

The gaucho war: the Argentine Cinema in Brazil (1935 - 1945)*

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Arthur Autran

(Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Centro de Educação e Ciências Humanas, Departamento de Artes e Comunicação. São Carlos – SP, Brasil)

Abstract

This article discusses the circulation of Argentine film production in the Brazilian market between 1935 and 1945 aiming to map out which films were shown in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, their repercussion in the press, as Argentine producers sought to market their products and the difficulties encountered by them. The research is mainly based on sources such as film magazines and newspapers of the period, besides bibliography about the history of Cinema. It was concluded that the market structure in Brazil, characterized by the dominance of Hollywood, was an insurmountable barrier to broad commercialization of Argentine product despite its good quality.

Keywords: History of Cinema. Exhibition. Production. Argentina. Brazil.

Introduction

This paper is part of a broader research project that focuses on the comparison between the Brazilian and the Argentine cinematography from 1930 to 1945. Although the cinematography of both countries started at similar production conditions, in Argentina, the industry developed considerably while in Brazil it was not even formed.

The aim of this text is to present an overview and to analyze the presence of Argentine cinema in the Brazilian market from 1935 to 1945. Thus, according to what was found in this research, it was possible to register the number of Argentine films commercially exhibited in Rio de Janeiro and/or São Paulo. The initial milestone is related to the release of *Riachuelo* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1934) in the city of São Paulo, whose premiere sets the beginning of the search for inserting the Argentine product in the Brazilian market; while the final delimitation is related to the moment in which the film *A guerra gaúcha* (*La guerra gaucha*, Lucas Demare, 1942) ends its successful commercial career in Rio de Janeiro.

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In addition to providing a record of all the Argentine premieres in Brazil, the goal of this article is to map how these films were received by film press, the strategies used by the producers from Buenos Aires to have their films shown and the difficulties they faced.

Therefore, the aim of this work is to understand to what extent a Latin-American cinematography that was in its moment of industrial development had its products commercialized in a foreign market with expressive dimensions, such as the Brazilian one, but dominated by Hollywood.

This research has a historical bias and it was based mainly on information gathering and analysis of texts published in the main Brazilian cinematography magazines of that time: *Cinearte* and *A Cena Muda*. Through the magazines' notes, news, interviews, articles and critique, it was possible to reconstruct how the Argentine films were received in the country and to understand their ways of advertisement and commercialization. In order to follow the circulation of films in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, newspapers from these cities were studied, especially these ones: *Correio da Manhã*, *Correio Paulistano*, *Folha da Manhã* e *Jornal do Brasil*.

This text also uses the bibliography on the history of Argentine cinema, especially authors as César Maranghello (2002), Clara Kriger (2009), Claudio España (1984 and 1992), Domingo di Núbila (1998) and Héctor R. Kohen (2000). They are fundamental because of the information provided about the film production companies, the producers and the films.

Likewise, this paper seeks to dialog with a new dimension of Cinema historiography, which expands its focus beyond national limits and film production itself.

According to Paulo Antônio Paranaguá (2000, p.30), the prevailing nationalism among Cinema historians in Latin America led research to focus on what was produced “[...] in the scale of each country”. However, this situation has changed for some years through the researches developed by Tunico Amâncio (2014), Afrânio Catani (2004), Fabián Nuñez (2009) and Silvia Oroz (1992), among others, which have contributed to a significant expansion in the comprehension of the relationships between Latin-American cinematographies.

Another important limitation of the classic historiographical discourse, as pointed out by Jean-Claude Bernardet (1995, p.29), is that: “This way of writing history favors essentially the act of filming over other functions that participate equally in the cinematography activity as a whole”. Moreover, this situation started to be changed through the work of Alice Gonzaga, André Gatti and José Inácio de Melo Souza, mentioning some of the most important authors who dedicated themselves to the history of distribution and exhibition in Brazil.

Being part of this context, this paper seeks to contribute to historiography through the analysis of one question – that is: the distribution, the exhibition and the repercussion of Argentine cinema in Brazil from 1935 to 1945 – which has not been deeply discussed until this moment.

First attempts (1935 – 1938)

The advent of sound films in the turning of the 1920s to the next decade caused a burst of excitement regarding the local production in different countries, which was not different in Argentina and in Brazil.

In both countries, funds were employed in the construction of well-equipped film studios, in hiring technicians, and in the search for establishing a local star system, frequently based on artists who were successful in the theater or music. In Brazil, Cinédia was created in 1930 – the production company owned by Adhemar Gonzaga – and Brasil Vita Filme in 1933 – Carmen Santos' company –², while in the neighbor country, Lumiton was founded in 1932 – entrepreneurship led by César Guerrico, Enrique Susini, Luis Romero Carranza e Miguel Mugica – and Argentina Sono Film was created in 1933 – commanded initially by D. Angel Mentasti. While in Brazil names such as Carmem Miranda, Mesquitinha and Oscarito became famous; in Argentina, Libertad Lamarque, Luis Sandrini and Niní Marshall were shining.

Many factors motivated these investments in film making in Argentina and Brazil. According to analysis conducted in a previous paper (AUTRAN, 2012), this process occurred due to the market instability promoted by the fact that most part of the audience from non-English speaking countries could not understand the North American movies. Also, it was due to the high price of sound reproduction equipment for movie theaters, as well as the patriotic demonstrations that were present in some social spheres against cinema spoken in English.

However, while in Argentina the production flourished with wide acceptance in the domestic market, and even in the external one, the same did not happen in Brazil, where the amount of feature films tended to stagnate. For comparison purposes, it is possible to provide some numbers: in 1939, while Argentina produced 51 feature films, the number of national productions was limited to only seven feature films in Brazil.

² This producer was created under the name of Brasil Vox Filme, but a lawsuit filed by *major* Fox, obligated Carmen Santos to change the name of her company.

With the success of Argentine Cinema in the internal market, the producers tried to export their movies to Latin America and Spain. Brazil is included in this set of investments from Buenos Aires' producers.

In the mid 1930s, the Brazilian domestic market was totally taken by Hollywood. If the advent of sound had provoked an increase in national production and some instability in the exhibition circuit, around 1934, everything had returned to the old regime, in which Brazilians cinematographic diet was served by Hollywood.

For a cinematography without tradition with the Brazilian audience, as was the Argentine, entering this market necessarily implied obstacles. This was due to the fact that there was a product dominating the market, as previously mentioned; in addition, the Brazilian audience did not know the production of the neighbor country.

In October 1935, the comedy *Riachuelo* was released at cine Glória, in São Paulo (CINEMATOGRAFIA, October 13th 1935, p.10). It was a movie starred by Luis Sandrini and it was a huge success in Argentina.

In the following year, in May, *A alma do bandoneon* (*El alma del bandoneón*, Mario Soffici, 1935) was also released in São Paulo, with Libertad Lamarque. The premiere was at cine República and it had good publicity in *Correio Paulistano* (CINEMATOGRAFIA, May 14th 1936, p.8); it then started to be exhibited at Olímpia (CINEMATOGRAFIA, May 19th 1936, p.6).

Riachuelo is a comedy set in a working class neighborhood with characters from poor sections of society. Because of this film, according to Claudio España, "Argentine cinema seemed to reach a good share of authenticity with the dialogs, based on the reality of streets, on the picturesque saying and on the jocose situation" (ESPAÑA, 1984, p.59). On the other hand, *A alma do bandoneon* is a melodrama and it "[...] was the first feature film of the new Argentine sound cinema, which was developed in environments and among bourgeois characters", as stated by Domingo di Núbila, who still considers it a film without authenticity, but because of Mario Soffici's direction, it was "[...] the most cinematographic film made here until the moment of its premiere" (NÚBILA, 1998, p.100-101).

In 1938, another comedy was released, *Um infeliz rapaz* (*El pobre Pérez*, Luis César Amadori, 1937), starred by Pepe Arias, but this time exhibited in Rio de Janeiro, at cine Alhambra and distributed by Cinesul (THEATROS, November 16th 1938, p.8). In the following year, the movie was released in São Paulo at cine Babilônia (CINEMATOGRAFIA, February 28th 1939, p.8).

It is noteworthy that the exhibition circuit in São Paulo, where the movies previously mentioned were shown, composed of cines Glória, Olímpia and Babilônia was clearly a

circuit of less important movie theaters. Even cine República was in decadence, far from its important days.

The Brazilian audience must not have received in a negative way the film starred by Libertad Lamarque, *A alma do bandoneon*. But it is important to state that the actress and singer was also successful on the radio in Brazil. A newspaper article, in April 1937, highlighted that she would soon be in São Paulo, where she would have some shows on Rádio Difusora (LIBERTAD, April 10th 1937, p.12).

All the movies that were mentioned so far were produced by Argentina Sono Film, the most highlighted film production company from the neighbor country. An Argentine movie marketed in Brazil that was not connected to this company was *Radio bar* (Manuel Romero, 1936), a musical comedy from A.I.A., distributed in Brazil by Paramount and released in 1937, in São Paulo, at Olímpia and Mafalda movie theaters (CINEMATOGRAFIA, October 6th 1937, p.9). Nonetheless, the publicity does not mention the nationality of the piece, solely stating that the movie is “spoken and sung in Spanish”. In the following year, it was released in Rio de Janeiro, at cine Império (THEATROS, February 22nd 1938, p.8).

The gaucho war (1939 – 1945)

From 1939 on, the Argentine producers organized themselves in order to enter the Brazilian market. It was possible to observe that the films from the neighbor country were exported to other places and were successful with the audience:

The Argentine films were successful in all parts. The Hispano movie theater, in New York, was completely dedicated to showing Lumiton’s and Argentina Sono Film’s productions; *La vida de Carlos Gardel*, *La vida es un tango*, *Puerta cerrada* e *Mujeres que trabajan* were box-office hits and many others attracted lots of spectators. The New York phenomenon was repeated in many other places in the United States – Texas, Colorado, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico and California. In Mexico, almost all of our films were released and *Puerta cerrada* was a box-office hit [...]. The results followed these examples in all the Hispanic-American countries (NÚBILA, 1998, p.312-313).

On February 12, 1939, there was not only the premiere of the film *Madreselva* (Luis César Amadori, 1938) starring Libertad Lamarque at cine Rosário in São Paulo, but also the actress and singer herself presented in that room at 4:20 p.m. and also at 9:20 p.m. It is noteworthy that the artist was described as “The soul of Argentine song” on a newspaper advertisement from *Folha da Manhã* on that day. This movie was even shown

in Rio de Janeiro, at Broadway movie theater (CARTAZ, January 24th 1939, p.1), owned by Generoso Ponce Filho, who intended to create an exhibition circuit, but was not able to do that (GONZAGA, 1996, p.188). Having as its star Hugo del Carril, *Madreselva* had successful tangos including the one that the movie was named after and it was also an expensive production. According to Domingo di Núbila “[...] it delighted crowds all over America” (NÚBILA, 1998, p.214). If *Cinearte* critic, C.F., on one hand did not seem so delighted with the piece, on the other hand, he did not despise it, considering that it “values the Argentine cinema” and evaluating it as “Regular” (C. F., March 1st 1939, p.50). Besides São Paulo, Libertad Lamarque also performed at Cassino da Urca, and according to H. Ponte, a *Cinearte* chronicler:

It was there that I felt all the tango enchantment that her sweet and unique voice told us. Libertad sings with her heart – she conveys the listeners the emotions brought by the song. She is graceful and humble, and she moves through the words of tango... (PONTE, February 15th 1939, p.18-19).

An advertisement published on *Correio da Manhã* on August 13th, 1939, announced the premiere in Rio de Janeiro, more precisely at the sumptuous theater named Palácio, at Cinelândia, of another film starred by Libertad Lamarque: *Porta fechada* (*Puerta cerrada*, Luis Saslavsky, 1939). It was also exhibited in October at cine Pirajá, in Ipanema, according to the advertisement published on the same newspaper on October 10th of the same year. The premiere in São Paulo was only in January 1940 in the movie theaters Rialto and S. José (PROGRAMMAS, January 3rd 1940, p.11) and it did not have any relevant advertisement, but the movie remained in exhibition for many weeks in different theaters, which may indicate that it was well accepted by the audience. This melodrama takes place in Buenos Aires of the beginning of the 20th century and tells the story of a mother, who is released after spending 20 years in prison being unfairly convicted, and looks for the son that did not know her. Claudio España highlights the importance of Luis Saslavsky’s direction and considers *Porta fechada* “one of the most long-lasting and wonderful works of local cinematography (and something more than the local one)”, having reached great success including abroad with exhibitions in Lima, Japan, Havana, Santiago, Montevideo and New York (ESPAÑA, 1984, p.143 and 145). In Brazil, the movie was distributed by Cinesul and caught *Cinearte* critic’s attention:

Libertad Lamarque in another splendid Argentine movie that shows us the great progress of Argentine cinematography.[...] She [Libertad Lamarque] presents a complete work. Also,

Luis Saslavsky develops a good work as the director because the ‘scenario’ was also his (X, September 1st 1939, p.41).

Cinesul also distributed *A vida de Carlos Gardel* (*La vida de Carlos Gardel*, Alberto de Zavalía, 1939), which was released once more at Palácio, according to the advertisement published on *Correio da Manhã* on October 1st, 1939. Hugo del Carril had the leading role.

All the movies mentioned were produced by Argentina Sono Film. This company was created in 1933 by D. Angel Mentasti, as previously mentioned, and it was the most important film producer of that country in the history of cinema. After D. Angel Mentasti’s death in 1937, the production company was commended by his sons Angel Luis and Atilio Mentasti, who reorganized it and changed it from a family company to a joint-stock company (ESPAÑA, 1984, p.138).

Claudio España (1984, p.70) states that a representative of this company, Enrique Wagenpfeil, went to Rio de Janeiro in 1935 to establish a distributing company, but the researcher does not provide further information on this and I could not find other references. However, the small quantity of Argentine films released in Brazil until 1938 seem to indicate that the distributor was not established. The same author asserts that, from 1939, the Mentasti brothers frequently traveled to Spain and Brazil, with the aim of “[...] increasing exchange opportunities and signing contracts of films that were being produced” (ESPAÑA, 1984, p.166). Actually, in July 1939, newspapers from Rio de Janeiro noticed that Angel Luis Mentasti was in the capital of the country with the goal of enhancing the cinematographic commerce between Brazil and Argentina (CHEGOU, July 23rd 1939, p.3).

Based on how *Madreselva* was released in Brazil – including the presence of Libertad Lamarque – and on the presence of one Menstati here, it appears that from this moment, the Brazilian market was a concrete target for film production companies from the neighbor country, or at least, for Argentina Sono Film.

Another important data around the year of 1939 is that, after this year, it was possible to find sections dedicated to Argentine cinematography on Brazilian film fan magazines, like the section “Argentine Cinema”, which was regularly edited on *Cinearte* since May; and another, with the same name, edited since December on *A Cena Muda*. These sections were full of pictures of stars and shooting scenes, as well as notes on production, exhibition and repercussion of Argentine productions, and they followed closely the pattern of those dedicated to Hollywood.

In August 1940, *Cine-Rádio Jornal* printed a full-page article that had as its title the following challenge: “Argentine cinema needs an opportunity in Brazil!”. It was an

interview with José A. Mentasti, presented as one of Argentina Sono Film's director and who was then in Rio de Janeiro³. This production company, according to the newspaper, was "the biggest and the most noticeable cinematography organization in South America". The interviewee asserted that:

All the South American markets were gained [by Argentine films], except for Brazil – continued Dr. José A. Mentasti [...]. But I am sure that Brazilians will properly appreciate the Argentine cinematographic production. Argentina and Brazil have the same feelings, the same habits, the same problems; it is fair, then, that really good cinema, different, one that seeks to address specific issues from South American countries, will be accepted by Brazilians (CINEMA, August 1st 1940, p.7).

Still in the beginning of 1940, Argentina Sono Film, through Cinesul distributor, released in São Paulo the film *Romance no Rio (Caminito de gloria*, Luis Cesar Amadori, 1939), starred by Libertad Lamarque and its premiere was at cine Ópera in January (CINEMATOGRAFIA, January 26th 1940, p.6). The release in Rio de Janeiro occurred at the same time and the movie was exhibited at Palácio. Brazil participates in the movie plot, which takes place (in some parts) in Rio de Janeiro, with emphasis on the scenes at Cassino da Urca, which was rebuilt in studio. *Romance no Rio* received "Good" as an evaluation from *Cinearte* (TELA, February 1st 1940, p.40), and, on the same edition of the magazine, the section "Argentine Cinema" presented a big picture of Libertad Lamarque and an interview in which the actress stated that she "dedicated" the movie to the Brazilian audience. In addition, in the film, she sings the song *A jardineira* dressed as a *baiana*, which was very emotional for her when she had visited Brazil (CINEMA, February 1st 1940, p.42). The dedication to which the actress is referring was apparently made of an introduction produced for the Brazilian market. In this introduction, the star addressed the audience and offered the work to Brazilians (CINEMATOGRAFIA, February 1st 1940, p.6). This was interpreted as another strategy of Argentina Sono Film to attract the Brazilian audience. *Romance no Rio* was an expensive production, according to Claudio España, but it was because of Libertad Lamarque's presence. The movies with this actress and singer required by contract that the foreign distributors purchased other movies from the film production company (ESPAÑA, 1984, p.6).

Despite all efforts, entering the Brazilian exhibition market was not easy. Cinesul distributor, a company led by Ramón Pesquera and responsible for Argentina Sono Film's

³ José A. Mentasti was Angel Luis and Atilio's older brother. The firstborn was a doctor and, because of his profession, he dedicated himself sparsely to the cinema business.

releases in the country (VIDA, August 13th 1940, p.4), managed to have the premiere of *O velho doutor* (*El Viejo doctor*, Mario Soffici, 1939) in São Paulo at cine Astória, according to advertisement from the newspaper *Correio Paulistano* on July 9th, 1940. Starring Enrique Muiño and Angel Magaña, this drama movie focuses on social issues. It is about changes in doctors' practices; but apparently, the movie did not reach the screens of Rio de Janeiro. In September, Cinesul was able to release in São Paulo another film from Mentasti's production company: *Doze mulheres* (*Doce mujeres*, Luís Moglia Barth, 1939) with Olinda Bozán leading the cast. In December, always in São Paulo, *E amanhã serão homens (...Y mañana serán hombres*, Carlos Borcosque, 1939) (CINEMA, September 7th 1940, p.8) was released, a film from the same producer starring as leading role Sebastián Chiola, but it had little advertisement. It was not possible to determine the distributor responsible for this last movie.

From 1941, Argentina Sono Film's strategy of entering the Brazilian market decreased meaningfully in commercial terms.

Another big company from the early days of sound Cinema was Lumiton. It produced movies that were box-office hits in the 1930s and are considered classics nowadays, such as *Los tres berretines* (Enrique Susini, 1933) e *La muchachada de a bordo* (Manuel Romero, 1936). However, in the 1930s, I have no news about the commercial exhibition of these movies or any other from the producer in the Brazilian market.

From 1940, Lumiton seemed to focus on Brazil, because, according to advertisement from *Correio Paulistano* on July 9th, it was released in São Paulo at cine Alhambra, *Três ilhados em Paris* (*Tres anclados en París*, Manuel Romero, 1938), a film that presents musical acts with Irmãs Pagãs singing songs from the Brazilian songbook.

In April 1942, *Mulheres que trabalham* (*Mujeres que trabajan*, Manuel Romero, 1938) was released at cine Pathé, located at Rio de Janeiro's Cinelândia. In this premiere, advertisements highlighted it was a film from Lumiton and it was distributed by Cineac, as it can be seen on *Correio da Manhã* of April 23rd. The critic Renato de Alencar, in an article defending the Argentine Cinema, states that the actress Niní Marshall in *Mulheres que trabalham* "[...] was able to dominate the assistance of Pathé, emerging in the fan's opinions as an artist full of enthusiasm and with a great performance in humorous roles, the salt needed in these days full of shootings, bombings, and despotism of the Hitler Era" (ALENCAR, June 9th 1942, p.3). In a sequence of the same article, the author announces that Pathé had been incorporated to the chain of the Brazilian Cinema Company, which was owned by the powerful Luiz Severiano Ribeiro – who was then the main exhibitor in Brazil – and that “[...] Mr. Severiano Ribeiro did not believed in this palpable thing:

the existence of Argentine cinema”, prohibiting theaters to exhibit films from this origin. Renato de Alencar ends the article considering:

It is not possible that we are condemned to only watch Hollywood movies, from January to December, every year, when we also have the right to vary, appreciating the elite productions of friends and brothers, such as the Argentines and the Mexicans, currently at the forefront of America’s cinematographic industry (ALENCAR, June 9th 1942, p.3).

The problem does not seem to be regarding Severiano Ribeiro’s lack of belief in the Argentine production; after all, the movies from Argentina Sono Film were released in the theaters of the Brazilian Cinema Company, such as the theater Palácio. What needs to be considered is Renato de Alencar’s perception of the barrier to foreign movies that were not American. This barrier existed due to the commercial system built toward the North American film since the 1920s in Brazil and in most part of the world, through which Hollywood monopolizes the market and leaves little room for products from different origins. It is important to point out that, similar to the Brazilian market regarding its own market, any other cinematography that tried to enter our market also had difficulties due to the connection between the North American distributor and the Brazilian exhibitor.

But Lumiton’s big move was to produce the movie *Embrujo* (Enrique Susini, 1941), which was named *A Marquesa de Santos* in Brazil. As shown in the title, the movie narrates the love of Domitila de Castro and D. Pedro I, having as background the Brazilian process of independence from Portugal. This was one of the most expensive movies produced in Argentina until then and, according to Di Núbila: “It was filmed with rigidity and affectation. It was sumptuous in scenography and costume design, including many songs and African-Cuban choreography...” (NÚBILA, 1998, p.338). The movie was released in Rio de Janeiro in the second semester of 1942 and was considered satisfactory by Celestino Silveira, who, despite the criticism regarding the “[...] historical contribution that was a flaw”, praised the actor that played José Bonifácio – Ernesto Vilches – and recognized “[...] the refinement of our neighbor’s kindness” to bring to the screen an episode of the Brazilian history. Furthermore, the chronicler considered the film a positive example of the industry in Argentina:

This movie alerted the most incredulous about the undeniable qualities of the Argentine cinematographic industry. Industry, we name it correctly, because they do not make independent movies there, in simple amateur practices, but they seriously consider the class investments, designing and executing plans for the production during an entire year (SILVEIRA, October 20th 1942, p.3).

Still according to the same critic, the movie was released by Columbia Pictures without publicizing the fact that it was an Argentine production. This, by the way, seemed to be one of the strategies of the North American distributors, as the same has been observed in the premiere of *Radio bar*, which was distributed by Paramount. The strategy sought to lessen, or at least, to not contribute to the promotion of the Argentine cinematography, as the viewer would not know how to connect those productions to a specific country.

The main attempt of an Argentine studio of entering the Brazilian market came neither from Argentina Sono Film nor from Lumiton – probably the most famous Argentine production companies in the film history from the neighbor country. The San Miguel Studios used moves related to diplomacy and developed the most elaborated strategy with the aim of exhibiting their movies on Brazilian screens.

The San Miguel Studios were composed of “[...] very well-equipped galleries and even their own laboratories” (NÚBILA, 1998, p.301). The production company belonged to the millionaire Miguel Machinandiarena, a businessman who owned many casinos and hotels in cities such as Mar del Plata, besides having connection to the Argentine political elite.

According to Héctor R. Kohen, the author of an excellent research on San Miguel:

After 1941, the films from San Miguel Studios would be distributed by a society of limited responsibility integrated by Narciso Machinandiarena [M. M.’s nephew] and the Mexican businessman Modesto Pascó, the Pan American Distributor, a name that shows the international expansion aspirations of San Miguel Studios with a crucial theme for the relationships between the countries of the continent: the Pan-Americanism. [Miguel] Machinandiarena’s commercial strategy develops through this connection between economy and politics, in a way that the history of San Miguel Studios – Distribuidora Panamericana abroad is, mainly in the cases of Brazil and Peru, the history of its relationship with the political power (KOHEN, 2000, p.350-351).

Regarding Brazil, an embassy representing San Miguel Studios and the Pan American Distributor visited the country in 1942. It was composed of Miguel Machinandiarena, Augusto Alvarez – the distributor’s director who substituted Modesto Pascó – and of Eduardo Morera – the director of the box-office hit *Melodias da América* (*Melodías de América*, 1942). Morera was an enthusiast of gaining the Brazilian market and went to country in September when he offered copies of the movies *Melodias da América e Amor*

e heroicidade (*En el viejo Buenos Aires*, Antonio Momplet, 1942) to Alzira Vargas, the President's daughter. In the following year, the President himself (Getúlio Vargas) received a copy of a short-film from this company. The effort in the political field worked partially, since Brazil's unit of San Miguel Studios was created in the same year, led by Simón Kischner and Eric Steimberg, who wanted to distribute in our country films from San Miguel Studios and Artistas Argentinos Asociados. There was a banquet offered by Miguel Machinandiarena at the Brazilian Press Association (BPA), in Rio de Janeiro, to celebrate the formation of the distributor. The following people participated in this event: Herbert Moses – president of BPA –, Luiz Severiano Ribeiro, F. Caruso – president of the Brazilian Exhibitors Union – and Israel Souto – head of the division of Theater and Cinema at the Department of Press and Propaganda (known as DIP in Brazil). San Miguel Studios and the producer Artistas Argentinos Asociados invited Israel Souto to go to Buenos Aires in April 1944. He defended the presence of the Argentine product in the Brazilian market (KOHEN, 2000, p.355).

Melodias da América was being exhibited in Rio de Janeiro in December 1943, but it was not able to have any movie theaters at Cinelândia, the heart of the Brazilian cinematography market. The movie was released in the neighborhoods, being exhibited at the same time at América and Roxy theaters (CARTAZ, December 29th 1943, p.12). Curiously, in July 1944, the movie was released again and its premiere was at Cinelândia, at Odeon, and in the neighborhoods, it was shown at Avenida, and once more, at Roxy (CARTAZ, July 13th 1944, p.12). Both América and Avenida were located in Tijuca and Roxy is in Copacabana up to the present moment. These are all middle-class neighborhoods that used to have a good flow of audience interested in cinematography.

However, the movie that led San Miguel Studios to pin their hopes was *Amor e heroicidade*, a film that was “[...] luxurious in its execution – its cost exceeded any other Argentine movie produced until that moment” (KOHEN, 2000, p.360). The melodrama starred Libertad Lamarque, Luis Aldás and Amelia Bence and was portrayed during a period of yellow fever that hit Buenos Aires in 1871. José María Beltrán was responsible for the film photography and it was considered as high quality by Di Núbila, but the same critic understands that “[...] its conventional plot and superficial characters made it less interesting, and it was not efficiently directed to dissimulate these disadvantages, lacking the necessary Argentine character”(NÚBILA, 1998, p.368).

Amor e heroicidade was released in Rio de Janeiro in January 1944, with its premiere at Glória – located at Cinelândia – and in the neighborhoods at Carioca and São Luiz (CARTAZ, January 27th 1944, p.12) – the former located in Tijuca and the latter

in Catete. Both theater rooms were refined and had good audience. The movie was on display on the screens of Rio de Janeiro for quite some time, being shown in different cinemas in neighborhoods and suburbs. This was common practice of relevant film product exploration in commercial terms; the films started to be shown in the most prestigious theaters and then went to other parts of the city. Nevertheless, I did not find any reference to its release in São Paulo, what indicates the difficulties Argentine films faced trying to enter the Brazilian market, despite the noticeable improvement in Rio de Janeiro. It is noteworthy that *Melodias da América* and *Amor e heroicidade* were released in theaters connected to Luiz Severiano Ribeiro.

However, San Miguel Studios situation in Brazil was affected, according to Héctor R. Kohen, because of the rise in tension between the United States and Argentina, as the latter kept itself as a neutral country in the Second World War in 1944. In retaliation, the North American State Department did not recognize the presidency of General Edelmiro J. Farrell, causing Buenos Aires to require the Argentine ambassador to leave Washington. According to Kohen: “the diplomatic isolation that followed these incidents – Brazil was a belligerent country in the World War – blocked definitely the access of San Miguel Studios to the Brazilian market” (KOHEN, 2000, p.355).

For the purpose of this article, it is important to highlight the last Argentine release in the Brazilian market: *A guerra gaúcha* (The gaucho war). Claudio España qualified this movie as

“[...] a classic work of our cinematography at the moment that it tested its strength with the Argentine and international audience” (ESPANÑA, 1992). Yet, for César Maranghello, the film has “[...] freshness and enthusiasm that are not common in the Argentine cinema” and it was responsible for dividing “the history of the industry in before and after its premiere” (*apud* MARANGHELLO, 2002, p.69-70).

The film was produced by Artistas Argentinos Asociados and it is an adaptation of the namesake book from Leopoldo Lugones. It takes place in the beginning of 19th century during the battles for Argentine independence, focusing on the figure of Lieutenant Villarreal (played by Angel Magaña), military connected to the Spanish army, but who changed sides during the war and became supportive of the Argentine fight for freedom when he noticed its fairness, the people’s courage, the love for the land – after all, he was born in America – and the love for Asunción (played by Amelia Bence).

The movie was a huge success among audience and critics in Argentina, and it was exported to different countries, in addition to Brazil, such as the United States, France, Spain, Norway and Denmark (MARANGHELLO, 2002, 73)⁴.

In Brazil, when *A guerra gaúcha* was released at cine Pathé in Rio de Janeiro, in December 1944 (CARTAZ, December 20th 1944, p.11), the section “As Cotações da Semana” (Quotations of the Week) of the magazine *A Cena Muda* evaluated it as 3 – 4 being the maximum –, what corresponded to “Very Good” and the review from an anonymous critic was highly complimentary, as it is possible to observe in the following excerpt:

The excellence of the Argentine cinema can be evidenced with this work of humanity and Pan Americanism. [...] In photography, sound, direction, technical and artistic resources, the Argentine studios are as good as some global film production centers as Hollywood or London and it is fair to acknowledge that they lead the Latin American cinematography (COTAÇÕES, December 26th 1944, p.4).

The movie attracted lots of spectators, at least in Rio de Janeiro, as in October of the following year it was still possible to find the exhibition advertisement of *A guerra gaúcha* at a cinema in the suburb – Méier (CARTAZ, October 28th 1945, p.4). It seems that the call of an Argentine film that dialoged with the western genre had good results among us. However, once more, I did not find any references to the commercial exhibition of this movie in the city of São Paulo in the 1940s.

Conclusion

By analyzing the Argentine cinematography releases in Brazil, Celestino Silveira (1942, p.3) makes an important observation. According to the chronicler, who recognizes the quality of the production from the neighbor country, “[...] the Argentine movie has faced serious obstacles to reach the Brazilian market” and part of the blame for this situation is attributed to the Argentine producers themselves, because they did not want to take risks, thus, they continued to sell at a fixed price the right to exhibit their movies, instead of deciding to divide the profits – this was how Brazilian exhibitors worked.

What appears in the issue raised by Celestino Silveira are different ways of negotiating the cinematography product. Argentine production companies, even in their

⁴ For a detailed research on *A guerra gaúcha* check chapters III, IV, V, VI, VII and VIII from the book *Artistas Asociados Argentinos – La epopeya trunca*, from César Maranghello.

domestic market, were traditionally paid with sales at a fixed price, that is, in the neighbor country, the exhibitor frequently paid the producer a certain value and had the right to exhibit the movie without sharing ticket sales (KRIGER, 2009, p.35)⁵. The producers tried to continue in Brazil the way the cinematography product was explored in Argentina. However, the exhibitors from big Brazilian cities used to work by sharing ticket sales, that is, the income earned was divided with the distributor according to percentages that were previously agreed. On the Argentine producers' side, it was a way of guaranteeing payment considered enough and/or fair for the product exploration and also of avoiding income fraud – that is, when the exhibitor declares lower income than the one actually collected. It would be difficult to organize an efficient controlling system to avoid fraud, besides not knowing well enough the organization and potential of the Brazilian market. For the exhibitors, the payment at a fixed price represented a risk higher than the usual, because if the movie was not profitable, the loss could be huge and it would be upon the owners of movie theaters, considering that the exhibitor was not sure of how the Argentine product would be received in Brazil.

Celestino Silveira (1942, p.3) also criticizes the fact that Argentines did not have their own distributors, as they claimed it was not economically worth. Regarding this criticism, it is important to point out that, at least in the cases of Argentina Sono Film and San Miguel Studios, there were attempts related to the distribution. The former producer had an exclusivity contract with Cinesul; the latter, on the other hand, established San Miguel do Brasil. These attempts were not enough, as previously observed, to meaningfully expand their participation in the market. These distributors were not powerful enough in a market dominated by the North American *major* distributors. In this sense, a few years later, Mexico came up with a more efficient solution: the creation of Pelmex (Películas Mexicanas), in 1947, a distributor that was connected to the State and concentrated the circulation negotiation of most part of the country's production in the rest of Latin America (RIERA, 1998, p.151-152).

Still during the Second World War, the Argentine cinematographic production decreased. In 1943, because of the country's neutral position in the war, the United States started to limit the exportation of different products to Argentina, among them, raw stock, which was considered strategic input in the world conflict. If 1942 had the peak of the production in this period, with 56 feature films, in 1945, the number dropped to 23. This decrease was a result, mainly, of the raw stock restriction in the Argentine market. Moreover,

⁵ Clara Kriger (2009, p.35 and 37) points out that, in 1944, the Argentine producers asked for the government of that country for a law that obligated the exhibitors to pay a percentage for the movies, not a fixed price. With the decree n. 21.344, after 1945, Argentine exhibitors had the obligation to pay at least 40% of gross income from top-notch cinemas, thus changing the system of doing business at a fixed price.

Mexico, the main competitor in the Latin American context, increased its production, with 42 feature films in 1942 and 64 in 1945, due to the North American policy, which considered the country an ally and did not severely limit the exportation of raw stocks (GETINO, 1998, p.38).

Emilio García Riera (1998, p.120) stated that the United States considered important to support Mexican cinema because their films could advertise the cause of the Allies to the audience of Spanish-speaking countries. According to the author:

Some agreements with Washington Coordinating Office of International Relationships, led by Nelson Rockefeller, predicted in 1943 the American support to the Mexican cinema in three basic ways: new equipment for the studios; economic reinforcement for movie producers; assistance to studio workers through Hollywood instructors (RIERA, 1998, p.120).

This means that the North-American support to Mexico and the boycott to Argentina created adequate conditions for the former country to overcome the latter in terms of production volume and of conquering space in the Latin American market, including Brazil.

After what has been presented, it is possible to assert that the failures of Argentine Cinema attempts in participating in the Brazilian market show that the spreaded “audience’s choice” for the North American movie based on its supposed quality, as stated by exhibitors and *major* distributors, was not true. As we have observed, many movies released in Brazil were considered high quality by the critics; in addition, some films such as *Amor e heroicidade* and *A guerra gaúcha* were acclaimed by the audience.

What happened in that moment was a complex situation between, on one side, the Brazilian cinematographic market structure that was established based on the association between the North-American movie distributor – specially the companies that represented the most important studios, such as Fox, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Universal and Columbia – and the Brazilian exhibitor; and, on the other side, issues connected to North-American political, ideological and commercial strategies related to the battle against the Second World War Axis. This entire situation ended up determining the setback of a more intense participation of the Argentine film in the Brazilian market.

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Arthur Autran

Professor at the Postgraduate Program in Image and Sound and at the Postgraduate Program in Science, Technology and Society both at Universidade Federal de São Carlos – UFSCar. He has a CNPq Productivity Research scholarship – Level 2. He holds a PhD in Arts from the Arts Institute of Unicamp and a Master’s degree from Universidade de São Paulo – US. He has a degree in Cinema from the College of Arts and Communication at USP. He published the books: *Alex Viary: crítico e historiador* (Perspectiva / Petrobras, 2003), *Imagens do negro na cultura brasileira* (EdUFSCar, 2011) and *O pensamento industrial cinematográfico brasileiro* (Hucitec, 2013), as well as collaborated on *Enciclopédia do cinema brasileiro* (organized by Fernão Ramos and Luiz Felipe Miranda, Senac, 2012) and on *Diccionario del cine iberoamericano* (organized by Emilio Casares Rodicio, Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2011). He wrote articles for the collections *Documentário no Brasil: tradição e transformação* (organized by Francisco Elinaldo Teixeira, Summus, 2004), *Cinema brasileiro 1995-2005 – Ensaio sobre uma década* (organized by Daniel Caetano, Azougue, 2005), *Cinema e mercado* (organized by Alessandra Meleiro, Escrituras, 2010) e *Intelectuais partidos – Os comunistas e as mídias no Brasil* (organized by Marco Roxo and Igor Sacramento, E-Papers, 2012). His articles were published in journals as *Alceu*, *Contracampo*, *Journal of Film Preservation*, *Revista USP* and *Significação*. He directed the short film *Minoria absoluta* (1995) and the feature film *A política do cinema* (2011), both documentaries. He is a member of the Board of the Cinemateca Brasileira. Email: autran@ufscar.br

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