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Cuban Cinema in a Global Context:  
The Impact of Eastern European Cinema on the Cuban Film Industry in the 1960s

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Cultures

by

Magdalena Matuskova

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Cuban Cinema in a Global Context:  
The Impact of Eastern European Cinema on the Cuban Film Industry in the 1960s

by

Magdalena Matuskova

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Jorge Marturano, Chair

The study analyzes how the socialist bloc film industry integrated Cuba in socialist internationalism, and how Cuba benefited from and resisted that integration. I argue that negotiating two competing narratives – socialist internationalism (solidarity) and the Cuban anti-neocolonialism (sovereignty) – affected this cultural exchange. Cubans enjoyed the material benefits of socialist solidarity, but strongly resisted when it threatened their decision-making. As a result of this, Cuba downplayed the importance of the socialist bloc aid for its film industry, even though the socialist bloc contributed significantly to its development.

The socialist bloc also played a role in the formation of the cinematic narrative of the Cuban Revolution through films that represented the “new” Cuba. Filmmakers attempted to integrate Cuba in the narrative of socialist internationalism, capitalizing on shared enemies like imperialism and the bourgeoisie, although these enemies and conflicts did not have the same significance for all parties.

The study reconstructs a cultural history of collaboration between Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the GDR and the USSR in the 1960s, using three co-productions as case studies: the Soviet *Soy Cuba* (Kalatozov, 1964), the Czechoslovak *Para quién baila La Habana* (Čech, 1962) and the East German *Preludio II* (Maetzig, 1964). I explore understudied and unpublished primary sources from archives in the Czech Republic and Germany, regarding the films' conception, production, and reception. I also study film press reviews to assess the films' historical value and add oral histories to cover the gaps in archival documentation.

I conclude that distinct visions of socialist internationalism informed the three countries' relationships with Cuba. While all three countries contributed material support and training, and their documentaries were praised in Cuba for reflecting the ideals that Cuban leaders wanted to broadcast, the three co-productions were rejected for not fulfilling the Cuban people's expectations. Cubans were wary of the political ambiguities the films had introduced, worried that they might destabilize the official narrative of the Cuban Revolution. My dissertation reveals that although the films were dismissed for their Eurocentric gaze and lack of authenticity, they demonstrate the filmmakers' capacity to understand the Cuban Revolution and connections it had with their own socialist reality.

The thesis of Magdalena Matuskova is approved.

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2017

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Committee Approval.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
Abreviations.....	viii
Vita .....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Part 1: Cuba Meets Soviet Filmmakers.....	51
Chapter 1: <i>Soy Cuba</i> : Solidarity and Sovereignty.....	52
Chapter 2: The “New” Soviet Union Meets the “New” Cuba: Defining the Cuban Cinematic National Identity through <i>Soy Cuba</i> .....	84
Part 2: Czechoslovak – Cuban Cinematic Collaboration.....	133
Chapter 3: Cuba and Czechoslovak Cinematic Socialist Internationalism.....	134
Chapter 4: <i>Para Quién Baila La Habana</i> : The Story of Convergences and Divergences.....	172
Part 3: East German – Cuban Cooperation.....	212
Chapter 5: The DEFA and the ICAIC: Parallel Histories and the First Joined Projects.....	213
Chapter 6: <i>Preludio 11</i> : Different Visions, Different Narratives.....	259
Epilogue.....	311
Bibliography.....	317

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AMZO – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive
- CDR – Comité de la Defensa de la Revolución (the Committees of the Defense of the Revolution)
- CNC – Consejo Nacional de Cultura
- ČSF – Československý státní film (the Czechoslovak State Film)
- DEFA – Deutsche Film AG (German Film Corporation)
- EICTV - La Escuela Internacional del Cine de San Antonio de los Baños
- FRG – the Federal Republic of Germany
- FSB – Filmové studio Barrandov (Film Studios Barrandov)
- GDR – the German Democratic Republic
- GKKS - State Committee for Cultural Relations
- ICAIC – Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficas
- ICAP - El Instituto Cubano de la Amistad con los Pueblos
- ICRT - Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión
- INRA – Instituto Nacional de la Reforma Agraria
- KF - Krátký film (Short Film)
- MŠK – Ministerstvo školství a kultury (the Ministry of Education and Culture)MY
- MZV – Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- NA – Národní archiv (National Archive)
- NFA – Národní filmový archiv (National Film Archive)
- PSP - Partido Socialist Popular
- SOZ – the Soviet Occupational Zone
- SSOD – the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies
- Territorial Departments
- UFA - Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (Universum Film Corporation)
- UNEAC - Unión de Escritores Cubanos

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2. “Entrevista con Arturo Sotto.” *Mester*. Submitted.
3. “Recordando los inicios..., por allá por sesenta.” *Cine cubano* 198 (2016): 48 – 54.
4. “Nikdo nic nikdy.” [Nobody Nothing Never] (excerpt). By Juan José Saer. *Plav* 2 (2016): 18 – 20.
5. “Las UMAP y la Revolución: el papel de la plantación en *El central y Arturo, la estrella más brillante* de Reinaldo Arenas.” *Mester* XLIII (2014-2015): 17 – 40.
6. “Kuba a její lidová náboženství.” [Cuba and its Popular Religions.] *Lidé a země* [People and Earth] (April 2003): 24 – 26 and *Astro* (March 2003): 15 – 18.
7. *El espinazo del diablo*. By dir. Guillermo del Toro. Translation to Czech for dubbing. Czech HBO, 2002.

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that some of the socialist bloc countries contributed significantly to the development of the Cuban film industry, as documented in various archives,<sup>1</sup> their true impact is barely recognized. Cuban filmmakers, scholars, and film industry leaders acknowledge a number of foreign influences, including the North American cinema,<sup>2</sup> the French New Wave and the Italian Neorealism, but they usually omit mentioning the contributions of the socialist bloc altogether or pass it over as unimportant. My dissertation reexamines the role that the socialist bloc played in building Cuban national cinema in the 1960s.

Cubans generally talk about their national cinema as “built from scratch,” but such statements are more political than factual. This discourse was established in the sixties when admitting the socialist bloc’s influence had the potential to distort the image that the Cuban film industry leaders wanted to convey to the world in general and to Latin America in particular. It was connected to the Cuban anti-neocolonial nationalist narrative, which was very important in the 1960s Cuba. This narrative led the Cuban film leaders to downplay the importance of the socialist bloc aid for the development of Cuban cinema in the eyes of the Cuban and international public. My research challenges the reigning narratives about the development of the Cuban national cinema by reconstructing this forgotten story of international socialist

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the National Film Archive in Prague and Bundesarchiv in Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> North American cinema influence on Cuban cinema is complex. Hollywood cinema was conceived in the 1960s Latin America as a negative influence, the model against which new national cinemas in Latin America were constructed (political program). The New Latin American Cinema as a movement was conceived as a weapon against imperialism, represented in cinema precisely by the cinema of Hollywood. For more on this topic, see, for example, *Evolución en libertad*. In addition, Latin American (and other) directors used Hollywood popular genres like westerns in a non-traditional way. Furthermore, films like *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Trial* (1962) by Orson Welles were admired. It is evident, for example, from Sáderman’s and Canel’s articles in *Cine cubano*.

cooperation.

The Cuban Revolutionary cinema was not born out of nothing, as Alfredo Guevara, the late director of *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficas* (ICAIC) and others pretended.<sup>3</sup> The ICAIC had “helpers” that eased Cuban cinema to get off to a strong start. Many of these helpers were filmmakers and technicians that came from the socialist bloc. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> Czechoslovakia, for example, was key in development of the ICAIC’s technical base by providing a significant number of teachers and advisors who helped hone the ICAIC personnel’s technical skills during the 1960s and beyond. This aspect of the socialist bloc’s help will be touched upon briefly; however, due to the limited extent of this study, I will not dive into it in the depths it merits.

The socialist bloc also mediated artistic influence of directors like Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Miloš Forman and Andrei Tarkovsky whose filming techniques and strategies certainly impacted Cuban artists as well as other filmmakers around the world. The “global sixties” provided many opportunities for filmmakers around the world to interact at film festivals and become familiar with each other’s films. The transfer of ideas and techniques was often indirect. A thorough analysis of this influence is not included here because of its speculative nature. Instead, I favor analyzing such socialist bloc’s influences, which are more traceable.

The socialist bloc made an impact on Cuban cinema through film festivals. The International Film Festival (IFF) in Moscow, inaugurated in 1959; the International Festival of Documentaries and Animated Film in Leipzig, initiated in 1954, and the IFF Karlovy Vary in

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Alfredo Guevara in Vicente Ferraz.

<sup>4</sup> A brief overview of the breadth of this kind of aid from Czechoslovakia is, for example, covered in my “Recordando los inicios...por allá por los sesenta” and in my forthcoming article in *Iberoamericana Pragensia*.

Czechoslovakia, launched in 1946,<sup>5</sup> were key for the Cuban cinema's outreach. These festivals provided a forum for Cuban filmmakers to exchange ideas with progressive filmmakers from all over the world and view each other's films. They also gave the ICAIC the opportunity to boost its film export. Furthermore, the IFF Karlovy Vary started a forum for young film industries from the Third World called the "Symposium of Young and New Cinemas of Africa, Asia and Latin America",<sup>6</sup> which became one of the unnamed precursors of events such as the foundational festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Viña del Mar, Chile in 1967.<sup>7</sup>

Although all of the above mentioned aspects were instrumental to the development and distribution of Cuban cinema, this study narrows its scope to one primary element of the socialist bloc collaboration with Cuba: the cinematic representation of the Cuban Revolution. It reveals how this cinematic representation interacted with Cuban cinematic self-representation from the moment of the films' conception, through their production and ending with their reception. I argue that the socialist bloc contributed greatly to the formation of the cinematic narrative of the Cuban national identity, i.e. the Cuban representation of the "new" Cuba, through films that socialist filmmakers made in Cuba and about Cuba. Such analysis indispensably works with terms like "sovietization", i.e. the degree of acceptance of Soviet values, norms and ideology

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<sup>5</sup> The festival was biannual. FIAPF forced the festival organizers by its recommendation to annually alternate with IFF Moscow, starting 1958. "Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2005". Kinema. N.d, n.a.,n.p. <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=271&festivals>.

<sup>6</sup> The first Symposium took place during the 8<sup>th</sup> IFF Karlovy Vary in 1962. Its goal was to intermediate "deeper knowledge of the development and state of young and new cinemas in Africa, Asia and Latin America in connection with the fight of democratic forces of those countries for national liberation and national independence, against colonialism, for national cinema in those countries, which would be an original contribution to the development of world cinema. National Film Archive. Festivals 1958 – 1963. R10/BII/2P/1K. Materials related to the symposium.

<sup>7</sup> A deeper inspection of this aspect of cooperation has been left out from this study because it merits a study of its own.

(externally imposed) and “self-sovietization” (self-imposed), socialist internationalism, and socialist realism. All these terms will be defined later.

The three most important components of the new Cuban cinematic national identity were: 1) fight against imperialism and colonialism; 2) fight against capitalism and bourgeoisie and 3) building a new society full of “new man” and “new women”. I argue that this is where the Cuban and socialist bloc socialist narrative intersected and departed from each other at the same time. On the one hand, in its content, these three components coincided with the values of the socialist bloc and its socialist internationalism policy and in its form, with the aesthetics of socialist realism.

On the other hand, these three components did not have the same semantic value in Cuba and the socialist bloc because Cuba did not share the same political agendas as the socialist bloc, let alone the Soviet Union. For example, they shared the idea of a fight against capitalism and imperialism but their agendas sometimes completely contradicted each other. They coincided in supporting the fight but while the socialist bloc promoted peaceful coming to power of the working classes and peaceful co-existence with the West (socialist internationalism),<sup>8</sup> Cuba endorsed armed struggle (anti-colonialism).<sup>9</sup>

### **Socialist internationalism**

Socialist internationalism interweaved all areas of the socialist bloc cooperation with the rest of

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<sup>8</sup> Socialist internationalism as a form of peaceful co-existence was especially promoted by Khrushchev. See, for example, Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (3) or Thomas Rupprecht.

<sup>9</sup> Cuban agenda is evident, for example, in El-Tahri, Jihan and Tancrede Ramonet’s film *Cuba, an African Odyssey* (2007).



the world. This study focuses mainly on cultural socialist internationalism. We can define it as “attempts to build cultural understanding, international co-operation, and a sense of shared values across national borders through cultural [exchange]” (Akira Iriye 34). One of its goals was “mutual enrichment of national cultures” (Siefert 163). A more covert goal was to convince the Third World about the advantages of the socialist system and persuade them to ultimately form alliance with the Soviet Union.

These objectives did not always align with questions of national sovereignty, national traditions, and national achievements, even in cultural matters (Siefert 163). For example, in Europe, historical memory gave the Soviet presence a “political and economic asymmetry that conditioned both the matter of the overtures of cooperation and their reception” (163). And in Cuba, as we will see in Chapter 1 and 2, Soviet internationalism collided with anti-colonialist sentiments. In summary, the effectiveness of socialist internationalism always depended on what country interacted with what country.

Cuba did not have direct historical memory of the Soviet Union. However, many Cuban communists had a strong pro-Soviet drive, especially those, who had strong ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> The majority of Cubans, however, had a strong anti-Soviet and anti-communist indoctrination from decades of co-existence with the United States. Cubans, therefore, like many socialist bloc citizens, interpreted socialist internationalism as Soviet internationalism (163) and reacted to it accordingly. In the ICAIC, this sentiment created strong obstacles to any attempt to extensively introduce the Soviet methods of working, norms and values through the so-called

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<sup>10</sup> Some of them, however, like Alfredo Guevara, witnessed Stalinist purges in countries like Czechoslovakia and that changed their stance towards the Soviet-driven socialism as Manuel Pérez Paredes shared in with the author in September 2014 and June 2016.

process of “self-sovietization”.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the ICAIC preferred to bring technicians and teachers from a smaller Czechoslovakia rather than from the Soviet Union.

One of the most important features of socialist internationalism was the shared value of solidarity with other nations. Cuba in general did not object becoming a recipient of material benefits this solidarity brought: discounts, cheaper loans, donations, professional training, etc. However, when the socialist bloc help implied limited sovereignty in their decision making, Cubans put up strong resistance. A good example of it was one of the proposals the Central Director of the Czechoslovak State Film, Alois Poledňák, made to the ICAIC’s director Alfredo Guevara. He suggested that Czechoslovakia could send their top film industry specialists to counsel the ICAIC leadership in the key areas of the Cuban film industry. Guevara “tactfully” refused.<sup>12</sup> He was not open to any foreign aid that would limit his decision-making.

Socialist internationalism also had to deal with the concept of the relationship to the West. It was one of the limitation of its application as Rieber explains (334). It was a paradox. On the one hand, socialist countries fought against the West and what it represented. At the same time, they wanted to be like the West economically and culturally. Therefore, higher cultural approximation to the West was perceived within the bloc as a sign of higher status. Socialist countries bordering with the West, such as Poland, the GDR and Czechoslovakia, showed

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<sup>11</sup> Many researchers lean away from the term “sovietization” because it implies a strong external pressure from the Soviet Union to implement its norms, processes and values in other countries. According to Lars and Skopal, this was not even true in the socialist bloc, let alone Cuba, because the Soviet Union did not have the financial and human resources to oversee the implementation. The researchers prefer the term “self-sovietization” because it emphasizes that the process was by large driven from the inside through “many East European functionaries who willingly adopted and used Soviet models themselves without direct instructions or pressure” (Lars and Skopal 4). This applies to the socialist bloc countries but even more so to countries so geographically and culturally distant as Cuba or China where a strongly imposed sovietization was logistically impossible.

<sup>12</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 1965. Zpráva o účasti delegace ČSF na Týdnu československého filmu v Havaně. Poledňák’s report from April 21, 1965.

“attitudes implying superior status within the Bloc”, which were reinforced “by the higher level of economic and technical development” they demonstrated (334). Based on this perception, the ICAIC preferred to cooperate with the countries from the Central Europe because it perceived them as the closest to the Western standards but without being capitalist.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, however, Cubans felt superior to all countries from the socialist bloc. For decades Cuba had been under the spell of the United States and even though almost nothing was produced in Cuba, let alone modern technology, Cubans felt more advanced than their Eastern brother countries in terms of skills and culture because of this experience. The air of “disdain” the ICAIC transmitted to Michael Chanan regarding some spare parts for the US cinema equipment in Cuba that the socialist bloc had not properly adapted to tropical conditions,<sup>14</sup> most likely stemmed from this sentiment as well.

A very important example of cinematic socialist internationalism was co-productions. Socialist bloc countries engaged in co-productions often: among themselves, with the West and with the Third World. The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Yugoslavia were particularly active co-producers. Socialist bloc co-productions with the Third World usually had more extra-artistic objectives than artistic, an approach that triggered much criticism in the co-producing countries from the Third World like Cuba. The socialist bloc co-producers’ usual

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<sup>13</sup> That, of course, changed as several of these countries attempted to open more to the West. As Czechoslovakia was opening to western influences, Cuba started limiting its collaboration with Czechoslovakia, especially in terms of traveling technicians and students. However, also film imports from Czechoslovakia were affected.

<sup>14</sup> In this case, Cubans shared with Chanan that the parts “were not correctly engineered for tropical conditions, and they buckled in the heat” (Chanan 167). This kind of judgement usually came from the leadership positions even though in this case, Chanan does not reveal his source. Such opinions were predominant before 1990 when he conducted most of his research. Alfredo Guevara still had this attitude regarding the socialist bloc in the 2000s when he was interviewed by Ferraz. On the contrary, many other ICAIC employees usually commend particularly the Czechoslovak technical skills, but not as much the Soviet equipment.

objective was to empower young film industries by providing material support and professional training through fiction films especially.<sup>15</sup> Documentary films mostly aimed to ideologically support the Third World countries' struggle for independence and sovereignty. Their second objective was to promote the achievements of socialism in general and their countries' accomplishments specifically.

The three co-productions analyzed in Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6 will demonstrate how the application of cinematic socialist internationalism on the Cuban-socialist bloc cooperation worked in reality. I argue that the foreign filmmakers who engaged in those films had to be creative in their attempt to consolidate two competing narratives, the narrative of socialist internationalism and the narrative of the Cuban Revolution (post-colonial narrative). They had to “translate” Cuban reality for the European and Eurasian viewer without simplifying and distorting Cuban reality too much. They found challenges on every step of the way: in pre-production, production, post-production, as well as reception.

In an attempt to consolidate the two narratives, the filmmakers inserted elements of their own socialist reality that resonated with Cubans, for example, discrediting the bourgeoisie and emigrants. Nonetheless, they could not avoid some superficial representations of Cuban history and a folkloristic take on Cuban reality in order to make the films understandable and appealing to non-Cuban audiences. The co-productions' reviews in Cuban press prove that, although the four countries were under socialist regimes, their views of the Cuban revolutionary process differed. They also reveal that the co-productions' perspective contradicted the Cuban anti-neocolonial nationalist narrative, which was very important in 1960s Cuba. This narrative caused

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<sup>15</sup> NFA. Porady ústředního ředitele ČSF 1961. R9/BII/5P/3K. Point IV Koprodukce p. 16.

Cuban film leaders to discredit the co-productions, undermining the importance of these productions for the development of Cuban cinema in the eyes of Cuban and international public. My research recuperates that importance.

### **Quest for the Ideal Marriage between the Socialist Ideology and Art**

As suggested earlier, socialist internationalism represented a potential threat of Soviet domination. In culture, the threat came mostly from the aesthetical movement of socialist realism.<sup>16</sup> Its application in different areas of Cuban culture was perceived as self-sovietization and sparked much resistance from some groups of intellectuals and artists. While Consejo Nacional Cubano (CNC)'s functionaries tried to convince writers, musicians and plastic artists to apply socialist realism aesthetics to a higher degree,<sup>17</sup> it was not the case of the ICAIC.<sup>18</sup> The fight for and against Soviet influence in Cuban cinema and culture took place between two distinct groups, “los liberales”<sup>19</sup> and the dogmatics, as Duanel Díaz Infante called them. Their dispute was about whether socialist realism aesthetics should be applied in Cuban films and if so,

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<sup>16</sup> A concept coined by Andrei Zhdanov in the Soviet Union during the Writers Congress in 1934. It had four main guidelines: 1) the art had to be relevant to the workers and understandable to them, 2) it had to depict scenes of everyday life of the people, 3) it had to be realistic in the representational sense, and 4) it had to support the aims of the State and the Party.

<sup>17</sup> The most emblematic examples in literature are Miguel Cofiño and Miguel Cossío Woodward's novels from the beginning of the 1970s. However, documents from the Ministry of Culture of the GDR reported in the 1960s that both the ICAIC and Unión de Escritores Cubanos (UNEAC) resisted socialist realism.

<sup>18</sup> Documents from the Ministry of Culture of the GDR in Bundesarchiv also mention debates within the UNEAC.

<sup>19</sup> Díaz Infante defines as “liberals” those who promoted “el marxismo más flexible”. He was not talking about “democracia liberal” because, according to him, “estos, o se habían marchado al exilio, o carecían de voz en el espacio público”. He used the categories “liberales” and dogmatics within the framework of marxism-leninism (164).

to what extent.<sup>20</sup>

For the purpose of this study, I am not using the Zhdanov's definition of socialist realism that many Cubans considered "Stalinism". In the 1960s everyone in the socialist bloc knew that the socialist realism in its purest form from the 1930s, the 1940s and 1950s did not work (and it was discredited along with Stalin). Zhdanov's vision related more to "an ideal" that was to be constructed<sup>21</sup> but this "ideal" had supposedly already become reality in the socialist bloc in the 1960s. Socialist realism adapted to this new circumstance. Consequently, I prefer to define socialist realism more broadly, as a form of socialist bloc aesthetics that served the purpose of building socialist society (educational value) and promoted socialist society in a positive manner (advertising value).<sup>22</sup> It is assumed here that its goal was to portray the "real" socialist society while still preserving the two previously mentioned aspects (realism). What was considered "real" was subject to constant negotiations.

Socialist filmmakers in all socialist countries including Cuba negotiated how they would portray contemporary socialist society. They tried to find "[the] ideal marriage between the socialist ideology and art". There was always some imposition (more or less depending on the time period and the country) because the socialist state film institutions had to approve the scripts and the films. In their dramaturgical plans, those institutions aspired the right heroes

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<sup>20</sup> It was not only about films made by the ICAIC. The debate mostly concerned the ICAIC's exhibition policy. More about this topic, for example, in *Polémicas culturales de los sesenta* by Pogolotti.

<sup>21</sup> No one yet knew how it would look like, not even the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>22</sup> Katerina Clark explains that "Socialist Realism is essentially a name applied to Soviet culture's literary system rather than to a way of writing that is particularly 'socialist' or 'realist'... the 'socialist' aspects and 'realist' aspects of Soviet literature are more functions of the 'superstructure' than they are of the 'base'. The 'base' is the master plot." (9)

(ideally from the ranks of the proletariat) and socialist values.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of these impositions, most films expressed the quest for this “renewed socialist vision” sincerely (Siefert 165).<sup>24</sup> They were not necessarily “defying” the regime as many scholars advocated.<sup>25</sup> Filmmakers tried to make films that would reflect the reality of socialism within the limits of the permissible, i.e. without being overtly critical, which could have been construed as subversive to the regime. The documentary and feature films made about Cuba were also part of this pursuit and so was all ICAIC’s cinema. Nurtured by the film of their progressive counterparts around the world, the ICAIC filmmakers contributed with their own films to this artistic-political quest as well.

Socialist cinema (Cuba included) saw itself as a counterpoint to the dominant commercial Hollywood cinema.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, while experimenting with this new vision, socialist filmmakers and their respective state film institutes’ objective remained socialist. They made “feature [films] realized through [their] collective production [i.e. through creative groups] and dramatized through [their] narrative, and socialist cinematic vision” (Siefert 165). Their task was not easy. Film was art but at the same time it was a political act, “all in the face of audience demand for genre and ‘entertainment’” (166).

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<sup>23</sup> There are number of examples in Czechoslovak and German archives of the state film institutions’ complaints regarding the permanent lack of heroes from the working class (factory workers or members of agricultural cooperatives). They complained that filmmakers preferred yearning intellectuals to representatives from the most important class in the country.

<sup>24</sup> The topic became central in the debates that took place in meetings, festivals and in many films. “A renewed socialist cinematic vision, recalling the revolutionary cinemas of the 1920s and 1930s, was projected with some optimism starting the mid-1950s. The Mexican and Cuban Revolutions as well as the Spanish Civil War became frequent sources of stories. Joris Ivens *Song of the Rivers* (1954) was one of the examples of this renewed fervor (Siefert 165). Ivens was living and working in the GDR at the time he made the film.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Peter Hames’s *Czechoslovak New Wave*.

<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the socialist and the New Latin American cinema shared the same “enemy” as shown in note 2, p. 1.

Films produced in socialist bloc had to be ideologically acceptable to gain approval from the respective state film institutions but at the same time, they had to have “mass appeal” in order to bring in cash and possibly also “hard” currency<sup>27</sup> if approved for showing in international festivals or other events. This proved particularly important, for example, for the East German Film Studios (DEFA) in Berlin. Until 1961, East Berlin citizens could walk over to West Berlin to see a movie if the DEFA’s production was not satisfactory, as Dana Ranga’s *East Side Story*, a documentary on socialist musicals, pointed out (1997). Overseas filming was very expensive. Therefore, all films made in Cuba about Cuba also needed to appeal to the filmmakers’ audiences as well as audiences of the socialist bloc and potentially in the West in order to at least partially recuperate the investment.

Cubans had the opportunity to see the progress of the socialist bloc filmmakers search in the hundreds of feature, didactical and short films that socialist bloc countries sent to Cuba upon the ICAIC’s request in order to help modify the taste of Cuban film audiences accustomed to American films. Cubans also had opportunities to exchange ideas with socialist bloc filmmakers in discussions during film weeks, visits of filmmakers in Cuba and international film festivals. An important element in this learning curve were films that socialist bloc filmmakers made in Cuba about Cuba, especially the feature co-productions.

The socialist films imported to Cuba and the films socialist filmmakers made about Cuba served Cuban filmmakers in a form of both a positive and reverse influence. On the one hand, many of these films, especially the earlier ones, were a prime example of the more extreme socialist realism aesthetics and those had mostly reverse influence, i.e. Cuban filmmakers wanted

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<sup>27</sup> I use the term “hard” currency interchangeably with “convertible” currency, which refers to the currency that could be used for business with Western countries (dollars, West German marks, francs, etc.).



to distance themselves from these films. *Coffea Arábiga* (1968) by Nicolás Guillén Landrián, for example, took a form of a typical socialist didactical film, as exemplified by those sent from Eastern Europe, and reworked it in a subtle critique of an inefficient governmental initiative.

On the other hand, when the process of “destalinization” spread throughout the socialist bloc, Eastern European filmmakers, especially the Czechoslovaks and the Poles started making new films that showed the socialist reality differently. The films of the new generation of filmmakers were especially daring. They grew up in socialism and their governments trusted them. Therefore, they were more confident in questioning different realities in their socialist societies. Many of their films are considered a part of the “New Wave” cinema.<sup>28</sup> Many filmmakers also experimented with different popular genres like western in a non-standard way. The use of popular genres usually worked well with audience and Cuba resorted to them eventually as well.

Several of these more critical and innovative films were warmly received at home but harshly criticized by Cubans. On the one hand, the “liberals” in Cuba considered some of the films still “too close” to what they called socialist realism or “stalinism”.<sup>29</sup> Among other things, they usually pointed out schematism and lack of development in characters. On the other hand, the dogmatics accused some films of going “too far” when they felt the films aligned “too much” with what they considered the “bourgeois” way of thinking or viewing. This kind of reactions show a different way of understanding of the supposedly uniform standards in socialist values,

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<sup>28</sup> More on the East Central European New Wave movement see, for example, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* for the movement in Czechoslovakia or *The Polish National Cinema* on the Polish Film School, which was considered the Polish New Wave.

<sup>29</sup> BArch, Berlin. DR 18902. Über die gegenwertige Situation in der kubanischen Kultur und Wissenschaft, p.4.

symbols and aesthetics in different countries as well as the influence of these films on Cuban cinema.

### **Methods and bibliography**

This study does not aim to hypothesize an argument based on a deep and thorough analysis of films. Instead, its objective is to reconstruct the cultural history of collaboration between Cuba and three socialist bloc countries. With this goal in mind I use several films as case studies. I zoom in on a specific moment in time – the decade of the 1960s (especially its first half). I focus on the Soviet Union (USSR), the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia, the three countries that had the most intense exchange with Cuba in the area of cinema in that time period. Poland and Hungary also had intensive exchange with Cuba, however, they are not included in the study for practical reasons of inaccessibility of documents (Poland) and the language barrier (Hungary). I selected three countries to show that the application of cinematic socialist internationalism was not homogeneous.

The analysis centers on three co-productions: the Soviet *Soy Cuba* (Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964), the Czechoslovak *Para quién baila La Habana* (Vladimír Čech, 1962) and the East German *Preludio II* (Kurt Maetzig, 1964). I chose these three co-productions specifically because 1) they were the first three Cuban-socialist bloc feature co-productions ever made; 2) they were the only three co-productions with the socialist bloc that had Cuba and the Cuban Revolution as their main topic; 3) the ICAIC disregarded them as “failures”,<sup>30</sup> and lastly, 4) they were the only three co-productions that came with material help and professional training for the

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<sup>30</sup> The ICAIC regarded them as unsuccessful, an example not to follow. This is evident from Gutiérrez Alea’s interview with Oraz (88) as well as Alfredo Guevara’s letter to Carneado in *Tiempo de fundación* (271).

ICAIC.<sup>31</sup> The study surveys historical documents regarding the films' conception, preparation, production, and reception in order to show their role and implications within the framework of socialist internationalism.<sup>32</sup>

Although I examine the material benefits the co-productions provided as well as how they impacted professional development of the ICAIC's personnel, my main focus are the co-productions' ideological implications: their attempt to integrate Cuba into the socialist narrative while simultaneously supporting the cause of the Cuban Revolution abroad. I show through these co-productions, their reviews and their production documentation how Kalatozov, Čech and Maetzig negotiated their perspective and what compromises they had to make between their perception of the Cuban revolutionary and their own socialist realities as well as among their artistic aspirations and ideological stance and expectations of the Cuban and their home film institutes.

The archival research also shows what steps the filmmakers took to address the expectations of their home and the socialist bloc audiences. It was an important consideration because the audiences expected a form of entertainment that would justify the resources put into a film made in distant exotic locations. At the same time, the three filmmakers continued striving – as they did in the films they made at home – to reconcile art and politics. In reality that meant to create a hero that would reflect socialist values and inspire the viewer to take action (support, more active participation in the building and defense of socialist society), socialist ideology

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<sup>31</sup> After these three co-productions, the socialist bloc continued providing Cuba with material help and professional training but not in a form of co-productions.

<sup>32</sup> All references and quotes from German and Czechoslovak documents are provided with a translation made by the author of this study. Quotes from documents in Spanish are quoted in Spanish unless the Spanish original is not available.

(fight against imperialism and the class enemies) and art (artistic form in service of socialism worldwide). The reviews show how successful they were in their quest for a true, solidarity-driven socialist film.

I situate the analysis of the three co-productions within the context of the history of Cuban relations with the three countries as well as a corpus of other cinematic works and projects that socialist bloc filmmakers made in Cuba and about Cuba in the 1960s decade and beyond. Among these films belonged, for example, several documentaries made by the Soviet filmmaker Roman Karmen and the Czechoslovak Bruno Šefranka as well as other film projects that involved Cuba in some aspect of the film. The documentaries are particularly important because alongside the newsreels they were the first image that the socialist bloc citizens saw of the Revolutionary Cuba and thus shaped the public's opinion. They also affected the reception of the posterior socialist bloc cinematic projects made in Cuba. This contextualization is crucial because it not only demonstrates the changing intensity of exchange between the countries' film industries but also how the Cuban discourse on the "new Cuba" shaped over time.

This study examines the selected socialist films from the perspective of the broader definition of socialist realism and its unique variation of war and warfare films. I denominate "Cuban warfare film" any film (art film or a film with classical narrative) about the Cuban Revolution that portrays some form of historical armed struggle (independence wars, slave rebellion, fights in Sierra Maestra or Escambray, etc). We can trace many similarities between the Cuban warfare films and the Soviet war films as Youngblood described them<sup>33</sup> In Cuba as in the Soviet Union, "wars in both their factual and mythologized incarnations served as the

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<sup>33</sup> Cuban warfare films share several features with the Soviet war films as outlined by Youngblood but they are not equivalent.

rationale for maintaining the hypercentralized authoritarian state: ‘We are surrounded by enemies who seek to destroy us.’” (Youngblood 3).

This study argues that the Cuban warfare film was a Cuban-specific application of socialist realism (and the Soviet war film) and that the three co-productions in question also belong among them. As in other socialist films throughout the bloc, warfare films in Cuba (like the war films in the USSR), “gave filmmakers the opportunity to subvert official history in the guise of art or entertainment, a luxury that Soviet [and Cuban] historians did not have” (3).<sup>34</sup> Still, many Soviet and Cuban directors “took the historical enterprise and their role as quasi historians very seriously” (3) and so did socialist filmmakers who came to make films about Cuba. All of them conducted heavy research. At the same time, however, the films were designed as entertainment movies because those appealed to the most people. As such, they were envisioned as a very efficient vehicle for “spreading propaganda”.

Although the Cuban warfare films, the socialist co-productions included, were supposed to transmit the official history, we cannot consider them as “a history written on film” because cinema is not particularly efficient in transmitting “facts” as Youngblood pointed out. Nevertheless, “a well-made historical film can evoke the *flavor* and *feeling* of an era more effectively than the written word” [italics added] (Youngblood 3). As White noted, film is a distinctive form of historical discourse based on “visual images and filmic discourse” (1193), which he denominates historiophoty.<sup>35</sup> According to him, a “translation” of a certain written account of history into “audio-visual equivalent” means “a significant loss of content” (1193).

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<sup>34</sup> It does not mean necessarily that their goal was to make subversive films.

<sup>35</sup> White defines “historiophoty” as “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse” (1193).

When assessing the historical value of a film, therefore, we cannot really speak of “accuracy” but rather “authenticity” (Youngblood 3). This is a crucial aspect for the study of the Cuban films made by foreigners because in their case the concept of “accuracy” and “authenticity” reigned Cuban willingness to accept the film as “Cuban”.

Cuban films made by foreigners were particularly vulnerable to judgements because foreign filmmakers had to make multiple “translations”. They not only “translated” into an audio-visual form all oral histories and written accounts they had discovered during their investigation. They also needed to “translate” Cuban culture and history to an audio-visual language understandable to their home audiences. For that matter, whenever possible, this study evaluates the films together with the film reviews both at home and in Cuba. In the full extent, however, this was only possible in the case of the Czechoslovak films. The rest of the films analyzed here are mostly examined just in conjunction with their Cuban film reviews.

I found particularly important to proceed this way because the Cuban reviews of the three socialist bloc-Cuban feature co-productions cast the word “inauthentic” frequently. On the contrary, the word “authentic” appears several times in Cuban reviews of Karmen’s *Alba de Cuba*. Therefore, the analysis will reveal that a true historical merit (judging from the reviews) consisted more in authentic evocation of the Cuban experience of armed struggles (anti-Batista struggle, militia interventions, Sierra Maestra fights, etc.) than their historical accuracy. This “authentic” feeling was connected with enthusiasm, unconditional support of the Cuban Revolution leaders and certain romanticism that surrounded this first period of the Cuban Revolution. The ICAIC and a large portion of Cuban audience expected this approach in all films made about Cuba.

## Resources

The main contribution of my study is that it is built predominantly on primary sources. I have spent significant amount of time sifting through documents in several archives in the Czech Republic and Germany, especially for Chapters 3 and 4 (Czech and Slovak archives) and Chapter 5 and 6 (German archives). I have also relied greatly on the fieldwork done in those countries and Cuba. The data collected from the interviews in Cuba, Poland, and the Czech Republic as well as the interviews conducted virtually (skype, emails) permeate all chapters.

As for the archives, I have mostly leaned on documents from *Národní filmový archiv* (NFA) [National Film Archive] holdings in Hradištko, Czech Republic. The materials from the funds of the Central Directorship of the Czechoslovak State Film, the Secretariat of the Central Directorship, Film Studios Barrandov, and Filmexport were especially revealing. The documents related to the meetings of the *Ústřední výbor (ÚŘ)* [Central Directorship], *Sekretariát ÚŘ* [Sekretariat] and *Kolegiální porady* [Collegial meetings] were probably my most important archival source. Many reports about decisions made in those meetings as well as preparatory documents for those meetings contain extensive information about the Cuban-Czechoslovak cooperation in the technical as well as other areas. They were particularly important for the analysis in Chapter 3 and 4.

Most of these NFA materials are only partially processed. Working with them was a very slow and time consuming process but it rendered unexpected discoveries that many times led to shifts in my perspective. Most of the materials related to the Czechoslovak engagement with the Third World, and Cuba specifically, remain largely understudied and unpublished. These materials certainly deserve attention of film scholars as well as Latin Americanists working on

film. In addition to these materials, NFA also enabled me to access some films about Cuba, such as Šefranka's documentaries.

In addition to the NFA materials, I have worked with documents from *Národní archiv* (NA) [National Archive] in Prague, especially the funds of *Ministerstvo školství a kultury* (MŠK) [Ministry of Education and Culture]. Not many materials related to the Czechoslovak-Cuban cooperation with Cuba from the Ministry of Education and Culture are available because they had either been destroyed or relocated in the early 1990s. Others are still being processed and are currently not accessible to researchers.

Furthermore, *Archív Ministerstva zahraničních věcí* (AMZV) [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] in Prague also rendered important data for my research, especially the Territorial Departments collection that contains a significant amount of correspondence between the Czechoslovak Embassy in Cuba and the Ministry. Some of the correspondence was duplicated in the Ministry of Culture collection in the NA. In addition to them, I have also been able to access archival materials from the Slovak National archive in Bratislava, especially Ivan Bukovčan's collection related to his script "Paloma negra" (Chapter 3).

For Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I have examined mostly archival holdings from Bundesarchiv in Berlin, especially the Deputy Minister Rodenberg's collection and the DEFA holdings. These documents supplied me with information relating *Preludio II* (reports, evaluations) as well as other forms of cooperation between the GDR and Cuba in the area of film and television.

In addition to these archival sources, I also studied film reviews in Cuban, German, Soviet, and Czechoslovak newspapers. They were crucial for establishing a "dialogue" between



the film and the audience of film critics. In the absence of data regarding general audience receptions of the films discussed in this study, the reviews reveal what specific issues the critics found with the films and what they saw as enriching or acceptable for Cuban cinema. In conjunction with other archive documents, however, the reviews of the critics, who served the goals of the groups they affiliated with, also reveal political strategy. I have mostly gained access to these reviews in *Cinemateca cubana* (Cuba) and the NFA Library (Czech Republic), which both hold newspaper clippings related to the films in their database.

In Cuba, I have mostly conducted fieldwork. I decided on this approach for two reasons. First, I wanted to take advantage of the fact that many ICAIC employees from the 1960s are alive and, despite the passage of time, they still remember the socialist bloc technicians and artists who came to offer their help in building the Cuban national cinema. Second, socialism was known as a system where many ambitious plans were made but not all of them came through. Therefore, not all the reports about people who were supposed to travel to Cuba and events or films planned can be taken as a fact. Furthermore, in spite of different government directives that all the state institutions should hand over documents to the archives, some enterprises did not comply or complied only sporadically. As a consequence, some documentation has been lost. Such is the case of, for example, *Krátký film* (KF) [Short Film], even though in this case some damage might have resulted from the relocation of the archive.

For the reasons stated above, I found oral history to be a good way to at least partially cover the gaps caused by lacking or incomplete archival documentation. I have included interviews with Cuban directors, photographers and technicians who used to work or still work at the Cuban film institute. They still remember well the socialist bloc filmmakers and technicians

who used to work side by side with them in their workplace or during co-productions, or shared their knowledge through workshops and discussions. In addition to them, I was also able to interview two of the last three remaining Czechoslovak Film technicians who worked in Cuba in the 1960s. They not only provided me with detailed information on their assignments but also offered a post-socialist bloc perspective on how the Czechoslovak experts perceived the Cuban Revolution, the Czechoslovak-Cuban cooperation in film as well as their own involvement in it.

### **A Note on Bibliography**

This study intersects several major field studies: Latin American Studies, Film Studies, History and Cultural Studies, and Eastern and Eurasian Studies.

#### *The Socialist Bloc and Latin America*

Many publications and articles have been written on the socialist bloc's relations with Latin America; most of them, however, emphasize the Soviet-Latin American relationships. This is true not only for the studies published before 1990 such as Stephen Clissold's *Soviet Relations with Latin America 1918 – 1968* and *Castro, the Kremlin, and Communism in Latin America* by D. Bruce Jackson but also for those published after 1990. Most of them focus on the military, political and economic power of the USSR exercised in Latin America. This aspect is particularly strong in the Clissold's and Jackson's titles, both of which were written in the 1960s. One of the most important Czech scholars who wrote about the Cuban-Soviet relations from the post-1990 perspective was Vladimír Nálevka, who dedicated his *Karibská krize* to the power dynamics in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Among the works written on the Soviet-Latin American exchange, the most useful for this study has been Tobias Rupprecht's recent *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*, in which he explains the importance of cultural diplomacy in the Soviet foreign policy. He argues that after Stalin's death, socialist internationalism changed its quality. Rather than continuing to focus on the militant expression of socialism geared towards the progressive people of the world, especially communists, the USSR changed its strategy. It started to develop its propaganda more on the image of a benefactor of the Third World and a model of technological development, alternative to the United States. It thus aimed at a broader international audience.

Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild's *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World* supplements and expands Rupprecht's work. It adds the dimension of heterogeneity to the analysis of the socialist internationalism of the Second World in terms of the different countries' approaches to the concept. It compares and contrasts their socialist internationalism to its Soviet variation. Both studies inform the framework of the present study because they enabled a differentiation of the concept of socialist internationalism among the different countries of the socialist bloc.

Some national studies also examine socialist internationalism. For example, there are several studies that survey the Czechoslovak and the Central European-Latin American relations. *Las relaciones entre Checoslovaquia y América Latina 1945 – 1989 en los archivos de la República Checa* focuses mostly on Czechoslovak diplomacy and commercial exchange with Latin America. Although it mentions cultural exchange only marginally, it confirms that Czechoslovak internationalism mirrored its Soviet version. At the same time, the study emphasizes that the commercial relations Czechoslovakia had built in Latin America before 1948

helped open doors for the rest of the socialist bloc, allowing socialist internationalism in Latin America to become more effective.

*Las relaciones entre Europa Oriental y América Latina 1945 – 1989* took a different approach to the topic. It contains many articles dedicated to topics concerning cultural ties between Eastern Europe and Latin America in areas like sports and education. Such publications that examine East Central European connections with Latin America in the area of culture are exceptions to the rule.

Another important source on the post-1959 Czechoslovak-Cuban relations is Hana Bortlová's *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959 – 1962*, which examines several facets of the Czechoslovak-Cuban collaboration. Although she is interested mainly in the Cuban cooperation with the Czechoslovak secret service, the supply of Czechoslovak military equipment and training, she expands beyond these three areas as well. For example, she also examines Czechoslovak diplomacy, economic relations, scientific cooperation, and education. Her study reveals the depth and breadth of the first four years of Cuban relations with one specific country of the socialist bloc where the cooperation was particularly intense.

For the period before 1989, there are also many memoirs and biographies of experts, journalist, filmmakers, and writers who visited Cuba for shorter or longer periods of time and whose perspective on the Cuban Revolution and Cuban cultural achievements in the 1960s are also worth reviewing. Among these belongs, for example, the Slovak screen and literary writer Ivan Bukovčan's *Kuba bez brady* [Cuba without a Beard], the Czech translator and writer Lumír Čivrný's *Co se vejde do života* [What Fits into Life] and Roman Karmen's *Po stranam trech kontinentov* [Through Countries of Three Continents].

*Transnational Cinema: Cuba and the Socialist Bloc*

Much has been written about Cuban cinema before and after 1990 but not much has been published about international influences in Cuban cinema. One of the most important studies of Cuban cinema history is Michael Chanan's *Cuban Cinema*, first published in 1985 and re-published in 2004. His study reviews the importance of interactions among the Cuban films, government initiatives and viewers. Although he mentions foreign influences in Cuban cinema, the influence of the socialist bloc is strongly downplayed, shown as unimportant, obsolete and conveniently inconvenient. That goes for the cooperation in general as well as the three socialist co-productions with Cuba more specifically.

The relationship between the Cubans and the Soviets in the area of film is also a subject of several chapters of Jacqueline Loss and José Manuel Prieto's *Caviar with Rum*, which examines the post-Soviet experience in Cuba. The main theme of the book is "nostalgia" for what Cubans remember from Soviet culture, for example, *los muñequitos rusos*, i.e. socialist bloc television cartoons. Carlos Espinosa Domínguez adopts a stance similar to Michael Chanan in his chapter "The Mammoth That Wouldn't Die" in *Caviar with Rum* as well as his article "Lo que el tiempo se llevó", published in the online journal CineEncuentro. In those articles, he examines the 1960's socialist co-productions with Cuba based mostly on the negative reviews in the Cuban press at that time.

Cuban film critic Juan Antonio García Borrero uses similar research sources as Espinosa Domínguez in his survey of Cuban cinema history in *Cine cubano en los sesenta: Mito y realidad*, in which he attempts to look at the 1960s with a more critical eye. In this volume, he mentions the socialist bloc-Cuban cooperation only briefly, however, in his following book,

*Intrusos en el paraíso*, the international influences on Cuban cinema are his main topic. In *Intrusos en el paraíso*, he pays tribute to foreign filmmakers who came to help build Cuban cinema, for example, Cesare Zavattini from Italy and Margarita Alexandre from Spain. In addition to these Western filmmakers, who occupy a larger portion of the book, he also dedicates a few chapters to the socialist filmmakers who came to assist Cuban cinema. His work is mostly based on the research sources located in Cuba. His view on the incoming “intruders” is positive, as he shows the broader implications that such international cooperation had on Cuban cinema.

English-language studies on the history of Eastern European cinema have been limited in number and have perpetuated the standard thinking of the period before 1990 as Dina Iordanova pointed out. She stated that such works usually overemphasized the Cold War dichotomy, i.e. the binary of a revolt against the state versus conformism as well as the role of censorship. Such is the case, for example, of Peter Hames’s *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, first published in 1986 and re-published in 2005.

Most English-language studies on the region are monographs that focus mostly on film analysis within individual national traditions, such as Peter Hames’s above mentioned study. *German National Cinema* by Sabine Hake and *The Triumph of the Ordinary* by Joshua Feinstein offer a survey of the East German Cinema. *Russian War Films* by Denise J. Youngblood analyzes one aspect of the Soviet and the post-soviet cinema. Seán Allan and John Sandford’s *DEFA East German Cinema 1946 – 1992* is also a monograph, however, it also briefly touches on the Soviet-East German relations in film as well as some cooperation with the rest of the bloc. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke’s *Re-Imaging DEFA* adds another perspective by presenting a review of the East German Cinema in its national as well as transnational context.

There have been several studies that take the relationship among the film industries in socialist Europe as their main focus. One of the earlier ones is, for example, Mira and Antonín J. Liehm's *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* from 1977. One of the more recent studies is the above mentioned Dina Iordanová's *Cinema of the Other Europe* from 2003. The former examines the interplay of art, society and politics in the Eastern European film between 1945 and 1975. The latter focuses mostly on similarities in the individual socialist bloc industries' structure, themes, concerns, stylistics, and interactions, with an important emphasis on the 1960s. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage take a similar approach as Iordanová in *DEFA at the Crossroads*. They look at the East German film industry as it dealt with different foreign influences that shaped both its themes and production practices.

In the Czech Republic, most film studies focus on film analysis. Relatively few recent studies examine production cultures and explore cultural-historical angle of the field. The most recent ones are Petr Szczepanik's *Továrna Barrandov: Svět filmařů a politická moc 1945 - 1970* [Barrandov Factory: The Filmmakers World and the Political Power 1945 – 1970], Lukáš Skupa's *Vadí – nevadí: Česká filmová cenzura v 60. letech* [Czech Film Censorship in the 1960s] and Pavel Skopal's *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku* [The Film Culture of the North Triangle]. Skopal's study from 2014 is unique in the group because it compares production cultures and film reception in three countries of the socialist bloc and examines specific cultural transfers among them. Two English language studies took a similar approach: one that Skopal co-authored with Lars Karl, *Cinema in Service of the State*, and Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau's *Behind the Screen*.

An important addition to transnational cinema history is also Jennifer Hosek's *Sun, Sex*

*and Socialism*, which not only focuses on transnational cinema within the European borders like Skopal but expands beyond them. She specifically examines the connection between the DEFA and the ICAIC. She analyses not only how Cuba affected the East German imagery but also how this imagery influenced East Germany. One of her chapters analyzes the first East German-Cuban co-production *Preludio 11*, where she not only looks at how East German filmmakers perceived Cuba but also provides information about the actual joint production and Cubans' reaction to the German representations of themselves.

This study builds especially on the works of Rupprecht, Opatrný, Skopal, Silberman, Babiracki and Jersild, integrating the Czechoslovakian State Film, the DEFA and Mosfilm initiatives in Cuba within the framework of socialist internationalism. Furthermore, it contributes to Hosek's study, adding how filmmakers from two other countries, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, cinematographically represented Cuba. It facilitates a comparative approach regarding differences in production practices of the three socialist countries (the GDR, the USSR and Czechoslovakia) and Cuba, their goals as well as how Cubans reacted to these different representations of their reality.

Moreover, my study also adds to Skupa, Lars and Szczepanik's works by adding a transatlantic dimension to their study of the Central European production culture and practices. Last but not least, my research enriches and nuances the analysis of Chanan and Borrero. While their sources were mostly Cuban and artistic, this study takes on a more global and technical approach. The present study adds to their analysis of the history of Cuban cinema a significant amount of archival research data from the Czech Republic and East German archives as well as oral testimonies of technicians that they did not include in their respective analysis.



## Chapter Summary

The introduction is followed by a survey of the historical context of Cuban-socialist bloc relations in the area of film. Then Part 1 examines the Soviet-Cuban cooperation and film projects in the offset of the Cuban Revolution. It defines Soviet internationalism and analyzes how 1961 documentary films by Roman Karmen about Cuba and the Cuban-Soviet co-production *Soy Cuba* transmitted the concept (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 defines the concept of *la mirada nacional* on the background of the Cuban post-colonial discourse. It examines how this gaze conflicted with the idea of Soviet internationalism that the Soviet filmmakers were trying to convey in *Soy Cuba*. In this regards, the chapter puts into conversation other international films about Latin America, such as Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Que viva México!* (1932), Marcel Camus's *Black Orpheus* (1959) and Karmen's *Alba de Cuba* (1960) to show what was and what was not acceptable for Cubans and why. Lastly, the chapter surveys the impact this co-production had on posterior co-productions and ends with a brief analysis of the last to-date Cuban-Russian co-production *Lisanka* (2009), a satire dedicated to the period when *Soy Cuba* was made.

Part 2 analyzes the Czechoslovak – Cuban cinematic cooperation. It reviews briefly the Czechoslovak technical support to Cuban cinema, the multiple projects Czechoslovakia envisioned and first documentaries it made in Cuba to support the Cuban Revolution. An important part of this chapter is an analysis of a screenplay “Paloma negra”. It was envisioned as the second Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production, but was aborted because it did not suit the ICAIC's goals (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 focuses on the first and last Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production *Para quién baila La Habana*. It analyzes its historical context, production and reception both in Cuba and Czechoslovakia. In addition, it draws conclusions about similarities

and differences in the Cuban and Czechoslovak production practices as well as audience expectations regarding this first socialist bloc co-production with Cuba. Furthermore, it reveals the co-production's cinematic connection to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) as well as the state of affairs of the Cuban film critics.

Finally, Part 3 is dedicated to the cooperation between the GDR and Cuba. Chapter 5 maps out similarities in histories and goals between the East German and Cuban film industries. It also traces the first steps in the cooperation between the two film industries, its first conversation and its most important actors. Finally, it reviews approaches and themes of the first East German documentary and feature films made on Cuban territory. Chapter 6 zooms in on the most important joint cinematic project, the GDR-Cuban co-production *Preludio 11*. It examines all phases of the making and showing of the film – production, approval, reception and consequences – in its sociopolitical context. It analyzes the film especially on the background of political discussions between the ICAIC and the East Germany Ministry of Culture regarding its suitability for screening and necessary censorship. The chapter also offers a meditation on the co-production's consequences as well as posterior cooperation between the two countries.

The study ends with a brief conclusion, which summarizes the findings and adds some ideas for further exploration of the topic of socialist bloc-Cuban collaboration in the area of film and culture.

## **History**

Cuban history between 1959 and 1989 revolves around Cuba's relationship to two world powers: the United States and the Soviet Union. On the one side, the US economic hegemony over Cuba

before the Revolution and the US post-1959 economic sanctions, and on the other, the Soviet ideological influence and their material aid to Cuba after 1960 (together with the rest of the socialist bloc), decided Cuba's direction for the following forty years. Even though the Cuban Revolution was proclaimed socialist on April 16, 1961, the Cuban-Soviet relationship was far from being clear and unproblematic until 1968 when Cuba openly supported the Soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia and expressed thus its allegiance to the USSR and its path. Before that, however, the ambiguous relationship between the two countries resembled a dance and this reality impacted the relationship of the Cuban government as well as the public had to the socialist bloc in general.

In the first months after the triumph of the Revolution, Fidel Castro and the 26th July Movement's position was not yet consolidated. It was also not clear what ideological direction the new country would take and who would be its main international allies. Even though Castro was originally well received in the USA, the many populist reforms he took in the first months of the new regime such as the Agrarian Reform in May 1959 and subsequent nationalization of many US companies had consequences. They led to the US support of armed attacks on Cuban territory which, in turn, the Cubans resented. The Czechoslovak and East German co-productions both depicted these attacks (Chapter 4 and 6 respectively).

The communists from Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) had experience with the government and organizing of workers and because their position was strong, the 26th July Movement stretched their alliances with them in order to solidify their own political position. In this process, Ernesto Guevara and Raúl Castro played an important role. They both sympathized

with communists.<sup>36</sup> Alfredo Guevara, the ICAIC's director, also had communist affiliation (Chanan 124). Nonetheless, his position was more cautious after he had experienced communist purges in Prague in the early 1950s.<sup>37</sup> The communists had strong relationship to the Soviet Union and after the US threatened to lower Cuban sugar quote, Castro started to look to the socialist bloc for support.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviet Union was initially cautious about any relationship with Cuba because it did not agree with several steps Castro's government was taking and it had its own problems in Europe.<sup>39</sup> However, in February 1960, a Soviet delegation led by Anastas Mikoyan, the nominal Head of State of the USSR, arrived to Havana to sign a commercial agreement to counteract the US threat of lowering the sugar quote. The diplomatic relations with Moscow were established. It was probably during Mikoyan's visit when the first discussions on a Soviet-Cuban co-production took place as a part of the commercial agreement negotiations between the Soviet Union and Cuba. Cuba signed its first commercial agreements with other socialist bloc countries in that year as well, for example, the East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Their state film institutes were among the most active in the area of culture and the two countries signed their first film exchange agreement in 1960 as we will see in Chapter 3 and 5.

The Cubans proceeded with nationalization of most US companies, which resulted in the US embargo and the end of diplomatic relationships. When on April 16, 1961 Castro declared

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<sup>36</sup> For more information on the complex situation in 1961, see, for example, Kapcia's *Cuba in Revolution* (28-29).

<sup>37</sup> Manuel Pérez Paredes. Personal interview. September 2014 and June 2016.

<sup>38</sup> More details in Kapcia and Bortlová.

<sup>39</sup> In 1956, there were two major uprisings – in Poland and Hungary – where the Soviet Army intervened. The Soviet Union was also trying to consolidate its position in partitioned Germany, especially, in the conflict regarding West Berlin.

Cuba a socialist country, J.F. Kennedy approved the Bay of Pigs Invasion which took place between April 17 and 19 of the same year. Castro's victory had two major consequences for Cuba. It reinforced Castro's prestige at home and abroad and drove him to seal the alliance with Moscow for protection. During the invasion, the preparations for the first Czechoslovak exhibition "Czechoslovakia – Land of Friends" were in full swing.<sup>40</sup> The Czechoslovak Film Week took place soon after. Around that time, all three co-productions were agreed upon and started with filming preparations. The first East German-Cuban co-production *Preludio II* took the events immediately preceding the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the so called "Operación Preludio", as its main theme.

A part of the Cuba-USSR agreement was the installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba in September 1962. Consequently, the United States started a maritime blockade of Cuba. At the eve of a potential global nuclear war in October 1962, Nikita Khrushchev and J.F. Kennedy negotiated peace and the USSR withdraw the missiles.<sup>41</sup> As a result of this outcome, however, the Cuban-Soviet relationship cooled down. The events further consolidated the sense of patriotism in Cuba<sup>42</sup> and at the same time affirmed Cuba's decision to benefit as much as possible from the help provided by the socialist bloc while being politically, ideologically and culturally independent.<sup>43</sup> All three co-production teams, Czechoslovak, Soviet and East German,

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<sup>40</sup> The preparation and challenges that the tense political situation provoked were captured in Bruno Šefranka's documentary *Československo-země přátel* (1979).

<sup>41</sup> This topic is the main theme of Daniel Díaz Torres's *Lisanka* which premiered in 2010. It depicts, as a mockery, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Soviet-Cuban relationships at that time. We will discuss the film in Chapter 2.

<sup>42</sup> Cubans on the street shouted over and over: "Nikita, mariquita, lo que se da no se quita" (Krause-Fuchs 78).

<sup>43</sup> In Cuba, the crisis led to a mixture of nationalist resentment and confidence. Cubans felt that on the one hand, their national sovereignty and safety was threatened, and on the other hand, they needed less protection from the USSR because of the US guarantee to not to attack Cuba (Kapcia 33).

were filming in Cuba at that time. The crisis tested the Cuban-socialist bloc “friendship” on the level of the mixed co-production teams. The post-Missile Crisis sentiments that lasted for several years influenced the reception of all three films, *Para quién baila La Habana*, *Soy Cuba* and *Preludio 11*, as well as Cuban relations with the three countries that had made them.

At some point after 1962, China also weighted in strongly with its “third” way that seemed more appropriate to Cuban government because it stood against Khrushchev’s rapprochement with the West, pacific co-existence and reforms, which both China and Cuba considered “revisionist” (Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersil 4).<sup>44</sup> China’s path also emphasized “discipline, effort, and communal labor” (7), the same approach Cuba took under the direction of Che Guevara. Furthermore, it regarded unique experiences with colonialism and indigenous cultures as Rieber pointed out (333), which the Soviets did not take into account as advisers and which became a frequent source of complaints in Cuba and elsewhere in the Third World. The ousting of Khrushchev and inauguration of the more conservative Brezhnev as the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in October 1964, also marked Cuban relationship with the socialist bloc and especially the Soviet Union.

This volatile situation strongly impacted the bilateral relations Cuba had with the three countries, Czechoslovakia, the USSR and the GDR, in the area of culture. It affected their joint projects, some more than others. The ups and downs of the relationships affected especially the three co-production, both in terms of the agreement to make them as well as their reception. A plurality of opinions about the co-productions mirrored the plurality of artistic opinions in Cuba in the 1960s. Most of the reviews, however, in one way or another commented on the co-

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<sup>44</sup> More on the Sino-Soviet split see, for example, Babiracki and Jersil.

production's ability (or inability) to capture the Cuban Revolution "authentically", reflecting that the *national* was more important than the *socialist*. In many cases, the reviews were an extension of the big debates that were ongoing in the Cuban culture and reflected internal struggles for power among the different groups with different relationship to socialism, socialist realism and the Soviet Union. The official (Alfredo Guevara's) assessment of the co-productions was "satisfactory" at most and hinted to the ICAIC's objectives for self-representation.

The internal struggles in the Cuban cultural sphere played out especially on the stage of important cultural institutions. The first big confrontation occurred in 1961 between the ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry), directed by Alfredo Guevara, and the journal *Lunes de Revolución*, supplement of the newspaper *Revolución*, directed by Carlos Franqui. The pretense was the ban of the Cuban experimental film *P.M.* (Sabá Cabrera and Leal Jiménez, 1961),<sup>45</sup> which became the first open act of censorship. The conflict led to a change of direction in the Cuban cultural policy and that indirectly affected *Para quién baila La Habana*.

The second big confrontation took place between the ICAIC and Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC). It was related to the Cuban premiere of *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960) and several other films in 1963. It was most likely also connected to Khrushchev's "crack down on several Soviet artists" in spring 1963 (Siefert 168),<sup>46</sup> which triggered renewed fear among Cuban intellectual and artist community.

The Cuban polemics was related to the function of film in the Cuban society. The

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<sup>45</sup> This was one of the most important debates of the 1960s Cuba. More about the topic can be found, for example, in *El caso pM*.

<sup>46</sup> At one point, Fidel Castro pronounced a discourse about Khrushchev's cultural policy assuring Cuban artists that Cuba had their own cultural policy and did not follow the Soviet model blindly. However, the approach during the so called *quinquenio gris*, a period of repressive, socialist realism like policy in arts, proved the opposite.

participants of the debate argued whether the film should have rather educational or entertainment function. Of course, the topic of socialist realism and schematism became part of the debate.<sup>47</sup> This second confrontation influenced, for example, the ICAIC's relationship with the East German state film institute DEFA (Chapter 5) and impacted the reception of both the GDR-Cuban (Chapter 6) and the Soviet-Cuban (Chapter 2) co-productions.

The year 1968 changed Cuba's approach to the socialist bloc as an aftermath of Castro's support of the Warsaw Pact invasion to Czechoslovakia. As a consequence many of the major differences between Cuba and the USSR smoothed out. However, it had detrimental effect for the intellectual community in Cuba and the Cuban-Czechoslovak relations. It was an irony – on the centennial anniversary of Cuba's struggle for independence and sovereignty, Castro supported an invasion to suppress sovereignty and independence of a small nation. Reinaldo Arenas wrote in his memoir that *Granma* did not take a stand on the issue for three days, until Fidel pronounced his discourse, which was crushing for many Cubans. Arenas summarized the feeling on his autobiography *Antes que anochezca*:

Si alguna esperanza teníamos en una posible democratización en aquel sistema, hacia una posible ruptura con la Unión Soviética, en ese momento quedaba descartada. Sólo nos restaba vivir en un régimen despótico, en una *colonia* despótica, que era, desde luego, más despótica que la misma *metrópoli* de la cual recibía órdenes [italics added]. (151)

Many young Cubans did not stay indifferent and in spite of the government's support of the

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<sup>47</sup> The "shoot-out" between the ICAIC and the CNC was not limited to the exchange of public letters between Blas Roca and Alfredo Guevara. Many filmmakers, writers and cultural functionaries participated. Several of these contributions can be found in *Polémicas culturales de los sesenta*, edited by Graziella Pogolotti.



invasion, they protested in front of the Czechoslovak embassy against “el imperialismo soviético”. The police arrested many of the participants (151). This Cuban perception of the Soviet Union as a metropolis, as a colonizer, is crucial for the analysis of socialist internationalism in this study.

Castro’s tighter adherence to the Soviet Union had many implications on economic, political and cultural level. Their analysis and the analysis of their influence on the relationships of Cuban cinema with the cinemas of the socialist bloc, however, falls outside of the scope of this study. The relationship with Czechoslovakia eventually normalized as well and in 1972. Official relations on the highest level were established and cultural ties renewed.

### **History of the Cuban Film Industry**

The Revolution immediately recognized film as an important tool of propaganda, education and potential source of admiration in the rest of Latin America. As a consequence, *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficas* (ICAIC), as the official state film institution, was created by one of the government’s first decrees, side by side with the agricultural reform, within only three months of the seizure of power on January 1, 1959. It was the first decree about cultural matters (Chanan 4).<sup>48</sup> Alongside the ICAIC, Casa de las Américas was founded in April 1959 and in January 1961, Consejo Nacional de Cultura (Cumaná 1).

Cuba’s government assured with series of decrees the full logistical support and financing for the ICAIC’s activities. There were many foreign, especially American, companies in Cuba in

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<sup>48</sup> The ICAIC took over the production of documentaries *Esta tierra nuestra* by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and *La vivienda* by Julio García Espinosa that had been undertaken by the Division of Culture of the Rebel Army established in January 1959 (Cumaná 1).

1959. In addition to them, there were enterprises, owned by Cubans, some of which were founded before and some after Batista left the island. All of these companies co-existed with the ICAIC in this first time period. Later they were either nationalized or absorbed by the film institute. The nationalization of the film industry started as early as 1959 and lasted until 1965. In March 1959, the studios in Cubanacán, former Baltimore, were transferred to the ICAIC.<sup>49</sup> The ICAIC started to amplify and urbanize the studios in January 1961 (Douglas 155). The ICAIC also gained an office space in Edificio Atlantic, in Vedado, on the 23th Street between 10 and 12 (Douglas 147),<sup>50</sup> its headquarters until this day.

In December 1959, the government nationalized two film exhibition companies, Compañía Operadora de Espectáculos La Rampa, S.A. and el Cine de Arte y Ensayo La Rampa, both by the Resolution 1104, of Ministerio de Recuperación de Bienes Malversados (Douglas 148). In lieu of mass nationalizations in Cuba, some North American companies, like Republic Pictures, Paramount and RKO Radio, closed its Cuban branches.<sup>51</sup> In May 1960, film laboratories 16mm, owned by Telecolor, S.A., were nationalized and transferred to the ICAIC by the Law 2790 from February 18, 1960 and the Resolution 3741 from May 4, 1960 of the Ministry (151). In September 1960, the production company Noticiario Noticolor, owned by Manolo Alonso, was nationalized (153). In October of the same year, the most important cinematographic circuits got under the ICAIC's control by the Law 890 from October 13, 1960.

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<sup>49</sup> They belonged to the State but Manolo Alonso used them for his own benefit, according to Manuel Mendoza (qtd. in Sotto 26).

<sup>50</sup> The building belonged mostly to lawyers at that time who had been gradually relocated out of the building. The building has been the ICAIC's headquarters ever since.

<sup>51</sup> Their funds are administered by Motion Pictures, Películas Europeas, S.A. and Arthur Rank, respectively (Douglas 149).

Before that some other film theatres, like Riviera, Acapulco, and Lido, had been nationalized by various resolutions. Nationalizations continued for more than a year, until the ICAIC dominated all the commercial film exhibition venues and companies in Cuba (153).

In May 1961, the ICAIC started intervening and nationalizing film distribution companies, in compliance with the Resolution 2868 from May 10, 1961 of the Ministry. In that first stage, six North American companies were nationalized: Películas Fox de Cuba, Artistas Unidos, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Columbia, Warner, and Universal. Later, nationalizations continued with all foreign and Cuban film distribution companies, some of which, like Rank, Pelimex and others, through negotiations. This operation finalized in 1965. In order to take over these companies, the ICAIC created the Consolidated Film Distribution, later Distribuidora Nacional de Películas (Douglas 156). In January 1965, the process of nationalization of distribution companies culminated by expropriating Allied Artists de Cuba, Buenavista International y Paramount International Films (166).

The subsequent nationalizations not only facilitated the ICAIC premises and equipment but also helped the ICAIC to get rid of all competition. After the nationalization of the film industry was completed, the ICAIC's position was consolidated. It had at its disposition film studios 35mm in Cubanacán, three film laboratories (35mm in Cubanacán, 16mm in Río Almendares, former Telecolor, and Noticiero, former Noticiero Noticolor), and large circuit of commercial cinemas. Furthermore, the ICAIC also eliminated all cinema press and replaced it with *Cine cubano*, the only official film journal existing from that moment on. It launched its first number in 1960, under Alfredo Guevara's direction. The ICAIC's competition thus reduced to a few groups.

One of the ICAIC's most important competitors at that time was the group around *Lunes de Revolución*. The group was under the leadership of Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Other important members were Humberto Arenal, Calvert Casey, Antón Arrufat, and Pablo Armando Fernández.<sup>52</sup> In May 1961, the newly founded the ICAIC prohibited the screening of the short film *P.M.*, directed by the painter Sabá Cabrera Infante, brother of Guillermo (editor of *Lunes*), and Orlando Jiménez Leal. Guillermo Cabrera Infante had produced the film. *P.M.* (1961) was previously shown on television, by TV channel run by *Revolución*. However, the ICAIC banned it from screening in commercial cinemas because it considered it “en ese momento, nocivo a los intereses del pueblo cubano y su Revolución” (Douglas 156).<sup>53</sup> The timing was significant. The incident took place six weeks after the Bay of Pigs Invasion when the patriotic spirit was at its highest. The polemics that formed around this film prompted Fidel Castro to meet with Cuban intellectuals in the National Library and pronounce his famous *Words to the Intellectuals*<sup>54</sup> in June 1961. At the end of 1961, *Lunes de Revolución* ceased existing and the group was no longer the ICAIC's competition.

The Czechoslovak Film Week was celebrated during the time when the debate around *P.M.* was taking place. A Czechoslovak delegate reported after the event that the Cuban press was “still in hands of people who, even though they had returned to Cuba as ‘patriots’, [never changed] their ideas and thinking [which] stayed within the categories of the former rulers. Today many of them are offended, disgusted and tired. Most intellectuals experience such

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<sup>52</sup> It was founded in March 1959. More about the group also in “Lunes de Revolución: Entre el mito y la realidad” online on [http://librinsula.bnjm.cu/secciones/237/entrevistas/237\\_entrevistas\\_1.html](http://librinsula.bnjm.cu/secciones/237/entrevistas/237_entrevistas_1.html).

<sup>53</sup> More information about the “P.M. affair” also in Chanan (133 – 143).

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html>.

feelings.”<sup>55</sup>

During the press conference, according to the report, the delegates could “spot people and their worldview at the first sight, even though they [were] not openly hostile.” The Czechoslovak delegation resented that these journalists had created with their reviews an “atmosphere of unattractiveness” before the Week and did the opposite in the case of American production.<sup>56</sup> Most certainly, some of these journalists were affiliated with the *Lunes de Revolución* group.<sup>57</sup> And even though the writer of the report from the Film Week did not reference *P.M.* directly, he did note that the Week “helped, at least partially, to paralyze some ‘Italian and French influences’, which some of the ICAIC’s members [tried] to promote.”<sup>58</sup> The prohibition of *P.M.* happened soon after the week’s closure, on May 31, 1961 (Douglas 156).<sup>59</sup>

The film was not anti-Revolutionary per say, but it showed the African descendent population in conditions remnant of their subdued position under Batista – drinking and socializing in night bars. This image was not serving the edification of the image of racial equality the Revolution was promoting. The timing of the film was paramount, as Chanan explains, “perhaps *P.M.* was only mildly offensive film, but in the euphoria that followed the defeat of the mercenaries” just six weeks before made it seem worse (133).

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<sup>55</sup> National Archive (NA). Ministry of Culture (MŠK). 35 Kuba 1961. The Week of Czechoslovak Film.

<sup>56</sup> National Archive (NA), Ministry of Culture (MŠK). 35 Kuba 1961. The Week of Czechoslovak Film.

<sup>57</sup> One of them was *Lunes de Revolución*. The *P.M.* was banned during the same month as the Film Week, which certainly affected the group’s attitude towards anything what came from the socialist bloc.

<sup>58</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1961. The Week of Czechoslovak Film. The author, probably Dubovský or the ambassador Pavlíček, most likely referred to *P.M.*, which was considered a Neorealist experiment in form.

<sup>59</sup> On May 31, 1961 the prohibition got ratified, after the film had been shown to members of various institutions, who were asked about their opinion.

The discussions around the ban included Fidel Castro and were crucial for defining the margins of artistic freedom for all intellectuals and artists in socialist Cuba. These margins were set by his *Palabras a los intelectuales* in which he emphasized that “Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada.” He made clear that no one had any rights against the Revolution because the Revolution was for all the people in Cuba and as such had the right to exist. Therefore, artistic experimentation was allowed but only if it served the Revolution. The ICAIC took charge of interpreting how Castro’s words would be understood in film production and exhibition. After Castro’s speech and the *P.M.* ban, *Lunes de Revolución* lost its influence and most of its members eventually left the country. The censorship of many films<sup>60</sup> that followed was the aftermath of the ICAIC’s interpretation of Fidel’s words, but also its alliances and disagreements with institutions occupied by more dogmatic communists.<sup>61</sup> This directly affected all the co-productions discussed in Chapters 2, 4 and 6.

The three co-productions indirectly participated in the debate around socialist realism and the function of cinema in socialist society. These two facets had already discussed in the National Library in 1961 but they were still important topics in 1963 when a major disagreement took place between Alfredo Guevara (ICAIC) and Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC). The latter was known for its inflexible views on socialist art and its obedience to the Soviet Union. Its stance was very threatening for many liberally thinking intellectuals and artists. The conflict was about how much Cuban cinema should or should not adhere to Soviet socialist realism and

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Pineda Barnet’s *Cosmorama*, a highly experimental short film, was shown only once and never shown again because it was considered too experimental. Enrique Pineda Barnet. Personal interview. 17 September 2014.

<sup>61</sup> The ban of *P.M.* was a result of the alliance of the ICAIC with the cultural commission of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) as Alfredo Guevara revealed in his interview in “No Creo Que Mi Pueblo Valga La Pena” (70).

whether the cinema should serve for educational or entertaining purposes. On the one hand, “The ICAIC believed passionately in aesthetic pluralism [and that] the only way for audiences to become more discerning was to have the opportunity and encouragement to see as many different kinds of film as possible” (Chanan 178).

On the other hand, Consejo Nacional de Cultura defended strictly educational function of cinema and socialist realism aesthetics. Its position was very close to the German Democratic Republic but Czechoslovakia and Poland departed significantly from the position in the 1960s. The conflict in Cuba started when a senior-ranking communist Blas Roca challenged the ICAIC’s pluralist exhibition policy in the United Party of the Socialist Revolution’s official paper *Hoy*. He attacked Fellini’s *La dolce vita* and some other films in December 1963 as “[inappropriate] *entertainment* for Cuban working class” [italics added] (Chanan 178). Alfredo Guevara, supported by Fidel Castro (Chanan 179), counterattacked and was able to successfully shield the ICAIC from any significant interference from the CNC, at least for the moment.<sup>62</sup> This conflict directly impacted the Soviet-Cuban co-production *Soy Cuba*, which was about to premiere the following year.

The ICAIC not only had to face political problems. After 1959, Cuban cinema, previously run mostly by the Americans, received a blow by sudden departure of its managers, directors, producers, editors, actors, and other film personnel. In addition, the original supplier of the technology and material disappeared and the newly founded ICAIC found itself in dire need of resources: human, technical and financial. In order to rebuild the national film industry, the ICAIC had to ask for help anyone they could.

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<sup>62</sup> The original article was published on December 12, 1963. Alfredo Guevara wrote a response to Blas Roca in *Hoy* on December 17, 1963. He wrote: “To men like you, the public is made up of babies in need of a wet-nurse who will feed them with ideological pap, highly sterilized, and cooked in accordance with the recipes of socialist realism.”

One of the ways different countries helped Cuba was through making films about Cuba on Cuban territory. For this, Cuba had one major condition: the foreign filmmakers had to employ Cubans, so that they could develop the necessary skills and thus help strengthen the Cuban film industry.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the Italian neorealist cinematographer Otello Martelli found himself, for example, collaborating on *Historias de la Revolución* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960), and writer Cesare Zavattini, another leading Italian neorealist, on *El joven rebelde* (Julio García Espinosa, 1961) (Chanan 144). These foreign filmmakers not only collaborated on films, but also offered workshops. The Cuban filmmakers, then in the early stages of their careers, eagerly participated in them.<sup>64</sup> Even though many foreign filmmakers were invited to come and teach in Cuba, the ICAIC heeded a philosophy that was in line with Cuba's desire to pave its own way in everything. Alfredo Guevara explained in Vicente Ferraz's documentary *The Siberian Mammoth*, "que todo el mundo venga, que todo el mundo sea diferente, pero que nadie nos marque" (00:12:40).

The films that foreign filmmakers made in Cuba not only aimed to help train the ICAIC's filmmakers and technicians. They also had a political purpose. The ICAIC's production was very small but it needed to promote the image of the "new" Cuba all over the world to harvest support. They needed friendly foreign filmmakers to make the films for them and about them. Especially the first documentaries, such as the Soviet Roman Karmen's *Alba de Cuba* and *La lámpara azul* ([Blue Lamps], 1961), Czechoslovak Bruno Šefranka's documentaries about the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Revolution and the Literacy campaign (1961), the Polish Jerzy

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<sup>63</sup> Since there were joined resources, human and material, many of these early projects could actually be considered co-productions.

<sup>64</sup> There are numerous articles in *Cine cubano* written by Cuban filmmakers about their experience working with foreign filmmakers. For example, in *Cine cubano* from October – November 1963 (n. 3), there is an article that features many directors writing about their experience working with Joris Ivens.



Hoffman's *Hawana 61* (1961), and Joris Ivens documentaries made a huge splash inside and outside the socialist bloc. They were especially useful as propaganda material during the Cuban Missile Crisis, as we will see, in Karmen's case in Chapter 1 and Šefranka's in Chapter 3.

The socialist bloc helped Cuban cinema in a number of ways. In addition to the political and ideological support through documentary films, the socialist bloc offered artistic and institutional support. The artistic consisted, among other things, in helping change the taste of Cuban audience used to seeing mostly American films. Cuba's government nationalized the major distribution companies and as a consequence the Americans cut their film distribution in Cuba. Furthermore, the newly established Commission for Film Study and Classification prohibited many Western films.<sup>65</sup> The Cubans were used to double features but suddenly the ICAIC found itself with "nothing to show".<sup>66</sup>

The Soviet and the socialist bloc saved the day by supplying films in bulk, so that the ICAIC owned cinemas could stay open. Julio García Espinosa praised this display of friendship and solidarity in his interview with Orlando Castellanos. He explained: "Cuando nosotros iniciamos la producción de películas, las salas de exhibición del país estaban en manos privadas, que respondían a los intereses del cine norteamericano." The Cubans proposed to the foreign exhibition companies what they considered their elemental right: "el derecho a pasar nuestro cine en nuestro propio país" (qtd. in Castellanos 56). The owners refused and started to cause disruptions in programming. Consequently, the big distributors' movie theatres were nationalized

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<sup>65</sup> The ICAIC's Consejo de Dirección dictated the Resolution 119 of November 16, which prohibited public or private exhibition of 87 foreign films, considered "de ínfima calidad técnica y artística, cuyo contenido y tendencia reaccionarios resultan deformantes de la historia y la realidad" (Douglas 153).

<sup>66</sup> It was also a business decision on part of the socialist countries. The sales brought hard currency for old films, mostly from the 1950s, which were no longer showing in Czechoslovak cinemas.

and the small owners were indemnified. The Americans removed all their films. That caused a problem because the majority of films shown in Cuba before 1959 were American (56).

The Soviet help was decisive, García Espinosa continued. The Soviets, he explained, provided them with “todas las películas (*los pobres*), inclusive las malas, con tal de que nosotros no nos viéramos obligados a cerrar las salas y a mandar para la calle a miles de trabajadores.”[italics added] (56). Afterwards, of course, Cuban audience started to hate socialist bloc films, which they found boring, and the ICAIC became more selective. However, García Espinosa stated: “... fue un gesto que jamás podremos olvidar, y es un ejemplo muy elocuente de lo que ha significado la colaboración de la Unión Soviética con nuestra cinematografía” (57). From that moment on started “un proceso de descolonización de [las] pantallas [cubanas],” as the Cubans called it. The ICAIC started exhibiting films from all over the world, giving prominent space to films that were marginalized or not shown at all in other countries (57).

Not all the socialist films had good quality; many of them were socialist realism films disliked even in their country of origin. Many had poor technical quality and problems with translation and subtitles.<sup>67</sup> Later, when the ICAIC could afford to be more selective, many of the films from the socialist bloc offered an inspiration to the young Cuban filmmakers both in terms of formal aspects and how they represented socialist society. They offered a more critical alternative to both the earlier socialist realism films and the early ICAIC production.

In this sense, it is interesting to follow Cuban reactions to films from different socialist

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<sup>67</sup> Socialist bloc countries were not prepared for such a sudden upsurge of film export in a language that had not been utilized to that degree in the past. Even Czechoslovakia, which had prior commercial and political relationship to several Latin American countries and exported films to Latin America before (in a limited scope), could not keep up. The Filmexport representative, the Czechoslovak Film delegations and the embassy all complained about the quality of films, lack of commentaries that would intermediate Czechoslovak history to foreign audiences, and the quality of translations. NA. 35 Kuba 1961. Report from the Film Week May 8 – 14, 1961. The GDR had similar problems.

bloc countries in different time periods of the 1960s. While Polish and Czechoslovak films were popular and admired, most of the GDR films were not. However, the 1965 GDR Film Week brought films like *Geteilte Himmel* ([El cielo dividido], 1964), which gained acclaim from Cuban critics and generated enriching discussions between its director Konrad Wolf and the ICAIC's filmmakers. In addition, it is also illuminating to review reports from different film weeks and from the different socialist bloc embassies because the writers often reported on the other countries' film weeks. Their reports uncover that the socialist bloc film industries unofficially competed for impact and popularity of their films in Cuba but also helped each other with subtitling and information.

Institutional assistance from the socialist countries was the first and the most important consistent base for building the Cuban national film industry and it affected all of its aspects. There was an extensive collaboration between the state institutions, such as the Czechoslovak State Film (ČSF), DEFA (East Germany), and Mosfilm (the USSR) with the ICAIC. These institutions provided Cuba with technical assistance and film material; organizational and structural consulting; cinematheque equipment and film journal articles;<sup>68</sup> film personnel training through workshops in Cuba and film schools in their respective countries and organization of film weeks jointly with the ICAIC.

The first film week in Cuba not yet openly socialist was the 1<sup>st</sup> Soviet Film Week on December 1960, which took place in La Rampa movie theatre. Originally, the Czechoslovaks were asked to do the film week during that time but they let the Soviets have their week first

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<sup>68</sup> The cinematheques and film journals regularly exchanged films and articles; especially the newly established *Cine cubano*, the official journal of the ICAIC, benefited greatly by the exchange, and so did Cinemateca cubana which received hundreds of classics of the socialist cinema as Héctor García Mesa wrote in *Cine cubano* in 1960.

(Douglas 154).<sup>69</sup> In May 1961, the first week of Czechoslovak cinema took place (156) and in November 1961, the first film week of the GDR (158). In April 1962, Hungary celebrated their first film week (160) and in October 1962, it was the Polish film week (161), which caused a sensation in Cuba. In January 1964, Bulgaria had its first week (165) and in May 1965, the first week of the Chinese cinema took place (166). Most socialist countries had their first film week in Cuba by mid-1965. By that time the Chinese had theirs, Czechoslovakia had already had three. The political significance of those weeks is evident from the historical markers of the Cuban Revolution they coincided with: the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Film Week, a few weeks after the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Polish Film Week around the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example.

Co-productions were another form of institutional cooperation and they also facilitated exchange among artists of the respective countries. On the one hand, the co-productions provided the ICAIC with material aid and a low cost training. In each of the co-productions, the co-producing country supplied not only the director but other principal personnel too (Chanan 166).<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the co-productions were also an artistic endeavor of the filmmakers who, in most cases, were personally vested in helping the Cuban Revolution and their Cuban colleagues.

All three socialist co-production directors were very committed to their task. The Soviets agreed on the co-production in 1960 and in October 1961, the first group of Soviet filmmakers

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<sup>69</sup> There was a lot of back and forth about the films of one or the other country not being ready but it is also possible that the Soviet Union simply had to have their week first for political reasons.

<sup>70</sup> The socialist co-productions were not the only co-productions made in Cuba at that time. Maria Caridad Cumaná cites and analyzes several other co-productions, both documentaries and features. Among the most notable Western filmmakers' documentaries belong *Carnet de viaje* (1960) by Ivens and *Cuba Si!* (1961) by French Chris Marker – both well received in Cuba. The two fiction features made by foreign filmmakers, *Crónica cubana* (1963) by Uruguyan Ugo Ulive and *El otro Cristóbal* (1963) by French Armand Gatti, on the other hand, “failed to capture the essence of [Cuban] people” as Cumaná points out in her essay (2).

arrived: the renowned Soviet director Mikhail Kalatozov, photographer Serguey Urusevsky and the internationally renowned poet Evgueny Evtushenko. They came to prepare a script for a feature film *Soy Cuba* (Douglas 158). The Czechoslovaks took a while to decide for the right project and it was not until 1961, when the Czechoslovak film director Vladimír Čech and the screenwriter Jan Procházka came to prepare the script for *Para quién baila La Habana* (Douglas 160).<sup>71</sup> The co-production agreement was signed in March 1962 and soon after, Čech's film crew arrived to start filming.

The East German director Kurt Maetzig thought of the idea in 1960. He arrived shortly after the Bay of Pigs Invasion with the screenwriter Wolfgang Schreyer to investigate and write the initial story, inspired by the most recent political events in Cuba. Maetzig and Guevara signed the co-production agreement in spring 1962 but the GDR crew did not start filming until October 1962 because the ICAIC could not service three co-productions at the same time. In addition to Čech's film, they were also assisting Armand Gatti's *El otro Cristóbal* (1963). Finally, in October 1962, Maetzig arrived to film *Preludio 11*, supposed to premiere in 1963. At some point during 1962, the Czechoslovak director Jiří Weiss came to investigate a topic for the second Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production "Paloma negra", which never filmed because the ICAIC did not find it politically appropriate as we will see in Chapter 3.

Michael Chanan, the expert on the history of the Cuban cinema, concluded that all the three socialist bloc co-productions were failures because "no one in Cuba thought much of these

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<sup>71</sup> Originally, Alfredo Guevara requested Jiří Weiss and Otakar Vávra, renowned Czechoslovak directors whose works were known and well received in Cuba. Otakar Vávra was the director of *Němá barikáda* ([Silent Barricade], 1949) and Jiří Weiss made *Vlčí jáma* ([Wolf's Trap], 1957). The latter was paradoxically later banned in Czechoslovakia until the 1990s but was shown in Cuba in the 1980s. It is unknown to the author why the choice of the director of the first Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production fell on Čech but it was probably because of the other directors' filming schedule. A report about the Film Week in Havana in NFA. ÚŘ ČSF zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 1963 and 1978 – 1979, p. 8.

films” (Chanan 166). That might be true if we use the response of the audience as the sole criterion to measure the success or failure of these films. The filmmakers did not have sufficient knowledge of Cuban reality and did not capitalize on all the Cubans participating in the crew as assistant directors, producers and co-screenwriters. The ability to capture Cuban reality, so that the ICAIC leadership and the critical audience in Cuba would perceive the films as authentic, depended on the degree to which the foreign directors and screen writers were willing to negotiate their own vision of Cuba with the Cubans. We will see in Chapters 2, 4 and 6 to what degree the co-productions complied with Cuban expectations and how viable they were as ideological projects in their own countries in this regard.

If we restrict ourselves to judging the co-productions only by the viewers’ response, we will only gain a limited picture about these films’ contribution to Cuban cinema. Therefore, we need to take into consideration other factors as well. At least, we have to consider that their main goal was to train Cuban filmmakers and provide material help. In this sense, they all succeeded. In addition to this material contribution, however, we need to take into account what role they played in defining the Cuban cinematic national identity. Therefore, we cannot only look at how the films looked like and what the audience thought of them but also what this cooperation meant in terms of Cuba’s evolving relationship with the socialist bloc.

## **PART ONE**

### **CUBA MEETS SOVIET FILMMAKERS**

## CHAPTER 1

### *SOY CUBA: SOLIDARITY AND SOVEREIGNTY*

After Stalin died in 1953 and especially after the XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, the Soviet Union started changing its foreign policy. It started leaving behind the policy of paranoid isolation and rejection of everything foreign and began opening up to the world. The two world superpowers, the USSR and the USA, presented themselves as competing models of modern development and as such courted the Third World. The USSR, in order to appeal to the underdeveloped countries, needed to change its strategy to gauge interest of a broader audience. It downplayed its image of the cradle of world revolution and instead emphasized its cultural and technological achievements. The new Soviet foreign policy promoted peaceful coexistence and showed the USSR as a role model and as an “altruistic helper with its own model of fast modernization” (Rupprecht 30). Instead of political activism, the Soviet State now refocused their attention to cultural representation to mobilize audiences abroad as well as at home.

Cultural internationalism, defined here as “attempts to build cultural understanding, international co-operation, and a sense of shared values across national borders through cultural, scientific or student exchanges” (Akira Iriye 34), had its base in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. The socialist internationalism, a political concept promoted by Lenin,<sup>72</sup> whose image the Thaw generation revered as “pure” after Stalin’s atrocities had been denounced, changed form and audience. Rather than appealing only to communists all over the world, it aimed to address also non-communist audiences. Its message became much more about culture and technological

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<sup>72</sup> Rupprecht understand there was a difference between socialist internationalism in the 1920s, which was more of a political concept, and the internationalism after 1953, which was attitude adopted by different levels of population in the Soviet Union (6).



progress than politics.

Latin America became the most important target of the Soviet opening to the world, especially in the late 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. The USSR took interest in Latin American “home-made socialism” (Rupprecht 4). Furthermore, there was a tradition of cultural connections established in the 1920s by Soviet intellectuals such as Vladimir Maiakovski, Sergei Eisensein and Ilja Ehrenburg. Soviet people knew many symbols of the Latin American cultures, especially Mexican, thanks to them. An important factor of this *acercamiento* was also that the Latin American culture was exotic enough to gauge interest in the USSR but not as distant as the Asian and African cultures. The element of the exotic, according to Yurchak, was very important to the Thaw generation of intellectuals and artists (Yurchak 160).<sup>73</sup>

In the framework of Soviet internationalism, many Soviets, especially important cultural personalities, traveled across the Atlantic and many Latin Americans had a chance to visit the Soviet Union. The USSR sent journals written in Spanish, opened clubs, organized spectacles and exhibitions, invited Latin American students and artists. It was how the Soviet State aimed to spread their model of socialist society to the world. When the Cuban Revolution triumphed, the Soviets understood it as a confirmation that their model of the world prevailed. For them, Cuba became the first in the chain of Latin American socialist revolutions and as such received unprecedented support.

When in 1959, the USSR presented a big exposition in Mexico City – which they

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<sup>73</sup> Yurchak explains that the faraway “elsewhere” referred to both spatially and temporally distant worlds. The experience of this faraway “elsewhere” occurred for the Soviet people in “foreign languages and Asian philosophy, medieval poetry and Hemingway’s novels, astronomy and science fiction, avant-garde jazz and songs about pirates, practices of hiking, mountaineering, and going on geological expeditions in the remote natural reserves of Siberia, the Far East, and the North” (160). Dreaming geographically and culturally distant worlds easily integrated in this experience.

designed to appeal not only to their potential trade partners but to the broadest audience possible – the Cuban Revolution leaders were there. The “new” Soviet Union and the “new” Cuba met and it seemed a match made in heaven. The Soviet Union as a friend and benefactor of the Third World countries found the perfect beneficiary for its “selfless” helping hand in Cuba. The new, post-colonial and post-imperialist Cuba needed exactly what the Soviet Union offered in order to not only defend its independence but also modernize the country. Cuban leadership asked Anastas Mikoyan to bring the same exhibition to Havana and the event, which took place in February 1960, had huge success (Rupprecht 46).

Ideologically, in order to participate in Soviet internationalism, Cuba needed to be integrated in the socialist discourse of solidarity. Consequently, Soviet filmmakers and other intellectuals traveled to Cuba to document for the Soviet and the socialist bloc audiences how the Cubans continued Lenin’s legacy and how much they benefited from the friendship with the economically and morally strong Soviet Union. As a part of this effort, the ICAIC and Mosfilm decided on a co-production in 1961,<sup>74</sup> which became *Soy Cuba*. The film is an excellent example of how the “matching” of interests between the two “new” countries functioned on the level of the film industry.

The material support and professional skills development that the first-ever Soviet-Cuban co-production brought to the ICAIC perpetuated this image of the USSR as a benevolent benefactor. At the same time, however, the cooperation bore traces of superiority, evident, for example, from the lack of trust the Soviet filmmakers had in Cuban filmmakers’ and technicians’ abilities, knowledge and skills. This showed, for example, in the fact that even though the

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<sup>74</sup> Yevtushenko, Kalatozov and Urushevsky gave a press conference in 1961 where they talked about their future film (Barash 302).

Cubans trained in different aspects of the film production during the filming, they did not take part in activities that directly related to the output: photography and editing. .

This chapter will show that Soviet internationalism, which permeated all levels of Soviet society, had different repercussions in Cuba. Not only the ICAIC benefited from material and equipment donation and professional training; it was also impacted by the vision of Soviet internationalism that the Soviet filmmakers, involved in the coproduction, brought with them. The Soviet filmmakers, whose works subscribed to the self-representation of the “new” Soviet Union, tried to integrate the “new” Cuba to this discourse. The positive and negative reaction of Cuban critics and audiences proves that the Soviet vision of Cuba in the framework of Soviet solidarity was only acceptable to a degree in which it did not threaten the Cuban new self-representation as a country able to defend its sovereignty against any superpower.

### **Roman Karmen: Two Revolutions Intertwined**

Before *Soy Cuba*, another Soviet director, distinguished documentary filmmaker Roman Karmen, discovered the “new” Cuba filmically for the Soviet Union and the socialist world. He was the first filmmaker to incorporate this “new” Cuba into the discourse on Soviet internationalism. The Cuban Revolution “called” him to Cuba twice before May 1961.<sup>75</sup> There he created several documentaries, for example, *La lámpara azul* (1961),<sup>76</sup> a film dedicated to the Cuban literacy campaign.

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<sup>75</sup> Karmen made *Kuba segodnia* [Cuba Today] in 1960. Konstantin Simonov and Genrich Borovik assisted in the production this film as well as Karmen’s other films about Cuba (Rupprecht 83).

<sup>76</sup> The 15-minute documentary has been digitalized and its Russian version can be viewed at <https://www.net-film.ru/en/film-5471/>.

His most acclaimed film, however, at least in Cuba, was a documentary *Pylayushtshy ostrov* ([Blazing Island] 1961),<sup>77</sup> which premiered on the island under the name *Alba de Cuba*. It is a synthesis of the Cuban process, as Valdés-Rodríguez explains, “desde antes del 26 de julio y la acción revolucionaria que sigue al desembarco del *Granma* hasta finales de 1960” (*Ojeada al cine cubano* 190). It shows

...el 26 de Julio, la derrota temporal, la lucha clandestina, la llegada del *Granma*, la alianza imperialista-batistiana, la complicidad de todas las fuerzas nefandas, el ascenso revolucionario, la Victoria y el establecimiento en el poder, la acción contrarrevolucionaria, las grandes medidas avanzistas, la vinculación de todo el pueblo a las medidas renovadoras y los grandes progresos realizados, la decisión y la alegría popular en la lucha...” (191)

Karmen considered important to include a reconstruction of the disembarkment of *Granma*, which Valdés-Rodríguez considers “poco menos que científica” (195), i.e. historically accurate. Karmen managed to get close access to all the leaders of the Cuban Revolution and was well liked and trusted by them.

Karmen put his skills to work in the support of the cause of the Cuban Revolution abroad and to establish an ideological connection between the Cuban and the Soviet people and their socialist revolutions. To achieve this effect in *La lámpara azul*, for example, Karmen not only used the images but also the soundtrack. In addition to the commentary, which makes the connection between the two nations explicit, he achieved the effect also implicitly by juxtaposing

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<sup>77</sup> The film is not accessible. My analysis of the film is based on the description of images at <https://www.net-film.ru/en/film-5539/> and the film synopsis as well as reviews published in Cuban journals and newspapers.

“El himno de la alfabetización”, also known as “El himno de la Brigada de Conrado Benítez”,<sup>78</sup> and a melodic variation of the “Internationale”, integrating the Cuban literacy campaign into the larger socialist international effort to improve living conditions of people all over the world.

Karmen applied a similar discourse in another documentary, his *Gost s ostrova svobody* ([Guest from the Island of Freedom, 1963) in which he documented Fidel Castro’s first visit to the USSR. In this documentary, Karmen highlights again through editing the parallels between the two nations and their histories instead of exoticizing Cuba. He made Castro “one of their own” by presenting him very human and likeable to Soviet audience – contrasting him with the Soviet governmental officials (including Khrushchov) that seemed cold and detached from their own people compared to Fidel. For the purpose of approximation, Karmen surrounded Castro with typically Soviet symbols. He showed him walking through birch groves (like Lenin) with Tschaikovski’s music in the background; he filmed him driving a Soviet tractor in Soviet fields and dressing up like an Uzbek to the laughs of all around him. He also portrayed Fidel playing with a bear cub that some Soviet workers gave him as a gift in the Taiga forest.

In addition to filming Fidel visiting different Soviet cities, meeting government officials and ordinary people and giving speeches, Karmen skillfully inserted into his otherwise color film a black and white newsreel footage from the Cuban Revolution, the Bay of Pigs Invasion and everyday life in Cuba. He showed not the exotic Cuba, like the Soviets Guram Asatiani, Melor Sturna and Georgij Kublinskij who traveled to Cuba sometimes before 1962,<sup>79</sup> but the socialist

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<sup>78</sup> A collective creation, with a melody by Cuban musician and composer Eduardo Saborit. The Cuban sociologist Fernando Martínez Heredia claimed it was the most important political song, surrounding Fidel Castro’s *Palabras a los intelectuales*. [https://www.ecured.cu/Himno\\_de\\_las\\_Brigadas\\_Conrado\\_Ben%C3%ADtez](https://www.ecured.cu/Himno_de_las_Brigadas_Conrado_Ben%C3%ADtez). The fact that almost all socialist documentaries used this song also shows how important it was in Cuba at that time.

<sup>79</sup> They traveled to Latin America and showed their impressions from Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, and also Cuba in *Raznoetažnaja Amerika*. Georgij Kublinskij made *Divo Kuby*. Both documentaries were made before 1962

Cuba. He juxtaposed this Cuban footage with black and white images from the October Revolution, the Great Patriotic War, the Siege of Leningrad (most likely his own footage), as well as images of people building their Soviet socialism. This way Karmen connected – through the thread of the shared discourse on socialism – two nations that fought for their country’s liberation and are now building their socialist future with the same courage and passion.

In *Alba de Cuba*, Karmen used similar techniques for an analogous effect. Valdéz-Rodríguez explains Karmen’s style in a detail in his review. Karmen used classical montage style through which he put together material filmed in Cuba and Cuban and foreign newsreels (like in his other films). He synchronized direct sound and word when filming certain landscapes, which allowed him to yield “el altísimo coeficiente suadorio, inexcusable” (*Ojeada al cine cubano* 191). One of the sequence where he used this technique was when Castro talks with peasants (195). Music, both Cuban and foreign, played an important role as well (191), similarly to Karmen’s other two films. Overall, his use of heterogeneous modes and resources proved very efficient. Karmen’s colored film, filmed for panoramic screen, became emotionally and sensorically so suggestive that it even evoked, as Valdéz-Rodríguez stated “el olor fuerte de la campiña criolla, presidido por el perfume de la miel de las cepas recién cortadas mezcladas con la paja revuelta, ¡va a inundar la sala!” (189).

Cuban critics like Mario Rodríguez Alemán and Rafael Valdéz-Rodríguez found the film “decisive” for how Cuba and the Cuban Revolution would be understood (Valdéz-Rodríguez 193). The latter believed that for people abroad, *Alba de Cuba*

ha de ser una revelación impresionante, por la *deslumbradora hermosura del*

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(Rupprecht 82 – 83).

*paisaje* y la gracia de las formas y el colorido fuerte y sobrio de la naturaleza y por el hálito de entereza, de *ímpetu revolucionario* que efunde la gente... y la genuina *integración racial* de nuestro país que en una *rápida evolución*, merecedora de un estudio a fondo sobre el poder transformador de las revoluciones, hermana de veras a sus hijos de diferentes razas, cubanos todos ellos dentro de la condición esencialmente mestiza de conglomeración social. [italics added] (191)

After *Alba de Cuba*, such representation of Cuba and its revolution were expected from all films made in Cuba about Cuba. They were supposed to convey the same message and images as well as inspire the same admiration at home and abroad as *Alba de Cuba*, the highest manifestation of solidarity and Soviet-Cuban friendship. Karmen's film became, according to Rodríguez Alemán, "un gran acto de apoyo" during the time of the Bay of Pigs Invasion: when it premiered in Moscow it attracted an enthusiastic audience of ten thousand people ("Alba de Cuba" 64). All posterior films about the Cuban Revolution, local and co-productions, documentary and fiction, aimed to emulate the admiration and respect people abroad felt for the Cubans and their Revolution after seeing Karmen's film. The socialist co-productions, in spite of the effort of the co-producing teams, however, never received the same approval. And the biggest "flop" was *Soy Cuba*, one of the most misunderstood films in Cuban and Soviet history.

### ***Soy Cuba***

*Soy Cuba* is the most extraordinary example of Soviet solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and of an effect a co-production can have on an emerging national cinema. *Soy Cuba* is a film full of

contradictions. It was the first co-production that the ICAIC agreed upon with the socialist bloc but the last one to finish. It took almost two years to make the film between research and the actual shooting (110). The ICAIC's and Mosfilm leaders and artists were very enthusiastic about the project. Mosfilm invested incalculable human and financial resources and the filmmakers an enormous effort, skill and energy to make the film, yet paradoxically, neither the effort nor the resources translated in the success with the Cuban and Soviet audiences.

In comparison to the two socialist co-productions that premiered before *Soy Cuba*, the Soviet-Cuban film achieved the highest praises but also harvested the harshest criticism in the Cuban press. In 1964, when it premiered, movie theaters only showed shortly and then the film disappeared in the depth of the respective archives. Despite that, the film that anyone in Cuba barely knew, became world famous in the 1990s, when Francis Coppola and Martin Scorsese discovered it.<sup>80</sup> The film that the two co-producing countries wanted to forget, reemerged to stay and it turned into the world's classic for its artistic qualities, the same qualities many Cubans had despised in the 1960s.

The Soviet-Cuban film was from the beginning to an end a political venture and that determined the resources invested as well as the rapid disappearance of the film after its premiere. Many Cuban and Soviet critics considered it a failure, an opinion that was later also adopted by the Western scholars like Michael Chanan. In spite of the critics' verdict, the co-production was a success on many levels. On continuation, we will examine some of the co-production's most positive attributes. We will look particularly at the material aid, professional

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<sup>80</sup> In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. More information about Milestone history can be found on their website [www.milestonefilms.com](http://www.milestonefilms.com).



skills development, innovations, and also enriching polemics the film brought to Cuban cinema.

*Soy Cuba* is a poem in images, an artistically highly experimental and sophisticated film. It consists of four stories. Some of them share characters but otherwise they are mostly independent of each other. Although color films were common at that time, the creators preferred black and white to emphasize the poetic feeling they attempted to evoke. They wanted the images to look like reflections of sparkling sugar crystals and they achieved this unique extreme luminosity by employing infrared film normally only used by the Soviet Red Army. Urushevsky had it brought to Cuba specifically for that purpose.<sup>81</sup> The stories are simple and the characters symbolic. The entire film takes place before the triumph of the Revolution and it ends with the triumphant descend of the Rebel Army from Sierra Maestra.

The film starts with an aerial shot, from which the camera slowly zooms in on a highly illuminated countryside of the eastern part of Cuba. With a simple percussion and guitar music in the background, we hear Cuban actress Raquel Revuelta reciting a poem about Columbus, his discovery of Cuba and the introduction of sugar cane to the island. A moment later, the camera zooms out and then zooms in on the roof of the hotel Capri in Havana. The tempo changes abruptly as the beauty pageant replaces peaceful countryside. The camera first focuses on a jazz band and pageant contestants and then descends slowly, in one of Urusevsky's most famous long tracking shot, level by level, from the roof to the pool and under the water.

The first story represents the exploitation of Afro-Cuban women by foreigners and allegorically, Cuba by neocolonialists. A mulatto girl María/Betty loves René, a fruit vendor, who helps to distribute clandestine pamphlets to students we will see again in the third story.

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<sup>81</sup> *The Siberian Mammoth* and also "Cine cubano" by Gilberto Blanco.

She works as a prostitute in a cabaret, a fact René ignores. One night a despicable tourist “buys her” for the night, which he insists on spending in her poor dwelling in Las Yaguas neighborhood. On his way out in the morning, he takes away her crucifix as a trophy and eats an orange given to her by René as a token of love. Nothing is really sacred for the rich. As he is leaving, he bumps into René who is coming to visit his beloved. René, heartbroken, abandons María. The tourist then wanders through the poor neighborhood chased by children begging for money.

The second story shows the penetration and pervasiveness of the US capital and exploitation of the Cuban land. Pedro’s family makes a living by cultivating sugar cane on a piece of land that no longer belongs to them. The illiterate Pedro does not know it because the landowner had tricked him when giving him a loan. In the course of the story, the landowner announces Pedro that he sold what used to be Pedro’s land to the United Fruit Company and Pedro no longer has right to the cane he had just started harvesting. Pedro, whose livelihood depends on this harvest, desperate, sends his children to the village with the last *peso*, puts the sugarcane field and house on fire as an act of the last resistance to the forces he cannot control, and dies. While the house is burning and Pedro is dying, his children – unaware of what is happening – laugh and dance joyfully in the village, paradoxically, drinking Coca-Cola.

The third story shows consequences of the inaction against injustice and violence. In the beginning of the sequence, Enrique and other students from the anti-Batista resistance destroy imperialist property by throwing Molotov cocktails. Shortly after, we find out the police killed some of Enrique’s friends but the student leader Alberto persuades Enrique to wait (in the

original script, Enrique sent to assassinate the police chief).<sup>82</sup> Enrique, angry, runs to the roof top where the rifles are hidden, eager to kill the murderer, but he cannot do it. Later, he witnesses Batista's police kills three of his friends and co-fighters and his life takes a turn. He makes a speech on the University stairs, urging his listeners to take action. Students confront the police, which meets them with water hoses. Enrique leads the crowd, holding a dove killed by a police's bullet. In the next moment, the police chief shoots Enrique, who is walking towards him with a stone in his hand. Enrique becomes a martyr and the whole Havana joins his funeral procession. The crowd symbolizes, as Pineda Barnet explains, that for each killed *revolucionario* ten rose in his or her place (qtd in Ruiz, "Soy Cuba" 12). The procession, filmed from a funicular moving between buildings, is the other of the two most memorable tracking shots in *Soy Cuba*.

The fourth and last story underscores the importance of armed action against oppression. It starts with a scene of a group of Rebels, captured by Batista's troops in the swamp. The Rebels defy their captors by not giving up Fidel's location, proving there is a strength in unity. The following sequence introduces Mariano, a peasant, who welcomes in his home a hungry Rebel whom we recognize as Alberto, the student leader from the previous story. Alberto instigates him to join the Revolution but Mariano refuses and runs the Rebel out of the house. Later Mariano's abode gets bombarded and his son killed. Finally, he joins the struggle, wins a gun in a fight and together with others defeats the enemy.

*Soy Cuba* was a political film in his context as well as content. Soviet internationalism required the USSR to invest in Cuba and Cuba needed dignified films, representative of the

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<sup>82</sup> Miguel Mendoza has a copy of a film script, which the author was able to reference.

“new” Cuba and its new film industry. The co-production had three major goals: 1) to provide material aid to help build the Cuban national film industry in terms of logistics, equipment and raw film; 2) to help build the necessary skill set and practical knowledge of the ICAIC’s cadres, both in the technical as well as creative sense, so that they became comfortable making good Cuban fiction films on their own, and 3) to introduce and praise the Cuban Revolution in the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist bloc and at different international film festivals. The following section will demonstrate that the co-production actually accomplished all three goals, but the ICAIC did not accept this reality in full extent. Due to the conflicting self-representations of the two co-producing countries, the film triggered several polemics. Many challenges formed around the *Soy Cuba*’s contributions were related to the ICAIC’s politics.

### **Building the Cuban Film Industry: Material Aid for the ICAIC**

Even though the co-production was welcomed, its magnitude became threatening to the image the Cuban cinema was trying to convey. Rather than praises for the many gifts the Soviets generously donated to the ICAIC, *Soy Cuba* received much criticism for its production approach. Its critics complained how expensive the production was, how long it took to make the film and how many ICAIC’s resources it tied up. Indisputably, to uphold its reputation as an altruistic helper to the countries in need, the USSR’s first co-production with Cuba needed to be done “in style”. As a result, *Soy Cuba* exceeded most of the parameters of a film made in a country like Cuba.

It was probably the most expensive film ever made in Cuban history. It also had one of the longest – if not *the* longest – production duration. The actual shooting took fourteen *month* which was unheard of for such a small film industry, which usually needed, according to

Alfredo Guevara, maximum twelve to sixteen *weeks*. He found the duration of *Soy Cuba* production ridiculous.<sup>83</sup> The crew consisted of more than 200 participants, not counting the 5,000 men from the Revolutionary Army from the Oriente province, participating in the last sequence (Espinoza Domínguez, “The Mammoth That Wouldn’t Die” 110). The elevated cost related to the production’s length, which was connected to the production difficulties and demands of Urusevsky-Kalatozov’s way of filming. The production encountered numerous technical challenges. Many of them related to the ICAIC’s mode of operating, others to the Soviet filmmakers’ filming style with long, uninterrupted takes. Manuel Mendoza remembers: “se preparaba un día, se ensayaba al siguiente y se filmaba al tercero, pero a veces [se demoraban] cuatro o cinco días para filmar porque el fotógrafo no tenía nubes...” (qtd. in Sotto 30).<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, these numbers do not mean at all that the project was detrimental to the Cuban film industry.

In their criticism, the faultfinders forgot to mention how much Cuba benefited from these excesses both in short and long term. Describing this Soviet-Cuban cooperation merely “satisfactory” as Alfredo Guevara did in Ferraz’s documentary, therefore, was a strong understatement. In the short term, *Soy Cuba*’s co-producer Manuel Mendoza recalls, the Soviet Red Army fed the entire crew and all extras during the entire period of filming (qtd. in Sotto 29). We cannot consider that a minor deed because at that time the US embargo had already set in and food had become scarce. This co-production resolved the problem of alimentation for

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<sup>83</sup> Alfredo Guevara made clear he disapproved of the privileges granted to the Soviet filmmakers. He emphasized: “Fourteen weeks of shooting is a luxury, fourteen month is ridiculous.” (Ferraz 00:58:30).

<sup>84</sup> Alexander Calzatti also refers to the length and difficulties of the production in his interview with Ferraz (00:57:40).

many people for two years. In addition, when the hurricane Flora hit Cuba in October 1963, Urusevsky wrote to his wife that the Soviet crew had bought food cans, fabric, shoes, and clothing in a Soviet store, the only place where they could still encounter those things, and distributed them to Cubans in need (qtd. in Fridman-Urusevskaia 88). These are examples of Soviet solidarity with the Cubans that occurred both on the institutional and personal level.

In addition to this short term aid, Cuba enjoyed many long term benefits that came with this co-production. Alfredo Guevara shared with Michael Chanan, for example, that knowing how lengthy and leisurely Soviet shooting schedules were, the ICAIC had requested that the Soviet filmmakers would bring their own transport and equipment, so as not to tie up the ICAIC's limited facilities and halt its other productions. By informal arrangement, the crew then left the equipment behind when the filming finished (Chanan 166).

*Soy Cuba*'s co-producer Miguel Mendoza found the *Soy Cuba*'s criticism unsubstantiated and unfair, "los soviéticos fueron sumamente generosos con el ICAIC. Ellos pagaron todos los excesos, los que les correspondían y los que no. Llegaron a traer más de sesenta camiones para el cine móvil, y eso incluía los proyectores y las películas, negativo para filmar y positivo para copias" (qtd. in Sotto 30). Without this material and equipment the ICAIC's classics such as *Lucía*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and other films could not have materialized (Smith Mesa 140). Without the material, equipment and transport, the Revolutionary ideological and instructional films would have reached the most remote places on the island much later and with much higher costs. In summary, even though the production required elevated costs and tied some Cuban resources,<sup>85</sup> Cuba ended up benefiting more than

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<sup>85</sup> According to Eduardo Manet, *Soy Cuba* did not tie up the ICAIC's resources as much as *El otro Cristóbal* de Armand Gatti which left the ICAIC "sin un clavo".

sacrificing with this co- production.

The magnitude of the production also benefited Cuban cinema by reverse influence. Through the negative film reviews and discussions among Cuban filmmakers about different aspects of the film, as García Borrero suggests in his *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad*, the film helped to shape the way how Cuban filmmakers thought of making their films after *Soy Cuba*. More specifically, according to him, *Soy Cuba* indirectly changed how they developed their strategies regarding the making of their own films. He cites, for example, Eduardo Manet's article "Autopsia de un film" from February 1964, regarding Manet's debut feature *Tránsito* (1964). Manet explains,

La idea de rodar mi primer largometraje con un presupuesto mínimo fue el motivo determinante que dio base al guión. La "maquinaria creativa" se manifestó pues, de la siguiente manera: Tengo \$80 000 para realizar un filme (equivalente del presupuesto mínimo con que trabaja la "Nueva Ola" en Francia): ¿qué puedo hacer para no aumentar el costo? **En primer lugar:** no filmar en el interior de la Isla para evitar los gastos de transporte, dietas, etc...**En segundo lugar:** filmar enteramente en locaciones naturales, ya que la realización de decorados lleva en sí gastos escenográficos y de utilería. **En tercer lugar:** reducir el número de los actores y evitar el exceso de extras (dos capítulos que se "comen" la mayor parte del presupuesto). **En cuarto lugar:** situar la acción en la actualidad para evitar las dificultades de "reproducción" de época. **En quinto lugar:** tratar de disminuir el equipo técnico tanto en hombres como en materiales. Y **en sexto lugar,** prever acciones no muy

complicadas de realizar para ganar tiempo en la filmación... (2)

According to García Borrero, all the points Manets makes, “replican las concepciones esgrimidas por los realizadores de **Soy Cuba**.” (*Cine cubano de los sesenta* 111). For example, on the contrary to *Soy Cuba*, Manet did not film all over the island, but concentrated the film to one Havana neighborhood. *Soy Cuba* used enormous number of personnel while Manet attempted to reduce both the number of actors and extras to save costs. His need of technicians and material was reduced to minimum compared to the enormous *Soy Cuba* Soviet-Cuban crew and costly infrared film. Lastly, he avoided complicated actions that would extend the filming; contrary to *Soy Cuba* where the resources and time were flexible and the filmmakers could afford making complicated takes which required time and labor, such as building artificial waterfalls in places where there was not water.

*Soy Cuba* was not the only co-production that was criticized for excessive production length and cost. Even though there is no direct recount from Cuban directors about how *Soy Cuba* affected their strategies, the fact is that the filmmakers followed the rule of thumb demonstrated by Manet until the 1980s. Even though the ICAIC’s cost politics might have been influenced by other factors as well, especially by the limited resources the ICAIC had at its disposal for most of its existence, the truth is that the first film to violate this golden rule was Humberto Solás’s *Cecilia*, a Cuban-Spanish co-production released in 1982.<sup>86</sup> *Cecilia*, like *Soy Cuba*, was made with international audiences in mind and was also very costly, because there were three versions: shorter and longer film version and a TV series. *Cecilia*’s excessive costs and length of filming (the same was reproached to *Soy Cuba*) even created troubles for the

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<sup>86</sup> *Cecilia* cost the whole year’s production budget. It also interfered with certain types of cultural icons (Chanan 388). More details on the critic reviews of *Cecilia* can be found in Chanan’s *Cuban Cinema* (393).



ICAIC's director Alfredo Guevara, who as the responsible entity, had to leave the ICAIC and transfer to the Cuban embassy in Paris. He was replaced by Julio García Espinosa who headed the Institute until the end of the decade when Guevara resumed his role as the ICAIC's director.

*Cecilia* demonstrates an interesting paradox that points back to the Soviet-Cuban co-production. Almost twenty years after *Soy Cuba*, during which the Cuban cinema received many awards, *Cecilia* became a strong contender for the Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival but it did not win the prize. Ironically, several members of the jury accused the film of what Alfredo Guevara had reproached to *Soy Cuba* in the 1960s: the production was too big for such a small country (it is no art to make an ostentatious film with a big budget) and it monopolized resources and halt production of many other films.<sup>87</sup> The image that the ICAIC built for itself in this case backfired.

### **Professional Development of the ICAIC's Cadres**

Among the most important elements of Soviet internationalism and solidarity belonged the cadre development. The Soviets learned after the civil war in their Central Asia and the Caucasus that "education and training of cadres [were] the keys to development" as Anastas Mikoyan explained the Mexican Minister of Education in November 1959 (qtd. in Rupprecht 65). For the purpose of empowering underdeveloped nations through education and training, the USSR awarded scholarships to study at Soviet schools as well as universities and sent out experts abroad. Many Cubans benefited from the quotas allotted by the Soviet Ministry of Education,

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<sup>87</sup> More about *Cecilia* in Cannes can be found in Del Valle's *Definirse en la polémica* (73).

which allowed them to study in the USSR.<sup>88</sup> The musician Carlos Fariñas who composed the score for *Soy Cuba* was one of many. The USSR also send film technicians as experts to the ICAIC but not as many as Czechoslovakia.<sup>89</sup> The Soviet contribution to training of the ICAIC's filmmakers and other personnel took place mainly through *Soy Cuba*.

*Soy Cuba*'s extra-artistic goal was to create an opportunity for the Cubans to learn from the best filmmakers and technicians the Soviet Union had at that time. Kalatozov had this objective very clear when he was selecting the Soviet crew, as he explained to Pineda Barnet in Moscow: "De una parte, queremos penetrar el espíritu del pueblo cubano, y por otro lado, queremos preparar de tal manera nuestro grupo y de tal manera seleccionar a los compañeros que puedan ser útiles a los cineastas cubanos, con sus experiencias y conocimientos técnicos" (qtd. in Pineda Barnet, "Después de Pasar Un Charco" 61). The Soviets incorporated the Cubans in the crew to teach them but at the same time, the Cuban crew was supposed to guarantee the film did not depart from Cuban reality and idiosyncrasy.

The full effect of the training that the Cuban film personnel received during the shooting of *Soy Cuba* is difficult to estimate because the majority of the beneficiaries – the sound and set technicians, costume designers, construction workers, pyrotechnics, and other film personnel – worked behind the scenes. From the little information in the interviews in Ferraz's documentary and judging from how this professional training worked in the Czechoslovak co-production *Para quién baila La Habana*, we can conclude that they learned much during

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<sup>88</sup> More about Soviet initiatives regarding the development of the Third World cadres in *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*, Chapter 1.

<sup>89</sup> All Cubans who worked at the ICAIC in the 1960s and who interviewed for this study insisted that the only two countries who came to teach Cubans at the ICAIC were the Czechoslovaks in the 1960s and the Hungarians in the 1970s.

the two years of working with the Soviets. The head of construction, Luis “Lolo” Carrillo, for example, who had known nothing about cinema before *Soy Cuba*, learned how to endure the difficult production where “cada escena fue como una batalla.” Juan Varona, mechanic in *Soy Cuba*, shared in *The Siberian Mammoth* that the experience he had gained working with the Soviet crew served him in the course of his entire film career. As a matter of fact, Varona understood *Soy Cuba* as “the landmark of Cuban cinema” because of how much the film influenced skills and careers of its Cuban participants (Ferraz 1:16:50).

*Soy Cuba*’s team was extraordinary in many aspects and the skills the Cuban crew acquired were many. Nonetheless, the Cuban crew members remembered especially strongly the work and personality of the director of photography, Sergei Urusevsky. In the early years of the Revolution, the artistic photography was not the biggest preoccupation for Cuban filmmakers who, for the most part, did not have the expertise and the resources but to *document* the extraordinary events that were taking place.<sup>90</sup> This changed after *Soy Cuba* because of all the training and inspiration the Cuban filmmakers received during the filming. *Soy Cuba*, and to a lesser degree also the other two previous socialist co-productions, *Para quién baila La Habana* and *Preludio 11*, showed that the Cuban recent history did not have to be portrayed in a strictly documentary fashion but that some artistic license was acceptable and even desirable.

### *Filming Style and Photography*

*Soy Cuba*’s filming style was considered innovative in the socialist film. Kalatozov and Urusevsky, giants of Soviet cinema, represented the Soviet “cultural renaissance of the late

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<sup>90</sup> Even the later “titans” of Cuban cinemas such as Humberto Solás and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, to name a few, were then just in the beginning of their film careers and were learning on the go. Gutiérrez Alea elaborates about his beginnings in his interview with Oroz.

1950s” that brought significant changes to the Soviet Cinema.<sup>91</sup> At that time, “Soviet cinema was able to break away from its constrictive models and find a new form of discourse” (Lawton 6). The films were no longer confined to the aesthetics of the socialist realist dogma,<sup>92</sup> which the Soviet artists denounced during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Soviet Artists in 1954 where they decided to finally replace “the empty heroism of Stalinist art” by a more authentic style (Rupprecht 74). That, of course, did not happen overnight and *Soy Cuba*, though it departed greatly from the former aesthetics, could not leave this inheritance behind completely.

The “poetic style,” common to the Soviet films of that time period, was a reaction to the “naturalistic films” created in the Soviet Union during Stalinism (M. Bleiman in Marshall 180). The same motivation drove also Kalatozov and Urusevsky’s poetic style even though they are not formally considered members of the Soviet New Wave but rather its predecessors. Poetic films also appeared in the rest of the socialist bloc. Among other creators with the same predilection belonged the Czechoslovak František Vlácil, the Polish director Jerzy Kawalerowicz and others. To this day, Cuban photographers and directors remember with admiration Vlácil’s *Holubice* (1960) which in Cuba screened as *Paloma blanca*, and *Markéta Lazarová* (1967), and Kawalerowicz’s *Matka Joanna ot Aniołow* (1961), known in Cuba as *Madre Juana de los Ángeles*.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> After Zhdanov’s socialist realism doctrine was denounced, the state film leadership, filmmakers and screenwriters continued struggling to find a cinematic expression that would be aesthetically pleasing, would promote socialist values and heroes of socialism and would be, at the same time, attractive for the audiences. Kalatozov and Urusevsky had teamed up for two other films before *Soy Cuba*, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and *The Unsent Letter* (1960). And even though in both they praised Soviet socialist heroes and promoted socialist values, they were accused of focusing on the form rather than content, especially in the latter. According to some of their colleagues, “a preoccupation with seeking new expressive forms had a negative impact on the dramatic development of the characters” (Loss and Prieto 112). The same was reproached to their *Soy Cuba*.

<sup>92</sup> This period “changed Soviet cinema so fundamentally that no subsequent ‘freeze’ could return it to the conditions that prevailed during the Stalin era” (Golovskoy 264).

<sup>93</sup> Personal interviews with Manuel Pérez Paredes and Raúl Rodríguez. June 2015.

The work with light was an essential element in poetic cinema, an aspect that *Soy Cuba* and other films from the socialist bloc highlighted. The formalism of Kalatozov and Urusevsky, i.e. their favoring of the formal aspects such as photography and composition over the storyline and psychology of characters, even though criticized, appeared frequently in the films from the socialist bloc. The Polish director Roman Polanski remembers that the Polish Film School in Łódź put big emphasis on the light and other formal aspects.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, directors themselves often preferred to focus on photography because it provided them with more artistic freedom – even at the risk of being accused of formalism – than venturing into elaboration of the characters and dialogues that could have been ill interpreted by censors. *Soy Cuba* was no exception.

Some of the tools Urusevsky used to create the poetic feeling in *Soy Cuba* was his somewhat unusual application of the handheld camera, extra short lens and infrared film. The effect he created inspired many Cuban photographers even though many found the effect overwhelming. The strong emphasis on the photography in *Soy Cuba*, however, triggered a strong polemic among the Cuban film critics, especially the camera movement, the use of infrared film and the custom-made 9mm lens<sup>95</sup> that produced unusual visual effects of image distortion.

Some critics considered the photography in *Soy Cuba* as a defect. Teresa Ruiz from *Revolución*, for example, disliked “reiteradas panorámicas,” and “incesantes movimientos” that, according to her, gave the impression that Urusevsky’s camera was dancing the twist

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<sup>94</sup> As a matter of fact, he said, the students could have failed any subject and stay at the school but if they failed photography class, they had to leave.

<sup>95</sup> More about the infrared film and the extra wide lens Urusevsky used can be located in “No soy Cuba” by López, “Cine cubano” by Gilberto Blanco and various interviews in *Siberian Mammoth*.

(“Urusevsky baila el twist”). Alejo Beltrán, who in general praised the film, frowned on the effect of the infrared film that produced “una caña blanca y unos cielos negros,” inexistent in Cuban countryside (“Soy Cuba”) and Luis M. López despised “a dreadful, delusional formalism,” and “esa cámara insoportable y su falsa audacia” and “su formalismo tremebundo y alucinante” (“No Soy Cuba” 24).

Contrary to this negative criticism, the most frequently quoted in the studies on *Soy Cuba*, several distinguished Cuban critics perceived the film’s poetic style and photography remarkable. Mario Rodríguez Alemán from *Diario de la Tarde* and Josefina Ruiz from *Verde olivo*, for example,

...apreciaban valores formales impresionantes. Se referían, desde luego, a ese plano secuencia que todavía hoy sigue despertando asombro por la originalidad de la composición, y la osadía presente en el movimiento de una cámara que aparece mostrando en un primer plano un sepelio público, que sorpresivamente asciende hasta lo alto de un edificio, atraviesa diversos balcones y se adentra en una fábrica de tabacos, luego sale por la ventana y levita por encima de la multitud. (García Borrero, *Cine Cubano de Los Sesenta: Mito Y Realidad* 110)

In addition, Alejo Beltrán praised the use of image as a narrative tool. According to him, “la imagen habla, cuenta y actúa al mismo tiempo” and it also has a sound, vibrates, besides of offering a great plasticity. The plasticity was a value that a distinguished Cuban critic José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez appreciated in addition to the powerful dramatic effect of Urusevsky’s photography (“*Soy Cuba*” 148).

Urusevsky might have been criticized for his “obsession” with photography and light<sup>96</sup> but it was his dedication and perfectionism what made his films so influential in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. Pineda Barnet, who had befriended Urusevsky, suggested that the imagery created by him was “extraordinaria, visión plástica muy personal, innovadora en su momento” (Pineda Barnet “Soy Cuba” 33). He admired Urusevsky, as he summarized in his interview with Ferraz,

aunque nadie lo haya reconocido en ningún momento, el cine cubano y el cine latinoamericano le debe grandes escenas de homenaje o de memoria o de reminiscencia o de influencia de la camera de Sergei Urusevsky... Podemos verlo en imágenes clásicas de *La primera carga al machete*, *Lucía* y de muchísimas otras películas cubanas y películas del cine brasileño de Glauber. Esa grandiosidad se lo debemos al cine, a la imagen de Sergei Urusevsky que era toda una poética. (Ferraz 1:18:20)

Pineda Barnet was not the only one who thought highly of the director of photography of *Soy Cuba* and Urusevsky’s genius. The co-founder of the ICAIC and later its director, the film director Julio García Espinosa, remembered, “Urusevskii fue algo importante en nuestras vidas, nunca había visto un camarógrafo de la magnitud y de la desmesura de Urusevskii, realmente era un tipo fabuloso, fabuloso como fotógrafo y como ser humano; era una gente que recordaré toda la vida” (qtd. in Fowler Calzada 131). Nowadays, many Cuban filmmakers and scholars recognize the trace of Urusevsky’s poetic style in many posterior Cuban films. After

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<sup>96</sup> Sergio Corrieri criticized Urusevsky’s obsession with light but at the same time he admired his dedication. He said: “Una sorpresa para mí que recuerdo es por ejemplo es el cuidado que ellos tenían con la luz. Yo diría que la luz era la protagonista de la película esta. Y ese cuidado de las locaciones, el cuidado de la luz, de los movimientos de la cámara, era de una meticulosidad extraordinaria (Ferraz 00:49:10).

*Soy Cuba*, the Cuban filmmakers became more comfortable using modern film technological devices such as the hand held camera which many of them started employing more creatively both in documentaries and feature films. The film's aspect of the "visualidad delirante" helped the Cubans to take more into consideration the dynamic image, which Jorge Herrera and Ramón Suárez developed in their films. Herrera led this technique to a visual delirium of his own in the battle scene in Humberto Solás's *Lucía I* (1968) and in Manuel Octavio Gómez's *La primera carga al machete* (1969).<sup>97</sup>

### *Use of Non-Professional Actors*

In addition to photography, *Soy Cuba* contributed to another important polemic in Cuban cinema of the 1960s, which related to the use of non-professional actors. This discussion was important in the world cinema at that time and the Cuban filmmakers often inquired about the topic when they spoke with their colleagues from the socialist bloc,<sup>98</sup> known for their frequent use of non-professional actors.<sup>99</sup> The Cuban filmmakers needed to resort to non-professional actors because in the beginning, the ICAIC lacked experienced film actors. In addition, they resonated with the idea that non-professional actors could facilitate greater authenticity. They believed that a militiaman performed a better militiaman than a professional actor pretending to be

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<sup>97</sup> Ramón Suárez worked as a photographer in Gutiérrez Alea's films *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966) while Jorge Herrera's most important film was *Lucía*. More information about Urusevsky's impact on Cuban photographers, for example, in *Cine Cubano de Los Sesenta: Mito Y Realidad* (110) or in *Cuban cinema* (262). Furthermore, Raúl Rodríguez talks about it in his interview with Ferraz (1:17:52).

<sup>98</sup> It was one of the questions *Cine cubano* asked Czechoslovak filmmakers during the first Week of Czechoslovak Film in 1961. The Czechoslovak directors' responses can be found in "Cinco preguntas a cinco directores checoslovacos" (20 – 26).

<sup>99</sup> The Czech director Miloš Forman was one of the prime examples of directors who used non-professional actors frequently. In his *Black Peter* (1964), *Loves of a Blonde* (1965) and *Firemen's Ball* (1967), which are all posterior to *Soy Cuba*, he cast non-professional actors for many of the roles, including some of the protagonists.



one.<sup>100</sup> Not all of the directors subscribed to this idea blindly. Gutiérrez Alea, for example, usually preferred professional actors after his experience with filming *Historias de la Revolución* where the use of non-professional actors in Sierra Maestra posed many challenges.<sup>101</sup>

*Soy Cuba* used a great number of non-professional actors mostly because the production demanded a great number of actors and Cuba did not have that many professional actors. But even though Kalatozov had to fill many roles, his work with non-professional actors did not always result standard. He did not hesitate to cast non-professional actors or actors in the beginning of their careers for the leads and guide them. For example, Raúl García, one of the sound technicians, became Enrique in the third story; it was his first time in front of the camera. The dancer Luz María Collazo, non-professional actress, who played María-Betty, shared with Ferraz that she remembered fondly how Kalatozov guided and encouraged her. Sergio Corrieri, who had some acting experience, was “a stage actor and a novice” (Loss and Prieto 115) when he obtained the role of Alberto. His career only picked up after *Soy Cuba*. Salvador Wood had a long career as a radio and TV actor. But the acting style in these media was considered, according to Gutiérrez Alea, faster and more superficial than in cinema (qtd. in Oroz 61). Wood belonged among the most experienced actors on the set but even he was not at that time, according to Beltrán, professional cinema actor (“Soy Cuba”). Wood also remembered his experience as valuable (Ferraz).

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<sup>100</sup> The most notable examples of non-professional actors in Cuba were Blas Mora, the protagonist of *El joven rebelde*, who acted in several films and then moved on to serve the Revolution elsewhere. More information about the film and Blas Mora can be found in “El joven rebelde” and “Con el protagonista del segundo cuento de *Historias de la Revolución de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, y de El joven rebelde* de Julio García Espinosa”. Adela Legrá, discovered by Humberto Solás, was a very talented non-professional actress who became one of the stars of Cuban cinema.

<sup>101</sup> Gutiérrez Alea speaks to the topic of use of non-professional actors in his interview with Silvia Oroz.

Transmitting authenticity through non-professional actors that played roles related to their professions or experience was becoming commonplace in the 1960s. Nevertheless, Kalatozov used a different strategy which became one of the film's most interesting yet at the same time one of the most criticized aspects. Kalatozov spoke about his philosophy in one of his interviews:

No he escogido actores experimentados. Algunos no han actuado nunca y otros apenas empiezan. Yo creo que el cine no necesita mucho del actor profesional, porque lo que cuenta, para lograr un personaje en la pantalla, es antes que todo una presencia humana, y eso es lo que da el Pedro de la tercera historia de *Soy Cuba*. El espectador sentirá ante él que está ante un campesino, ante un hombre que lleva en él los signos de su lucha con la tierra y los elementos. A José Gallardo no le hace falta, pues, actuar... (qtd. in Rodríguez Alemán, "Esperando el gran fuego" 20)

Pineda Barnet and others, however, did not believe in Kalatozov's philosophy.<sup>102</sup> According to him, Kalatozov's use of non-professional actors did not work. Miloš Forman and others who employed non-professional actors according to their life experiences, to "play themselves" in front of the camera, achieved the effect of authenticity much more successfully in their films.<sup>103</sup> Kalatozov says that the peasant Pedro's face bears traces of exposure to the elements and hard work and for that alone, he does not need to be an actor to represent well his role. But in reality, Pineda Barnet argues, Pedro might have looked like an old peasant but he was not a

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<sup>102</sup> Even though the film criticism was aimed mostly at the photography, the film was also criticized for its "bad directing" of non-professional actors whom Kalatozov asked to exaggerate "temperament" where more moderate "temperament" would have appeared more natural as Pineda Barnet pointed out in his article "Soy Cuba".

<sup>103</sup> Generally, non-professional actors played characters in environments and situations they exercised in their normal life, as Valdés and Torres wrote in their article about Miloš Forman (56).

true *guajiro* because he worked in the gastronomy not agriculture and could not, therefore, transmit convincingly that he was a sugarcane cutter (Ferraz).

Another example of this failed strategy, according to Pineda Barnet, is the old guitar player in the second story, a type of an old man from Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* with "mapa mundi written in his face." Kalatozov and Yevtushenko looked for this character which inspired them in their favorite novel of their favorite writer. Kalatozov had trouble finding an actor that would embody the characteristics he wanted. Therefore, he cast a drunkard for the role of the *trovador*. He had the look Kalatozov wanted but could not play a guitar, sing or even talk, had no teeth or prosthesis (Pineda Barnet "Soy Cuba" 34). Pineda Barnet and Carlos Fariñas considered it disastrous. They had to face the consequences of Kalatozov's decision because they had to write a romantic song after Kalatozov had already filmed the sequence with the man. Kalatozov made it even more nightmarish for them because of the requirements for the lyrics that they then had to synchronize with the man's lips' movement. He wanted "una canción triste, pero optimista, antigua, pero contemporánea, muy cubana, pero universal" (34). They spent hours on *moviola* and ended up calling the song *Canción triste* because of their sad experience (Ferraz 00:45:28).

In spite of all the criticism, Kalatozov's use of non-professional actors was innovative. He wanted to achieve – paradoxically – the effect of a "look", emblematic of the Hollywood cinema, but with non-professional actors. Although it did not work as he envisioned, the film's use of non-professional actors served as an important exercise for the Cubans involved, future directors and actors alike. Whatever they learned by positive or negative experience, served the Cuban actors in their careers, which *Soy Cuba* launched for many of them, and for the directors

and producers in their approach to directing both professional actors and non-professional actors.

### *The Socialist New Man*

Given the length of the production, it is not surprising that besides of technical and artistic skills, Cubans learned also about the socialist and Soviet way of life. That included the values of the socialist New Man, the rekindled concept of the Soviet 1920s. This concept diverged from the New Man Guevara spoke about. After Stalin, the Soviet New Man was actually the “modern Soviet man,” related to the confidence the Soviet people gained from the successes their country scored in technology, especially in atomic energy and space travel. The self-image the Soviet State created convinced its own people, especially *šedesátniky*, the 1960s generation that they lived “in the strongest country on earth” (Rupprecht 127). No wonder the Soviet artists, intellectuals and other citizens alike, shared this feeling of invincibility.

Luis Carrillo remembers this about Urusevsky. In one scene Urusevsky wanted a waterfall in a place where there was no water. Luis told him that it was impossible, but Urusevsky encouraged the crew to keep trying and in the end they managed. When the work was done and Urusevsky achieved the effect for the camera he was looking for, he said to Luis: “el hombre puede todo.”<sup>104</sup> Luis has always remembered this lesson (Ferraz 00:53:20). Also the director of photography Mario García Joya “Mayito” remembers this aspect of Urusevsky fondly. Urusevsky was able to resolve any technical challenges and achieve any image he and Kalatozov envisioned.<sup>105</sup> It was a skill that was dear to the Cubans who had to be inventive all

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<sup>104</sup> It stems from a commonly used slogan in the socialist bloc, “We will command wind and rain.”

<sup>105</sup> Mario García Joya. Personal interview. January 2017.

the time due to limited resources at their disposal.

### *The Socialist Filmmaker's Negotiation Skills*

It is important to mention that *Soy Cuba* also showed the Cuban filmmakers, whether both sides were aware of it or not, how to navigate censorship in a socialist society. Kalatozov and Urusevsky did not blindly follow all the rules of the filmmaking required in the USSR. Experienced in the attacks by the censors in their previous work, they used strategies that allowed them to create a superb work of art while still complying with the substantial requirements of their state film institutions. This was not a minor deal in Cuba. The importance of the artistic freedom in socialist filmmaking was one of the preoccupations the Cuban filmmakers had since the Revolution became socialist in 1961, at least judging from the questions they repeatedly asked their Eastern European colleagues during their visits in Cuba.<sup>106</sup>

In regards to dealing with socialist authorities, Pineda Barnet had a particularly impressive experience in Moscow. He witnessed Kalatozov defending the screenplay of *Soy Cuba* in front of the Mosfilm leaders. Pineda Barnet recalls in his article in *Gaceta* that it was then when he discovered in Kalatozov “sus habilidades y destreza para colocar un proyecto frente a la prepotencia autoritaria. Kalatozov hizo gala de sus mañas oscilantes entre humildad condescendiente y arrogancia bien colocada entre citas de hazañas y relaciones influyentes” (35).

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<sup>106</sup> It was evident in the interviews with Czechoslovakian filmmakers during the first Czechoslovak Film Week. Some of the questions were: “¿Cuál es el significado del cine, según su opinión, en un país que construye el socialismo?” and “Díganos su opinión sobre el Nuevo cine soviético, sobre el neorrealismo italiano, sobre la ‘Nueva Ola’ francesa y sobre Hollywood.” The responses were published as “Cinco preguntas...” (20 – 26). Directors from Poland, the USSR and Hungary received similar questions on different occasions.

Pineda Barnet, however, does not share if this experience served him during his filmmaking career in Cuba. For example, his *La bella del Alhambra* (1989) could never be filmed under Guevara and Pineda Barnet only got his chance when Guevara was sent to Paris in the early 1980s.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

Many thought that Urusevsky overshadowed Kalatozov, but Raúl Rodríguez, a distinguished Cuban photographer, understood in the last years that Kalatozov and Urusevsky were a team,<sup>108</sup> they were one. Their split after *Soy Cuba* was a true loss for the world cinema. As many geniuses before them, Urusevsky and Kalatozov were misunderstood at their time, especially in Cuba. Nevertheless, their immeasurable commitment to the perfection of their craft served as an inspiration to many filmmakers who knew their films and had a chance to see them work.

*Soy Cuba* not only provided the opportunity to learn for the ICAIC employees directly involved in the production but also to those who did not participate directly. Some of them could meet the experienced crew, observe their work and participate in discussions with them, especially with Urusevsky and Kalatozov who gladly explained techniques they were using, as well as their filming strategies, concepts and ideology during roundtables, at the set and in interviews for *Cine cubano*. Unfortunately, the ICAIC did not use fully the learning opportunity *Soy Cuba*'s filmmakers and technicians offered due to its internal politics and favoritism. Not

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<sup>107</sup> Pineda Barnet attributed this to Guevara's personal animosity towards him. Personal interviews with Pineda Barnet in September 2014 and June 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Raúl Rodríguez originally resented the overinvolvement of Urusevsky. He felt that Urusevsky pushed Kalatozov aside to the detriment of the film. However, he later understood that Kalatozov and Urusevsky were a great team and shared the same vision. Raúl Rodríguez. Personal interview. June 2015.

all the ICAIC's filmmakers and technicians had equal access to foreign directors and technicians and discussions with them.<sup>109</sup> This reality limited a potentially broader influence of the *Soy Cuba* crew on the ICAIC's artistic and technical personnel. The impact was also lessened because, as Mendoza asserts, about fifty percent of the directors from the 1960s left Cuba and with them many photographers and technicians (qtd. in Sotto 35).

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<sup>109</sup> Raúl Rodríguez and Mario García Joya both coincide in this claim.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE “NEW” SOVIET UNION MEETS THE “NEW” CUBA: DEFINING THE CUBAN CINEMATIC NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH *SOY CUBA*

As suggested in Chapter 1, the Soviet project of solidarity and the Cuban desire to maintain its political and cultural sovereignty intersected in *Soy Cuba*. The two countries' visions of the mutual relationship did not create major problems in regards to the material aid and professional skills development, even though it did create some polemics around the film's artistic choices and production practices. Overall, however, the USSR was interested to provide this aid to solidify its image as a benefactor of the Third World and the Cubans gladly accepted the Soviet help because it meant they would have resources and capabilities to create their own good artistic fiction films in the near future. The Soviet and the Cuban visions, however, clashed ideologically, in the way how they wanted to show Cuba, Cuban people and especially the Cuban Revolution. The ICAIC leadership disagreed with the Soviet portrayal of Cuba and took corrective measures which “justified” the film's shelving. This section will analyze in what aspects the two visions coincided and where they disagreed, always having as a reference point *Alba de Cuba* as a model of a propagandistic socialist film about Cuba to follow.

The filmmakers' vision and the expectations of the Soviet audience and the Soviet film industry leaders stemmed from the mental picture the Soviets had of Latin America, established during the post-Stalin aperture in the mid-1950s and rooted in Soviet internationalism. On the one hand, as Rupprecht explains, Soviet people became fascinated with exotic landscapes and people, and on the other hand, they learned to expect depictions of “underdevelopment, poverty and US-backed exploitation” (83). As in other areas, in the cinema, the Soviet experience with



their Central Asia and Caucasus also shaped the Soviet view of the global South, Rupprecht elaborates further. That is probably why Mosfilm sent Kalatozov to be the co-production director, like the Soviet State had selected Anastas Mikoyan earlier to be the Cuban-Soviet liaison. Mikoyan was an Armenian and had experience with the “state induced modernization” of the Caucasus (Rupprecht 62) and so did Kalatozov who was Georgian. Kalatozov documented the experience in *Salt for Svanetia* (1930), a propaganda film about the Georgian region of Svanetia, which supposedly greatly benefited from a Soviet built road that connected the previously isolated mountain village to Soviet civilization.

The Soviet intellectuals and politicians were aware of the danger of tropical exoticism in representing the struggle of Latin American countries to free themselves from imperialism. Aram Khachaturian, the president of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies (SSOD),<sup>110</sup> said “never will the tropical exoticism, palms and orchids, parrots and alligators keep us from acknowledging the pride of the Latin American peoples, their diligence, their fight, their history, culture, their pursuits and dreams” (qtd. in Rupprecht 31). This was, of course, difficult to uphold all the time. The late Stalinist culture was dull and as the artists of the Thaw generation tried to depart from “realism” (Rupprecht 74), they could not avoid falling for the opposite: exotic worlds, real and imagined (Yurchak 160).

The film directors, who worked on Latin American themes, wanted to assure success with the Soviet audience. Rupprecht explains that the audience, used to symbols, signs and

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<sup>110</sup> From the 1920s, the Vsesojuznoe Obscestvo Kul'turnoj Svjazi s Zagranicej [All-Union Organisation for Cultural Contacts] (VOKS) “had organized much of the Soviet Union’s foreign propaganda, most notably the notorious visits of hundreds of foreign intellectuals. Its name, somewhat discredited internationally, was changed to Sojuz Sovetskich Obscestv Druzby [Union of Soviet Friendship Societies] (SSOD) in early 1958. While the VOKS had only had one department for the United States and Latin America together, the SSOD quickly developed a refined regional differentiation.” (Rupprecht 31).

rituals of internationalism, expected a certain degree of exoticism as a mode to escape from the monotony of everyday life as well as traumatic past of the war and Stalinism (77). That's why the geographical and cultural identity misrepresentation never became an issue in the USSR (until *Soy Cuba*) and why films like *Amphibian Man* (Vladimir Korenev, 1962), which mixed elements from the Mexican, Caribbean and Spanish cultures, achieved enormous success with the Soviet audience regardless (Rupprecht 85).

The creators of *Soy Cuba* did their best to maintain the premise exemplified by Khachaturian. At the same time, they followed the expectations of the Soviet State film in terms of how Cuba should be presented ideologically. Still, some of their images displeased Mosfilm because they were in contradiction with how Kremlin wanted Latin America, and by extension also Cuba, shown at home. The film, for example, flashed luxury, splendor and modernity of Havana, reminder of the investments made in Cuba by the Americans, and that contrasted with the image of Latin America as an impoverished continent that needed to be rescued and modernized by the USSR. Furthermore, in the first and third story Havana appeared more modern than Moscow, and its images hardly justified all the material aid that was pouring to Cuba from the Soviet Union.

The fate of *Soy Cuba*, however, was most likely sealed in Havana. When we look at the reviews *Soy Cuba* received in different Cuban newspapers and journals we realize the film premiered during a very complex political situation in Cuba, which heavily impacted all the arts. The film reviews reflect very contradicting, individual and group agendas. *Soy Cuba* was praised or condemned depending on the reviewer, his or her home journal or newspaper and party he or

she was affiliated with<sup>111</sup> as well as their relationship to the ICAIC and the Soviet Union. Most of the criticism the film received, however, relates to the project being viewed as a threat to the Cuban national cinematic identity. According to Pineda Barnet, Cubans complained mostly about the lack of authenticity, exaggeration and touristic portrayal of their land, which contradicted the image they pretended to create of their country (“Soy Cuba” 32).

### *La mirada nacional*

In the 1960s, Cuba was building its national cinema in two different ways. In the material sense, the government provided funds to build the material and professional infrastructure of the emerging ICAIC, so that it could become the Revolution’s exclusive cinematic representative and could exercise full control over what the public would see in movie theatres. Consequently, the ICAIC, as an instrument of the new regime, proceeded to build the national cinema ideologically in agreement with the Revolution leaders’ vision. The concept of “cinematografía nacional” or “identidad (cinematográfica) nacional,” if we follow the terminology proposed by Manuel Palacio, does not depend as much on the official recognition of the nationality as on how people in a particular nation perceive themselves and their reality. Palacio calls this phenomenon “mirada nacional” which, as he suggests, “emerge de un universo único, formado por una serie de patrones recurrentes que implican personajes, historias, imágenes o cualquier otro rasgo cultural específico” (qtd. in Pardo 144).

Although *mirada nacional* largely relates to idiosyncrasy, the leaders of the nation can influence it, at least to a certain degree, by controlling how certain people and events get

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<sup>111</sup> Different reviews in different papers represented el Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, militant communists, the ICAIC’s interests, people that loved the Soviet Union and others that despised it.

portrayed on the screen and in other media. The ICAIC, for example, as a state institution, not only approved and disapproved films to be made locally and foreign films to be imported and shown but also used film reviews and cooperated with other national culture institutes to correct certain images if necessary. The most emblematic example of this is, of course, *P.M.*, but critics accused also other films of distorting the image of the Cuban Revolution. For example, Eduardo Manet's *Tránsito* (1964) supposedly misrepresented the Committees of the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). These are just two examples of the locally made films that disagreed with the "official" new *mirada nacional*.

Foreign movies, including socialist films, in conjunction with their reviews also contributed to the fine-tuning of this *mirada nacional* in the socialist Cuba. On the one side, among the films that were favored belonged, for instance, the earlier mentioned Roman Karmen's militant propaganda films. The Cubans welcomed them because they reflected their own vision of the Cuban Revolution and themselves. Among the disapproved films counts, for example, Stanislav Strnad's television film *Zámek pro Barborku* ([Castle for Barbora], 1962), shown in Cuba under the title *Castillos de viento*. A militant film reviewer Eduardo López accused the film in his article "Peligro en la Rampa" in *Juventud Rebelde* of perpetuating a "folkloristic" perspective of the Third World, the bourgeois way of life and consumerism – to the consternation of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Havana and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague.<sup>112</sup>

Co-productions played a special role in this process of sorting out the acceptable and the unacceptable. They were sometimes praised for their photography (*Soy Cuba* and *Preludio*

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<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MZV), Czech Republic. Hospodářské a kulturní zprávy z Kuby 1967, složka 3, p.366- 369. Dopis velvyslance Ing. Pšcolky. TO MZV Pragopress. Příloha 2.

11) but, at the same time, they were slandered by some critics for “distorting” Cuban reality, “misconstrue” Cuban history and offering “a touristic image” of Cuba and its people. If we take the criticism of *Soy Cuba*, for example, we notice that it was precisely the film’s distance from *mirada nacional* what created a rift not only with the country’s and the ICAIC’s leadership but also with many ordinary people, artists and intellectuals who, for one reason or another, adopted their leaders’ opinion.

A co-production is always a risk for all the parties involved and it is always important, Toby Miller suggests, to take into an account that international co-productions “desestabiliza[n] las medidas nacionales de identidad cultural [...] y determina[n] un emplazamiento de transformación a escala cultural, de lo local a lo nacional y de lo regional a lo global” (qtd. in Pardo 135). This is, of course, for the sake of the prospective international audiences whom, even in countries where the production did not depend so much on the box office success, films still needed to cater to. These foreign audiences often looked for filmic representation of realities and issues than did not match those that interested the people living in the country filmed.

In the case of *Soy Cuba*, the risk was miscalculated by both parties and as a result, *Soy Cuba* was caught in a cross fire. Its reception related more to the historical circumstances of Cuba’s relationship with the USSR and the image that Cuba’s and the ICAIC’s leaders wanted to convey of Cuba rather than the film’s aesthetic or ideological proposition. The reception was affected especially by the emerging post-colonial discourse. At the time of the film’s release, the postcolonial discourse was gaining strength and the national identity movements emerged all over Latin America, Asia and Africa. The Revolution ended the centuries-long colonization in

Cuba, first by Spain and then the United States, and was not ready to fall into the hands of another superpower like the Soviet Union, culturally or economically.<sup>113</sup> In the end, the Cubans, of course, could not avoid the economic dependence on the USSR, but they could at least affect the cultural impact by creating resistance to some expressions of the Soviet and the socialist bloc culture. *Soy Cuba*'s history relates to this resistance.

Cubans were sensitive to stereotypical images of themselves and the Third World they were used to seeing before in American films with the Third World themes. For example, the critic of *Castillos de viento* complained – with the same fervor as *Soy Cuba*'s most unforgiving critic Luis M. López about Kalatozov's film – about one of the scenes in the film that pictured socialist technicians, working in Bagdad, i.e. in one of those “underdeveloped countries”

que, como se sabe, están habitados por nativos desagradecidos, incapaces de comprender toda suerte de ayuda samatarisana [*sic*], sobre todo cuando proviene de un hermano blanco... Sin duda, el realizador de este filme ha querido emular (competir sería mejor) con la mentalidad de la RKO de la década de los 40, tan pletórica de “beautiful señoritas” y apuestos “toreadores”. Y para decirlo más tajantemente, con la repugnante concepción capitalista que pretende presentar a nuestros países como un apetecible bocado “turístico”, aunque repletos de piojos e inmundicia, merecedores, en fin, de la clásica patada en el trasero.” (Eduardo López)<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Kápacia claims that after the Missile Crisis, “the Revolution’s inherent nationalism [was] aroused by yet another large power seemingly treating Cuba as a dispensable location for its global strategy” (33).

<sup>114</sup> The Czech translation of the article was sent to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Czechoslovak ambassador in Havana. *Hospodářské a kulturní zprávy z Kuby 1967*. Složka 3, p. 366- 369. *Dopis velvyslance Ing. Pščolky MZV. TO, Pragopress. Příloha 2*.

It is evident from Eduardo López's review that many Cubans could not avoid perceiving the socialist bloc, but the Soviet Union especially, with the same resentment and unease as the countries that had colonized them before and that they were dependent on. The Third World countries in general (and this effort was spearheaded by Cuba) wanted to get rid of this kind of dependence of the First (and the Second) World and preferred to lean on each other rather than the superpowers. In agreement with this objective, the ICAIC started developing its international identity in relationship to Latin America rather than the socialist bloc from which it tried to distance itself artistically as well as conceptually. Its position crystalized during the founding festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Viña del Mar in Chile 1967 and is evident, for example, from the abrupt content shift in *Cine cubano*, which around 1967 started covering almost exclusively the New Latin American cinema and its creators.

The ICAIC's decision to disassociate from *Soy Cuba* as a "Cuban" film had more to do with this strategy than with the way how *Soy Cuba* dealt with the Cuban theme. Its rejection of the film related not so much to the cinematography as to what the project represented as a whole. García Borrero explains,

todo aquel despliegue de recursos económicos, número casi incontrolable de personas a utilizarse en la filmación, obsesión por la exquisitez técnica, chocaba de manera frontal con la propuesta cinematográfica que propugnaba el ICAIC, que ya en esos instantes comenzaba a marcar su influencia en el cine de la región. ...Un cine de estas proporciones y demandas resultaba cuando menos "obsceno" en el contexto de una cinematografía que lo que pedía a gritos era la oportunidad de contar historias reales, esas que con el tiempo conformarían "la

estética del hambre” de Glauber Rocha, o el “cine indigenista” de Jorge Sanjinés. (*Cine Cubano de Los Sesenta: Mito Y Realidad* 109)

This strategy prevented the ICAIC’s leadership and affiliated critics from identifying with the opinions of the reviewers like Josefina Ruiz from *Verde olivo*, who claimed that with this film “por primera vez se ha visto un cine realmente cubano” (13). The “real Cuban cinema” how Ruiz perceived it clearly was not the “real Cuban cinema” that Guevara and the ICAIC leadership had on their mind.

This situation, however, put the ICAIC in a double bind. Praising the film did not suit the ICAIC, which aimed to create the image of a national cinema built from scratch. Nonetheless, the ICAIC could not slam it publicly either (at least not directly) because of all the support it gained from Mosfilm thanks to the co-production. Therefore, the ICAIC probably made arrangements with Mosfilm behind closed doors for limited showing<sup>115</sup> and abstained from reviewing the film in its official journal *Cine cubano*.<sup>116</sup> The negative reviews, especially the now almost canonical analysis by Luis M. López from *Bohemia*,<sup>117</sup> made sure to highlight

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<sup>115</sup> The film was shown for two weeks in various Havana movie theatres and it was also shown in Santiago de Cuba during the carnival. Rosalind Galt disputes Ferraz’s claim that the film was shown only for a week and quickly pulled out because it was a failure. According to her, two weeks was not a sign of failure. It was an average showing time for many films. The market was competitive: there were many different films shown in Havana’s theatres at the same time. The feeling the film was only shown for a short period of time can come from the fact that big expectations were placed on the film and maybe this made the two weeks look like an underperformance, especially, in terms of recovering the money and time spent (215). Pineda Barnet shared in his article in *La Gaceta* that the film was shown only for a few days and was a “disaster” in terms of the production’s return on investment (33).

<sup>116</sup> According to Galt, the journal did not publish many reviews during its first years, therefore, the fact that the journal did not publish any reviews of the film does not really prove anything (217). In my opinion, however, in the case of *Soy Cuba*, the ICAIC deliberately avoided to express its opinion publicly.

<sup>117</sup> Galt points out that most of the more contemporary reviews of *Soy Cuba* concluded that the film had been a failure based almost exclusively on this review, even though there were many other, very positive reviews of the film at the time of its release. According to her, this critic was strongly biased against almost all foreign non-realistic representation of Cuba (216).



that the film looked foreign and touristic and had nothing to do with the real Cuba. It was to prevent any complaints in Cuba about censorship from more liberally thinking artists and intellectuals.<sup>118</sup>

### *Soy Cuba meets Black Orpheus*

*Soy Cuba* was not the only film in Latin America, accused of presenting a distorted, Eurocentric vision of a Latin American country. Analogous to the polemic of *Soy Cuba* was the case of *Black Orpheus* (Marcel Camus, 1958), a cinematic remake of the play *Orfeu da Conceição* by Vinicius de Moraes. It was filmed in Brazil and it won the French director the Palm D'Or in Cannes and the Oscar for the best foreign film in 1959. The feature, like the play, retells the Greek myth on the background of Rio de Janeiro's colorful carnival. It screened only five years before *Soy Cuba*.

Like in the case of the Soviet-Cuban film, the Brazilian film's critics slammed *Black Orpheus* for "presenting a fake, stereotyped image of [Brazil]" ("The Mammoth That Wouldn't Die" 115). For example, the Brazilian director Carlos Diegues who made *Orfeu* (1999), "a remake" of the film and the play, confessed in the press release of his film that *Black Orpheus* was one of the reasons why he made *Orfeu*. He shared that in 1959 Camus's film not only disappointed but also "personally insulted" him. He felt that Camus, "Despite his sincere fascination for the human and geographic landscape of Rio de Janeiro, and although he even showed certain tenderness for what he was shooting, the film offered an exotic and tourist view

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<sup>118</sup> At least, this is how the film institutions operated in the socialist bloc. Of course, discussions about it always happened verbally and behind close door, therefore, it is difficult to find documentation proving it.

which betrayed the meaning of the play and completely abandoned its fundamental qualities.” (qtd. in Nagib 94). Camus’s film made Brazil famous as a carnival and dance country without going any deeper than that. *Soy Cuba*’s critics in Cuba coincided with most of what Diegues said. According to many of them, the fascination and the exotic and touristic view betrayed the true representation of the Cuban reality.

Although the critics of those two films coincided in some points, *Soy Cuba*’s take on the Latin American and the Cuban reality was very different from *Black Orpheus*. A Soviet theatre play *Den’ rožděnija Terezy* [Teresa’s Birthday] by Georgij Mdivani about the Bay of Pigs’ Invasion, presented in Moscow in early 1962, shared more with *Black Orpheus* than *Soy Cuba* in this regard. When the Soviets proudly invited a Cuban delegation to the screening of the play in Moscow, they were in for a surprise. The delegation, led by Paco Alonso, the head of the theatre department of the Cuban Ministry of Culture, slammed the popular Soviet drama in a letter to the State Committee for Cultural Relations (GKKS)’s<sup>119</sup> president Georgij Žukov. Alonso criticized the stereotypes, the music used (it was Dominican, not Cuban), and – what was probably the worst offense – that the Revolutionaries were presented as “rum guzzling bouncers instead of the humble and restrained human beings they allegedly were” (Rupprecht 114).

### *The Non-Cuban Gaze*

*Soy Cuba*, in comparison to the superficial exoticism in the Brazilian film and the Soviet play,

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<sup>119</sup> The Gosudarstvennyj Komitet Kul'tumych Svjazej (GKKS) was founded in 1957 and “was responsible for the final implementation of most cultural foreign representational activities in the ten years of its existence. Its officials did collaborate with local communist parties, but whenever they negotiated with foreign authorities in Soviet missions and embassies they were supposed to show a certain distance from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and to represent the Soviet state.” (Rupprecht 33).

did not commit such careless stereotypical misrepresentations. But at the same time, the film could not avoid completely the Eurocentric perspective the Third World countries were so sensitive about. That's probably also why the Brazilian filmmaker Vicente Ferraz, Latin American himself, forty plus years later resonated with the post-colonial, anti-Eurocentric opinion about *Soy Cuba* that many Cubans who saw the film in the 1960s had. Consequently, his documentary's point of view also emphasizes the negative opinions about Kalatozov's film, related to the Soviet filmmakers' non-Cuban gaze, distance, paternalistic tone and exotization, and omits positive reviews from the 1960s press in Cuba or anything where the Soviets might have coincided with the Cuban point of view.

From the reviews as well as the documentary, we can deduce that the Cubans perceived the Eurocentric perspective in the film especially from the film metanarrative, at least, if we take into consideration the hostility the title provoked in the Cuban press. The journal *Bohemia's* critic Luis M. López called his article *No soy Cuba* while another critic questioned *¿Soy Cuba, sí o no?* (Loss and Prieto 111). The title of the film probably came from Yevtushenko's poem of the same name.<sup>120</sup> The title seemed problematic from the beginning, judging from the fact that the Cuban co-screenwriter Enrique Pineda Barnet wrote about it in two of his articles. In "El cadillac de puro charol" he mentioned the title sounded well in Russian (57) and in "Después de pasar un charco", he referred to it as a "título provisional de nuestro film, que no nos hace mucha gracia" (59). In one interview, he agreed that the hostility towards *Soy Cuba* might have been exacerbated or even triggered by the choice of the title.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Yevtushenko, Yevgenyi. "I am Cuba". *Znamia*. 3 (1963): 3 – 67.

<sup>121</sup> Enrique Pineda Barnet. Personal interviews. September 2014 and June 2015.

The title – in combination with the voice over narration and overall paternalistic tone – contributed to the feeling that the Soviets talked for the Cuban people, on their behalf, without giving them a voice. The voice-over became a master narrative<sup>122</sup> because it allowed the narrator to judge from a “god-like perspective.” The overall tone was related to the Soviet aspiration to do grandiose things,<sup>123</sup> combat imperialism and fight for equality of all people, inherent to Soviet internationalism. The voice-over and the overall tone transmitted a paternalistic perspective associated with this Soviet policy. Therefore, even though the voice belonged to Cuba’s very own Raquel Revuelta and words to the Cuban poet Pineda Barnet, the combination of the film’s title and melodramatic recitation of a reiterative and very didactic text gave the impression that who spoke in the film was the Soviet filmmaker, not the Cubans. That is probably why the poem was on many occasions actually contributed to Yevtushenko rather than Pineda Barnet.<sup>124</sup> Pineda Barnet shared in *La Gaceta de Cuba* that he had advised Kalatozov’s team against this narrative voice (32).

The voice-over narration created a sense of distance, which was generally also attributed to the Eurocentric perspective. This “objective” distance, which we sense throughout the film, gets established in the initial aerial shot, which opens the prologue of the film. The camera “floats” above the sea and then slowly zooms in on the island, an image which sets the stage for an “objective” observer. The aerial traveling shot suggests that the camera approaches the island

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<sup>122</sup> According to Gyan Prakash, all master narratives are repudiated by the postcolonial criticism. Since the most powerful current master narratives are the products of a post-Enlightenment European constitution of history and therefore Eurocentric, postcolonial criticism takes the critique of Eurocentrism as its central task” (qtd. in Dirlik 334).

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Enrique Pineda Barnet in *Siberian Mammoth*.

<sup>124</sup> Enrique Pineda Barnet. Personal interview. September 2014.

from above, with the perspective of outside in. It can be interpreted as a perspective of a conqueror or a colonizer, which is probably how it was perceived in Cuba, especially in the conjunction with the story of Columbus we can hear in the background. Nevertheless, we can also understand it as a point of view of a foreigner who is discovering Cuba and slowly falling in love with it. In this case, the film would be more about the relationship of the Soviet filmmaker to Cuba than Cuba itself.

The initial sequence can be interpreted as demonstrative of a paternalistic attitude towards the Cubans which the filmmakers most likely developed as they learned about the historical travail of Cuban people. As Urushevsky's camera pans over the trees and almost naked, very poor, innocent peasants gliding on their canoes, we have the impression that we are looking at the indigenous people from yesteryear. María, René and Pedro in the first two stories are also cast as these helpless, innocent inhabitants. However, this changes with Enrique, Mariano and Alberto. They are no longer passive or powerless victims. Once they gain the revolutionary consciousness, they confront the tyranny. Their attitude resembles much more the empowered, typically Cuban characters we see in Cuban films, and depart, therefore, from the typically Eurocentric take on Latin America.

Besides of the films metanarrative, tone and voice-over narration, Eurocentrism comes across also in a certain degree of folklorization that Pineda Barnet accused the filmmakers of. He blamed especially Kalatozov and Yevtushenko. He complained, for example, about Kalatozov's obsession with "temperament" ("Soy Cuba" 33). He disliked that Kalatozov tried to bring out this "temperament" even in situations where it was not necessary or appropriate. He criticized Kalatozov's directing of actors for that.

Kalatozov knew the Latin Americans were passionate. Therefore, to achieve what he

saw as typical, he often directed his non-professional actors to act passionately. His idea probably came from the Latin American films and the foreign films about Latin America, imported to the USSR. It could have also come from some Latin American artists who traveled to the USSR and probably perpetuated this stereotype to certain degree because they knew it would “sell”. The character of María in the first story and her “temperament”, for example, might have been inspired by *Black Orpheus*.<sup>125</sup> The female lead *Eurydice*, played by the US actress Marpessa Dawn, not only looks like María and dances passionately (even though she is not a Brazilian). She also becomes “a toy”, like María, when in the middle of her escape a bunch of men grab her and start playing with her, throwing her from one to another, laughing, just like the American tourists do with María in the cabaret.

In addition to revealing Kalatozov’s obsession with “temperament”, Pineda Barnet illustrated the folklorization with a story about an anecdote they had once collected from a student-poet that accompanied the crew. The poet told them about his ex-girlfriend who wanted to be a singer and they obligated her to become a prostitute. She abandoned him to spare him from pain. The anecdote became the base of the first story. Pineda Barnet considered the story moving as it was but “the genius Yevtushenko”, Pineda Barnet complained, adapted the story to supposedly reach a stronger effect.

Yevtushenko came up with the idea that the story should take place “en el barrio de indigentes más grande del mundo” (barrio de las Yaguas) and that María should be “bella, tropical y negra... Vivirá en las Yaguas, tendrá un novio puro... que será un mestizo que vende frutas exóticas...” (“Soy Cuba” 34). This way the story could exploit the image of the

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<sup>125</sup> Given the international recognition *Black Orpheus* achieved, it is very likely Kalatozov was familiar with the film.

poor and innocent Afro-Cubans. As a result of this move, however, the story ended up packed with Portocarrero's masks, palm trees, exotic fruits, and tropical beauty that were considered the elements per excellence of the Caribbean tropical exoticism that Khachaturian warned about.

### **Documentary versus Fiction Approach**

The exoticism and distance, however, were not the biggest problem of the film. It was the film's aesthetization of poverty, the Cuban Revolution and the processes that led to it. This aesthetization of the recent Cuban history became a big issue because it was in contradiction with, what Galt calls, "[the] nationalist representational politics" (224), i.e. the politics that perpetuated *mirada nacional*. This *mirada* created an expectation that the recent Cuban history should be represented as close to reality as possible. The expectations were, of course, mostly related to the fact that the events the films presented were much too recent and everyone still remembered them. That expectation led Luis M. López from *Bohemia* and others to unjustly accuse the Soviet filmmakers of having taken their research task too lightly and of not taking the Cuban circumstances seriously. According to him, *Soy Cuba* reflects

el superficialismo con que se han acercado a una realidad demasiado cercana y conocida para resistir una suplantación. Los hechos históricos han sido reflejados anecdóticamente, y esto no es malo, pues la imaginación de un creador, su poesía y libertad, pueden suplir la ausencia de rigor. Pero el carácter del film, que no es abiertamente ficción, sino aproximación documental, ha olvidado aquel *espíritu* tras la anécdota, *la fuerza vital* que promovió el material del tema. Nuestros espectadores, que han visto mucho cine, intuyen que ese

carácter nos es ajeno. Que nada fue así. Que nada pudo ser así. [italics added]  
("No Soy Cuba" 25)

This excerpt from López's review reveals that he fell into a superficiality of his own when he accused the filmmakers of having been unable to make a "true" Cuban film (meaning, a film that would be authentic, true to reality, concordant with the Cuban perspective) simply because they were foreigners. His "politically limiting rhetoric of nativist", as Galt calls his attack on *Soy Cuba* (222), precluded him from a deeper understanding of the film. Actually, he followed the very same approach as the socialist bloc censors who tended to read filmic form and content against each other. But in a film like *Soy Cuba*, we can only understand the meaning if we read the content together with and through the form.

### *Form versus Content*

During the Thaw, Soviet artists were past naturalistic films. In a similar way as the Soviet society (and the rest of the socialist bloc) tried to envision a socialism with human face, filmmakers tried to overcome the dichotomy of form and content, the aesthetics versus the plot and characters. While socialist realism conveyed ideological messages mainly through the content (which facilitated the censors' job), the Thaw filmmakers were finding a way to put the aesthetics in service of the ideology as the avant-garde Soviet filmmakers like Eisenstein and Vertov had done before them.

The emphasis on cinematography did not necessarily mean the films were subversive, escapist or uncommitted as the authorities and the film theorists often pretended, imposing the artificial premise of the separation of the content and the form. Sergei Eisenstein, whom,



according to Pineda Barnet,<sup>126</sup> Kalatozov and Urusevsky greatly admired, proved them wrong. He created several films, like *Acorazado Potemkin* (1925), that were strongly pro-regime but with clever cinematography and stunning photography. Another Eisenstein's film *¡Qué viva México!* (1932) eventually became a model for *Soy Cuba* (but there are also intertextual references to *Acorazado Potemkin* in Kalatozov's film). The Eisenstein's Mexican film was so important to Kalatozov and Urusevsky that the director of photography made Pineda Barnet watch the film about ten times (*Gaceta* 32) when Pineda Barnet worked on the *Soy Cuba* script in Moscow. He wanted to ensure Pineda Barnet understood the effect they wanted to achieve with their film.

*¡Qué viva México!* was not a Mexican-Soviet co-production as one might expect. The funds came mostly from the North American writer Upton Sinclair and his friends, who gave Eisenstein almost unlimited artistic freedom (at least in the beginning).<sup>127</sup> By being distanced from the always vigilant eyes of the Soviet censor, Eisenstein could unleash his creativity in a way, he could not have back home. The geographical distance permitted Kalatozov and Urusevsky, like Eisenstein before them, to take more artistic liberties. The creators of both films benefited, of course, from the fact that they did not have to reveal the footage in the USSR and thus risk imposed limitations before the films were finished.

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<sup>126</sup> He refers to it his article in *La Gaceta*. In "Después de pasar un charco" Pineda Barnet expresses great admiration for Eisenstein's film *México*, as he calls it, which he apparently saw in the first Alexandrov's version. In Moscow, he also saw an American documentary composed from the same Eisenstein's takes they had seen in the Soviet film. He despised the musicalization and bad taste in the American film (58).

<sup>127</sup> More information on Eisenstein's stay in Mexico and his relationship with Sinclair in Dashiell and in De las Reyes. *¡Qué viva México!* artistically shared much with *Acorazado Potemkin*. The fact that both films were made almost ten years apart, points to Eisenstein's sense of artistic freedom during the filming in Mexico. Although the socialist realism doctrine was not declared until 1934, avantgard cinema was increasingly denounced in Stalin's State already since the end of the 1920s.

Kalatozov's and Eisenstein's Latin American adventure share many features. Both films appear stereotypical and touristic in some ways, but at the same time, they reveal a deep understanding of the revolutionary process and the soul of the underprivileged of the country where they filmed. They established a strong subtle connection between the values and principles of the Great October Socialist Revolution with the revolutions in Mexico and Cuba.

The two films illustrate the core of Soviet internationalism in the 1920s – 1930s' period and the 1960s: the films side with the poorest and denounce violence and exploitation against them. They show how this abuse led ultimately to the Mexican and the Cuban Revolution. Unfortunately, Eisenstein could not film the last part of his film called "Soldadera" to make this point<sup>128</sup> and to tie all the strings together during the editing process. The State called him back and Sinclair did not release the footage to the USSR immediately, so Eisenstein could never see the footage after he left the United States. Therefore, we can only guess how the film would have looked like as a whole.

The directors of both films wanted to show the revolution forming processes rather than details about individuals and their stories. They inquired 1) why people made the Revolution, 2) what happened in cities and countryside, and concluded with 3) the final epopeya of the revolution.<sup>129</sup> Kalatozov and Urusevsky, like Eisenstein, chose poetic narration in images over more realistic depiction in order to reveal the almost utopian or mystical vision of the process. The theme was important to them and the creators became much personally vested in their Latin

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<sup>128</sup> More information regarding the difficulties Eisenstein endured and liberties he took as he was making his film in Mexico can be found in Dashiell and De los Reyes.

<sup>129</sup> In the case of *Soy Cuba*, Pineda Barnet shares in his article in *La Gaceta*, the basic premise was to show the process of the Revolution: why the revolution was made, students and workers' resistance in the cities, problems the peasants faced, and the epopeya of Sierra Maestra (32). That is exactly what Eisenstein had proposed in his film as well as we can see from the structure of his film.

American films. The two films belong to their finest. Eisenstein never saw his film finished but he never stopped dreaming about Mexico. Kalatozov and Urusevsky, impacted by the negative reception of the film, never made another film together. Urusevsky, until the end of his life, felt disturbed by the criticism of *Soy Cuba*.

### *Representing a Revolution in the Making*

*Soy Cuba* managed to uncover the process of revolution in the making. It showed the hidden processes mostly through editing (tempo, rhythm), symbolic characters and the work with spaces (long takes). The tempo and the rhythm were criticized in Cuba because they accentuated the feeling that *Soy Cuba* was not a “Cuban” film. Several Ferraz’s interviewees mentioned the tempo and rhythm as a sign that the filmmakers misunderstood the Cuban way of being. The “faulty” tempo and rhythm were a sign that the filmmakers supposedly saw Cuba through the Soviet “lens”. According to them, it resulted from the lack of knowledge of the Cuban idiosyncrasy.<sup>130</sup> Salvador Wood, who played Mariano in the last story, explained,

el tempo del filme soviético entonces, el tempo de las escenas cuando el estudiante, por ejemplo, sale con una piedra, para tirársela al jefe de la policía, que era un asesino, ese tempo, esa demora, ese avance lento, continuado, sostenido que no termina nunca, ese no es el temperamento cubano. El temperamento cubano no es el temperamento del soviético. Cada pueblo tiene su idiosincrasia, su manera de sentir, su forma de reaccionar... (Ferraz

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<sup>130</sup> Alexander “Sacha” Calzatti narrates: “We did not know much about Cuban history, we didn’t know the culture, we did not even know where the country was located, we only knew its location on the map, and so it was a big surprise to everybody” (Ferraz 00:20:00).

1:04:05).

The problem with the tempo in this scene is obvious when juxtaposed to the normal rhythm of contemporary Havana streets in Ferraz's documentary. The mismatch of the real and the filmic tempo, however, is not uncommon in co-productions. It can occur to the most experienced editors when editing a film about and for a foreign country they do not know. It has happened, for example, to an editor of a magnitude of Nelson Rodríguez, the editor of Solás' *Cecilia*, when working on the Bolivian film *Cuestión de fe* (Marcos Loyaza, 1995). The final result was too accelerated for the Bolivian idiosyncrasy and had to be adjusted (qtd. in Sotto 65).

In the case of *Soy Cuba*, however, the question of tempo was not a mistake, resulting from the lack of knowledge of Cuban idiosyncrasy. The slow, almost unending movement of Enrique walking towards the police chief, had a legitimate reason in the film. The film form, i.e. all the film's technical aspects together, including the sound and camera work, aimed to create a sense of trance. To understand what they tried to accomplish, we will use the wider definition of the term "trance" here which Lúcia Nagib utilizes in her essay on *Soy Cuba* and Glaber Rocha's *Terra em transe* (1967).

She understands the term "trance" not only as a "sleep-like state, caused, for example, by hypnosis, in which one concentrates on one's thoughts remaining oblivious of the world around" (the more limiting English definition) but also as a state that relates to passage, transition, transformation, distress, and revolution (Portuguese meaning of *transe*) (80).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> According to Nagib, the word "trance" has a relations with transit, transformation, and revolution. *Transe*, in Portuguese, is an overarching word, which includes ideas of "distress", "risk", "danger", "hazard", "crisis", and "anxiety". It suggests "struggle", "fight", the state of a medium possessed by a spirit, as well as "passage" and "death". In English, the word *trance* has the more restricted meaning of a "sleep-like state, caused, for example, by

According to her, the trance occurs when there is a crisis, a turning point in characters' life. In such case, trance represents "the desperate needs of the oppressed, [who] fall into a trance that lends their crisis a metaphysical dimension" (Nagib 83). Through this "enactment of trance", as Nagib explains, both Kalatozov and Rocha create "the subject of revolution" (79).

The trance relates to individuals as well as the masses. Each story in *Soy Cuba* has these distinctive moments of trance. The individual trance can be interpreted as the character's need for the revolution: Betty/María's frenetic dance in the cabaret, Pedro's desperate sugarcane cutting and later burning of his house and field, Enrique on the rooftop, and lastly Mariano's confusion after the bombing of his house. When the trance occurs in the masses, however, it no longer represents the need for revolution. It represents the revolution itself. We recognize this in Enrique walking towards the police chief, the funeral procession after his death, and in Mariano's walk among exploding bombs, loading and shooting, loading and shooting together with many other Marianos. Here the trance represents the revolution materialized... above time and space. These sequences<sup>132</sup> in which many Cubans looked for realistic depiction of their reality and which they discarded as a false image of Cuba, do not present an incorrect image of Cuba at all. Rather, we can understand them as a different, much more globalizing vision.

The construction of the characters in *Soy Cuba* was also misunderstood because it offered a different point of view than the Cubans were used to seeing in their films. The

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hypnosis, in which one concentrates on one's thoughts remaining oblivious of the world around" (80). For the purposes of this analysis, I will be using the word *trance*, like Nagib, in the broader sense of the Portuguese term.

<sup>132</sup> I am referring here mostly to the sequences of Enrique's walk with the dove and later a stone in his hand and Mariano's walking and shooting in the end of the film. Both sequences were criticized especially by Luis M. López.

Cubans were accustomed to characters who resembled real people, real heroes of the Revolution and they could not identify with the *Soy Cuba*'s characters that were more symbolic and therefore, more shallow. But the Soviet filmmakers needed to develop the characters ideologically and symbolically rather than psychologically because such characters were better suited for capturing historical processes for propaganda purposes (Eisenstein did the same in his Mexican film). Therefore, *Soy Cuba*'s characters represent all peasants, all women, and all students rather than individual people. This way the filmmakers aimed to create a universal language that would speak in clear images and would be understandable to all humankind. Kalatozov explained his intentions to Rodríguez Alemán in an interview for *Cine cubano* before shooting the big fire sequence in the second story:

La historia se refiere a la condición real de la clase campesina en Cuba, pero *no la vamos a hacer de modo naturalista*, sino en cierta forma simbólica y poética. Porque Pedro representa a la vez un personaje concreto y un símbolo de *todos los guajiros cubanos*, con su vida difícil y explotada. Nosotros queremos darle al público fuera de Cuba, y especialmente de los países socialistas, una imagen sintética del hombre del campo cubano, y por eso *Pedro tiene muchos rasgos del campesino de todos los países, más los rasgos característicos cubanos*.

[italics added] (qtd. in Rodríguez Alemán 20)

Kalatozov clarifies in this interview that they never intended to portray the Cuban characters naturalistically. He explains that Pedro is not an individual with a unique story and psychological development. Neither are the other characters. Their stories are re-lived over and over by many other people like them all over the world. They were victims of corrupt

governments, greedy landlords, poverty, and exploitation. Through these characters, *Soy Cuba* integrated Cuba into the discourse of fight against the vices of imperialism, which was the base of the Soviet internationalism.

Yet Cubans had difficulties to accept these “underdeveloped” characters. They could not recognize themselves in them, let alone identify with them (which was the way the Cuban films operated). By “synthetizing” the characters, the film stripped them of their Cubanness and this is what the actor Sergio Corrieri talks about when he says that after seeing the film, people were wondering, “eso en la realidad no es así, ese personaje no existe, ese no es un cubano” (Ferraz 01:05:40). The Cuban critics and several *Soy Cuba* collaborators, interviewed by Ferraz, shared this impression.

The characters of *Soy Cuba*, however, are not shallow because the Soviets would be prisoners of the socialist realism aesthetics, as the film’s critics Luis M. López’s and Pineda Barnet suggest. Unlike the Cuban films at that time, Kalatozov and Urusevsky chose to bring to the forefront spaces rather than individuals. They were trying to illustrate the process of gestation of the Cuban Revolution, for which the conceptual and ideological “deepening” of spaces through “formal” techniques was better suited than the psychological development of characters. As Galt suggests, the use of cinematic techniques, the “formalism”, was instrumental as “the means to imagine exuberant aesthetics of geopolitical transformation” (225). This way the political meaning was created. The poetry of the film, through “a rhetoric of composition, condensation and metaphor” (224), gave the aesthetics of the cinematic spaces political value.

In *Soy Cuba*, one of the most emblematic cinematic features are the extremely long

takes and it is precisely the fluidity of these takes, Galt explains, that the filmmakers used “as a mechanism to reveal social relations” (116). This is particularly highlighted in the funeral scene that evokes the feeling that the city is slowly waking up to the revolution, through all the doors and windows that open, people that pop up on their balconies or join the crowd on the street. The slow traveling camera movement uncovers this awakening of private and public spaces in Havana neighborhoods and facilitates this “alchemical distillation” of the spatial energies of the revolutionary imagery which make the revolution-in-making visible (228). All the people that come into view provide not only “a visual account of revolutionary forces” but also create “a performative mobilization of their spatial relationships” (228).

The two long takes that have been most praised in *Soy Cuba* thus acquire a political meaning that is hidden when we look at them only from the aesthetic perspective, i.e. when we regard them only as a revolt against the more content driven aesthetics of social realism. While the first long take (the first story) reveals “the imperialist body” through the sensory pleasure we enjoy as the camera slowly descends from the roof to the pool, the funeral sequence (the third story) is the “Cuban revolution body” (Galt 230). The camera’s bold movements that López so dislikes, make the revolution, according to Galt, “visible...desirable, attractive and lovable” (230). In this manner, the poetic form facilitates the closeness, *acercamiento*, which Beltrán praises in his review.

### *The Poetry of the Cuban Revolution*

The use of the poetic cinematic format in *Soy Cuba* did not only come from the quest to find a different aesthetic expression of the socialist and revolutionary ideology that *Soy Cuba*’s



creators shared with many socialist bloc filmmakers during the Thaw. It was also a result of a more practical production approach. The Soviet filmmakers were aware of their limitations to render an authentic Cuban story, with authentic Cuban characters and situations and they feared to distort the reality. They found the poetic form, as Galt explains, much more appropriate for “a cross-cultural encounter” (225). Urushevski revealed their reasoning behind this decision to Eduardo Manet in an interview for *Cine cubano*,

Estaba claro que no íbamos a escribir una novela sobre Cuba, ya que para eso, hubiese sido necesario quedarse en Cuba varios años para conocer plenamente el tema. Realizar una película sobre tipos psicológicos cubanos, nos parecía también aventurado y atrevido ya que, siendo extranjeros, no podíamos dar un reflejo cabal de la realidad. Pensamos, sin embargo, que se podían escribir versos sobre Cuba. Por eso decidimos que la solución artística de la película estriba en realizar un guión que fuese como un poema dedicado a este país. En los poemas no se requieren esos pequeños detalles psicológicos y de hábitos que se necesitan en una novela. El poema requiere unas imágenes muy claras, muy definidas que penetren rápidamente en la imaginación. Por eso quisimos que la película fuera como un poema romántico (5).

Conceptualizing the film as a romantic poem, even though the critics praised Urushevsky’s images, their beauty and their capacity to “tell a story”, resulted unfortunate for the general film’s reception. It became one of the most praised but, paradoxically, also one of the most resented elements of the film.<sup>133</sup> The problem was not as much the poetry of the film

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<sup>133</sup> Raúl García, the sound technician of the film and the protagonist of the third story, confessed that at least at that time he did not find the epic, poetic tone of the film appropriate for speaking about the Revolution and places and

itself as the interpretation of what was considered poetic. While for the Soviets the poetry consisted in elaborate images and stunningly beautiful photography together with a melodramatic recitation of a poem to accompany those images, the Cubans had a different idea – their reality and their country were poetic enough and did not need “artificial” elaborations.

This is the time where we need to bring back Karmen’s *Alba de Cuba* as a reference point to understand what the Cubans expected from films about Cuba and why *Alba de Cuba* was received so well while *Soy Cuba* turned out unpopular. We will look at reviews from three prestigious Cuban critics, José Manuel Valdéz Rodríguez, Arturo Agramonte and Mario Rodríguez Alemán who reviewed *Alba de Cuba* and praised it for its *poetic qualities* as well as its *Cubanness*. Valdéz-Rodríguez actually reviewed and praised both films but curiously, even though *Alba de Cuba* is a documentary with almost half the length of *Soy Cuba*, he wrote more about Karmen’s film than Kalatozov’s. Later, he did though add a couple more pages when *Soy Cuba* received an award at the 6<sup>th</sup> Uniatec Congress in Milan.

We can gain better understanding of the different reception of the two films if we use Alejo Carpentier’s manifesto *Lo real maravilloso* as a lens to compare Valdéz-Rodríguez’s highly complementary review on *Alba de Cuba* with the reviews we have seen so far about *Soy Cuba*. In the prologue to his *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier compares the natural beauty – *lo real maravilloso* – of Latin America with the elaborate and artificial images created by surrealists. Judging from the negative reviews of *Soy Cuba* and the glamourizing reviews on *Alba de Cuba* from the three above mentioned critics, *Alba de Cuba*’s and *Soy Cuba* can be read through the same dichotomy. Valdéz-Rodríguez praises *Alba de Cuba*’s naturalistic

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events as important for the national history as Sierra Maestra, the university and the countryside (Ferraz 1:03:31).

photography, commentary and music that, according to him, reflected Cuban nature and reality really well. *Soy Cuba*, on the contrary, even though it did not go as far as the surrealists, emphasized the virtuosity of the photography that the Cubans found foreign.

In a similar way as Carpentier, *Soy Cuba*'s critics did not consider authentic the elaborate artistic expressions, but rather what was inherently theirs. Valdéz-Rodríguez explains, for example, that *Alba de Cuba* characterized the Cuban countryside very appropriately with “la turquesa de nuestro mar, el azul claro de nuestro cielo, la albura de la arena fina de nuestras playas..., el profundo verdor de la hoja del tabaco y la esmeralda del cogollo de la caña...” (189). What a difference from *Soy Cuba* in which Urusevsky's camera eternalized the beautiful Cuban countryside in his audacious takes of the coast and a forest of palm trees in the aerial sequence.<sup>134</sup> The film critics found his palms too white and his sky in the background too black for the Cuban scenery.<sup>135</sup> For them, contrary to *Alba de Cuba*, which was shot in color and for panoramic screen, Urusevsky's countryside, filmed in black and white, with a “strange” light and sparkle, with a lens that distorted the image, and some other unusual takes, did not evoke the image of the typical Cuban *campiña*.

The poetry of both films is undeniable but its rendition is very different. In *Alba de Cuba*, Valdéz Rodríguez found the poetry “en la visión, en la palabra, en la música íntimamente articulada en una firme unidad de expresión... en la luz cernida que se filtra como en una decoración mágica por entre la fronda de un verde profundo... en las criollísimas avispa que

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<sup>134</sup> Josefina Ruiz from *Verde olivo* praised this traveling shot along with the sequence in the hotel Capri and the cabaret singer in the first story; Pedro cutting cane and burning the sugarcane field in the second story and Mariano's family's escape and bombarding in the last story (“Soy Cuba” 12).

<sup>135</sup> Mario García Joya disliked it and so did Alejo Beltrán. Mario García Joya. Personal interview. January 2017 and Beltrán's article in *Hoy* respectively.

liban en la yema de la caña recién cortada, junto a los dos niños que se deleitan con un trozo cristalino y jugoso” (192). According to him, the film also captured the soul and mind of the Cuban people through “tonadas y melodías genuinamente [cubanas], de todos los géneros y todas las épocas usadas con discernimiento y propiedad” and through a commentary, “siempre esclarecedor... bien criollo, a más de emocionado; y con fervor muy nuestro” (192).

*Soy Cuba* also features popular music and genuine happiness but these moments are not as predominant as in *Alba de Cuba*. We can find them, for example, in the second story when Pedro’s daughter dances with joy on a popular song about *guajira*.<sup>136</sup> She also enjoys sugarcane juice she squeezes from a stem she took playfully from a small boy. Mariano’s wife demonstrates hospitality and compassion, inherent to Cuban idiosyncrasy, when she hands Alberto a bunch of bananas after her husband kicked him out of the house. The Cuban character also comes through when Enrique confronts a group of the US marines in a cavalier defense of an unknown girl Gloria. These moments are, however, rare. The film lacks *human* poetry of the moment that *Alba de Cuba*, according to Valdés-Rodríguez, captured really well, for example, in “[en una] flor blanca, símbolo de todas las demás, que flota ingrávida sobre la turquesa móvil del mar” (192), thrown in on the day of the commemoration Camilo Cienfuegos’s death. For the Cubans, this flower and the jasmynes, which the literary campaign participants decorated their rifles with, were much more poetic than Urusevsky’s “twist” as Tereza Ruiz called Urusevsky’s photography.

The most important difference between the two films in terms of their poetry was how they captured the Revolution itself, a revolution that the Cubans “[percibían] con particular

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<sup>136</sup> A female peasant.

intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que [conducía] a un modo de ‘estado límite’” (8),<sup>137</sup> if we return to Carpentier’s words. Valdés-Rodríguez applauds Karmen for having understood their Revolution and having captured the revolutionary fervor that characterized Cuba in the early 1960s. The critic especially highlighted the way how Karmen captured two of the most notable aspects of the Cuban Revolution: “la cabal fusión del pueblo y sus líderes” and “la voluntad de vencer, aun al precio de morir, afirmada con sencilla entereza por los dirigentes y los hombres y mujeres de fila, y ¡hasta por los niños!” (190). We do not find these two aspects in *Soy Cuba*. Even though Beltrán praised that *Soy Cuba* transmitted “el marcado acento romántico que se desprende de la Revolución misma”, it did not seem to be the same romanticism Valdés-Rodríguez attributed to *Alba de Cuba*.

Furthermore, meanwhile *Alba de Cuba* dedicates significant space to the Sierra Maestra fighting and the triumph of the Revolution as well as the most important events that followed during its first two years, *Soy Cuba* only showed the moment of victory. It appears at the end of the film to show the culmination of the whole process of revolution-in-making and it only lasts a few minutes. This sequence was supposed to show the magnitude of the triumph and the massive support, with 5,000 Rebel Army soldiers from the Oriente province as extras. Showing the massive support for the Revolution was crucial for the Cuban cause abroad as we

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<sup>137</sup> Alejo Carpentier in his Prólogo to *El reino de este mundo* criticizes the surrealists for creating formulas for the “marvelous” that were unreal and bureaucratic, “Lo maravilloso, obtenido con trucos de prestidigitación, reuniéndose objetos que para nada suelen encontrarse [...] Invocando por medio de fórmulas consabidas que hacen de ciertas pinturas un monótono baratillo de relojes amelcochados, de maniqués de costurera [...] Pobreza imaginativa [...] es aprenderse códigos de memoria. Y hoy existen códigos de lo fantástico, basados en el principio del burro devorado por un higo...” (6). “Lo maravilloso”, Carpentier continues, “comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de ‘estado límite’” (8).

will see in Chapter 6. In *Soy Cuba*, the last sequence, however, looks like extrapolated from a Soviet war movie with too many unnatural smiles, rather than a triumphant descend from the Sierra Maestra that the Cubans remembered. Even though no reviewer mentioned this particularly, the Cubans probably perceived it strange and maybe even inappropriate.

As suggested earlier, many Cubans felt *Soy Cuba* imposed a distance but this was not the case of *Alba de Cuba*. Even though a portion of Karmen's film is not a reportage,<sup>138</sup> but a re-enactment in which the most important events of the recent Cuban history are viewed through the eyes of a small Cuban boy Buenaventura,<sup>139</sup> the Cubans felt the director stayed faithful to the reality as they had experienced it. The film shows “momentos de heroísmo, de integración patriótica; pasajes representativos del alma criolla jocunda y riente, enamorada de la gracia y del ritmo, notas sentimentales de una delicadeza inenarrable...” and does not leave out anything important (Valdéz-Rodríguez 192). Everything is in agreement with the Cuban point of view. As far as Agramonte was concerned, “los artistas soviéticos supieron penetrar la realidad cubana, no sólo en sus formas más evidentes y militantes sino también en aquellos aspectos a través de los cuales se revela el carácter nacional” (Agramonte 128).

Agramonte's words are crucial for understanding the Cuban reaction to *Soy Cuba*. the Cubans were interested to see “la realidad cubana en sus formas más evidentes y militantes” as well as what revealed “el carácter nacional.” *Alba de Cuba* showed “real” events and “real”

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<sup>138</sup> The journalist Borovik felt very inspired after his first stay in Cuba and started literary writing. He composed a script for Roman Karmen's historical epic documentary *Alba de Cuba* and also wrote a novel *Povest' o zelenoj jascerice* [Novella about a Green Lizard]. A green lizard was a poetic description of how the shape of Cuba looked like on a map. The book is a collection of short romantic stories about episodes from the recent Cuban history. It achieved a huge print run of 215,000 copies (Rupprecht 112).

<sup>139</sup> A peasant child, a small boy from the Oriente province, Buenaventura, is central to Karmen's film as Valdéz-Rodríguez pointed out in his “Alba de Cuba” (191).

people. The audience appreciated it, judging from Mario Rodríguez Alemán's comment. The spectators applauded deliriously because the film "habla en cubano y toca a las puertas de nuestras almas" ("Alba de Cuba" 64). *Soy Cuba*, on the contrary, was perceived as insufficiently informed about the Cuban history and reality and as superficial, distant, and overschematic. It spoke in a language which the Cubans found dissonant. Furthermore, judging especially from Luis M. López's review, many Cubans understood the film at that sensitive and euphoric time as diminishing of the historical importance of the Revolution itself because it had placed too much weight on the aesthetic aspects instead of the agents of change.

From this point of view, *Soy Cuba* did not fulfill the objective to inspire admiration and support for the Cuban Revolution that its leaders and people that followed them expected. Unlike *Alba de Cuba* before, it did not, for example, show the world any of the social and racial transformations the Revolution accomplished in a very short time.<sup>140</sup>

Although the creators of both films admired the Cuban Revolution and worked to support its cause, what they prioritized about Cuba and the Cuban Revolution and how they showed them decided the film's reception. Karmen's "ideologically overloaded historical re-enactment ... [full of] pathos and manichaeism" (Rupprecht 83) was more appropriate for the occasion than Kalatozov's and Urusevsky's poetic rendition. Furthermore, the historical circumstances of the Cuban-Soviet relations mattered for the films' reception. While Karmen made his *Alba de Cuba* when the Soviet support and protection were indispensable and welcomed, *Soy Cuba* premiered after Khrushchev's "betrayal" and when the USSR's

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<sup>140</sup> Rodríguez Alemán praised that the film had showed these accomplishments.

involvement in Cuba started becoming a tangible threat to Cuban hegemony.

### **Transculturation of Ideologies, Symbols, Concepts, and Images**

Even though *Alba de Cuba* and *Soy Cuba* had a very different reception, their intentions were similar. Both films tried to reconcile the needs of different audiences, the governments that commissioned the films and their own artistic ambitions and vision of the revolution. They wanted to make a film about Cuba but at the same time preserve the values and ideology of Soviet internationalism, rooted in the Marxist philosophy, which they identified with. Soviet internationalism was not just an empty catchphrase to them. Their effort to integrate Cuba in the Soviet narrative of solidarity with the Third World aimed to establish Cuba as part of the revolutionary lineage that started with Lenin.

*Soy Cuba*, even though it belonged to the global Soviet internationalism effort, was not about imposing a certain dominant vision, which Cubans needed to fear. It was a process of give and take. It was a process of sharing and about discovering “the other”. The exchange translated into cinematic expressions of ideologies, symbols, concepts, and images, which in some cases “endangered” and in other cases enriched the Cuban cinematic identity. Among the most important ones belong the image of revolution, Lenin as a symbol, the concept of gaining political consciousness, the symbol of a white dove, and the image of people at work.

### *Two Revolutions*

For the Soviets, there was a deep ideological and poetic connection between the October and the Cuban Revolutions. Pineda Barnet pointed out that Soviets saw Cuba through the eyes of



their Revolution of 1917 (Ferraz 00:22:20), which many Soviet politicians and intellectuals perceived as the untainted ideological base of socialism after the Party had denounced Stalin's atrocities. They perceived the Cuban Revolution as a fresh wind coming to their "ossified" socialism. It was romantic and more human and spontaneous than their own reality (Ferraz 00:22:25). Kalatozov, Urusevsky and Yevtushenko created a film that reflected this romantic vision of Cuba and its fight against imperialism, which they felt was also their own, especially after they had witnessed the immediate aftermath of the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Vicente Ferraz emphasized this romantic, and somewhat utopic vision, by comparing Kalatozov to Don Quixote (00:25:48).<sup>141</sup>

The idea of revolution in the Soviet Union was closely linked to Lenin. The image of Lenin was a must in any Soviet film. In *Soy Cuba* it appears in the third story, in the clandestine printer sequence. When Batista's police burst in, they discover Lenin's *El Estado y la Revolución*. Luis M. López criticized the insertion as illogical in the historical context in Cuba. In his opinion, the filmmakers were "inaccurate". He considered the reconstruction of the history in *Soy Cuba*

falsa y sobre todo, pueril, cuando muestra en el registro "un libro comunista" [the above mentioned *El Estado y la Revolución*] que la porra batistiana esgrime como un arma de triunfo frente a los estudiantes. Kalatozov cumple así con su conciencia, pero violenta los hechos rudamente: en aquellos días ser pescado por comunista, era buscarse una salación. Pero estos jóvenes que se declaran

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<sup>141</sup> Kalatozov says in an interview from that time, "I will make a movie in Cuba and that will be my answer and that of all Soviet people against the naval blockade, this cruel aggression of American imperialism!" Also Yevtushenko believed that the film they were doing in Cuba was supposed to be "a great epic poem, to defend and show the Cuban Revolution to the whole world" (qtd. in Ferraz 00:25:57).

culpables, son tan irreales... (“No Soy Cuba” 24)

The filmmakers might have inserted the image to placate the Soviet censors, as López suggests, but the interpretation of the representation of Lenin here does not follow the usual pattern. Even though Lenin is connected with the socialist ideology per excellence, López assumed incorrectly that the image was just an empty propaganda. According to Alexei Yurchak, the Soviet people truly believed in Lenin and the integrity of his ideals. That is why his images did not disappear together with Stalin’s after Stalin’s death. Yurchak explains that after Stalin died, Lenin as a symbol actually gained more importance. His images were not just ordinary images but “semiotic ‘indexes’ which pointed to one of the key organizing concepts of Soviet ideology, its master signifier ‘Lenin’” (56). We can assume that Martí, the master signifier of the ideology behind the Cuban Revolution, functioned similarly as Lenin. While Lenin represented the purity of the revolutionary ideas in the Soviet Union, Martí symbolized the right for self-determination of nations, which culminated with the Cuban Revolution. Both Lenin and Martí were considered their nations’ ideological fathers.

The image of Lenin, which appears in the printer sequence, illustrates the core of the Soviet-Cuban relationship that we have also seen in Karmen’s films. When Batista’s policeman asks one of the students, “¿De quién es este libro?,” he responds, “Es nuestro...y quien no haya leído este libro es un ignorante.” (Kalatozov 01:30:12). This sentence “blesses” the Cuban Revolution and frames it in a context the Soviet people knew, the context of their own October Revolution. That is the reason why the Soviet filmmakers placed Lenin’s book and Martí’s bust in the same frame. In Cuba, this detail was passed over as the majority of the Cubans did not find it logical to put so much emphasis on Lenin, however international and

inclusive this symbol might have been.

### *The Process of Gaining Political Consciousness*

Very closely related to the revolutionary thinking in the socialist world was the concept of political mentor and with it associated concept of gaining political consciousness. The concept of the political mentor arrived to Cuban cinema with the earlier socialist realist films, and adapted to the Revolutionary circumstances. A mentor in the socialist realism films is a politically conscious individual (usually older and more experienced) who mentors another man or a woman who is good natured but politically undecided or immature individual (Haltorf 62). One of the best examples of this in Cuba would be Manuela in *Manuela* (1966), a film by Humberto Solás, which premiered two years after *Soy Cuba*. Manuela is the politically immature but passionate *rebelde* and her boyfriend, El Mexicano, is her mentor who teaches her the values and the discipline of a true Revolutionary (but not a true communist).

In *Soy Cuba*, such a novice is Mariano. Similarly to Manuela, Mariano is also the positive hero we identify with. He is morally pure, he is hard-working, and he is pacifist. He hesitates to join the struggle because he has a family to take care of and because his hands “han sido hechas para sembrar, no para matar” (Kalatozov 01:57:05). The Rebel Alberto, who we know as the student leader from the third story, becomes Mariano’s mentor. He tries to teach him about the ideals of the Revolution and educate him about class struggle. As we listen to him, we realize that Kalatozov’s version of the Cuban Revolution had the same goals we know from the USSR and the socialist bloc’s propaganda: the possibility for all children to go to school, have shoes and live in peace... Mariano runs Alberto out of the house; it is not *his* war.

Later, when he joins the Rebel Army after he finally realized that it *is* his war, they meet again. Alberto then teaches him how to get a gun while others laugh at the rookie.

Even though the hero-mentor relationships in several Cuban films follow a similar pattern as in socialist realist films, they are geared more toward the process of *toma de conciencia revolucionaria* – not communist – related to the concept of Che Guevara’s New Man.<sup>142</sup> Ana Serra explains this for literature but films follow the same logic as well. According to her, *toma de conciencia* is “a basic schema of a *bildungsroman*, or a novel of apprenticeship, where a character undergoes a series of trials until he or she achieves greater harmony within him or herself and society.” (140) In *Manuela* or *El jóven rebelde* the protagonists endure different tests and their behavior gets constantly “corrected” until they gain the Revolutionary consciousness (Manuela on her deathbed). Compared to the characters’ development in these two Cuban films, however, the mentoring relationship between Mariano and Alberto in *Soy Cuba* is only reduced to a couple of rhetorical sentences.

The relationship between a political mentor and a positive hero in *Soy Cuba* does not limit to Alberto-Mariano. It also appears in a much more subtle way in the relationship between Alberto and Enrique but not in a way we would expect. As a matter of fact, this is one of the most interesting contributions of the film to Cuban cinema. In the beginning, it seems that Alberto is Enrique’s political mentor in the old style because he, as a student leader (and probably also communist), is politically mature compared to Enrique who is sincere, passionate

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<sup>142</sup> Ana Serra refers to the discourse on New Man in great detail in her *The “New Man” in Cuba*. The concept was in alignment with socialist realist works where, according to Katerina Clark, “the transformation of the main character is highly ritualized, punctuated by a series of rites of passages toward enlightenment....The ‘master plot’ of these works [...] is the resolution of a conflict between ‘consciousness’ and ‘spontaneity,’ where consciousness is taken to mean actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined, and guided by politically aware bodies” (qtd. in Serra 14).

and spontaneous, but sensitive, politically immature and undisciplined.

Nonetheless, as the third story flows into the fourth, we realize that it was actually Enrique who was a mentor to Alberto through the *very Cuban* process of gaining the Revolutionary consciousness. Alberto's political and ideological stance initially resembled the "careful" approach of the Cuban communists to Castro's 26th of July Movement and to their armed fight against Batista as well as the international politics of the Soviet Union, which advocated for peaceful co-existence.

In the end, however, it is not Alberto's but Enrique's stance that proves the correct one. Enrique dies without firing a single shot just like Martí and just like him, he becomes a martyr. Alberto, after witnessing Enrique's death, inspired by his example, understands that the only "right" way to act is to join the armed struggle and consequently leaves for Sierra Maestra. The Soviet filmmakers might have very well meant this relationship as an allegory on the ossified Soviet internationalism connected with waiting and speeches, while Cuba actually took the matter to their hands and changed the history as the Russians had done before under Lenin's leadership.

In this sense, it is important to point out that even though the Cubans in general felt the film did not support adequately their cause, the mentoring relationship between Enrique and Alberto proves the opposite: the Soviet filmmakers supported the Cuban stance on armed struggle as the only possible way of liberating the oppressed. Deaver proposes that *Soy Cuba* symbolically represents the need for armed struggle by the death of a white dove in the third story (89) and Enrique's decision to fight back even though he was previously hesitant.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> In *Soy Cuba*, the symbol of a killed white dove actually means, according to William O. Deaver, Jr., "that peace

The death of a white dove means that Cuban people are past the hope for any peaceful resolution. Through this symbol, the film calls for action and dissuades the masses from just passively accepting their fate. This call is answered in the city when people start joining Enrique's funeral demonstration and in the countryside, in the fourth story, when Mariano finally joins the struggle. As Mariano walks, in trance, with a rifle shooting at the enemy, the voice-over explains that he is actually not killing people but his past in order to protect those he loves. The film thus delivers a clear message to the international audience through examples of Enrique, Mariano and even Alberto: people like them only killed because they were forced to it by the violence committed against them, their friends and families.

This stance of violent response to oppression contradicted the Soviet policy of peaceful co-existence and, as Rupprecht suggests, disagreed with Moscow's orders<sup>144</sup> to communists in the Third World countries to take a peaceful path to the class liberation (110). Che Guevara came under attack in the Soviet Union precisely because, contrary to the Soviet directive, he encouraged armed struggle as the only possible way to independence and lasting improvement of the lower class conditions. Unlike the USSR international politics that advocated for the more peaceful way for the masses coming to power, the film aligned with Che Guevara's and the July 26th Movement's idea that neo-colonialism and imperialism could only be defeated through armed struggle. The invitation to take arms in *Soy Cuba* might have been one of the issues the Soviet State encountered with the film and could have been behind its ejection from international film festivals. It is unlikely that the Soviet leadership would

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is dead; hence violence must beget violence" (89).

<sup>144</sup> Under Stalinism, communist parties in Latin America and the rest of the world underwent bureaucratization, hierarchization in their internal structure and had to obey Moscow (Rupprecht 29).

agree to spread a message that contradicted the image of the world peace keeper they were building for themselves. On the contrary, the Cubans showed *Soy Cuba* in the Third World weeks of Cuban cinema, for example, in Algiers.

### *Different Expectations Regarding the Filmic Language*

The peace and peaceful coexistence in socialist imagery was represented by Picasso's white dove. Unlike the socialist peace dove that is usually alive, *Soy Cuba's* dove is dead, killed by a policeman's bullet. Galt suggests that the dove in *Soy Cuba* is a metonym (223). It represent one of the student activists from the printer and many other innocent people killed by Batista's police. Before the bullet kills the student, he manages to throw his illegal pamphlets down to the crowd below him. As the pamphlets slowly descend, they visually overlap with a flock of white doves. Police shoots randomly to the crowd – and it is possible they hit an anonymous student – and a dove falls from the sky. Enrique picks it up and holds it in front of him as he walks in front of the crowd.

This sequence and the one that follows (Enrique walks with a stone to kill the police chief) are probably the two most criticized sequences of the entire film. Teresa Ruiz from *Revolución*, for example, liked the plastic beauty of the sequence, but in her opinion, the beauty could not diminish “la atmósfera irreal creada en torno a la representación de hechos históricos que tenía un contorno especial, un carácter y una definición que no son precisamente los que recuerdan la marcha tras la paloma, un símbolo que en la lucha callejera de aquellos días no tenía ubicación.” In her opinión, the sequence did not convey “authentic” experience.

Luis M. López's found the representation of the manifestation on the University's *Escalinata* inacceptable: “Francamente, aquí [en Cuba] la paloma no movilizó a nadie, sino la

rebeldía, el énfasis por la justicia, el odio a la tiranía. Opuesto a la realidad, el símbolo viene amujerado.” (“No Soy Cuba” 225). He overlooked that the dead dove symbolized precisely the rebellion and the need for justice. The sequence was never about recreating the reality. It was poetic symbolism. Galt explains that it visually links the death of the white dove to the death of Enrique’s friend. The activist falling from the balcony, his pamphlets slowly descending, the flock of doves, the random shooting of the police, and a dead white dove connect to “a metonym of police violence that just killed a comrade” (222).

López encountered such a poetic representation of the student demonstration, which people knew from the newsreels, false. For him, Galt explains, “materiality of the struggle [was] superior to any poetic or rhetoric trope, in which aesthetics can never hope to adequate reality” (123). He could not or did not want to transcend above the dichotomies: reality versus symbolic representation, truth versus art and masculinity versus effeminacy. The overly “ornamented” cinematography was for him, as Galt further elaborates, “far from the ideal of forthright *masculine* form” [italics added] (223). The conflict between the masculine (the realism) and the feminine (the art) thus created for him two competing historical discourses.

Both López’s and Ruiz’s complaints once again demonstrate that the Cubans looked for a language that was more literal, more materialistic as well as realistic, and that symbolic, poetic renditions seemed foreign, exaggerated, fabricated, and even inappropriate to them. Those critics, who managed to distance themselves from this expectation, however, like Alejo Beltrán, could perceived the great emotion in the end this story. Beltrán, for instance, reconoced as a romantic Wagnerian moment when “el estudiante que marcha a la cabeza contra los chorros del agua resiste el impacto de cinco balas y sigue en pie.”



Notwithstanding, also this sequence generated a backlash. The same image Beltrán praised, evoked a completely different feeling in Luis M. López who read the sequence as overly schematic and dehumanized. He sensed a moral intention behind Enrique walking after being hit by several bullets (and he probably was not mistaken). According to him, there was a tradition in the recent Soviet cinema in which the good characters kept standing in spite of bullets, sustained by the force of their ideas. On the contrary to them, the bad characters died quickly. He perceived this kind of schematic reconstruction of the pre-revolutionary events as “un falso drama de conciencia”.<sup>145</sup> According to him “la realidad clandestina y los primeros duros días de la lucha estudiantil y universitaria no admitían los remilgos planteados por Kalatozov acerca de la eficacia de la acción directa” (25). He again found the film “inaccurate” and “inauthentic”.

### *The Image of Sugarcane Cutting*

It is evident that *Soy Cuba* mostly “sinned” by not portraying accurately and authentically events that related to the anti-Batista struggle and the triumph of the Revolution. It is implied in the fact that there were other images that were very foreign to Cuban cinema, yet contrary to the previously mentioned ones, critics did not comment on them. One of those images was the relationship of a man and the crop in the second story. Pedro walking through the stems of sugarcane smiling and fondly touching the stems, with the camera taking him from below, so that we can see him and the cane on the background of almost cloudless sky abundantly lit; he and

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<sup>145</sup> López cites *El último disparo* (1956) by Chuchrai, photographed by Urusevsky, where the traitor dies by one shot. The film was known as *El 41* in Cuba. He contrasts this sequence with *Viento* by Alov and Naumov (1958), where “una descarga cerrada no pudo matar al joven comunista” (“No Soy Cuba 25”).

his children cutting cane and smiling and laughing happily... pertained to the usual imagery of socialist realism film.<sup>146</sup> The smile and the photography represent a victory of the man over the nature and were typical in the socialist bloc films about workers in the 1950s.<sup>147</sup> Kalatozov might have picked up the image of smiling sugarcane cutters from Karmen's *Alba de Cuba*, which he knew.

In Cuba, however, sugarcane cutting did not have the same connotation as in the USSR. Even though the Cuban leaders promoted it as a heroic effort in the 1960s, Cuban fiction films never depicted it the way *Soy Cuba* did. In Cuba, where the sugarcane cutting was mostly connected with slavery, hard labor and hard volunteer work, sugarcane cutters do not smile. Cuban critics probably did not find this difference so striking because they did not mention it. In this story, they only pointed out the bad direction of actors (Pineda Barnet), the exaggerated whiteness of cane (Alejo Beltrán) and Pedro's mental health when he "sale al campo por las noches y habla con las maticas de caña..." ("No Soy Cuba" 24).

### **The Institutional Evaluation and Consequences for the Soviet-Cuban Collaboration**

When the Soviet Union and Cuba decided about the co-production in 1961, neither country realized how difficult it would be to consolidate the *mirada nacional* cubana with the policy of cultural internationalism of the Soviet Union. The image of the "new" Cuba as the Cuban

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<sup>146</sup> Those films were typical of the late 1940s and 1950s (in the Soviet Union also in the 1920s and 1930s). They featured factory workers or people harvesting large wheat fields or working in agricultural cooperatives.

<sup>147</sup> Even films that deviated from the socialist realism canon such as *Letter Never Sent* do not escape this tendency. In this film, the final vision of the dying geologist is progress. It is coming to Siberia as a consequence of the men's finally defeating the nature. Other Soviet films that show work as joy are shown in a documentary *East Side Story* (Dana Ranga, 1997).

leadership wanted to portray it emphasized independence, sovereignty, resourcefulness, heroism, and fast progress in all areas of everyday life. It was meant to inspire admiration and it was strongly nationalist. The “new” Soviet Union, on the other hand, attempted to frame the “new” Cuba in the context of its own policy of internationalism, which implied dependency, paternalism and some unavoidable exoticism.

As soon as they saw the film, the leaders of both state film institutes realized that *Soy Cuba* did not serve their purposes. Alfredo Guevara and the ICAIC considered the co-production a failure to never be repeated and, apparently, the Soviets agreed. Guevara’s (and the ICAIC’s) position is evident from a letter he sent to José Felipe Carneado from Departamento de Educación, Cultura y Ciencia in the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in November 1974.<sup>148</sup> The letter might have been his reaction to Carneado’s proposal to do another co-production with the USSR. Even though Guevara did not mention *Soy Cuba* specifically, he referred to it along with the other socialist co-productions when he implied that when a co-production does not sow “comprensión, simpatía y [...] admiración,” it cannot be considered “una coproducción cultural y políticamente válidas” (Guevara, *Tiempo de Fundación* 271).

This assessment did not stop the ICAIC from engaging in other co-productions with the Soviet Union, however, after *Soy Cuba*, the terms and conditions changed. First and foremost, none of the co-productions had the Cuban Revolution again as the main theme. Secondly, none of the two co-productions came with the size of material and professional aid as *Soy Cuba* (the later Soviet contributions did not differ from what was standard for co-productions). Lastly, Cuba gained more say in the choice of the theme and the crew. In the 1970s and 1980s, the

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<sup>148</sup> The letter was written on November 13, 1974. Guevara included it in his epistolary *Tiempo de fundación* (270).

ICAIC made two more co-productions with the USSR and after 1990, two co-productions with Russia.

The 1970s co-production was a film adaptation of Thomas M. Reid's eponymous novel *El jinete sin cabeza* (Vladimir Vajnstok, 1972), situated in Texas sometime after the Mexican-American war. This joined production of the ICAIC and Lenfilm cast many famous Cuban actors to play Texans of Mexican descent (not always very convincingly). This first Soviet western substituted the artistic cinema of *Soy Cuba* with suspense and romance and the Soviet youth loved it, as Rupprecht points out (117). It became a box office success in the USSR.<sup>149</sup> In Cuba, people also liked it because it was different from the Cuban production at that time, but they did not consider it a film of a great artistic value.<sup>150</sup>

In the 1980s, Cuba and the USSR decided to make together *Capablanca* (Manuel Herrera, 1987) as a joint project of the ICAIC and the Gorky Studios. The film ventured to Cuban history – but earlier than *Soy Cuba* – under the direction of a Cuban film director who co-wrote the script together with the Soviet and Cuban screenwriters. During the production, Herrera faced similar problems with the Soviet crew, especially with the director of photography, as Pineda Barnet with Yevtushenko. The Soviets were adamant to impose their vision full of historical inaccuracies and exoticism. Fortunately, Herrera had worked as a second assistant to the director in *Para quién baila La Habana* and that helped him to navigate the whole adventure much more smoothly.<sup>151</sup> Still, he does not remember his experience very fondly.

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<sup>149</sup> More in Sergei Kudryavtsev's *Otetshestvennye filmy v sovyetskoy kinoprote* and "Vsadnik bez golovy: tetskoye prerii pod Belogorskom" in RIA Novosti.

<sup>150</sup> Conversation with Raul Avila, Cuban TV actor, about the film.

<sup>151</sup> Manuel Herrera. Personal interview. September 2014.

### *Coming Full Circle*

In the 1990s, both countries participated in the mega co-production *El siglo de las luces* (Humberto Solás 1993), together with France, Spain and Ukraine. The Russian-Cuban exchange in this film, however, is not as interesting as in its successor *Lisanka* (2009) by Daniel Díaz Torres. *Lisanka* was completely filmed in Cuba, with mostly Cuban crew and actors and with just a few Soviet actors. What is interesting about *Lisanka* is that it was the first Cuban film about the Soviet-Cuban relationship during the period immediately preceding *Soy Cuba* – the Cuban Missile Crisis. Furthermore, it was the first film that spelled out openly how the Cubans perceived the Soviets (this opinion comes across implicitly in *Soy Cuba*'s reviews). The younger generation received the film well but curiously, some critics who had experienced the Soviets in the 1960s, criticized it. As in the case of *Soy Cuba*, they were under the impression the film did not portray the reality accurately. One of the things that bothered them, for example, was that the film showed the Soviets too sympathetically.<sup>152</sup> The Soviets were perceived as a threat to the Cuban post-colonial identity, which comes across from the initial sequence that establishes visually that Spain, the United States and the Soviet Union were one and the same in their relationship to Cuba: they all tried to possess it and impose their culture.

*Lisanka* can be understood as a retribution and a tribute to *Soy Cuba* whether the creators meant it that way or not. On the one hand, *Lisanka* “paid back” the Soviet filmmakers for taking liberties and not showing “naturalistically” the real Cubans of those times. It does it by showing how the Cubans saw the Soviets and it does it in a typically Cuban way – with *choteo*, mockery. On the other hand, the tribute comes from several intertextual references to *Soy Cuba* throughout

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<sup>152</sup> For example, “LISANKA, una película cubana que vale la pena ver” by Irina Echarry, “La tractorista y el soldado ruso” by Luis Cino, and “Una comedia en trance épico” by Joel Ríos.

the film. First, both films start with an “aerial” traveling shot of Cuba (in *Lisanka* animated). Second, both films share an “objective” observer female voiceover narration (in *Lisanka*, the voice belongs to a virgin and it is all but serious). The voiceover narration was resented by Cuban critics in both films. Third, one of the Soviet protagonists recites an ode on the Cuban Revolution (*Soy Cuba* was a cinematic poem to glorify the Cuban Revolution). Lastly, to top it off, the same character also mentions – of all the Soviet poets he could have chosen – the poet and the *Soy Cuba*’s co-screenwriter Yevtushenko.

## **Conclusion**

The two co-producing countries envisioned *Soy Cuba* as a political project that was supposed to support the Cuban Revolution and disseminate the image of the “new” Cuba abroad as well as promote the generosity and artistry of the great benefactor of the Third World, the “new” Soviet Union. Through the co-production, the USSR provided countless material resources that facilitated the production of several of the most important Cuban films but also the possibility to spread cinema and the Cuban Revolution’s ideology all over the island with the mobile cinema. In the professional sense, *Soy Cuba* was instrumental in developing skills, sensitivities and strategies of the ICAIC’s personnel thanks to the carefully selected crew of Soviet filmmakers and technicians that worked side by side with the Cubans for almost a year. The director of photography Sergei Urushevsky changed the look of Cuban cinema through his innovative and resourceful camera work. It inspired many who later became distinguished Cuban photographers and directors themselves. *Soy Cuba*’s training consisted in transferring professional and technical knowledge but the exchange with the Soviets also led to modifying personal and socialist values of the Cuban participants. In summary, although the Cubans

complained about the size of production and the length of the filming, the co-production was a success in this aspect.

The Soviet artists entrusted with the co-production complied with the main ideological concepts of Soviet cultural internationalism, which they identified with, but at the same time, they were able to capture many *Cuban* nuances in the film. They tried to transmit the Cuban reality accurately but at the same time, they used the opportunity afforded to them by the distance from their homeland to take artistic liberties. They resorted to an interpretation of the Cuban Revolution through their own experience and revolutionary tradition.

The Cubans admired Urusevsky's photography but resented what they perceived as a tourist take on their country. They complained about folklorization, exoticism and historical "distortions." Even though the Cubans felt that the Soviet filmmakers perpetuated the vision of Cuba as an underdeveloped and exotic Third World country, the filmmakers did not impose their European vision or blindly transfer Soviet cultural symbols to their film. They found a way to consolidate both the Cuban national gaze and the vision connected with Soviet internationalism. They demonstrated a deep insight to what led to the Cuban Revolution and understanding of the historical connections between Cuba and the USSR. They showed it especially by juxtaposing the symbology of Lenin and Martí, by illustrating the process of making a revolution as well as the process of gaining revolutionary consciousness in Cuba. In addition, they adopted the Cuban stance on the necessity of armed struggle even though it was contradictory to the Soviet policy.

In spite of the filmmakers' effort to find a true Cuban-Soviet perspective, neither the Cubans nor the Soviets were satisfied with the final result of the film. The reason was that it did not resonate with the images they wanted to project of themselves and their co-production

partners in the historical circumstances of post-Stalinism and post-colonialism. *Soy Cuba* was far from the “consecrated” vision *Alba de Cuba* proposed. As a consequence of the co-production, the ICAIC changed its position toward future co-productions with the Soviet Union. Neither of the two consequent Soviet-Cuban co-productions resembled *Soy Cuba* in the theme and material and professional cooperation. The first one, *El jinete sin cabeza*, had a Soviet director and a Texan-Mexican theme (not Cuban). The other had a Cuban theme (more remote history than *Soy Cuba*) but had a Cuban director. It dealt with the Cuban-Soviet relations, rather than offering again a foreign take Cuba. In spite of all these precautions, however, even thirty years after *Soy Cuba* it was still difficult to consolidate the Cuban and the Soviet gaze as shows the production of *Capablanca* in the memories of its director Manuel Herrera.

The Soviet/Russian-Cuban co-production journey came full circle with *Lisanka*. This time the point of view reversed. The film looks back at the Soviet-Cuban relationships at the times of *Soy Cuba*’s making and does not take them at all seriously. Indispensably, it brings *Soy Cuba* in intertextually, to give a hint that the reasons for *Soy Cuba*’s unpopularity and shelving were indeed political.



## **PART 2**

CZECHOSLOVAK – CUBAN CINEMATIC COLLABORATION

## CHAPTER 3

### CUBA AND CZECHOSLOVAK CINEMATIC SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the policy of internationalism was key in the Soviet cooperation with Cuba. It was strongly reflected in the Soviet-Cuban cinematic collaboration as well as Soviet films about Cuba. The application of Soviet internationalism in the post-colonial Cuba had its challenges. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the Cubans perceived the Soviet Union as “a neocolonialist” and showed resistance to anything that suggested cultural domination. The mega-co-production *Soy Cuba* met with a strong, negative reaction and fell prey to this sentiment, unlike Roman Karmen’s documentaries that were highly praised because they resonated with the Cuban idea of self-representation.

Czechoslovak socialist internationalism was different from the Soviet Union due to Czechoslovakia’s different historical and geographical circumstances. Cuba had much more in common with Czechoslovakia than the USSR. Czechoslovakia was a small country with limited resources like Cuba. It shared with Cuba a similar history of fight for preserving national identity and resistance against a hegemonic power because it had a long history of being under an imperial rule. The Soviet Union was the last of the many “conquerors” of the Bohemian lands.<sup>153</sup>

In addition, Czechoslovakia was one of the most Western countries in the bloc and therefore, more modern, even though Czechoslovak infrastructure was not as modern as Cuban. Still, Czechoslovak assistance was more “palatable” for the Cubans and less threatening than the

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<sup>153</sup> More on the application of post-colonial studies methodology on Eastern European studies in *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, Chapter 3.

interventions from the Soviets<sup>154</sup> whom the Cubans blamed for several unpopular measures taken by Cuban government—such as the erosion of the market—contributed to the orthodox Soviet economic model<sup>155</sup> (Yevtusenko in Carson).

We have to take into consideration, however, that the Czechoslovak foreign policy was not independent. In general terms, it obeyed “recommendations” from Moscow. This attitude did not change even after the Soviet Union somewhat loosened the grip on the countries in the socialist bloc after 1956 (Bortlová 14). Consequently, Czechoslovak socialist internationalism served the Soviet internationalism. Czechoslovakia had “the most extensive diplomatic, economic and cultural relations” with Latin America but it put them all in service of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union. Its conception of socialist internationalism as well as its commercial ties were built on the following premise (26),

This advantageous position binds us to approach the solidification and broadening of mutual relationships [with Latin America] with the awareness that it is important to help the other countries of [the socialist bloc] in this area, especially the USSR (...). Our economic and commercial relations with this region are the basis for the relations between the socialist bloc countries and Latin America. In addition to the economic aspect, they are significant politically if we take into consideration that it is a region that depends on (...) the USA...”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Hana Bortlová offers a brief survey of the Czechoslovak-Cuban-Soviet relationship in the first years of the Cuban Revolution in her *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959 – 1962*.

<sup>155</sup> The term “erosión del Mercado” and “modelo ortodoxo soviético” are used and further explained in *Historia y evaluación de medio siglo de políticas económico-sociales en Cuba socialista, 1959-2008* by Carmelo Mesa-Lago (in Naranjo Orovio 513).

<sup>156</sup> NA. 1261/044 KSČ-ÚV-AN II. Latinská America, kartón 1, příloha III. “Koncepce vztahů mezi ČSR a Latinskou Amerikou. Usnesení politbyra ze dne 25.6.1959,” p. 6. The translation is mine.

Although the Czechoslovak foreign policy was dependent on the Soviet Union, it does not mean that the Soviets had full control over any international decision every institution in the country ever took. There were general guidelines, which the ministries and the Czechoslovak Communist Party followed, however, on the lower institutional and governmental levels there was always some leeway on how these general guidelines and rules would be applied. Nonetheless, we can observe some “division of labor” in terms of who the ICAIC received the help from. For example, Czechoslovak technicians predominated in the 1960s. They were substituted by the Hungarians in the 1970s and the Bulgarians in the 1980s.<sup>157</sup>

This chapter examines the Czechoslovak-Cuban cinematic collaboration, integrated in the cultural socialist internationalism. It surveys the different forms of the Czechoslovak aid to Cuba. In addition, it demonstrates that along with *Karmen's*, the first Czechoslovak documentaries contributed to building a strong international reputation of the Cuban Revolution. Furthermore, it gives an overview of different Czechoslovak-Cuban cinematic project proposals. It focuses on one of these incomplete projects, a co-production proposal “*Paloma negra*”, which was the only project between the socialist bloc and Cuba that had interracial relations as the main topic. Moreover, “*Paloma negra*” was the only project with a Slovak technical expert as one of the fictional protagonists. He represented the many Czechoslovak experts sent to Cuba to help.

### **Czechoslovak Socialist Internationalism**

Initially, Czechoslovakia had both commercial and ideological objectives in mind for the

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<sup>157</sup> It appears that the Czechoslovaks were very involved with the ICAIC together with the Soviets who worked in the area of exhibition and the East Germans who provided the film stock ORWO. The Czechoslovak teachers were substituted by the Hungarians in the 1970s and the Bulgarians in the 1980s. The East Germans seemed to be very involved with theatre. However, there has not been any consistent research done yet on this topic.

collaboration with Cuba. The tension between the two aspects prevailed throughout the 1960s. In the cultural sphere, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflected on this tension when setting the tasks for the cultural, scientific and academic cooperation. According to the Ministry, the task was to promote Czechoslovakia as “a developed State, ready to collaborate, in spite of limited resources, not only based on principles of reciprocity but also offer help in less developed disciplines” (35).<sup>158</sup> The report writer expected Czechoslovak cultural institutions to align themselves with cultural internationalism and act according to cultural diplomacy promoted by the Czechoslovak foreign policy.

Due to this approach, Czechoslovak commercial aims were constantly hindered by ideological objectives and vice versa. That was also true for the area of film. On the one hand, the Czechoslovak-Cuban cooperation was a way to bring in foreign currency for the export of film copies and for the sale of monopolies for film screenings of Czechoslovak films in Cuba and other Third World countries. On the other hand, the foreign policy goal to “fight against the dominant position of capitalist production in Africa, Latin America and Asia”<sup>159</sup> often led to donating films and significantly lowering the prices of film copies to secure the bond Czechoslovakia had with those Third World countries. The penetration of these “markets” always had this dual purpose. ČSF had to constantly strive for balance between helping disadvantaged cinemas as much as they could while maintaining its own film production and distribution sustainable.

The financial accountability caused that the cultural internationalism did not always

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<sup>158</sup> More in Opatrný's “Las primeras concepciones de la política exterior checoslovaca en América Latina” (35). With Cuba, the “help” strongly outweighed the „reciprocity”.

<sup>159</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF 1961. Zápisy z porad. R12/AI/6P/3K. 7. porada, n.d., n.a., p. 9.

translate into action. The author of a report about cultural expansion complained, for example, about inappropriate selection of delegations for festivals, film weeks and exhibitions. He resented that Czechoslovak institutions did not choose appropriate cultural representatives and for the main representational tasks they sent instead administrative employees who “were not equal partners for film critic audience” as film directors, for example. He demanded of them to “leave behind the current form of relationships that [was] driven mostly commercially and move towards real cultural diplomacy.” He recommended to “send people who have something to say, who have ideas, people that are worth interviewing and photographing, who can lead press conferences, participate in discussions.” It was necessary to seek results in the area of cultural-political penetration first, as he stated, and the focus on commercial results should only be secondary.<sup>160</sup> This was, however, easier said than done because cultural diplomacy was expensive.

### **Czechoslovak Cinematic Socialist Internationalism**

The Czechoslovak State Film Institute (ČSF) mirrored the grandiose plans of the Czechoslovak foreign policy towards Cuba. It viewed Cuba as a commercial, cultural and political gateway to the rest of Latin America,<sup>161</sup> which would also soon become socialist. The ČSF’s attitude revealed – beyond its commercial interests – a great feeling of solidarity with a “brother” country on its way to socialism.<sup>162</sup> The ČSF’s ambitious initial plans, however, soon needed to be

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<sup>160</sup> NFA, ÚŘ ČSF. Foreign Affairs 1962 – 63. R12/BI/3P/1K. Kulturní expanze (včetně vývozu).

<sup>161</sup> More information, for example, in Hana Bortlová *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959 – 1962*.

<sup>162</sup> NFA, ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R9/BII/5P/3K, p. 16.

adjusted because they did not reflect either the objectives or the way how the ICAIC operated. Last but not least, they also did not correspond to the Czechoslovak economic reality.<sup>163</sup>

The Cuban and Czechoslovak film industries were both very enthusiastic about working together. The foundation for the Cuban-Czechoslovak cooperation was the visit of five directors, the heads of different Czechoslovak Film enterprises, in October 1961. This “delegation of directors” was led by Josef Veselý, the director of Barrandov Film Studios<sup>164</sup> who returned to Cuba a few more times after this first visit. At least one of those visit was related to the co-production *Para quién baila La Habana* as we will see in Chapter 4. Veselý was accompanied by Josef Eisler, the director of Film Laboratories of Barrandov (FL); Ing. Robert Hardonyi, a technician from *Filmová tvorba a distribúcia Bratislava* (FTDB) [Film Creation and Distribution Bratislava]<sup>165</sup> and engineer Stanislav “Stano” Kvasnička,<sup>166</sup> the Filmexport’s delegate in Havana. The last but not least was Vilém Taraba, the director of the Film Industry Enterprise, the branch of ČSF that took care of maintenance, repairs and product development in the area of equipment and machinery.<sup>167</sup> They all had ample experience and shared it with the ICAIC personnel as

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<sup>163</sup> For example, the question of disponible limit of foreign currency hindered the possibility to admit more trainees in Czechoslovakia in spite of the ICAIC’s increasing demand.

<sup>164</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R18/AI/3P/1K. Zpráva J. Veselého, 30. 10. 1961. Příloha 1.

<sup>165</sup> The Slovak technician Hardonyi was one of the technicians that traveled to Cuba several times. He was quite versatile. In addition to consulting, he also taught some courses at the ICAIC film school. He also visited Cuba with the first post-1968 high-level cultural delegation and spent time consulting in other countries of Latin America as well. He prepared many instructional and technical documents that the ICAIC used for many years after his departure. Carlos Bequet recalled, for example, that anytime he opened a drawer he found Hardonyi’s documents from 1961. Carlos Bequet. Personal interview. June 2016.

<sup>166</sup> The Cubans had nicknames for several of the Czechoslovaks that stayed in Cuba for a longer period of time and established more personal relationships the ICAIC’s staff. In the text, these nicknames will be italicized and placed between commas in between the first and last name.

<sup>167</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R18/AI/3P/1K. Zpráva J. Veselého, 30. 10. 1961. Příloha 1.

much as they could during their visit.

The delegation stayed in Havana for a month and conducted an in depth assessment of all ICAIC departments. It also provided consulting support to the ICAIC employees at all levels, including the ICAIC leadership. As a result of their assessment, the Czechoslovak directors prepared a document, which will be referred to from now on as “the final protocol”. This document became the base of the Czechoslovak-Cuban cooperation for almost the entire decade.<sup>168</sup> The final protocol outlined immediate measures, medium-term measures (based on a 4-year plan 1962 – 65) and long-term measures (related to the construction of a film town).<sup>169</sup> The delegation also prepared a proposal for the organization and development of film production, film distribution, film export as well as a training system.

Based on the protocol, Czechoslovakia offered help in the area of film production management, the professional training for the ICAIC’s cadres and the fundamentals of planning.<sup>170</sup> The importance this delegation had for the ČSF is evident from the fact that the ČSF sent to Cuba three main directors of the ČSF enterprises for an entire month when the typical extent of visits at this level was up to ten to twelve days including the trip. It is also likely that the ČSF paid their salaries during the trip, which was not the case of the delegations of technicians that came to Cuba later with the objective to fulfill the final protocol. In their case, the ICAIC covered all salaries and expenses.

During the visit of the delegation of directors in 1961, the ICAIC asked for

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<sup>168</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R18/AI/3P/1K. Zpráva J. Veselého, 30. 10. 1961. Příloha 1.

<sup>169</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R18/AI/3P/1K. Zpráva J. Veselého, 30. 10. 1961. Příloha 1.

<sup>170</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. 1962. R19/AI/5P/3K.



Czechoslovakia to become the principal advisor of its young film industry.<sup>171</sup> The Czechoslovak State Film leaders took this petition very seriously and so did the Cubans (according to the report). Veselý reported that the ICAIC approached responsibly all Czechoslovak suggestions, even in questions such as nationalization of film theatres and construction of the film town. In this regard, Alfredo Guevara immediately consulted the delegation's recommendations with the president Osvaldo Dorticós, the Prime Minister Fidel Castro and the Minister of National Defense Raúl Castro. The ICAIC accepted all recommendations. The importance of this delegation is also evident from the fact that Fidel Castro personally visited the ICAIC to meet with the delegation.<sup>172</sup>

Based on the final protocol, the ČSF sent many experts and professors to Cuba to teach and provide consulting in different ICAIC departments. In addition, at least two dozen technicians traveled to Czechoslovakia to study in various Czechoslovak State film enterprises. Furthermore, a group of laboratory cadres studied with Czechoslovak professors at the ICAIC and later finished their studies with a practical training in the Czechoslovak Film Laboratories. Moreover, the ICAIC also sent a group of twelve Cubans to study in the Film Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) and the Secondary Technical School for Film and Television in Čimelice. Last but not least, the ČSF sent a crew to film the first Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production *Para quién baila La Habana*.

Some of these initiatives were more successful than others, but overall the Czechoslovak State Film was instrumental in building the technical base for the Cuban film industry. No other

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<sup>171</sup> NFA. Kolegium. Porady 5 – 16 1961. R13/AII/2P/6K. Porada z 3.11.1961, p. 2.

<sup>172</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Porady 1961. R18/AI/3P/1K. Zpráva J. Veselého, 30. 10. 1961, p. 2.

country has provided such a long-lasting and consistent assistance in the area of the professional skills development as Czechoslovakia. The ČSF's help to Cuba, however, did not end there. It also offered support in the form of cinematic collaboration, i.e. with films made in Cuba about Cuba. Their goal was to support the Cuban Revolution at home and internationally.

### **Documenting the Cuban Revolution**

Bruno Šefranka was the first Czechoslovak filmmaker to “discover” Cuba for the Czechoslovak audience. The Czechoslovak Foreign Trade enterprise Technoexport commissioned the film *Československo – země přátel* ([Czechoslovakia – Land of Friends], 1979), a document about the eponymous first Czechoslovak exhibition in Cuba.<sup>173</sup> He traveled to Cuba for this purpose together with the photographer Jan Špáta in 1961. The exhibition took place in Havana in 1961 with the goal of introducing the Czechoslovakian socialist society to the new Cuban “friends”. Among other things, the exhibition presented one of the biggest accomplishment of the Czechoslovak Film Industry – the multiscreen Polyekran.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The exposition took place between June 9 and July 4, 1961 under the name “Československo, země přátel” [Czechoslovakia, the country of friends]. NFA. ÚS ČSF. Porady kolegiální 1. – 8. 1962. R12/AI/5P/4K. 4. porada ÚS ČSF z 2.2. 1962). Věc: Hodnocení zahraničních styků československého filmu 1961.

<sup>174</sup> Polyekran “was conceived by Josef Svoboda in collaboration with Emil Radok and, like Laterna Magika, was presented at the EXPO 58 in Brussels. It was a system of 8 projection screens, carefully positioned within a black space, onto which films and photographs were projected with a musical score, forming an audio-visual composition without live performers”. <http://www.svoboda-scenograf.cz/en/polyekran-polyvision/>. During the Havana exhibition, ČSF showed Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos's film *Mláďi* (1960). According to the report “Assessment of Foreign relations ČSF for 1961”, there were 183 shows, seen by 34,000 viewers. The film was “a successful propagation of the idea of socialism and its perspectives and unity of nations in their struggle for peace”. The interest was huge, according to the report. Also Dorticós, Castro and almost all members of the Revolutionary government, diplomats and other important political and cultural personalities came to see the film. Several shows were offered for factory and administrative workers and for the militia and the army. NFA. Porady kolegiální ÚŘ 1-8 1962. R12/AI/5P/4K. 4. porada 2.2.1962, p. 16.

Šefranka and Špáta captured the exhibition on film. The documentary *Czechoslovakia – Land of Friends* records the preparation of the exhibition as well as the exhibition itself. It documented the many challenges the organizers had during the exhibition’s preparation,<sup>175</sup> related to the after-math of the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April 1961 (Strusková 5). The film had a strong pro-Revolutionary message, same as all the other films the two filmmakers made in Cuba.

The ČSF took the opportunity that Technoexport provided by financing the trip and stay of the two filmmakers and assigned Šefranka and Špáta to create a few newsreels about Cuban people in addition to the film for the Office of Commerce.<sup>176</sup> While in Cuba, they traveled the island, met with people and filmed what they saw.<sup>177</sup> They were supported by both the ICAIC and the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), and were accompanied by Félix Puentes, a Cuban State Security member, with a special government issued letter, which “opened doors”.<sup>178</sup> Even though the filmmakers did not communicate well in Spanish, the trip was “one of their best memories” because of how friendly and open-hearted were all the people they met. They also admired the Revolutionary fervor of the young Cubans (qtd. in Strusková 5).

It was very important for the filmmakers when they arrived to Cuba that they had the opportunity to see Karmen’s *Alba de Cuba*, showed at that time. They also saw Joris Ivens’s

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<sup>175</sup> More about the film in the Czechoslovak Film Database. <http://www.csfd.cz/film/357456-ceskoslovensko-zeme-pratel/komentare/>.

<sup>176</sup> More about the documentary in Strusková’s interview with Šefranka in *Kino*.

<sup>177</sup> Originally, three filmmakers were supposed to travel but in the end, only two did. They were supposed to stay for 60 days but the number 60 in the document was corrected by hand to 30. More information in NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Zápisy z porad 1960. R12/AII/3P/9K. 19. porada. 11.11.1960 s finanční přílohou. Šefranka was later hired to film *Modré cesty* (1963), a documentary for the 30th anniversary of the Czech Airlines. One of its parts was filmed on the route Prague. <http://www.fdb.cz/lidi/55215-bruno-sefranka.html>.

<sup>178</sup> Félix Puente. Personal interview. June 2016.

documentary about Cuba, as Šefranka recalled in his interview. He considered it the best beginning because it had help him and Špáta to realize what they were *not* going to film. According to him, Karmen’s film had exhaustively covered the history of the Cuban Revolution up to the present, therefore, he and Špáta did not have any other option but to “opt for the most contemporary Cuba – Cuba shortly after the invasion” (qtd. in Strusková 5). The progressive filmmakers shared one language – the language of socialism and joint fight against imperialism.

As a result of their encounter with Cuba and the Cubans, Šefranka and Špáta created five poetic but at the same time militant documentaries with exquisite photography, most of them in color. *Tudy šla revoluce* ([the Revolution Walked through Here], 1961), *Dvě invaze na pláži Girón* ([Two Bay of Pigs Invasions], 1961) and *Havana* (1962), *Santiago de Cuba* (n.d)<sup>179</sup> and *Léto na Varaderu* ([Summer in Varadero], 1962). The first three are political documentaries and at the same time, a traveller’s account of 1961 Cuba.

The films justified the Cuban Revolution by the commentary as well as the juxtaposition of the images. The commentary enumerates a number of crimes and abuses by the United States against the Cuban people. In addition, *Two Bay of Pigs Invasions* praises the young Cuban people who faced the literacy campaign with the same courage and dedication as they had confronted the enemy during the Bay of Pigs Invasion. The filmmakers also made sure to highlight how Czechoslovakia helped build the “new” Cuba. Unlike Roman Karmen’s documentaries, however, these connections were more a matter of national pride than a deliberate insertion of Cuba into the socialist narrative. Regardless, this insertion and the films’ language transmitted the feeling of solidarity of one socialist country with another.

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<sup>179</sup> *Santiago de Cuba* is not available for viewing in the National Film Archive and *Léto na Varaderu* is a documentary about a red corral.

These productions were not the kind of films that would be screened once and forgotten. On the contrary, they played an important role, especially at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. For example, in November 1962, a month after the Missile Crisis, the 5<sup>th</sup> International Week of Short Documentary Film in Leipzig screened Šafranka's *Havana*. Furthermore, the documentaries were shown in the Soviet and Syrian televisions to draw support for Cuba. Moreover, they "belonged to the most favorites" in the socialist bloc, some capitalist countries like Norway and Switzerland, and in developing countries like Syria, the Central African Republic, Morocco, and most of Latin America"<sup>180</sup>.

A few years later, Jan Špáta accompanied another documentary filmmaker, Jiří Papoušek, to Cuba. They again traveled at the expense of Technoexport that sent them to make a promotional film about the Czechoslovak machinery units in Cuba, which became *Strojírenské celky na Kubě* ([Machinery Units in Cuba], 1963). In addition to the commissioned film, they made two other films between 1963 and 1964: *Flora nese smrt* ([Flora Carries Death], 1963), about the destructive hurricane Flora, and *Ostrov slunce* ([The Island of Sun], n.d.). Papoušek and Šafranka's documentaries are important not only individually but also in comparison. Individually, the films show how the Czechoslovak filmmakers understood Cuba. The comparison demonstrates how the relationship between Cuba and Czechoslovakia evolved in the first half of the 1960s. Especially, since the Cuban Missile Crisis stood between them.

### **Feature Film Projects**

On December 22, 1960, Czechoslovakia and Cuba signed a bilateral agreement that established

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<sup>180</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Kolegiální porady 1 -10 1963. R12/AI/5P/6K. 6. kolegiální porada z 5.4. 1963.

the cooperation of the two countries in the area of culture, education and science (Opatrný, “Cuba” 98). Under the umbrella of this agreement, the ICAIC and the Czechoslovak State Film signed an agreement that included not only a film exchange but also a co-production. At that time, however, it was not clear what kind of co-production it would be. There were three possibilities: filming exteriors for the Czechoslovak State Film, a documentary about Cuba or a fiction film. Both countries were very interested in the cinematic collaboration<sup>181</sup> for developmental and political purposes.

As early as in 1960, the ČSF leadership planned for a feature film about Cuba, probably a documentary, called “Příběh mladé země” [A Story of a Young Country], proposed for spring 1961. Nevertheless, the project was discarded when Czechoslovaks found out a similar film was already being filmed by the Italians, according to a document from November 1960.<sup>182</sup> The writer probably referred to *Historias de la Revolución* by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, photographed by Otello Martelli, the director of photography of Federico Fellini’s films like *La strada* (1954) and *La dolce vita* (1960).

After the Czechoslovaks discarded this idea, they thought of filming exteriors. One of the candidates was “Fata Morgana”, contained in the dramaturgical plan of the creative group Šmída-Kunc in Film Studios Barrandov. The director of the first Cuban-Czechoslovak co-production Vladimír Čech wrote the original story and was supposed to direct the film. It was a story about four Vietnam War legion deserters who discovered that it was not possible to be

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<sup>181</sup> NFA. Porady ÚŘ ČSF 1961. R9/BII/5P/3K, p. 19.

<sup>182</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Zápisy z porad 1960. R12/AII/3P/9K. 19. porada ředitele ÚS ČSF z 11.11.1960. VIII. Služební cesty dokumentárního filmu, p. 3. 4 filmmakers were supposed to travel to Cuba to shot a film about the struggle of the Cuban people and their new life. They were supposed to spend 30 days in Cuba with budget of 32,832 Czechoslovak Koruna in foreign currency and 22,140 Czechoslovak Koruna in airfare.

neutral in today's world of injustice.<sup>183</sup> The proposal shared the idea of the impossibility to be neutral when an injustice is being committed, for example, with *Una crónica cubana* (1963), a Cuban film by the Uruguayan film director Ugo Ulive.<sup>184</sup>

“Fata Morgana” was supposed to be a film about the clash of two worlds and show the power behind the idea of national liberation struggle.<sup>185</sup> The topic was very pertinent to the historical and political realities in Cuba as well as its international politics in Africa and Latin America later. However, in the beginning of the 1960s when the film was conceived, Cuba needed to consolidate internally first. That is also why the majority of the films made in Cuba in the first years – 1960 to 1961 – had a single focus on Cuba. The interest in Vietnam came a bit later when it became a strong part of the Cuban anti-American political agenda, for example, in Santiago Álvarez's films. The Cubans' increased interest in the Vietnam War then could have been related to the increased presence of the US military forces in Vietnam after 1964.

The Czechoslovak-Cuban collaboration in film received a boost in 1961 when the first ever Czechoslovak Film Week took place between May 8 and 14, 1961 in Havana. The delegates did not only come to promote Czechoslovakia and show and discuss their films but also to negotiate further cooperation. The film director Vladimír Čech screened his successful detective story *Kde alibi nestačí* ([Where Alibi Is Not Enough], 1961) but that was not his only task during the Film Week. His participation in this highly politicized event (even Fidel Castro participated

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<sup>183</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Dramaturgické plány 1958 – 76. Dramaturgické plány na 1961, připravené 29.4.1960 pro zasedání kolegia, p. 17.

<sup>184</sup> I mostly refer to the position, which one of the film's character, professor Salas, tried to uphold. He wanted to stay neutral but very soon he had to take a stand to defend a colleague. He also had to turn his back on his counterrevolution father-in-law and his family.

<sup>185</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Dramaturgický plán FSB na 1962, p. 41.

in the screening of one of the festival films) afforded him the opportunity to meet with Alfredo Guevara to discuss different possibilities of collaboration.<sup>186</sup> Initially, he proposed “Fata Morgana”, however, in the end, Guevara probably decided that a “real” co-production was going to be a better solution for the ICAIC judging from the fact that the co-production agreement was signed the same year.<sup>187</sup> “Fata Morgana” was dropped<sup>188</sup> and it was replaced by *Para quién baila La Habana*.

In these initial stages, the cooperation accounted for more than the one co-production and a few documentaries. Pavol Dubovský, the leader of the Czechoslovak Film Week delegation, who also met several times with Guevara, mentioned in his report that the ICAIC was particularly interested in having two of the most prominent Czechoslovak directors, Otakar Vávra or Jiří Weiss, film in Cuba. They both had received multiple international awards and the Cubans knew their work well. Guevara did not plan a co-production in their case,<sup>189</sup> although Weiss’s project “Paloma negra” later became regarded as such.<sup>190</sup>

In addition to *Para quién baila La Habana*, the National Film Archive materials mention

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<sup>186</sup> MZV. 35 Kuba 1961. Zpráva o týdni československých filmov na Kube. Dubovský, vedoucí delegace. Document z 12.6.1961, p. 3.

<sup>187</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Kolegium 5 – 6 1961. R13/AII/2P/6K. Porada z listopadu 1961, bod II/19, p. 12.

<sup>188</sup> There is no record in any of the Complex plans reports of the Film Studio Barrandov located at the NFA that the film was actually made. The FSB archive in Prague only has a synopsis and a literary script and no record that the script was filmed. Email from Jana Zajíčková from the FSB, August 25, 2015.

<sup>189</sup> NA. Fond MŠK. 35 Kuba 1961. Zpráva o týdni československých filmov na Kube. Sepsal Dubovský, 12.6.1961, p. 12.

<sup>190</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Alfredo Guevara to Prof. Hans Rodenberg, GDR’s Vice-Minister of Culture, March 24, 1962, p. 1.



four other projects: the above mentioned “Paloma negra”, “Rosita”,<sup>191</sup> “Žralok zemře za soumraku” [The Shark Will Die at Dusk], and “Španělská balada” [The Spanish Ballad]. Nevertheless, *Para quién baila La Habana* was the only one that premiered in the end. The most probable reason why the other projects were dropped was their themes. The themes selected were important for Czechoslovakia but they did not interest Cuba. The ICAIC at that time focused more inside rather than outside of its boundaries, concentrating more on the national rather than global problems.

“Rosita” seems to have been abandoned in rather early stages because it was only mentioned in the dramaturgical plan of the Film Studios Barrandov (FSB) for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 1962 and does not appear on the list of completed films in the following years.<sup>192</sup> There is no record about what the film was supposed to be about. “The Shark Will Die at Dust”, a triptych about children from different countries, was further along when it was removed from the production plan: the original story and the literary script were completed and some Cuban actors were cast.<sup>193</sup> The studios probably called off this project as well, because no record can be found of it ever being completed.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> According to Plán cest do zahraničí na II. čtvrtletí, 30 FSB employees were supposed to travel to Cuba for 90 days to co-produce this film together with the ICAIC. NFA. ÚS ČSF Porady kolegiální 1. – 8. 1962. Porada z 14.2.1962, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> There is no record of what the film was supposed to be about.

<sup>193</sup> A photograph of the actress together with a commentary can be found in the interview Hana Slavíková had with Čech in Kino 7, Yr. XVI. For example, Hilda Sidia Ferreûle, a 14-year-old Cuban actress was supposed to play a role in the film.

<sup>194</sup> Email exchange with Jana Zajíčková from the FSB, August to December 2015.

“The Spanish Ballad”<sup>195</sup> was a film about the Czechoslovak *interbrigadistas* in the Spanish Civil War. It was a popular theme among the socialist filmmakers because of the international involvement of progressive people of the world. Czechoslovakia chose Cuba for the filming because Cuba was the closest Spanish speaking country friendly with the socialist bloc. It was impossible for the socialist bloc countries to film in Spain during the Franco regime. This film was never filmed either even though Čech had already cast some Cuban actors while he was in Cuba conducting research for *Para quién baila La Habana*.<sup>196</sup>

Even though these projects were never filmed, we cannot ignore them because they point to differences in political interests in certain themes, which could and probably did influence that the projects did not materialize. The topic of children of the world (“The Shark Will Die at Dusk”), for example, was one of the favorite topics in the socialist bloc, especially in the youth films. However, it never attracted the ICAIC filmmakers (at least in the 1960s). The Vietnam War, the main theme of “Fata Morgana”, only became of interest to Cuban filmmakers later in the decade as we can see in Santiago Álvarez’s documentaries like *Hanoi 13* (1968).

In the 1960s, Cuban filmmakers’ interest was almost exclusively the immediate Cuban reality, with exception of *Cumbite* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1964),<sup>197</sup> the only Cuban film in the first two decades of the ICAIC’s history that had an international theme. In this film about a Haitian national who returns home after years of harvesting sugarcane in Cuba, Gutiérrez Alea dealt with

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<sup>195</sup> NFA. FSB 55 až 66. The film was supposed to be directed first by Čech but later it was assigned to V. Gajer. Čech and Procházka were accompanied by Milan Jariš, hired to write the script for this second coproduction. Emails from Jana Zajíčková from August to December 2015.

<sup>196</sup> Maruja Calvo, actress and singer, was supposed to play the role of Juanita in the film. Her picture with a commentary is in Slavíková’s interview with the director “Čech na Kubě aneb Komu tančí Havana”.

<sup>197</sup> The film was based on a novel *Le Gouverneur de la Rosée*, written by a Haitian novelist Jacques Roumain.

a Haitian theme and even cast some Haitians living in the Eastern Cuba. The director was not satisfied with the result. According to him, he could not “rescatar la autenticidad de la manera de hablar de los haitianos, sencillamente porque no era [su] cultura... veía las cosas como alguien que está afuera. Ese [fue] el grave problema.” (qtd. in Oroz 79). Therefore, he admitted in his interview with Oroz that he had made the same mistake as all the foreign directors who had come to film in Cuba. “Quise hacer un tema haitiano, pero tampoco esa era mi cultura.” (88). The foreign filmmakers’ films were not authentic and neither was his.

From all the projects that Czechoslovakia prepared during that time period, two co-production projects deserve more attention: “Černá holubice” [“Paloma negra”], which was abandoned in the phase of the script, and *Para quién baila La Habana*, which received the green light and became a film. Both projects show that the Czechoslovaks read the Cuban history through the lens of their own reality. The Cuban and Czechoslovak perspective usually converged when their realities were similar and diverged when there was a gap. Both projects are an example of a mismatch of expectations and experiences rooted in different realities of the two socialist countries. This mismatch had consequences in both cases.

The two projects also served as an important indicator of how the relationship between Cuba and Czechoslovakia evolved over time, especially, since their politics distanced from one another more and more as the decade progressed. On the one hand, the liberalization in Czechoslovakia, which was taking shape while the Cuban regime was getting progressively more dogmatic, probably influenced Guevara’s decision to not to approve the first version of the script of “Paloma negra”. The situation also affected *Para quién baila La Habana*’s reception. On the other hand, the frustration of the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, supported

by Castro, was likely the main cause why the second version of the script of “Paloma negra” was never made into a film either, just like its predecessor in the beginning of the decade.

### **“Paloma negra”: A Multiracial World Up-close and Personal**

“Paloma negra” by Jiří Weiss and Ivan Bukovčan has been under the radar of the scholars, dedicated to examine the Cuban-socialist bloc relations. It has been hidden in the National Slovak Archive in Bratislava and except for Jiří Weiss’s bibliography, no one ever mentions it. This lack of attention is undeserved. The text is important because it is the only socialist bloc-Cuban co-production project with interracial relationships as the main theme. The theme was not only daring in Cuba but also in the socialist bloc because it tested the Cuban racial policies as well as socialist internationalism and its political premise of equality among all humans regardless of race. In addition, the characters and their race (the woman is Afro-Cuban, the Slovak technician is a white male) and the relation between them suggest the text could be understood as an allegory of the Cuban-socialist bloc relations on the background of the conflict of the global North and South.<sup>198</sup>

“Paloma negra” is a story of persistence. Even though the script was rejected in its first version in the beginning of 1963,<sup>199</sup> one of the authors, a renowned Slovak writer and journalist Ivan Bukovčan, presented a rewritten version to the Slovak State Film Studios in Bratislava in the end of the 1960s. In spite of his persistence, neither one of the two versions made it into a

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<sup>198</sup> More about the concept of global North and South, for example, in Samir Amin’s *Obsolescent Capitalism: Contemporary Politics and Global Disorder*.

<sup>199</sup> Alfreda Guevara requested Dubovský, the deputy director of the ČSF, during the 2nd Czechoslovak Film Week to communicate to Weiss that his script could not be filmed. ÚŘ ČSF. Zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 63, 78-79. R12/BI/3P/1K. Zpráva Dubovského o týdnu čs. filmu v Havaně v březnu 1963, p. 8.

film. The reasons differed in each case. While in the first version, the theme and the way the script presented the Cuban racial reality, did not resonate with the ICAIC leadership (namely Guevara), the second version seemed to have succumbed to the deteriorating relationship between the two countries and the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact invasion to Czechoslovakia in 1968. Much had happened in the Czechoslovak-Cuban relations between 1962 when Weiss started working on the script and 1967 when Bukovčan presented the second version to the Bratislava film studio.

Weiss's project was supposed to be the first Czechoslovak-Cuban fiction co-production. As we have seen earlier, Guevara asked for Weiss or Vávra in June 1961.<sup>200</sup> In the end, however, Čech and Procházka started writing the script sooner and when Weiss started working on his, Čech's co-production crew was already getting ready to depart to Cuba. The ICAIC expected "Paloma negra" with anticipation. Alfredo Guevara invited "none less" than Jiří Weiss, the famous Czechoslovak film director. Weiss accounts in his bibliography *Bílý mercedes* that Guevara asked him to come "to teach Cuban comrades how to build their national Cuban cinematography" (164). Cuban filmmakers knew and admired his *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness* (1960), *That Kind of Love* (1959) and *The Wolf's Trap* (1958) but he thought that he had nothing to teach *them*. He liked their early films.

In Cuba, Weiss was particularly impressed by three things: Fidel Castro's charismatic personality, a 12-year-old teacher of the Literacy Campaign<sup>201</sup> whose family he stayed with while he was working in Cuba, and Raúl Castro's initiative to retrain prostitutes to taxi drivers.

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<sup>200</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1961. Zpráva o týdnech československých filmů na Kubě. Dubovský, June 12, 1961, p. 12.

<sup>201</sup> Ivan Bukovčan writes about her in his *Kuba bez brady*.

Weiss had experienced the latter firsthand because one of these women—the beneficiaries of the policy became his driver for the length of his stay. He recalled that she had provided him with countless moments of terror when she was speeding up and down Havana’s streets (166).

The initiative (and the fear) must have really impacted him because when he returned back to Havana later with his friend, the Slovak writer Bukovčan, they chose the initiative as the central theme for “Paloma negra”. The shooting was supposed to take place in 1963 under the Creative Group Feix-Brož<sup>202</sup> but Guevara informed the ČSF that he could not approve Weiss’s script. Dubovský, who recorded Guevara’s decision in his report, did not offer any explication for the abortion of the project.<sup>203</sup> Weiss regretted that he had not proposed a film about the literacy teacher instead of “Paloma negra” because such project would have had a better chance of the ICAIC’s approval. Had he done that, he would have been the first to make a fiction film about the literacy campaign. The first Cuban film, which took the teachers from 1961 as the main theme, was Octavio Cortázar’s *El brigadista* in 1977, more than a decade later.

The first version of the script “Paloma negra” has unfortunately been lost. We only know about it from Weiss’s memoirs. He explained that it was a story of a young Afro-Cuban woman who used to be a prostitute and now “in the Cuban ‘macho’ society she wants to be retrained as a taxi driver” (168). It is unfortunate that the original story cannot be located anywhere in the Czech, Slovak or Cuban archives because it would be very interesting to see how the Czechoslovaks approached the topic of race and prostitution in the early 1960s. Especially, since

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<sup>202</sup> NFA. FSB 55-66. Posudky. R19/AI/1P/4K. ČSF FSB – Technicko hospodářský plán na 1963. Plán scénáristické přípravy, p. 19.

<sup>203</sup> ÚŘ ČSF. Zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 63, 78-79. R12/BI/3P/1K. Zpráva Dubovského o týdnu čs. filmu v Havaně v březnu 1963, p. 8.

according to Weiss, Bukovčan wrote “a typically Czechoslovak comedy” (168). The typical Czechoslovak comedies of the 1960s were usually loaded with satire and often drew on hyperbole or parody. It would have been an unusual approach to the Cuban Revolution, maybe similar to Gutiérrez Alea’s *Las doce sillas*.

The genre choice is surprising considering that the story and the script were written in a very tense Cuban political situation. In addition, the authors wrote about a country neither of them knew well. Therefore, Weiss was not surprised that their script was turned down by the Cubans. According to him, “no foreigner has yet succeeded in writing an original script in a country they have no roots in” (168). In spite of that, it seems that the rejection caught him by surprise. He wrote that he and Bukovčan were happy in the end to get out of this politically sensitive project. However, his tone reveals a sense of hurt and jealousy when he contemplates why his film was not made, implying that he would have done better than the director Čech “who had a mansion in Barrandov and a big production”, which failed with the critics (168).<sup>204</sup>

Obviously, there was more behind the rejection of “Paloma negra” than just the fact that it was written by foreigners, unable to penetrate the Cuban character and understand the history of Cuba. If it had been so, *Para quién baila La Habana* would have not been made either because its portrayal of Cuba and the Cubans was quite superficial. The ICAIC had political reasons for not moving forward with Weiss’s project. One factor was, without a doubt, the flop of Čech’s film but it was not the main (or the only) reason. The combination of the three following factors was probably what determined the project’s fate: it was a *comedy* about an *Afro-Cuban prostitute retrained* as a taxi-driver. In other words, the comedic rendition of an

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<sup>204</sup> Possibly also with the audience but there is no record of the reception but the film reviews.

important government initiative possibly contradicted some of the Revolution's political goals. In addition, the authors tampered with one of the pillars of the Revolution, the Afro-Cubans, by highlighting the link between the prostitution and the Afro-Cuban women.

Showing Afro-Cubans in an activity reminiscent of their pre-Revolutionary past, was not appropriate at that time. All we need to remember is *P.M.* which was banned about a year before the script of "Paloma negra" was completed just because it showed the Afro-Cubans having fun and drinking in bars. How problematic this particular element of the story might have been is evident from Weiss's comment regarding the one fundamental observation Alfredo Guevara made after reading the script. He asked: "Wouldn't it be possible to make this young prostitute white?" (168). The Soviet rendition of the young mulatto prostitute in *Soy Cuba* was probably more acceptable since she was shown as a victim of imperialism *before* 1959.

The Cubans wanted films about the Revolution but some topics and some renditions were off limits. For example, when Weiss proposed to Che Guevara a film about the Moncada Attack, Che Guevara rejected his suggestion. He proposed a film about fishermen instead (167). As the Revolution consolidated, more topics were barred from being discussed or shown on the screen, let alone by *foreign* filmmakers. Only a few Cuban filmmakers dared to portray some of the Cuba's most sensitive problems. Sara Gómez, for example, carefully addressed the question of *machismo* in *De cierta manera* (1974) and Gutiérrez Alea condemned bureaucracy in his black comedy *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966).

Those occurrences were, however, rare. Most filmmakers had to wait to discuss these thorny issues until the 1980s. Czechoslovak filmmakers had much more freedom of expression and their society had different issues and priorities. Consequently, their proposals and work



triggered sometimes a negative reaction in Cuba that was becoming increasingly dogmatic and intolerant. This is evident not only from the criticism of some imported films like *Zlatá reneta* (Vávra, 1965). It became an issue also in the case of the two Czechoslovak co-production projects. The issue of *blanqueamiento*, for example, which is the central theme of “Paloma negra” (1967), does not appear in Cuban film until *Cecilia* (Humberto Solás, 1982).

Weiss could not film “Paloma negra” in the beginning of the decade. However, Bukovčan returned to the script a half of a decade later, in 1967, and rewrote it. Jiří Weiss most likely did not take part in the rewrite because he does not mention it in his autobiography (and he emigrated in 1968). Ivan Bukovčan rearranged both the story<sup>205</sup> and the literary script (further “the 1967 script”). He changed the genre (from comedy to a melodrama), the tone and the storyline. The story, the script and the written evaluations for both of them are preserved in the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava.

Unfortunately, neither the 1967 version could be filmed, although the II. Creative Group Gajdošová-Král in Koliba,<sup>206</sup> the ČSF self-managed branch located in Bratislava, Slovakia, approved it albeit with some required modifications. The screenplay was considered for a co-production or at least a cooperation,<sup>207</sup> although some of the reviewers did not see a co-

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<sup>205</sup> Zápis z 6. porady II. tvůrčí skupiny 3.4.1967. Slovenský filmový ústav. Personální fond Ivana Bukovčana. All following assessments from the II. Creative Group and notes from their meetings are part of Ivan Bukovčan’s Personal Collection in the Slovak Film Institute in Bratislava.

<sup>206</sup> Zápis z 8. porady II. tvůrčí skupiny 6.6.1968 and Zápis z 10. porady 1.10.1968 o posuzování literárního scénáře. Slovenský filmový ústav. Personální fond Ivana Bukovčana. The remarks were supposed to be resolved in the technical script after the production were approved. The group was ready to advance the script to the Ideological Commission for approval. See Posudek scénáře od Józefa Tallo pro 8. porad. Tallo takes the opportunity to vouch for dismantling the Ideological Commission which he found outdated. It served as a preventive censorship.

<sup>207</sup> 8. pracovní porada II. tvůrčí skupiny z 6.6.1968. Dále také v Posudku scénáře Józefem Tallo for the same meeting.

production as indispensable.<sup>208</sup> The screenwriter Vichta cautioned that the production could be difficult to arrange due to the fact that the relationship with Cuba had cooled off considerably.<sup>209</sup> There is no record in the archive whether the film was ever suggested to Cuba for a co-production. Therefore, it is probable that it was the ČSF leadership itself that took the decision to not to move forward with the project. The project was written off in 1970.<sup>210</sup>

Even though the 1967 script never turned into a film, it is a valuable document especially in conjunction with its evaluation by the Koliba's Creative Group, in charge of Bukovčan's project "Paloma negra". It reveals how the Czechoslovaks perceived the multiracial Cuban society and how they saw themselves in the relationship to it. It also shows how the Czechoslovaks perceived the change of the course of the Cuban Revolution in the late 1960s. Furthermore, it reveals the freedom of discussion the members of the group were able to have about the potentially sensitive topics of the Cuban-socialist bloc relationships and censorship. This freedom of expression, as we know, ended soon after.

The 1967 version of the "Paloma negra" script is a story of a Slovak engineer Tomáš Pavlík who comes to Cuba as an expert, and an Afro-Cuban taxi driver Barbara, a caregiver to her ill younger brother Manuel. Contrary to the first version of the script, the author does not suggest that Barbara is a retrained prostitute. Nonetheless, the respective government initiative might be implied in Tomáš's comment about Barbara's work attire. She was wearing a forage cap and a grey full blouse, and Tomáš thought "this is how the Revolution dressed her and put

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<sup>208</sup> Posudek scénáře od Józefa Tallo pro zasedání 8. porady II. tvůrčí skupiny z 6.6.1968.

<sup>209</sup> Posudek scénáře od Józefa Tallo pro zasedání 8. porady II. tvůrčí skupiny z 6.6.1968.

<sup>210</sup> Email correspondence from August 25, 2015. Lucia Karellová, Slovenský filmový ústav.

her behind the wheel” (9).

He does not elaborate further, and neither does the rest of the script. However, in contrast to what Tomáš’s comment might have implied, one of Barbara’s neighbors swears that Barbara is decent and maybe a virgin (“Paloma negra” 31) even though another neighbor tries to disprove it. The morals of black women are a big topic in the first half of the script. Barbara’s female neighbors carry on judgements about her. Her reputation in the neighborhood seems to be impeccable, but it is contradicted by how easily Barbara ends up in bed with the Slovak engineer.

Tomáš is married but estranged from his wife Maríá. After a seven year marriage, Tomáš no longer feels capable of loving and caring about anyone (in his own words). But he still feels linked to Maríá who is the imaginary recipient of a magnetic tape we “hear” in the beginning and in the end. The tape forms the metanarrative frame within which the story of Barbara and Tomáš unfolds, the story that is intercalated by Tomáš’s reflections about love, Barbara, himself, and Barbara’s ill brother Manuel.

Barbara and Tomáš meet when she picks him up on the street to take him to his hotel. The next day she brings him a Spanish grammar book he forgot in her taxi and invites him to her home to meet her brother Manuel. Manuel is wheelchair bound. He studies the Czech language in a preparation for his study in Czechoslovakia. Here the 1967 script references the educational agreements between the two countries. It was a similar move as when Šefranka inserted a story about a young Cuban who drives a Czechoslovak Tatra truck.

Unlike Barbara who is religious and distrusts the Revolution, Manuel is its avid supporter. He idealistically believes the Revolution will cure him from polio and enable him to walk again; while Barbara has lost hope in Manuel’s cure. Here Weiss inserted a reference to the

“achievements of socialism”, indispensable in socialist internationalism. When Manuel is taken to the hospital for treatment, he convinces Barbara and Tomáš to take a trip together (alone) to Pinar del Río and Viñales in the hope they would fall in love and stay together. He is aware that Barbara has otherwise no chance of ever getting married because she is taking care of him.

Tomáš is attracted to Barbara but he tries to keep a distance. During their trip, however, when their car breaks near La Jagua, their intimate adventure begins. It takes them from a romantic love making on the beach to Barbara’s pleading for a baby from Tomáš. Her request causes a discord between them and when it seems both characters are at peace with the idea, counterrevolutionaries who attempt to kill the foreign expert Tomáš by accident kill Barbara instead. Out of guilt, Tomáš decides to take care of Manuel and he pleads María to help him on a tape, which now comes to an end.

The story takes place during “Año de la Planificación” in 1962. It shows many contradictions in the Cuban reality at that time and challenges to the socialist bloc-Cuban cooperation. It hints at an increasing number of socialist experts (three are mentioned in the script) and their exposure to counterrevolutionary attacks (one of them was killed recently). The experts are confronted with a more “relaxed” work attitude of their Cuban workers whom they are supposed to help and train.

The 1967 script also addresses what the Cubans inherited from the Americans. It describes modern buildings and infrastructure the Americans had built. Tomáš repeats the word “modern” when he speaks of the hospital where Manuel is interned and a garage where Tomáš’s car is being repaired. The “modern” is a reminder of the pre-Revolutionary past, together with others of its remnants: a vagabond, lying on a street underneath Barbara’s window, who does not

want to work; a prostitute who stops Tomáš and wants to go with him even for free because he is fair haired and has blue eyes; a black boy who shines Tomáš' shoes, and finally, all kinds of racial prejudices. None of this exists in Tomáš's homeland.

The story of the two lovers is set in a broader context of the 1962 Cuba. The TV that Tomáš watches in his room, establishes this context and so do the loudspeakers in the two towns where Tomáš and Barbara take refuge. They transmit Fidel's speeches condemning counterrevolutionary sabotages, disembarkation of counterrevolutionary forces in remote areas of Cuba, and other attacks on the young Revolution. Castro declaims that these attacks and sabotages are of no avail because the Revolution will come out victorious in any confrontation. The strong presence of *milicianos* and sexy *milicianas* (Barbara is one of them), guarding strategic buildings and areas, demonstrate that Cuban people are mobilized and ready to face any enemy.

At the same time, the 1967 script suggests that people in Cuba now repeat blindly Revolutionary rhetoric. It shows that the Revolution lost its original purity and freshness and words are becoming empty slogans as had happened in Czechoslovakia and the rest of the socialist bloc. For example, a militiaman who attends the hotel room where Barbara had just died, says that "Barbara died for Cuba" (116). It sounds out of place because Barbara made very clear earlier in the story that she did not trust the Revolution, was not interested in politics and did not want to die at all (76). Her death did not benefit the Revolution in any way, although the militiaman pretended she had become a martyr. Contrary to many Soviet war films<sup>211</sup> and Cuban films' like *Manuela*, where the heroes die as patriots and martyrs in the end, in this text the

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<sup>211</sup> As a parallel to Youngblood's analysis of the Soviet war films that often have their heroes die as martyrs in the end.

“martyr” death sends a very ambiguous message.

The most important contradictions, outlined in the 1967 script, however, are those related to interracial relationships. They appear on many different levels. The Koliba’s Creative Group’s reviewers did not believe that the script represented the Cuban interracial reality authentically and accurately. None of them, however, expressed doubts that the Cuban Revolution had truly eliminated racism as the Cuban leaders pretended. It was the kind of issue they did not address at all.

Several reviewers from the Koliba’s Creative Group considered the racial problem sort of “dissolved” or camouflaged by Tomáš’s unclear relationship to his estranged wife María. According to the leader of the Koliba’s Creative Group, Monika Gajdošová, Tomáš’s relationship with Barbara was asymmetric. He has an “advantage” over her because he is married. His marriage justifies his rejection of Barbara and her plea on the grounds of a happy marriage and family.<sup>212</sup> Barbara’s demeanor, therefore, comes across more like a lovelorn behavior of a woman that is rejected because she wants to capture a married man and not because of her race. His marriage justifies his indifference and prevents us from understanding Tomáš and Barbara’s relationship in terms of a possible racism, prejudices and judgement. This way his racial prejudices cannot be fully exposed. Gajdošová found it detrimental to the script.<sup>213</sup>

It is surprising that none of the Koliba’s Creative Group’s reviewers pointed out the exotic and erotic depiction of Barbara. She is portrayed from an absolutely Eurocentric and male-centric perspective (colonizer’s gaze). She is pictured as an oversexualized *mulata*. She

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<sup>212</sup> Not only that. He has another excuse – he is tired of relationships and maybe scared of them after his marriage failed.

<sup>213</sup> Posudek na literární scénář od Moniky Gajdošové pro 8. poradů.

always dances and sings. She believes in – what Tomáš sees as – witchcraft. She is manipulative and superstitious, emotionally unstable and inconsistent. This is how European colonizers perceived inhabitants of the Caribbean and Latin America.

Even in the military uniform, she is not described in terms of her commitment to duty and courage, but rather in terms of her feminine attributes: breasts, hips and long legs. The Koliba's reviewers did not worry about this aspect of the script. The exotic and erotic aspect was one of the things they appreciated as innovative in Czechoslovak cinema. They believed that if the film showed making love to a black woman, it would increase the value of the film because it was a novelty in the Czechoslovak film.<sup>214</sup> The Koliba's reviewer Gajdošová, the only female in the group, did not speak to the point. However, the Koliba's reviewer Felix did. He liked the erotic scenes but he found them borderline excessive.<sup>215</sup>

On the other hand, most reviewers from the Koliba's Creative Group found improbable that Barbara would insist on having a child with Tomáš just to advance her race. Apparently, the issue prompted quite a discussion in the group because it appears on many of the evaluations. The Koliba's reviewer Pavol Gajdoš suggested that this aspect needed to be evaluated by “the other side”,<sup>216</sup> i.e. the Cubans, in order to avoid a potential misstep. He implied that the Cubans should have a say in whether this depiction of their reality was valid and acceptable. His concern was well-founded given how sensitive the Cubans were about any such alienating perspective. Certainly, judging from the reactions to *Soy Cuba* and the other socialist co-productions, these

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<sup>214</sup> Posudek literárního scénáře od Pavola Števčeka pro 8. poradu.

<sup>215</sup> Posudek filmového scénáře od Jozefa Felixe z 26.9.1968 pro 10. poradu.

<sup>216</sup> Posudek na literární scénář od Pavola Gajdoše pro 8. poradu II. tvorivé skupiny.

characteristics would have triggered a strong reaction if the 1967 script were filmed as it were.

Married or not, Tomáš's racial prejudices come across anyway. We mostly perceive them through his judgements about Barbara and her blackness. His "omniscient" reflections suggest he knows everything about black women. For example, when he meets Barbara after he broke a promise given to her that he would come visit her brother, he "reads" in Barbara's disdainful look, "I knew you, *señor*, a foreigner from a luxury hotel, would not accept an invitation from an ordinary taxi driver. I knew that *you, a white man*, would never visit a home of *unknown black people*" [italics added] (15).

This is not the only example of his prejudices. During their trip later on, he once again generalizes: "Every black woman is superstitious" (64). On another occasion, while Barbara is cooking in the bungalow where they are staying after their car broke, Tomáš thinks "...it looks like she even cooks in a dance rhythm and she needs to restrain herself so that the movement, hidden underneath the black skin by magic, would not completely reel her to dance even in the small kitchen corner next to the gas stove" (72). The sensuality of her dance and the "repulsiveness" of her superstition and beliefs are mentioned several times during their trip. They reinforce again the male-centered, Eurocentric gaze.

The most problematic is Tomáš's "very clear" idea about the racial beliefs of black women in regards to *blanqueamiento*. He suddenly "understands" this very old burden of black women in Cuba. After Barbara asks Tomáš for a child and they argue about it several times, he concludes,

Finally, I understood everything. This woman... only feels fear... age-long, unpronounceable fear of a black chain of her destiny... This woman that is crying



only wants to interrupt the chain... She only wants a child that won't be completely white... but won't be completely black either...And when the chain starts to break...The woman sees far away in the distance...Through the life and death of generations that continue in this chain until the end that cannot be seen...And she wants to help those who will come... liberate them from her fear...I am a good opportunity...She affirms she loves me...But what? Me? Or only her opportunity? (109)

Tomáš understands that Barbara's wish to have his child is motivated by her desire to advance the race of her child. Her attitude and her words support this assumption. First, she tries to coerce him by appealing to his long-aged "white" guilt, which he probably originally did not feel because he came from a country that was racially rather homogeneous (white). She tells him that he is a coward and that he does not want a child because he is *white*. She shouts: "That is the true obstacle – that is the real reason...! I am just black, a miserable, stupid, black woman crazy in love" (106) and she continues,

That you can! Sleep with a black one...! We are good in bed, right! Yes, in bed we are fine! But then... It is true! It is true! You do not want a child, because you are white! Admit it! Your child can't have a black mother...And I wanted so much... I wanted so much...a child from a white man! (108)

Besides of the issue of *blanqueamiento*, the author also hints on racial equality laws the Revolution promulgated, and how some "backward" segments of the population reacted to them. For example, when Barbara and her lover-to-be Tomáš arrive to a bungalow after their car broke, the place is full. They have to share one bungalow, though it is not appropriate in Cuba of the

1960s for decent single men and women to sleep in one room. It was not unusual before 1959 to see a white man and a black woman to spend a night together. However, their white neighbors did not see their relationship as a “white man’s pastime” from before the Revolution. Instead, they judged it as a “despicable” result of one of the new government’s policies on racial equality. When Tomáš and Barbara walk by them, they sarcastically remark: “There is nothing more beautiful than such a bastard black and white honeymoon.” (68).

The racial equality message the author tried to convey was not strong enough according to some Koliba’s reviewers. On the contrary to the writer’s intentions (we suppose), the black people seemed to be the problem, not the prejudiced white man.<sup>217</sup> The script highlights more the black people’s racial prejudices than the white man’s.<sup>218</sup> We can feel it from Barbara’s focus on a white man’s child and from the behavior of black people in her neighborhood in the beginning of the story. It is also contained in the message implied in Barbara’s death. Some of the Koliba’s Creative Group’s reviewers assumed the shooters were black. They arrived at this conclusion probably because of the violence of a black man who threw his keys at a light pole earlier in the story when he saw Barbara talking with Tomáš. This reading does not seem probable. Nothing in the script supports the assumption that the counterrevolutionaries who were killing white experts to sabotage Cuba’s development and advancement towards socialism, were black.

Bukovčan focuses on a clear division between the white and the black. The game of chess in the story is symbolic of that. Aside from the dialogues that emphasize the separateness, the author also employs an important stylistic resource, a discursive shift. In the first half of the

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<sup>217</sup> Posudek filmového scénáře od Jozefa Felixe z 26.9.1968 pro 10. poradú.

<sup>218</sup> This was quite unusual in Cuban cinema even though *De cierta manera* hints to it.

script, before the trip, Bukovčan refers to both Tomáš and Barbara with their proper names. However, when Barbara confronts Tomáš about the child, Bukovčan starts depersonalizing Barbara and Tomáš by alternating between their proper names and more general “white man” and “black woman”. For example, after a moment of silence “*Barbara’s* voice returns the *white man* to reality...” [italics added](78), not Tomáš as we might expect. Later the author reverses it: “*A black woman* [not Barbara] walks on the sand in a certain distance behind Tomáš, like a gypsy behind a man” [italics added] (82). Comparing a black woman with a gypsy is also telling: the gypsy and the black women historically shared their pride, independence, and passion, as well as a submission to a man.

The author depersonalizes Barbara more than Tomáš. She is frequently referred to as a black woman, a black silhouette, a negress, or a strange black woman while Tomáš is Tomáš most of the time. The contrast culminates when Tomáš brings a rock rose to Barbara and “the negress dips her face into a *white* fragrance” [italics added](103). This sentence is charged with symbolic meaning. On a symbolic level, black Barbara “smells the fragrance” of the whiteness of Tomáš but cannot merge with it. The whiteness is accessible to her only as a temporary sensory pleasure. This aspect was outlined earlier when Tomáš pondered about the game of chess: “It is a game and it is a fight. It is like life...you sacrifice to gain...and in the end, you lose everything...A player’s hand moves a black queen in front of a white king...checkmate” (43).

In the end, after month of drought, the rain arrives like the biblical deluge that washes away all sins. After the rain passes and the nature has come to peace, both lovers find harmony. They are no longer a white man and a black woman, they are simply a man and a woman. Yet it is not love that connects them but again only sensuality, symbolized by the jasmine flower:

Barbara is described as “full of attractive, brimming womanhood” (112).

This final truce, moments before Barbara dies, however, is not about sensuality. It is not about love either. It is about humanity. One man and one woman, two equal human beings. “You and I...our blood has... has one... co..lor,” says dying Barbara to Tomáš when she sees him bleeding from his arm (116). Above all the eroticism, exoticism, revolution, and everything else, people are equal regardless of race, regardless of the love they feel or not for each other. They are humans, first and foremost. That is the main message of the 1967 script. Not regarding people by their race was also the ultimate expression of socialist internationalism and the backbone of the Cuban racial policy.

“Paloma negra” could be read as an allegory, as Vichta, one of the Koliba’s Creative Group’s reviewers suggested. He viewed Barbara as a symbol of the young Cuban Revolution. She represents passion, purity, faith, hope, and justice. It was, however, not the Cuba of 1967 but the Cuba of the early years when it was still perceived as pure, untainted by judicial processes, imprisonments and censorship.<sup>219</sup> Tomáš is the opposite. According to Vichta, Tomáš is “a product of [their] Czechoslovak revolution, which grew old, turned a bit stinky, fixed some things but made other things worse, it became bureaucratic instead of being a process.”<sup>220</sup> And not only that. Tomáš also represents Czechoslovakia or even the socialist bloc in general. He is empty, there is no love, no passion, and no fulfillment. We can understand him as the socialism in those countries: empty, full of rhetoric and emptied of content. That is why it needed “a

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<sup>219</sup> All of this, of course, existed from the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, however, it is very unlikely that general population in the socialist bloc was aware of all the purges and executions that were taking place in Cuba in those early years.

<sup>220</sup> Posudek na povídku od Vichty pro 6. pracovní poradě II. tvořivé skupiny v Bratislavě-Kolibě z 3.4.1967.

renewal” in the form of the Prague Spring reforms (Czechoslovakia), for example.

The relationship of Barbara and Tomáš can symbolize the impossible relationship among Cuba and Czechoslovakia (or the socialist bloc). Their relationship had no future. Barbara and Tomáš could not get married and have children because Cuba and Czechoslovakia could only have a love affair but not marriage. María, Tomáš’s wife could represent the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia fell out of love with it after the XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 (or earlier) but it still needed the relationship because it meant security, shared history and a certain status quo. The prejudices about the black race, originally attributed to the whites, which Barbara adopted, could symbolize some of the prejudices, values and practices Cuba “imported” from the socialist bloc. Barbara’s death could mean that the Cuban Revolution’s purity, hope, passion, and authenticity would end up “killed” eventually, especially under the influence of the socialist bloc.

Even though “Paloma negra” was never filmed, it contributed to Cuban cinema because it enabled Jiří Weiss to travel to Cuba twice and meet with Cuban directors and screenwriters. Weiss was fluent in French and English and spoke some Italian, therefore, he was able to communicate with some of the filmmakers directly without a translator. That was always important given the fact that sometimes translators adjusted “inappropriate” answers to political questions. Alfredo Guevara admired Weiss’s professional skills in a letter he wrote to Professor Hans Rodenberg, the GDR’s Deputy Minister of Culture in October 1963. He described Weiss as “particularmente inteligente, agudo, ingenioso”.<sup>221</sup>

Cuban filmmakers probably found Weiss’s experience and skill set useful for several

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<sup>221</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A message from 13.10.1963 from Alfredo Guevara to Prof. Hans Rodenberg.

reasons but one thing made him particularly close to them. He was not only a director but also an author of many of his films. He not only directed them but also wrote or co-wrote their scripts. One of the examples is his *Zlaté kapradí* ([Gold Bracken], 1963). He shared this trait with Cuban filmmakers who depended on their ability to write scripts because screenwriting was not a separate career in Cuba at that time in contrast to Hollywood. This situation changed only recently when La Escuela Internacional del Cine de San Antonio de los Baños (EICTV) in Cuba opened a screenwriting specialty in the 1990.<sup>222</sup> Being an author and the director at the same time was not rare in Czechoslovakia where good screenwriters were also rare. Vladimír Čech, among others, also wrote scripts to many of his films.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen throughout the course of the chapter, socialist internationalism was the engine that drove Czechoslovak-Cuban collaboration, like in the Soviet case. Even though Czechoslovakia was much smaller than the USSR and had much more limited resources, its Czechoslovak State Film had ambitious plans for cooperation with its new ally. Although many initial filmic projects did not materialize in the end, the range of topics they encompassed shows a mutual process of discovery and synchronization of artistic and practical objectives of the two countries. Especially illuminating in this sense is the unfilmed project “Paloma negra”. Its two versions, neither of which worked out in the end, reveal not only how protective the ICAIC was of its historical discourse. It also demonstrates how the Czechoslovaks perceived Cuban society and its Revolution and how this perception evolved in relationship to the changing political

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<sup>222</sup> Sotto, Arturo. Personal interview. October 2015.

relationship between the two countries.

The Czechoslovak-Cuban collaboration was significant politically and technically. Politically, the films Czechoslovakia made in Cuba supported the cause of the Cuban Revolution abroad. Especially the documentaries made by the Czechoslovak director Bruno Šefranka were very popular internationally and together with Karmen's documentaries inspired support for the "new" Cuba. Technically, Czechoslovakia helped Cuban cinema to get on its feet especially by providing professional training to the ICAIC's personnel. The aid did not take place only through the traveling technicians and experts but also through the co-production *Para quién baila La Habana* as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 shows that the first Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production was not only important as a provider of professional skills training for the ICAIC's technicians and filmmakers but also artistically, through its connection to the Cuban film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1968). In addition, the co-production is also an important historical document or better yet, an important historical discourse. In this sense, the film is a testimony about how the Czechoslovak artists viewed Cuba in the early 1960s. The film's press reviews in both countries then reveal how Cubans and Czechoslovaks reacted to such representation.

## CHAPTER 4

### ***PARA QUIÉN BAILA LA HABANA:* THE STORY OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE**

The Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production was the first Cuban co-production with the socialist bloc that ever premiered in Cuba and abroad. As such it played an important role in the history of the ICAIC as well as the Czechoslovak State Film-ICAIC relations. The expectations connected with such a pioneer project affected the film's reception both in Cuba and Czechoslovakia. Yet in spite of its historical importance, scholars have barely paid any attention to this film, mostly because the Cuban film critics dismissed the co-production as a bad film. No one has ever analyzed the wealth of archival documentation on the film. This chapter aims to recuperate the film's historical and cultural significance.

Similarly to the case of *Soy Cuba*, this analysis also goes beyond the binary of a good or bad film and a success or failure. Instead, it looks at the film as an important historical discourse. It examines the co-production in conjunction with the many documents in the National Film Archive's holdings to understand the film's conception, production and reception on the background of its historical, social and cultural circumstances. The discussion on "accuracy" and "authenticity" will illuminate our journey.

#### **Empowering the Cuban Film Industry**

*Para quién baila La Habana* premiered in Cuba and Czechoslovakia during their respective film weeks in 1963. In 1961, when ČSF and the ICAIC agreed on collaboration, both film institutes were very interested in a co-production as one of the most convenient means of cooperation



between the two nations. At the time of the meeting, the ICAIC had not yet filmed any full-length feature film,<sup>223</sup> and most of the ICAIC's personnel was relatively new. Therefore, the ICAIC expected the Czechoslovak-Cuban co-production to guarantee the first Cuban fiction film in the immediate future, made at a lower cost than if they tried to make the film on their own. A co-production also promised a relatively cheap training for Cuban filmmakers and technicians. The ICAIC was quite excited at both prospects.

From the perspective of the Czechoslovak State Film, *Para quién baila La Habana* was an emancipation project for the young Cuban film industry, subsidized by the Film Studios in Barrandov (FSB). It was envisioned as a *purely* Cuban film, which the Czechoslovak technical and creative personnel were *only* supposed to carry out.<sup>224</sup> The reality was different: the Cubans ended up playing a much more passive role than originally planned. In the end, the decisive share belonged to Czechoslovakia and Cuba only provided actors and scenary. The burden of the costs also lied predominantly on the FSB. It invested about 2,160,000 Czechoslovak Koruna (88%) compared to 300,000 Czechoslovak Koruna (12%)<sup>225</sup> invested by the ICAIC. In addition, the ČSF paid all airfare between the two countries related to the film and the crew even brought their own medical doctor in order to not to burden the Cuban healthcare system.<sup>226</sup>

It was one of the goals of the Czechoslovak government's foreign policy to empower the

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<sup>223</sup> NFA. Porady ÚŘ ČSF 1961. R9/BII/5K/3K. It is unfortunately not clear what the exact date of the meeting was. It appears, however, that it must have been before the first two Cuban features were screened: *Cuba baila* (García Espinosa 1960) and *Historias de la Revolución* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1960) (Chanan 144 and 150). The first film had a script written before the Revolution and reworked after 1959, the latter consist of four stories, so it is actually not a full length fiction feature film. *Historias de la Revolución* was screened before *Cuba baila* for political reasons.

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Slavíková in *Kino*.

<sup>225</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF legislativní a právní úsek 57 – 69. R18/AI/2P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého, p. 3.

<sup>226</sup> Coproduction Agreement, point XIX.

national film industries in developing countries through a convenient and relatively cheap training.<sup>227</sup> That's why none of the Czechoslovak co-productions with developing countries had artistic ambitions. We can see it in the case of the Čech's film as well as in the Vladimír Sís's Indonesian-Czechoslovak co-production *Operation Kalimantan*. Both films were made in 1962 by the same Creative Group Šmída-Fikar.<sup>228</sup>

According to Bohumil Šmída, the head of production for both films, Sís did his best “to film *authentically* a piece of Indonesian history about the fight of [Indonesian] pilots against the Dutch colonizers” [italics added] (193). Nonetheless, in spite of his best intentions, he could only know about the country “what he saw around himself at that moment”. The ČSF considered the film bad; the loss was written off in lieu of “finding friends in the Southeast Asia” (193). As we will see, the circumstances and results were similar in both films and the causes also aligned. It is of interest though that the ICAIC purchased *Operation Kalimantan* for the Cuban Ministry of Armed Forces in 1975.<sup>229</sup> *Operation Kalimantan*, a warfare action film, even though schematic and superficial as well, fit the Cuban agenda unlike the Čech's film because it was about liberation struggle but not *Cuban* liberation struggle.

The motives of these political co-productions were always extra-artistic.<sup>230</sup> Rather than creating a work of art, the co-productions catered to the political goal of forming film cadres and providing technical aid. They also offered a vehicle to support the partner developing countries

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<sup>227</sup> NFA. Porady ústředního ředitele ČSF 1961. R9/BII/5P/3K. Point IV Koprodukce, p. 16.

<sup>228</sup> Bohumil Šmída wrote about both co-productions in his memoirs *Jeden život s filmem*.

<sup>229</sup> NFA. FEX. Kuba 1970-1977. R7/AII/1P/7K. Letter from April 24, 1975.

<sup>230</sup> Pittermann, Jiří. Kino 9: XVIII, 11.

ideologically and internationally: they showed the justification for their liberation struggle and cinematically fought for the countries' right for self-determination. In the case of Cuba, the co-production aimed mostly to give the ICAIC's artists and technicians a good foundation, so that they could become self-sufficient in creating their own successful national fiction films, as they were already doing in the area of documentary. It was in the area of fiction films where the ICAIC needed help the most as Gutiérrez Alea explained (qtd. in Oroz 88). This form of help was the Czechoslovakia's version of cinematic socialist internationalism.

The co-production fulfilled some of the original goals but not others. Due to the late start and end of the co-production, *Para quién baila La Habana* was not the first ICAIC's fiction film screened in Cuba. Before the Czechoslovaks and the Cubans even agreed on this co-production, the ICAIC screened *Historias de la Revolución* and *Cuba baila* in 1960. Furthermore, during the two years of the co-production's preparations and filming, Oscar Torres and Eduardo Manet made *Realengo 18* (1961) and Gutiérrez Alea, *Las doce sillas* (1962).

*Para quién baila La Habana* may not have fulfilled the objective of being the ICAIC's first *largometraje de ficción*, however, in its goal to provide the ICAIC filmmakers and staff with proven filmmakers as teachers, the co-production succeeded. That is probably also why, despite the negative criticism the film received in Cuba, surprisingly, the ČSF was satisfied. It referred to the co-production in some of its internal reports as good, acceptable or even successful,<sup>231</sup> although the Czechoslovak film reviews criticized it. That is just one of the film's contradictions.

The Cubans were also divided on the issue. Although some of them claimed that the

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<sup>231</sup> For example, in the report for the ÚŘ ČSF's 9<sup>th</sup> meeting on February 26, 1963. Zpráva o činnosti ČSF za rok 1962, p. 3.

project should have never been made,<sup>232</sup> others understood the broader positive implications of the co-production in spite of the criticism it had received. Arturo Agramonte, one of the co-founders of the ICAIC, wrote: “En esta producción trabajaron técnicos checos y cubanos, y fue de gran beneficio para ambos países el intercambio de conocimientos, sistemas de trabajo y robustecimiento de la amistad cubano-checa” (139). This exchange was the most important goal of the film and resulted in long-term benefits for the ICAIC thanks to the crew that the ČSF selected very carefully.

The crew consisted of 35 people who spent six to seven months in Cuba, working on the film.<sup>233</sup> For practical reasons, the Cubans requested technicians who not only excelled as artists and technicians but were also able to teach. Therefore, several crew members, in addition to having a successful career in film, were also experienced teachers from the prestigious Film Academy of Music Arts (FAMU). The ICAIC was particularly keen to form their photographers and editors: Dubovský mentions in his report from the Czechoslovak Film Week in Cuba that Alfredo Guevara asked for “one excellent photographer for a prolonged period of time” to help develop photographers for artistic feature films, and “a film editor, master teacher, for at least one month”.<sup>234</sup> Čech’s film fulfilled both requests by bringing the photographer Václav Hanuš and the master editor Antonín Zelenka.

The training impacted not only the areas and people directly related to the co-production, but had a much larger scope and effect. It occurred on three main levels. First, a group of Cubans

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<sup>232</sup> *Bohemia* and *Verde olivo* coincided in asking themselves this question.

<sup>233</sup> Interview with Slavíková.

<sup>234</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1963. Dubovský – Zpráva o týdnu československých filmů na Kube, p. 12.

that was integrated in the crew received a practical training side by side with experienced Czechoslovak filmmakers and technicians.<sup>235</sup> Second, some members of the Czechoslovak crew gave lectures and practical training not only to those filmmakers and staff who participated in the co-production but also to some who did not. Third, the filmmakers and technicians helped the ICAIC establish production principles.<sup>236</sup> It probably happened through discussions with the ICAIC leadership and working side by side with the Cuban crew.

The Cuban trainees had different degrees of experience but even the most experienced gained something that helped them solidify their technical skills. Octavio Cortázar, the later director of *El brigadista* (1978), worked closely with Vladimír Čech as his first assistant director. He had joined the crew in Czechoslovakia after the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival in December 1962.<sup>237</sup> Manuel Herrera, the future director of the the Cuban-Soviet co-production *Capablanca* (1987), was the second assistant director to Čech and worked mostly with Čech's wife and assistant Věra Ticháčková. Also Fernando Pérez, the future director of *Clandestinos* (1987) and *Havana Suite* (2003) was part of the crew.<sup>238</sup> Onelio Jorge Cardoso, a famous writer, who later collaborated, for example, on the script of Gutiérrez Alea's *Cumbite*, had worked with Richard Falbr<sup>239</sup> on the Spanish version of the script.

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<sup>235</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF 63 a 64. R14/AI/2P/5K. Úvod k výrobnímu plánu na rok 1963.

<sup>236</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF. R14/AI/2P/5K. Zpráva o činnosti komise pro propagaci filmem v zahraničí v roce 1962, p. 8. None of the documents at the NFA specifies who studied the production principles and in what form.

<sup>237</sup> TO Pilát informs the collegium about Cortázar's expected arrival in his report from December 1, 1962. NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Kolegiální porady 1962. R14/BI/6P/9K. 19. kolegiální porada z 14. 12. 1962.

<sup>238</sup> Brief encounter with Fernando Pérez at the ICAIC in June 2016. Not a formal interview.

<sup>239</sup> Falbr later became the director of the Czechoslovak Casa de cultura in Havana, an establishment that organized lectures, screenings and concerts and otherwise promoted Czechoslovak culture in Cuba. Falbr was an avid supporter of the Cuban Revolution and as the only one from Czechoslovak professionals in Cuba also participated in

Cardoso's contribution was not as extensive as Pineda Barnet's in *Soy Cuba* but rather the opposite. According to the journal *Večerník Bratislava*, his input was so small that the film could not really be considered a *real* co-production ("Nevyužitá příležitost."). Cardoso probably only adjusted the Spanish translation of the Czech script for the Cuban actors, though it would have been in the film's benefit if he were allowed more input. It is a curiosity though that because of the time constraints (the premiere at the Czechoslovak Film Week in Havana) the Czechoslovaks never produced a dubbed version of the film in Czech. Therefore, Cardoso's version is the only one that exists. For the Czechoslovak audience used to dubbing, it was only subtitled.

It is another film's paradox. Cubans considered the co-production more as a Czechoslovak film: in spite of being filmed with Cuban actors and in Spanish, they did not find it "authentic". On the contrary, the Czechoslovak audience had a film made by a Czechoslovak crew but with no Czechoslovak actors and in Spanish. *Operation Kalimantan* was similar: the film was in Dutch and Indonesian, subtitled to Czech. Most likely, the ČSF did not see any prospects of selling the films, therefore, it did not want to invest more into synchronizing them.

Another member of the Cuban crew was Nelson Rodríguez, the Cuba's most important master editor, who later worked on most of the major Cuban films such as *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, *Lucía* (Humberto Solás 1968) and *Cecilia*. During the co-production, he worked with Antonín Zelenka. Zelenka was a very experienced editor who debuted in 1926 and worked on 176 feature films before the co-production. Rodríguez, who had had some prior experience editing documentaries, recalls in his biography *El cine es cortar* that he learned from Zelenka

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Cuban militias. Later he had a political problem in Cuba and was removed from his post.

much about how to edit fiction films (28). In his interview with the author, he remembered he was especially impressed by the precision of Zelenka's cuts and the security with which he worked on *moviola*, the same dexterity that later many admired in him. Čech had complete trust in Zelenka and only visited the editing room when the first cut of the film was ready,<sup>240</sup> which was not common in Cuba at that time. Rodríguez has always remembered that.

One of the most influential teachers in Čech's team was the Czech photographer Václav Hanuš. Before the co-production, he had photographed 58 films. Among his most famous were Weiss's *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness* and *The Wolf's Trap*, Vávra's *Hussite Trilogy: Jan Hus* (1954), *Jan Žižka* (1955) and *Proti všem* (1956), as well as Josef Mach's *Waltz for a Million* (1960).<sup>241</sup> All these films were known in Cuba and *Waltz for a Million* was actually one of the most popular films showed in Cuba in the 1960s. All Hanuš's films visually differed from each other, which speaks of his versatility and adaptability.

Hanuš also learned new skills in Cuba. One of the things the European filmmakers and the Cubans struggled with was the strong light of the tropics. Hanuš could capitalize on his skills acquired in Cuba when he returned to the island in the end of the 1970s to film two episodes of Jiří Sequens's *30 případů Majora Zemana* [Thirty Cases of Major Zeman].<sup>242</sup> Contrary to *Para quién baila La Habana*, the sequel was filmed in color. It was a co-production between the

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<sup>240</sup> Nelson Rodríguez. Skype interviews in October and November 2015.

<sup>241</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF 1965, 1966 a 1980. R5/AI/1P/3K. FSB, 5.10.65. The document was written by Zajíček, the secretary, and addressed to the secretary of ÚŘ ČSF, Šolc. The document stated that Hanuš had worked in film for 35 years and made 106 films as photographer. He received awards at international film festivals as well as in different film events at home. He had participated in the education of young film cadres as a professor of camera in the AMU since its opening.

<sup>242</sup> Václav Hanuš was the director of photography also for two episodes that were partially filmed in Cuba: *Rukojmí v Bella Vista* (1970) a *Poselství z neznámé země* (1971). Later the episodes were made into a feature film.

Czechoslovak Television, the ČSF and Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (ICRT). It had nothing to do with the ICAIC.

The Cubans appreciated Hanuš. It is possible that they had requested him specifically and that is why he came to form part of the film crew. During his stay, Julio García Espinosa, the ICAIC's General Director, sent a letter to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education and Culture (MŠK) in March 1963 and asked them to authorize “el compañero Hanuš para que durante su estancia entre [ellos] ofrezca un cursillo a [sus] camarógrafos, ya que sus conocimientos [eran] de gran valor para [sus] técnicos.”<sup>243</sup> The Ministry approved and Hanuš gave the course.

According to an article in *Bohemia* from March 1963, Hanuš was a specialist in light control in studio settings and had preference for black and white material (Luis M. López, “Para quién baila La Habana”). Many Cubans learned from him. For example, Ramón Suárez, the director of photography of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, participated in the workshop and so did Raúl Rodríguez, a distinguished Cuban photographer who made films like *La bella de Alhambra* (Pineda Barnet, 1989). Rodríguez was not invited by the ICAIC to participate in Hanuš' workshop officially because the ICAIC was very selective in regards to whom they allowed to meet with foreign filmmakers as we have seen in Chapter 1. In spite of that, Rodríguez came in his free time and was impressed by how quickly and efficiently Hanuš assembled and disassembled the lights to create the right atmosphere for each particular scene.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to the photographer and the editor, many other film professions were represented in the crew: makeup artists and hairdressers, pyrotechnics, scenographers, etc. Some

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<sup>243</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1962. Dopis Julia Garcíi Espinosy z března 1963 pro Ministerstvo školství a kultury. It seems the year on the letter is incorrect because it refers to the time before the filming which actually started in 1962 not 1963.

<sup>244</sup> Raúl Rodríguez. Personal interview. June 2015.



of the Cuban technicians who learned with them were Hector Ramírez (decoration) who worked with Josef Pavlík; Carmelina García (costumes) worked with Helena Vondrušková; Edgardo Carulla (illumination) with František Mališ; Roberto Miqueli (architecture) with Leoš, *Leo*, Karen, etc. The Cuban participants learned from the Czechoslovaks different techniques that we consider mundane today but they were new to many Cuban technicians at that time. Herrera recalls one of them, a technique that resembled *papier-mâché*, i.e. how to film crashed cars without actually crashing a car.<sup>245</sup>

The opportunity to exchange technical and procedural knowledge was just one of the many ways how Cubans benefited from this collaborative project. The co-production also served as an opportunity for them to learn about socialism like we have seen in Chapter 1. In addition to everyday interactions within the two teams through which the participants exchanged information in an informal way, just by working together, there were also more formal ways to share views and experience. Čech, for example, participated in several debates with Cuban filmmakers. Such debates were very important at the time when the socialist regime was being introduced in Cuba. Cubans asked socialist filmmakers many questions about the role the film and the filmmaker played in a socialist society, about freedom of artistic expression, and application of contemporary artistic trends such as the French New Wave, the Italian Neorealism, the new Soviet cinema, and Hollywood.<sup>246</sup> The ICAIC later published these interviews and roundtables in *Cine cubano*, so that broader audience could also access the information.

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<sup>245</sup> Manuel Herrera. Personal interview. September 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Many of these questions are featured in the previously mentioned article in *Cine cubano* “Cinco preguntas del cine cubano a cinco directores checoslovacos”.

## The Production Circumstances

Artistically, we may consider *Para quién baila La Habana* an average film if we judge it based on the bad reviews it received both in the Czechoslovak and the Cuban press. However, we need to take these reviews with a grain of salt. No film is created in isolation. Its message and its reception are always a product of its environments, especially when the filming takes place under such precarious conditions as those in Cuba in 1962.

In the case of *Para quién baila La Habana*, without a doubt, the Cuban and Czechoslovak political and production circumstances influenced the final look of the film as well as its reviews. Many extra artistic factors played a role, among them the artistic and the extra-artistic intentions and expectations of the leadership on both sides. For all of the above reasons, the film was a valuable joint project of the two worlds that were just getting to know each other. Through the film, we can learn about how the two sides viewed each other, how they projected their own realities onto each other, and what repercussions both of these factors had for the film in Cuba and abroad.

As mentioned before, the historical context of the co-production happened to be one of the tensest periods of the sixties. The climate of anxiety and alertness that accompanied the constant US supported attacks on the Cuban territory in 1962 put psychological pressure on the crew. It made their work more difficult and their relationships with the ICAIC more jumpy and stressful. The political heat was exacerbated by the harsh climatic conditions of the Caribbean. Most filming took place in summer and hot streets of the Cuban capital showed temperatures of 45 to 50 Celsius, i.e. 110 to 125 F, and extreme humidity.<sup>247</sup> For comparison, on the hottest days

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<sup>247</sup> According to the Coproduction Agreement, the filming was supposed to start no later than in June 1962. The climate was discussed, for example, in the interview with the head of dramaturgy Ladislav Fikar for *Kino 18*.

in Czechoslovakia, the temperature rarely goes above 36 Celsius while the climate is much drier.

When the FSB director Veselý arrived in Havana in October 1962, he noted that many crew members were “considerably physically and psychologically exhausted”<sup>248</sup> by the prolonged stay in the heat. That could have been one of the reasons of the “haste” *Večerník Bratislava* mentioned in its article from April 1963 about the co-production, which, according to the article, “[was] filmed with professional skills but it [bore] signs of haste” (“Nevyužitá príležitosť...”). Everyone was eager to return home. In this sense, the filming in Cuba and Indonesia was very similar.

The poor working relations with the ICAIC was another setback. The reasons were probably several, some of them certainly related to the way the ICAIC operated at that time. Their improvisation and the overall lack of organization<sup>249</sup> mirrored the government’s way of managing Cuba in those early years. Even though the improvisation in the ICAIC often contributed to finding creative solutions to their problems, it was not always positive because it created an environment of instability and led to waste of time and resources. The Czechoslovak Filmexport’s delegate Kvasnička characterized the environment at the ICAIC at that time, literally, as a chaos.<sup>250</sup>

The Czechoslovak team, desperate by the heat and overall tension, probably lacked the patience to deal with constant obstacles, inefficiency and need of improvisation,<sup>251</sup> which was a

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<sup>248</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého. Cesta na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962.

<sup>249</sup> ČSF complained about the chaos that ruled at the ICAIC. It was most noted in the ICAIC’s inability, for example, to stick to agreed numbers and dates when they were sending Cuban trainees to the FSB. More in NFA. ÚŘ ČSF. Kolegiální porady 62. 19. porada.

<sup>250</sup> NFA. Kolegiální porady. 1962. R14/BI/6P/9K. Technická pomoc Kubě. Dokument z 1.12.1962, p.2.

<sup>251</sup> The same problems were reported by other specialists working in Cuba.

constant in all the reports the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs received from Czechoslovak experts in Cuba (not only in film). In addition, the ICAIC was likely prioritizing other projects. The lack of support for Čech's co-production could have been related, for example, to the resources required by the concurrent Cuban-French co-production *El otro Cristóbal* (Armand Gatti, 1963),<sup>252</sup> which left the ICAIC “without a single nail” as Eduardo Manet remembers with resentment to this day.<sup>253</sup>

The ICAIC and the Czechoslovak State Film also had financial disputes. The often unnecessary delays increased the overall cost of the production mostly for the FSB. In the end, the Czechoslovak Film Studios had to partially assume the cost of the laboratory work, the postproduction and the synchronization that the ICAIC was responsible for according to the Co-production Agreement.<sup>254</sup> In reality, it meant that all the film stock had to be developed in Prague.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, eight Cuban actors had to travel to Prague for the Spanish synchronization<sup>256</sup> at additional cost to the Film Studios Barrandov for work that the ICAIC had originally agreed to do in Cuba at its expense. Notwithstanding, the Czechoslovaks could not enforce any penalties for ideological and business reasons. Ideologically, the Czechoslovaks had to show support and understanding to Cuba due to the recent Missile Crisis. As for the business reasons, the ČSF did not always fulfill all their obligations contracted with the ICAIC either.

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<sup>252</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého z cesty na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962.

<sup>253</sup> Eduardo Manet. Phone interview. August 2015.

<sup>254</sup> More information about this situation can be found in NFA, ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K and in Veselý's report from his visit to Cuba in October 1962.

<sup>255</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého. Cesta na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962.

<sup>256</sup> NFA, ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Machkův dopis z 4.12.1962.

Therefore, they could not really insist on penalties when the ICAIC did not fulfill theirs.<sup>257</sup>

As the co-production was nearing the end, the relationships between the two teams were straining more and more, according to the account of the FSB director Veselý who arrived to Havana in October 1962.<sup>258</sup> His intervention helped to relax everyone and the atmosphere of close friendship prevailed in the end as his report read. His presence was particularly important because he arrived during the Missile Crisis and stayed in Cuba until November 8. None of the other two socialist co-production teams had the luxury of an on-site ideological and moral support of one of the highest leaders of their state film institution (not having it had serious consequences for the *Preludio 11* crew). In the end, the only relationship that remained tense between the two teams was the one between Vladimír Čech and Alfredo Guevara.<sup>259</sup>

Guevara did not think highly of Čech. He blamed him for all the problems concerning Čech's relationship with the ICAIC. When Dubovský spoke to Guevara after the premiere of the film, the ICAIC's director indicated that the film director himself was at fault for the difficulties he endured during the film realization. "Had he established a different relationship with the ICAIC's leadership, he would have received more help."<sup>260</sup> From his words we can deduce that the ICAIC's leadership was sabotaging or at least ignoring Čech's production needs because Guevara and Čech did not get along. Fortunately, according to Veselý, his visit and his ability to foster communication, managed to calm the staff and motivate the Cubans to put in more effort.

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<sup>257</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1963. Zpráva o situaci v kubánském filmovém průmyslu ve 4. čtvrtletí 1962 od velvyslance Pavlíčka. 31.1.1963, p.11.

<sup>258</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého. Cesta na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962.

<sup>259</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého. Cesta na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962.

<sup>260</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 63 and 78 to 79. R12/BI/3P/1K. Dubovského zpráva o týdnu československého filmu v Havaně, p. 8.

He even managed to increase the interest of the ICAIC's directorship<sup>261</sup> in the co-production, which translated in more willingness to help.

Differences in personalities, interests and expectations were not the only challenge. The co-production also faced problems stemming from misunderstandings related to incompatible cultural and legal realities of both countries. One of the examples was the different approach to copyrights, for example, for film songs. This was a particularly tricky situation in case of American songs. Čech inquired with the ICAIC director of the sound department, Duchesne Cuzán, about the copyrights for two American songs "Over the Rainbow"<sup>262</sup> and "Crying the River"<sup>263</sup> because he wanted to use them in his film. Since the Cuban-American relations were broken and Cuba was not a member of the Berne Convention for copyright protection or any other similar convention, the ICAIC did not feel the need to comply with the copyrights for original songs. Its philosophy was that since the Americans did not pay for the use of Cuban songs, they should reciprocate. In their understanding, Czechoslovakia was exempt from paying anything because it was Cuba's co-production partner.<sup>264</sup> However, the FSB legal department was not convinced by Cuban assurances and recommended not to use the songs.

Cuba was isolated and subjected to the U.S. embargo, and therefore, it did not face any repercussions for copyright violations but the case of Czechoslovakia was completely different.

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<sup>261</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF Zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 63 and 78 to 79. R12/BI/3P/1K. Dubovského zpráva o týdnu československého filmu v Havaně, p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> Probably the song "Somewhere over the Rainbow" by Harold Arlen (music) and E.Y. Harburg (lyrics) written in 1933 for *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939). The song won the Oscars for the Best Original Song.

<sup>263</sup> Probably "Cry Me a River" by Ella Fitzgerald released in 1955.

<sup>264</sup> FSB. Komu tančí Havana. Dopis R. Hájka náměstkovi ředitele pro výrobu Schmiedbergerovi z 8.9.1962.

Czechoslovakia was a member of the Berne Convention. Even though the socialist bloc was antagonist to the West, socialist countries were still connected to the West through products and services and had to respect certain rules. At that time, the Czechoslovak films started to win important international awards and the film festival in Karlovy Vary had become recognized as an international film festival, therefore, Czechoslovakia had much to lose.

The ČSF was not willing to risk its recently acquired favorable status on the international film market. If they had used the songs in the film without permission, they would have been exposed to financial sanctions in dollars by the American publishing houses. Additionally, no one would buy the showing rights for the co-production from them because the remaining members of the Convention would sabotage its release in their countries, including the socialist bloc members of the Convention. The ČSF could have purchased the copyrights to the songs but because of the tense political situation around the Missile Crisis, they did not want to pursue a consent from the American authors. The ČSF assumed the authors would either not give their consent at all or would have given it only under unacceptable financial conditions.<sup>265</sup> Using another soundtrack was a more practical solution.

### **The Conundrum of the Quest for Authenticity**

*Para quién baila La Habana* was the first ever socialist co-production and as such generated high expectations. These expectations – probably similarly to *Soy Cuba* – further exacerbated the film’s “flip” with the Cuban and Czechoslovakian critics and audiences. The Cubans expected the co-production to not only be a developmental tool but also a masterpiece. They wanted an

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<sup>265</sup> FSB, Prague. Komu tančí Havana. Dopis Nora Hájkovi z 19.9.1962.

artistic film that would also be political, i.e. match the Cuban political goals while being artistically sophisticated and authentic. It is not surprising that by not fulfilling these expectations, *Para quién baila La Habana* received harsh criticism. The Critics in both countries slammed its lack of artistic qualities and inability to reflect complexities of the Cuban character and the Cuban life. They considered that the biggest problem was the insufficiently elaborated script, which hindered the authenticity of the representation. They blamed the authors for not having done their homework (Chanan 167). The problem, however, was more complex.

Čech and Procházka had only seven weeks to research and write their script, but in spite of that, they tried to get to the bottom of things. During his first visit to Cuba in 1961, Čech saw Cuba as a tourist. That was the perspective the ICAIC facilitated to foreign delegates. Nonetheless, when he later returned for this second visit with Procházka they wanted to get to know Cuba differently and capture it in their script as truthfully as possible. They proceeded in a similar way as the documentarist Šefranka before them: they crisscrossed the island, visited agricultural cooperatives, sugar refineries, and ports, met with people and talked with them. They wanted to encounter the *real* Cuba as Čech shared in his interview with Slavíková for *Kino*. They wanted to discover it for themselves as filmmakers, not as foreign delegates.

The director felt that he and Procházka succeeded in capturing the true feelings and thoughts of the Cuban people (“Čech na Kubě”). According to Čech, they managed to “capture the different types of Cuban characters and destinies, which [were] incredibly heterogeneous and [were] in [that] revolutionary time especially rich in abrupt shifts.” The film reviewers could not disagree more. They complained precisely about the lack of development of characters and



incompetent acting that further flattened their psychology.<sup>266</sup> Cubans did not recognize themselves in the characters and found the film inauthentic. This aspect did not remain hidden to the Czechoslovaks either. For example, the ambassador Pavlíček characterized the story and the theme as shallow and described the film as unintelligible<sup>267</sup> in his letter from April 1963. Czechoslovak audience had the opportunity to compare it with Cuban films shown during the Cuban Film Week in Prague. The film did not win with them either.

The plot is promising. In the early 1960, a revolutionary fighter Eduardo returns from Canada to liberated Cuba after three years of jail for smuggling arms to the anti-Batista fighters in Cuba before 1959. He is looking forward to seeing his co-fighters: José and Margarita, Luis, and especially Laura he has been in love with all these years. Nevertheless, nothing is as he has expected: Luis is no longer committed to the Revolutionary cause and Laura, this year's carnival queen, has been dating him.

Luis's family is planning to illegally leave Cuba shielded by a sabotage act in the port in the middle of the carnival night. Before that, Luis tempts Laura to leave Cuba along with him. During the carnival night, Eduardo confronts Luis. The fight is not as much about their political differences as for the sake of Laura and her feelings. Finally, a ship explodes in the port as an act of sabotage, which takes José's life along with the lives of other militiamen and port workers. The entire Havana runs to the rescue. The boat with the runaway bourgeois, Luis included, is apprehended by fishermen and all its occupants arrested.

The Cuban Revolution triumphed merely four years before *Para quién baila La Habana*

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<sup>266</sup> See the reviews in *Verde olivo* and *Bohemia*.

<sup>267</sup> NA. 35 Kuba 1963. Pavlíčkův dokument z 8.4.1963.

was screened. In a country like Cuba, where such a highly transformative event took place, it was important to portray the recent history as close to reality as possible. That meant 1) to show it in a way aligned with how people who had participated in it remembered it, and 2) to make sure it resonated with the way how the country leaders wanted the people to remember it.

Cuban cinema had as its primary goal to *document* the Revolutionary process and it did it through all its productions. The ICAIC made many documentaries at that time about the achievements of the Revolution and also their fiction films aligned with the required official historic discourse. In films like *Historias de la Revolución*, which featured the battle for Santa Clara in one of the stories, or *El joven rebelde*, which showed a process of gaining the Revolutionary consciousness of a young man who joined the Rebel Army in Sierra Maestra, the filmmakers researched well and made sure to not to depart too far from the reality. They often cast real Rebels, many of whom still preserved their characteristic beard. Cuban filmmakers made sure to portray the Revolutionary fervor, the dedication and the spirit of self-sacrifice that the Cuban Revolution was known for.

How important was this “historical truth” for the revolutionary leaders proves a conversation that Alois Poledňák, the Central Director of the ČSF, had with Fidel Castro during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Czechoslovak Film Week in Havana in March 1963. They spoke about a film that Julio García Espinosa was preparing. Its main episode was to be a fight in Sierra Maestra in which Castro had personally participated. Castro pointed out to Poledňák that he was welcoming the idea but emphasized that the filmmakers would have to “pay much attention to the historical truth, so that it would not end up distorted.” He did not care so much about whether the film would talk about him or even “cast” him. He did, however, wanted to make sure the filmmakers

met with many eye-witnesses and participants. He had even promised to García Espinosa he would personally guide him through the sites of the fight, would explain him everything on the spot and would personally introduce him to interesting people. In the end, Castro emphasized again that “what he cared about was the *veracity* of the fight” [italics added].<sup>268</sup>

It was expected from *all* the films made in Cuba about Cuba at that time to stay faithful to the “historical truth”. The 1960 co-productions were no exception because the Revolutionary process was their main theme as well. The closest to Cuban acceptance was probably Ugo Ulive and Oswaldo Dragún’s *Crónica cubana* (1963), which even incrustated a documentary footage from the Bay of Pigs Invasion, similar to the one Gutiérrez Alea uses in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. However, all the other co-productions took too many liberties in depicting the Cuban Revolution. Gatti in *El otro Cristóbal* did not even pretend to assimilate his representation to the reality. His film was an allegory and was about the entire Latin America. The socialist co-productions, although they tried to be faithful to the best of their abilities and possibilities of the genres they chose, ended up accused of deviating from the reality.

*Para quién baila La Habana* did not satisfy the critics mostly because it did not transmit authenticity and it was inaccurate in its depiction of certain events. La Coubre explosion from 1960, which the filmmakers took as an inspiration for one of the scenes in the film, was one of the examples. Even the Czechoslovak critics who saw the film alongside the Cuban documentaries and fiction films during the Cuban Film Week in Prague, noticed the co-production did not resemble the films Cubans made about their country.

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<sup>268</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF zahraniční záležitosti. 1962 – 63. R12/BI/3P/1K. Zpráva o týdnu čs. filmu v Havaně 14. – 21.3.1963, p. 4.

The newspaper *Lidová demokracie* contributed the lack of authenticity to the fact that “a Czechoslovak writer and a Czechoslovak director [wrote] a story for Cubans from their own history”. Their fable was about as convincing as “their visibility [could] have been, had they been sitting at a green desk in Czechoslovakia looking over the sea to distant Havana” (“Nové filmy”). The feedback was similar in Cuban periodicals. *Bohemia* in an article from March 1963 called the co-production “a waste of resources” that should have been placed “in the hands of [Cuban] filmmakers. Those, when they create [their] work, good or bad, never create a work that is false.” (Luis M. López “Para quién baila La Habana”). This was not entirely true if we remember Gutiérrez Alea’s assessment of his *Cumbite* about Haiti. Let’s now look at what Cubans perceived “false” and why.

The reviewers in Cuba mostly found inauthentic the sequences that distorted or diminished the heroic contribution of the pro-Revolutionary forces or the abuse of Batista’s followers. *Bohemia* and *Verde olivo* pointed out three situations particularly. Luis M. López from *Bohemia*, who later blasted *Soy Cuba* as well, mentions the underground movement sequence, i.e. the scene when Eduardo and Laura hang illegal anti-Batista posters. Unfortunately, he does not explain why he found the scene problematic.

One hypothesis is that the film simplifies the engagement of the members of the underground movement that this critic was particularly sensitive about as we have seen in Chapter 2. The film shows their effort as disorganized, isolated and inconsequential, and the characters’ behavior as foolish and lacking in discipline. This is certainly not the way how the Cuban leadership wanted to show one of the pillars of the Revolution to the international and local audience. The same can be said about the scene where a militiaman (José) dances *pachanga*

at his post during the carnival instead of being vigilant. Such carelessness costs him his life in the end. The Cubans resented this scene particularly and some took it as an offense. Luis M. López found the situation not only false but absurd (“Para quién baila La Habana”).

The problem was not only in how the film portrayed the positive forces of the Revolution but also its enemies. For example, in the sequence where Luis and Laura hide the injured and unconscious Eduardo at Luis’s family house at the countryside, the protagonists are afraid they will be discovered by the Batista’s police that keeps on walking by. According to López’s article, this sequence was “made up” for the suspense rather than reflecting reality. According to him, the police never bothered the rich nor judged their habits (such as having women over). Neither did fishermen, who posed, according to the article, no real danger to the rich on their boats. Therefore, before 1959, Luis had no reason to engage in an interaction with them when he was taking Eduardo to Miami to save him from sure death – contrary to what the film suggests.

The discussion on authenticity is one of the most interesting aspects in the analysis of this film because it points to differences and similarities in the aesthetics as well as the political goals between the two countries. It also reveals the degree of maturity of the film critique in Cuba and its political manipulation. In the aesthetics, we witness the Czechoslovak filmmakers’ struggle between their ambition to create something new and conveying a clear political message convincingly. They could not leave behind fully the inheritance of socialist realism, even though this style was already considered obsolete in the socialist bloc. However, even though the film sins with schematism, the filmmakers came up with characters and situations that were closer to the real life and real people with their conflicts and ambiguities than expected. Thus they approximated to the New Wave aesthetics. The filmmakers worked hard to tell a story from

Cuban history with techniques and images that could potentially satisfy their Czechoslovak home audiences but the final result disappointed the audience in Cuba.

It was not easy to find the right balance between a political message and a good and authentic story. Čech did not succeed in his attempt because he tried to combine too many genres. He wanted the film to be fictional but also documentary, melodramatic but political. He wanted to create a fictional film, yet the extent of carnival sequences is excessive for a fiction film. In the words of the director, the original intention was that the carnival would only *underscore* the atmosphere in the film because the creators wanted to avoid creating “anything that would resemble the so called carnival films” (“Čech na Kubě”) like *Black Orpheus*.

In the end, however, the carnival occupied much more dominant space than originally envisioned. The Cuban directors like Gutiérrez Alea in his *Las doce sillas* and Ulive’s *Crónica cubana* managed to create films that were more effective and creative in their combining fiction and documentary. They kept the documentary sequences to the minimum in order to emphasize their political point without hindering the action. Still, the three socialist co-productions together with these first Cuban fiction films served as a learning curve for later Cuban films like *La primera carga al machete*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Las aventuras del Juan Quinquín* (Julio García Espinosa, 1967), which mastered the merger of the two genres.

### **Politics, Entertainment and Art**

The director needed to find a way to deliver an ideological message because *Para quién baila La Habana* was after all a political film in support of the Cuban Revolution. The problem was that *just* political films usually did not appeal to audiences. The socialist countries learned it after

many unsuccessful socialist realism films in the 1950s (the 1930s and 1940s in the USSR). When the socialist bloc leaders realized the moviegoers went to see only Western films because they were entertaining, they changed strategy. They understood that in order to influence the masses through films, the audience first had to find the movies attractive.

As one solution, socialist filmmakers started to use popular genres to push political agenda. Resorting to genres such as western or melodrama helped. We can see it in the case of *Under the Phrygian Star* (Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 1954), a film where the unfortunate love of two political agitators forms the central line of the story. The film was well received by the audience in Poland (Haltorf 65). The melodrama was popular with Cuban audiences as well because their taste had been formed by Hollywood and Mexican cinema.

The choice of a popular genre by itself could not “save” the films because the political agenda contained in them often led to unwanted schematism. Schematism was a problem in many socialist bloc films from that time period and even later. Some Czechoslovak directors, like František Vlácil, resorted to poetic cinema (Chapter 2). Others experimented with more contemporary themes and treated conflicts in a more critical light than what had been possible before 1956. None of them, however, really knew how far they could go. It was a question of negotiation with the authorities and the audiences.

Some creators were able to adapt to the trend faster but some preferred to play it safe. The Czechoslovak Commission for the Film Propaganda complained that some authors still resorted to schematism because they were unable to conduct “a deep, non-dogmatic analysis of facts of life.”<sup>269</sup> Nobody knew what they were looking for. In this regard, *Para quién baila La*

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<sup>269</sup> A report of the Commission for Film Propaganda gives as an example *Zámek pro Barborku* (Stanislav Strnad, 1962) that curiously one Cuban critic blasted as reactionary and bourgeois in *Juventud rebelde*. NFA. Sekretariát

*Habana* is a transitional film. Even though it introduced some innovative elements in characters and photography, it could not escape oversimplification. As a result, the artistic quality and depth of the film suffered.

The oversimplification is most evident in the polarization of the two male lead characters, Eduardo and Luis, a positive pro-revolutionary hero and a traitor antihero. Although the two protagonists studied and fought together before 1959, their class difference makes them now, after the Revolution triumphed, political adversaries. In this regard, the Czechoslovak and the Cuban perspective coincided – their political agenda targeted bourgeoisie and emigrants-traitors.

In order to emphasize the political division between the two friends and make them more “black and white”, Luis personifies many ethical flaws attributed to the bourgeoisie: he does not work, he prepares an insurance scam; he is a womanizer and a liar; he is cynical and has no regard for others including his own class. This demonization, however, looks forced because in the flashbacks from before 1959, Luis is a hero who saved Eduardo’s life twice. His deed is, however, belittled; much bigger importance is given to Luis’s belonging to the exploiting class.

What we are missing here is a transition, an event or series of events, a dialogue or thought that would justify this change in Luis’s character. Such a transition would facilitate an understanding of why a hero from three years ago is suddenly portrayed as a villain. Regardless, he is expelled from the midst of his pro-Revolutionary friends and left in between two worlds neither of which he belongs to. Eduardo, on the other hand, is a hero and a martyr who suffered in a capitalist jail for supplying arms to the revolutionaries in Cuba. He has been faithful to Laura all these years, he is not a womanizer like Luis (ideal revolutionaries are monogamous and

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ÚŘ ČSF 63 a 64. R14/AI/2P/5K. Zpráva o činnosti komise pro propagaci filmem v zahraničí v roce 1962, p. 3.



chaste in the tradition of socialist realism). Furthermore, we catch a glimpse of him carrying an injured sailor out of the burning ship after the explosion. Meanwhile, Luis's family, and by extension Luis, are guilty of the tragedy which they caused to camouflage their escape.

The authors attempted to build this polarization between Eduardo and Luis into a climax in the final confrontation between the two but their intent fell short. Rather than taking a strong political stance against Luis for having turned his back on the Revolution he once fought for, Eduardo acts on the basis of worry about Laura and her feelings. Though Eduardo openly accuses Luis of belonging to the class, which only cares about hoarding money and exploiting others, the rendition is not convincing. Where the film should be strongly political, it errs by melodramatic.

Although the creators have not exploited the full political potential of this scene, they did include some important elements to emphasize the binary opposition. They literally drew the line between "the good and the bad" by placing the camera close to the central axis created by a fence around Luis's property. The entire confrontation takes place across that fence. After the initial small talk, the camera moves into a close up of their hand shake through the bars and in the rest of the sequence, we either see the protagonists in a reverse shot with the fence partially obstructing our view, or the two protagonists are in the same frame with the bars between them. Luis pretends to not have a key, so he prevents any possibility to overcome the barrier between them and to reconcile the two groups of Cubans they represent. It is clear they are separated forever. Luis, literally locked inside, cannot leave his environment.

Not even Laura's love can purify Luis and enable him to reintegrate. She is just a trophy for the man who is on the right side, with the Revolution. She is not a catalyst of change. Laura's

status as a carnival queen, her elevated position on the float above all the people and her impeccably white attire drives the point very strongly. In the entire film, she looks and behaves static, as if she were a beautiful porcelain doll who does not decide anything on her own or express her position, opinion or emotion.<sup>270</sup> Her political stance is weak and her anti-emigration position, though suggested, is not developed.

Laura as a trophy has to be kept pure. Therefore, Margarita and José remained her guardians since Eduardo had left for exile. They are the most appropriate guardians and mentors for her because they fully support the Revolution. They have proven that, unlike Luis, they are willing to cut off all ties with the family members who do not support the Revolution. Margarita, for example, has stopped interacting with her mother who opposed her joining the Revolution and the literacy campaign as well as her relationship with a black militiaman. The GDR-Cuban co-production *Preludio 11* made by Kurt Maetzig is more forgiving in regards to mothers with “petit bourgeois prejudices” as we will see in Chapter 6.

Laura’s purity is taken seriously, especially if we understand the film as an allegory, in which case, Laura would symbolize Cuba. José takes his task of protecting Laura’s political purity to heart; he is paternalistic towards her similarly to how the Revolution is paternalistic of Cuban citizens. For example, when José, Margarita and Laura drive Eduardo from the airport, José complains that they “had problems with Laura” referring to her hanging out with Luis. Laura could not be exposed to anti-Revolutionary ideas and sentiments, let alone ideas about abandoning Cuba. Such “contamination” was unacceptable and that is implied in the mise-en-

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<sup>270</sup> This may not have been completely intentional. It was in part due to Odalys Fuentes’s acting, which was criticized strongly in Cuban press precisely for her inability to give her character more identity and strength.

scène of the previous sequence. When Laura meets Margarita and José at the airport, Luis watches them from behind a glass wall. Laura looks at him briefly, turns her face back to her friends and at that moment, two men start cleaning the glass in front of Luis as if he tainted it with his presence.

### **Similarities and Differences in Political Agendas**

The creators did not portray the Revolution accurately and authentically according to Cuban standards, took some politically sensitive missteps and made a few simplifications. In spite of that, they were able to capture some realities in a surprising depth. Because of their experience with the regime in their country, they were able to spot some similarities between Cuba and Czechoslovakia in the political sense and were able to capitalize on them. Most importantly, they came up with a psychology of an intellectual that ended up on the wrong side of the fence because he could not and did not want to give up his bourgeois roots and privileges.

This situation was familiar to Čech and Procházka because since they had come to power in 1948, Czechoslovak communists used a similar anti-bourgeois and anti-intelligentsia rhetoric as the Cuban leadership. Emigration as treason was another theme very relevant to Czechoslovakia since that time. Thanks to the insights Čech and Procházka gained in Cuba and parallels they were able to draw based on their own experiences, the creators contributed to Cuban cinema a psychology of an ambivalent character Luis, later enriched and deepened by Gutiérrez Alea in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*.

In this sense, the most interesting sequence, both politically and from the point of view of the narration, is the party at Luis's family home the night of the escape. First, Luis flirts with his

drunk step-mother María to show the lack of commitment and loyalty in bourgeois male-female relationships. In the next shot, we see him alone in a spotlight in the middle of the patio. The camera-viewer looks at him from a high angle, suggesting not only that he is an actor on stage but also that he will judge and be judged.

After Luis reenters the house, the camera changes focus. Now it represents Luis's point of view. He walks among the half-sleeping guests in the same order as before he left the room. All guests are filmed in the same body posture as the first time. There are two main differences between the before and the after. The first is that while the first time we only see the half-sleeping guests with no sound but the background music, the second time, we hear Luis scornfully condemn them in voiceover. He reveals perverse values and habits of his own class he despises: lack of scruples, superficiality in all relationships, egotism, ambition, laziness, and boredom. This scene recalls Federico Fellini's *Dolce vita* by how vain and empty the lives of these rich people appear.

The second difference consists in that while the first time all guests were in focus, the second time, every time Luis comments on any of them, their faces are shot out of focus making them "disappear". The last two to "vanish" are his step-mother and his father. Luis's step-mother is shown not so much as deprived as lazy but she is condemned all the same. His father, however, is portrayed as the worst of all, the most ambitious. In the end, the camera changes a viewpoint again, allows us to catch a last glimpse of Luis in focus and then he blurs as well. The out of focus images emphasize that all these people, including Luis, are meaningless and empty. The hypothesis is that the authors resorted to "predetermination" on the grounds of class. Luis cannot be "good" because of his bourgeois background.

This sequence is particularly important for what it shares with *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. As a matter of fact, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* seems an amplification or a remake of this scene. Not only Fausto Mirabal (Luis) physically resembles Sergio Corrieri (Sergio) but both directors also used their protagonists to condemn the bourgeois society and its lack of values. Sergio is a rich intellectual (writer) and so is Luis (a medicine student who loves books). Neither one of them belongs; both are outsiders in their own country. They do not identify either with the supporters of the Revolution, even though Luis did actively participate in the anti-Batista struggle, or its adversaries (their own bourgeois class), although Luis decides to leave Cuba with them in the end.

Both Sergio and Luis observe rather than engage. Their thoughts in off are the voice of the final judgement concerning the bourgeois way of life. The way Luis talks about his family and his father's friends carries a very similar tone to how Sergio passes judgement on his friend Pablo and some of the Bay of Pigs prisoners. Sergio uses the same demeaning tone when speaking about his wife Laura as Luis when he talks of his step-mother María: they are both shown as lazy gold-diggers. Luis does, however, suggest a potential of María's rebellion because she had helped to find a doctor to save Eduardo's life before 1959.

Furthermore, both characters use a telescope as an element of the *mise-en-scène* to comment on broader extra-personal historical events that impact them personally. The telescope is not central to Luis. He only uses it once to look at a ship *Rosa*, confiscated to his family by the Revolution, as it is entering the port. Sergio, contrary to Luis, is a *flanêur*, a casual wanderer and observer of street-life in Havana. He uses the telescope throughout the film to survey the city and its inhabitants. Even though the telescope brings him "closer", the telescopes in reality stands

between him and the object of his observation.<sup>271</sup>

The telescope sequences serve in both cases to talk about the changes of ownership and nationalization after the triumph of the Revolution, even though in case of *Para quién baila La Habana* it is not Luis but his father who makes the comment. Lastly, Sergio and Luis both defy their family (Luis) or their friends (Sergio) by suggesting they would stay and join the Revolution, which is considered “the ultimate betrayal” of the bourgeois class..

### **Different Production Practices and Viewing Habits**

Different production culture and practices between the Cuban and Czechoslovak film industries were another aspect that made the film appear inauthentic to Cubans and created a stir. In this case it was not the length of production or its cost as we have seen in the case of *Soy Cuba*. Similarly to the Soviet film, however, Cuban critics pointed out the photography and the editing as two particularly disliked aspects, which did not resonate with Cuban viewers’ expectations and viewing habits. Curiously, as we have seen earlier, the ICAIC had requested Hanuš to be a teacher to their photographers and Zelenka was very skilled at what he did as well. Still, Cuban press criticized several aspects of their work.

The criticism points to differences in production culture and practices as well as viewing habits on the island. Hanuš’s work was criticized partially because Cuban people had been used to viewing a different kind of cinema than the Central Europeans, both from their previous experience with Hollywood cinema and from their own recent national production. *Para quién*

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<sup>271</sup> The telescope is a device that approximates objects but at the same time, there is a difference between getting physically closer to people and getting closer through a device that “mediates”.

*baila La Habana* can be considered an auteur cinema but without the innovations implemented by Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini, for example. Still, the film's photography, though rather conventional, does not look like mainstream Hollywood films the Cubans were used to viewing before 1959 either.

The Cuban critics complained mostly of the lack of innovation. One of the problems they encountered with the photography was the employment of "studio shots". In his article in *Bohemia* from March 1963, López accuses Hanuš of not being able to leave behind "the path set in the 1940s" because of the overuse of "studio shots". He refers mostly to the numerous scenes of rear projections: conversations in moving vehicles and boat rides shot in a studio. Cuban critics perceived these artificially looking car and boat takes as inauthentic, especially in the context of the Italian Neorealism Cubans highly praised. Secondly, Luis M. López criticized the overuse of red filters which was "contrary to naturalism of shooting in the open air" ("Para quién baila La Habana"). He did admit though that Hanuš used some free cinema techniques and out of focus images (the party scene), which were not standard. Therefore, there were some innovations after all.

Some filming techniques served the purpose of showing Cuban reality better than others. The most evident is the example of how the Czechoslovaks and Cubans represented the first socialist carnival. In *Para quién baila La Habana*, Hanuš used large 35mm cameras that offered more static images using pans, tracking and tilts, overhead planes, zoom, and many long and extreme long shots. Alberto Roldán in his documentary *El primer carnaval socialista* (1962) preferred more dynamic images made with a light weight handheld camera. While Hanuš often employed low and high angles to depict not as much the atmosphere of a popular diversion as the

elegance and beauty of a spectacle, Roldán used mostly an eye level position of the camera, closeups and medium shots of people dancing, eating, and laughing. People in Cuba expected to see similar images they saw in Roldán's documentary. They wanted to see *themselves*. That could only be achieved in a reportage-like photography with a handheld camera.

Czechoslovak and Cuban photographers valued different techniques because they had a different purpose and different audience. In Cuba, the handheld camera was synonymous with documentary style, which depicted Cuban reality most authentically. At the same time, it was a synonym of experimentation and originality. For the famous Cuban photographer Jorge Herrera, for example, coming up with innovative ways to apply the handheld camera became a sense of pride.<sup>272</sup>

The Czechoslovaks, on the other hand, valued filming technically difficult scenes. Especially impressive is one carnival sequence where we see people dancing on balconies in a multiple story building, all well-lit, deep space and deep focus. The camera moves with a slight tilt from the lowest to the highest floor always capturing in detail every single dancer. It may not be the most innovative scene but it shows a solid craft. Odalys Fuentes as well as Manuel Herrera both coincided that those were very difficult sequences to shoot.<sup>273</sup>

The carnival scene is important for yet one reason. It contains “a signature” of the Czechoslovak-Cuban relationship – El Instituto Cubano de la Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP)'s float with a dove sitting on the earth globe. The ICAP's purpose to foster friendship among nations and the image of a dove highlighted the solidarity and the brotherhood of the two

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<sup>272</sup> More about Jorge Herrera's technique in films like *La primera carga al machete* and *Lucía* can be found in *El cine es cortar*.

<sup>273</sup> Odalys Fuentes. Personal interview. September 2014. Manuel Herrera. Personal interview. September 2014.



countries. This is the classical use of the white dove symbol that represents peace and socialist internationalism unlike the white dove in *Soy Cuba* that symbolizes the beginning of the Revolution.

Another element that deserves to be highlighted is the editing. The Czechoslovak master editor Zelenka's did not use the innovative editing style à la Jean-Luc Godard which was admired among Cubans.<sup>274</sup> His work in *Para quién baila La Habana* is quite conventional. Nevertheless, two elements of his work in the film deserve more attention – parallel editing and flashback. They are noteworthy especially in the way they construct political meaning.

The narrative aim of the parallel editing was to build up suspense by alternating carnival scenes with the sabotage and escape of the bourgeois family. In this sense, it did not achieve the dramatic effect it wanted to. However, the escape sequence is very important because it furthers the separation between the two alienated groups of Cubans that Eduardo and Luis represent. The technique connects four actions and four places: empty rocking chairs at the side of the pool of Luis's family residence after everyone left for the port; empty floats and streets in front of the Capitolio building after all people left the carnival procession after the explosion, Luis's family on the boat being intercepted by fishermen, and a multitude of people running towards the port where the tragedy happened.

All people of Cuba meet in the port: one group to do harm, betray and leave, the other to help each other in common solidarity. It is not random they all meet in the port. The port is an intersection and means a choice: some choose to stay with the Revolution, others to abandon it. It is clear whose side the Czechoslovak filmmakers are on. Especially, since emigration and

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<sup>274</sup> Nelson Rodríguez. Skype interview. October 2015.

sabotage were also a hot issue in Czechoslovakia.

The flashback sequence in the film serves the purpose of creating an equation between the Batista's abusive regime and the West from Czechoslovak perspective. The technique uses specific illumination and distinctive soundtrack, which together created an atmosphere that was very different from the scenes in the present. The flashback scenes occur mostly at night and are often filmed with film noir techniques where the low key lighting predominates. The images are accompanied by a non-diegetic sound: a simple three-tone melody that keeps on repeating together with a sound of marching boots. The soundtrack evokes anxiety of constant oppression, surveillance and danger, similarly to the mass music that Luis puts on by accident when he and Laura are hiding Eduardo in the countryside (diegetic sound).

The soundtrack used in the flashback scenes creates a bridge between the flashback scenes in Cuba and North America. As such, it enables the viewers to make a connection between the oppression during Batista's regime and the oppression in Western countries like the United States. This way Čech forges a political statement against the imperialist West, an indispensable element in many socialist bloc and Cuban films. The film characters Eduardo and José establish this connection explicitly during their conversation about Eduardo's "unjust" imprisonment, which, according to the characters of the film, ignored the historical necessity of Eduardo's actions. Later, the accusation comes implicitly through Eduardo's memory of his trial and imprisonment in the United States.

The three tone melody we hear in the flashback from the US is the same as the one we previously heard during the flashback from Cuba. However, two elements changed in the US sequence, compared to the flashbacks from Cuba. This change modified the effect for the viewer.

There is different illumination in the US flashback sequence and the sound of marching boots is no longer there. The three tone melody that connects the two places implies that there is oppression in both countries. The change in the lighting (the scenes in the US have more clarity) and the disappearance of the sound of the boots, which evoked the sense of constant vigilance and peril, suggest that qualitatively the oppression is not the same. While in North America, people can be “wrongly” imprisoned for serving their fatherland, they do not have to hide in the dark of the night and fear for their life like in Batista’s Cuba. Whether this implied message was introduced deliberately reflecting the revisionism in the Czechoslovak politics or by mistake, is hard to say.

### **The State of the Film Critics in Cuba**

The film reviews in Cuba did not only give a testimony about differences and similarities in productions techniques and viewing habits but also about the Cuban film critique. The development of the film critique in Cuba after 1959 is a topic that is barely ever discussed, yet it is important to consider it when evaluating a film from the 1960s on the background of its reviews from the official press.

There were only a handful of experienced and knowledgeable film critics from the pre-Revolution era, such as José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, Mario Rodríguez Alemán and Guillermo Cabrera Infante (who was not in Cuba between 1962 and 1965). Many others were new and had little to no training in the film analysis. As a consequence, they were sometimes unable to assess accurately all aspects of films that were different from Cuba’s own production. The inexperienced and militant Josefina Ruiz from *Verde olivo*, for example, did not understand why

someone needed to film Cuban carnival if people could “just go and see it at Paseo del Prado” (“La segunda semana del cine checo”).

Other times, they read some film elements literally because they were unable to capture their more subtle meaning. Josefina Ruiz, for example, criticized the sound of marching boots in the film because she found it illogical that the sound would continue when Luis and Eduardo were already on the boat (“La segunda semana del cine checo”). She saw it as an editing mistake. The sound of the boots under the sea surface, however, was perfectly justified, especially in combination with the search light that the boat was trying to avoid. The soundtrack creates a feeling of imminent danger of capture and possible death by the Batista’s police.

### **Consequences for the Collaboration**

The film transmitted a political agenda in favor of the Revolution, yet it did not fulfill the ICAIC’s expectations. It was mostly because the film’s story and characters do not instigate viewers’ empathy with any of the positive characters and could not, therefore, be exploited for propaganda purposes. Since the film did not satisfy the ICAIC’s political agenda and, to make the matters worse, also failed its artistic expectations, the ICAIC responded with silence. Similarly as with the other two co-productions *Soy Cuba* and *Preludio 11*, the ICAIC never published a review in *Cine Cubano*, the ICAIC’s official journal. *Soy Cuba* had at least considerable coverage during the filming, mostly thanks to Enrique Pineda Barnet and the general interest in Urusevsky’s work. However, *Para quién baila La Habana* did not receive a single interview or reportage before or after in spite of being the first co-production with the socialist bloc and a joint project with a country that offered extensive support to Cuban cinema.

Even though originally, *Para quién baila La Habana* was to be followed by several other co-productions between the two countries, both sides decided otherwise after the premiere. Instead of engaging in another fiction film co-production with Czechoslovakia, Guevara invited several famous directors like Zdeněk Brynych, Jiří Weiss and Bruno Šefranka to film documentaries about the Cuban painting, construction, school city, etc. He made the same offer also to the Polish director Andrzej Wajda. Guevara considered it a good way for acclaimed foreign filmmakers to better understand Cuban reality. It was also an assurance that no foreigner would commit another misrepresentation in case any of them attempted to create a fiction film about Cuba again in the future. None of these directors, however, accepted his offer<sup>275</sup> because at that time they were more interested in filming at home than making documentaries in Cuba about topics that did not promise much creative potential.

After the co-production, the Czechoslovak State Film never again ventured into making a feature film about Cuba. However, as mentioned earlier, the two countries did co-produce two episodes of the Czechoslovak spy-detective series *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* for the Czechoslovak State Television in the end of the 1970s. The episodes were edited into a feature film *A Hostage from Bella Vista* (1979). The sequel, known in Cuba as *El capitán Zeman*, did not have Cuba as the main theme, let alone the Cuban Revolution. In this regard, the co-production's aftermath was similar to *Soy Cuba*. The sequel, however, inserted a character that represented the Czechoslovak-Cuban friendship as well as the cooperation in the area of secret services. There is a Cuban spy in Chile that ends up allying forces with the Czechoslovak secret

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<sup>275</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF zahraniční záležitosti 1962 – 63 and 78 to 79. R12/BI/3P/1K. Zpráva Dubovského o Týdnu československého filmu v Havaně, p. 8.

agent Žitný in search of a counterrevolutionary central that is behind several murders and sabotages in Czechoslovakia.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Cuba and Czechoslovakia opened the decade with a promise of an intense cooperation but much had to be adjusted along the way. Both film institutes jointly traced a series of projects that ranged from consultations and cadre training as well as making films. Training cadres was what the ICAIC needed the most and the Czechoslovak aid was mostly geared in that direction. One of the means to achieve this goal was a co-production. The ČSF proposed several filmic projects that were to serve that purpose but almost all were discarded. Even these projects, however, have a value because they speak to preferences in terms of topics and interests.

The two co-production projects “Paloma negra” and *Para quién baila La Habana* were an important barometer of the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Cuba. “Paloma negra” had a much more daring script that ventured into a topic distant to Czechoslovakia and at the same time sensitive to the Cubans but it could not be made into a film for political reasons. On the contrary, *Para quién baila La Habana* was filmed but Cubans did not receive it well. It served mostly as a platform for forming the ICAIC’s film cadres but the Cubans also had artistic expectations. Those were not fulfilled. Instead of depicting the euphoria of the triumph – which was what the ICAIC probably expected – the film zooms in on the discord between the supporters and the adversaries of the Revolution and the complexities of their relationships. Together with its reviews in Cuban press, the film shows how the Czechoslovaks perceived these tensions and how the Cubans reacted to such representation of their immediate reality.

In the end, both the Czechoslovak and the Cuban leadership concluded that the cooperation was a success in terms of training the ICAIC's technical and film personnel, but a disaster in terms of its artistic qualities. This kind of success, however, proved more important in the long-run because it was an investment in the ICAIC's future. Therefore, notwithstanding the harsh verdict the film received in both countries and the difficulties the crew endured in Cuba during the filming, the FSB director Veselý was convinced that "the film [would] have its historical place in Cuban cinema and in the development of the relationships [between] Cuban cinema and the cinema of the socialist countries."<sup>276</sup>

Czechoslovakia and the USSR were not the only countries that engaged with the Cuban film industry. Also the East Germany's state film institute DEFA initiated contact with the ICAIC. Both countries soon started cooperating. Their collaboration had a potential to become really robust because of the many parallels we can trace between the two countries' political circumstances and the history of their respective state film industries. We will see in the next two chapters to what extent the cooperation was able to fulfill this promise.

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<sup>276</sup> NFA. ÚŘ ČSF 64. R14/AI/1P/9K. Cestovní zpráva ředitele FSB J. Veselého. Cesta na Kubu 21.10. – 8.11.1962, p.5.

## **PART 3**

### **EAST GERMAN – CUBAN COOPERATION**



## CHAPTER 5

### THE DEFA AND THE ICAIC: PARALLEL HISTORIES AND THE FIRST JOINED PROJECTS

The first two parts of this study showed two different versions of socialist internationalism. The Soviet internationalism offered ample resources to build the Cuban cinema (equipment, films stock and training). In addition, Soviet documentary films helped create a favorable image of the Cuban Revolution internationally (Roman Karmen's films). At the same time, however, Soviet internationalism was perceived as a threat to the Cuban national cinematic identity. The Cubans feared that the USSR would impose their discourse on Cuba and the Cuban Revolution and the Soviet way of working (at least that is how the Cuban critics saw *Soy Cuba*). That was also why the number of Soviet experts in the ICAIC was rather low.

On the contrary, Czechoslovak socialist internationalism was not threatening at all. The ICAIC even asked the Czechoslovaks to become the principal advisors for its film industry. The Czechoslovaks impacted the ICAIC the strongest in the area of professional training through the exchange of technical experts. However, they also had strong ambitions in terms of filming. For example, Šefranka made several important documentaries that helped foster support for the Cuban Revolution internationally. In the area of fiction films, however, the largescale plans shrank to only one co-production in the 1960s and two episodes of a spy sequel in the 1970s.

In Part 3, we will examine East German socialist internationalism, which differed from both of them. The collaboration between the East German state film institute DEFA and the Cuban ICAIC looked very promising initially, especially, because the countries shared similar political challenges and their film industries shared many traits in their early histories. The

cooperation developed on many levels. Among other things, the DEFA and the ICAIC engaged in several joint film projects. In the end, however, the cooperation ended up much more reduced than what it could have been. The archival documents from Bundesarchiv in Berlin, consulted for this study, suggest that the two main challenges were a substantial disagreement in question of aesthetics between the two countries and the GDR's limited resources.

This chapter surveys the main parallels between the two film industries in terms of infrastructures, personnel, audiences, and self-representation. It also explores the 1960s cooperation between the GDR and Cuba that mainly consisted of film weeks, film exchange and filming in Cuba. Finally, it examines what aspects of the cooperation worked well and highlights some of the obstacles the collaboration encountered. Some of those challenges will be explored in depth on the case of the first East German-Cuban co-production *Preudio 11* in the chapter that follows.

### **East German Socialist Internationalism**

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Soviet internationalism was set to compete with the United States, its main adversary in the Cold War. East German socialist internationalism, on the other hand, was mostly geared towards its own antagonist, West Germany, as indicated in a report from the East German Ministry of Culture. The report stated that for the German Democratic Republic (GDR) it was necessary to engage in cultural political work in Latin America because “Western Germany also [increased] its activity towards Latin America in scientific and political but also cultural area”.<sup>277</sup> Thus, East German interest in Latin American collaboration was motivated not

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<sup>277</sup> BArch. DR1 15972. Bericht über die Tätigkeit auf dem Gebiet der kulturellen Beziehungen mit dem Ausland im 1. Halbjahr 1960, p. 8.

only by the interest to promote socialist internationalism through culture, but also by an intranational competition between capitalist West Germany and communist East Germany. Cuba became the GDR's most important partner in Latin America, together with Brasil and Uruguay.<sup>278</sup> As customary, this foreign policy also applied to cultural institutions, including the DEFA, *Deutsche Film AG* (German Film Corporation), the East German State Film institute.

The Cuba's and the GDR's unique geographical and political position made their relationship different from Cuba's affiliation with the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia. Similar histories of their respective film industries and their discursive strategies regarding their respective national cinematic identities made the DEFA and the ICAIC particularly well-suited partners for a strong cooperation. The East German filmmakers, who participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> GDR Film Week in Cuba, felt an affinity towards the Cuban people and their struggle during their stay. The film director Frank Beyer described it in his report:

...the Revolutionary attitude of the Cuban people, complicated situation of Cuba at the door of Yanqui imperialism and many similarities between the GDR and Cuba [showed] from the very beginning [that] the Film Week [was] not just [about] sympathies in the artistic realm... 'the wave of enthusiasm' we have encountered in Cuba can be mainly attributed to this shared fight of our two nations. This sense of community can also be found with ordinary people.<sup>279</sup>

This sense of community described by Beyer is what Jennifer Hosek calls "extended

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<sup>278</sup> BArch. DR1 15972. Bericht über die Tätigkeit auf dem Gebiet der kulturellen Beziehungen mit dem Ausland im 1. Halbjahr 1960, p. 8.

<sup>279</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Bericht über den Aufenthalt der ersten Filmdelegation der DDR in Cuba. Frank Beyer, December 5, 1961.

Heimat”, i.e. the extended fatherland, a feeling that the fatherland or homeland extends beyond one country’s borders.<sup>280</sup> This feeling was the closest to the practical application of the premise of socialist idealism that the progressive people of all the world are in fact one family.<sup>281</sup> However, despite the feeling of belonging to a shared larger community, despite having similar challenges and in spite of the initial enthusiasm from both sides, the cooperation between the GDR and Cuba did not fulfill the expectations.

### **The DEFA and the ICAIC: Parallel Histories**

#### *The Enemy at the Doorstep*

The case of the GDR and Cuban cooperation is very interesting because the two countries shared many challenges, though not necessarily at the same time. First and foremost, they had their biggest enemy at their doorstep. In addition, they also had been forcefully isolated from most of the global community by the Hallstein doctrine<sup>282</sup> (the GDR) and the US embargo (Cuba). Furthermore, they had not been officially recognized as sovereign states by most Western countries and their allies around the world, including most Latin America and Africa. These circumstances influenced the two countries’ self-understanding, their cinematic self-

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<sup>280</sup> More on Hosek’s definition of extended Heimat in general and in relation to Cuba can be found in Chapter 2 of *Sun, Sex and Socialism*.

<sup>281</sup> Hence Karl Marx’s famous slogan: “*Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!*” [Proletarians of all countries, Unite!]. The slogan has also been translated as “Workers of all the world, Unite!” (translation approved by Engels). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm>.

<sup>282</sup> The Hallstein doctrine, established in 1955, gave the Federal Republic of Germany “an exclusive mandate” to represent Germany internationally. It meant that it could potentially break diplomatic relations with any country except the Soviet Union that had diplomatic relations with the GDR. In 1969, the FRG recognized the GDR as a sovereign state and the doctrine was officially abolished in 1972. [http://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument\\_de&dokument=0019\\_hal&object=translation](http://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0019_hal&object=translation).

representation and the relationship with each other.

In the beginning of the 1960s, Cuba was one of the places of friction between the two Germanies. The GDR was not the only German diplomatic representation in Havana. According to the Hungarian ambassador János Beck, Revolutionary Cuba “[wanted] to preserve diplomatic relations with as many countries as possible”. Therefore, in March 1962, when Beck wrote the report, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) still had diplomats in Havana. The number of diplomatic staff, however, did not justify the low cultural and commercial exchange the FRG had with Cuba and Beck suspected intelligence work for the Americans.<sup>283</sup> In January 1963, Castro recognized the GDR. In retribution, the FRG closed its embassy in Havana, breaking diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba (Gray 138). The first GDR ambassador was the General Major of the Popular General Army, Fritz Johne,<sup>284</sup> which indicates that the kind of relationship the two countries were most interested in at that time.

Both the GDR and Cuba had to break with their immediate neighbors. Cuba had to sever its strong economic and cultural ties with the United States. The GDR, created in 1949, had to separate forcefully from its “sister” Federal Republic of Germany. By doing it, they were also breaking with some of their past. Therefore, they needed a new, strong national narrative to defend their new national identity against both internal and external enemies. Cuba promoted a

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<sup>283</sup> At that time, the FRG had in Cuba, according to Beck, an ambassador and seven diplomats. According to Beck, the FRG did not want to recognize the legitimacy of the GDR because if they did, by the Hallstein principle, they would have to break diplomatic relations with Cuba. They did not want to do it because that would have worsened their position in Latin America and Africa where they were interested to penetrate economically. More information in “Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on the Federal Republic of Germany and Cuba”. A declassified report from the Wilson Center, written by the Hungarian Ambassador Beck on March 16, 1962. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116756.pdf?v=3b3fb9e94109fd0ee0f7e484ec7367aa>.

<sup>284</sup> According to *Europa-Archive*, Volume 20, part 1. According to *Directory of East German Officials*, Fritz was in Cuba from May 1963 to October 1966.

narrative of itself as an independent country, which defeated imperialism and rebuilt and modernized the country at a high speed. The GDR created a narrative of “the good” Germany that was anti-fascist, socialist (workers were victims of the WWII) and also anti-colonialist.<sup>285</sup> On the contrary, the FRG was “imperialist and fascist” and therefore responsible for the colonialism of the German Empire as well as the World War II. The constant threat to these new identities made both countries less tolerant towards any distortion or deviation from the official discourse. The cinema was one of the most important tools to further these narratives, but the two countries differed greatly in how they approached the task, as we will see later on.

### *Artistic Freedom and Plurality*

The film industries of both countries shared – almost twenty years apart – artistic freedom and plurality in the beginning of their national state film institutions. In 1945, Germany was partitioned among the victors of the World War II. The part occupied by the Soviets, the Soviet Occupational Zone (SOZ), became in 1949 officially the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The DEFA<sup>286</sup> was created on the rubbles of the UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft)<sup>287</sup> in

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<sup>285</sup> Contrary to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, German Empire owned colonies until 1919. Germans even owned colonies in Latin America in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. The GDR distanced itself from the past in its official historic discourse.

<sup>286</sup> The initiative for founding the studio came from the Soviets. In accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) confiscated all property of the Nazi film industry. A month later, filmmakers, writers, and representatives from the SMAD, the German Central Administration for People’s Education (DVV), and the German Communist Party (KPD) met in the Hotel Adlon in Berlin to discuss getting the film industry off the ground (Heimann, 50-51). The studios were wrecked, lacked equipment and materials such as film stock (43) but the reorganization of the motion picture industry progressed quickly (Feinstein 28). The DEFA was originally set up as a private firm but the studio was entirely dependent on the SMAD or the DVV for financial backing. The possibility of independent revenues was further restricted by the exclusive distribution rights held by the Soviet film ministry. The studio soon also lost whatever nominal legal independence it ever had. As of July 1947, the Soviets held a majority interest in the company and the SED had a minority one (Heimann 56-57).

<sup>287</sup> The UFA was founded with the encouragement of the German military during the WWII and quickly became the

Babelsberg, a suburb of Potsdam outside Berlin, in 1945 as an initiative of the Red Army officials in charge of the zone.

The UFA's production was considered "escapist" and representative of "bourgeois false consciousness" in the Soviet Occupational Zone (Feinstein 20). In addition, the UFA production was "synonymous with the many Nazi propaganda pictures produced in the studio" (21). Therefore, in order to distance itself from the UFA's aesthetics, the new DEFA needed to "[shape] a radically new cinema out of the remnants of a discredited one", even though physically it was not building new facilities but rather reconstructing what was left from the UFA (20). The ICAIC also had to create a radically new Cuban cinema in opposition to an escapist and morally dubitable Hollywood cinema, which it tried to depart from. Similarly to the DEFA, the ICAIC depended on the facilities that had belonged to their "enemies", the Americans, before 1959 (studios, laboratories as well as movie theatres), which were nationalized by the new Cuban government.<sup>288</sup>

The rebuilding of a new cinematic identity took place on different terms before and after the GDR was created in 1949. Kurt Maetzig, the director of *Preludio II*, described in his interview with Martin Brady in 1996 in London that during the Soviet Occupational Zone period, there was much more creative freedom for East German filmmakers than after the GDR was established (qtd. in Allan and Sandford 83).<sup>289</sup> The DEFA's first years are sometimes referred to

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largest commercial film studio in Europe, Germany's Hollywood. Most UFA films had been conventional entertainment films: "revue" films with leggy showgirls dancing in massive formations or historical "costume" films with nationalist messages. They were considered escapist production which represented, "bourgeois false consciousness" for the DEFA (Feinstein 21).

<sup>288</sup> About the different decrees and facilities they nationalized see *La tienda negra*.

<sup>289</sup> Some scholars consider the initial tolerance of the Soviet cultural policy, along with the wider "anti-fascist, democratic transformation", as a tactical ploy (Feinstein 23), connected to appealing to broader sectors in both

as its golden age (Feinstein 25). Maetzig remembered that

[the filmmakers] were very free and could make the films [they] wanted to make... There was not yet any German censorship. Censorship was in the hands of the cultural division of the Soviet Military Government... [the Soviet] officials [had] a very high standard of education – they were all university professors and so on, and they gave [the German filmmakers] an enormous amount of freedom. This was possible because at that time the theory was officially approved that there should not be an imitation of the Soviet system in Germany, but rather a *specifically German road to socialism*... “[The Soviet officials] hoped that they could help Germany to a better system than the one they had left behind them at home.” [italics added] (qtd. in Allan and Sandford 83)

During those first years after the war, the filmmakers were searching for a “specifically German road” to socialist film. The initial freedom Maetzig described made the DEFA’s initial output quite diverse. It displayed different lines of continuity with the earlier German cinema, for example, emulation of the expressionist art in films of the 1920s. It also took from the Italian Neorealism, which resonated strongly with the alternative filmmaking traditions in Germany. Both the German Left and the Italian Neorealists rejected “the glitz and glamour of commercial cinema” in favor of films attempting to address issues allegedly of more genuine concern to the audiences (Feinstein 27).

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Cuban cinema was also marked by plurality. In the first years, several cinema companies co-existed on the island alongside the ICAIC. Some

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Germanies to support the SED in case of reunification of the country (24).



of them came from before 1959 and others were newly created by Cuban citizens. However, the nationalizations and other measures that the new government took, like the creation of Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas,<sup>290</sup> gradually “pushed” them out of the equation. The ICAIC absorbed them. Several short and feature films were also made in Cuba at that time (not by the ICAIC) but the ICAIC has never included them in the canon of the national cinema<sup>291</sup> and even banned some of them immediately.<sup>292</sup>

Still, a relative creative freedom<sup>293</sup> and experimentation lasted in Cuba until the beginning of the 1970s. The best films of the Cuban cinema were created just before, in the second half of the 1960s. However, after Herberto Padilla’s affair in 1971, even the ICAIC, which was previously able to defend its choices of films produced and exhibited, had to exercise stricter control and more careful selection. As a consequence, some of the films made around the first half of the 1970s decade had to be delayed for exhibition. The most famous case was probably Humberto Solás’s *Un día de noviembre*. The film was made in the early 1970 but could not screen until 1976.

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<sup>290</sup> The Law 589 transferred la Comisión Revisora de Películas to the ICAIC. It was renamed to Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas (Douglas 148).

<sup>291</sup> More about the companies that existed in Cuba after 1959 and films made outside the ICAIC see *La tienda negra*.

<sup>292</sup> The most notorious is the earlier mentioned case of *P.M.*

<sup>293</sup> Both in East Germany and Cuba the “freedom” refers more to the form and topics discussed. However, none of the films could still criticize the regime, the government or the Soviets. Castro’s speech “Palabras a los intelectuales” summarized it clearly. Who was “for” the Revolution and who worked on behalf of the Revolution could continue. Artists whose work was perceived as “against” the interests of the Revolution eventually lost the ability to creatively contribute in Cuba, i.e. their work was not published, etc.

### *Reeducation of the Audience*

In the beginning of their existence, both the DEFA and the ICAIC shared the need to change the taste of their audiences (this was also the case of Czechoslovakia but not the Soviet Union). The East German audience's taste was "schooled on Third Reich entertainment films [and] the competition from West German and American movies (accessible to many in the East with the still open borders to the West)" (Silberman 4). As the Cold War intensified, the East German cultural policy "became more ideologically and aesthetically restrictive". This, however, constituted a problem for the newly founded DEFA. For the filmmakers, it became increasingly difficult to manoeuvre between satisfying the audience who would otherwise stop attending movie theatres and "the mandate [of the communist party] to create socialist realist films for the masses" (4). The Soviet films DEFA imported to help with this task had more of an adverse effect (as everywhere else).

Cuba's situation was similar. The Cuban audience was accustomed to the Hollywood cinema and to a lesser degree to cinema from Western Europe, where the commercial German cinema predominated. Therefore, in addition to its own documentary and feature production, which was scarce, the ICAIC resorted to a similar reeducation mostly through films imported from the socialist bloc and China. Some of the films came from East Germany. The DEFA Aussenhandel<sup>294</sup> sold them to the ICAIC through the first Cuban-GDR film exchange contract, signed on November 18, 1960.<sup>295</sup> Among the films the ICAIC purchased were, for example, Andrew and Annelie Thorndike's montage film about the history of Germany, *Du und mancher*

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<sup>294</sup> Foreign trade enterprise that handled the DEFA's international business. It was similar to Czechoslovak Filmexport, etc.

<sup>295</sup> BArch. DR1 18902.

*Kamerad* (1956) and Kurt Maetzig's *Das Lied der Matrosen* (1958). Both are important historical films, one documentary and the other fiction, which served to deepen the ideological gap between the GDR and the FRG.

The reeducation of the Cuban population took place in all media not just films. The GDR-FRG conflict was “useful” and therefore, heavily publicized. All Cuban newspapers contrasted the militarization of West Germany and the “pacification” efforts of East Germany. Since the beginning of the Cuban-socialist bloc relations, the US driven West German “militarization and revanchism”<sup>296</sup> fitted really well with the Cuban militant anti-US agenda and it received ample coverage. Likewise, the GDR heavily publicized Cuba-US conflict.

### *Inherited Personnel*

The DEFA and the ICAIC also shared problems with personnel. Both countries lost much personnel due to mass exodus of qualified workers to the West. Those who stayed had their working habits already set. They were used to working in commercial cinema and did not necessarily “view themselves as members of a socialist avant-garde” (Feinstein 32). It often reflected in their attitude. Yet both film institutes called for a radically new cinema, completely different from what these workers knew from before. In the face of this challenge, the ICAIC and the DEFA took radically different approach.

The DEFA studio was a conservative institution. The Communists did not build a new film industry from scratch but rather utilized what they had inherited, including personnel. It was

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<sup>296</sup> During the 1960s, Cuban newspapers, for example, *Revolución* and *Verde Olivo*, were full of articles aimed against West Germany, accusing it of rearming, sabotaging, and provoking East Germany and supporting the United States.

genuine to believe that the change in the socialist property relations (taking over the UFA) “would immediately yield a different cinematic practice” (Feinstein 32). Even though the DEFA was “firing skilled workers right and left” (Heimann 141) and others presumably left on their own for better opportunities in the West (Feinstein 33), it was impossible to renew the entire staff. The DEFA had to work with what it had if it wanted to continue producing films with good technical quality. It would take time to train new generations of technicians and artists that would make films fully compliant with the GDR’s political needs. In the meantime, the DEFA needed to compromise.

The regime and the DEFA management did not only strive for a politically valid cinema but also for economic efficiency because the resources were scarce. Therefore, working with people experienced in commercial cinema was not necessarily a bad thing in all aspects. The DEFA “just” had to find the right balance and make films that would satisfy both goals. As one of the measures, the DEFA occasionally needed to employ progressive Western German technicians and filmmakers but those did not always produce the films the DEFA wanted. The DEFA sometimes had to ban their films and that upset the Western filmmakers affected. Regardless of this measure, the production dropped considerably during the first half of the 1950s and the DEFA also lost much audience.

The ICAIC was much more radical in its approach. It also lost much personnel<sup>297</sup> and the

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<sup>297</sup> It is unclear how many of them emigrated and how many were fired. In the interview with Oroz, Gutiérrez Alea only spoke about emigration. He blamed the departure of technicians and filmmakers on the increasing scarcity that they (those who decided to emigrate) did not want to endure any longer. Another reason why the ICAIC would want to get rid of the “old timers” was their salaries. They were used to an entirely different pay scale than the new employees, including those who had more experience. Octavio Cortázar mentioned this in his interview with Castellanos and Hildemaro Montejo referred to the same situation in his interview with the author. When he entered the ICR as the head of laboratories he earned half the salary compared to his employees who had worked there from before 1959.

artists and technicians who stayed sometimes had the same resistance to the state institution, which was “theirs”, as to their old American boss before.<sup>298</sup> Guevara knew that they could not build a true revolutionary cinema with this old personnel. Therefore, the ICAIC substituted those who left and those who would eventually leave with young, unexperienced but loyal employees.<sup>299</sup> They gradually gained their experience on the go. They also learned from the different foreign directors and other professionals through co-productions, discussions, and consultations as well as a more formal training. This strategy came at a cost of lower technical quality but Guevara cared more about the correct message and not so much about the technical perfection. The filmmakers like Joris Ivens assured them that they were on the right track.

### **Self-Representation: National Identity Narrative**

As mentioned earlier, the East German and the Cuban film industries shared a need to consolidate their national identity narrative. This narrative was rigid and didactic in both cases (less or more depending on the time period). It related to the fact that both nation-states perceived a strong internal and external threat. Both countries needed to prevent internal criticism that could potentially erode the state’s position inside the borders (internal self-representation) and protect their “brand image” abroad (external self-representation). Both countries had a militant message to deliver. The difference was *how* the message was delivered. It was the approach to experimentation, innovation and rigid socialist realism aesthetics where

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<sup>298</sup> Mendoza and Gutiérrez Alea both refer to it in their interviews with Sotto and Oroz respectively.

<sup>299</sup> Octavio Cortázar shared in his interview with Orlando Castellanos for Radio Havana that he was trained by producer Marcotte, “an old producer from the previous period”. He shared that Marcotte knew his work well and “helped him, taught him even though he intuitively knew that [Cortázar and other new employees] were training and that there was a strategic intention to displace them” (qtd. in Castellanos 79).

the two film industries departed the most from each other. The following analysis of the East German and Cuban cinematic self-representations, even though it is not specified, refers to the corpus of films that depicted either the respective country's history or its contemporary society. That is where the issue of self-representation becomes the most apparent.

In their initial stages, the ICAIC and the DEFA shared artistic pluralism. Between 1949 and 1953, however, even though the DEFA had similar political goals as the ICAIC between 1959 and 1965, it had very different artistic and aesthetic priorities. After the GDR was created in 1949, the filmmakers lost the artistic freedom they were used to under the Soviet administration because the censorship passed now onto the hands of the new state authorities. The Party imposed how films should look like from that moment on. Maetzig recalled that at that point "stalinist cultural policy was applied" also to the GDR (qtd. in Allan and Sandford 83).

The filmmakers could no longer pursue just any kind of aesthetics. For example, the Party rejected any "films dealing with morbid themes and moral dilemmas," regardless of their artistic merit (Feinstein 30). Political functionaries called for socialist realism and insisted that the films should overflow with confidence and optimism and should be populated by exemplary positive heroes. Under this new policy, any "aesthetically innovative works, whether they exhibited the influence of Weimar-era expressionism or contemporary neorealism, became politically suspect" (31). In this environment, the East German filmmakers had barely any room for experimentation. The regime demanded "their participation in constructing a radically new society" but the slightest challenge to its authority had repercussions (Feinstein 32). Regardless, many artists learned to maneuver in this unstable terrain and continued making films.

The Cuban leadership also required filmmakers to participate in constructing a radically

new society and any film that would potentially deal with morbid themes or moral dilemmas would simply did not get made in that first period (1959 – 1965). However, socialist realism did not apply officially and dogmatically, at least in the 1960s. As we have seen in Introduction, Cuban artists and intellectuals engaged in strong debates about the application of the aesthetics during almost the entire first decade. Many ICAIC artists were strongly against socialist realism.

Although socialist realism was not the official doctrine in Cuba, some early ICAIC's films bear some socialist realism features and principles, for example, schematic plot, positive heroes and political mentors. Several Cuban films from the first period also have positive heroes who have to overcome travails to gain the right consciousness (revolutionary in this case). This revolutionary (not communist) consciousness serves as their moral compass. These elements belong to socialist realism. As mentioned earlier, such elements are most apparent in the films like *El joven rebelde* or *Manuela*. None of these films is about factory workers and none of them reached the extreme of workers films of the 1950s (or 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union).

### *The Crucial Year of 1961*

The year 1961 was an important historical marker for both countries' identities and their cinematic representation. The GDR built the Berlin Wall to physically inhibit more emigration. Paradoxically, the wall created a sense of stability. Maetzig recalled in his interview that after the closure of the border the East German filmmakers realized that it was “a good moment to deal with the internal problems of the GDR”. He explained that before they had always been told that the GDR was in a “very difficult and dangerous situation”. Therefore, they (the filmmakers) had to “act in a disciplined manner” because it was not a good moment “to criticize everything” (qtd.

in Allan and Sandford 85). After the Wall was built, the regime was able to tolerate some challenge to its authority and the GDR filmmakers could become more critical.

A generational shift also contributed to the change in dynamics. A new generation of talented filmmakers, who identified strongly with the GDR order, were beginning to emerge (Konrad Wolf, Frank Beyer, Heiner Carow, Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Günter Reisch). They seemed loyal “beyond question” to the new state. Consequently, they felt more at ease in taking “the artistic and political risks necessary to depict the new order” in a more critical way (Feinstein 43). It was mostly them who also benefited from the studies abroad. Frank Beyer, for example, studied in Prague. The studies opened their perspective and they transferred it to their films.

The global exposure was another important factor in the shift in the East German cinema after the Berlin Wall was built. Several film directors could participate in Eastern and Western international film festivals (including Cannes) with their films (Silberman 4-5). In these events, they could engage in discussions with filmmakers from around the world and discuss the best films as well as gain exposure to the New Waves in the East and the West. As a result of all these circumstances, the filmmakers not only became more politically bold but they also started experimenting with genres, including musicals, adventure films and satires (Feinstein 106).

In 1961, counterrevolutionaries invaded Cuba in the Bay of Pigs and were defeated. Yet the US sponsored attacks continued and there were also anti-Castro insurgencies on the island, especially in the area of the Escambray Mountains. The Berlin Wall released tension in the GDR but the Bay of Pigs Invasion increased it in Cuba. Cuba was mobilized and alert. Everything, including films, was in function of defending the Cuban Revolution against the internal and external enemy. The tolerance decreased. It was the year of *P.M.* affair and Castro’s “Palabras a



los intelectuales”.

It took approximately until 1964-1965, after the Missile Crisis and the final defeat of the insurgents in Escambray, when Cuban filmmakers could start introducing more critical themes and more moral dilemmas in their films. In the meantime, experimentation with different aesthetics and genres, especially blurring the difference between documentary and fiction, continued. Most filmmakers were still learning, so the best Cuban films were yet to come.

### *Experimentation*

The main difference between the DEFA and the ICAIC in the question of self-representation was the room the filmmakers had for experimentation. Alfredo Guevara encouraged experimentation as long as it had a clear purpose and did not affect negatively the message and values of the Revolution.<sup>300</sup> In a roundtable “¿Qué es lo moderno en el arte?”<sup>301</sup> among Cuban and foreign filmmakers, which took place in the ICAIC, the Cubans placed much emphasis on originality. They were looking for innovative ways of making ideological films about Cuba that would also be artistic and well attended by audiences.

Even though the GDR also desired ideological and artistic films that would be popular with the GDR people, it feared innovations (especially formal) and a more critical outlook.

Contrary to Cuba, the East German government<sup>302</sup> distrusted neorealism and anything else that

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<sup>300</sup> The case of *P.M.* is not only about applying free cinema style to make a film that was not militant or unengaged. It also was a strategy to eliminate one of the ICAIC’s competitors, the group around Carlos Franqui.

<sup>301</sup> The roundtable was transcribed and published in *Cine cubano*. 3:9, 31 – 49.

<sup>302</sup> The dramaturgic plans and approval of films for public exhibition was mostly in the hands of the Ministry of Culture and the SED rather than the head of the studio.

looked critical or too experimental. One of the classics of the East German cinema *Berlin - Ecke Schönhauser* (Gerhard Klein, 1957) was initially banned because it was not optimistic enough and it showed socialist East Germany as decadent and unable to compete with the West. In addition, it did not have any positive hero (Feinstein 12).<sup>303</sup> Overall, it did not portray East Germany in a way that would foster a positive image of the East German socialist society and its achievements.

Most of the countries of the socialist bloc were open to the kind of protagonists and reflections about their countries as *Berlin - Ecke Schönhauser* offered as long as the films conveyed the right message. However, the East German Communist Party's insisted on socialist realism that many other socialist countries were happily leaving behind. Consequently, the first East German films that arrived to Cuba – though they were some of the best East German films – were overshadowed by films from other socialist bloc countries that the Cubans encountered more innovative. Therefore, the ICAIC did not show much interest to expand the cooperation with the DEFA beyond what was absolutely necessary, even though the Cuban-GDR cultural exchange was otherwise quite intense. The GDR representatives did not want to “force” it even though they probably wished the cooperation in film worked as well as in theatre, music,

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<sup>303</sup> *Berlin-Ecke Schönhauser* illuminates the relationship between competing realist aesthetics and the constitution of the political authority in the German Democratic Republic. The film was released in 1957 and was at first enthusiastically received by the press and public alike but, according to Feinstein, the film “offended the functionaries”. It became the center of a debate concerning neorealism. One of the reasons was that its theme was “alienated youth addicted to Western popular culture”. In addition, it used some neorealist techniques such as “on-location shooting, use of original décor, and natural lighting” to portray “decaying Berlin neighborhood”. The functionaries did not want this “depressing vision of socialist society” associated with East Germany. They wanted exemplary “positive heroes” and the “law-like nature” of history. At the same time, however, some high-ranking officials conceded that the movie was on the “right path”. In a few years, the ban was lifted and the film was recognized as a East German classic (Feinstein 12-13).

literature, and the plastic arts.<sup>304</sup> Nonetheless, those were governed by Consejo Nacional de Cultura, which had a different agenda than the ICAIC.

An East German report regarding contemporary situation in Cuban culture and science reveals why the GDR did not insist. A big part of Cuban artists who were participating in the cultural exchange with the GDR, the writer stated, “had big reservation regarding the cultural development and work of the GDR artists”. Especially the UNEAC and the ICAIC had “influential groups that [rejected] socialist realism.” According to the report, those groups were inspired by artistic influences from Western Europe and “consider[ed] socialist realism as Stalinism.”<sup>305</sup> They were interested in German expressionism, which the East German Communist Party also discredited alongside neorealism. In summary, the DEFA and the ICAIC had different agendas.

The cooperation between the two film industries further deteriorated after 1966. The most New Wave-like East German films were made just before that, between 1961 and 1966. In December 1965, the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenary of the Central Committee of the East German Communist Party (SED) banned almost the entire year of the DEFA film productions, the so called “rabbit films”, named after Maetzig’s *Das Kaninchen bin ich* ([The Rabbit am I], 1965). The Plenum declared that the films could not be released because “they ostensibly had lost touch with the contemporary reality and focused too narrowly on problems of individuals rather than the socialist collective” (Silberman 4). This was pretty much a description of the new wave preoccupations, which the GDR filmmakers shared with the rest of the socialist bloc and which

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<sup>304</sup> BArch. DR 18902. Über die gegenwärtige Situation in der kubanischen Kultur und Wissenschaft, p.4.

<sup>305</sup> BArch. DR 18902. Über die gegenwärtige Situation in der kubanischen Kultur und Wissenschaft, p.4.

they were now forced to abandon.

Not only were the films shelved; there were also consequences for their filmmakers. Some directors, like Maetzig, had to submit to public self-criticism. Others, like Frank Beyer, had to leave the studio altogether.<sup>306</sup> The public could not see the films until the 1990s. The Cubans saw several of the 1961 – 1966 films but did not find them particularly aesthetically stimulating. They found the Czechoslovak, Soviet and Polish films more innovative. None of the “rabbit films”, which criticized the East German bureaucracy and defended “individual claims to self-expression within the socialist collective” (Silberman 39), made it to Cuba. After the Plenum, the East German Communist Party imposed once again the course of a more dogmatic socialist realism doctrine for the GDR cinema. At that point, the East German cinema aimed in the opposite direction than the ICAIC cinema – away from experimentation and back towards socialist realism aesthetics.

### *Historical Truthfulness*

As we have seen in Part 1 and 2, the ICAIC insisted on “authenticity” in films about Cuba. It was very important for the Cuban and the ICAIC leadership that their films about Cuba followed the official discourse on the Cuban recent history. The GDR documentarist Annelie and Andrew Thorndike contributed to the debate on the historical truthfulness in film from a different angle – how to effectively “manufacture” historical cinematic discourse. The Cubans saw their *Du und mancher Kamerad* (1956) in 1961. It was a film that narrated the history of Germany from the

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<sup>306</sup> After the ban of Beyer’s *Spur der Steine*, Beyer was removed from the DEFA, He could not make another film until 1974 when he came to film *Jakob der Lügner*, nominated for Oscars in 1974. More on Frank Beyer in his memoirs *When der Wind sich dreht* and in the DEFA Library on <https://ecommerce.umass.edu/defa/people/445>.

GDR perspective. In order to convey the right message, the filmmakers opted for a formal composition, which blended “archival footage, intertitles, maps, graphics (to analyze the imperialist conflict) and photography to deliver visual evidence of injustice and abuse” (Silberman 285). The means these GDR filmmakers used were useful for Cuban documentarists and the structure was fitting for the Cuban militant self-representation.

Almost a decade later the Thorndikes created another documentary, *Das russische Wunder* (1963), a two-part montage film capturing fifty years of the history of the Russian Empire (part 1) and the Soviet Union (part 2). The film triggered strong debates across the socialist bloc. The Czechoslovak film critics Antonín J. and Mira Liehm mentioned that strong schism occurred especially between the GDR and Czechoslovakia. The debate concerned “the question of historical truthfulness...or more precisely, of the degree to which historical fact was doctored”. Another issue that came up in the debate was “the question of the artistic morality of its creators”. According to the Liehms that debate “in the years that followed, disclosed two profoundly opposing viewpoints on the meaning and the aims of film” between the two countries (271). It was a debate that was very concurrent also globally in the 1960s.

The film caught an interest of Guevara and the two countries decided that Cuba would produce a Spanish version. The film was most likely commissioned by the GDR, probably for the entire Latin American region, not only for Cuba. Guevara first mentioned the work on the Spanish version in his letter to Rodenberg from September 3, 1963.<sup>307</sup> Roberto Fandiño, a Cuban film director, was assigned to discuss with the Thorndikes the preparation of the project,<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> BArch. DR 8920.

<sup>308</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Telegram from Guevara to Rodenberg from September 28, 1963.

including its Spanish translation.<sup>309</sup> In the end, the film was dubbed into Spanish,<sup>310</sup> even though it was more customary in Cuba to subtitle films. In Cuba, it screened as *El milagro ruso*.<sup>311</sup> It received an ample press coverage and made a good impression on the ICAIC's photographers.<sup>312</sup> Guevara called the film "excellent"<sup>313</sup> in his letter to the new East German Deputy Minister of Culture, Günter Witt, even though Guevara had only heard about the film at that time.

In the light of the debate the film generated and Guevara's demands of authenticity, Guevara's interest in the film seems controversial but it is not. The ICAIC did not seek to portray Cuban history truthfully in all its aspects. Rather, it aimed to convey the official version of that history. Santiago Álvarez's films like *Now* (1965) prove it. He used a similar strategy to construct a social persuasive narrative on the editing table.

## Documentary Filmmaking

The ICAIC and the DEFA shared much in the area of documentary making and had a lively exchange in that area. The East German documentary started with the newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* (Eyewitness), co-created by Kurt Maetzig in February 1946 (Feinstein 28). After 1960, *Der*

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<sup>309</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Guevara's letter to Rodenberg from September 3, 1963. Engelsman's memorandum about meeting between Rodenberg and Fandiño shortly before October 5, 1963. Fandiño arrived to Berlin on October 2, 1963, according to Guevara's telegram from September 28, 1963.

<sup>310</sup> BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 2.

<sup>311</sup> BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 2.

<sup>312</sup> Guevara wrote to Rodenberg about the premiere of the film. He had not seen the film when he wrote the letter but shared that the ICAIC's photographers were very impressed. The document has no date but it had to be written in 1964 because in the same letter, Guevara mentions the Leipzig Film Festival, which took place in November 1964. BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg, p.2. N.d.

<sup>313</sup> BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 2.

*Augenzeuge* exchanged regularly material with Santiago Álvarez's *Noticiero*.<sup>314</sup> The ICAIC also regularly participated in the Leipzig's Documentary Film Festival where Cuban filmmakers gained many awards and were highly regarded. Santiago Álvarez, Julio García Espinosa and Octavio Cortázar participated as jury members several times.

After 1949, the GDR documentary was intended "to provide the East German citizens with audio-visual evidence that would confirm ideas and attitudes and reinforce and naturalize socialist philosophy and practices" (Silberman 284). According to Silberman, the documentaries then "engaged a rhetoric of ideologically calibrated social persuasion that reiterated certain tropes – including the socialists' moral superiority, their historical evolution, recent achievements and future" (284). The documentary served similar purpose in Cuba after 1959 and it engaged in similar rhetoric. We just need to substitute the word "socialists" for "Revolutionary". The ICAIC's documentaries were crucial to persuade Cuban citizens about the Revolutionaries' moral superiority and the bright future awaiting them under their leadership.

There was another important connection between Cuban and East German filmmakers – the teachers they shared.<sup>315</sup> The most important of them was Joris Ivens who joined the DEFA in 1954 (Silberman 21) and worked there until 1957 (284). Similarly to Roman Karmen, he also dedicated his art to "fostering international solidarity" (Silberman 284). Ivens brought with him to the DEFA not only "two and a half decades of professional experience and critical kudos but [also] passion, ideological conviction and international flair" (285). He impacted the DEFA

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<sup>314</sup> BArch. DR1 8874, p. 4. The ICAIC signed a contract for exchange of newsreels, fiction and documentary films in 1960.

<sup>315</sup> More on the generation of Jürgen Böttcher, the same generation as Jorge Fraga and Octavio Cortázar, for example, in Silberman (21) and Nick Hodgins's chapter on alternative documentary in East Germany starting p. 281.

directors like Konrad Wolf who worked as his assistant. Wolf gained “documentary sensibilities”, which he applied later in his feature films (285). In addition, Ivens helped launch the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival in 1955. Furthermore, he brought with him a network of international contacts, which in the 1950s helped open doors for East German documentary filmmakers like Andrew and Annelie Thorndike. It is possible that the first invitation and awards for Cuban documentarists was influenced by him.

Joris Ivens was one of the first filmmakers to offer a helping hand to Cuban filmmakers. The Cubans had much admiration for him. According to an article in *Cine cubano*, probably written by Guevara, Ivens was always present – as a creator not tourist – “donde [hubiera] un país que luche por su libertad, donde [existiera] un pueblo que [tratara] de liquidar las viejas estructuras y [se forjara] un futuro sano y propio donde el hombre [reclamara y obtuviera] su dignidad” (“Joris Ivens” 23). His work was, as the article pointed out, militant, lyrical and emotive at the same time (23).<sup>316</sup>

Ivens’s ideas about filming, about the necessity to establish a dialogue between the film and the audience and his admiration for the Cubans and their Revolution made him especially dear to Cuban filmmakers. Among those who worked with him and learned from him were the directors José Massip and Jorge Fraga, and the photographer Ramón F. Suárez. One of the things they most admired about his aesthetics was that it was based on “deep solidarity [and] honest admiration” for the humble. His work was militant but he was not a pamphleteer (29). This is what they also thought of Roman Karmen.

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<sup>316</sup> In Cuba, he made two documentaries *Pueblo en armas* (1961) and *Carnet de viaje* (1961).



## Conducting Business with the ICAIC

### *The First Steps*

The first East German delegation arrived to Havana on February 10, 1960. The delegation was led by the vice-president of the GDR's foreign commerce, Herbert Merkel. Its goal was to “research possibilities for initiating mutual exchange of goods” as well as have a conversation with Cuban ministries.<sup>317</sup> The cultural exchange with Cuba started in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1960 but even before that there had been some correspondence between the GDR and the Cuban provincial administration. As the political situation stabilized, the GDR started working on establishing commercial representation in Cuba.<sup>318</sup> The political and commercial Mission opened in Havana soon after.

The first official Agreement of Cooperation in Culture and Science was signed on March 19, 1961 and became the base for annual or biannual work plans as well as agreements between specific cultural institutions, such as the DEFA and the ICAIC. The Agreement and the consequent work plans governed the cooperation in the area of high and specialized education, including an exchange of teachers and scholarships, organization of culture and film weeks, etc.<sup>319</sup> The business exchange between the two film industries started several months earlier.

In November 1960, the first DEFA delegation left for Havana. Their goal was to explore the market and make connections. As in the case of the first Czechoslovak delegates in 1960,

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<sup>317</sup> *Neue Deutschland*, February 10, 1960.

<sup>318</sup> BArch. DR1 15973. Report from the Department of Cultural Relations, Sector III. Assessment report for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1960 from January 16, 1961.

<sup>319</sup> BArch. DR1 18904. Volume 2. According to Arbeitsplan zum Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der revolutionären Regierung der Republik Kuba über die kulturelle und wissenschaftliche Zusammenarbeit für das Jahr 1964.

they also had business interests in mind first. Even though they had some previous contacts, they focused all their attention on the ICAIC because they realized its privileged position in the Cuban market. Yet they did not want to miss out on other opportunities. Therefore, on November 1, 1960, Otto, from the Legal Department of the Department of Press and Publicity, advised the DEFA that Fenix Producciones, S.A., Havana, Cuba, wanted to “discuss exhibition license for the region Cuba for films ‘Verwirrung der Liebe’ and ‘Seilergasse 8’”.<sup>320</sup>

The DEFA representatives, Bulla and Otto, felt the DEFA had a good chance to place their films in the Cuban market. They noticed, for example, that “the American films were disappearing from Cuban cinemas and TV programs”<sup>321</sup> and that “the amount of Chinese, Soviet, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak films in Cuban cinemas [had] picked up remarkably in the last few weeks.” They also observed that “the American Wild West and criminal films [were] being substituted by good film reportages and intelligently transmitted documentary films, [a fact that] was greeted by parents and adults that [before] had to keep correcting the influence of bad American film on the youth.”<sup>322</sup> The East German representatives saw a chance for the DEFA to finally screen their films on the island, something it had not been able to achieve before in spite of its prior correspondence with various film rental companies in Cuba after 1959.<sup>323</sup>

The ICAIC needed to substitute many American films it had pulled out or was about to

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<sup>320</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. Bericht von Rechtsabteilung der Presse und Werbung from November 1, 1960. Signed by Otto (counsel). A comedy *Verwirrung der Liebe* was made by Slatan Dudow in 1959 and a crimi drama *Seilergasse 8*, by Joachim Kunert in 1960.

<sup>321</sup> BArch. DR1 8874.

<sup>322</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. A cipher from November 26, 1960.

<sup>323</sup> BArch. DR 1 8874. Report from Bulla and Otto’s trip in November 1960. It was written on January 14, 1961 and included in the report for the deputy minister of culture, Rodenberg, on August 6, 1961, p. 1.

pull out from distribution. It could use any help available. However, Cuban audience was not used to the socialist bloc films, therefore, Guevara was cautious about introducing them. In his conversation with the two East Germans, he showed particular interest in purchasing “light entertaining films” and “films with explicit political content but ...only ... if they had a good artistic quality.”<sup>324</sup> However, those films were scarce in the socialist bloc as well, let alone in the GDR as we have seen earlier.

Guevara planned to promote certain films from the socialist countries through the cine clubs. He found it more suitable because it enabled discussions about them, which traditional commercial screening would not. The ICAIC also wanted to promote those films in conjunction with cultural exhibitions because Guevara wanted the audience to get familiar not only with the films but also with the culture of the countries the films came from.<sup>325</sup> The ICAIC’s concern was, however, that most socialist bloc films dealt with the anti-fascist struggle or the World War II. Cuban audience had been saturated by war films from the socialist bloc and the ICAIC’s own warfare production. Therefore, the ICAIC urged that “it was about time to show more films from a happier side of the socialist life.”<sup>326</sup> Such socialism would be potentially more appealing to Cuban citizens.

During their November 1960 visit, Otto and Bulla realized the necessity to make the ICAIC-DEFA commercial relations official. Therefore, they prepared a global contract. Originally, they estimated the exchange of films in the 1:1 ratio but if that were not possible due

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<sup>324</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. Report from Bulla and Otto’s trip in November 1960 from January 14, 1961, p. 3.

<sup>325</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. Report from Bulla and Otto’s trip in November 1960 from January 14, 1961, p. 3.

<sup>326</sup> BArch. DR1 8904. Summary of a discussion with Samperio from the ICAIC, February 28, 1962. A letter from from the GDR Mission from March 8, 1962.

to the low number of films produced in Cuba, the DEFA would sell its films for 2,200 (color) and 1,800 (black and white) convertible dollars.<sup>327</sup> The agreement contained an important clause in order to mitigate the “competition” the ICAIC still had in the area of film exhibition. The clause stated that the DEFA had to offer its films first to the ICAIC and only after the ICAIC turned them down, the DEFA could offer them to third parties.”<sup>328</sup>

That was important because it gave the ICAIC the exclusivity not only in selecting what would show but also where. The other film rental companies could only rent films from the ICAIC and had very little leeway in differentiating the programming from the rest of the cinemas. The Cubans ordered three copies of each film, which the East German representatives read as a sign that the ICAIC “intended to show [the GDR] films more extensively.”<sup>329</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the DEFA’s primary interest was to conduct business. At that time, the Cuban Revolution had not declared any definite ideological direction and the socialist bloc countries did not consider it socialist. The delegation was pleased that the sale<sup>330</sup> brought 92,000 German Marks in convertible currency.<sup>331</sup> For the following year, the ICAIC promised to

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<sup>327</sup> BArch. DR1 8874, p. 4. The exhibition license for short films, documentaries, popular-scientific and animated films would cost the ICAIC 0.70 \$/meter (color) and 0.69/meter (black and white). In addition, the ICAIC needed to pay 0.26 \$/meter (color) and 0.12\$/meter (black and white) for the material and cover the production cost of the copies as well as transportation costs.

<sup>328</sup> BArch. DR1 8874.

<sup>329</sup> BArch. DR1 8874, p. 4.

<sup>330</sup> Out of nine subtitled films that Bulla and Otto offered, the ICAIC choose six: *Weises Blut* (Gottfried Kolditz, 1959), *Das verurteilte Dorf* (Martin Hellberg 1952), *Mazurka der Liebe* (Hans Müller 1957), children’s films *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1953), *Das singende, klingende Baumchen* (Francesco Stefani, 1957), and *Das kalte Herz* (Paul Verhoeven, 1950). The ICAIC refused *Der Hauptmann von Köln* (Slatan Dudow, 1956), *Geschwader Fledermaus* (Erich Engel, 1958), and *Kabale und Liebe* (Martin Hellberg, 1959). BArch. DR1 8874, p. 4.

<sup>331</sup> DEFA gave the ICAIC credit for equal amount.

purchase “at least 15 full-length feature films”. In addition, the ICAIC showed “big interest [in] documentary, popular-scientific and animated films”. The delegation expected a big purchase in that area since the ICAIC had requested “as soon as possible...animated films without dialogue or with a commentary”.<sup>332</sup>

The ICAIC had extensive needs in many different areas. In addition to fiction and documentary films, it needed documentaries and film stock for 16 and 35mm for the mobile cinema. They depended on the socialist countries, especially in regards to “the 16mm projectors, film stock and other technical equipment”.<sup>333</sup> In addition, they needed 16mm, didactic and popular-scientific films as well as teaching tools of any kind because it was no longer possible to import them from the United States. The Cuban Institute of Radio and TV (ICR) was in the same situation.<sup>334</sup> The socialist bloc tried to fulfill all these needs within their possibilities but they had logistical problems, so they were not always able to respond to the ICAIC’s sense of urgency.

In the first months of the relations, the cooperation between the DEFA and the ICAIC looked very promising from a business perspective. Therefore, the DEFA started considering having a permanent delegate in Havana who would represent the DEFA in the area of film, radio and television.<sup>335</sup> The DEFA also invited the ICAIC representatives for a film selection to Berlin and Alfredo Guevara himself for a visit. In addition, the two film institutes started discussing the

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<sup>332</sup> BArch. DR1 8874, p. 4.

<sup>333</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Anstelle eines Protokolls: Besprechung zwischen Herrn Prof. Hans Rodenberg, Mitglied des Staatsrates der DDR und Stellvertretender Minister für Kultur und Herrn Alfredo Guevara, Präsident des ICAIC, dated in Havana, November 8, 1961. It was signed by Bulla, Rodenberg, Beyer, and Trappen.

<sup>334</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. Travel Report from January 14, 1961 by Otto (Justizier) and Bulla, p. 4.

<sup>335</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. Travel Report from January 14, 1961 by Otto (Justizier) and Bulla, p. 4. For the time being, it was the German diplomatic mission in Havana that intermediated the contacts.

first DEFA film week in Cuba for 1961. Originally, its goal was to promote the DEFA's films and boost sales but before the film week took place, Cuba became socialist and the circumstances changed.<sup>336</sup>

### *Film Weeks*

A year after the Otto and Bulla's first visit to Cuba, a few months after the erection of the Berlin Wall and the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the DEFA and the ICAIC enabled the first exchange between filmmakers of both countries through the first GDR Film Week. The Film Week took place from November 6 to 12, 1961, in conjunction with the first East German industrial exhibition in Cuba.

Contrary to the first Czechoslovak Film Week, organized earlier that year and led by a Deputy President of ČSF, the GDR sent a delegation of the highest level. It was led by Professor Hans Rodenberg, the Deputy Minister of Culture,<sup>337</sup> the Head of the Central Film Administration of the Ministry of Culture (HV) and a member of the State Council.<sup>338</sup> He became a key figure in this first stage of the German-Cuban film cooperation. Another member of the delegation was Frank Beyer, a promising director who made, for example, the light-hearted, satiric comedy

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<sup>336</sup> BArch. DR1 8874, p. 5. The ICAIC provided La Rampa Film Theater for free for that event, the same place where the Soviet and Czechoslovak film weeks took place in 1960 and 1961 respectively.

<sup>337</sup> Deputy Ministers of Culture were also appointed as directors of Hauptverwaltung (HV) of the DEFA, i.e. of its Central Administration. HV was equivalent to the Central Administration of the Czechoslovak State Film whose director was Alois Poledňák for most of the 1960s. He was, however, never a deputy minister.

<sup>338</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961, p.1.

*Karbid und Sauerampfer* (1963)<sup>339</sup> and the anti-fascist drama *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1963).<sup>340</sup> He was a member of the work group “Roter Kreis” like Maetzig. In addition to them, Bulla from the DEFA Aussenhandel returned to Cuba and Trappen, the 2<sup>nd</sup> secretary of the GDR Mission, also joined the delegation.

The delegation and Alfredo Guevara had many topics on their agenda. They discussed the ICAIC’s situation up to November 1961 and the plans for 1962, the necessary import of films from the DEFA, including documentaries and the 16mm, and Maetzig’s co-production.<sup>341</sup> Guevara showed interest in establishing direct exchange between filmmakers in both countries. He wanted his filmmakers to have access to “materials about the artistic development, artistic problems and discussions” that were taking place in the GDR.<sup>342</sup> Guevara and Rodenberg also agreed to extend the validity of the film exchange contract from 1960 to 1962.<sup>343</sup> The collaboration had a potential. In the spirit of the typical socialist diplomacy and rhetoric, Rodenberg and Guevara assured each other that “the relationship with the VEB DEFA Aussenhandel [had] developed [and was] exceptionally good and friendly.”<sup>344</sup>

The Film Week showcased a variety of films. They showed, for example, Beyer’s *Fünf*

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<sup>339</sup> Originally, East German authorities were considering banning the film because they were concerned that the Soviet Union would be offended. They did a test screening with Soviet audience in Moscow and they loved the film. As a result, the film was allowed (Poss 186-187). Beyer’s code name in Stasi files was Karbid, inspired by the film title (Berghahn 28).

<sup>340</sup> *Nackt unter Wölfen* was shown during Havana’s second GDR Film Week in 1964 but *Karbid und Sauerampfer* probably never made it to Cuba.

<sup>341</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961.

<sup>342</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961, p.2.

<sup>343</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961, p.4.

<sup>344</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961, p.2.

*Patronenhülsen* (1960), an episode from the Spanish Civil War, Konrad Wolf's *Professor Mamlock* (1961) and Slatan Dudow's comedy *Verwirrung der Liebe*.<sup>345</sup> The DEFA originally sold the latter to Félix Producciones as we have seen earlier. Overall, both parties were satisfied with this first demonstration of friendship between the two brother film industries.

Three years later, the DEFA and the ICAIC organized their second GDR Film Week, celebrated from October 5 to 11, 1964.<sup>346</sup> The DEFA was at the peak of its "New Wave" period. Some of the more critical and inquisitive films from this time period made it to Cuba. Several films gauged interests among the Cuban filmmakers, especially, *Geteilte Himmel* ([El cielo dividido], 1964)<sup>347</sup> by Konrad Wolf. *El cielo dividido* generated much discussion in Cuba as well as in East Germany due to its unusual narrative structure. Wolf, a young film director, engaged in a lively discussion with Cuban filmmakers about the film during the Film Week.

The film also caught attention of Cuban critics. For example, Manuel Valdés Rodríguez wrote: "Only a director with [such] a fine taste for film art in service of an esthetical, fine and strong concept who looks for beauty and sincerity in a drama of people and their social and

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<sup>345</sup> BArch. DR 1 8920. According to Frank Beyer's report from December 5, 1961, the DEFA showed in Havana films *Fünf Patronenhülsen*, *Das Lied der Matrosen*, *Professor Mamlock*, *Mich dürstet*, *Affäre Blum*, *Verwirrung der Liebe*, *Sie nannten ihn Amigo*, *Sterne*, *Der Untertan*, and *Der Fall Gleiwitz*. In Santiago, they projected *Fünf Patronenhülsen* and *Professor Mamlock*. *Verwirrung der Liebe* was one of the films that the company Félix Producciones had selected but there is no document in the archives that confirms the transaction actually took place. It always took several months to translate and subtitle films to Spanish and at that time, nationalization was in full swing. Therefore, it is possible that Félix Producciones purchased it but by the time the films were ready, the company was gone. In that case, the ICAIC would have taken over the films delivered and possibly also their payment as the sole distributor of films in Cuba.

<sup>346</sup> BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 2. An article from *Freie Erde Neustrelitz*, July 26, 1965.

<sup>347</sup> Other films screened were: *Sterne*, *Der Untertan*, *For Eyes Only*, *Nackt unter Wölfen*, *Julia lebt*, *Mir nach*, *Canailen*, *Der Tanzlehrling*, *Schwarzer Samt*, *Anmut-Schönheit-Lebensfreude*, and *Die Vogelscheuche*. BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 2.



political situation could create such a pure film.”<sup>348</sup> The film was a demonstration of a successful negotiation between the politics and the art. The film dealt with the separation of couples as an aftermath of the construction of the Berlin Wall. The theme of separation of families between East and West was very close to the Cubans as well, but except Gutiérrez Alea’s *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Los sobrevivientes* (1979), the Cubans did not really start making films about it until the 1980s and 1990s.

The DEFA film weeks occurred with less frequency than, for example, the Czechoslovak Film Weeks. They took place every three years (1964, 1967) while the Czechoslovaks had their weeks bi-annually (1961, 1963, 1965). The film weeks were reciprocal. However, East Germans had to wait for the first ICAIC’s film week in the GDR until July 1965 (July 23 to 28) because the ICAIC reportedly did not have films to show, at least according to the archives. The Week was supposed to take place in the end of 1963 but the DEFA did not have the capacity to subtitle the proposed Cuban films that fast (not even with Czechoslovak help). The first Cuban Film Week in Czechoslovakia took place two years earlier, in the first half of 1963.

During the first Cuban Film Week in the GDR, the ICAIC screened four fiction films and several documentaries. One of them was *Crónica cubana* by the Uruguayan Ugo Ulive who live in Cuba at that time. It was a chronicle of the Cuban Revolution from 1958 to 1961, which featured documentary footage from the Bay of Pigs Invasion, inserted in the film. Ulive co-wrote the script with the acclaimed Argentinean theatre director and playwright, Osvaldo Dragún.<sup>349</sup> In

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<sup>348</sup> Valdéz Rodríguez’s review from *El mundo* was mentioned in an article “Erfolg für ‘Geteilten Himmel’”, written by an unknown author for *Neues Deutschland*, 3.11.1964. Its paper clipping is located in BArch. DR1 18910. Volume 1. The author was unable to reference the original articles.

<sup>349</sup> Dragún was known for his politically themed plays and received the Casa de las Américas award several times.

addition to Ulive's film, the ICAIC showed *Tránsito* by Manet, *La decisión* (José Massip, 1964), and *En días como estos* (Jorge Fraga, 1964). Manet attended the Week together with the actresses Daisy Granados and Sonia Calero. Gerry Wolf, an actor from the GDR-Cuban *Preludio II*, accompanied them. During the Week, Daisy Granados accepted a role in a film that later became one of the "rabbit films" *Wenn du gross bist, liebe Adam* (Egon Günter, 1990). She played a passionate *mulata* and the GDR make-up artists had to apply a lot of brown make-up to make her look more exotic.<sup>350</sup> Cubans were happy with the Week and so were the East Germans.

### *Alfredo Guevara's Ally*

The Deputy Minister of Culture, Hans Rodenberg,<sup>351</sup> was a key figure in the development of the GDR-Cuban relationship in film in this initial stage. He was very invested in the cooperation with Cuba. He communicated frequently with Alfredo Guevara during meetings at different

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<sup>350</sup> The filming was completed in 1965. The 1990 release contained reconstructed scenes that had been removed by the censors. One memorable thing about Daisy Granados's appearance is the amount of make-up used to make her skin look "darker". The element of Caribbean dance and exaggerated "latino passion" in Daisy's character were present as well. More information about her and the film can be found in different documents in BArch. DR 18910. Volume 2, for example, correspondence and newspaper clippings.

<sup>351</sup> Rodenberg worked as a theatre actor, director and writer for several years. He entered the film industry in the early 1930s as a vice director of the film studio Meshrapom-Film Produktions. He also worked as screenwriter and consultant in Mosfilm Studios in the second half of the 1930s. After the war, he became a member of the East German Communist Party (KPD) commission for film matters in Moscow. After his return to Germany, he was the head of the DEFA studios for fictions films from 1952 – 56, dean of dramaturgy in the film college in Potsdam-Babelsberg, and 1960 – 63, Deputy Minister of Culture and Director of the Film Division of the Ministry of Culture under the minister Bentzien. He left the Ministry to start working in the State Council as of January 1, 1964. BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from December 18, 1963, written by Rodenberg to Guevara. He was substituted by Günter Witt whose relationship with Guevara seemed more "protocolar". Both Witt and Bentzien were dismissed after the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum in 1966 as ultimately responsible for the "rabbit" films. <http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=2871>.

festivals and also through telegrams and letters.<sup>352</sup> Guevara seemed to trust Rodenberg.<sup>353</sup> In a letter from August 14, 1963, for example, Guevara felt he could share his concerns with Rodenberg about *Preludio 11* openly and candidly because Rodenberg was “todo devoción y amistad por Cuba”.<sup>354</sup> Guevara even wrote letters to Rodenberg to just share his thoughts.<sup>355</sup> That was not common among bureaucrats whose correspondence usually just dealt with problems to resolve, requests and congratulations to personal and state anniversaries.

Generally, however, Guevara did have many requests (and demands). Rodenberg, in spite of his enthusiasm for Cuba and the ICAIC, did not always find the support in other ministries and even the DEFA when he urged that the GDR should up their support to the ICAIC. For example, Rodenberg wrote an enthusiastic report about the state of Cuban affairs after his visit to Cuba in November 1961. In the report, he urged that “the Cuban friends” needed “strong help for the film and television ‘on a non-commercial basis’”.<sup>356</sup> He meant that the GDR should be more generous and donate films to the Cuban institutes rather than always ask for payments. The Deputy Minister Stibi responded defensively: “Do you have an idea where should the payment

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<sup>352</sup> For example, in his letter from March 24, 1962, Guevara wrote a letter to Rodenberg, which had a tone of a letter a friend writes to a friend: just sharing, no request or information about any pending DEFA-ICAIC exchange related questions.

<sup>353</sup> It is known about Guevara who, like Castro himself, were able to calculate people they worked with and adjust their attitude towards them accordingly to reach their goals. They had a great facility of persuasion.

<sup>354</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963. Rodenberg received it on August 27, 1963, p.7.

<sup>355</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from March 24, 1962.

<sup>356</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. The Integrated Revolutionary Organization (ORI) was particularly demanding in terms of free stuff (with the GDR) and so was the film studio of the Armed Forces (with Czechoslovakia). Both made big requests with a sense of urgency. The Armed Forces representative even resorted to manipulation when he mentioned that China provides them with training free of charge unlike ČSF, which required payment for their services.

for their wishes come from considering our own economic needs?”<sup>357</sup> At that time, the GDR still struggled economically and the Cubans were very demanding in terms of “selfless help”, i.e. deliveries in the true sense of socialist internationalism – for free. Rodenberg’s idealism was not sustainable.

Rodenberg also emphasized in his report that it was necessary and even urgent to send scientist and technicians again on a “non-commercial” basis. The Deputy Minister Stibi found that proposal also unreasonable. He wondered how they should consolidate Cuban demands with the GDR’s foreign currency goals.<sup>358</sup> He referred to the “hard” currency limits that affected, for example, sending and receiving foreign delegations. The GDR leadership demanded rationality in the process of selection, preparation and sending of delegations (also delegations of technicians). Receiving and sending delegation at the expense of the GDR was not encouraged.

The Czechoslovak “delegation of directors” in 1961 (Chapter 3) was also reprimanded by the ČSF for promising help without negotiating with the ICAIC how to cover it financially. In their case, the ČSF’s lawyer Štercl was worried about the promises made on the ČSF’s behalf in terms of the trainees to receive and technicians to send. There was always a tension between the goals of cultural diplomacy and their financial sustainability in all socialist countries but the smaller countries felt the financial burden of socialist internationalism especially strongly.

Rodenberg was a true socialist internationalist but he was biased towards Cuba. Stibi was trying to show him the bigger picture. Rodenberg, a true defender of the solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, forgot about the overall goals of the GDR international policy. In his

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<sup>357</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Letter from Stibi to Rodenberg from December 11, 1961.

<sup>358</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Letter from Stibi to Rodenberg from December 11, 1961.

reflection, Stibi asked him rhetorically how he would justify such an extensive solidarity with Cuba in the political, economic and cultural cooperation at the expense of the resources for other friendly countries from the Third World.<sup>359</sup> Although there were probably many people like Rodenberg, the pushback of those who had their “feet on the ground” caused that the GDR help to Cuban cinema stayed limited for economic reasons, more limited than Czechoslovakia, for example.

Occasionally, Rodenberg felt overwhelmed by Guevara’s petitions, especially when they meant fighting with the GDR bureaucracy. For example, in his letter to Dr. Erich Apel from the State Planning Commission, Rodenberg “sighed”: “you know the saying ‘when you [offer] a finger ... they take your whole hand’”. He referred to Guevara’s requests related to the resorts that Rodenberg did not administer. In this particular case, Guevara “[called] for help” in regards to a problem with the East German enterprise Dia Chemi’s deliveries of the film stock for NP 20 Agfa cameras. At that time, the deliveries were delayed one month, which threatened to halt the ICAIC’s production in three weeks. Rodenberg wanted to help Guevara because he felt it was not correct that the Cubans would have to halt their production because of the GDR’s failed commitment.<sup>360</sup> Nonetheless, he could not resolve the problem as quickly as Guevara would have wished.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Letter from Stibi to Rodenberg from December 11, 1961.

<sup>360</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Rodenberg to Erich Apel from September 21, 1963. Guevara wrote to Rodenberg that they had been waiting for the film stock “for months”. The day before he wrote the letter, the ICAIC had only 48,000 feet in stock. It was a problem because the ICAIC was producing three rather long films, several artistic documentary films and Latin American newsreels, Popular Encyclopedia on 35mm as well as some animated films. It was especially important for *Cumbite* and *Pablo, Manuel y María* that had already started filming. DIA Chemi had some production difficulties and not even Rodenberg’s intervention could accelerate the process in this case.

<sup>361</sup> According to Guevara’s letter to Rodenberg from October 2, 1963, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

Guevara lost his important ally when Rodenberg left the Ministry of Culture in the end of 1963 to work fulltime at the State Council. He was substituted by Günter Witt, however, neither he stayed at the head of the film ministry for long. He was fired after the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum as one of the entities responsible for the “rabbit films”.

### *Other forms of cooperation*

The most important assignment the GDR had in relationship to Cuba was the delivery of film stock. It was the exclusive supplier for the socialist bloc and also for Cuba.<sup>362</sup> ORWO<sup>363</sup> supplied both black and white and color film stock. Cuba depended on the GDR’s export, established by the quotas set by the two countries’ Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The ICAIC would have much preferred to order from the capitalist countries (Kodak) because ORWO did not have a good quality (especially the color film stock) and ORWO often fell behind in their deliveries as shown earlier. However, the advantage for the ICAIC was that they did not have to pay in “hard” currency, which they did not have.<sup>364</sup> ORWO had many problems that were discussed over and over among the filmmakers from the entire socialist block. ORWO always promised improvements but did not deliver on its promises. In the end, however, all socialist filmmakers depended on it, even though for color films they had to supplement ORWO with Fuji to obtain better results. They did the same in Cuba.

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Rodenberg had both notified him that the deliveries should resume in October. BArch. DR1 8920.

<sup>362</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Rodenberg to Apel from September 21, 1963, p.2.

<sup>363</sup> ORWO or “Original from Wolfen”, was the East German branch of Agfa factory in Wolfen. In the first years, the GDR used the name Agfa but eventually, it lost in a lawsuit against the West German Agfa and had to change its name. Manuel Pérez Paredes. Personal interview. September 2014 and June 2016.

<sup>364</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Rodenberg to Apel from September 21, 1963, p.2.

Another aspect of the GDR and Cuban cooperation, although on a much smaller scale than with Czechoslovakia, was exchange of technicians and study visits. For example, on May 5, 1962, Antonio Rodríguez Gallego came to the GDR to study technical equipment for film studios. He came together with the film director Jorge Fraga López, who was assigned the task to study the DEFA's equipment and get acquainted with questions related to subtitling, in addition to viewing and selecting films for Cuban distribution.<sup>365</sup> These study visits were important because they enabled the ICAIC to get to know available technology and exchange information with those who worked with it in the socialist bloc.

The ICAIC was also allotted scholarships for its technicians and filmmakers but the exchange did not always take place as desired. According to the Implementation Plan for 1965/66, the ICAIC was supposed to send two film technicians to study for four weeks in the DEFA studios but “did not nominate anyone”.<sup>366</sup> The lack of interest among the ICAIC's technicians came, at least partially, from the overall lack of interest in the East German cinema. For example, Raúl Rodríguez, an earlier mentioned Cuban photographer, was offered a scholarship to go the GDR but he turned it down because he was not interested in the kind of cinema made there at that time. He shared that he would have liked to study in Czechoslovakia or Poland but the ICAIC never offered him that opportunity and the GDR did not interest him.<sup>367</sup>

On the other hand, at one point, the ICAIC requested placement for several film

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<sup>365</sup> More details about the visit of these two delegates and Samperio, who came to sign contracts and view films, can be located in BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Bulla from May 3, 1962.

<sup>366</sup> BArch. DR1 18904. Letter from May 4, 1965, written by Gysi from der Abteilung für Kulturelle Beziehungen, sector III, to Engelsman from the HV film.

<sup>367</sup> Raúl Rodríguez. Personal interview. June 2015.

technicians to train in reproduction technology and duplication techniques. The technicians in the end could not go because neither the Film College in Babelsberg nor any other school in the GDR offered such educational programs at that moment. Neither could they be accepted as skilled workers because the majority of the GDR's educational capacity in those areas was from January 1, 1967 reserved for the 2nd TV program GDR.<sup>368</sup> The exchange of technicians worked better with Czechoslovakia.

Generally, Guevara did not want to send his film directors to study abroad because he did not want them to lose touch with the ever changing reality of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>369</sup> He did send, however, two ICAIC's employees, Ortega and Humberto López, to the GDR. They studied in the Babelsberg Film College for several years, at least from 1964<sup>370</sup> to 1966.<sup>371</sup> Humberto López made a student film *Carlos* (1966)<sup>372</sup> about a Cuban, injured in the Bay of Pigs Invasion, who was receiving hospital treatment in East Germany. Hosek analyzes the film in *Sun, sex and socialism*.<sup>373</sup>

The film offers the Cuban perspective on one of the socialist bloc societies. It belongs,

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<sup>368</sup> BArch. DR1 18904. Volume 2. Letter from from November 15, 1966, written by Ruff to Adler from the Culture Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>369</sup> Manuel Herrera. Personal interview. September 2014.

<sup>370</sup> BArch. DR1 18906. Conception of negotiations for the Cultural Implementation Plan for 1964. The document mentions a possibility to accept more students starting 1965.

<sup>371</sup> BArch. DR1 18904. Additional proposals from the GDR to the Implementation plan, p. 8.

<sup>372</sup> Email from April 27, 2015, written by Renate Goethe, Leiterin der Universitätsbibliothek, Filmuniversität Babelsberg *KONRAD WOLF, Potsdam*, to the author.

<sup>373</sup> More information about *Carlos* and how it contrasted with the vision of extended Heimat of the GDR, reflected in the two East German films about Cuba, *Preludio 11* and *Und deine Liebe auch*, can be found in *Sun, Sex and Socialism*.



therefore, in the same group as Roberto Fandiño's earlier film *Gente de Moscú* (1963). However, Fandiño's film is a free cinema style movie without dialogues or commentary while López's film has dialogues. In addition, contrary to *Gente de Moscú*, *Carlos* offers a more personal perspective of a Cuban living in the GDR. López and Ortega had both participated in different documentary productions at the ICAIC before their departure to the GDR but neither of them made any films after their return to Cuba.<sup>374</sup>

### **Filming in Cuba**

In addition to the film exchange, ORWO film stock purchases, exchange of technicians, and scholarships, the ICAIC and the DEFA also cooperated in filming, especially in the area of documentary filmmaking. For example, a documentarist Kurt Stern stayed in Cuba from January 6 to February 6, 1962. He needed to "process more than 300 Spanish newsreels to find material for his future film". In addition, he was supposed to interview "some Cuban comrades". Dr. Lutz Köhlert from the DEFA's Documentary Film Department also arrived to Cuba around the same time. They both came by surprise to the displeasure of the German diplomatic mission in Havana. It was probably mostly the Documentary Film, which had this lack of proper communication with the Mission, because the DEFA Studio for Fiction Film did properly announce, according to Trappen, the arrival of Wolfgang Schreyer and Gerhard Hartwig for *Preludio II*. They coincided with Stern in Havana.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> López eventually emigrated to Sweden where he currently works for the Swedish television. He returned to Cuba in the early 1990s to document Castro's regime crumbling, but that did not happen and he left. During his visit, he met Manuel Pérez Paredes with whom he had made some documentary films before leaving for the GDR. Email correspondence with Manuel Pérez Paredes from July 18, 2016.

<sup>375</sup> His trip was one of the example of lack of communication between the DEFA and the German Mission in

During Stern's stay in the ICAIC, the Cuban critic Mario Rodríguez Alemán took the opportunity to interview him. He found out that Stern was in Cuba collecting materials about the Spanish Civil War. He was planning to use as a base Joris Ivens's documentary made during the civil war in Spain. Stern himself had been in Spain as a political commissary of the German brigade ("Kurt Stern" 70).<sup>376</sup> East Germans, like the rest of the socialist bloc, had difficulties accessing archival materials in Franco's Spain and Cuba was a suitable alternative source for this kind of material. In addition, the topic of the Spanish Civil War was popular in the GDR because it helped redirect the attention from the usual "German guilt" to the support of the Spanish Republican fighters. For example, the earlier mentioned *Fünf Patronenhülsen* ([Cinco casquillos], 1960), shown in the 1<sup>st</sup> GDR Film Week, dealt with that theme. The Spanish Civil War theme was also popular elsewhere in the socialist bloc as we have seen in the case of "The Spanish Ballad", one of the Czechoslovak co-production proposals, discussed in Chapter 3.

Based on the materials he found in Cuba and the Ivens's documentary, Stern eventually made *Unbändiges Spanien* (1962). Stern's film evoked interest of its Italian co-producer who wanted to buy it for Italy. However, there was a problem with the copyright. According to Oley from the VEB DEFA Studio for Newsreels and Documentary film, the DEFA had not yet clarified the distribution rights for the capitalist countries with Joris Ivens whose *The Spanish Earth* (1937) formed one part of the Stern's documentary on Spain. The studio was keen to clarify this situation because they wanted to sell the film to "Spanish speaking countries": Cuba

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Havana. Trappen complained that Stern came unannounced. As a matter of fact, not even after he had already been in Cuba, did the DEFA notify the Mission about his stay and his assignment. BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from March 14, 1962, written by Trappen from the GDR Mission in Havana to the DEFA.

<sup>376</sup> The brigade was the second largest after France, according to the article.

and other countries of Latin America.”<sup>377</sup> Alongside *El milagro ruso* and *Du und mancher Kamerad*, Stern’s film about the Spanish Civil War served to promote a particular historical discourse about socialist countries internationally.

Lutz Köhlert came to Cuba to film a part of the Soviet-East German co-production *Menschen und Tiere* (1962),<sup>378</sup> directed by Sergei Gerasimov. The Gorki-Studios in Moscow shot the film in cooperation with the DEFA in East Germany, Moscow and Cuba. Cuba represented Argentina in the film. Lutz, who also belonged to the Work Group “Roter Kreis”, like Maetzig and Beyer, stayed in Cuba from February 1 to April 15, 1962. He was co-directing the film but at the same time, he also played a role of “the administrator Wolfgang” to avoid the costs associated with having to bring another person to Cuba.<sup>379</sup> The socialist bloc viewers could not travel, therefore, they did not know the difference between different Latin American countries. A careful selection of a more neutral location (no palm trees and known historical landmarks) easily converted Cuba to Argentina, Chile or any other Latin American country.

In addition to *Menschen und Tiere* and *Preludio 11*, Cuba played a part in yet another East German film, *Und deine Liebe auch* (Frank Vogel, 1962). The original script did not account for shooting in Cuba as Hosek pointed out. It happened coincidentally. One of the protagonists of the film, Armin Müller-Stahl, was a member of the delegation for the 1<sup>st</sup> Film

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<sup>377</sup> BArch. DR1 8904. A letter from Rodenberg to Charlotte Schlotter from the VEB DEFA Aussenhandel.

<sup>378</sup> Based on a film novel from Tamara Makarowa who also co-wrote the script with Gerasimov. More in the DEFA Stiftung online database of films <http://www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=412&FilmID=Q6UJ9A002LUB> and other websites such as [http://www.flimmerkiste.bplaced.net/menschen\\_tiere.htm](http://www.flimmerkiste.bplaced.net/menschen_tiere.htm). The film can be watched on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7ZFCIkTPQc> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNd2MkdDo2Y>.

<sup>379</sup> BArch. DR117 33794. A document from January 6, 1962, written by the director of DEFA Studio for Feature Films, Joachim Mückenberger and the Head of Cadre Department, Wulf.

Week of the GDR in Cuba. Several months before the Film Week, he had been working as a protagonist of *Und deine Liebe auch*.<sup>380</sup> The film shooting extended because the film did not have a fixed script and because of the closure of the frontier between East and West Berlin, which affected the plot (Hosek 59). Normally, the studio would not have allowed him to travel, like they did not give permission to Maetzig to attend the same Film Week in order to avoid a delay in the completion of his film. However, the Ministry of Culture insisted. Therefore, Müller-Stahl's trip to Cuba had to be incorporated to the script (59). According to the Beyer's report, he and Armin Müller-Stahl dedicated three days of their stay in Havana to shoot some scenes. The filmed material was found to be "suitable for the film"<sup>381</sup> and incorporated.

The film was experimental in its use of documentary techniques, such as the hidden camera. In addition, it used a script that was not fixed and was developed as the film progressed. It tried to "blur the lines between fiction and reality" (Hosek 59). One could think this would make the film interesting for the Cubans since they experimented a lot with connecting the two forms. However, the film does not have dialogues and the characters only speak introspectively, i.e. "in their heads". The only exception is when a Cuban Revolutionary Alfredo sings on the bridge between the GDR and the FRG, guarded by Müller-Stahl's character Ulli, a factory worker-turned militiaman, and his fellows. The Cubans did not like the film, although it cast Alonzo Arau, a Mexican actor, popular in Cuba. According to Hosek, even though *Cine cubano* covered the GDR film weeks in Cuba, the film "screened on the island in 1963 with only brief

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<sup>380</sup> More about the film can be found in *Sun, Sex and Socialism*.

<sup>381</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Frank Beyer's report from December 5, 1960 about the stay of the 1<sup>st</sup> film delegation of the GDR in Cuba.

mention” (Hosek 59).

Although the film was an example of socialist internationalism and contained exotic elements, such as scenes from the Revolutionary Havana and a “Cuban” character playing drums and singing songs of the Cuban Revolution, the film was not attractive in the socialist bloc either. For example, the ČSF Selection Commission did not accept Vogel’s film for distribution “for its schematic view and for its overall quality, which [was] deep under the level of the Czechoslovak production, [while] in the GDR this film was highly praised.”<sup>382</sup> Each country was protective of its aesthetical as well as ideological direction, as we will see in *Preludio II*. The direction changed in different time periods. The Czechoslovak State Film did not accept *Und deine Liebe auch* in 1963 because it found the film too schematic. But a few years earlier, in 1958, it had refused some of the most acclaimed Polish “New Wave” films, like Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) and Andrzej Munk’s *Eroica* (1958) because the ideas the films accentuated “did not correspond to [the Czechoslovak Communist] Party’s and cultural policy”.<sup>383</sup>

## Conclusion

The DEFA and the ICAIC collaboration looked very promising in the beginning. The two countries shared similar political challenges. The DEFA had experienced many problems in its initial stages that the ICAIC was also dealing with in the beginning. Therefore, the DEFA could have become the ICAIC’s “mentor”. The problem was that the ICAIC’s artistic aims radically departed from the DEFA’s. The DEFA opted for a sterner and more rigid socialist realism while

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<sup>382</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF 63 a 64. R14/AI/2P/5K. Zpráva o dovozní a vývozní politice ČSF 1957 – 1963, p. 9.

<sup>383</sup> NFA. Sekretariát ÚŘ ČSF 63 a 64. R14/AI/2P/5K. Zpráva o dovozní a vývozní politice ČSF 1957 – 1963, p. 9.

the ICAIC praised experimentation. The differences deepened over time. Eventually, the ICAIC lost interest in an intensive cooperation with the GDR. That shows, for example, in the limited number of students and technicians the two countries exchanged. The GDR also did not subscribe to much export on “a non-commercial” basis, in spite of Rodenberg’s insistence that the GDR should behave more altruistically, in the spirit of true socialist internationalism.

The two countries had a lively exchange in documentary filmmaking, an area where they shared much common ground and also teachers. Surprisingly, however, no GDR filmmaker made films similar to Karmen’s and Šefranka’s documentaries about the early stages of the Cuban Revolution. The newsreels about Cuba that the ICAIC sent to the GDR, therefore, shaped the East German citizens’ vision of Cuba.

As we will see in the following chapter, the GDR-Cuban cinematic collaboration in the area of fiction films was much more complicated. Kurt Maetzig made *Preludio 11* in the spirit of the GDR changes of the 1961 – 1966 period and introduced an alternative historical discourse to the history of the Cuban Revolution. The ICAIC generally admired the “New Wave” films because they were more complex in the stories about their societies and histories. However, it was not so keen on introducing complexities where such revisions of the recent Cuban history “hit too close to home”. During the time when the Cuban Revolution was still fighting its enemies, the ICAIC preferred a more “schematic” approach, even though they generally rejected schematism in imported as well as co-produced films.

## CHAPTER 6

### *PRELUDIO 11: DIFFERENT VISIONS, DIFFERENT NARRATIVES*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the GDR and Cuba had a similar geographical and political situation of isolation and proximity to their archenemy. Consequently, they shared the need for a strong national identity narrative to mobilize internal and external forces for support, protection and defense. *Preludio 11* is a story about these two countries' militant narratives and agendas that seemed to be aligned but were not. It is a story about two countries that seemed to share the same vision but did not coincide in their understanding of the Cuban Revolution.

*Preludio 11* was a joint project with a political purpose. It expressed the GDR's desire to support anyone and anything that fought against American imperialism, the closest ally of the West German imperialism and militarism.<sup>384</sup> *Preludio 11* shared many traits with the Soviet and Czechoslovak co-productions *Soy Cuba* and *Para quién baila La Habana*: 1) they were all warfare films with a militant agenda, which conveyed a strong political message against imperialism; 2) they strove for an authentic representation of the Cuban Revolution; 3) they showed the "new" Cuba (*Preludio 11* and *Para quién baila La Habana*); 5) they were more complex art films but complied with the ideological and aesthetical imperatives of their regimes (with their inevitable oversimplifications); 6) they were all filmed in black and white, and 7) they all targeted broad audiences in hopes of influencing them with their militant message.

Although the co-productions shared all these traits, *Preludio 11* was unique in several aspects. First of all, it was the most daring of the three co-productions. Maetzig made a *fiction*

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<sup>384</sup> BArch. DR1 15974. Furfühlungsbericht des Jahres 1961 und statistischer Übersicht, Sektor III, P. America/Cuba.

film about one key warfare moment in the history of the Cuban Revolution and instead of focusing on praising the travails of the victors as Cuban films did, he decided to “dissect” and discredit the enemy. He analyzed the triumph of the Revolution through their eyes rather than the victors, which had not been done in Cuban cinema before *Preludio 11*. As we will see later on, however, such decisions came with a cost.

Second, the film was the most politicized of the three co-productions. Alfredo Guevara saw it as an opportunity to show the camouflaged manipulation of the yanquis and at the same time give assurances to Cuba’s population.<sup>385</sup> The choice of the epic genre to make an action-warfare film was perfect for this purpose. In addition, the ICAIC’s president trusted in a close supervision by his East German ally Rodenberg, who had a vested interest for the co-production to be politically correct and acceptable in *both* countries. Since that did not happen, despite Rodenberg’s best intentions, *Preludio 11* was also the only of the three co-productions that led to serious repercussions for both the ICAIC-DEFA relations and the film’s director.

Finally, it appears that as the only 1960s socialist co-production, *Preludio 11* did not have technical and artistic training as one of its principal objectives. Although the film certainly served that goal as well, archival documents do not offer any indication that it was the co-production’s aim. It is possible, however, that the co-production provided training for Cuban actors, either intended or deliberate.<sup>386</sup> It seems logical. The cast was mixed and some of the German protagonists were renowned East German actors.<sup>387</sup> This was not the case of the other

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<sup>385</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. A protocol from the meeting between Alfredo Guevara and Hans Rodenberg on November 8, 1961, p.4.

<sup>386</sup> Luis M. López mentions this aspect of the co-production in his review of *Preludio 11* (“Operación Cucaña”).

<sup>387</sup> On the Cuban side, there were several actors that were just starting in film. The Cuban actor Roberto Blanco was one of the most renowned actors in Cuban theatre, however, he was not an experienced film actor either.



two socialist co-productions where all protagonists and most of the remaining cast were inexperienced Cuban actors. In addition, Cuban technicians obtained some training as well because Maetzig used the Totalvision<sup>388</sup> lens for cinemascope and Cuban photographers thus gained the opportunity to learn how to work with the technology. *Preludio 11* was the first film in cinemascope ever filmed in Cuba.<sup>389</sup>

This chapter maps out the film's conception, production and reception within the framework of their circumstances. In this regard, it explores mostly written communication among the DEFA, Rodenberg and the ICAIC, located in Bundesarchiv in Berlin. Two documents are reviewed with particular care: the Cuban and the GDR political and artistic assessments of the first, unedited version of the film. The study continues with a survey of the film's reviews in Cuba. It assesses how Cuban critics received the adjusted version of the film in terms of its validity as an authentic representation of the Cuban Revolution. Lastly, the chapter analyzes the repercussions the film had for all parties involved and the future GDR-Cuban collaboration.

*Preludio 11* has caught some interest of researchers although not as many as *Soy Cuba*. Most scholars dismiss the co-production as “a failure”. Supposedly, the East German filmmakers could not read and understand Cuban reality. The studies of Marta Muñoz-Aunión, Vladimir Alexander Smith-Mesa and Jennifer Hosek go beyond this perspective. Muñoz-Aunión reads *Preludio 11* as an opportunity to discover clues of the “ideological and cultural parameters” that influenced the GDR filmmakers' gaze. Smith-Mesa searches for artistic, thematic and genre innovations the film brought to both the East German and the Cuban cinemas. Finally, Hosek

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<sup>388</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Studio für Spielfilme Potsdam. Production costs. February 15, 1964.

<sup>389</sup> The article “Preludio 11”, published in *Girón* on April 20, 1964, highlights this aspect. Maetzig's film *Das Lied der Martrösen* (1958) was already shot in Cinemascope. [http://www.instereouk.com/East\\_Germany.html](http://www.instereouk.com/East_Germany.html).

understands *Preludio 11* as a means to connect the domestic and international concerns through the idea of “extended *Heimat*” (Hosek 69).

The present study complements these three works by focusing on an aspect that they do not cover – the expectations. It argues that the ICAIC and the GDR leadership had different expectations. Therefore, they had to negotiate a particular image of the Cuban Revolution that would be acceptable to both parties. The director tried to consolidate these different expectations and simultaneously propose a more complex vision on the Cuban reality of that moment. These different expectations and visions collided. The aftermath was that an amended version of the film was released to the public and the two co-producing partners had to re-evaluate and adjust their future cinematic cooperation.

## **Conception and Production**

### *Conception*

It was probably the director Kurt Maetzig himself who conceived the idea to make a co-production with Cuba when he and the East German actor Günther Simon came to Havana in 1960. During their visit, they interviewed with the Cuban critic José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez and expressed their desire to make a film about the Cuban Revolution and its fight against imperialism (“*Predulio 11: el cine en la batalla cubana*”). They wanted to produce “a film about problems that interested both countries”<sup>390</sup> but at that time, the critic concluded, nothing came out of that visit. At least, that is what he thought at that time (“*Predulio 11...*”).

The project did not come from above like in the other two co-productions. Maetzig and

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<sup>390</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. *Preludio 11*. Final production report from April 18, 1964.

his Creative Work Group “Roter Kreis” had to “pitch” the idea to the Ministry of Culture and probably also to the East German Communist Party (SED), as they did with any other filmic project. We can deduct it from the request the Deputy Minister Rodenberg made to Guevara in November 1961: he asked him to write an evaluation of the story, which Maetzig had sent Guevara earlier that year, and “[emphasize] again that there was a possibility of a new invasion and the co-production could help uncover the US intentions as well as reassure the population”.<sup>391</sup> He made the suggestion in order to support the project. He knew that such request would stimulate the Party to approve the film as the means necessary for the propaganda in support of the Cuban Revolution.

Maetzig and the scriptwriter Wolfgang Schreyer started to work on the story in the late spring 1961. The topic presented itself with the Bay of Pigs Invasion, which had taken place two month before they arrived to Cuba.<sup>392</sup> The theme was convenient because it represented the shared concern of the two countries, which were geographically “at the door of imperialism”.<sup>393</sup> Maetzig and Schreyer wrote the story after four weeks in Cuba.<sup>394</sup>

The filmmakers wanted to make an authentic film about the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, they planned to cast “a los artistas y al pueblo cubano, a [los] milicianos y, de ser posible, a los propios contrarrevolucionarios de Playa Girón” (Valdés Rodríguez, “Predulio 11”). They were fascinated by the mercenaries already then but for obvious reasons, they could not

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<sup>391</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Bulla’s protocol from a meeting between Rodenberg and Guevara. November 8, 1961, p.4.

<sup>392</sup> BArch. DR1 15974. Report about the fullfilment and implementation of the Plan for 1961 from December 12, 1961. Department of Cultural Affairs, Sector III.

<sup>393</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Frank Beyer’s letter from December 5, 1960.

<sup>394</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Final production report from April 28, 1964, written by Mählich and Rost.

cast them in the end. Instead, they hired several actors that physically resembled some of the real mercenaries from the Bay of Pigs Invasion we know from Cuban newsreels and Ulive and Gutiérrez Alea's films.<sup>395</sup> Maetzig and Schreyer also wanted to shoot the exteriors and "aquella parte de los interiores que fuera posible" in Cuba. As we will see later, however, due to the Missile Crisis they had to depart from their plan and shoot not only most of the interiors but also some of the exteriors in the GDR.

Maetzig elicited ample feedback regarding the story. "Roter Kreis" discussed it and sent it to the ICAIC. Maetzig sent a letter to Guevara with some of the most important comments from "Roter Kreis", eliciting the ICAIC's opinion. He pointed out that the story had not yet been officially approved by the authorities.<sup>396</sup> Soon after, in November, Rodenberg and Beyer traveled to Havana for the GDR Film Week and discussed the co-production with Guevara directly. He then sent his evaluation to Berlin with Rodenberg.<sup>397</sup>

Guevara approved the story with some recommendations. Although he did not initially see it "very suitable", he thought that "if properly revised," it could work. He recommended Schreyer to work with a "Cuban author living in Cuba" to achieve greater authenticity and historical accuracy. Guevara promised to find a suitable collaborator.<sup>398</sup> Guevara essentially agreed with the feedback by "Roter Kreis", which Maetzig had transmitted to him in his letter.

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<sup>395</sup> *Crónica cubana* and *Memorias del subdesarrollo* both use newsreel footage that depicts some of the prisoners captured in the Bay of Pigs Invasion.

<sup>396</sup> BArch. DR1 8874. A letter from Maetzig to Guevara from October 16, 1961.

<sup>397</sup> Since Rodenberg was not directly involved with the screenplay, he asked Guevara for "a written evaluation" before his departure on November 13, 1961, so that "Roter Kreis" could assess the script proposal and discuss the film's realization. He could not personally commit to any formal agreement or protocol, which could serve as a base for initiating the co-production process. BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961, p.3.

<sup>398</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961.

He coincided especially with the objection that “the only commander in the film becomes a traitor.” He suggested that the screenwriters could also “enrich the atmosphere” by highlighting the enthusiasm that governed in Cuba.<sup>399</sup> Both Guevara and Rodenberg thought these problems could be remedied. Overall, Guevara believed the proposal “corresponded with the actual life in Cuba, the characters [were] depicted interestingly and historical and political conditions corresponded well [to reality].”<sup>400</sup> That was what was most important to him.

Based on the discussions in the group and Guevara’s feedback, “Roter Kreis” approved Schreyer’s story on January 16, 1962 and commissioned him to write a script. At that time, the DEFA started the official co-production negotiations with the ICAIC.<sup>401</sup> Schreyer and the main dramaturge of “Roter Kreis”, Hartwig, stayed in Cuba from January 15 to April 30, 1962 writing the script.<sup>402</sup> They were probably already cooperating with José Soler Puig,<sup>403</sup> assigned to the co-production. Soler Puig was a good match. Shortly before, he published his *Bertillón 166*. He wrote “action” novels and had, therefore, a potential to enrich Schreyer’s story.

### *Production*

After the story was approved, Maetzig started getting ready for the production. He returned to

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<sup>399</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961.

<sup>400</sup> BArch. DR1 8875. Report from November 8, 1961.

<sup>401</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Final production report, written by Mählich and Rost on April 28, 1964.

<sup>402</sup> BArch. DR117/ 33794. A letter from November 20, 1961, addressed to Schreyer, and letters to Hartwig and Schreyer from December 7, 1961.

<sup>403</sup> Soler Puig was a logical choice since shortly before the co-production his adventure historical novel from the Revolution, *Bertillón 166*, became very popular in Cuba. Soon it was translated to German and other socialist bloc’s languages.

Cuba with Hans Mählich in June 1962 and signed the co-production contract<sup>404</sup> with the ICAIC on June 20, 1962.<sup>405</sup> They also made camera probes, cast Cuban actors and signed contracts with them, according to the article “Preludio 11”, published in *Film Spiegel*.

The beginning of the co-production,<sup>406</sup> was provisionally set for August 20, 1962. However, shortly before the crew’s departure the ICAIC advised the DEFA that the filming needed to be postponed for two months. The reason was that two other co-productions, with Czechoslovakia and France, were taking place at that time. They both extended beyond the initially set end date of filming. Guevara notified Rodenberg that the Cubans would not be able to provide the services needed with the other two co-production running at the same time. Therefore, part of the crew left by ship in the end of July and the rest flew in October. The delay created several challenges. One of the biggest was that Maetzig’s new wife, film editor Irene Ulrich, expected their first child in December 1962 (Musial and Rittmeyer 119).<sup>407</sup>

Finally, the filming began. The crisis made the filming very difficult. The first shooting day was October 8, 1962, six days before the Cuban Missile Crisis set off. The crew barely started filming, therefore, it could not leave. It also had the added pressure of representing the

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<sup>404</sup> “Preludio 11”. *Film Spiegel*. July 31, 1963. The author could only access the article’s translation into Spanish, which is located in Archivo de la Cinemateca cubana.

<sup>405</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Comments to the final report. April 28, 1964.

<sup>406</sup> The co-production had different working names. It was called *Operation Preludio* after a real event “Operación Preludio”. Cuban newspapers at that time wrote about it because it was related to the prosecution of the Bay of Pigs invaders. In the archives, the film also appears under the titles *Cucaña*, *Unternehmen Preludio* (BArch. DR117/33818. Letter from November 1, 1962 addressed to FSB in Prague) and *Operation Cucaña* (BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Studio for Spielfilme Potsdam. Production costs. February 15, 1964).

<sup>407</sup> The studio allowed Maetzig to take his wife with him. But his crew later perceived him as isolated from them because he was too focused on taking care of his family. That contributed to an increased strain on everyone during the Missile Crisis especially. BArch. DR1 8920. A report from April 10, 1963 about the stay of *Preludio 11*’s crew in Havana, written by Wolff a Gerwien.

socialist bloc. The media, in order to further the official agenda of the GDR solidarity with Cuba, emphasized the parallels between the GDR filming and the Cubans' fighting. For that purpose, they highly disseminated Maetzig's statement in which he expressed that they felt "a thing of honor ... to fight on the 'film front' ... to help [their] Cuban friends" (qtd. in Hosek 70). In contrast to the director's declaration, however, the GDR crew members were far from united in their stance. The Cuban actor Miguel Benavides remembered that the only true solidararian member of the East German crew was the actor Gerry Wolff (qtd. in Hosek 70).

The otherwise good relations between the GDR and the Cuban crews got tested during the Missile Crisis. Some of the East Germans crew members even wanted to stop the production. Nevertheless, in the end the GDR team, more or less united in regards to how to respond questions from the Cuban people regarding Khrushchov's decision and the GDR's position, decided to continue.<sup>408</sup> The production did not interrupt except for one day when they had to give up their arms-props because the true militia needed them.<sup>409</sup> The crew left Cuba on December 11, 1962 and in January 1963, after a brief break, it continued shooting in Berlin together with fourteen Cuban crew members, including the actors.<sup>410</sup> The filming ended mid-April 1963.<sup>411</sup>

The Missile Crisis impacted the cost but more its distribution than the overhead. In

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<sup>408</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A report from April 10, 1963 about the stay of *Preludio 11*'s crew in Havana, written by Wolff a Gerwien.

<sup>409</sup> However, that could have also been a story made up by East German journalists along with the story about a Cuban militiaman who once reported to a "fake" officer, an East German actor who played a Cuban official. A translation of the article, published in *Film Spiegel* on July 31, 1963, is located in Archivo de la Cinemateca cubana.

<sup>410</sup> BArch. DR117 33818. Letter from December 3, 1962, written by Mückenberger and Wulf and directed to the co-production's producer Hans Mählich.

<sup>411</sup> Most filming in the GDR finished in the end of February 1963 but two sequences had to be filmed at the Berlin airport. The crew had to wait for the snow to melt, therefore, they did not reinstate the work until April 1963. BArch. DR117/32361.

general, the project stayed within the budget. On one side, the crew saved because the filming in Cuba ended earlier than planned. Therefore, there were less shooting days abroad (shooting abroad was more expensive). On the other side, the costs increased because some scenes originally shot or planned to be shot in Cuba had to be filmed in the DEFA studio or its surroundings. That augmented the cost of scenography.<sup>412</sup> Those scenes are easily noticeable, especially because of the light: the mercenaries' training base Camp Ambros in Florida, their boat ride to Cuba and a portion of the big fire in the swamp sequence.<sup>413</sup>

The troubles for *Preludio 11* did not end with leaving Havana. In June 1963, Maetzig send the first, unedited copy to the DEFA and the Ministry of Culture leadership, expecting an approval but the copy raised concerns. It took until October 23, 1963 when the film was finally approved.<sup>414</sup> As we will see later on, in the meantime, Rodenberg and Guevara met at the IFF Moscow in July and exchanged much correspondence trying to figure out how to “fix” the film, so that it would be acceptable in both countries.

### *International Crew*

The co-production was a true internationalist effort. Not only because it joined two countries together with a common goal to defend the Cuban Revolution with artistic means. It also had a diverse international crew. The majority of technicians and artists were East Germans and they were aided by the Cubans. In addition to Maetzig, whose assistant director was Pastor Vega,

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<sup>412</sup> BArch. DR117/33500 8/9. Final production report, written by Mählich and Rost on April 28, 1964.

<sup>413</sup> BArch. DR117/32361. Report “Operation Preludio”1963.

<sup>414</sup> BArch. DR117/33500. Report from April 28, 1964.



*Preludio 11* also had the East German director of photography Günther Hauboldt and the Cuban photographer Gustavo Maynulet as his assistant. The film featured the renowned East German actors Armin Müller-Stahl, Günther Simon and Gerry Wolff, and the Cuban actor Roberto Blanco, who was considered at that time “el mejor actor de teatro” in Cuba, according to “Preludio 11”, published in *Filmspiegel*.

Alongside East Germans and Cubans, two other nationalities were represented with the Spaniard Margarita Alexandre and Brazilian Ibere Cavalcanti. Alexandre, who worked as the production director in *Preludio 11* together with Mählich, had been in Cuba from before 1959. She came to work with Antonio Vásquez Gallo on the script of *La vida comienza ahora* (1959), a love story between a daughter of a prison director and a political prisoner. As Barbara Zecchi pointed out, it was the first Cuban fiction film that shot and premiered in Cuba after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (“Margarita Alexandre”).<sup>415</sup> However, it was never regarded as such by the ICAIC. It could have been because its content was not revolutionary enough or because it was made by ex-employees of RKO Cuba<sup>416</sup> and not the ICAIC.

The ICAIC recognized the importance of Margarita Alexandre. Therefore, Guevara, García Espinosa, Cabrera Infante, and Gutiérrez Alea encouraged her to stay. She then produced many of the first Cuban films such as *Las doce sillas* (1962), *Cumbite* (1964) and *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966). In addition to *Preludio 11*, she participated in another film made by a foreign director, *Crónica cubana*. She was a great professional, however, officials at the ICAIC

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<sup>415</sup> For more about Margarita Alexandre see, for example, <http://www.umass.edu/gynocine/biographies/alexandre>.

<sup>416</sup> The film was produced in Cooperative Cinematográfica RKO de Cuba and released in August 1960. It was the only film made by this company, created by ex-employees of RKO Radio Pictures Cuba (Douglas 148).

felt a bit uneasy around her, probably because she asked a lot of questions.<sup>417</sup>

Ibere Cavalcanti had studied in Potsdam-Babelsberg Film College before *Preludio II*. He joined Maetzig's team as an assistant director, interpreter<sup>418</sup> and actor. He was supposed to transfer under the ICAIC's contract for part of the post-production and he did not plan to return to the GDR.<sup>419</sup> After the co-production, he stayed in Cuba where he became very active. He starred in *En la noche* (Pastor Vega, 1964) and he directed *La fuga* (1964) and *Pueblo por pueblo* (1963)<sup>420</sup> before returning to Brazil. He was quite knowledgeable of German cinema after his studies in the GDR. Therefore, he also wrote articles for *Cine cubano*. He authored several articles about Bertolt Brecht<sup>421</sup> and reviewed some films shown during the 2<sup>nd</sup> GDR film week in Cuba, for instance, Wolf's *Cielo dividido* ("Cielo dividido" 18). Furthermore, Cavalcanti sometimes assisted Guevara as interpreter when Guevara conducted business with the GDR.<sup>422</sup>

### *Kurt Maetzig, the Film Director*

Maetzig was one of the most versatile directors in the GDR, as Martin Brady introduced him in

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<sup>417</sup> When the author's contact in Cuba was helping her to arrange an interview with one of the ICAIC's former directors, over the phone and with her present, he had to assure the director that she was not as inquisitive as Alexandre.

<sup>418</sup> BArch. DR117 33794. Document from February 8, 1963, written by Mückenberger and Wulf.

<sup>419</sup> BArch. DR117 33794. Document from February 8, 1963, written by Mückenberger and Wulf. According to some archival documents, it appears that the synchronization was supposed to be done in Cuba. However, in the end, it was done in the Johannistal DEFA studio. Therefore, Cavalcanti probably traveled to Berlin again, even though his name does not appear in any documents. There is no request for his reentry visa, for example.

<sup>420</sup> He also made several films in Germany: *Plakat* (1965), *Samba* (1965), and *Los zafiros y el Leipziger* (1966).

<sup>421</sup> For example, "Berthold Brecht. 66 años" in *Cine cubano*. 4:19, 13 - 24.

<sup>422</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from September 3, 1963.

London's screening of *Der Rat der Götter* (1950) (qtd. in Allan and Sandford 78). He also called him a "pioneer" and "innovator" (79). Maetzig had a long and diverse career in cinema. He started in 1933 as an assistant director, later he worked in animated film and during the war as a chemist in a photochemical laboratory. After the war, he became a documentary filmmaker. This experience gave him a good preparation for his later work as fiction feature film director (79).

Maetzig was a prime example of an artist who learned to navigate the turbulent waters between his own socialist conviction and party demagoguery that stifled artistic creation. On the one hand, he made a state-commissioned two-part biography *Ernst Thälmann* (1954, 1955) with a shining example of a "positive hero" and "edited" history of a communist leader, which brought him a national prize.<sup>423</sup> On the other hand, he filmed *Schlösser und Katen* (1957), a film about 1945 displacements, agriculture cooperatives and the uprising of 17 June 1953,<sup>424</sup> which was still a touchy subject in 1957. Then came *Preludio II*, which the East German leadership did not find either sufficiently militant or socialist realist. To top it off, he made *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, one of the banned 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum films. The prizes and reprimands attest to a sincere quest for the right balance between socialist *realism* and socialist reality the filmmaker could identify with.

Maetzig was also very versatile in terms of experimenting with different genres. His

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<sup>423</sup> Ernst Thälmann was the head of the East German Communist Party during the last years of the Weimar Republic and died a Nazi prisoner. The Party leadership was very interested in a film about him, so Maetzig pitched the final project directly to the Politbüro. He combined a visual style deliberately borrowed from such "high Stalinist" classics as Mikhail Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (1949) – the color scheme was, of course, dominated by red – and a clearly articulated exhortations to political action. The film was well attended by audience. Feinstein argued it was not only thanks to the official campaign to encourage viewership. The audience liked *Thälmann* films because they were action movies packed with scenes of battle and intrigue (Feinstein 39).

<sup>424</sup> In his interview with Brady, Maetzig shared that he wanted to do a different film about Thälmann, more nuanced and real but once he entered the "machinery", there was no way out. He had to do what the Party wanted. He liked *Schlösser und Katen* better because it was more verisimilar (qtd. in Seán and Sandford 84). The topic of the 1953 uprising, however, was still a touchy topic in 1957.

feature film *Der Rat der Götter* (1950), as he stated, “introduced a new genre in the film-making, the so called documentary-feature film” (qtd. in Allan and Sandford 77). A documentary-feature film has a fictional story but many other things are based on official sources (77).<sup>425</sup> *Preludio 11* was also a documentary-feature film.<sup>426</sup> Like *Der Rat der Götter*, *Preludio 11* was a fiction, based on a real event, a real “Operación Preludio”. Unlike his prior film, however, in this case Maetzig did not use any archival footage even though Rodenberg recommended it<sup>427</sup> after the state sent the film back to the studio for rework in June 1963. In addition to his documentary-features, Maetzig also directed a comedy *Vergess mir meine Traudel nicht* (1957), historical drama *Das Lied der Matrosen* (1958) and even a sci-fi movie *Der schweigende Stern* (1960).

Even though Maetzig was considered an innovative director in the GDR, Guevara did not value him as a director. He wrote to Rodenberg in his letter from August 14, 1963 that “[él] nunca [sintió] especial entusiasmo por la obra y el estilo de Kurt Maetzig”. According to him, “el artista [debía, tenía] que afinar y renovar creativa y constantemente su instrumental de trabajo, su lenguaje, y en general sus medios expresivos, como un modo de asegurar la más profunda y combativa eficacia.” In his opinión, Kurt Maetzig had not demonstrated such attitude, at least in the films Guevara had seen and “menos en ‘Preludio 11’”.<sup>428</sup> Of course, the work “combative” is important here: Maetzig *was* constantly evolving but not in the direction Guevara valued.

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<sup>425</sup> In this case, “everything concerning the relations between the German chemical industry and American industry [was] based on official sources” (Maetzig qtd. in Allan and Sandford 77). More about the film, for example, in *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946 – 1989* and *The Triumph of the Ordinary*.

<sup>426</sup> Smith-Mesa argues that *Preludio 11* introduced the genre in Cuba, however, some Cuban films had used their own version of it before 1963, for example, *Las doce sillas* and especially, *Historias de la Revolución*.

<sup>427</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Rodenbert to Röder from September 2, 1963.

<sup>428</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963, p.3.

### **Authenticity, Accuracy and Political Purpose**

*Preludio 11* narrates a story of a group of Cuban mercenaries who land in Cuba to carry out *Preludio 11*, an attempt to prepare conditions to overthrow Fidel. As a consequence of a failed landing and a lack of support from the Cuban population, the discord inside the group grows, fed by the group's captive, Peña. Peña is a militiaman, who intends to seed doubt inside the group to sabotage their success. A rapid intervention of the Rebel Army and the help of the coal miners working in the area prevents another invasion and the mercenaries, who survived, are arrested. Parallel to the story of the mercenary group, we follow three soldiers: Ramón Quintana; his boss, Carlos Palomino and Daniela, Quintana's platonic love. Palomino, who filters information to counterrevolutionaries and sabotages the Rebel Army military operations, commits suicide when he is discovered. Daniela, soldier and teacher, single mother and ex-wife of one of the mercenaries, Miguel, has to decide between the father of her child and Quintana as well as love and duty.

As we have seen earlier, the film was planned and produced during the tensest period of the Cuban Revolution's history. The Cuban (and the ICAIC) leadership had certain expectations from films produced or co-produced at that time. As Guevara explained to Rodenberg in a letter from January 24, 1962, the ICAIC needed feature films "basados en ideas contemporáneas y combativas" to help lift spirits and persuade the population. He confirmed to Rodenberg that *Preludio 11* "[cumplía] esos requisitos". Guevara sensed that such a film could be useful and was urging Schreyer and Hartwig to come as soon as possible.<sup>429</sup> He felt the film argument could help convince the world of the evil-doing of the Yanquis and that *all* Cubans were ready to defend their Revolution.

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<sup>429</sup> BArch. DR1 8920.

The ICAIC did not expect a *documentary* film. They knew that a fiction film required filmmakers to take certain artistic liberties. However, they did not want their reality “distorted” either.<sup>430</sup> They still wanted the film to be authentic and aligned with the official discourse on the Cuban Revolution. Schreyer explained that both the DEFA and the ICAIC expected a highly political adventure film, captivating and at the same time realistic<sup>431</sup> and militant. This was a difficult objective to meet. That is probably why the film bears some elements of a spy movie.

A spy genre was practical for what *Preludio 11* was supposed to fulfill. One of the typical features of the genre is a fine line between reality and fiction. As such it offered the filmmakers a possibility to create a certain verisimilitude with Cuban reality without having to sacrifice the artistic license altogether. The film told a story of an invasion that easily *might* have happened but at the same time it emphasized through a text on the screen, which appeared right after the initial credits, that the film was neither based on real events nor talked about real people: “La historia de esta película se inspira en líneas generales en la situación de Cuba poco antes de la invasión y la derrota de los mercenarios en Playa Girón, pero los hechos, situaciones y personajes que presenta no reflejan, sin embargo, ningún acontecimiento histórico concreto” (*Preludio 11*). In addition, of course, the film has a Rebel Army captain who is a spy and sabotages operations.

It is not easy to make an artistically valuable film with a strong political message without any contradictions. The filmmakers of *Preludio 11*, similarly to the creators of *Para quién baila La Habana*, were trying to portray reality instead of an unrealistic ideal. They introduced

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<sup>430</sup> BArch. DR 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 13, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>431</sup> Wolfgang Schreyer. Email interview. August 2016.

ambiguities in characters because real people were always “grey” and never “black and white”. Between 1961 and 1965, East German filmmakers, although they had to work in a much more rigid environment than the Czechoslovaks, also started leaning away from the dogmatic version of socialist realism. *Preludio 11* bears the spirit of that brief period, albeit it was not as daring as some other films from the same time, including the director’s own “rabbit film”.

Maetzig did not try to take advantage of the distance from the GDR to create a subversive film. On the contrary, he and Schreyer genuinely wanted to help the Cuban Revolution to succeed (Hosek 68). The topic of invasion was not only politically convenient but also practical because “the highly charged event was on every Cuban’s mind” and it was manageable for the filmmakers even with their limited knowledge of Cuba. They did not want to film a documentary because the ICAIC was already making one about Playa Girón (69). They figured though that it would not be difficult to transmit an experience of an invasion as “action-melodrama” (69).

Maetzig had done documentary-feature films before and knew he had to investigate. He and Schreyer conducted a thorough research to make their film as accurate and authentic as possible. They used mainly four sources: 1) Cuban newspapers from October 1960 – July 1961; 2) verbal and written references from the East German correspondent Kurt Hoffman; 3) verbal consultation with Günter Metzker, from the GDR Mission in Havana, and 4) observations, interviews and notes from their own expedition.<sup>432</sup> The film reflects their findings as well as the understanding of Cuban reality transmitted to them by other East Germans who were more familiar with it thanks to their prolonged stay in Cuba and who were also easier to communicate with (in German).

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<sup>432</sup> BArch. DR117/9178. Report from September 29, 1961.

Historical ambiguity tends to be threatening to authorities but it does not mean that it does not exist. The beginning of the Cuban Revolution was not politically transparent even for the Cuban people themselves, let alone for foreigners. The many incidents that happened in the course of the 1960s confirm that the seemingly unified front behind Castro was a myth. Mass emigration, conflicts between the old communist and *castristas* and insurgencies in the Escambray Mountains happened for a reason. It is also clear that the press in the socialist world<sup>433</sup> (including Cuba) manipulated the information according to their own agendas. The images of Castro and his bearded men triumphantly entering Havana and the massive gatherings for his speeches made a strong impression abroad suggesting the unwavering support of all Cubans. However, the reality was much more complex and *Preludio 11* reflected that surprisingly well.

In some way, despite the filmmakers' intentions, the film defied the two countries' official discourses on the Cuban Revolution and there were consequences. The ICAIC and the GDR government officials accused the film of "distorting" the reality of the Cuban Revolution. They concluded that the film "failed" ideologically, especially because it did not show the massive support and unity of *all* Cubans behind Fidel.<sup>434</sup> By not showing it, the film potentially called in question the legitimacy of the Cuban Revolutionary leaders before international public and that was not politically appropriate. The Cuban leaders made sure to broadcast wide support of the masses for the Revolution to gain legitimacy and international endorsement. And the GDR showed this fervor and unity in their media as well. The GDR leaders did not want to produce a

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<sup>433</sup> Obviously, as the election year in the United State proved, not only in the socialist world.

<sup>434</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film *Preludio 11*, attached to a letter from August 14, 1963, p. 1.



film that would be inconsistent with their own official propaganda. Such inconsistency could have invited the East German people to start questioning the plausibility of the GDR official public communication altogether.<sup>435</sup>

### **The Institutional Compromise**

It was clear to both the ICAIC and the GDR leadership that the film could not screen publicly in the form Maetzig had submitted it. They had to find a solution. During the IFF Moscow Rodenberg and Guevara agreed that the ICAIC would send a representative<sup>436</sup> to Berlin with a proposal of interventions, required for a version acceptable in Cuba.

### *The East German Assessment*

A couple of months before the arrival of the ICAIC delegate, the Central Film Administration of the Ministry of Culture met and conducted an internal pre-screening, which was needed before a statewide exhibition approval could be issued for the GDR. Later the film also screened for the Collegium of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Party. They decided jointly to postpone the statewide distribution until the DEFA addressed their comments. Their concerns were summarized in

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<sup>435</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11, attached to a letter from August 14, 1963, p. 3.

<sup>436</sup> Originally García Espinosa was supposed to travel to Berlin after his stay in Prague where he was working on the final version of *Para quién baila La Habana*, however, Maetzig fell ill and the postponement prevented García Espinosa's participation. Nicke's Department of Culture was supposed to cover the costs of the delegate's stay in East Germany. BArch. DR1 8920. A letter from Mathyssek to Nicke from August 28, 1963.

*Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11* (further *Argumentation*),<sup>437</sup> generated by Erhard Kranz.

This section will put in conversation this document with the ICAIC's proposal, carried out by the ICAIC's delegate, the film director Roberto Fandiño (further Fandiño's report).

One of the GDR leadership's biggest concerns, which the *Argumentation* expressed, was that *Preludio 11*, in spite of being the first GDR-Cuban co-production, did not show "the most important feature of the Cuban Revolution [which was] the atmosphere of the Cuban Revolution, enthusiasm, unity, and determination to fight with which the people [stood] behind Fidel Castro".<sup>438</sup> Guevara had already pointed it out in his evaluation of the film story. How important this aspect was is also evident from Valdés-Rodríguez's review of Karmen's *Alba de Cuba*, discussed in Chapter 2.

Another big problem the document highlighted, was the ratio and the characterization of the film's positive and negative characters. According to the *Argumentation, Preludio 11* characterized the Cuban nation basically by three people: a cement factory worker Peña, the mercenary group's prisoner; Daniela and Ramón, a son of the bourgeoisie and now lieutenant of the Cuban Army.<sup>439</sup> They are supported by the working class, however, in the scene where the people enter into action in mass, the report complained, "[the people] stay anonymous and there are no individual performances that the viewer would remember." The masses were represented by coal miners, militiamen in the cement factory, crowd in the bomb explosion scene, and

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<sup>437</sup> The report was written by Dr. Erhard Kranz from the DEFA Department of the Artistic Production.

<sup>438</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.1.

<sup>439</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.1.

soldiers.<sup>440</sup> There was no character among them with a name, history and political consciousness, who would rise and led the crowd.

In this aspect, *Preludio 11* differs from the other two co-productions. The sequences where the Cuban people enter the scene in mass, Enrique's funeral and Mariano's joining the Rebel Army in *Soy Cuba* and the port sequence in *Para quién baila La Habana*, have some of the main characters integrated in the crowd. That does not happen in *Preludio 11* where the protagonists do not interact with the masses, do not connect with them.

That by itself would not have been such a problem. The real issue was that in contraposition to these relatively weak positive characters and the anonymous poor class, there is a group of negative characters who stand out and are "unforgettable". The *Argumentation* referred mostly to the group of mercenaries (with exception of Rico who later joins the Cuban Revolution) and Carlos Palomino, an official-traitor. In addition to them, there are a peasant and a priest, who help the mercenaries, and an optician and his helper.<sup>441</sup> Furthermore, there is an elevator boy who delivers cocaine to Palomino and exchanges information between him and the counterrevolutionaries but the *Argumentation* does not mention the character. Overall, the small group of the weak positive heroes together with the anonymous group of the poor cannot counteract the negative characters and neutralize this ideological imbalance.<sup>442</sup>

As for the individual characters, the *Argumentation* found a problem especially with several members of the mercenary group and the peasant. It did not have any problem with the

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<sup>440</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11, p.1.

<sup>441</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11, p.1.

<sup>442</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11, p.2.

two truly negative characters, Paco and Umberto. Neither did the ICAIC as we will see later. Paco is an ex-member of Batista's police, who is violent, selfish and has no regard for the collective, including his own troupe. Umberto, an ex-landowner, makes derogatory statements against black Cubans and objectifies women. Neither of the two posed any ideological dilemma. This was probably how the GDR leadership wanted all the negative characters portrayed. They are so negative that just by how they behave they help convert the only black mercenary Rico in the Revolution's supporter.

The rest of the characters is more ambiguous and that raised questions. In addition, their characterization makes the conflict inside the group incomprehensible, according to the *Argumentation*. The film, for example, never clarifies why some of the mercenaries had left Castro's ranks and why they returned to Cuba. It is also not clear what they are fighting for. Furthermore, Sergio and the fights within the group are constructed "to evoke compassion with the counterrevolutionaries or at least debilitate [the viewers'] aversion towards them".<sup>443</sup>

According to the *Argumentation*, Sergio was the most likeable character from the mercenary group. He even appeared "convertible". He treated everyone fairly and "humanly", his fellow mercenaries as well as the prisoner. He defended Miguel in the base camp. He reprimanded Paco for taking bread away from the captive Peña. He emanated a sense of solidarity. He was antagonist to the self-serving Paco, as emphasized in the final sequence when the Cuban Army soldiers shackle them together. Sergio was a problem because he transmitted the idea that not all mercenaries were bad, although the Cuban and the GDR leadership made people believe they were. That was inconvenient for both the ICAIC and the DEFA. However,

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<sup>443</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.2

there was nothing the GDR leadership could do with Sergio except reshooting most of his scenes but it was too late for that.

Another problem the *Argumentation* pointed out was that the film's concept made it difficult for the viewers to understand "the ideological intention" of the film, i.e. "the impression that each invasion against Cuba [was] doomed to fail". According to the *Argumentation*, "one [was] more under the impression that the prelude [failed] accidentally but that [the outcome] could have also been different." In addition, the GDR leaders resented that the film did not evoke "the feeling of patriotism" and left the viewer rather "untouched and dissatisfied".<sup>444</sup> The warning "Muerte al invasor",<sup>445</sup> which the mercenaries found on a tree, reminded to the Bay of Pigs Invasion and was supposed to evoke the feeling that the mercenaries were not welcome. The image, known from documentaries and other films, however, did not have the same impact in *Preludio 11* as in Cuban fiction films because the mercenaries did not react accordingly.

In the spirit of the discussion on socialist realism, it is important what the report concluded about the question of art versus politics. It stated that the film was not artistically well done and that "the language of the film [did] not surpass agitation form and content... the plot [seemed] artificial... and the retrospective, instead of deepening the characters, confused the viewer."<sup>446</sup> Apparently, the GDR officials wanted a political, socialist realist film but without the socialist realism aesthetics. It was a paradox that was very difficult to resolve.

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<sup>444</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.3.

<sup>445</sup> Such inscriptions could be found in several documentaries made in Cuba about the Bay of Pigs Invasion. It is possible that the crew found the sign during the filming and used it for greater authenticity. Such artefacts and props were indispensable for any documentary-feature film.

<sup>446</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.3.

*The ICAIC's Assessment*

The ICAIC's delegate Roberto Fandiño arrived to Babelsberg in the beginning of October 1963 with instructions from the ICAIC. He viewed and discussed the film with Rodenberg and Maetzig. Maetzig was very forthcoming, which Fandiño appreciated. Fandiño then edited the film for two days. When he was done he presented it to Rodenberg together with a report. He wrote in the report that the film was in general satisfactory because it corresponded to Cuban reality. Although it took some artistic license, it was acceptable.<sup>447</sup> There were, however, some sequences, which the ICAIC wanted changed or eliminated for political reasons.

One of the problems was the two direct references to Fidel Castro in the film. In Frame 17: "The commander with an official", Fandiño recommended eliminating the sentence "has olvidado que él le dio la primera dinamita a Fidel". Fandiño clarified that "la alusión a Fidel resulta desagradable". He gave the same reason for "Fidel ha dicho que la Sierra del Mico es un problema político" in Frame 23: "Palomino and Quintana".<sup>448</sup>

There are two possible reasons for the intervention. First, both sentences are connected to Palomino (they are either about him or by him). They suggest a very close relation between Palomino and Fidel Castro, which was inappropriate because Palomino was a traitor. This was the reason given to Schreyer when he was asked to lower Palomino's rank from a commander to a captain.<sup>449</sup> If Palomino had remained *comandante*, the film would have implied that one of the commanders closest to Fidel was a traitor and Fidel did not notice. The second reason could be

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<sup>447</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño's report from October 13, 1963, p. 2-3.

<sup>448</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño's report from October 13, 1963, p. 1-3.

<sup>449</sup> Email interview with Schreyer.

that the Cubans were cautious about quoting Fidel because his words were the law. Quoting him on something he did not say in a film that was a borderline documentary was not appropriate.

Another problem in the film was the peasant who was one of the negative characters in the unedited version. That was an issue for the ICAIC. Therefore, Fandiño suggested to eliminate the entire sequence with the peasant in Frame 21 and some phrases in Frame 22. It became Fandiño's most important ideological intervention in the film. The goal was to make the peasant "shown in a different light".<sup>450</sup>

Unlike the East German leadership in the *Argumentation*, Fandiño did not object per se that the film analyzed different types of Cuban counterrevolutionaries – as long as it ended with their defeat. It was even acceptable that they appeared in more variety than the Revolutionaries but it had to be clear that the counterrevolutionaries fought "por una causa injusta y animados por los peores sentimientos de avaricia y egoísmo". The problem was when "alguno de los tipos presentados pudiera tomar categoría de *símbolo* de una clase que en la realidad es revolucionaria" [italics added].<sup>451</sup> This was the case of the peasant and that was why Fandiño needed his character changed, so that he would no longer be viewed as a counterrevolutionary.

According to the *Argumentation*, the peasant as a counterrevolutionary was a problem especially because he was *the only* peasant in the film. He was helping the mercenaries because he was afraid "that it could turn out otherwise again". This way the film "[distorted] the image of the Cuban Revolution where small peasants [were] the main force".<sup>452</sup> In the "adjusted"

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<sup>450</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño's report from October 13, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>451</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño's report from October 13, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>452</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.1.

sequence, the peasant still gives the mercenaries food but does not discuss with them his distrust in the outcome of the Revolution. In Cuba, peasants could not be shown as doubting, at least in the 1960s because until 1965-66, many real peasants were helping *bandidos*, the insurgents in the Escambray Mountains.<sup>453</sup> The ICAIC did not want its films to give people the idea that Fidel did not have the situation under control or inspire more people to leave Castro's ranks.

While such characterization of *campesinos* was not acceptable at the time of *Preludio 11*, doubting peasants appeared in Cuban cinema in the following decade. For example, *El hombre de Maisinicú* (Manuel Pérez, 1973), *Ustedes tienen la palabra* (Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1975) and *El brigadista* (Octavio Cortázar, 1978) feature several peasants who collaborate with their late masters abroad and *bandidos*<sup>454</sup> to sabotage the Cuban Revolution. The fact that the ICAIC leadership criticized the *Preludio 11*'s character in 1963 tells a lot about how important it was to preserve the myth of the unconditional and unweaving support of the peasants, one of the pillars of the Revolution, during the period of the Revolution's consolidation.

The cut in Frame 21, recommended by Fandiño, however, created an important inconsistency in the film: the peasant calls Fidel Castro "Castro". The Cuban critic Mario Rodríguez Alemán, not knowing that a part of the sequence had been censored, pointed it out as a historical inaccuracy. According to him, Cuban peasants did not call Fidel Castro "Castro" because he was *their Fidel* ("Preludio"). They felt him close to them. The film captured this close relationship accurately. The counterrevolutionaries consistently call Castro "Castro" while

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<sup>453</sup> More information regarding the insurgencies in the Escambray Mountains and the aftermath of their defeat can be found for example in Tamayo's article "El alzamiento más prolongado contra Castro", published in *El Nuevo Herald* online <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/ultimas-noticias/article2008184.html>.

<sup>454</sup> The leaders of the Cuban Revolution called the insurgents in the Escambray Mountains "bandidos".



his supporters always call him “Fidel” (except Palomino who is a covert spy). It was a subtle code for the Cubans to know who was who.

Another character the ICAIC had an issue with was the priest. Fandiño requested the entire Frame 26: “Priest, Rico and the peasant” eliminated. He gave two reasons for the deletion. 1) He thought it was problematic because the peasant’s presence in the scene appeared politically negative for the same reasons exposed before. 2) It made the priest’s character more politically ambivalent. Fandiño stated: “Si no vemos al cura atendiendo al miliciano herido, le ponemos en evidencia cuando se justifica en el parque diciendo que él atiende lo mismo a los milicianos que a los contrarrevolucionarios y hacemos más justa y lógica su deportación.”<sup>455</sup>

In the uncensored version, the priest not only attended the dying American official that led the mercenary group but *also* the dying militiaman they had shot in front of the peasant’s house. When Quintana confronts the priest in the park, the priest justifies himself by saying that he gives the ultimate unction to all who need it regardless of their relationship to the Revolution. If we see him tending to both, nothing inculpates him since, as the character emphasized, neither God nor he discriminate. That did not help the character who was already likeable for being played by Reynaldo Miravalles, the ex-servant Oscar in Gutiérrez Alea’s *Las doce sillas*.

The problem was that he was a Catholic priest and in both countries the clergy was an undesirable element. The Cuban Revolutionary government cast the Catholic clergy in Cuba as the supporters of the old system.<sup>456</sup> As a consequence, Castro deported many Catholic priests,

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<sup>455</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>456</sup> More information regarding the Cuban leadership’s stance towards the Catholic clergy can be found, for example, in the article of *Prensa Latina*’s Hemeroteca from September 2015 online at <http://www.prensalibre.com/hemeroteca/cuba-expulsa-a-sacerdotes>. The article also features a photograph of the front page of *Prensa Latina* from September 18, 1961, reporting about priests, expelled from Cuba that year.

many of whom were Spaniards. Fandiño reasoned that if the sequence with the dying militiaman were removed, the viewer would only see the priest helping the mercenaries and his arrest and eventual deportation would become necessary and just.<sup>457</sup>

The ICAIC also had a problem with the characterization of the mercenary Miguel, therefore, Fandiño suggested to eliminate Frame 58: “Daniela and Palomino”. In the dialogue, Daniela defended Miguel. Fandiño found inappropriate “[que] la exaltación de los valores revolucionarios de Miguel crea[ra] una simpatía hacia el personaje que no [era] justa y se opon[ía] al mensaje general de la película’. In his opinion, the scene also further politically debilitated Daniela’s character.<sup>458</sup> This cut mitigated the problem with Miguel but did not resolve it completely. Miguel remained the least consistent character in the film. The viewer never learns anything about his agenda and it is very unclear why he came back with the mercenaries. His hint that he came because he had heard Daniela had his child does not sound convincing at all.

As we have seen in the *Argumentation*, the GDR officials considered such inconsistencies in characters a big problem. The GDR report does not mention Miguel specifically, however, he is a very problematic character. Until the moment he leaves Daniela in the garage and returns to the mercenary group, we believe that he could potentially reintegrate. He had actively participated in the struggle against Batista and has nothing against Castro. In the last sequence, the inconsistency grows even stronger. Miguel confronts the mercenaries when they take Daniela prisoner after she brought the jeep. But later he is the first one to shoot at her when she jumps off the jeep to escape. Still, even after the cut of Daniela’s defense of Miguel

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<sup>457</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>458</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p. 2.

and his shooting at her we are not fully convinced that Miguel is “bad”...not even in the end of the film when Daniela turns her back to him (literally and symbolically).

The last politically motivated change Fandiño proposed referred to Frame 60: “Militiaman Peña and Miguel”. When Peña tries to convince Miguel to desert the group, he tells him: “ven nos hace falta uno grande como tú.” Fandiño did not like the sentence because he considered it “un comportamiento por parte de [los] milicianos [cubanos] grosero e irrespetuoso, que además de falso es indeseable.”<sup>459</sup> The militiamen and the peasants were the moral beacons in the symbolism of the Cuban Revolution and even such a simple sentence was not allowed to taint their image. It was particularly important in the case of the militiamen and women because Fidel needed the Cuban people to trust them and not regard them as a sign of oppressive power.

### *The Approval*

In the end of the report, Fandiño assured that most of the concerns that the GDR leadership expressed to him in fact did not worry the ICAIC. He referred undoubtedly to the issue brought about in the *Argumentation* that the film does not portray the mass support of the Cuban people. He stated there were many documentaries and newsreels that had captured it and it was not necessary to use a fiction film to “inform” about it. The entire world already knew that the Cuban people were “dispuesto[s] a luchar hasta la última gota de sangre por su revolución socialista.” Therefore, he did not see appropriate to insist on adding documentary footage.<sup>460</sup> He thought that

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<sup>459</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p.1. A native Cuban explained to me that the sentence was not rude but it was disrespectful because Peña only referred to Miguel’s size, his body instead of his skill (he was an engineer), intelligence, courage, etc.

<sup>460</sup> Maetzig recognized Rodenberg’s suggestion as a possibility. BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Röder from September 2, 1963, p.2.

such insertion “además de dañar la película estéticamente, resultaría superflúa e inútil.”<sup>461</sup>

His words indicate that contrary to the GDR leadership and media’s habit to “spoon-feed” the GDR audience with “prescribed” ideological information, the ICAIC trusted in “comprensión y valorización de las masas cuando se trabaja[ba] honestamente y con la verdad”.<sup>462</sup> It reflects the position of the ICAIC against Consejo Nacional de Cultura and Blas Roca, whom Alfredo Guevara later accused precisely of wanting to feed the Cuban people with ideological “pap”.

According to Fandiño’s report, the ICAIC understood fiction films as art. As such they did not need to play a role of a documentary. They were meant to “presentar la realidad en facetas más complejas y sutiles y...penetrar en sus contradicciones.” *Preludio 11* accomplished it. It fulfilled its function and the ICAIC considered it “acceptable”.<sup>463</sup> Therefore, if the DEFA implemented all the changes he proposed, the ICAIC was ready to accept the film for distribution. But it was not so simple. The film also needed to be approved in the GDR; the ICAIC’s approval was not enough.

The final screening before the approval for the GDR took place at the GDR Ministry of Culture on October 28, 1963.<sup>464</sup> It was an important meeting because even though the ICAIC approved the copy “as far as the political and artistic side concerned”, the GDR authorities now had to do the same. “It [was] not possible to have different versions from one negative”, one for

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<sup>461</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p. 2-3.

<sup>462</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p.3.

<sup>463</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Fandiño’s report from October 13, 1963, p.3.

<sup>464</sup> The meeting was “orientational” but all present officials and artists agreed that the film had no problems and could be screened. They wanted to make sure it premiered in Cuba before the end of the year. Before showing the film, Rodenberg read Fandiño’s report. The officials present at the meeting were: Rodenberg, Siegfried Wagner, Dieter Heinze, Röder, Ernst Hoffmann, Jochen Mückenberger, Maetzig, Günter Karl, Mählich, Bulla, and Hartwig. BArch. DR1 8920. Memorandum from October 30, 1963, written by Mathyssek.

Cuba and one for the GDR. Therefore, the GDR had to decide whether Fandiño's version could also be accepted at home.<sup>465</sup> This is key for understanding the GDR-Cuban relationship. It demonstrates that each country had its own agenda. Even though the East German authorities took the ICAIC's requests seriously, what mattered the most to them was the version for the GDR audience. Fortunately, it appears that in this case they reached a common ground. Fandiño's version prevailed and no further changes were necessary.<sup>466</sup>

### **Maetzig's Innovations**

As a co-production director, Maetzig searched for a compromise that would represent both the GDR and the Cuban version of socialist realism. In the process, like Kalatozov and Čech, he introduced some innovations. He departed from the doctrine of the class determination as well as the typical GDR and Cuban characterizations of positive heroes and women. However, none of the reviewers and authorities realized his subtle play with characters and concepts.

#### *Class Predetermination*

*Preludio II* divides the characters in good and bad in relation to their personal decisions rather than their class affiliation as we have seen in *Para quién baila La Habana*. The film avoids class predetermination and that is a big step away from the dogmatic socialism doctrine. In *Preludio II*, the decisions the characters make have either individualist objectives (the American way) or collective objectives (the Cuban way). The former are decisions that only benefit the individual

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<sup>465</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Bentzien from October 25, 1963.

<sup>466</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Memorandum from October 30, 1963 by Günther Mathyssek.

while the latter are decisions that are good for all the nation. In “bad” characters such as Paco and Umberto, their class, their past deeds and their current decisions and conduct overlap and there is no doubt they are bad. However, in other characters, it is more subtle because the filmmakers’ attempted to send a message also to their home audience whose circumstances were different.

Miguel is the best example of this paradigm. He does not come from a rich family. He fought against Batista. He did not leave because he had something against Castro. It is difficult to understand why a person like him would leave the Cuban Revolution and turn against it. Yet in East Germany people like him did leave for the West and it was detrimental to the success of the GDR. Therefore, Miguel represented all the Cubans *and* East Germans who were *selfish*.

Miguel is doomed because he chose an individualist objective (study technology and see the world) instead of a collective objective (staying in Cuba and contribute to the defense and construction of the “new” Cuba).<sup>467</sup> The filmmakers proposed that individualist decisions were bad regardless of what they were. Socialism was all about the collective needs being above individual needs and desires and this premise coincided with Che Guevara’s concept of the “new society”. In this sense, the film parallels two characters, one on the inside (Palomino) and one on the outside (Miguel). Palomino helps the counterrevolutionaries who extort him for something he did after he had been arrested by the Batista police. He does not have a way out. It is evident from the spatial relations. Most sequences with Palomino occur in closed, narrow spaces, such as offices, lobby full of people, and an elevator. There is always a sense of anxiety.

It is different with Miguel because the filmmakers decided to give him free will and not to

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<sup>467</sup> Through Miguel, the filmmakers spoke to all East Germans who were leaving for West Germany instead of staying and contributing to the collective good. More about projecting East German struggles through *Preludio 11*, see Hosek.

condemn him from the start. When Miguel is in Cuba, contrary to Palomino, he moves most of the time in open spaces. It suggests that he can make the right decision any time and it looks like he will. In the end, however, he makes the “wrong” one. In that moment, the film equals Miguel’s decision to emigrate and later join the mercenary group and the decision to *stay* with the mercenaries with Palomino’s treason. They both betrayed. Palomino condemns himself. In case of Miguel, Daniela is the judge. In the last sequence, she turns her back to him and faces Quintana who, contrary to Miguel, took the “right” decision. He gave up his property and family, stayed in Cuba and defended the Revolution with a gun in his hands against people like Miguel.

Quintana and Miguel’s characters defy the preconceived notion of class predetermination. Miguel was not rich yet ended up as a counterrevolutionary. Quintana, on the contrary, came from a rich family but gave up everything and joined the Revolution. That was, of course, the “ideal outcome” for the bourgeoisie in Cuba. Quintana is a unique character in the Cuban cinema. It has never been replicated. He is the opposite of the bourgeois characters like Pablo in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, who criticizes and deserts, or Sergio, who stays but does not integrate. Quintana, as a soldier in the Rebel Army, is integrated. He is not distrusted. No one has a problem with Quintana being an officer although he is a former member of the exploiting class. The character had a big dramatic, social and ideological potential. Unfortunately, it was only suggested not developed just like Luis in Čech’s film.

### *The Positive Hero*

Peña was the only true positive hero in the film, simple and uncomplicated (except Fandiño’s comment to Frame 60). He was the GDR leadership’s favorite character. They considered him

“one of the most beautiful characters in the film”<sup>468</sup> because he was a factory worker and militiaman (like Uli from *Und deine Liebe auch*). In addition, he died as a martyr. This character was Maetzig’s biggest compromise. An appearance of a factory worker in a Cuban film was rare; one example is Solás’s *Lucía II*. On the contrary, for an East German film it was strange that there was *only* one factory worker. It is understandable that the GDR leaders were disappointed. They wished the character were *at least* more developed and was given a more prominent space. Socialist realism was still on their mind as the highest form of art in the GDR<sup>469</sup> and the positive hero was one of its most distinguished elements.

Peña is also a political mentor, in the socialist realism style, to the Guatemalan mercenary Rico, the only black man in the group. Peña teaches him about the Cuban Revolution, what it did for people in Cuba, and contrasts the behavior of some of the mercenaries with the exemplary behavior of his fellow militiamen. Similarly to Alberto-Mariano mentorship relationship (Chapter 2), the mentor-mentee relationship here is only drafted, not elaborated. However, Peña’s character conveys, similarly to Enrique in *Soy Cuba*, an implicit message. His ability to convince Rico suggests that with the right propaganda the Cuban Revolution can secure international support or at least keep international mercenaries joining invasions against Cuba. It also implies that the only *right* side for the people of African descent and Latin Americans to be was with the Cuban Revolution because it “eliminated” racism unlike the United States.

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<sup>468</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11, p.1.

<sup>469</sup> More on socialist realism in the 1960s in the GDR see, for example, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*.



## *Women*

Women were important characters in socialist films. They also gained prominent space in Cuban cinema as evident from the many films with female protagonists, such as *Manuela*, *Lucía* and *Hasta cierto punto* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1983) among many. Neither of the two co-producing partners had a problem with how *Preludio 11* depicted women, except Daniela's defense of Miguel in Fandiño's report and the acting skills of the lead Aurora Depestre.

Daniela is probably the most analyzed *Preludio 11*'s character. Hosek, Smith-Mesa and Muñoz-Aunión all realized the importance of how she was depicted and what she represented. She is certainly the most exotic and erotic character, as the three scholars coincided, and can be easily interpreted as a reflection of the gaze of a white European male. Hosek examined Daniela as an allegory of Cuba and her place in the imagery of the extended *Heimat*; Muñoz-Aunión concentrated on her as a creation of a new ideal of a socialist stereotype, as well as her cinematic "masculinization", and finally, Mesa-Smith paid attention to her as a new character of sexy *miliciana* in the GDR and Cuban cinema.

Maetzig was not the only filmmaker fascinated with *milicianas*. Roman Karmen in *Alba de Cuba* portrayed a Cuban woman in an olive green uniform loading a gun while her long, polished nails clicked on the metal. *Milicianas* also appear in *Und deine Liebe auch* and in Šefranka's documentaries. Alexander Calzatti, Urusevsky's assistant photographer, mentioned the Soviets' fascination with these women dressed in *verde olivo* in his interview with Ferraz.

*Preludio 11*, however, does not show Daniela only as a sexy *miliciana* but also as a teacher and a mother. Her role as soldier and mother resembles more the socialist realism films from the 1950s (earlier in the USSR) where the character of an independent single mother, who

prioritized the country and work to romantic relationships, was frequent. It was not the case of Cuban cinema. The protagonist from *Hasta cierto punto* and Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) are these independent, single working mothers but they are not soldiers and militiawomen<sup>470</sup> and their romantic relationships have a weight in their lives.

*Preludio 11* makes Daniela's character interesting for one more reason: as a means to show the process of cinematic construction of the role of a woman like Daniela in the new society. It occurs through Daniela's interactions with other characters like the priest and her mother who try to pull her back to the traditional role and behavior expected from a woman before the Revolution.

Daniela and her mother are the only female characters in the film, notwithstanding an anonymous crowd of working women in the Rebel Army headquarters whose role is marginal. Daniela is a single mother but rather than being at home with her child she dedicates her life to helping the Revolution. Her mother, who is raising her child, would rather see her married to Miguel even if it meant that she would leave Cuba with him. The *Argumentation* called her complaints about Daniela "typical German petit bourgeois prejudices".<sup>471</sup> Daniela defends herself and gives no space to negotiations. She is empowered to decide about her life.

In this sense, Daniela resembles Margarita from *Para quién baila La Habana*. They are both *mulatas*, militiawomen and literary campaign teachers but they differ in the way they dress (Margarita wears dresses, Daniela, a uniform) and the relationship they have with their mothers. Both their mothers want them to play a more traditional role and do not want them participating

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<sup>470</sup> We find more examples in literature. For example, Jesús Díaz's *Las iniciales de la tierra* has a similar character.

<sup>471</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. *Argumentation zum Film Preludio 11*, p.2.

in man-like activities. As a result, Margarita breaks all the ties with her mother but Daniela does not. Margarita's mother does not have a voice in the film, Daniela's does.

In this regard, *Preludio 11* is more inclusive (like it is with Quintana). Daniela's mother is not shown as an enemy of the Revolution like Margarita's mother in the Čech's co-production. We can deduce it from the fact that Daniela trusts to leave her son with her. If Daniela symbolizes the Revolution, then the Revolution entrusted her son, the future of the country, to the care and influence of such a woman. Therefore, symbolically, she is allowed to integrate because a few prejudices did not make her ideologically "defective".

Daniela is also confronted with men in her new role, especially with a priest who had helped the mercenaries as we have seen earlier. The priest is now a prisoner and Daniela guards him while he is awaiting his sentence. Meanwhile, he inject her with fear and guilt, so that she would liberate or defend him. That comes across as much more incriminating for him than his extreme unction for a dying mercenary.

The filmmakers made him a symbol of religious prejudices and backwardness. He appealed to the women's traditional role in the society and implied that it was inappropriate for a woman to wear a uniform, carry a gun and run around with men. He especially resented that she was defiant with him, a priest, instead of being submissive as a woman should be. He tried to coerce her to let him go by saying that God would punish her for being involved with communists, people that arrests priests and deport them. That scene speaks to "strong moral deprivation" of Catholic clergy, a view both Germans and Cubans shared.

## Reception in Cuba

*Preludio 11* premiered in Cuba during the week of Cuban cinema<sup>472</sup> on December 28, 1963.<sup>473</sup> It was exhibited again, more widely, in February 1964<sup>474</sup> and repeated in November 1967.<sup>475</sup> The approved version met with a mixed success. Some critics liked it, some did not; some found some aspects good but dismissed others. The Cuban newspaper *Girón* (Matanzas) called *Preludio 11* “la mejor película cubana filmada hasta [el momento]. La primera en CinemaScope y con gran parte de la misma filmada en esta Provincia” (“Preludio 11”).

On the contrary, G. Rodríguez Rivera from *Mella* wrote on January 13, 1963 that it was *the worst* film screened during the Week of Cuban Film (“Preludio once”). Mario Rodríguez Alemán, one of Cuba’s most estimated critics, considered it better than *Para quién baila La Habana* but he was not thrilled either. For him, it was an action film with a dose of romance but without “arrojo épico [y] un sólido argumento histórico”. In general, he found the film “bland[o], limitad[o] [and borderline] panfleto...un costumbrismo cubano bastante barato, sin llegar a la comedia ni ganar la fuerza de un drama.” He concluded that “Kurt Maetzig trabajó mal y no alcanzó la meta” (“Preludio”).

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<sup>472</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. A telegram from Guevara to Rodenberg, n.d. The week was planned from December 23 to 29, 1963. Guevara invited a delegation of filmmakers but Rodenberg replied that he thought the visit of the minister Bentzien would represent East German filmmakers sufficiently. It is possible that he was worried about the Cuban audience political concerns regarding *Preludio 11*, which a minister would certainly address more appropriately. However, it is also possible that it was a question of costs. DR1. 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Guevara from December 18, 1963.

<sup>473</sup> Valdés-Rodríguez provided this information in his article “‘Predulio 11’: el cine en la batalla cubana”. BArch. DR117 33794. Volume 2. Travel permit for Maetzig and Simon who were supposed to stay in Cuba from December 18, 1963 to January 5, 1964.

<sup>474</sup> Rodríguez Rivera provides this information in “Preludio 11” from February 17, 1964.

<sup>475</sup> This information was provided in “Lo que se exhibe en estos días.”

Another estimated critic, José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, who had adored *Alba de Cuba*, found *Preludio 11* acceptable, “bien hech[o], estimable, sin rango mayor ni dramática ni filmicamente, con un contenido político-social acorde con la circunstancia revolucionaria del primer país socialista de América en su hora de lucha decidida con el imperialismo.” He praised the film’s “excellent photography almost always”, good use of music and sound, expressive and correct dialogue and in general, good acting (“Predulio 11...”). Mario Trejo applauded the choice of genre – adventure – because it had not yet been sufficiently exploited in Cuba. He thought that Maetzig could have done better though: the plot was too simple (not necessarily bad) and treated schematically (bad). Trejo, like Valdés Rodríguez, liked the photography and considered the dubbing very good (“Semana del cine cubano”). The good work of most actors and dubbing was one of the things several critics appreciated.

It is important to point out that in the case of *Preludio 11*, the reviews resembled more normal film reviews than the “exorcism” of Luis M. López regarding the other two co-productions as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 4. In most cases, the critics read *Preludio 11* like a not-so-good adventure movie rather than a political film. They did, however, comment on how accurately the foreigners captured Cuban reality. The least forgiving was probably Rodríguez Rivera. He accused Maetzig of presenting “un film falso, *esquemático* que no responde en absoluto a la realidad cubana que pretende narrar.” According to the critic, “Maetzig ha tomado al vuelo, superficialmente, elementos de la compleja realidad cubana del 1961... [y creó] una amalgama que va del panfleto al absurdo y de ambos al melodrama”[italics added] (“Preludio once”).

The film probably was not *that* bad though because the same critic went to see it again

during its February screening. He then wrote another review where he praised Maetzig's differentiation of the mercenaries. Contrary to what he had written a month earlier, he concluded that "Maetzig ha sabido captar verazmente este aspecto de la realidad, *librándose de todo esquematismo*" [italics added] ("Preludio 11"). Regardless, he still thought the film was not good. It was evident it was made by a foreigner because it suffered "ingenuas visiones" of Cuba. The critic thought Maetzig was "deslumbrado por la rica y compleja realidad cubana" and tried to put in everything without developing anything. He coincided in this aspect with his first review.

Mario Rodríguez Alemán thought that the film did not commit any serious historical mistakes but could have gone into more depth. The film was based on "preludios" launched by the State Department before the Bay of Pigs Invasion but according to him, "esto pudo hacerse con más profundidad y no con ese aire de paseo turístico por la Habana y sus alrededores" ("Preludio"). He was probably referring to the initial rear projection sequence when Palomino, Quintana and Daniela arrive to Havana and the takes on the Bacunayagua Bridge. Other critics liked those takes.

Mario Trejo addressed the mercenaries' ambiguities as well. According to him, the film had "una cierta búsqueda de matices en cuanto a la psicología de los mercenarios, pero sin llegar al fondo de los problemas de conciencia que, debemos concederle, muchos de ellos padecerán en forma de contradicciones e ineptias políticas" ("Semana del cine..."). He found the counterrevolutionaries treated too superficially and schematically and undefined politically. His opinion coincided with the *Argumentation*. He disliked especially Palomino who was "una caricatura en vez de un personaje". He thought, however, that Maetzig "ha sabido dar la luz y la belleza al paisaje local." It was important. Valdés Rodríguez praised the same in *Alba de Cuba*.

Luis M. López who “trashed” *Para quién baila La Habana* and later also *Soy Cuba* was surprisingly kind to *Preludio 11*. He considered it “[el inicio del] período de aventuras y romance perfiladas contra un fondo histórico de una muy reciente epopeya cubana, y al mismo tiempo ayuda a la creación de una escuela de actuación cinematográfica capaz de descubrir verdaderos talentos” (“Operación Cucaña” 21). He considered that the best in the film was the work of the actors “a los que una buena selección muy pulida ha entregado diálogos oportunos, nacidos para el cine y réplicas construidas dentro de una lógica funcional.”

His benevolence had two reasons. He understood *Preludio 11* was an action film and not a recount of the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In addition, he did not go to the screening with high expectation, unlike with the Kalatozov and Čech’s films, because he had already heard that the film was “mediocre”. As a consequence, he admitted to be “agradablemente sorprendido” (“Operación Cucaña” 21). Like Trejo, he liked that the director situated the conflict in a group of counterrevolutionaries whose class, racial and political contradictions enriched the psychology of the characters. He praised that although there was a traitor among the good characters, the film had una “intriga policial y los personajes ...al momento de tomar una decisión no [vacilarían]”. In other words, he found the film “logical” in the framework of its historical circumstances.

For López, the film ended up with a positive score. Despite some deficiencies in the construction of the argument, *Preludio 11* “[era] la obra más coherente realizada hasta este momento [en el] cine [cubano]”, con la excepción de *Las doce sillas* de Gutiérrez Alea (“Operación Cucaña” 21). It was mostly because of its “unidad orgánica” and because the director “se [trazó] el propósito de una historia inventada y lo [cumplió]”. He considered the dialogues “los mejores que [ha] escuchado en el cine” and the acting “[superior] a cuanto [ha]

visto hasta el presente.”

### **The Institutional Evaluation of the Cooperation**

Guevara was not pleased with the film. In his letter to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963, he understood that the co-production was valuable in the realm of international relations and cooperation with the DEFA. He believed that

pese a todo, se ha realizado el film, hemos colaborado artística y técnicamente en su rodaje y... de un modo u otro podremos presentar, si no un resultado relevante, una obra común, de una cierta dignidad, entretenida, que no comporta problemas políticos equívocos, y que nuestros públicos pueden aceptar como un producto medio”.

However, he did not consider *Preludio 11* a good work of art. He found it “una obra menor, discreta... que ni profundiza suficientemente en [la] realidad [cubana], ni la enriquece con aportes que puedan considerarse particularmente apreciables. Los personajes se pierden en un tratamiento esquemático y solo la trama, aprovechada por el director sobre la línea de un film de aventuras les permite seguir adelante, y llegar hasta el fin.”<sup>476</sup>

Guevara blamed the failure of the film on a bad script. He wrote that he had never expected “a courageous and refreshing work of art,” even though Schreyer’s first version had a potential “to portray one moment of the Revolution” because of its series of characters with constant conflicts and overlaps. Guevara reminded Rodenberg that he had recommended earlier to pay attention to the “elaboration and deepening of some characters in [the filmmakers’]

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<sup>476</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963. Rodenberg received it on August 27, 1963.



general conception and in their relations”.<sup>477</sup> It was not done, at least not sufficiently.

Guevara did not want to assign all the blame to Schreyer and the script. He did not hold the director liable for everything either although, as he stated, when a film ends up being “una obra mediana, acceptable, pero sin brillo”, it is the director’s fault. He understood though that Maetzig had to execute the biggest part of his work during the Cuban Missile Crisis “en un clima que el realizador no supo o pudo asimilar” and those conditions “indudablemente” impacted the film.<sup>478</sup> It was understandable that the production had suffered under those conditions.

Rather, he blamed the failure of the co-production, at least partially, on the ICAIC and the DEFA because it was *them* who approved the argument and the script as well as Maetzig as the film’s director. As for himself, in the spirit of self-criticism, Guevara admitted that he was “demasiado [débil], y demasiado [formal] y [protocolar], en las relaciones con la DEFA, callando ‘cortésmente’ opiniones artísticas que forman parte de [la] tendencia cultural [cubana] con tanta fuerza como la de los principios ideológicos que [los] animan como revolucionarios y creadores.”<sup>479</sup> For example, he only strongly objected regarding the argument *after* the co-production had already been completed.

The film did not fulfill Guevara’s artistic and political expectations but his August 1963 letter had a conciliatory tone. He understood that in the film industry every project was a risk. They took the risk and would assume the consequences. As for his political expectations, even though the film did not fulfill those either, the collaboration was still politically important.

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<sup>477</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963. Guevara quoted his own letter from November 17, 1961.

<sup>478</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

<sup>479</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

Therefore, the premiere would be, he stated: “un hecho político y cultural importante” and they should feel satisfied. He ended very diplomatically: “El balance no es de ninguna manera negativo y presenta importantes aspectos que serán indiscutiblemente positivos para nuestras cinematografías y países.”<sup>480</sup> The distance that the ICAIC adopted after the premiere, however, proves that the disappointment was difficult for Guevara to overcome.

### *The Assessment of the Logistics and the Work Relations*

In his final evaluation, Guevara brought up some issues that occurred during the co-production in Cuba and the GDR. He assumed the responsibility for those caused by the ICAIC. He admitted:

...no todo marchó sobre rieles durante la filmación, muchas veces por nuestra culpa. Carecemos de una experiencia técnica completa, y nuestra base material (equipos e instalaciones varias, transporte, etc.) no es suficiente para los empeños a que nos lanzamos. Conocemos nuestra situación organizativa, el grado de desarrollo de muchos de nuestros departamentos, y la urgencia de superar algunas situaciones. Esta es nuestra realidad, y superarla, y hacer avanzar este trabajo es el centro de nuestras vidas... [el cine cubano] toma por punto de partida bases que pueden ser consideradas mínimas: unos pocos técnicos, equipos recién adquiridos, realizadores y productores, y organizadores, improvisados, y un núcleo de trabajadores que sobre la marcha van adquiriendo calificación”.<sup>481</sup>

These were without a doubt the same issues that confronted director Vladimír Čech and

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<sup>480</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

<sup>481</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

his crew and caused many disagreements between the two teams. In *Preludio 11*, the teams seemed to work well together in spite of the difficulties. The interpreter Monika Krause-Fuchs confirms it<sup>482</sup> and there is no documentation in the archive that would disprove it.

The Cubans might have caused logistical and technical issues but they excelled in “las atenciones y sobre todo el espíritu de amistad y solidaridad que tanto el director como sus colaboradores encontraron siempre a su alrededor.”<sup>483</sup> Guevara was disappointed that the treatment was not reciprocated in the GDR. He complained especially about the DEFA’s departments that were in charge of the Cuban crew in Berlin. His Cuban colleagues, “carecieron de alojamiento adecuado, transporte, facilidades para la alimentación, y del cuidado comprensivo y amistoso para quienes andaban lejos de la patria.” The per diem did not correspond “ni formal ni prácticamente” with those that the DEFA technicians and artists received in Cuba but he assumed responsibility because he was the one who had signed the contract.<sup>484</sup> He probably had not realized the different cost of living in the GDR. The rest, however, was inexcusable.

There was an incident that the Cubans considered particularly insulting. A DEFA official who accompanied the technicians and artists to their transfer in Prague in February (probably Mählich) “recogió toda la ropa de invierno que les había sido prestada. Esos compañeros debieron en esas condiciones afrontar el frío de Terranova, en la escala de regreso, y claro, la estancia en Praga”. Guevara considered the official’s action not only a lack of common sense but also a lack of solidarity. It did not correspond to what had been promised to him “sobre las

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<sup>482</sup> Monika Krause-Fuchs. Personal interview. July 2016.

<sup>483</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

<sup>484</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

atenciones y el cuidado que para [sus] compañeros se planeaba”.<sup>485</sup> Guevara was very upset.

It was not the first or the last time the Cubans had this experience. It was customary in the socialist bloc film industry to lend visitors from warm climates clothing that belonged to the studios’ props department. The department had periodic inventories and the items had to be returned. The DEFA leadership also had to issue a special permit to give away anything. On one occasion, for example, Czechoslovak technicians tried to be more proactive and gave away some small devices to their apprentices in Cuba. The legal department got involved immediately and demanded that it should never happen again. It was precisely this “half-hearted” and “overbureaucratized” treatment instead of a “congenial and comradely behavior” that the Third World and Cuba complained about in regards to socialist internationalism (Rieber 333).

### **The Repercussions**

Although Guevara evaluated the co-production as ideologically and artistically acceptable and Cuban critics were moderate in their criticism of the film, the ICAIC and the GDR leadership were disappointed. It was not the film they expected. Therefore, the film had repercussions for the ICAIC-DEFA relationships. It is evident from a report about negotiations of the Implementation Plan for 1965/66. The writer evaluated the overall cooperation in 1963 as good but noted that after the co-production *Preludio II* the ICAIC showed “somewhat reserved attitude”.<sup>486</sup> And Rodenberg was no longer at the Ministry of Culture to smooth things out.

The film not only had repercussions for the East German-Cuban relations but also for the

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<sup>485</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Guevara to Rodenberg from August 14, 1963.

<sup>486</sup> BArch. DR 1 18906. Dept of Cultural Relations. Sektor III, Politische und fächliche Einschätzung der Realisierung des Kulturarbeitplanes zwischen der Republik Kuba und der DDR in Jahre 1963, p.4.

film's director Maetzig. In a "strictly confidential" letter, Rodenberg informed Arno Röder from the East German Communist Party's Department of Culture about his conversation with Maetzig regarding his situation as film director. At that time, Maetzig was the highest paid director in the GDR (5,000 DM) and had received the National Prize three times. He was one of the leading film directors in the socialist bloc. However, his performance started declining since *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) until he became "an average filmmaker at best".<sup>487</sup>

Rodenberg considered *Preludio 11* "one of [Maetzig's] least successful films". He was "so horrified during the accepting of the rough cut [of *Preludio 11*] that he did not even see any possibility for improvement." In order to provide Maetzig with more details about what the ICAIC thought of the film, Rodenberg provided him with a copy of Guevara's letter but omitted some parts the Rodenberg and Röder had previously agreed upon.<sup>488</sup> Rodenberg was almost sure that "Maetzig ... reached a zero point, he [was] in a blind alley and it would probably take months, so that he could – with a help [from government and Party] – reach a subjective position again, which would allow him to take part in further development of the socialist film art". He did not see much hope for Maetzig to regain his previous prestige.

During the meeting with Rodenberg, Maetzig conducted a self-criticism and assured Rodenberg he would not start another film unless he had a very good quality script. It did not appease Rodenberg because he was not only worried about Maetzig's future as film director but also as a rector and professor. Rodenberg was especially concerned that Maetzig would have difficulties in the film studio and the Babelsberg Film College in the following year because "he

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<sup>487</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Röder from September 2, 1963, p.2.

<sup>488</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Röder from September 2, 1963, p.2.

[would] not have any authority and [would] not be convincing”. He shared with Röder that the discussion with Maetzig convinced him “about the necessity to take measures in the film college” he and Röder had previously discussed.<sup>489</sup>

We do not know what they discussed but it appears that it was Maetzig’s removal from the post of rector at the Babelsberg Film College, which he had held since the school opened in 1954. Whether he resigned or was made to resign is unclear. However, the records show that he only worked there until 1964 and *Preludio 11* premiered in Cuba in December 1963. It is no coincidence. As for his career as film director, Maetzig made five more films. *Kaninchen bin ich* was the script he was waiting for after *Preludio 11* but it was not what Rodenberg and the Party had hoped for. However, one of his following four films, *Die Fahne von Kriwoj Rog* (1967), won him a National Award again in 1968. Maetzig’s professional life was full of contradictions but that was how the socialist film industry worked. In 1976 he retired as a film director.<sup>490</sup>

### **The Post-*Preludio 11* Collaboration**

In spite of taking a substantial hit with *Preludio 11*, the DEFA and the ICAIC cooperation did not die. Their next project was the earlier mentioned Spanish version of *El milagro ruso*. At the same time, the ICAIC was formalizing an invitation for Hans Wrede, the head of the DEFA’s Department of Popular-Scientific Films, agreed upon earlier that year.<sup>491</sup> Furthermore, *Cine cubano* was preparing a special issue on Joris Ivens and hoped to have it ready for the Leipzig

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<sup>489</sup> BArch. DR1 8920. Letter from Rodenberg to Röder from September 2, 1963, p. 3.

<sup>490</sup> For more on Maetzig’s biography, see, for example, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081009185044/http://www.kurt-maetzig.de/Biografie/biografie.html>.

<sup>491</sup> The bibliographical reference can be located at <http://www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=1227>.

film festival, which was dedicating a retrospective to Ivens that year.

The GDR also planned for future co-productions as evidenced in the proposal for the Work Plan for 1965/66.<sup>492</sup> Both countries agreed on them but the collaboration would have a different form. The GDR mostly used Cuba for exteriors and sourced the ICAIC's services. Cuba often represented other Latin American countries like Argentina. This was not only the case of cooperation between the DEFA and the ICAIC but also the ICAIC and the East German TV. Films like *Georg Weerth* and *Erzählungen aus de neuen Welt* (Joachim Hellwig, 1968)<sup>493</sup> are just a couple of examples.

There was also a cooperation on the level of exchange of actors and actresses. The GDR engaged in this form of cooperation with Cuba more frequently than any other socialist bloc country. In addition to Daisy Granados's participation in *Wenn du gross bist, liebe Adam* mentioned earlier, several Cuban actors were cast for the East German television film about the Spanish Civil War *Auf den Bergen roter Mohn* (Kurt Jung-Alsen, 1965). The DEFA made the film in a co-production with the Contemporary Film London and the Deutschen Fernsehfunk Berlin-Adlershof.<sup>494</sup> The film featured actors and actresses from Great Britain, Canada and even the United States. Six Cuban actors were cast as Spaniards:<sup>495</sup> María Calvo Valdés, Alejandro Lugo (also played in *Preludio II*), Salvador Wood Fonseca (also in *Soy Cuba*), Reinaldo

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<sup>492</sup> BArch. DR1 18906. Vorschläge für die Arbeit in den Jahren 1965/66.

<sup>493</sup> BArch. DR1 18902. The Film Agreement 1965/66, p. 8 and BArch. DR 18904. Attachment to a document from May 4, 1965, p.8. The filmmakers' estimated stay was three month.

<sup>494</sup> BArch. DR117/33797. Letter from from December 4, 1964, written by Mückenberger to the Ministry of Finance and Letter from December 3, 1964, written by Mückenberger to the Ministry of Interior, HV Deutsche Volkspolizei.

<sup>495</sup> BArch. DR117/33797. Letter from November 6, 1964, written by Schmidt from VEB DEFA to the Department of Passports and Travel Agency.

Miravalles (also in *Preludio 11*), Enrique Almirante, and Francisco Alfonso Hernandez [Hernández].<sup>496</sup> They were supposed to travel to Babelsberg on January 28, 1965<sup>497</sup> and stay until May 1, 1965.<sup>498</sup>

Another joint project was “Geschangheit in St. Jones”. His director Lutz Köhlert, who worked in Cuba on *Menschen und Tiere* (1962), returned to Cuba to work on this project in 1968. He traveled with his wife, author Irmgard Köhlert, and the head of production of “Roter Kreis”, Johannes Mählich, who had been to Cuba with *Preludio 11*. The feature film was planned for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the GDR and its goal was “to reinforce the national consciousness of the young GDR citizens”. The project narrates about a transoceanic fisherman’s long journey home after he was detained in Canada. Köhlert needed Cuba for the exteriors.

The Köhlerts and Johannes Mählich were approved to travel to Cuba on August 15, 1968.<sup>499</sup> It was a period of increased tension between the GDR and the FRG, therefore, Bruk gave instructions how the filmmakers were supposed to behave in Cuba in relationship to the FRG. They were supposed to “take stance in current political issues. They [had to] reject all demands of West Germany for exclusive representation. In their work with the Cubans, they

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<sup>496</sup> BArch. DR117/33797. Letter to the Ministry of Interior, HV Deutsche Volkspolizei, from December 21, 1964. Request for entry visas and residence permits.

<sup>497</sup> BArch. DR117/33797.

<sup>498</sup> BArch. DR117/33797.

<sup>499</sup> BArch. DR1 18900. Letter from from July 10, 1968, written by Gysi to Dickel from the Ministry of Interior. Travel visas were requested for them with a letter from June 12, 1968, written by the main director Bruk. BArch. DR1 18900. Lutz’s travel report for the Ministry of Culture, attached to a document, was signed by Bruk and Wulf. The filmmakers discussed the project with the ICAIC’s delegation in Karlovy Vary where the delegates of both film institutes had practically agreed to cooperate. The filmmakers’ trip was approved on July 10, 1968.



[needed to] use the opportunity to discuss the politics of [the East German] Party and government.<sup>500</sup> In other works, he wanted them to make a propaganda on behalf of the GDR's claims. What Bruk did not know was that the filmmakers would probably also have to respond questions regarding the Warsaw Pact invasion to Czechoslovakia, in which the GDR participated and which shook Cuba. However, that is another story.

Cuba and East Germany continued their filmic cooperation in the 1970s. In 1971, the ICAIC participated in one of the *Indianerfilme*,<sup>501</sup> Konrad Petzold's *Osceola*. It was a story about the Osceola Indians in Florida and their fight against the expansion of sugar plantation owners. The DEFA and the ICAIC also cooperated on *Das Licht auf them Galgen* (Helmut Nitzschke, 1976), a cinematic adaptation of Anna Seghers's eponymous story about a slave uprising in Jamaica. The film was shot in the GDR, Cuba and Bulgaria and it engaged actors from the three countries.

## Conclusion

*Preludio II* was meant to help expose the wrongdoings of the United States and consolidate the political situation in Cuba. Much was expected from this warfare film that was made around the period when Cuba was *getting ready for a war* with the USA and *was in war* with insurgents at home. Both the ICAIC and the GDR wanted the film to be combative but also artistic. The filmmakers did their best to portray that particular moment of Cuban history as accurately and

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<sup>500</sup> BArch. DR1 18900. The project "Geschankheit in St. Jones" was probably never filmed and if it was, it was not in Cuba because in a letter from July 25, 1968, Mählich asked for a permission to travel to the Soviet Union regarding the film.

<sup>501</sup> They were also called "Red Westerns". For more on the topic see, for example, in "The DEFA *Indianerfilm*. Narrating the Postcolonial through Gojko Mitic" by Evan Torner in *Re-Imagining DEFA*.

authentically as they perceived it but that did not suit the Cubans. Therefore, the Cubans accused the film of “distorting” their reality. However, it was not *the reality* the film distorted but just its official version. The GDR’s agenda was to justify their own propaganda. Maetzig “failed” them both. The film and its censorship are a testimony not only of one historical moment but also of a strong ideological narrative that imposed itself to all other alternative, more complex narratives.

## EPILOGUE

In her *Soviet Novel*, Katerina Clark emphasized that “monolithic communism” did not exist. Neither did monolithic socialist internationalism. Each country had its own version of it depending on their history, their resources and their relationship to the West. The analysis of socialist internationalism of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic toward Cuban cinema offered by this study proves it. All three respective film industries made their first negotiations with the ICAIC on the offset of the Cuban Revolution. They provided material and technical support to the extent of their possibilities and in an extent sustainable for their economies. They helped in different areas but divided their labor according to their specialties and the Cuban demands.

According to Chanan, the cooperation between the ICAIC and the socialist bloc countries did not work. He blamed the socialist countries for their inability to adapt their products to Cuban conditions and to assess correctly and in depth Cuban reality. This study showed that the situation was more complex. If the cooperation did not fulfill its potential, we need to look for the causes on both sides. The Cubans, for example, liked to improvise rather than plan<sup>502</sup> and wanted to do things their own way.<sup>503</sup> They often misused resources flowing from the socialist

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<sup>502</sup> There are many documents in the Czech National Film archive where Czechoslovak bureaucrats and ambassadors complain that the ICAIC constantly missed deadlines for scholarship placements and then sent people that were not qualified; it constantly changed lists of technicians traveling to Prague and often sent technicians unannounced. The lodging for the first Czechoslovak technicians was not secured when they arrived and the ICAIC had not even signed the agreement with Junta Central de Planificación (JUCEPLAN). The Filmexport delegate in Havana called the ICAIC’s situation “chaos”. Another example is the frustrated project of the color film laboratories for the entire Latin America. Its incompleteness was related to unrealistic ideas and lack of proper planning, which ended up wasting much resources. Domingo Cordoví. Personal interview. June 2016. Many Cuban leadership cadres, who learned from the Czechoslovaks, admired the Czechoslovak’s ability to plan and think things through, which was something the Cubans were not used to. Vicente Alba and Carlos Bequet. Personal interviews. June 2015.

<sup>503</sup> It was common in other resorts to have socialist bloc advisors consulting directly with ministers. Bortlová, for example, speaks in length about František Kriegel, who consulted at the Cuban Ministry of Health. The ČSF made a

bloc, not admitting even that they were dependent on them.<sup>504</sup> These resources not only served Cuba but also set the economic and skill base for its own socialist internationalism outreach.

It is a paradox that scholars praise the Cubans for the extent of their disinterested assistance to the Third World, “a level of support unmatched by the [Soviet Union] support anywhere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world” (Rieber 333), yet they completely dismiss the fact that the extent of the Cuban help to these countries was only possible because of the money, the equipment and the training that the socialist bloc poured to Cuban economy, army<sup>505</sup> and culture. This is also true about the socialist bloc’s help to Cuban cinema. It was there, it was strong and multifaceted. It was in many ways effective. However, the Cuban and the ICAIC leadership and Western scholars, still biased towards the late socialist bloc, unjustly ignored it.

Cinematic socialist internationalism did not only consist in the material support and training. The three countries analyzed in this study also collaborated with Cuba by making films about Cuba. The message of support and admiration for the Cuban Revolution, expressed through films like *Alba de Cuba*, Šefranka’s and the Polish Jerzy Hoffman’s<sup>506</sup> documentaries, transmitted a favorable image of the Cuban Revolution in the world. In addition to Cuban

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similar offer to Guevara in 1965, as mentioned earlier, but Guevara turned it down.

<sup>504</sup> *Soy Cuba* brought extensive resources to the ICAIC, yet Guevara never admitted the cooperation was beneficial for the institution. He dismissed it as unimportant in his interview with Vicente Ferraz. In addition, the collaboration with socialist bloc directors and photographers could have been much more beneficial in terms of the training if the ICAIC did not make the access to foreign filmmakers exclusive to a relatively small circle of filmmakers. Mario García Joya and Raúl Rodríguez brought it up several times in their interviews.

<sup>505</sup> In the military, Bortlová’s study of the secret operation MANUEL in Chapter 10 of her book is very illuminating. Dozens of Cuban guerrilla fighters, who later participated in the guerillas in Africa and Latin America trained in Czechoslovakia, paradoxically, in spite of the socialist bloc policy of peaceful co-existence. This help lasted almost the entire 1960s decade.

<sup>506</sup> The Polish-Cuban relationships were not subject of this study, however, Jerzy Hoffman was one of the first socialist bloc filmmakers to film Cuba. The Poles, however, never made a co-production with Cuba unlike the three countries analyzed and Hungary, which made its first and last co-production with Cuba in the late 1980s.

newsreels, these films were *the* image of the Cuban Revolution, at least in the 1960s. They were respected and praised in Cuba because they conveyed the same message that the ICAIC wanted to broadcast at home and to the world.

This was not the case of the three fiction co-productions. The three films made in the 1960s with Czechoslovakia, the GDR and the USSR, did not satisfy Cuban expectations. These expectations were based on the contemporary political situation in Cuba, which required combative films and a straightforward distinction between the “good” and the “bad”. The ICAIC expected good artistic films because they were going to be among the first fiction films with the ICAIC’s name on them.

The ICAIC did not want Cuba to be subjected to the stereotypical, Eurocentric gaze as before 1959. They wanted to show the “new” Cuba. They were also wary of ambiguities that could destabilize the official narrative of the Cuban Revolution. Since none of the co-productions accomplished their mission according to the ICAIC’s standards, the ICAIC had to “correct” them. In some cases, the films were censored for public distribution (*Preludio 11*);<sup>507</sup> in others, the ICAIC used covertly negative press reviews. Therefore, we have to take the critics’ and the authorities’ claims that the films “distorted” Cuban reality or history and that they were “inauthentic” with a grain of salt.

All three films contributed to the debates on socialist realism. As Katerina Clark argued and this study showed, socialist realism was not “a *single* doctrine” (3). Every country, every period and every filmmaker has introduced some new aspects. The Cubans also had its version of it, the Cuban warfare film. These films were also “accessible to masses”, often with “optimistic”

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<sup>507</sup> It is likely that some interventions were made also in the other two films but there is no documentation about it.

outcomes and definitely “party-minded” even though in their case it was not the *communist* party but the 26<sup>th</sup> July Movement. In addition, their heroes often underwent travails to gain consciousness but again, it was not a communist but rather “Revolutionary” consciousness. They often had help of their mentors as in other socialist realism films. The three co-productions belonged among this kind of films as well.

The three co-productions contributed to socialist realism with a compromise between their home-grown and Cuban socialist realism, shifting their traditional paradigms to address the Cuban specific situation. Many elements of their films were misunderstood. The Cubans simply dismissed them as Eurocentric gaze. However, a more careful insight reveals more subtle meanings. It demonstrates the filmmakers’ capability – in spite of their limited knowledge of Cuba and Cubans – to connect their socialist reality to theirs. This way, they hoped their films would speak to both partners’ audiences as well as audiences elsewhere. It does not mean that there were no exotic elements in those films. The filmmakers had to include them because they wanted to make the films attractive to their audiences, otherwise, why film in Cuba...

The ICAIC did not like the three co-productions because it felt that they did not represent the authentic Cuba (Gutiérrez Alea qtd. in Oroz 88). Nevertheless, it did not prevent the ICAIC from continuing to make co-productions with its brother countries. They just changed their form. The ICAIC, for example, never again allowed socialist directors to make a film about the Cuban Revolution. The only two Cuban co-productions with socialist (or ex-socialist) countries that treated Cuban history were *Capablanca* (1987) and *Lisanka* (2009), the former with the Soviet Union and the latter with Russia and Venezuela. In both cases, however, the films were directed by Cuban directors, Manuel Herrera and Daniel Díaz Torres respectively.

All the other socialist co-productions had diverse topics and portrayed other, mostly Latin American countries. Cuba offered its landscapes and its actors to represent Argentina, Chile, Jamaica, España, and even Florida. It did not matter because the Eastern European audience could not travel and did not know those countries. Among those co-productions and joint projects belonged, for example, the two Polish films *Zejście do piekła* (Zbigniew Kuźmiński, 1966) and *Pogoń za Adamem* (Jerzy Zarzycki, 1970); all the 1970s co-productions with the socialist bloc like *Osceola* (Petzold 1971) and *Das Licht auf dem Galge* (Nitzschke, 1976) and the last Cuban co-production with the socialist bloc, *Adelante Robinson!* (1989), made by the Hungarian director Peter Timar. Even the Czechoslovak-Cuban cooperation in the two episodes of the sequel *30 Cases of Captain Zeman* by Sequens, uses Cuban landscapes and actors in a story about Chile. One episode, however, features a character of a Cuban spy and furthers the idea of solidarity and cooperation among socialist countries in their fight against imperialism and Nazi threat, inherently connected with it.

This study demonstrated that the cooperation between Cuba and the socialist bloc in the area of cinema was important. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the socialist bloc's impact on Cuban cinema, however, further research is needed. It could continue in two directions. On the one hand, it would be beneficial to examine the archival sources in Cuba and each of the countries of the socialist bloc, especially Poland and Hungary but also the southern countries like Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. My research suggests that Bulgaria had interesting exchange with Cuba in the area of technical training in the 1980s and that Yugoslavian feature and animated films gauged much interest among the Cuban filmmakers. A thorough research in these countries will enable a comparison across the socialist bloc in terms

of the countries' specialization in cinematic socialist internationalism as well as the extent of their help to the ICAIC. It will also enable an assessment of the overall importance of the socialist bloc film industry and films in Cuba.

On the other hand, it would be beneficial to explore the socialist bloc's cooperation with other Cuban institutions that made films simultaneously with the ICAIC, such as the cinema department of the Cuban Armed Forces (FAR) and Cuban Television (ICR). Materials about these institutes in Cuba will probably still be difficult to access, however, much about this cooperation can be found in the archives of their socialist bloc counterparts. My research suggests that the exchange between the Czechoslovak Army Film and the FAR film studios was lively and the dynamics was very different from the ČSF-ICAIC collaboration. The recently published Alice Lovejoy's book *Army Film and the Avant Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military* reveals the importance of the research into these institutions.



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