taken by the Spanish forces. These episodes display the brutality of the Spanish and the patriots' honorable conduct. When both armies finally meet on the battlefield, the patriotic forces exhibit courage and the discipline instilled by their vigorous training. The only scene that deals with the shooting of an enemy comes when a traitor blows up the patriot's arsenal. Even when the patriots achieve a victory, Belgrano chooses to confiscate arms, instead of shooting the enemy troops.

The third element of war films evident in *Bajo el signo* is attention to the rapport between members of the same army. While Belgrano's leadership raises some doubts at first, soon his discipline and comprehensive approach, and his ability to lead by example, win his men over. The general's demeanor also changes, having been stern he becomes more relaxed. He begins by showing concern for his men's well-being: when he sends men to scout and draw maps, he asks them to be careful. In one scene, an official asks him for a leave of absence to visit friends; at first he rejects the request, but then he sees the opportunity for the officer to gather intelligence, a reassignment of



Belgrano entering church with Argentine flag.

his duties which makes the leave grantable. For this mission, he also orders a civilian recruit, Zaldivar de Frías (Mario Lozano), a father of five boys, to act as the officer's detail so that the latter may visit his family. An episode that tests Belgrano's management and his relationships with his closest aides occurs in the last third of the film. Ordered to retreat south, he realizes that he is leaving behind people who supported the patriotic effort and who would become targets of Spanish retribution. Consequently, he instructs the locals to harvest their crops, get their cattle together, and move south where they can be protected. This decision, which contravenes the orders from Buenos Aires, is fully supported by the same officials who were skeptical of his abilities at the film's outset, showing the trust that the leader has earned among his officers.

In *Bajo el signo*, fictional characters provide a complementary view of the destruction caused by war. One of these characters is Juana Azurmendi (Leonor Benedetto), the daughter of a Spanish general. She first meets young Colonel Zelaya at a social event. Despite his seductive attempt to count her as a patriotic supporter, she remains faithful to King Ferdinand VII. Once Belgrano and the Army of the North arrive in the city of Jujuy, the general has nightmares and orders that Juana be expelled from the patriots' territory. The

film shows her being accompanied to an inhospitable no man's land where she must fend for herself. Juana manages to find the Spanish troops but, considered a volatile supporter, she is given few comforts. Strolling around the camp at night, she discovers the injured Lieutenant Lucero and gives him water before he dies. The inhumane treatment for the prisoner pushes her to flee from the Spanish base and take the news of Lucero's death to the patriotic side. Her help is deemed so important to the subsequent patriotic victory that Belgrano personally apologizes for her treatment and, because of her social connections, enlists her as a spy when Jujuy city is reoccupied by the Spanish.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Juana's patriotic sympathies become known to the Spanish, resulting, in the film's final scenes, in her execution. This fictional female character, who displays some degree of agency, appears as an innovation when compared to Remedios's traditional role in Torres Nilsson's *El santo*, showing that women also took part in aspects of the war of independence and became victims. Her shooting without trial takes place immediately after Belgrano makes a noble gesture to the defeated Spanish general, emphasizing the vindictiveness of the imperialists.

Several other fictional characters are also casualties of the war. Two of these are colonel Bedoya and Lieutenant Lucero, the first men whom Belgrano sent to spy on the enemy. Both die heroically without betraying information about the patriotic army. These losses appear to teach the general about the perils of the area to which he was assigned and the human cost of his men's death. The other fatalities are children. Zaldivar de Frías is a fictional resident of the city of Jujuy who has left his wife and sons to join the patriotic forces. The enthusiastic and good-humored Frías is motivated to fight for liberation to ensure his family's safety. When he finds out that his whole family has been caught in a fierce battle and perished, he asks for leave, but Belgrano tells him about the risks associated with returning to a land occupied by Spanish troops and emphasizes his belonging to the 'national' family. Because these casualties of war not only included enlisted men but also women and children, *Bajo el signo* presents armed conflict, even that of national liberation, as an endeavor with great human cost. The deaths of Azurmendi, Bedoya, and Lucero stress the tragedy of losing characters endowed with strong moral values. The annihilation of Zaldivar de Frías's family further adds the senseless killing of children, future citizens of the nation-to-be. Consequently, *Bajo el signo* appears to be an anti-war film.

Despite (or because of) *Bajo el signo's* depiction of the evils of war, the film also has elements of the epic. As an epic of national emergence, the film first highlights the formation of horizontal bonds of fraternity among the men in the Army of the North, whether they are enlisted soldiers or *gaucho* militia men. A key scene is one in which Nemesio Luna and his *gauchos* decide to join the Army of the North and Belgrano commands Colonel Juan Ramón Balcarce (Hugo Múgica) to make room for them among his troops. The general later follows up on their training and Balcarce informs him that the new recruits are courageous fighters. The smooth integration of civilians

into the army speaks to a fraternity under the shared goal of liberation from the Spanish enemy. In this way, Múgica's film appears to be an epic film that 'evokes a different kind of imagined community, a sense of collective affiliation and powerful emotion once collected to homeland and heritage' (Burgoyne, 2011, 7). In *Bajo el signo*, the idea of a collective identity is supported by ties with the land and Catholicism.

Religion plays a prominent role in Múgica's film. When Belgrano decides to move the population of Jujuy who had faithfully supported his army south, he is inspired by the biblical exodus, associated with both destruction and renewal. The exodus conjures up the search for the Promised Land and the general appears as a military Moses. Indeed, Belgrano's instruction implies that people of all ages and walks of life will have to move, some on foot, carrying their possessions in a slow and weary march, punctuated by accidents and perils that convey the sense of defeat and melancholy for what is left behind. Belgrano, however, is shown as a hands-on hero, helping people who fall from horses, carrying children, and even getting his uniform wet.¹⁵ When a platoon is ordered to delay the Spanish troops' advance, the fighting is conducted street by street. Nonetheless, the most important showdown between the Spanish army and the Army of the North comes in a spectacular battle in which the patriotic artillery and infantry defeat the Spaniards. Historian Giménez explains that 'el triunfo de Las Piedras en nada evitaba el avance español: apenas era una escaramuza exitosa de más valor moral que militar' [the victory of Las Piedras in no way prevented the Spanish's progress: it was merely a successful skirmish of greater value for morale than military] (1999, 511). Despite this assertion, the skirmish marks a change in the film's and army's mood: from flight, Belgrano's men pass to the offensive, exposing the results of their hard training and arduous preparations. More crucially, this encounter gives the patriots the confidence to disregard orders from Buenos Aires to avoid confronting the Spanish in another battle. In this new theater of war, Belgrano's daring troops beat the enemy again. The film thus traces the swift development of the patriotic army under the command of the general who instructed it in such a way that it achieved a considerable victory over the better-equipped and more professional Spanish army.

The film's ending emphasizes the epic struggle between liberators and oppressors. In this regard, Burgoyne states that 'the epic film may be read against the grain as a counter imperial genre' (2011, 90). The arrogant Spanish general Tristan writes that he is stationed in Campo Grande [Big Field], while Belgrano describes his location as Campo Chico [Small Field], a contrast that evinces the latter's humility. After the triumph in Tucumán, Belgrano is offered a promotion, which he declines, giving due credit to his men: 'la victoria ha sido obra de mis capitanes' [victory has been achieved thanks to my captains]. With this acknowledgment, he downplays his own role and brings to the fore the courageous deeds of nameless soldiers.¹⁶ The general is also offered money, which he accepts only in order to build schools,

stating that the revolution must be made with ideas as well as bayonets. Consequently, his vision appears to go beyond the day-to-day survival imposed by a military campaign, extending to the foundation of a nation. Here it is important to consider what Silveira Cyrino holds to be the role of the epic: ‘to rouse audience affect with stirring narratives of “freedom” and gritty but highly romanticized warrior settings, while proposing modern paradigms of national identity set against the backdrop of the historical past’ (2011, 32). Consideration of national identity at the time of the film’s release leads us to ask in which ways *Bajo el signo* contributes to shoring up *argentinidad* in the early 1970s. More specifically, which ideologies—leftist or conservative, if any—is the film promoting?

Bajo el signo and Argentina in the 1970s

Like *El santo* and *Güemes*, *Bajo el signo* sought to overcome the division of the late 1960s and early 1970s by presenting a positive portrayal of a founding father. The Belgrano who appears in the film is infused with both the authority to run the army and delegate tasks and the vulnerability of being a leader who is given few material means to carry out his mission. Thus, he constantly needs to improvise, learn, and troubleshoot in an unknown territory—both geographical and professional, as he is not a career officer. Because he manages to overcome the constraints imposed by a precarious situation and shows critical thinking when he assesses orders from his superiors, he seems progressive and nuanced. Given his emphasis on the nation’s future, the national flag, and education, he is presented as a unifying figure. Far from being depicted as a radical warrior, he displays empathy and compassion for both his men and those he takes prisoner. Shown as strict at first, he later comes in a paternal way to value his men and the people entrusted to his protection.

Where Belgrano’s representation is favorable, some of the military leaders who fought for independence are presented in a different light. One of these is Juan Martín de Pueyrredón (1777–1850), who refuses to go to welcome his replacement personally, showing some jealousy. Another historical figure that is desacralized is Manuel Dorrego (1787–1828), who is depicted as easygoing and not fully aware of the plight of the army. Colonel Eustaquio Díaz Vélez (Roberto Airaldi), an experienced war veteran, constantly challenges Belgrano’s orders: he is satisfied with the poor state of the troops and reacts negatively to the general’s instructions. Hence, *Bajo el signo* presents a view of some of Argentina’s most prominent men as far from perfect military men. The film’s engagement with the most pressing contemporary issues of the 1970s pivots around the representation of war.

Unlike *El santo*, which does not challenge the need for war, *Bajo el signo* shows it as carnage, albeit necessary to build a better society. The former is evident both in the tense preludes to confrontations which present corpses of past battles and the shooting of deserters and traitors, and men dying

from injuries sustained in combat. In addition, after the final battle, pans over the casualties of war also reinforce the message of bloodshed. Belgrano decries the spilling of so much Latin American blood when he offers his rival a capitulation. The film advances the notion that even if war is needed to secure the nation's foundation, it has a steep human cost, a message that may have been directed at those engaged in the armed guerrillas in the 1970s. Nonetheless, the film could also be interpreted as positing that war leads to renewal and liberation. Talking about films shot during the Second World War, Paul Virilio holds that 'these films were made into veritable "war paintings" whose task was to imbue audiences with fresh energy, to wrench them out of apathy in the face of danger or distress, to overcome that wide-scale demoralization which was so feared by generals and statesmen alike' (1989, 13). Múgica's film can be understood as a war painting that sought to inspire Argentine citizens to take action. Also acknowledging, like Torre Nilsson's films, that at its inception Argentina lacked crucial resources to aspire to nationhood, *Bajo el signo* proposes that those deficiencies could be overcome by the right kind of leadership and determination. Belgrano—like San Martín in *El santo*—knows that he and his army are being given minimal funds, but he remains undaunted by the task ahead of him and relies on his wits. He has the ability to organize, prioritize, and mobilize men, giving them concrete missions and goals. Erausquin holds that

Al mostrar los valores del héroe militar, su capacidad de liderazgo, por un lado, su patriotismo, y su honradez por el otro, se aseguraban las subvenciones y el triunfo de taquilla. Se combinó así el afán de lucro con la imagen que las Fuerzas Armadas querían dar de sí mismas.

[In showing the qualities of the military hero, his ability to lead on the one hand, and his patriotism and honesty on the other, the loans for the film and its success at the box office were ensured. Consequently, the interest in commercial success was combined with the image that the armed forces wanted to give of themselves] (2008, 125)

This view ignores the fact that Belgrano was not a career officer and thus was not a 'true' representative of the armed forces. His centrality in the film may, however, be read as a justification of the rise of a strongman, but if that is the case, *Bajo el signo* seems to have opted to support neither Perón nor the army generals who ruled in the early 1970s.

Perhaps the most salient issue is the film's Catholicism. As mentioned earlier, scriptwriter Aisemberg was identified as Jewish and deemed unqualified to write about one of Argentina's founding fathers. Apparently to appease censors, scenes showing Belgrano's Catholic faith and his devotion to the Virgin of Carmen, patron saint of the army, were included. The film's depiction of Church members encompasses those who supported royalists, such as the Bishop of Salta, and those who sided with the patriots, such as the priest who blesses a church. This mixed and antagonistic position mirrors

the divisions experienced by the Catholic Church in the 1970s, when some priests joined left-wing organizations, such as the Movement of Priests for the Third World, while others sided with the more conservative elements of Argentine society. Nonetheless, the film does not abound in images of the clergy's ideological positions. What is certainly stressed is the fact that in the 1810s, the word of the Bishop of Salta carried great weight among different social classes and his assertion that patriots were heretics met with Belgrano's unambiguous clarification of his own religious beliefs and those of his men. *Bajo el signo* also reveals the way in which the founding father's beliefs were translated into action: the general is seen praying before the battle of Tucumán. After this victory and very moved, Belgrano publicly pays his respects to the Virgin. Given the repeated images of his religiosity, it could be surmised that the war of independence was a new crusade.

Bajo el signo, however, pays lip service to several other important issues in the 1970s. One of these is the economy. Besides the commentary on the lack of military uniforms and supplies, Múgica's film does not present details of the financial impact of war on the regional economies, other than showing the implications of requisitions and the hardships of the exodus. Like *El santo* and *Güemes*, which openly celebrated regional contributions to the war of independence (the Cuyo area in *El santo* and Salta in *Güemes*), *Bajo el signo* credits Jujuy and Tucumán with the army's achievements under Belgrano's command. Nevertheless, the film does not display the general's concern with passing measures that would mitigate the effects of the war as he actually did. Another issue that appears problematic is the role of two fictional female characters. A devout Catholic, Josefa Zaldívar de Frias (Gloria Leyland) is a traditional wife and mother. She is seen in four brief scenes in the purely domestic roles of wife and mother. Her death occurs as a result of her search for one of her sons who had stayed behind in a city occupied by Spanish troops. She is shot, along with her boys, becoming yet another sacrificial victim. The other female character is Juana Azurmendi, who courageously switches sympathies to become an ally of the Army of the North. In the scene in which Belgrano thanks her for passing a message from the soon-to-be dead Lucero which gives him his first victory, she does not utter a single word. Her quiet acceptance contrasts with the first scene when she holds her ideological position with grace and aplomb. Hence, Belgrano silences her at the very moment when he entrusts this figure with the mission of spying for the patriotic army, suggesting that she can be useful—but without being heard. Juana's independent stance and her work on behalf of the patriotic cause lead to her death, an outcome that may appear to be cautionary for women active in Argentine politics in the 1970s.

The film's depiction of scarcity at the moment of the nation's foundation stresses an 'Argentine' feature which, in turn, constitutes a reflection on Argentine cinema. In the early nineteenth century, creating a new independent nation without adequate financial support was a formidable task. In the late 1960s, the goal of resisting neocolonization was an equally

impressive objective given Argentina's dependency on foreign markets and the global order's demand for its participation in world affairs. In addition, lower-middle-class Argentine citizens still needed the state's support as they had under the governments of Perón (1945–1952 and 1952–1955). Just like Perón, Belgrano's paternalism in *Bajo el signo* seems to favor the protection of the weakest. On the other hand, his ability to train troops and achieve military victories despite the scarcity of assets could be compared with the filmmaker's role of producing a film with scant resources. This self-congratulatory reading similarly corresponds to Torre Nilsson's historical films. Here it should be remembered that Múgica's and Torre Nilsson's early 1960s films were greeted with critical praise but not enthusiastically received by local audiences. Consequently, in their historical films about crisis at the outset of the nation, both directors may have traced parallels between their film's main characters and themselves. The 'epic' accomplishments of fighting for freedom and improvising corresponded to their own role of making films in Argentina, an industry that since the 1950s had lost relevance for the local public and whose investments, even when considerable, were not on a par with those of Hollywood.

In the next and last chapter, I conclude the examination of historical films with a close analysis of Manuel Antín's *Juan Manuel de Rosas*, a film which, because of its ideology, departs significantly from the three analyzed so far. Nonetheless, its content engages head-on with issues of nationhood and Argentine identity.

Notes

- 1 The Instituto Nacional Belgraniano [National Belgranian Institute], founded in 1944, is in charge of preserving the memory of General Belgrano.
- 2 Aisemberg means 'mountain of steel' and in the Bible, Isaac was Ismael's brother (Peña, 2003, 188).
- 3 According to Erasquin, the army lent 300 soldiers with uniforms, 300 horses, and 16 cannons (2008, 115). A report in *Gente* mentions that 'un millar de extras, en su mayoría santiagueños, se encargaron de revivir aquellas jornadas en que la patria era joven' [a thousand extras, mostly from Santiago, were responsible for bringing back to life those days when the homeland was young] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 44).
- 4 René Múgica took part in several *gauchesque* films in the 1940s, such as *El cura gaucho* [The Gaucho Priest] (Lucas Demare, 1941), *La guerra gaucha* (Lucas Demare, 1942), and *¡Gaucho!* (Leopoldo Torres Ríos, 1942). He directed several films in the early 1960s, such as *El centroforward murió al amanecer* [The Center Forward Died at Dawn] (1961), which was nominated for the Palm D'Or at Cannes, *El hombre de la esquina rosada* [The Man of the Pink Corner] (1962), and *El reñidero* [The Pit] (1965), also nominated for the Palm d'Or at Cannes. Nonetheless, from 1966, when he directed *La buena vida* [The Good Life], there was a hiatus in his directorial endeavors until he worked on *Bajo el signo de la patria*, which was also the last film he

- directed. Asked about the difference between *Bajo el signo* and his previous films, Múgica replied: 'Mire, yo pasé cinco años sin filmar porque no tenía ofertas que me convencieran. No económicamente sino desde el punto de vista artístico. Esta vez, di en el clavo, encontré el personaje' [Look, I spent five years without making a film because I had no proposals that were appealing. Not financially, but rather from the artistic point of view. This time, I was lucky, I found the character] (Giménez Zapiola, 1971, 45).
- 5 Laura Radetich notes that Múgica experienced less pressure and censorship than was suffered by Torre Nilsson (2006, 63).
 - 6 Erasquin explains 'Se puede observar que el filme consigue mucha publicidad antes del estreno. Todos los periódicos lo mencionan' [You can see that the film received a lot of publicity before its release. All the newspapers mentioned it] (2008, 115).
 - 7 Ovidio Giménez cites a letter from Belgrano who, upon learning of his appointment as commander of the Army of the North, wrote to the Triumvirate expressing his lack of knowledge of the area to which he had been reassigned and stressing his commitment to the cause of the homeland's freedom (1999, 500–501).
 - 8 Ignacio Quirós (1931–1999) starred in TV programs in the late 1960s.
 - 9 Giménez holds that Belgrano's 'autoridad era severa, pero ajustada a la más estricta justicia, creando un verdadero espíritu militar' [authority was harsh, but set to the strictest justice, creating a true military spirit] (1999, 503).
 - 10 Erasquin has another reading of Belgrano: 'El héroe aparece como un militar excepcional, sobre todo por su carisma' [The hero appears as an exceptional military man, above all because of his charisma] (2008, 119).
 - 11 In the scene in which Belgrano challenges the Bishop of Salta, Múgica makes a daring move. Erasquin explains: 'en la época en la que se exhibe la película toda posible crítica a la jerarquía eclesiástica no podía ser aceptada, aun cuando fuera puesta en boca de un gran patriota como Belgrano' [at the time the film was shown, no criticism of the ecclesiastic hierarchy could be accepted, even through the mouth of a great patriot like Belgrano] (2008, 122).
 - 12 Radetich notes that 'a los gobernantes porteños no se los pone en pantalla sino a través de emisarios' [the Buenos Aires authorities are not seen on-screen except through their representatives] (2006, 62).
 - 13 Erasquin states that 'el film se insiste sobre todo en su interés por la educación de los soldados' [the film insists on his interest in the soldiers' formation] (2008, 118).
 - 14 Radetich mentions that 'Belgrano queda ligado a la presencia de una mujer realista' [Belgrano remains linked to the presence of a realist woman] (2006, 62), but this character displays a huge admiration for the general.
 - 15 Giménez details the founding father's activities during the exodus: 'Belgrano todo lo atendía en una tarea agotadora, pero no desfallecía. Organizaba cuerpos, señalaba rutas, indicaba funciones, exaltaba emociones dando grandiosidad al sacrificio que exigía a la población toda de Jujuy' [Belgrano attended to everything in a grueling duty, but he did not succumb. He organized bodies, pointed to routes, distributed chores, stimulated emotions,

bestowing grandiosity to the sacrifice that he demanded from all the people of Jujuy] (1999, 507).

16 This technique pioneers the decentering of the subject in recent cultural production about the war of independence, as noted by Carolina Cortes Pizarro (2011).

Juan Manuel de Rosas

Juan Manuel de Rosas [henceforth *Rosas*] premiered ten months after the release of *Bajo el signo*. Unlike his role in *Don Segundo Sombra*, in this film Antín was a contract director. In 1971, during the shooting of *Rosas*, he acknowledged that the idea of concentrating on this character came after making *Don Segundo Sombra*. In a different interview, Antín declared that inspiration for the project came in 1970 when reading American historian Myron Burgin and his Canadian counterpart H.S. Ferns (Saenz Germain, 1971, 24). He then approached historian José María Rosa in October 1970 to invite him to participate in the writing of the screenplay because he wanted to count on the support of a renowned scholar and he admired his passion ('Para Antín,' 1971, non. pag.). Antín clarified that the script was finalized after its sixth version: 'estudiamos las posibilidades industriales del proyecto y reunimos lo necesario para emprenderlo con una sana y tranquila producción' [We studied the commercial possibilities of the project and gathered the funds necessary for a healthy and smooth production] ('Para Antín,' 1971, non. pag.). Such an efficient process would make sense everywhere except in Argentina, where funds for film production and audience research have not been widely used. In recent years, Antín's statements about the film have changed. In conversation with Sández, he stated that he was approached by Diego Muñiz Barreto (1934–1977), an upper-class nationalist who went from being an anti-Peronist and working in a technical position under Onganía's regime to joining the Montoneros and financing the 1973 Peronist campaign.¹ According to Antín, Muñiz Barreto, the film's executive producer, wanted 'una película ideológica y estridente en la época de Lanusse' [an ideological and polemical film in the Lanusse period] (Sández, 2010, 92). To achieve this, he chose Rosas (1793–1877), whom historian Hebe Clementi has characterized as the 'figura más controvertida' [most controversial figure] (1970, 7) of Argentine history. As a teenager, Rosas took part in the defense of Buenos Aires against the British invasions. He later worked in his family's *estancias* in close proximity with the *gauchos* whom he would recruit to guard Buenos Aires from the Federalists in 1820. When Unitarian Juan Lavalle (1797–1841) seized Manuel Dorrego (1787–1828) and

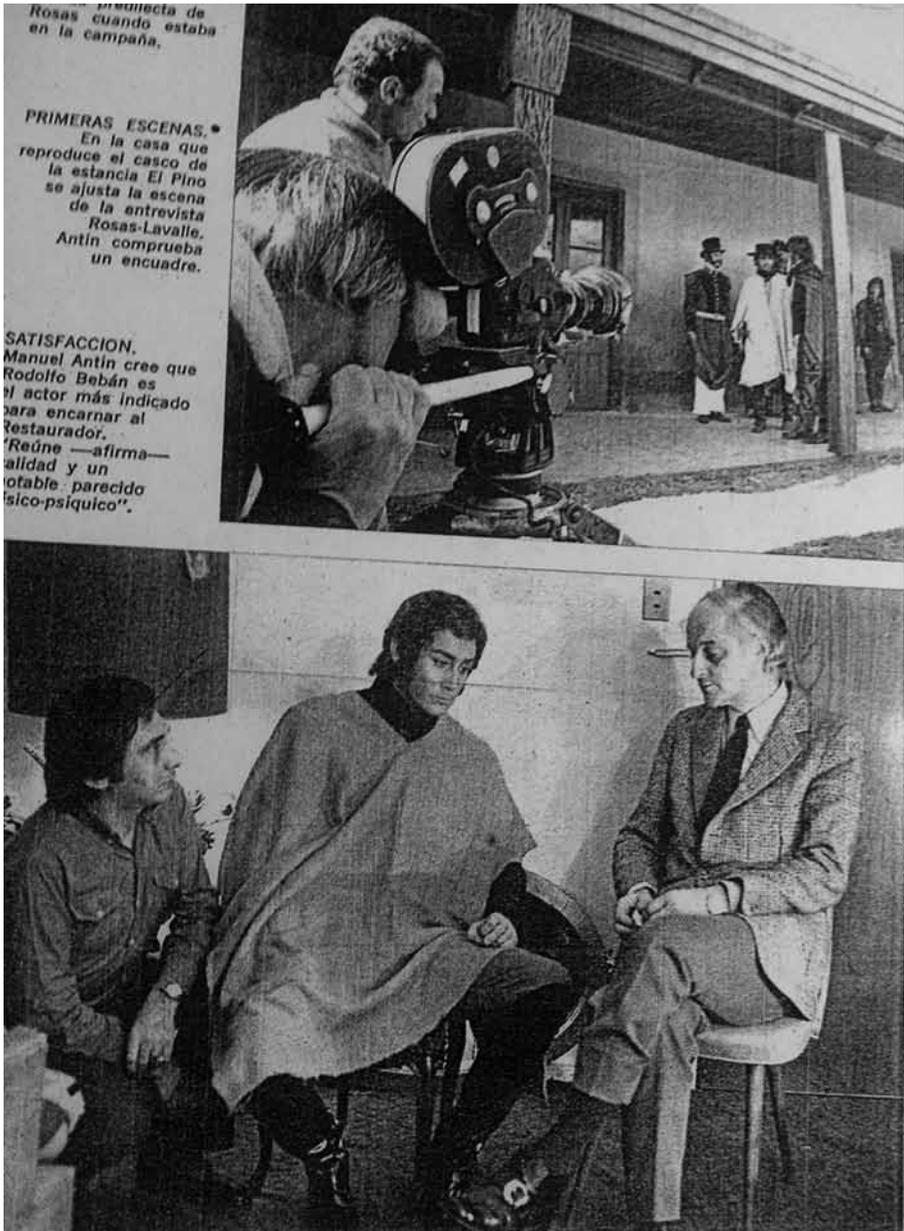
ordered him shot, Rosas became a Federalist and was elected governor of Buenos Aires with extraordinary authority. He ruled with an iron fist for more than two decades, persecuting and killing dissidents. In the 1840s, he sent an army to Uruguay that besieged the port of Montevideo, an event decried by the British and French who blockaded Buenos Aires for two and three years, respectively. Despite the fact that both nations finally ended their siege, accepting Rosas's conditions, the Restorer of Laws, as he was called, became increasingly isolated. In February 1853, when his troops were defeated in Caseros by those of Justo José Urquiza (1901–1870), he went into exile in England, where he died in 1877.

Rosas's legacy has been as polemical as his government. After the battle of Caseros, Urquiza made the passing of the national Constitution possible. In the following decades, Argentina cemented its development and established close relations with Europe, particularly France and England, initiating a period of national prosperity and growth that would last until the late 1920s. In the decades immediately following the battle of Caseros, liberal historians, such as Mitre, described Rosas as a tyrant who favored barbarism and false populism and delayed the country's political organization. Nevertheless, in the 1880s, new voices belonging to a different generation of historians, ostensibly those of father and son Vicente and Ernesto Quesada and Adolfo Saldías, began offering new interpretations about Rosas. They called attention to his handling of foreign affairs and his defense of Argentine sovereignty during a tumultuous period. This scholarly work paved the way for the creation of the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas Juan Manuel de Rosas [Juan Manuel de Rosas Institute of Historical Research] in 1939.² One of the institute's first publications stated that as 85 years had gone by since Caseros, it was high time to revisit Rosas's legacy (Clementi, 1970, 52). The research undertaken under its auspices contributed to dividing Argentine historiography between those who were more orthodox, academic, or liberal and the *revisionistas* who saw Rosas as the true founder of the Argentine nation.³ Among the latter, the work of Carlos Ibarguren (1877–1956), *Juan Manuel de Rosas, su vida, su tiempo, su drama* [Juan Manuel de Rosas, his Life, his Time, his Drama] (1930), and the five volumes of *Vida política de Juan Manuel de Rosas a través de su correspondencia* [The Political Life of Juan Manuel de Rosas through his Correspondence] (1941–1950, republished in 1970) penned by Julio Irazusta (1899–1982), initiated the reassessment of Rosas's role in the building of Argentina.⁴ Also included in that group was historian José María Rosa (1906–1991), a Peronist activist, who was exiled after the 1955 *coup*, and wrote *Historia argentina*, a revisionist interpretation published in the mid-1960s, a time in which revisionism was in *vogue* and the repatriation of Rosas's remains was once again discussed.⁵

For Antín, the Rosas project represented a sharp ideological turn from his previous film. With *Don Segundo Sombra* (1969), he had achieved national (the film won the Condor for Best Film) and international recognition (it was nominated for a Palme d'Or in Cannes). As discussed in the previous

chapter, the film's detachment from its times also drew harsh criticism from the Grupo Cine Liberación, whose members noted the film's aristocratic vision of Argentine history and decried its engagement with the pressing issues of the time. In *Rosas*, however, Antín performed a 180° turn to embrace a more 'nationalist' version of the Argentine past, not only directing the film but also working with historian Rosa in its script. This radical change has been, for the director himself, difficult to process, even decades later. In an interview with Sández, Antín admits, 'Yo ya no era yo, claro, pero no quiere decir que había pasado del día a la noche' [I was no longer myself, of course, but that does not mean that I had gone from day to night] (2010, 93). Despite this contradictory assertion, it is crucial to highlight that unlike San Martín, Belgrano, and Güemes, the subjects of the previously studied historical films, *Rosas* was a very divisive historical figure. In accordance with the growing polarization of the early 1970s, his representation no longer sought to unite and awaken the dormant energies needed for Argentina's harmonious development. Rather, *Rosas* was a film with a clear ideological position. Consequently, it is not surprising that decades later Octavio Getino, a member of the Grupo Cine Liberación, should point out that the film ostensibly displays 'una preocupación revisionista frente a la historia nacional, sin duda el mayor mérito de esa película' [a revisionist concern regarding national history, without any doubt the highest merit of this film] (Getino, 1998, 54). Some Argentines felt that the controversy surrounding *Rosas*—in the late 1960s, there were renewed talks about repatriating his remains—constituted a way to constantly look backwards, instead of focusing on the future (Mahieu, 1972, non. pag.). Precisely because of its controversial topic, the film received considerable attention.

Rosas was a costly historical film with a substantial production. Shooting began in October 1971 in Salta and Jujuy as well as Buenos Aires. Initially, it was to be titled *El señor de las Pampas* [The Lord of the Pampas]. Some of the scenes had to be shot outside Buenos Aires in San Justo, in the province of Santa Fe, because the extras did not want to wear Unitarian uniforms (Unitarians were based in Buenos Aires and were for the central power of Buenos Aires in detriment to the equal power of the inner regions) and because there were more horses available in San Justo. The film's final budget was around 180 million pesos. Like the other historical films, *Rosas* featured scenes with numerous extras. In one, for example, there were 1,200 riders dressed in historical costumes. In another, fourteen 80 centimeter-long ships were used to stage the port's blockade ('*Rosas y su época*,' 1972, non. pag.). The production also involved building a house similar to the *estancia* Los Cerrillos, *Rosas*'s family home. Stage and TV actor Rodolfo Bebán was selected for the main role: 'El rostro de Bebán se prestó a las mil maravillas para expresar los matices más complejos del alma de *Rosas*' [Bebán's face lent itself marvelously to expressing the complex nuances of *Rosas*'s soul] ('*Visión*,' 1972, non. pag.). The rest of the cast comprised other remarkable actors, such as Sergio Renán (Juan



'Rosas en el cine,' *Gente*, 2 September 1971: 25.

Lavalle), Alberto Argibay (Dorrego), Silvia Legrand (Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson), and newcomers Myriam de Ridder (Encarnación) and Teresa Barreto (Manuelita Rosas).⁶

As with the previous historical films, the promotional campaign that appeared in the press paved the way for *Rosas's* release. The film, which had the initial support of the NIC, was scheduled to begin shooting in August 1971, but when the NIC withdrew its support, Antín faced both financial and logistic problems, which hampered the project on and off throughout September and October 1971.⁷ Once these problems were solved, the local media began to follow the preproduction. *Revista Clarín* first published material on the film in October. Two months later, *La opinión* and *Radiolandia* began monthly reports about its progress. The latter reported that the shoot finished on January 9, 1972, and called Antín 'un director que no se arredra ante las empresas más osadas' [a filmmaker who does not run from the most daring projects] ('Visión,' 1972, non. pag.). In February, *La opinión* published the film's blurb and an excerpt from the script. *La nación* also reported on the forthcoming release, 'Según informes de prensa proporcionados hasta ahora, el filme ofrece una visión objetiva de la figura de Rosas y de la época evocada' [According to reports released thus far, the film provides an objective depiction of Rosas and his period] ('Rosas y su época,' 1972, non. pag.), and provided information about its production. For its part, *Crónica* called *Rosas* 'one of the most awaited films of the year' ('Esperado,' 1972, non. pag.). The day of the film's premiere, Antín described Rosas's time:

Matar al contrario si constituía un peligro eran cosas posibles desde los tiempos de Mayo. Sobre todo si el contrario está dispuesto a lo mismo. La fuerza contra la fuerza. Como en la guerra. Y el país estaba en Guerra. Contra propios y extraños.

[Killing one's opponent if he was a threat had been a possibility since the time of (the revolution of) May. Particularly if one's opponent was ready to do the same. Force against force. Just like in war. And the country was at war. Against its own and foreigners] ('Rosas,' 1972, non. pag.)

Three days after the film's release, promotional ads appeared in the most important Argentine dailies, *La nación* and *Clarín*. Both had a black background but with different messages: in the former, 'Jazmines y sangre in Palermo' [Jasmin and blood in Palermo], in the latter, 'Rosas-Manuelita: lo que nunca se pudo decir' [Rosas-Manuelita: what could not be said before].



Revista Clarín, 13 March 1972.



La nación, 13 March 1972.

Rosas, a Norma-Vigo Production, was released on March 16, 1972 in the Ocean theatre and other cinemas. It was polemical and met with the critics' disapproval because of its open revisionism. Details of the premiere were published by *Crónica*, which listed the many attendees, among them the ex-president Marcelo Levingston, the scriptwriter Rosa, and politician Arturo Jauretche (1901–1975), as well some actors and directors, such as Tato Bores and Lucas Demare. It is worth mentioning the mood of apprehension in the first showing: 'se temió mucho que se produjeran escenas de violencia' [there was great concern that the film would cause scenes of violence] ('Entre polémicas,' 1972, non. pag.) as members of the group Movimiento Juventud Federal [Federal Youth Movement] threw flyers and people booed certain scenes. Three days later, *Crónica* proclaimed:

Rosas debió ser una motivación temática para profundizar y no para enfocarla con la simplicidad de una historia de Grosso, para niños de segundo grado. Manuel Antín, cuya belleza formal y temática en 'Segundo Sombra' le ganó la admiración de la crítica, debió pensar más de una vez en la necesidad de NO hacer esta historia de Rosas que parece un magnífico envase de colorida atracción, con un gran vacío en su interior.

[Rosas should have been a thematic motivation to explore deeper, not to approach with the simplicity of a history by Grosso for second-grade children. Manuel Antín, whose formal and thematic beauty in *Segundo Sombra* won the critics' admiration, should have thought more than once about the need to NOT make this history of Rosas look like a wonderful container with colorful appeal, but a huge void on the inside] ('Rosas solo eso?', 1971, non. pag.)

The reviewer for *La nación* was more explicit in his assessment when he noted that 'contrariamente a lo que habían adelantado algunas versiones de la productora, no es objetiva ni imparcial: por el contrario se inclina manifiestamente a favor del rosismo y de la figura de Rosas' [contrary to what has been advanced in some accounts by the production company, it is neither objective nor impartial: on the contrary, it is clearly biased in favor of Rosism and the figure of Rosas] ('Fue estrenada,' 1972, non. pag.). Agustín Mahieu, who reviewed the film for *La opinión*, singled out as the main weakness its reductive nature, evident in the superficial portrayal of Rosas's prolonged years in government: 'El resultado es la veloz sucesión de episodios, cada uno de los cuales daba para un largometraje independiente' [The result is the rapid succession of episodes, every one of which could have been the subject of a feature film] ('El cine,' 1972, non. pag.). Another criticism was its declamatory style: 'Sus largos diálogos políticos con Encarnación Ezcurra resultan de una falta de naturalidad evidéntísima' [Its long dialogues with Encarnación Ezcurra are devoid of the most evident naturalism] ('Fue estrenada,' 1972, non. pag.). Similar opinions were presented by the reviewer for *Análisis*, who mentioned the poor artistic value of the film but

El pueblo la aplaude, la critica la ataca, pero ya ROSAS
 lo dijo: "LOS LEIDOS NO COMPRENDEN AL PAIS"
 Por eso el pueblo apoya la película JUAN MANUEL DE ROSAS

Ve la verdadera historia: Rosas, su mujer, Manuelita... Dorrego fusilado...
 Facundo asesinado... Lavalle combatiéndolo... mientras Francia e Inglaterra
 pretenden devorar la Argentina como a una empanada.

RODOLFO BEBAN
**JUAN MANUEL DE
 ROSAS**
 DE MANUEL ANTIN

200.500 espectadores
 en 4 días:
 la película récord!

VEALA
 USTED TAMBIEN!

SILVIA LEGRAND - JORGE BARREIRO
 SERGIO RENAN en el rol de Juan Lavalle

GRAN
 EXITO cine OCEAN LAVALLE 739
 y simultáneos

La opinión, 23 March 1972.

commended the performances of actors Bebán and Renán ('Juan Manuel,' 1972, non. pag). Finally, J.H.S. declared in *La prensa*, 'No pasa de ser una aventura proselitista, que con abundante respaldo pecuniario puede utilizar a esos fines la enorme difusión que representa el cine' [It is no more than a proselytizing adventure which, with solid financial support can deploy to its ends the huge dissemination offered by cinema] ('Juan Manuel,' 1972, non. pag.). On March 25, 1972, *Crónica* ran a short piece reporting that after the negative reviews, Antín 'decidió vengarse publicando avisos' [decided to take revenge by paying for ads] ('Criticar,' 1972, non. pag.). *Crónica* called attention to the fact that writing a film review was a different matter from judging the country's history.

As with Múgica, Antín also sought to differentiate his film from Torre Nilsson's blockbusters. When asked about the difference between them, Antín replied:

El punto de partida de ambas concepciones es diferente. Por el simple hecho de haber elegido una versión de Juan Manuel de Rosas que no

es la tradicional, yo participo—o intento hacerlo—de un hecho cultural diferente, hasta el momento, en la Argentina.⁸

[The point of departure of the two perspectives is different. Given the simple fact of choosing a version of Juan Manuel de Rosas that is not the traditional one, I take part —or at least strive to do so—in a new cultural endeavor in Argentina] ('Manuel Antín habla,' 1972, non. pag.)

The main difference between the historical films of Antín and Torre Nilsson concerned Antín's decision to represent a historical character who deeply divided Argentines. While the former strove to unite the Argentine population by subscribing to a traditional version of the past, Antín chose instead to generate a controversy that would impact the film's reception.⁹ His original approach not only showed the limits of what film critics deemed acceptable, but also presented a version of the Argentine past that was intensely politicized and corresponded to the early 1970s climate of political violence between guerrilla groups and the authorities. The account of the past that Antín selected not only stressed Rosas's stance regarding national sovereignty but also, and more importantly, the people's role in sustaining his government. As Antín explained, 'Rosas fue el primer argentino que comprendió los peligros del imperialismo y creyó en las virtudes del pueblo' [Rosas was the first Argentine who understood the dangers of imperialism and believed in the merits of the people] ('Rosas: Celuloide,' 1972, non. pag.). The emphasis on imperialism at the time of the film's release spoke to the Argentine left, which held that the country was becoming an ally of the United States by persecuting those who favored socialism or Marxism. In addition, the emphasis on the popular was a nod to Perón's followers, who were still lobbying for his return to Argentina after a long exile. Thus, it is not unexpected that Antín should declare, 'En muchos sentidos Rosas, vive; divorciado del presente pero determinándolo' [In many aspects, Rosas is alive; divorced from the present but impacting it] ('Para Antín,' 1971, non. pag.). Despite these comments, *Rosas* was a historical film that dialogued with subjects that were important in the early 1970s. I will first provide an overview of the film and then explore the way it engaged with political issues of its time.

Rosas is a biopic that begins in the 1810s chronicling the main character's life as an *estanciero* [farm owner] and ends in the late 1840s after his successful stance against England and France. The film opens with shots of the Colorados del Monte [Mountain Reds] cavalry riding across the plains. After the initial credits, an excerpt of a letter written to Rosas by General José de San Martín praises his leadership and the prosperity, honor, and order that he achieved, and wishes El Restaurador de las Leyes [The Restorer of Law] proper acknowledgment of his public service in defense of Argentina. Immediately after, Rosas's voice-over provides a reflection on his life in which he declares, 'nunca pensé que mi destino fuera la política' [I never thought that my fate would be in politics]. He also briefly mentions his

childhood, during which he played with Indian children, developing his wits and patience, his love for the *pampa* and horses, and an understanding of the land and its inhabitants, which he equates with love. Finally, he reveals the fact that by age 20, he owned several carefully administered *estancias*, and lived by three principles: order, respect for the law, and equal justice. To prove this point, in one scene a *gaucho* takes him to task for carrying a dagger on a Sunday, a proscription which he himself imposed. Rosas agrees with his observation and has someone whip him for his transgression, thus remaining consistent: 'la ley tiene que ser pareja' [the law has to be balanced]. But he makes a point of stressing that the upper classes have a tremendous responsibility to maintain order, respect for the law, and equal justice. His voice-over explains, 'si los patrones no son los primeros en respetar la ley, las cosas van a andar mal para todos' [if the masters are not the first to abide by the law, things will go badly for all]. This anecdote emphasizes the self-imposed rules that governed his life and that led to his becoming the Restorer. The film links the strict *estanciero* and the public official, superimposing the sound of whips with a bottom-to-top pan of Rosas dressed in his uniform.

Despite Rosas's centrality, which is announced in the film's title and his voice-overs, Antín's film strives to be a multisided account. In addition to Rosas, many characters—notably his detractors—feature prominently. One of these is Manuel Dorrego (Alberto Argibay), whom Rosas helped raise to power but later abandoned. Another with a similar fate is Facundo Quiroga (Juan María Gutiérrez). A figure who prevails is General Juan Lavalle (Sergio Renán), seen in many scenes from the 1820s to the 1840s. Lavalle's opinions are uttered in frontal close-ups and the inner battle of his thoughts is also revealed throughout the film. Other dissident characters are Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson (Silvia Legrand), Gral Lamadrid (Onofre Lovero), José Mármol (Andrés Percivalle), and Lord Ponsonby (Jorge Barreiro). Even though, as critics noted, this accumulation of characters appears more an attempt to document history in episodes rather than to develop a dramatic narrative, these dissident characters and their views of Rosas contribute to nuancing his representation. *Rosas* is a multi-perspectival biopic, a term used by Bingham to refer to films that present different angles (2010, 23). Here it should be clarified that Bingham applies the term to postmodernist biopics of the 1990s, which suggests that Antín's film was innovative for its time. Besides Rosas's detractors, *Rosas* also introduces an anonymous character who does not utter a single line but is seen in many scenes representing the common citizen, a privileged witness of Rosas's time. Talking about fictional characters in historical films, scholar Bruno Ramírez asserts that 'Not only are they essential to enrich the portrayal of a specific historical milieu; they also constitute a narrative layer that is indispensable to the development of dramatic effects' (2014, 45). In *Rosas*, however, the anonymous character's enhancement of the plot is minimal as he does not interact with other characters, nor utter a single line.

The film presents Rosas in a dialogic relationship with his wife in which she fulfills different functions as alter-ego, confidante, and ideologue. According to his voice-over, his marriage to Encarnación Ezcurra (Myriam de Ridder), 'his life-long partner,' is a decisive point in the Restorer's life. The first scenes show them discussing a possible agreement among *estancia* owners who want to organize in order to counter the English threat to force down the price of leather. When Rosas is summoned to pacify Buenos Aires, Encarnación appears as his alter-ego, encouraging him to fulfill his duty as a citizen. She also acts as a spectator, watching him leave for action. The assignation of active (Rosas) and passive (Encarnación) roles can be understood as an example of what Laura Mulvey has termed *scopophilia*, that is to say, looking as a source of pleasure (1988, 59). When Rosas returns, he confides in her his disappointment with the way matters are handled in Buenos Aires and states his desire to devote his energy to his *estancias*. Encarnación speaks against the prevailing political discord and she appears as a defender of order. At another time, she even engages in political strategizing when she suggests curtailing Dorrego's and Quiroga's power.

Rosas illustrates the fact that law constitutes a central axis of the Restorer's involvement in politics. When he is called to Buenos Aires in 1820 to help reinstate peace, he prioritizes harmony as a condition for nationhood, gathering his numerous supporters, the Colorados del Monte. Aerial and ground views convey their march as a song calls Rosas 'el padre de los gauchos' [the father the *gauchos*]. Later, General Las Heras (Ricardo Passano) charges Rosas with the task of reaching a peace agreement with the Indians, which he accepts on the condition that they be treated as human beings, something that is never actually shown on screen. In the second half of the film, Rosas is seen as the embodiment of the law. He decides the fate of several characters: he condemns Camila O'Gorman and her priest lover to death even though her family is among his supporters, orders the relocation of Governor Maza to Uruguay to avoid his death (which nevertheless follows him), limits his men's acts of retribution against the opposition, and reaches a ceasefire with the English and French envoys.

The film traces the political turmoil of Argentina in the 1820s, which pitted Federals against Unitarians. The Federals, led by Dorrego, are depicted as considering the plight of the people, that is to say, the lower-class citizens who have been drafted for the successive wars since the 1810s and still lack rights. In one scene, Rosas admonishes Dorrego about the opposition, which the general disregards, expressing his distrust for him in a voice-over. The next scene, shot from an angle, presents a meeting of Unitarians who plot against Dorrego and persuade Lavalle to depose and kill him. Lavalle displays his discomfort with this order by walking in circles, illustrating his feeling of being trapped. Even though he belongs to the Unitarian party, he finds his task despicable. The same feeling of unease surfaces when he awaits Dorrego's shooting. First seen through a barred window, he appears to be the prisoner, but later he walks outdoors and, with the sound of drums to

heighten the drama of the moment, addresses the camera: 'Quisiera que el pueblo de Buenos Aires sepa comprender que la muerte del Coronel Dorrego es el sacrificio mayor que puedo hacer en su obsequio' [I would like the people of Buenos Aires to understand that the death of Colonel Dorrego was the greatest sacrifice that I could present them]. His perspective is followed by his antagonist Dorrego's short monologue, predicting further divisions among Argentines and his blurred final view as he falls to the ground fatally wounded. Two songs are interposed: in one, Dorrego's execution elicits grief among his supporters; in the other, his death is a reason for further violence. The next scene presents a brief combat between Unitarians and Federals. Unlike similar scenes of conflict that appeared in *El santo*, *Güemes*, and *Bajo el signo*, in which patriots face Spaniards, here, for the first time, Argentines fight each other in a battle.

The film presents a counterpoint between Lavalle and Rosas. Early on, Rosas states that the Unitarian general is his milk brother (having shared the same nurse). Although they represent different political positions, they have a shared civility and respect for each other. When Lavalle visits Rosas's camp and does not find him, he waits for him and falls asleep. Despite being adversaries, upon his arrival, Rosas gives orders to let Lavalle sleep and wakes him up with a *mate*, a gesture of hospitality. They discuss the country's future and arrive at an agreement that would entail forgetting the past, holding elections, and supporting an independent government. When Lavalle's men break the pact, in conversation with Encarnación, Rosas blames them instead of the general. An interim government paves the way for Rosas's first short term in office, during which he is seen reaching an agreement with the leaders of the provinces of the Litoral and Facundo Quiroga.

Rosas emphasizes the multiple players that compete for political power, pulling the Restorer in different directions. The film alternates scenes of political strategizing with domesticity, in which Encarnación pushes her husband to seize power and restore peace. These exchanges convey the idea that Rosas is in the middle ground, subjected to opposing pressures. The tipping point is Facundo Quiroga's death, after a meeting with Rosas. Aware that to impose order, bloodshed is necessary, Rosas accepts the power. His decision, in the sixtieth minute of the film, is celebrated by the *gauchos* and the lower classes but meets with indifference from the Unitarians whose closed faces are shown in a pan. In Rosas's passionate inaugural speech, vengeance and intolerance prevail. In the following scene, he summarizes the country's problem, mentioning that Argentines do not have a say in their country's affairs: 'hemos dejado de ser colonia española para serlo de todas las naciones comerciales' [we have stopped being a colony of Spain, only to become a colony of all commercial nations]. His explicit goal is to regain control of domestic matters and defend the country's sovereignty.

Despite Rosas's extraordinary qualities, the film depicts the polarization of Argentine society. His supporters are *gauchos* and mulattos who celebrate his rule with popular dances; his detractors are the members of the upper

classes who gather at the *tertulia* of Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson or the Unitarians who conspire against his government. The film shows Rosas provoking and taunting his opponents following the French blockade and the death of Encarnación, calling them traitors for their alliance with a foreign power. He allows a pair of mulatto youths to impersonate him in front of respectable guests, making fun of them and shaming his daughter Manuelita (Teresa Barreto Muñiz). As the opposition against Rosas grows, so do his supporters' acts of violence. A plot against him is cruelly crushed which, in turn, gives way to further Unitarian conspiracies.

At the film's end, Rosas stands alone. Having concentrated the internal political power, his strategy and men are deployed to fight the Anglo-French fleet. The battle of Vuelta de Obligado is briefly shown, as is the reaction of a British officer praising the courage of the Argentine recruits. Once the French and British realize that military victory does not translate into free trade, they send their representatives to negotiate with the Argentine leader. A keen manipulator, Rosas sends his daughter Manuela to entertain them and show them civilized ways before he is ready to receive them. The signing of the peace accord is celebrated with joy and numerous expressions of support for Rosas's leadership. As the fireworks explode, the anonymous witness seen in several scenes is shot, foreshadowing the end of Rosas's government and the relentless conspiracy against the people. Nonetheless, the film ends with Rosas's voice-over stressing his duty to sustain Argentina's independence, honor, and integrity. For Rosenstone, 'Film emotionalizes, personalizes, and dramatizes history. Through actors and historical witnesses, it gives us history as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering, and heroism' (2001, 56). Antín's film, though presenting a version of past events, fails to dramatize history, presenting it instead as a documentary with a multitude of characters that lack development. Because of the film's overtly political stance, I now turn to an analysis of its engagement with the issues of the 1970s.

Rosas: Argentine Challenges in the 1970s

Rosas touches on three major issues that were important in Argentina's sociopolitical life in the 1970s: national sovereignty and nationalism, the role of a political leader and his relationship with the popular classes, and the role of women in society. The discussion of national sovereignty and nationalism was the most prevalent. The status of Argentina either as an independent nation or as a colony of a foreign power was first brought to the fore by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas's *La hora de los hornos* [*The Hour of the Furnaces*] (1968). Although the documentary was released abroad in 1968, it was not screened in Argentina until 1973 (Metsman, 1999, 52). Nevertheless, it circulated underground and the Grupo Cine Liberación's active presence in intellectual circles allowed the transmission of its thesis, that Argentina was in a colonial relationship with the United

States. For Getino and Solanas, the neocolonial status of Argentina had become more evident since the military *coup* of 1966, a stance that, as film scholar Mariano Mestman explains, was rooted in the Peronist doctrine (1999, 53–55). *Rosas* echoes the neocolonial thesis presented in *La hora de los hornos*. From the first dialogue, Rosas expresses his will to resist the economic pressure of British businessmen. In other scenes, Rosas forcefully defends the idea that poverty is preferable to economic domination. As expounded earlier, one of the producers of *Rosas*, Muñiz Barreto, was active Peronist circles and his political sympathies greatly influenced the film's ideology, particularly highlighting the issue of national sovereignty. While this topic had also been present in *El santo*, *Guemes*, and *Bajo el signo*, albeit with variations, *Rosas* consistently stresses it, emphasizing the leader's staunch defense of the national territory and affairs.

Throughout Antín's film, Rosas is presented as a defender of national sovereignty. As a businessman, he is behind the union of other beef and leather exporters who want to counter British control over the prices of these goods. This initial, private effort to stop foreigners influencing the price of raw Argentine materials serves as a springboard for his protection of Argentine sovereignty when he is in charge of national matters. In one scene, Rosas lectures, 'No basta con tener gobierno, también hay que ser independientes' [It is not enough to have a government, we must be independent too]. This proclamation captures the dilemma of political, economic, and cultural independence. For Rosas (and Peronists in the early 1970s), the notion of freedom encompasses political, economic, and cultural liberation from the dictates of other nations. The film also depicts the fact that opposed to this idea are Unitarians, intellectuals, and the upper classes who are culturally influenced by foreign ideas and, thus, are either oblivious or supportive of economic dependence. Their way of thinking is illustrated in a crucial scene in which the anti-Rosas Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson asks about Romanticism. When told that it is a European literary movement that values the natural and authentic, she first compares it to Rosas, but then realizes that this is inappropriate, given that he does not read French books. Her statement simultaneously casts Rosas as outdated and against foreign culture, while also presenting his detractors as pampered and co-opted by French ideas when they complain about the lack of luxury French products due to the blockade. Stressing the different positions, this scene immediately precedes the tense conversation between the French representative and Rosas. Faced with the foreign envoy's ultimatum, the latter aggressively declares, 'Si no podemos tener una patria respetada, no tendremos ninguna' [If we cannot have a respected homeland, we will not have one at all]. Rosas's words not only reject compromise but also demonstrate that he is unwilling to negotiate the integrity of the Argentine nation, even when facing the threat of an external attack. When this danger materializes in the scene of the battle of Obligado, the Argentines' courageous fight is commented on by their foreign opponents. In the film's final scenes, Rosas

meets with the British and French ambassadors to sign a peace treaty. They mention that they represent the two most important world powers, to which Rosas replies, 'la primera potencia del mundo es la Confederación Argentina' [the first world power is the Argentine Confederation], conveying not only his defense of the homeland, but also his pride and belief in its glorious rank among other countries. Lastly, in the film's final voice-over, Rosas reminds the audience of all his work for Argentine sovereignty and independence. The emphasis on these issues colors the film's celebratory tone of his government.

The film's national-foreign dichotomy spoke to the Argentine audience of the 1970s. On one hand, national liberation was advanced by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's actions in Cuba and Bolivia against the elites who were thought to consort with foreign interests instead of defending the national territory and the masses; on the other hand, national dependence was perceived as being introduced by anti-Peronists, particularly Onganía's regime, which had been explicitly aligned with Western values—especially American capitalism—and had repressed left-wing movements. Consequently, when a passionate Rosas tells the French envoy that he can bomb Buenos Aires, this taunt has shades of Che Guevara's speech before the United Nations in 1964, in which he referred to foreign invaders and ended with the oppositional rallying cry 'Patria o muerte!' [death or homeland]. In the film, Rosas's successful resistance of external pressure places him on the side of the homeland and inevitably condemns his detractors, even in the early 1970s, to death.

Closely related to the protection of Argentina's sovereignty, we find the topic of a leader and his relationship with the masses. Again the film first stresses Rosas's leadership as a private businessman, setting the law and organizing his *estancias*. His knowledge of Indian ways is mentioned as an example of his openness to those considered 'Others' in the nineteenth century. He counts on the Colorados del Monte, his private militia, to pacify Buenos Aires. When he is given extraordinary powers, common people celebrate his designation. But Rosas is shown as an authoritarian leader who values discipline and imposes his will to 'stabilize' the country. He does not interact with his supporters. On one occasion, his voice-over proclaims, 'sin orden, no merecemos ser independientes' [without order, we do not deserve to be independent].¹⁰ He thus justifies his iron-fist style management as a necessary evil for independence. For him, order and civilization go together and in this conflation, the role of the masses is to obey his directions. In one scene, he makes it clear that he controls the *gauchos* and his supporters when he gives them license to be violent with his opponents but orders them to respect their private property. He thus appears as a paternal figure for the masses. Curiously, when freed slaves and mulattos celebrate his rise to power, Encarnación and Manuela are the ones seen interacting with them, perhaps indicating that the leader lacks either the time or appetite for popular celebrations.

In Antín's film, Rosas's paternalism toward the masses could rightly be compared to that of Juan Perón. Indeed, *revisionistas* sought to highlight the

similarities between Rosas and Perón and the film stresses that connection. Just like the veteran leader, Rosas built a multisector coalition that propelled him to power. In the Argentina of the early 1970s, when different armed groups were striving for political clout and pushing for Perón's return from exile, a strong leader like Rosas—or Perón—was a guarantee for order among different constituencies. Curiously, two years after the film's release, history would prove Perón's paternalism to be as stringent as Rosas's when the former broke with the leftist youth on May 1, 1974, accusing them of disturbing the peace needed for national reconstruction and calling them traitors propelled by foreign ideologies. In his reprimand, Perón seemed to have followed Rosas in allowing violence, but protecting private property. Hence, both leaders appeared as strict fathers in their relations with the masses. Their populism surfaced to build clout and then disappeared.

Even though *Rosas* includes two women—Encarnación and Manuelita—in prominent roles, their presence does not constitute a disturbance of patriarchy. The inclusion of Encarnación and Manuelita may be a response to the criticism that Torre Nilsson received for his submissive representation of Remedios de Escalada in *El santo*, that is to say, the lack of women in leading roles. Nonetheless, Antín did not imbue these characters with any more agency than Torre Nilsson did. First, the women selected for these roles were not professional actresses: these were their first and last cinematic roles. This casting decision sends a message about these characters; they are not worth being impersonated by actresses. Myriam de Rydder, who played Encarnación, delivered long speeches without any dramatic skill. For her part, Teresa Barreto, who gave life to Manuela, mentioned in an interview that her main qualification for the role was her knowledge of history and not her acting abilities. Second, these characters complement Rosas's strong personality. In some scenes Encarnación is critical of her husband, voicing a different opinion from his, usually to be disregarded or countered by him. Even though she explicitly defends order and discipline, she appears in clear domestic roles: serving *mate* to Rosas, as a mother of two young children, commenting on the house servants. In the only scene, in which she is shown in a city and among her husband's supporters, does she express her view: she advocates going after her husband's detractors but also mentions that her hands are tied as he has warned her not to get involved. Manuelita is also seen parroting her father's notion of the English who defend their nation in contrast to some of his father's detractors who 'betray' it. In another scene, she seems to be asking for mercy for Camila O'Gorman, but this scandal is an occasion for Rosas to demonstrate his 'equality before the law' mantra and his unwavering decision to impose order, even if those affected are among his own supporters. Finally, Manuelita is shown empowering Rosas in two scenes; the first is when she witnesses his mistreatment of the dwarves and remains silent, taking her father's odd behavior as a necessary 'letting off steam.' In the other scene, she is asked to 'soften' the French and English representatives and she acquiesces to being an object of civilization instead of

showing her own agency. Therefore, the film endorses the notion that women, even those connected to power, are secondary to the male leader, a fact that reinforces the film's conservatism at a time when women were occupying more active roles in Argentine society and politics.

Notes

- 1 Muñiz Barreto was a member of the Montoneros. He was elected deputy in 1973 but quit a year later to show his opposition to changes in the Penal Code. He was disappeared in 1977.
- 2 Alberto Spektorowski persuasively traces the origins of Argentine nationalism to the 1930s and highlights the connection between nationalism and anti-imperialism: 'in the 1930s radical nationalists were introduced to the language of anti-imperialist economics, something that was to be reflected in their ideology' (1994, 164).
- 3 Historian Tulio Halperin Donghi clarifies: 'El revisionismo era, desde su origen, antes que una escuela de investigación histórica, un esfuerzo por sustituir a una cierta imagen del pasado nacional otrora juzgada más apta para justificar ciertas actitudes del presente' [Revisionism was, from its inception, more an effort to replace a certain image of the national past previously considered richer to justify certain attitudes in the present, than it was a school of historical research] (1970, 25).
- 4 Spektorowski explains Julio and Rodolfo Irazusta's belief that 'the liberal tradition was associated with the foreign plutocracy and responsible for the eternal dependence and underdevelopment of the Argentinian nation' (1994, 167).
- 5 Chiampini held that revisionism focused Rosas's vindication (1968, 6).
- 6 Teresa Escalante Duhau de Muñiz Barreto was producer Diego Muñiz Barreto's wife. According to Saenz Germain, 'carece de antecedentes profesionales. Empero, ante GENTE, demostró ser una experta en historia argentina' [she lacked professional experience. Nonetheless, with GENTE, she showed that she is an expert in Argentine history] (1971, 26). Saenz Germain's comment is indicative of the film's ideology, according to which an actress highlighted her knowledge of history (not necessary to play a role) instead of her performance skills.
- 7 The shoot scheduled to take place in Chascomus had to be shortened given that descendants of the families victimized by Rosas rejected the presence of the crew and actors. Two actresses—Susana Rinaldi, who was to be Manuelita, and Amelia Bence, who was to play the role of Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson—had to be replaced ('Don Juan,' 1971, non. pag.).
- 8 Similar concepts were declared by Jose María Rosa: 'La de Torre Nilsson es la historia estereotipada, común, esto es algo viviente, esto es el pueblo. Es la liberación nacional y no el dibujito de los héroes de cartón' [Torre Nilsson's history is a stereotype, a common one: this is something alive, this is the people. It is national liberation and not a drawing of cardboard heroes] ('Rosas Repatriado,' 1972, 35).

- 9 In 1971, Antín proclaimed: 'el dinero para rodar *El señor de la Pampa* es la suma de 'cuatro amigos': uno de los amigos soy yo. Es lo que se hace habitualmente: queremos expresar una teoría por medio del cine y tratar de lograr la continuidad económica que nos permita seguir filmando' [the money to shoot *El señor de la Pampa* is a gift from 'four friends': one of the friends is me. Usually we strive to convey a theory through cinema and try to achieve the financial continuity to keep on making films] (Saenz Germain, 1971, 26). Months later, he stated: 'Creo que la película va a ser un éxito. Económico y de crítica' [I believe the film will be a success. Commercial and critical] ('Manuel Antín habla,' 1972, non. pag.).
- 10 Radetich talks about a pendular movement: first he identifies with the people, but when he mocks dwarves, he splits from the masses (2006, 63).



The four historical films examined in this section show an epochal concern on the part of some filmmakers to engage with national topics—ostensibly those that present Argentina’s nation-building process in the nineteenth century. This interest in bringing the origins of the Argentine nation to the silver screen appealed to the local media, which covered their production for middle-class spectators. While these films enjoyed varying degrees of support from the state, they were all born of Law 17,741, which encouraged national productions of quality centered on Argentine topics. Therefore, these films were seen by the public and critics alike as necessary at a time of politically sharp national divisions.

In the making of these films, Torre Nilsson, Múgica, and Antín employed several subgenres of the historical film: epics, biopics, and war films. While all these are primarily centered on male figures, from *El santo* to *Rosas*, there is a notable interest in depicting and including strong female characters, a feature that was appealing to the Argentine population of the late 1960s and early 1970s. For many years, *El santo* remained the most watched Argentine film. The others were also important pioneers in representing Güemes, Belgrano, and Rosas. Rosas’s government would later be the background of the costume drama *Camila* (María Luisa Bemberg, 1984).

Conclusion

The Argentine revolution of 1955—which ended Juan Perón’s second term as president—inaugurated a period in which his opponents sought to erase the traces of his seven years in office. In addition to the de-Peronization of the arts and national culture, another pressing matter for the military and democratic authorities after the mid-1950s was the issue of nationalism. Because Perón had adhered to the Third Way, ‘a political-economic strategy that rejected liberal capitalism under the tutelage of Euro-American capitalism and Moscow communism’ (Petras, 2000, 28); nationalized companies owned by foreign investors, such as the railroads; and implemented policies that benefitted the working class, he was strongly associated with nationalism. That is to say, his defense of the most vulnerable Argentines and his refusal to ally with either Western capitalism or Eastern communism, cemented Argentines’ perception of his strong protection of national affairs. Consequently, his successors found themselves having to challenge his nationalism and articulate new forms of national doctrine. In order to do that, post-1957 authorities turned their attention to the cultural realm in order to legitimize their claim to be defenders of national interests. Political scientist Daniele Conversi aptly defines culture as ‘the common pool and repository from which groups can draw on to maintain, root and embed their identity’ (2010, 86). Conversi also holds that the study of nationalism is ‘the study of how elites strive to defend, strengthen, or even construct this sense of distinctiveness’ (2010, 88). Hence, the building of national distinctiveness is inextricably linked to a particular culture made up of different elements.

In attempting to define Argentine culture and nationalism after Perón, post-1957 Argentine authorities understood that the film industry had a valuable and central role to play. In the late 1950s, cinema was the only visual medium which operated in Argentina. The Argentine film industry had been successful in previous decades, proving that it had found niche markets and spectators. Cinema’s impact as a mass medium and its past achievements were factors that influenced the state’s protection of this industry with the passage of four laws between 1957 and 1973 to subsidize films and reinvigorate this area of cultural production. The first law, approved immediately

after Perón's removal from office, was effective in injecting dynamism into a languishing sector: Argentine film production increased after its passage and there was even a push for new, innovative filmmaking, as shown by the productions of the Generation of 1960. The domestic public, however, was not swayed by these innovations and instead preferred foreign productions with recognizable stars. More productions with few spectators were symptoms that the state's protection of this industry had reached its limits and/or that state policy regarding cinema needed changes. As Argentine cinema continued to compete with and lose market share to imported films, the pressure to attract local audiences became a priority. The film laws of 1966 and 1968 mentioned 'national themes' and encouraged film productions for large audiences in order to placate exhibitors. National films were pressured by the state to focus on Argentine topics, but this move was problematic as Argentine films were subject to the scrutiny of rating boards created to monitor their content.

At a time of increasing political and social activism, curiosity about new cultural forms coexisted with the workings of censorship that limited the topics and issues presented in Argentine films. Adding to the problem, between 1957 and 1970, state subsidies for films depended on both box office data, which was far from trustworthy, and the decisions of boards peopled by military officers in charge of approving and selecting scripts for funding. Within this context, local filmmakers were influenced by different demands: on the one hand, they had to create quality films that could vie successfully for the attention of domestic audiences; on the other, they first had to receive the approval of boards whose main interests were not aesthetic, but political. The demand for quality films whose scripts were also palatable to rating boards came at a time of deep division in Argentine society, between Peronists and anti-Peronists, pro-Western society and left-leaning groups. Filmmakers thus had to address an eclectic national audience as they were encouraged to touch on national topics. Each Argentine filmmaker in the 1960s faced the same pressures to decide which themes would receive the necessary approval to move forward through the different bureaucratic layers, equal or outperform well-funded foreign films, and draw Argentines to theatres.

In the search for 'themes of national quality,' one director stood out: Leopoldo Torre Nilsson. His experience, contacts, and entrepreneurial skills allowed him to initiate, in the late 1960s, two variants of Argentine filmmaking that met with the approval of the authorities and the public alike, while also receiving some international exposure. The first was concerned with heritage films, that is to say, films that depicted Argentina's foundational past and resorted to the representation of the land-man symbiosis of the *gauchos* in the *pampas*. A costly super-production, *Martín Fierro* was the first—and so far, only—adaptation of Argentina's national poem to the silver screen. In addition to being a hit at the box office, it was released abroad and won an award at an international film festival. More importantly, it broke the impasse between filmmakers and boards,

providing a model of what quality Argentine filmmaking should and could be. *Martín Fierro*'s success spurred other directors to engage with the *gauchesque* genre. This return to the foundational past is evident in several visual productions from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, all of which can be considered heritage films: *Don Segundo Sombra*, *Santos Vega*, *Juan Moreira*, and *Los gauchos judíos*. Despite their inclusion of the *gauchos*, these films present realist (*Martín Fierro* and *Don Segundo Sombra*) and fantastical elements (*Santos Vega* and *Juan Moreira*). Departing from these films, *Los gauchos judíos* focuses on an immigrant community whose members adapt to Argentina. It celebrates their assimilation to Argentine mores, preserving *argentinidad* while enriching it with their own cultural values.

In spite of the interest of the media and intellectuals in these films' productions and box office performances in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they are understudied. One likely reason for the original attention that made them possible and the indifference of subsequent critics is explained by Ludmilla Iordanova: 'much of the past that is in the public domain possesses such a fluid status; it is a matter of some interest how chunks of history temporarily lose their indistinct, background qualities, and capture the imagination and interest of broad audiences' (2007, 9). It has been one of my central contentions that these films contributed to the examination of Argentine national identity and were aimed at the middle class with the goal of strengthening Argentine identity independent of the radical political positions of the time of their release. Because of their 'neutrality,' they were challenged by the Grupo Cine Liberación, a development that may have resulted in the representation of *gauchos* as victims of the political system in *Santos Vega* and *Juan Moreira*, two later heritage films. Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider these films as part of an impromptu effort to nationalize Argentine culture by representing the mythical *gauchos* and deploying them as models of *argentinidad*. The push to touch on themes related to nationalism was also evident in *Gente*, a popular magazine of the 1960s and 1970s, which launched a campaign called 'Argentinizing Argentina' that encompassed the exploration of the new Argentine man. Thus, it is not surprising that the production of Argentine heritage films, the *gauchesque* genre, came to an end with the *coup d'état* of March 1976 when the armed forces again abrogated the right to sanction what they deemed to be acceptable nationalism and to shape Argentine culture.

The second group of films influenced by Torre Nilsson was related to the heritage films but engaged more with the birth of the nation. It consisted of biopics of the founding fathers, which provided the basis for an exploration of national history. For Iordanova, films that revolve around individuals can be the object of consumption and debate (2007, 11); more importantly, they entail a celebratory gesture: 'Honouring *individuals* is part of the fabric of our lives; it entails just these processes of identification, which, as I noted earlier, inform both public history and government policies' (2007, 18). The representation of the Argentine heroes San Martín, Belgrano, Güemes, and Rosas hoped to

inspire new generations of Argentines, particularly at a moment when the issue of national liberation was a hot topic. Nevertheless, there were also notable ideological distinctions. Where Torre Nilsson—and, to some extent, Múgica—saw these films as a means to reach a broad audience by highlighting the harsh conditions of the nation-building period, Antín's biopic of Rosas was a picture with ostensible political goals that aimed to incite controversy. These historical films were crucial to imbuing Argentines with a sense of nationhood that, due to the diversity of the founding fathers' representations, presented different options to unite and divide Argentines.

Heritage and historical films, taken together, show the ways in which Torre Nilsson innovated through product differentiation—the production of films that were different from foreign ones—and close attention to artistic details, evident in the well-researched scripts. State subsidies in the form of funds that could be reinvested to finance future films provided strong financial support to undertake the shooting of these epic films, particularly at a time when other cinemas from around the world were abandoning this filmic genre for being too costly. Furthermore, the originality of these films is evident in two ways. First, in the short term, they opened the way for a cluster of other historical films about the nineteenth century that continued to be produced in the early and mid-1970s, such as *Argentino hasta la muerte* [Argentine until I Die] (Fernando Ayala, 1971), *La revolución* [The Revolution] (Raúl de la Torre, 1973), and *Yo maté a Facundo* [I Did Kill Facundo] (Hugo del Carril, 1975). Another variant of historical films like *Quebracho* (Ricardo Wullicher, 1973) and *La Patagonia Rebelde* [Rebellion in Patagonia] (Héctor Olivera, 1974) focused on the twentieth century, usually telling the history of the dispossessed masses. In Argentina in the tumultuous early 1960s and mid-1970s, historical films constituted a means not only to learn about the past but also, and more importantly, to clarify issues related to *el ser nacional* [the national being]. Scholar Bruno Ramírez thoughtfully points out that ‘identity whether as search or as a creative thrust, has indeed underpinned many a historical film’ (2014, 84). This brief period of introspection in Argentine cinema was concerned with both the definition of a national identity and the status of a national cinema and its relationship to the local audience. Second, in the long term, this line of filmmaking would be reprised only during the 1990s with Jorge Coscia's *El general y la fiebre* [The General and the Fever], but without the epic component of the films by Torre Nilsson, Múgica, and Antín. More than 40 years later, Leandro Ipiña's *San Martín: El cruce de los Andes* [San Martín: The Crossing of the Andes] (2011) would be produced.

While much remains to be studied in Argentine cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, the two groups of films explored in detail in this volume—heritage/*gauchesque* and historical—not only presented viable quality products that circulated and were consumed in a global age, but also examined issues related to nationhood and Argentine identity, which were the main foci of the Argentine state's push for the establishment and sustainability of its

national cinema. The national audience's interest in, and the national media's extensive coverage of, these productions put Argentine film at the center of the country's cultural life, an alignment that has seldom been repeated in the last four decades.

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