A "Revolution of Consciousness": Redefining Venezuelan National Identities through Cinema

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Spanish and Portuguese

By

Michelle Leigh Farrell, M.S.

Washington, DC
August 24, 2011
A “REVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS”: REDEFINING VENEZUELAN NATIONAL IDENTITIES THROUGH CINEMA

Michelle L. Farrell, M.S.

Thesis Advisor: Gwen Kirkpatrick, PhD.

ABSTRACT

I explore the popular Venezuelan National Film Platform, one of President Chávez’s controversial social initiatives established in 2004. The Platform promotes the "Revolution of Consciousness" through cinema supporting both national film production and public participation in creating Venezuelan film. I provide an analysis of this complex film program while also offering close readings of three blockbuster films that are products of the initiative. I analyze the political use of these popular films in a contemporary context.

I begin exploring the five organizations that make up the National Film Platform. These organizations include a new national, regional and community film network that accounts for the popularity of these films. While the community network is innovative I show that other aspects of this initiative are a continuation of a century-old tradition of combining filmmakers with the Venezuelan state to use cinema as a political tool.

To place this film initiative within a Latin American context, I then examine the use of cinema as a revolutionary tool in two of the strongest national film projects in Latin America, Cuba and Brazil, which serve as models for the current Venezuelan Platform and the base of the New Latin American Cinema tradition. Building on the theoretical framework of Michael Chanan I further dispute the unified New Latin American Cinema Tradition and the past canon.
of revolutionary cinema that persists today. I analyze Venezuela's previous and present role in
the interconnected world of Latin American Cinema.

I dedicate the remaining chapters to an analysis of three celebrated films that are products
of the Platform. In these films the national stories are revisited to incorporate the realities of
today's Venezuela. I examine a reshaping of the canonical foundational fictions and analyze
popular documentary films that challenge the previously accepted Venezuelan official history.

While the National Film Platform is an attempt to reach ‘authentic’ representation and
inclusion, the process continues to face challenges due to cumbersome government organizations
and top-down initiatives. My goal is to add depth and visibility to the complexities of this
initiative and its role in Venezuela's current political process.
To my parents and brother
Acknowledgements

I have a world of people to thank for supporting me through this academic and personal journey. I have met mentors and friends each step of the way from Georgetown University to Caracas, Venezuela.

First I would like to begin by thanking my dissertation advisor: Dr. Gwen Kirkpatrick. She tirelessly supported me through applications, research, and each chapter—challenging my ideas, editing, writing recommendations or picking up the phone when I called from all corners of the world. She is both a brilliant professor and an expert in advising doctoral students through this overwhelming process. I hope for all PhD students to have an advisor like Gwen.

I also have had an exceptional dissertation committee that has supported me throughout my research process: Dr. Joanne Rappaport, Dr. Vivaldo Santos and the newest committee member Dr. Luis Duno Gottberg. In my first semester I took one of Joanne's courses that forced me to question my understanding of gender, race, ethnicity and identity. I will never forget what I learned in her course and am forever grateful for her continuous support and encouragement throughout my graduate career. I took Vivaldo's courses nearly every semester of graduate school. His work has made Brazil such an important part of my understanding of Latin America showing a dialogue of the region beyond linguistic barriers. He is one of the main reasons that Portuguese is a language that I am proud to speak. The newest member of my committee is my outside reader, Dr. Luis Duno Gottberg and I am honored to have such an expert in Venezuelan cultural studies and film as a member of my committee.
At Georgetown it has been a privilege to learn from and work with each and every member of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Thank you to the Department Chair, Dr. Alfonso Morales-Front, who always found a way for me to continue with my research in and beyond the classroom. The professors, instructors, fellow students and staff from the Department deserve much more recognition than what I can offer here in this limited space. Thank you, Dr. Michael Ferreira, Dr. Emily Francomano, Dr. Adam Lifshey, Dr. Alejandro Yarza, and many others. There are two Department members that are no longer with us but have personally helped me in my development: Dr. Abelardo Hernando and Tulia Camacho Chernick. Tulia's work on Venezuela lives on in this dissertation and has served as a map for me through this maze of state agencies and cultural initiatives.

I would like to thank my fellow students that have become more than academic peers--instead they are a part of my Georgetown family and made this dissertation possible. Thank you to José Lara and Laura Gurzynski Weiss for your friendship throughout this entire process.

Thank you to the five organizations that make up the Venezuelan National Film Platform, especially La Cinemateca Nacional. They have gone out of their way to include me in all of the exciting programming, debates and events in Caracas and throughout Venezuela. I would also like to thank the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC, under the direction of Ambassador Bernardo Álvarez, for inviting me to cultural and political events to witness first hand the successes and difficult debates on the politics of Venezuela. Regardless of politics and nationality, I was treated as a part of the Venezuelan community. A special thank you to the Cultural Attaché Patricia Abdelnour and the Minister Counselor Charge D'Affairs Ángelo Rivero Santos.
I would also like to recognize the generous grants and funding awards that have made my dissertation research possible: the Lewis and Clark Fund for Exploration and Field Research through the American Philosophical Society, the Georgetown University Graduate School Dissertation Research Award, the Georgetown University Center for Latin American Studies Summer Research Grants, the U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships in Brazil, and the St. James Armenian Apostolic Church Graduate School Funding Grants.

Thank you to Joaquin for introducing Venezuela to me, the Bolivarian University for including me in the Latin American cinema course, Raúl Álvarez Sierra, the Calle y Media school in La Vega, the community cinema in La Pastora, Oscar Murat, Juan Sanoja, Sr. Javier Sarabia, Dr. Fernando Coronil, and Dr. Víctor Rivas. Thank you Esther Gentile and Mariana Álvarez. Thank you to Josh Eriksen and Laura Leone for being my supportive best friends for decades.

Finally I would like to thank my own family. This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and my brother Michael; the three people that have witnessed my entire process and have supported me through it all. To my family thank you for proving to me that with your support anything is possible.
# Table of Contents

Introduction........................................................................................................................................1

Chapter I: Proving Venezuelan Nationhood through Film: Past and Present Labyrinths of the National Film Platform..................................................................................................................13

1.1 Introduction..................................................................................................................................14

1.2 The Venezuelan State’s Historical Relationship with Film..............................................................20

1.3 Chávez and the Film Industry...........................................................................................................33

1.4 The Film Platform's Maze of Organizations....................................................................................35

1.5 A Visit to a Community Cinema......................................................................................................59

1.6 The Margarita National Film Festival: A Visit to the Public Film Works....................................62

Chapter II: Is Venezuela Continuing the New Latin American Cinema Tradition?.........................69

2.1 Introduction..................................................................................................................................69

2.2 New Latin American Cinema: A Unified Movement?.....................................................................73

2.3 Retroactive Cinema Novo Roots?....................................................................................................75

2.4 Cuba: A Revolutionary Film Model?..............................................................................................81

2.5 Thirty-two Years Strong: The Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana..........................87

2.6 Venezuela's Role & New Latin American Film: Forty Years After Mérida...................................92

Chapter III: Doña Bárbara Gets a Facelift: El Libertador Morales Redefines Civilization and Barbarity...............................................................................................................................................103

3.1 Introduction..................................................................................................................................103

3.2 A Return to Doña Bárbara and Foundational Fictions...................................................................104
3.3 *El Libertador Morales* and a New National Plan through Melodrama ............109

3.4 *El Libertador Morales* vs. *Doña Bárbara*: Different Objective with a Similar Recipe ...........................................................................................................154

Chapter IV: Documentary Film in the Venezuelan National Film Platform:

*Víctimas de la democracia* & *Venezuelan Petroleum Company* .....................163

4.1 Introduction ..............................................................................................................163

4.2 A Public Debate to Define Documentary .................................................................164

4.3 The Aesthetics of Documentary and its Role in Latin America ............................166

4.4 *Víctimas de la democracia* .....................................................................................173

4.5 *Venezuelan Petroleum Company* .........................................................................185

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................200

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................210
Introduction to Dissertation:

Venezuela's Revolution of Consciousness through Film

"[I]n the case of Chávez, words are indispensable...constant narrative to give meanings to all that happens...it is not just that words are produced as part of the revolution, but that words produce the revolution"  
- Fernando Coronil- *What's Left of Chávez?*

In this dissertation I focus on the Contemporary Venezuelan National Film Platform, one of President Chávez’s social initiatives. The program is, like Chávez himself, controversial, and forms part of his twentieth century “socialist revolution” that has become a model for countries throughout the world. Although little is known about these social programs, they have attracted both praise and disparagement worldwide. In this dissertation I provide a detailed analysis of the National Film Platform its successes and failures within the context of film production in Venezuela and in dialogue with the New Latin American revolutionary film tradition in Latin America.

President Hugo Chávez launched the National Film platform in order to use film and literature, to promote a “Revolution of Consciousness”. This “Revolution” is a way to awaken the Venezuelan people to contribute to the Venezuelan cultural industry. Instead of continuing their dependency on and love for Hollywood movies, imported literature, and foreign culture, this is a push for Venezuelan people to contribute to their own culture through film and literature. The initiative intends to bring people on board with the ideas of the revolution while also democratizing the filmmaking process and representations of Venezuela through workshops, community cinemas and a five-part National Film Platform. While the Platform is an attempt to reach ‘authentic’
representations and inclusion of the Venezuelan people through community film workshops, the Platform remains tied to government funding and political interests.

In my field research I have examined in-depth the National Film Platform to provide a close analysis of this political use of film. In the fall of 2008 I met with representatives at each level of the Film Platform, spending time with the community groups involved in filmmaking and training. While the Film Platform, similar to all of the other Chávez social programs, focuses on fostering participation within Venezuela and democratizing opportunities to contribute to the representations of the country, at times there is a gap between theory and practice.

Since my research trip in the fall of 2008 I returned to Venezuela for two more months from August to October 2009 to visit more community cinemas, the national film festival and take part in the public film workshops. There I attempted to re-interview one-on-one each of the presidents of the five organizations that compose the Film Platform. This decision to revisit the five presidents was telling of the challenges of Chavismo--many of the presidents that I had originally met with were replaced due to political differences. Much to my dismay all new community cinemas that were scheduled for inauguration during that period were put on hold for six months while the existing network continued to operate. These changes made my work and theirs more complicated. Since those visits many of the presidents of the five organizations have been replaced again (and happily I found out that some of the contributors to my original research were asked to return).

From my five interviews with the helpful presidents of the organizations that horizontally rather than hierarchically form the Film Platform I realized that this initiative
is composed of a cumbersome labyrinth of agencies that require an enormous amount of what Pierre Bourdieu would call "cultural capital". In terms of "cultural capital" I am referring to the amount of knowhow that is required to use, take part in and benefit from these initiatives. While there is an extensive program designed to promote participation in the filmmaking process--the programs are not always transparent and user-friendly. The overwhelming web of institutions challenges the participatory focus, widening the gap between the theoretical initiative and its community-level practice.

To conduct my research I spent two semesters in Venezuela in 2008 and 2009 to attend state film workshops, visit community cinemas, participate in debates on the role of film in a revolution, take a course in revolutionary Latin American film at the Bolivarian University, interview the leadership of the maze of organizations that make-up the Film Platform, attend community and national film festivals and to be in Venezuela at such a vibrant moment in history. All in all I travelled to Venezuela five times between 2005-2011 to better understand the multiple realities of such a complex country. In terms of culture and film, the changes that I witnessed contradicted each other, repeated successful formulas and mistakes of the past while also creating innovative uses of film and opportunities for dialogue that broke with previous Latin American models. During this time, I also traveled to Brazil to learn of the Cinema Novo past that has formed Latin American revolutionary films roots. Finally to better understand the idealized Cuban system that Venezuela uses as a model I was fortunate to attend the 2010 New Latin American Cinema film festival in Habana.

---

In my first chapter, entitled "Proving Venezuelan Nationhood through Film: The Past and Present Labyrinths of the National Film Platform", I explore the state’s long tradition with the Venezuelan film industry. To better contextualize the contemporary Venezuelan Film Platform and the initiative to promote a “Revolution of Consciousness” through culture, I consider the historical role the Venezuelan state has had in shaping, fostering, ignoring and recently reviving the film industry soon after its 1897 arrival of film in Venezuela. Venezuelan presidents and dictators alike have used film as a tool to teach the people about model citizenship, culture, and identity.

This intricate historical relationship between film and the Venezuelan state sheds light on the current maze of organizations that the Chávez administration has since dismantled, reformed, and maintained to represent Venezuelan people in movies. After offering a map of the contemporary web of organizations, I focus on the participatory projects of the National Film Platform that promote inclusion in the film industry while facing the challenges of government sponsored initiatives. I explain the workings of the labyrinth of organizations that horizontally rather than hierarchically operate to bring funding opportunities and cinemas to the public. I conclude by sharing two visits to both the celebrated community film network and the National Margarita Film Festival public film workshop. These two visits extend my research beyond the official policies and organizations of the Platform revealing challenges in communication and organization that may ironically help to protect artists' freedom from state control. I argue that the state's inefficiency may be part of the strength of this cultural investment.

In my second chapter, entitled "Is Venezuela Continuing the New Latin American Cinema Tradition?" I examine the use of cinema as a revolutionary tool in two of the
strongest national film projects in Latin America, in Cuba and Brazil, which serve as models for the current Venezuelan project and the base of the New Latin American Cinema tradition. As Venezuela works to contribute to the New Latin American Cinema tradition working to revive the revolutionary film ideal I challenge the idealized past of New Latin American Cinema tradition. Before I show how the Venezuelan initiative compares to the boom of revolutionary cinema I question if a unified New Latin American Cinema existed. I work backwards to show how New Latin American Cinema retroactively claimed Brazilian Cinema Novo roots as the model of revolutionary film and later adopted a revolutionary film canon. In my analysis I show that while what we now consider Cinema Novo as the foundation of anti-establishment, revolutionary cinema, there was an often overlooked tacit relationship between film and state that further complicates this glorification of revolutionary film.

I then analyze Venezuela's current model, Cuba, and how the ICAIC became known as the model for revolutionary film--a title that has persisted until today. The admired Cuban revolutionary film tradition manifests itself in the longest running Latin American film festival in Habana that is still considered the center of revolutionary film. In my account of the 2010 festival I explore the challenges of venerating and attempting to replicate Cuba's film past, overlooking country-specific realities. I conclude the chapter with Venezuela's recent contribution to the debate on the New Latin American film tradition with the understudied 2008 film meeting--Forty Years after Mérida. The 2008 event echoed the festival that, in 1968, held the premiere of the groundbreaking film The Hour of the Furnaces. Forty years later in Caracas the revolutionary Latin American filmmakers reunited to discuss the collective role of Latin American revolutionary film in
society and the challenges of film in the region. I share an analysis of the debates that took place at the 2008 meeting that attempted to construct a unified Latin American narrative showing Chávez's initiatives as the embodiment of the original goals of the New Latin American Cinema movement.

In my third chapter, *Doña Bárbara Gets a Facelift: El Libertador Morales Redefines Civilization and Barbarity*, I analyze a blockbuster film from the National Film Platform: the film *El Libertador Morales*. I decided to include this film due to its exceptional box office success and prolonged time in commercial cinemas before reaching the public cinema network. I also chose it because of its notable similarities to previous Latin American nation-building narratives, namely the canonical Venezuelan melodrama *Doña Bárbara*. I compare this melodramatic sensation to the Venezuelan canonical narrative and argue that the film recycles and reshapes the novel *Doña Bárbara* to suit the needs of contemporary Venezuela. In both works we see the close relationship between film and politics in a Venezuelan context.

I discuss the previous national narratives published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These narratives married love and politics creating a peaceful, melodramatic, and national romance that both represented and created the nation. By comparing these works I show the return to national melodramatic narratives in the National Film Platform and how *El Libertador Morales* represents the political platform of Chavismo and public participation through the binary formula of civilization and barbarity.

In my fourth and final chapter I analyze a crucial part of the film initiative that is the re-interpretation of history through documentary film. I begin by examining the
important role documentary film has in the current Venezuelan National Film Platform while the term documentary continues to pose a problem for both administrators and audiences alike. I follow the discussion on documentary that has resulted in endless debates and further explore Latin America's peculiar historical relationship with documentary film. To analyze how documentary earns its authority in the contemporary film initiative, I offer close readings of two films from the National Film Platform: \textit{Víctimas de la democracia} and \textit{Venezuelan Petroleum Company}. I chose these films due to their surprising success at box offices and omnipresence in regional, community and outdoor film events throughout Venezuela and abroad. Also these films focus on two important parts of Venezuelan history: the victims of the Fourth Republic previously considered the longest running 'democracy' in Latin America and the discovery and 'progress' of oil. The films challenge the celebration of the previous interpretations of Venezuelan history that idealized the Fourth Republic and the 'progress' of oil. I conclude analyzing how these documentaries break with the past and use cinematography to replace previous official histories with new ones.

In a contemporary project to reshape the Venezuelan people's relationship with government, democracy, and citizenship, these films are the tools used to teach the political paradigm shift and re-ignite a national pride in the local traditions and idiosyncrasies of Venezuela. While I am fascinated by this public use of film in contemporary Venezuela, I must explicitly recognize the controversy over Chávez and even my dissertation topic. When I originally told a colleague in 2006 that I was going to study the films from the Contemporary Venezuelan National Film Platform, a recent project from the Chávez administration, his response was, 'Why bother? Those films are
probably propaganda from the government. We have seen those kinds of projects before, and why would you touch anything from Venezuela right now?’ My fellow classmate was right; we have seen this type of national film and culture project before in Cuba, Brazil, México and Lenin's original call for a cultural revolution. I also agree that these films do offer a specific plan for the future of Venezuela. So why should I study them? Propaganda or not, one thing is for certain: they are popular and widely circulated throughout Venezuela in both commercial and public movie theaters. Due to their popularity and wide circulation these films cannot be ignored.

Another concern pervades each presentation that I make on any part of my research: does this work come from the perspective of a Chávez supporter or part of the Opposition? Or as Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil eloquently writes, "discussing any aspect of his [Chávez's] regime is entering a mine field. Both in Venezuela and overseas, it is hard to talk about Chávez without falling or being pushed into one of the opposite extremes" ("Magical History" 1). Personally I do not fit neatly into Chavismo or the Opposition. I agree that there was a need for a more socially aware individual to lead the country given Venezuela's long history of banking crisis, currency devaluation, and social injustices. However, I do not agree with many of Chávez's decisions that have resulted in a divided society. If I were a voting citizen of Venezuela, I would probably find myself among the frustrating official category of ni-ni (ni el uno, ni el otro). Regardless of my own politics, throughout my numerous research trips to Venezuela and many debates, dinners with Venezuelan classmates, politicians, arepa-sellers, fishermen, filmmakers and ambassadors, I have always felt respected and welcomed regardless of my critical perspective.
My personal interest in the topic came from a collision of various factors. In February 2006 I attended the Venezuela film cycle, which was open to the public and held at the Bolivarian Hall in the Venezuelan ambassador Bernardo Álvarez's residence in Washington, DC. These film festivals were and continue to be an important part of public policy both domestically and internationally, representing a specific vision of Venezuela. The films that were part of the open events at the Embassy sparked my interest in representations of Chávez's Venezuela.

My interest in Venezuela continued to grow on Georgetown's campus. The Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University and Dr. Angelo Rivero Santos offered a seminar entitled *Venezuela: Revolution or Continuity*, which I had the opportunity to audit in the spring of 2007 with Visiting Professor Dr. Julia Buxton. In the course we focused on Venezuela from the discovery of oil until contemporary politics to discuss Chávez in the context of Venezuelan history rather than as the single source of Venezuela's contemporary challenges. During the course on Venezuela, as a literature student I began to realize, that peppered throughout Chávez's speeches, academic criticism about Venezuela, and coverage of the country, there were continuous references to Doña Bárabara's characters, constructions of romantic contemporary epic narratives of love and country and discussions of the founding fathers as if they were contemporaries of President Chávez. I realized that the vehicle for many of these recycled narratives were the state funded films through the National Film Platform. I wanted to understand how these narratives gained their authority and who was able to benefit from this heavy investment in culture. While many criticize or support the funding of many of these social initiatives such as the National Film Platform, there was (and continues to be)
limited academic research on the specifics of the workings of the initiative or analysis of the films themselves. I decided that my dissertation would help contribute to fill this gap.

Given widespread popular involvement in support of and against current Venezuelan politics, Venezuela cannot be overlooked in terms of cultural production. As of 2008 Venezuela became one of the highest producing film countries in Latin America, producing more films than even Cuba, the model for state films. These films produced by the Villa del Cine are products of the National Film Platform of Venezuela. According to the Ministry of Culture's official website, the National Film Platform:

- tiene la responsabilidad de propiciar y estimular la construcción del
- imaginario colectivo, a través de creaciones concebidas como instrumentos
- centrales para lograr una profunda transformación en la gestión cultural, en
- la que el pueblo venezolano sea el artífice y protagonista.


As products of the National Film Platform, the films I analyze are directly connected to the government's objective to create the ministry's motto of a "revolution of consciousness". Regardless of their government funding, the films are popular, and part of my objective is to expose why these films are so popular, seductive and omnipresent throughout Venezuela.

Another crucial contributing factor in determining my dissertation topic was Professor Gwen Kirkpatrick's 2006 course on the contemporary Latin American novel. For the final paper fellow student Tulia Camacho and I both began to research the recent Venezuelan blockbuster hit movie Secuestro Express. Tulia later went on to study
Venezuela's recently founded National Production Company: La Villa del Cine, which inspired me to learn more about the use of film under Chávez and the various projects that made the Villa del Cine possible. Tulia and I were later invited by the Georgetown Center of Latin American Studies in October of 2006 to present on *Secuestro Express* at a campus-wide open screening and debate. While the movie is not an example of a film funded by the National Film Platform, it does highlight the impact that a film had in contemporary Caracas, causing national controversy about the role of art in society.

Never claiming to be anything but fiction, the film opened with the highly controversial shots from Puente Llaguno on April 11, 2002 that some say solidified Chávez supporters. The television coverage (or lack of coverage depending on the politics of the television station) later became known as the world's first media-attempted coup d’état. *Secuestro Express* resulted in a lawsuit by Rafael Cabrices (the man that some say shot from the Llaguno Bridge) and later a public denouncement of the film by the then vice president Rángel as a “falsification of the truth with no artistic value” (Forero 2). Despite becoming the biggest blockbuster in Venezuelan film history, it was not sent to represent the country for the Oscars for the best foreign film category. Instead for the first time in Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía's (CNAC) history a Venezuelan nomination did not arrive in time for the Oscars.

The research on *Secuestro Express* solidified my interest on the topic of the cultural impact of film on contemporary Venezuelan society and the government’s reactions and use of film in this dynamic Latin American country. My colleague Tulia Camacho generously shared her research with me that served as a starting point for my own work. Tulia's generosity and work lives on in my dissertation. Tulia, Dr. Julia
Buxton, Dr. Kirkpatrick, educational opportunities, interest in contemporary regional politics, and loving relationships all pointed to Venezuela as the necessary focus of my dissertation research.

Through my in-country research and weekly events in the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC, I realized that there was just too much to include in one dissertation and that I would have to choose a selection of films to analyze. This is not an exhaustive study of all films from Venezuela's National Film Platform. Instead it is an abridged study of select influential films and programs from the Platform to contribute to the discussion of such an aesthetically, culturally, and ideologically rich initiative. I analyze how Venezuela's program contributes to the notion of film as political manifesto, social practice, educational tool, and artistic medium all rolled into less than two hours of entertainment. The readings of these films are my interpretations within a specific cultural moment in Venezuelan history. They hopefully invite others to contribute to the infinite readings of these films and to recognize these films as the cultural actors that they are. In my analysis of these films and the National Film Platform in general I use a hybrid approach by including close readings of national films, interviews with administration, and personal research experiences at the community level that at times oppose official objectives of this Platform. Through this diverse combination I hope to offer a vertical study of the complex workings of the National Film Platform. I look forward to continuing my research on a selection of the latest films soon after completing this dissertation.

Here I return to the initial quote by Fernando Coronil that I used to open this introduction. Fernando Coronil highlights the importance of words in not only telling of
but also in creating the Chávez revolution. There is a constant narration of this new version of history. In this dissertation I argue that the ubiquitous images of state films that freely circulate the newly established film networks and embassies also reinforce as well as construct the new narratives of Venezuelan history and melodramas at this turning point in the nation. This is a revolution of not only words, but also words in performance--images, media and enjoyable movies.
Chapter 1: Proving Venezuelan Nationhood through Film:

The Past and Present Labyrinths of the National Film Platform

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I look at the film/state relationships in Latin America and the entangled realities of film and the Venezuelan state. Through petroleum exports and public policy the state and Venezuelan filmmakers weave the complex web of Venezuelan organizations that now constitute the new Venezuelan Film Platform. To better contextualize the contemporary Venezuelan Film Platform and the initiative to promote a “Revolution of Consciousness” through culture, it is important to consider the historical role the Venezuelan state has had in ignoring, shaping, fostering and recently reviving the film industry since the 1897 arrival of film in Venezuela. By exploring this complicated historical relationship between film and the Venezuelan state we will better understand the extended network of organizations that the Chávez administration has since dismantled, reformed, and maintained to work towards representation on the silver screen of and by the Venezuelan people.

The negative criticism surrounding the 2004 Venezuelan Film Platform stems from a general fear of the government taking film from a non-political art form to becoming part of the government's political agenda. However, in this chapter we find that in Latin America, and in Venezuela in particular, the close relationship between the government and film is not a product of the recent Chávez Administration propaganda program. Instead the history of film, in Latin America in general and in Venezuela in particular, has continuously been interlaced with the state's interests throughout Latin America. Historically Latin American countries have used film to portray an idealized
image of the region to prove national progress. While film has served as evidence of modernity to the outside world, these state sponsored films in the process have also helped form Latin America from within. Instead of negating the propaganda of the recently established Venezuelan Film Platform, I would rather argue that the propaganda characteristic of film in Latin America, and in particular Venezuela, is part of a long tradition that we will discuss in this chapter.

Using the technological inventions from William Kennedy Laurie Dickson to the Lumière brothers, film in Europe and the United States was used to document the fascinating advancement of the train and innovative architectural structures. In Latin America, however, film was an imported art arriving only six months after its premiere in Europe. In many ways, as another European import, film replaced previous forms of colonialism and hegemony through a different means: culture. Critic of early Latin American cinema Ana M. López explains that:

on the very same ships and railroads that carried raw materials and agricultural products to Europe and the U.S., Lumière and Edison cameramen returned with fascinating views of exotic lands, peoples, and their customs. Thus, in reference to Latin America, it is difficult to speak of the cinema and modernity as "points of reflection and convergence" as is the presumption in U.S. and European early cinema scholarship. Rather, the development of early cinema in Latin America was not directly linked to previous large-scale transformations of daily experience resulting from industrialization, rationality, and the technological transformation of modern life, because those processes were only just beginning to occur across the continent. In turn-of-the-century Latin America, modernity was, above all,
still a fantasy and a profound desire (49).

Latin America soon became an audience for European and US films while also learning of imported notions of modern society and development. Even as film represented a new advancement in technology and art, it also highlighted and reinforced another subservient relationship of the region. Again Latin America was becoming dependent on Europe and the US not only as an audience of films, but also as Latin American countries began to establish their own film industries. The US and Europe had monopolies on the raw film materials, creating another level of cultural hegemony and unequal power. Author John King writes of this relationship in his seminal work Magical Reels, "The very technology of cinema is seen to highlight uneven development in the region: cameras, film stock, expertise all came from outside" (7-8).

The speedy arrival of film from the brothers Lumière in Paris to the streets of Buenos Aires was not merely an attempt to search for new audiences to view these European films. Instead John King highlights another important reason that the Lumière brothers chose to travel to Latin America with their film equipment. King writes, "Within months of the first Lumière projection in December 1895 in the Grand Café, Paris, Lumière cameramen were in many parts of Latin America looking for new exotic locations to film" (7). King's work highlights that the Lumière brothers were in search of new subjects to represent. Latin America soon became a space to be imagined by others-the exotic world to be defined and consumed by the "objective" eye of the movie camera.

When Latin America became a space defined by the film industries of the US and Europe, Latin American governments began to invest in film industries to use film to
define a local representation (idealized or not) of the independent nations of Latin America. The extreme cost of filmmaking and the official response to the exotic representations of Latin America made the connection between state, film, and artist inevitable. This necessary state sponsorship and filmmaker relationship complicates early Latin American film history, making the possibility of an objective or non-propaganda Latin American film close to impossible. From the beginning film in Latin America was synonymous with propaganda. It was quickly realized that film was a way not only to prove modernity, but also was a forum to teach the nation. Or as Ana López summarizes cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis's explanation "[Cinema was] where Latin Americans went not to dream but to learn to be modern" (72). López continues with this idea: "[film] also produced a tremendously self-conscious form of spectatorship in that Latin America was almost immediately translated as the need to assert the self as modern but also and, more lastingly, as different, ultimately as a national subject" (52-53). It was in each state's best interest to promote film since, through its use, the state was able to demonstrate to the world a level of progress and represent a version of itself.

Further explaining the role of early modern Latin American film, film theorist López writes, "it is not productive to seek replicas of the technological and narrative experiments associated with early cinema in the developed West, for the history of filmmaking in Latin America is too profoundly marked by differences in global position, forms of social infrastructure, economic stability, and technical infrastructure" (4). Given López's presentation of the uneven and imported use of film in Latin America, the lack of raw film materials, and the use of film to prove modernity rather than to document "progress"--we are able to immediately see why from the beginning Latin
American states were interested in taking part in this powerful world economy of images that was and is film.

As film technology advanced to include sound, Latin America's relationship with Europe and the US through its competitiveness in the film industry suffered even more cultural imperialism. The United States nearly had a regional monopoly on film with access to cheap raw materials and, by the 1930s, the US had the ability to dub cheaply and add subtitles in Spanish. In this imbalanced relationship, film in the US soon became part of US official foreign policy towards Latin America. Or as John King writes:

Moving pictures were part of the Roosevelt government's successful 'Good Neighbor' economic penetration of Latin America in the 1930s. They did excellent business -- and could also form consumer tastes...The Good Neighbor policy was the US administration's strategy for defusing what they perceived as revolutionary nationalism in Latin America, not by wielding the Big Stick but by more pragmatic measures...At the levels of both practical and symbolic consumption, the Hollywood cinema demonstrated, and was a product of, the modern, the new...Many millions all over Latin America would be seduced and 'betrayed by Rita Hayworth', to paraphrase the title of Puig's first novel" (32-33). While Lopez's work shows the extensive state/film relationship in Latin America, King's work shows that Latin America was not the only region to use film as public policy. More specifically the US used film throughout Latin America in a similar way that we see Venezuela use film during the Chávez administration: as a political tool to educate others.

In this space between representing realities and exporting a desirable regional
image, film from the beginning fostered and continues to foster a constant dialogue between replication and creation. This continuous balance of representation and replication is a metaphor for modernity in Latin America. Lopez explains, "Latin American modernity is produced via an ambiguous symbiosis of traditional experiences/practices and modernizing innovations, such as the technologies of visuality epitomized by the cinema" (49). While López writes of cinema representing the precise metaphor of modernity in Latin America, she also explains that cinema remains a foreign import much like modernity itself. She writes: "The cinema experienced by Latin Americans was--and still is--predominantly foreign. This is a factor of tremendous significance in the complex development of indigenous forms, always caught in a hybrid dialectics of invention and imitation, as well as in the development of the form of experience--mass spectatorship necessary to sustain the medium" (52). In terms of spectatorship, film access itself was a privilege not shared by all Latin Americans. As an import, foreign film immediately was considered to be of better quality and had prestige over local film attempts. Facing these realities of expensive production costs, imported materials, foreign tastes and social status to film access, countries such as Cuba, Brazil and now Venezuela made a political effort for film to reach a large national film audience through domestically made films. Even today in Venezuela's attempt to bring domestic films to a large national audience, it is simultaneously challenging audiences' taste for or familiarity with Hollywood film, reintroducing the local into film aesthetics and narratives.

Given the Latin American state/film background, the new Venezuelan film initiative is, in my opinion, a continuation rather than a departure from previous uses of
film in Venezuela. It is considered part of a continuing struggle against cultural imperialism in Latin America since the arrival of film. We see a reflection of this in contemporary Venezuelan state film highlighting national symbols to strengthen a sense of collective identity. I argue that this recent relationship between the state and the film industry in Venezuela does not create a new threat of propaganda in film. Instead I argue that the use of film in Latin America throughout history has had a political purpose. It is not recent propaganda but rather the continuation of a tradition.

As is the case with early Latin American film, the newest programs are national initiatives towards self-representation and national topics of interest that work against imported images of progress. In terms of early Latin American film, López explains that during the first centennial "the paroxysms of patriotism elicited by the centennials and their preparations also motivated filmmakers in a different direction, away from current events and toward the reconstruction of key patriotic moments, in an effort to further mobilize the new medium in the service of nationhood" (63). This use of national film celebrated the first hundred years of independence from Spain. Now we see a return to the use of film by the government for the bicentennial of independence to remember, tell, and reshape many of the founding narratives for today's Venezuela. Further supporting my reading of a continuation of a state use of film rather than a break with the past relationship between film and the state, we see that in the wake of the bicentennials the nation returns to domestic patriotic cinema to reshape the country: the traditional relationship between film and the state in Latin America.

1.2 The Venezuelan State's Historical Relationship with Film

While for years Venezuela was not considered a frontrunner in Latin American
film and the Venezuelan state was not thought of to have fostered the strongest support system to promote Venezuelan film, the history of film in Venezuela proves a different reality. According to López the first "film" made in Latin America was Venezuelan: "a somewhat precarious dental extraction in Venezuela was the subject of what may be the earliest views shot in Latin America. The film, Un celebre especialista sacando muelas en el Gran Hotel Europa ... was made by Guillermo and Manuel Trujillo Durán and shown for the first time in January 1897" (López 11). Venezuelan filmmakers were some of the first on the continent to use the invention of the Lumiè re brothers, and the theaters in Maracaibo were filled to view both domestic and imported films. Quickly the state became involved in using film for its own purposes. In the case of Venezuela one discovery that launched the expensive film industry, making funds available for such an expensive state investment, was the discovery and rapid 'success' of Venezuelan petroleum. Venezuela’s first significant oil deposit was discovered in 1914 under the dictatorship of Vicente Gómez, who immediately made the Venezuelan petroleum available to US businesses. Gómez also quickly began to establish a state-run National Cinema Laboratory that was to be used to make newsreels and films in support of his government. However archives show that the cinema laboratory was extremely ill managed and was supported solely through oil profits. Even before the discovery of oil Gómez had begun the state-funded film industry in the form of propaganda film: the first initiative to invest in the state-run culture industry introducing film nationally to Venezuela. The first showings of state films in the form of documentaries on Venezuela’s customs were sponsored and controlled by the Vicente Gómez dictatorship. The first Venezuela fiction film was made in 1913, El Fusilamento de Pilar, which was quickly
confiscated by the government since it was considered to have content disrespectful to the government (Dinneen 88).

While the petroleum industry was considered a great push for the world into modern industry, its Venezuelan reality differed from this interpretation: “the most modern industry of the world contributed to consolidating Gómez’s autocratic rule as a model of the traditional Latin American caudillo” (Coronil 71). The Gómez dictatorship came to represent the dark ages of Venezuela’s history, selling the natural resources off to foreign companies without benefits for the Venezuelan people, urbanizing previously agrarian Venezuela overnight and making a one-product national economy that supported nearly all domestic industries, including the birth of an official film industry.

Under Gómez's dictatorship Venezuela was launched into what would be defined as modernity, yet many still consider it the downfall of the country:

For the vast majority of Venezuelans, the petroleum era brought reduced employment (oil being a capital-intensive industry) and high food prices stemming from a decline in domestic agricultural activity and an increase in imports. Inflation increased and real wages declined. Little improvement took place in public education and health care, and although the capital-intensive petroleum industry grew impressively, oil-derived revenue was not applied to labor-intensive efforts such as agricultural diversification or the promotion of small-scale industry. (Venezuela-The Century of Caudillismo-google) http://countrystudies.us/venezuela/5.htm.

In this launch towards 'modernity', all forms of cultural expression, including film, were
supposed to document and portray this sudden modern and urban existence. According to the *Panorama histórico del cine en Venezuela 1896-1993* in 1927 the Ministerio de Obras Públicas created the Laboratorios Nacionales: "[el] primer establecimiento moderno y completamente equipado para la producción cinematográfica" (17). While this government investment was made for film production, unfortunately for many, the filmmakers, artists and writers who did not represent the government's vision of the country were considered enemies of the state. Gómez's oppressive regime attacked Venezuelan intellectuals, students and writers, sentencing them to time in prison or forced labor for creating non-traditional perspectives considered subversive threats to the government. This censorship was the straw that broke the camel's back, resulting in the famous student demonstrations in Caracas in February 1928. As the student movement at the Universidad Central de Venezuela during Carnival took shape in the wake of the empty realities of Gómez's promised modernity and resulted in massive demonstrations; exile was an option for some, including future president Rómulo Betancourt and future president, writer, and filmmaker Rómulo Gallegos.

From exile in Spain, Gallegos published his masterpiece: an extended metaphor for the Venezuelan struggle against the tyrant dictator Gómez: *Doña Bárbara*. The novel was an immediate success. However, it was when Rómulo Gallegos worked with a Mexican production team to create the film adaptation that *Doña Bárbara* turned into Venezuela's canonical story known throughout Venezuela and Latin America. The film version that Gallegos also wrote reached the silver screen in 1943, paradoxically marking the height of the Mexican film industry with its Venezuelan blockbuster hit *Doña Bárbara*:
This movie broke all box office records in Venezuela in a landmark year for
great Latin American pictures, none of which were produced in Venezuela
(Tirado n.d.:112). The film's success in Venezuela, as elsewhere in Latin
America, was in large part due to the enormous star power of María Félix and
Julián Soler, but the adaptation of the novel also created unprecedented
expectation among audiences there...No ordinary novel, *Doña Bárbara* was a
canonical text about Venezuelan national identity and pride written by the
country's most distinguished living author (Alvaray 35).

While Gallegos created the national love story marrying the country back together, his
work with the film industry began before this blockbuster hit.

In 1938 Gallegos also established one of the first Venezuelan film companies:
Estudios Ávila which later failed due to financial difficulties but was then converted into
Bolívar Films that became a primary actor in the Venezuelan film industry. While
Estudios Ávila is still considered to be one of the first attempts to establish a private film
company and break with the state's oppressive grip on film in Venezuela, there is a
complicated aspect of this celebrated attempt at private filmmaking by the talented writer
that would later become the country's democratically elected president. Gallegos' private
Estudios Ávila absorbed the filmmaking resources from the state's Laboratorios
Nacionales. In the Cinemateca Nacional's *Panorama histórico del cine en Venezuela
1896-1993*, this fact is mentioned and the authors discuss that the terms of this
questionable agreement remain unknown:

Todavía no conocemos los términos legales, económicos o de facto de esa fusión.
Lo que resulta cierto es que un organismo destinado a cumplir con objetivos
During the brief life of Estudios Ávila and considering the dubious relationship between the state and this private company, most of the Estudios Ávila films continued with the work and themes of the state's Laboratorios Nacionales. There was one particular exception of note. In 1941 Gallegos wrote the script for the film that helped to initiate the social criticism film genre in Venezuela. The film was *Juan de la calle*: “relating the story of a group of young delinquents and arguing for reform to rectify the situation, the film was an early example of the cinema of social criticism that would become a strong current in Venezuela decades later” (Dinneen 89).

Although Gallegos began one of the first film companies in Venezuela, it was his novel and movie script for *Doña Bárbara* that helped launch his democratic and modernizing plan for the country. Eventually the two works helped him gain support for his political platform. Soon after, in 1948, Gallegos, the Acción Democrática party candidate, won what is considered to be the first democratic and honest presidential elections in Venezuela and assumed a leadership role embodying that of his beloved protagonist Santos Luzardo in *Doña Bárbara*. The political strife of the 1940s and brief presidency of Rómulo Gallegos furthered the state-initiated film tradition. No longer completely censored by the state, artistic directors began to work with the state to denounce social injustices within Venezuela. While the film industry began to take form under the short-lived nine-month democratic government of Gallegos, the country

---

b While this film is one of the first films of social criticism and was written by Venezuela's most celebrated writer, the film is not available through the National Cinemateca and has been lost due to years of neglect of the country's filmography.
quickly returned to a dictatorship.

Unfortunately the break with cultural censorship and democracy under Gallegos quickly came to an end. Gallegos was overthrown in a coup d'etat, resulting in a military junta government led by Carlos Delgado Chalbaud. Despite the advancements of the 1940s in private and state funding for film, democracy, free expression and denunciation of social inequality, the following period from 1948-1958 did not represent state advancement in democracy, cultural and social programs. After Chalbaud's assassination the country returned to another extended dictatorship. Soon after, an oppressive ruler, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, led the next dictatorship from 1950-1958, attempting to rule the country alone. Also during this time period, due to the Cold War, in response to the United States' search for allies in Latin America, Pérez Jiménez established a state-centered economic policy: “increased openness to foreign capital; repression of domestic labor; economic growth through state investment in infrastructure, services, and basic industry; and the promotion and yet containment of the local bourgeoisie” (Coronil 180).

While the state was left in shambles after the dictatorship, the film and cultural industries strengthened as the dictatorship was overthrown in 1958. Soon in the 1960s Venezuela’s film industry boomed with socially charged documentaries:

[with the overthrow] of Pérez Jiménez in 1958 a new era of democratic politics and open debate began, and the Cuban Revolution the following year galvanized political and cultural activity by Venezuela’s radical left...The short [film], both documentary and fictional, became the preferred form for Venezuelan movie makers to record and debate the political struggles of the time (Dinneen 91).

After the coup of 1958, the three strongest political parties, Partido Social Cristiano
COPEI), Acción Democrática (AD) and Unión Republicana Demócrata (URD) organized to make a pacted democracy known as *El Pacto de Punto Fijo of 1958*. This pact was made to avoid dictatorships, power vacuums and extreme leftist or rightist governments. At this point of pacted agreements between political parties, and what was then considered the birth of the Venezuelan democracy during the 1960s, Venezuelan film saw a boom in the production of movies for domestic audiences. The majority of these films were co-sponsored by the universities in Venezuela. In 1966 the Cinemateca Nacional was founded and the annual filmmakers' meetings *Encuentros del Cine* began, “[t]hose who gathered at that first Encuentro...demanded legislation to protect the national film industry, so that it could compete on a more equal basis with the giant foreign companies whose films continued to dominate the commercial cinemas in Venezuela” (Dinneen 93).

With the foundation of the ICAIC in Cuba and the move throughout the developing world that sought radical political change in order to break the economic and cultural dependency of the countries involved...for many Venezuelan filmmakers there seemed to be real possibilities of creating within the country the conditions for a national cinema oriented toward social and cultural transformation, in opposition to the U.S. mainstream cinema. (Dinneen 93)

Through meetings on this new use of film known as *New Latin American Cinema* came hopes for state-protected national cinema-- the market, however, was still overrun by imported U.S. films with little interest in Venezuelan national production.

Coupled with the renewed interest in the political use of film in the 1970’s when oil prices increased ten-fold, the wealthy Venezuelan state benefited from the immense
oil profits. It launched its state-run cultural programs, and the film industry in Venezuela was booming. By 1975 the government developed a subsidy system in support of Venezuelan films, financing 29 feature films over the 1975-1980 period, “many of which combined a high degree of aesthetic quality with the exploration of national social and cultural life” (Dinneen 95). The government further made film exhibitors show at least twelve Venezuelan films a year, yet “[d]espite the large number produced during these years, Venezuelan films still constituted only 3% of those shown in the country between 1976 and 1985” (Dinneen 99). The boom in Venezuelan cinema resulted in 1981 in the government creating the Cinematic Development Fund (FOCINE) as the primary way for the state to offer funding for cinema projects that were part state and part privately funded. The FOCINE charged cinemas a tax to show foreign films and facilitated the projection of national titles by making domestic films more affordable, helping to increase an interest in domestically made films.

King writes of this time period in Venezuelan film history, "the state did not create a film industry ab initio. In fact, its investment in the seventies came as a result of an organized campaign from producers and film-makers to seek guarantees for a slowly developing film culture" (216). In eight brief pages devoted to the Venezuelan Industry, King refers to the industry primarily as a product of the seventies. I would argue that while great advancements were made in the 1960s and 1970s, the beginnings were rooted in the dictatorial state and a single-product economy, establishing first a relationship between the state and film industry not in the seventies but rather in 1913. In terms of industry, film in Venezuela has continuously received subsidies from the government since Gómez's dictatorship to the present time due to the limitations of an oil-based
economy, the exorbitant prices of imported raw film materials, and Hollywood's monopoly on film audiences. This holds true for the majority of Latin American film industries, and therefore when applied to film the term *industry* works beyond the economic definitions of supply and demand. It can be argued that the only film industry in Latin America in economic terms that has continually covered costs and made profits is the Mexican film industry. Given this limitation, we can say that the beginning of the film industry in terms of opportunity, audience and state intervention occurred under Gómez. I argue that the film industry in Venezuela does not have a single start date and is instead a continual process that has benefited from and has been limited by the interests and economic recessions of the state.

While Venezuela plays a minor role in King's book, he does write of an extremely important aspect of Venezuela that is continuously refuted in the films of the current Film Platform: Venezuela as the region's example of the longest running 'democracy'. King writes of this shared concept: "[f]rom the late fifties cinema developed in a context of a representative democracy with highly organized and well-funded political parties... Almost uniquely in Latin America, the last thirty years [book published in 1990] have seen stable regimes with a relatively low incidence of political violence" (215-6). This is an ironic perspective on Venezuela since we can see through the film history alone the socially constructed vision of Venezuela as the longest surviving democracy in Latin America. It is a country that has a very complex, albeit somewhat untold, history of dictatorships and pacted democracies (this tightly maintained 40 year "Punto Fijo" pact was democratic only for those that were part of the recognized parties). While King mentions Venezuela's extensive democracy he curiously continues his research by
including an anecdote of a less than democratic clash between film and the state in 1982:

The borders between art and reality became spectacularly blurred in the ['democratic'] government's reaction to a film by Luís Correa, Ledezma-El caso Mamera 1982, which revealed once again that what the state could give with one hand, it could take away with the other. The film is a documentary on a high-ranking police official in Caracas who murdered the young men who had had relations...with his young wife. For two years, the criminal remained undiscovered then the man confessed. Luís Correa...managed to film and interview with Ledezma and he confessed to camera the details of the murder...Correa also interviewed other police officials, who made it clear that Ledezma had been protected for a long time since he knew too much about police corruption. The film was banned on the flimsy pretext that it was an 'apologia for violence' and Correa was imprisoned for forty-five days (223).

After considering the Venezuelan film industry up until the 1980s we see that this incident of censorship is a continuation of rather than a break with film's historically political past. King's reading of Venezuela as an extended democracy may actually prove the power and control of the social contract and representation of democracy and the power of the image machine that worked to convince its audiences domestically and abroad of Venezuela's progress and modernity.

As the film industry continued its dependency on the state, it suffered directly from the fall in oil prices in the late 1980’s and the neo-liberal economic shock treatment that the second presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez put in effect, although he had
promised otherwise. With the price of oil crashing, the 1980s and 1990s represented a time of little growth and investment in the film industry as well as in social programs. The future of Venezuelan film suffered greatly as did the future of Venezuela's economy. Many looked toward private investment as the solution; however, the Venezuelan film industry was a poor investment given Hollywood’s monopoly on audiences, markets and taste. Therefore the state intervened, creating FONCINE in 1981, "El Fondo de Fomento Cinematográfico surge como medida económica para estimular la producción cinematográfica nacional" (Izaguirre 84). The FONCINE connected both private and public funding to the filmmaking process in efforts to recuperate filmmaking in Venezuela. With this state and private combination Venezuelan film in the 1990s moved from the socially responsible themes of the 1960s to much more profitable comedies.

While the film industry suffered in the late 1980s and 1990s, the oil market and entire country experienced near ruin in the bloody massacre in the streets of Caracas known as the Caracazo in 1989. The Caracazo massacre and street demonstrations occurred due to an unexpected rise in oil and gas prices throughout Venezuela. The rise in oil and gas prices meant an immediate fare increase for buses and public transportation, resulting in a bloodbath between citizens in Caracas and the military. Then-president Carlos Andrés Pérez responded by imposing martial law and accepting the neo-liberal economic package the IMF and the World Bank prescribed for Venezuela (known as el Paquetazo). Carlos Andrés Pérez remained in power until 1992 throughout a series of failed coups. In 1992 Lieutenant Hugo Chávez Frías led one of the failed coups. After leading the failed coup to oust Carlos Andrés Pérez from office, Lt. Chávez turned himself in and asked the military to call off the rest of the soldiers around the country.
who were attempting to aid in the coup efforts. The government allowed Chávez a brief public announcement on television where he called off the coup and troops using his famous phrase “‘por ahora’” (Coronil 377). As Coronil writes of the failed coup, “Chávez...became a popular hero overnight. A man of humble social origins and darker-skinned than most high-ranking military officers, Chávez was seen as a man of the people, the embodiment of the patriotic leader” (377). Chávez also publicly accepted responsibility for the coup during his brief remarks on television. This acceptance of responsibility was something that many previous Venezuelan leaders, that continuously enjoyed impunity, had strongly avoided and was one of the first signs of Chavez’s mark of difference. This topic of taking responsibility for one’s actions is a theme that will reappear throughout the Film Platform films--each heroic protagonist will lead their community and publicly assume responsibility for wrongdoings or actions. I will analyze this similarity in my chapter on El Libertador Morales.

Lieutenant Chávez's brief 1992 public announcement calling off the coup d'état in Venezuela was also one of the first examples of what would become a continuing strong relationship between audiovisual culture and the soon to be president Chávez. Months later another coup was staged by a different part of the military, thus beginning a return to a neo-liberal government by second time around president Rafael Caldera. Caldera supported the economic shocks of the World Bank, a privatized oil industry and a cutback of public programs including the national film industry. The shocks, currency controls, breakdown of industry and failure of multi-national organization initiatives was the perfect setting for Hugo Chávez’s win in the 1998 elections and later for his popular social reforms and cultural missions in attempts to challenge the previous state
1.3 Chávez and the Film Industry:

Since 1998 Chávez has put Venezuela in the international public’s eye beyond the global interest in the Venezuelan petroleum based economy. Given this dependency on oil Venezuela has imported most other products including films. This dependence on imported ‘culture’ results in a massive problem of representation due to the tight hold that Hollywood continues to have on the movie industry in Venezuela. Chávez responded to Venezuela’s international dependence for everything from food to film by creating over twenty social missions and platforms. One of the over twenty missions President Chávez established was the Misión Cultura: a program to stimulate cultural actors at the local leaders in an alternative university program. In addition the ideas of the Misión Cultura also formed a cultural mission or objective to promote the Misión's "Revolution of consciousness" through culture. Under this general objective to use culture to support the revolution, in 2004 Chávez established the National Film Platform, beginning to revive the film industry with it through the newly established Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura.

One of the objectives of the National Film Platform is not only to promote Venezuelan-made films but also to foster a different cinema by making alternative and independent international film available in Venezuela beyond the film festivals. The purpose is to offer a different cinema to the people of Venezuela. One of the first major projects of the cultural mission was to re-frame the previous enemies of the state, such as the 'guerrillas' from the late 1950s and 1960s. Through documentaries on these
individuals and others showing their direct connections to Chavismo, the Film Platform began to break the ties with the past version of Venezuelan history sponsoring movies expose the victims of the longest 'democracy' in Latin America, and rewriting the country's narrative. The National Film Platform funds, produces, directs and distributes films made to teach, celebrate and export a different vision of Venezuela.

Through these new state-sponsored films the Venezuelan government is celebrating a Venezuelan identity through film while strengthening an industry for national film production and a network of community and regional films. Unlike Cuba’s hierarchical film system, the ICAIC (that I discuss further in chapter two), the Venezuelan model is composed of five organizations that are in charge of various aspects of the film industry, cultural movements and the distribution of Venezuelan films nationally and internationally. Some of these organizations were previously established in the 1960s and others in the 1970s under the last massive social program initiative during the oil boom of the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez. These previously established organizations were detached from a centralized mission or objective and often lacked communication with each other. The most recently established additions to the National Cinema Platform were included in 2006; therefore, while this is a new movement for inclusion in the film industry and re-organization of the industry under a National Cinema Platform, the Chávez government did not invent the role of the Venezuelan state in film. Instead this government aims for a different way of looking at film and seeks popular inclusion in the film industry and access to these domestic films. In this combination of the historical organizations and recently established ones, there is an overwhelming mosaic of agencies that share the role, working to stimulate the
production, outreach and consumption of the Venezuelan film industry. This extended network of organizations and massive film projects makes the agencies very cumbersome in executing their objectives. This network of state operated organizations requires a level of cultural capital\(^6\) to understand how these organizations interact with each other in order to take advantage of the social programs, training opportunities, educational workshops and funding benefits.

1.4 The Film Platform's Maze of Organizations:

The Venezuelan film organization through the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura is composed of five separate organizations that work together (or at least in theory) under a common film objective to promote Venezuelan film, extend opportunities to make Venezuelan film, distribute the film throughout the country, and to recover the film history and canonical films that form part of Venezuela's cinematic history. One of the five organizations is the CNAC: National Autonomous Cinematography Center (CNAC: Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía). The CNAC is the financial arm of the industry that was originally established in 1994 but has since radically changed its funding objectives to include first time directors, scriptwriters, community cinema, and scripts that focus on topics of national identity and areas of cultural interest. The CNAC receives the majority of its funding from FONPROCINE (2006) which is a tax system that taxes commercial cinemas to show commercial films and re-invests that tax to support domestic films and works deemed to be of national interest. The newest of the five organizations of the film platform is the National Film Village (Villa del Cine).

The Villa is the recently established national production company, while a third organization, Amazonia films, is the national distributor of these films. The fourth organization of the platform is the National Cinemateca (Cinemateca Nacional) that is the national exhibitor, expanded to include a recently extended network of regional and community cinemas. Finally there is the national reproducer of discs (for both National Film Platform's films and national musicians): the National Disc Center (CENDIS: Centro Nacional del Disco).

When compared with the Cuban national film model, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry (ICAIC), that is a model for the Venezuelan system and used film to disseminate the messages of the Cuban revolution both domestically and abroad, one of the primary differences between the two models is the organizational structure of the initiatives. The ICAIC is one hierarchical organization whose funds are completely state-sponsored. Within the single organization there are sections dedicated to funding, production, distribution, exhibition and reproduction. Cuba’s model is centrally organized and governed. Venezuela's model differs in the fact that these are each separate and autonomous organizations that can work together under the common National Film Platform's shared objective, however, they each have their own selection committees, funding and different relationships with the state. The Venezuelan five separate organizations may or may not work together, which allows for more diversity of opinion, selection committees and projects. This also makes the Venezuelan film organizations very bulky, slow and at times difficult to manage. This network of organizations runs the risk of overlapping on work, programming and sponsorship and creates challenges in terms of communication.
To begin with the newest of these organizations, La Villa del Cine or cinema village, was recently inaugurated on June 3, 2006. This is a state of the art film studio that is located 30 minutes from Caracas in Guarenas, Venezuela. The Villa is in charge of the state production of films to facilitate public cinema in Venezuela instead of expensive privatized or outsourced international production. The Villa’s lower cost for making films and the state production studio also enable Venezuelan films to circulate domestically without the public cinemas paying for rights for the films.

While this newest addition to the film organizations in Venezuela, La Villa del Cine, is the production arm of the film system, the CNAC is the financial arm of the film industry in Venezuela. La Villa is not able to offer direct funding to projects and productions; instead it is able to offer its production and editing resources including equipment and teams of film workers. La Villa does not provide its services to all film projects; instead at the beginning of each year the Villa’s administration decides on the themes that they will focus on for the year. The theme could range from national heroes, to untold national stories or representations of contemporary Venezuela. In addition to the annual theme, the Villa committee also continually promotes children’s films, shorts, documentary, and full-length films. The first question is, who benefits from the La Villa resources and who does not? And what are the criteria to determine the quality of applications? There are two ways to receive support through La Villa. The first is for future directors and/or screenwriters to apply directly to La Villa with a proposal, script, and a detailed list of production needs to execute their project. The list of production needs is the way in which La Villa is able to contribute to these film projects. If the project fits La Villa’s theme for that year, and La Villa’s committee considers the project
worthy, then La Villa would support the project by supplying the directors with the supplies, personnel and resources needed according to the project's detailed list of production needs (boom lighting, editing, etc). La Villa, in exchange, receives credit as the producer of the film and thus has the right to distribute the film through the state distributor Amazonia films, founded in 2005, after the film has appeared in the private cinemas. For example in the year of 2007, with the bicentennial of Miranda the Villa’s committee decided to fund the 2007 film *Miranda Regresa* in efforts to highlight the founding heroes of Venezuela.

Besides the committee approving a director that has applied to complete their project which is deemed of national interest, another possibility to apply for support through La Villa is through the public calls (*convocatorias*) announced on the internet for applications, scripts, and projects with a focus on a specific type of applicant: first-time screen writers, first-time directors, and novice film-makers. These public calls for applications are directly linked to the subject matter that La Villa’s committee decides as the theme for the production year. For example, one of the public calls for scripts and applications was for social criticism. The winning application in 2008 was “*1,2,3 mujeres*” which is a series of three vignettes that the winning novice scriptwriters, Andrea Herrera, Anabel Rodriguez and Andrea Rios, turned into a full-length film. Another film that resulted from the public call for “escritores virgenes” -- novice scriptwriters who had not previously made a full-length film -- is the successful film “*Bloques*” (2008) that was in response to a public call for scripts with a cultural focus.

While the Villa del Cine state production company has resulted in opportunities for new scriptwriters and directors, the Villa also contracts established Venezuelan
directors to create feature-length films and attract domestic and international audiences. As the production opportunities increase there are politics included in the decision to work with La Villa. For example, there are Venezuelan filmmakers who have decided to return to Venezuela to direct a film with La Villa while other filmmakers refuse to accept resources from La Villa due to a fear of artistic compromise. One Venezuelan director in particular, Fina Torres, winner of the La Caméra d'Or at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival with her debut film Oriana, returned to Venezuela to work with La Villa. Her film, Habana Eva, premiered in 2010 and competed in the Havana Film Festival representing Venezuela. While she is a well-known director, having directed both Oriana and Woman on Top, Habana Eva cost the National Film Platform an exorbitant amount of money: a price they paid to celebrate an internationally recognized Venezuelan director and to bring fame to the Platform. Some established directors, such as Fina Torres, can also benefit from the National Film Platform. Many chose not to since fearing that La Villa is an initiative similar to the explicit propaganda filmmaking arm of the former USSR or is following Cuba's model too closely. To its critics the film initiative makes Venezuela one step closer to Cuba. With this political divide over La Villa, the majority of domestic press coverage of La Villa films is also divided along party lines of Chavismo and Opposition.

The professional support that La Villa and the Film Platform are able to offer is part of the focus of La Villa, while the second part is to support new filmmakers. The movie La Clase (2007) is another example of a work produced by new filmmakers and amateur actors. Also the movie El Libertador Morales (2009) is another example of La Villa’s work produced by an amateur team of writers and crew that fulfills the cultural
mission of including Venezuelan actors, crew and writers in the filmmaking process. The projects, to make the filmmaking process an inclusive one that involves various teams of amateur crewmembers, are sustainable due to the low cost of production resources available at La Villa. La Villa does not have to outsource production as done in the past. This lower production cost that La Villa is able to provide means more Venezuelan films. While La Villa has made a great deal of national progress in the Venezuelan film industry, it is not completely technologically independent from other countries; at times the Villa coordinates with other countries such as Cuba and Argentina for post-production assistance. With more Venezuelan-made films, these films are able to have a greater socio-cultural influence, while also making an economic impact by employing crewmembers, film teams, editors, designers, and actors. Within this mosaic of organizations that work with film within Venezuela, the question is how La Villa fits in with the overarching Cultural objective of the Ministry. La Villa's relationship with the objective of cultural access and participation lies in its focus on cultural inclusion. La Villa puts into practice the philosophical objective of the cultural ministry. In general La Villa works to plant thematic projects that focus on social justice, the historical struggle of Venezuela, national expression and to recover the identity and memory of the Venezuelan people. These reasons are why La Villa decided to fund *Miranda Regresa* celebrating the national hero's struggle.

While the Villa offers production support the Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía, (the National Autonomous Cinematography Center) CNAC is the financial arm of the Venezuelan Film Industry. It is located in Los Ruíces, Caracas, Venezuela, and was first established in 1993 and began its work on August 1, 1994. The
formation of the CNAC is a result of the 1993 Cinematography Law. As the financial arm of the Film Platform, the CNAC earns funds from and enforces film legislation. Article 31 of the National Cinematographic Law requires that private and commercial cinemas exhibit a minimum of twenty percent of Venezuelan films. In order to enforce this law, the CNAC taxes cinemas that do not comply with the law. The CNAC replaced and incorporated the previously formed state agency: Fondo de Fomento Cinematográfico (FONCINE), which was established in 1981. According to the official website of the CNAC it is the institution that:

buscaba responder a la necesidad de contar con un organismo gubernamental, con personalidad jurídica y patrimonio propio, encargado de gerenciar la actividad cinematográfica, formular políticas e instrumentar acciones dirigidas a estimular, regular y desarrollar la industria audiovisual en Venezuela. De esta forma, nos convertimos en el máximo ente oficial responsable de la actividad cinematográfica nacional, siendo nuestras funciones promoverla y respaldarla a lo largo de su cadena de vida: creación, producción, promoción, divulgación, distribución y exhibición (April 28, 2009).

(http://www.cnac.gob.ve/beta/content.php?idcat=21&Lg=ES)

This funding arm of the film platform is the agency that connects state and private funding through co-production. It reopens a space for Venezuelan cinema to compete domestically with Hollywood. While this is part of the film platform, it has a completely different function from that of the Villa; instead of supporting projects through resources such as lighting and crews, the CNAC supports film projects financially.

The CNAC receives its funding through the FONPROCINE film taxes of the
private cinemas, and gives tax breaks to private cinemas that display CNAC selected works, such as alternative international films, Villa del Cine films, and films sponsored by the CNAC. Fonprocine (2006) is the tax that was created through article 36 of la Ley de Cinematografía Nacional (LCN) that charges each commercial film 5% of its profits in order to exhibit in Venezuela, and with this tax revenue the CNAC is able to finance movies. The difference between this funding and La Villa is that the Villa is 100% directly funded by the State. The Villa produces and co-produces films with state funding and thus must comply with the politics of the State. In order to administer the diverse types of funding, each of the organizations holds their own open calls for applications (convocatorias), and these competitions are focused on attracting different projects. For example the CNAC holds contests for scripts to promote script writing, while la Villa often looks for new directors. These diverse open calls to the public and competitions for funding and resources through each of the five organizations further differentiate the Venezuelan from the centralized Cuban model.

The CNAC contributes to the participatory film platform by offering filmmaking workshops, editing and scriptwriting through its Film Laboratory. This is a space that is owned by the CNAC that offers courses to serious film students with contracted specialists such as Venezuelan Director Fina Torres. The objective of these workshops is to extend access to film making to future filmmakers. A CNAC selection committee chooses the workshop participants.

The CNAC also promotes participation through open calls for scripts, projects, films and directors to direct and produce new films. One of the competitions that the CNAC organizes is called the Yulimar Reyes Documentaries competition. According to
the rules of the documentary competition:

Las propuestas documentales deberán ser expresión de un riguroso y lúcido ejercicio interpretativo de los hechos y las realidades de la sociedad contemporánea venezolana, atendiendo a sus más significativos procesos culturales, sociales, políticos, ambientales, indígenas, laborales y educativos (http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n17946.html)

The 2005 winner of this competition a documentary film, *El Viejo y Jesús: Profetas de Rebelión*, is about two men that live in the streets of Caracas and was made by the film cooperative Calle y Media. Upon receiving funding from the CNAC, unlike the Villa del Cine, the director is not obliged to use the state distributor Amazonia Films, nor does the director need to give all movie rights to the CNAC. The CNAC also offers funding for shorts and community films. A separate selection committee decides on the winners of each of these competitions. The winners are able to combine their awards with other awards from the remaining organizations in the Film Platform.

In terms of the CNAC working with the various parts of the Film Platform, the CNAC cooperates with the other organizations in planning the annual Margarita Film Festival. However, in general, while there may be communication among the organizations, they are independent of each other, with separate selection committees, budgets, presidents, and agendas. For example, instead of directly supporting the community cinemas program from the Cinemateca Nacional, the CNAC has its own separate program called *Cine de la Calle*. This is a fairly recent pilot program that the CNAC is testing in Caracas in hopes to make it a national program. The *Cine de la Calle*
is a program in five different popular plazas in Caracas where the CNAC shows films six nights of the week by installing an inflatable movie screens in public plazas. The focus of these films is to share Venezuela’s contemporary and classic films with the audience in public spaces. However, one of the constant problems of this pilot program is a lack of communication between the CNAC and the Cinemateca, which does have a large overlap in programming. Also the CNAC’s *Cine de la Calle* program is not well advertised to the Venezuelan public and is centered in Caracas. The problem of information, communication and publicity is a common challenge for all of the film and cultural initiatives. Unfortunately this project is not an exception to this rule.

The CNAC has changed its objective since the overall transformation of the Cultural Ministry and Film Platform in 2005. Previously, the majority of the film funding was awarded to a small group of established filmmakers. To promote participation and democratize the filmmaking process, the CNAC focuses primarily on new filmmakers and first time full-length films. The CNAC works to integrate itself with the Venezuelan community at large and also works abroad to focus on the topic of Latin American integration by organizing Venezuelan film festivals in embassies throughout the world. One in particular that was a success in April 2009 was the week of Venezuelan film in Argentina.

Beyond the production of La Villa del Cine and the funding from the CNAC, the Cinemateca Nacional adds to this web of organizations, which is in charge of protecting the cinema patrimony and history of Venezuelan film in a central film library in Caracas. The Cinemateca is also in charge of making film accessible to the Venezuelan people through the network of newly inaugurated regional and community cinemas. Through
these recently established cinemas the Cinemateca works to create a space to foster new film audiences.

While Venezuela does have a history of award-winning films and social documentaries, in general Venezuelans do not have access to their film history. In order to see the classics of Venezuela’s cinematic past, these films need to be ordered for viewing two days ahead of time from the library in the offices of the Cinemateca Nacional. Unfortunately the archive had been overlooked for decades and is currently under renovation. If there is a missing movie in the film archive, it is nearly impossible to find a copy of the film. One can also contact the newly founded state distribution company Amazonia films to see the classics of Venezuelan film if Amazonia has a copy available. In general this difficulty to access national films and classics has resulted in a lack of general knowledge of Venezuela’s own film history. Also there is a popular notion that if it is a Venezuelan film, then it must be poor quality. The Cinemateca along with each of the five organizations that make up the National Film Platform are confronted with this problem of a lack of pride Venezuelan film.

The Cinemateca works to create a space to show Venezuelan and Latin American films often unable to compete with the imported international blockbusters in private cinemas. One of the great challenges of the Cinemateca is to foster an interest in Venezuelan films not only internationally but also among the Venezuelan people. One of the ways to gain prestige is by entering the Villa del Cine productions in international film festivals such as the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema held in Havana, Cuba, annually in the month of December. Interestingly enough, internationally some of the movies from La Villa have been more successful outside of Venezuela than
domestically. Also since the films are produced through La Villa, the Cinemateca is able to copy and send these films to both the Venezuelan Embassies throughout the world for Venezuelan film cycles and to the network of public cinemas throughout Venezuela.

One of the main concerns is whether or not this national film project is in fact financially sustainable. Due to Venezuela’s ownership of a state production facility, editing resources, and a team of film-making experts, Venezuela is able to work on the sustainability of La Villa through co-productions with other countries, working with Cuba and Spain. La Villa is an ideal candidate for co-productions, since Venezuela now has a valuable production resource to offer in co-production relationships. La Villa has also furthered relations with other film institutions such as the ICAIC in Cuba with distribution support through Amazonia films, also by offering the services that Venezuela has for film conservation. Venezuela is able to send a considerable number of students to the world recognized San Antonio de los Baños film school in Cuba to study filmmaking, editing, script writing and production. The goal for the near future is to have a similar type of school in Venezuela; however, for now the focus is on sharing resources.

While there are various initiatives to share resources internationally through training and editing, the principal focus is to include Venezuelans in making and viewing film to create a new Venezuelan audience. The central office of the Cinemateca Nacional distributes La Villa productions throughout the country to address the need to foster a new Venezuelan audience. When Margot Benacerraf in conjunction with the French Cinematheque initially established the Cinemateca Nacional in 1966, the focus was to spread the diversity of cinema from Cinema Novo in Brazil to silent film in Europe throughout Venezuela. As of 1990 the Cinemateca was reorganized into a foundation,
opening its focus to include film publications, television programs and a film archive. However, since its establishment until recently the Cinemateca Nacional remained primarily in the two locations in Caracas. Therefore working with the philosophy of inclusion under the umbrella goal of the Cultural Mission and the Cultural Ministry, the Cinemateca Nacional is focused on making film available and accessible to the communities of the Venezuelan people beyond the center of Caracas. While previously two cinematecas represented the extent of the National Cinemateca, as of 2008 the Cinemateca has increased its cinemas to include 16 regional cinemas and 200 community cinemas. This initiative according to then Cinemateca President Javier Sarrabia (and later re-appointed president) in a 2008 interview is to make the cinemas centers for conversation and conscious raising for the Venezuelan people. The centers are not meant to show Hollywood blockbusters. Instead they are programmed by a programming team in the central office of La Cinemateca in Caracas to show films that are not as easily accessible to most Venezuelan people, including art film, documentary, children’s films, international cinema (including US independent film) and Venezuelan cinema. With the 335 municipalities in Venezuela the goal is to place a community cinema in each of the municipalities. These recently established cinemas are in constant communication with the central cinema in Caracas to work on film festivals and programming. In 2008, 160 of the 200 community cinemas that were established had been officially inaugurated, and 40 more community cinemas were inaugurated in 2009.

In order for the Cinemateca to open a community cinema, the community needs to have a community member in charge of the community cinema that agrees to the specific film programming, and there needs to be a safe space to store the film-viewing
equipment. Also the space needs to be large enough to fit 50 people. These community theaters are fairly simple spaces and can serve another purpose during the day, such as a high school or community cafeteria. The space does not have to be a public space; it just needs to be open to the public. The Cinemateca supplies the community cinema with projection equipment, fifty plastic seats, film programming and they require that there are four movies shown per week, and one of them has to be a children’s movie. Also one of the four films needs to be open for a cinema-forum for film discussion.

This is not the first time in the history of Venezuela that there is a cinema-forum movement in the barrios. Until the 1980s there were student cinema clubs that went to the poorer communities to show and share films with the communities. This, however, is an attempt to establish a more sustainable community space and forum for film. While for the time being the Cinemateca is in charge of organizing the programming of the community theaters, the president of the Cinemateca explained that they are working to educate the community about film so that they are able to work with the Cinemateca and contribute to the programming. The programming department works on an annual plan so that the films support topics of interest such as public health. For example, on Venezuela’s National Food Day, the Cinemateca played *Fast Food Nation* in all of the cinemas, to promote discussion on the importance of healthy eating. The future objective is a collaborative programming between the Cinemateca and the specific communities.

In an interview with then Cinemateca president, Javier Sarabia, he explained that there are five different reasons as to why the communities often express interest in having a community cinema: 1) many of the communities want a cinema because they are not able to go to the movies due to a lack of commercial or public cinemas in their area or the
cinemas are extremely expensive, 2) there is an interest in having a space to create and exhibit community-made films, 3) there is an interest in the communities to show documentaries to teach about social issues such as teenage pregnancy, 4) some communities want to use the cinema as a form of educating others about politics, and 5) other communities request to have a community cinema to use the space and equipment for technology workshops. Regardless of the reasons that the community is interested in having the community cinema, they still need to comply with the rules and programming of four films per week with at least one of those films for a young audience. If the communities do not comply with the approved use of these cinemas or are not using the cinema, then the Cinemateca looks for another community leader to direct the space, or the community runs the risk of losing its equipment and cinema.

These community and regional cinemas are a way to attempt to change the historically Caracas-centered national cinema access. In 2005 the Cinemateca began converting pre-existent spaces to create another network of cinemas: regional cinemas that also became part of a network of cinemas in Venezuela (linked directly to the two principal centers in Caracas). This regional initiative began with Maracay, Coro, Guarenas, Barinas, and Acarigua. There were eight regional cinemas in total. After establishing these cinemas, the Cinemateca opened a second round of cinemas in Pampatar, Puerto Ayacucho, Sucre, San Carlos, Valera, Maracaibo and San Fernando de Apure. In the month of November 2008 the Cinemateca inaugurated three more regional cinemas in San Felipe, Barquisimeto and Calabozo. In the regional cinemas a ticket costs the equivalent of about $1.50 and in the community theaters there is no fee. With these newly opened regional and community cinemas, the Cinemateca became an institution...
with a national reach rather than the historical focus solely on Caracas. Also this extensive national network is more in line with the Cultural Mission of inclusion since it helps make film available in areas that did not have cinemas or that only had access to one single type of cinema: commercial Hollywood blockbusters at a very high price.

The community cinema network is one of the key differences between the current Film Platform and the state's past investments in film. While most previous investments were made at the organizational and agency level, this is a direct institutional rather than ad hoc investment in making film available to all Venezuelans through community cinemas. This film initiative intends to bring people on board with the ideas of the revolution while also democratizing the filmmaking and representations of Venezuela through workshops, community cinemas and the five-part Film Platform. While the community cinema network is the key link between Chavez's initiatives and the communities, there is a scarcity of research on this network and the film workshops. The communities that this initiative is designed to affect are the poorest in Venezuela and were also the political base of Chavez during both of his terms, the 2002 coup, the general strike, the oil strike and the 2009 Organic Education Law.

Working with the extensive community cinema network, the Cinemateca also has another important branch called Formación y Participación (Training and Participation). Previously this branch was called Docencia (Teaching). This area of the Cinemateca works to train and form a new educated and critical film audience. Theoretically their way to form a more educated audience is to teach the spectator a critical background on film and to discuss the tools to further understand the various aspects of film through workshops. Also the community cinema forums are used as an opportunity to discuss
film and become active, critical audience members rather than passive receptors of film images. This initiative is directed at the community cinema network to communicate about nationality, analyzing the cultural side of identity. In general, this part of the Cinemateca is faced with the heaviest amount of work and is also the part that has the most work yet to be done. Due to a scarcity of film critics willing to work with the Cinemateca, often the workshops are given at the regional cinema level, inviting leaders of the surrounding communities to attend and then to return and share their experiences with their communities.

Formación also works to train new audiences through educational publications and magazines for adults and children. These publications are distributed for free in the community cinemas and accompany the monthly programming for the cinemas. According to the Cinemateca’s then president Sarrabia, these community initiatives have contributed to the objective of the changing role of the Cinemateca from a representational democracy to a participatory space.

For the Cinemateca the programming of the community and regional cinemas includes movies from Venezuela produced in La Villa and foreign films that the Cinemateca receives rights to reproduce and send to the network of cinemas. The communications part of the Cinemateca is in charge of obtaining the rights to the movies and planning the international film festivals. Therefore the communications department has a close relationship with the foreign embassies throughout Caracas to facilitate the international film festivals and access to international films. The Cinemateca depends on the willingness of the embassies to work with them for their film festivals. Therefore, for example, the French Embassy has facilitated many French films in the programming for
the cinema network; thus French films have a heavy representation in the Cinemateca’s programming. The films used for programming are productions of La Villa, Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa and independent and critical films from the United States (e.g. the works by Michael Moore).

The Cinemateca is also in charge of restoring Venezuelan films, using the recently acquired film restoration technology now available at the Cinemateca. The team works on the restoration of thirty-five movies per year. With the restoration technology, Venezuela is able to offer this resource to Cuba, while in return Cuba trains filmmakers at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión at San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. The preparation of future film crews in Venezuela is the area where Venezuela needs Cuba’s help and motivates the two countries to exchange resources.

Another key part of the work of the Cinemateca is to recuperate Venezuela’s film history and to produce a filmography of the works made and produced in Venezuela. This area is called Coordinación de investigación (Coordination of research). Coordination of research also produces the publication, *Cuadernos cineastas venezolanos*, which is a selection of criticism and filmography about specific Venezuelan directors. Additionally Coordination publishes the respected film journal *Objeto Visual*, which began in 1992 and produces nearly one issue per year. This is a publication that invites critical essays on film and film studies from film academics, critics and directors throughout Venezuela and beyond.

The Cinemateca Nacional is also in charge of including the Venezuelan people in the making of film. In order to work on participatory projects the Cinemateca works in
conjunction with the CNAC. For example the CNAC organizes the Venezuelan film festival in Margarita Island, and 2008 was the first year of the community film festival submitted by communities. The CNAC made the official call for the community-made movie contest with the objective of opening a space for the communities to tell their stories through film in the form of an audio-visual memoir of their community. The community submissions were sent to the CNAC, re-organized into various DVDs, then programmed into the regional cinema programming through the Cinemateca, and the audiences voted for the best community-made films. This organization continues today. I was able to view a great number of the community-made films submitted to the 2008 competition. In general the films were focused on telling the local epic histories of their communities.

While each of these organizations works to complete the overarching mission of the Cultural Ministry to ensure the development and growth of the national patrimony, each of these organizations has its own role in that process, and the ministry itself has changed in its role. Before the current Cultural Ministry, the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura (CONAC) held the role of the cultural ministry. One of the many roles the CONAC held was to disperse funding to Venezuelan film directors. Many complained that the funds were not dispersed in a transparent way and the CONAC was uninterested in investing in new talent. In efforts to break the centralized funding and previous relationships between the various state agencies and the CONAC, it has been slowly dissolved, and the current government established the Cultural Ministry to reflect the ideology of the present government.

With the centralized CONAC dissolved, we see the assorted politics of each
organization that contributes to the Film Platform. Not only are these organizations in charge of different aspects of filmmaking, but also the state has varied rights over the films produced. For example a film made with La Villa del Cine resources has to be distributed by Amazonia films, while if the film is funded by the CNAC the director/producer is free to use a private distributor or is able to choose to use the state distributor Amazonia Films. In attempts to further the ministry’s objectives, the state distributor Amazonia Films has the role of distributing the films that are produced by La Villa del Cine. However, while complying with the objectives of the Ministry of Culture, Amazonia is the most business-oriented part of the film platform. Amazonia works with distributing Venezuelan-made, Latin American and international films; unlike the other agencies, it does not directly take part in workshops, community cinemas, nor film initiatives with the public.

In the Margarita Film Festival, while all organizations of the Platform participate, Amazonia Films is the principle organizer of the event. In 2009 the film festival was dedicated to celebrating fifty years of the ICAIC and included workshops given by Cuban director Juan Padrón from the film *Vampiros en La Habana*. The second annual Margarita Film Festival in 2009 lacked direction, a unique topic and personality of its own. It had not been organized to attract world-class film applications nor had Amazonia advertised the event beyond its webpage. There is a lot of work to be done in the organization of this film festival for it to be a respected festival that attracts quality works to be premiered.

In the near future Amazonia will coordinate with the Film Platform to create the Bolivarian Film and Television School to train talent locally instead of relying on
international schools such as San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba. Thus far Amazonia’s relationship with Cuba is offering services for Cuban movies to be distributed in Venezuela. While Cuban films are distributed internationally through Amazonia, Amazonia has not begun to distribute the Venezuelan films in the international market to create a source of income for the distributor. Instead it relies mainly on state funds. The state funding does allow Amazonia to distribute different and diverse films—however, the sustainability of the project is dependent on petroleum profits. Amazonia’s focus is on promoting accessibility to film. According to their website mission statement, Amazonia "se extiende a la distribución de películas para ser transmitidas en televisión y distribuidas masivamente en formato de video para el hogar" (http://www.amazoniafilms.gob.ve/?content=noticias&clf=3). Amazonia focuses on democratizing the supply of films shown in Venezuela by diversifying the selection of film through the use of government funding, thus complying with Article 99 in the Venezuelan Carta Magna that ensures cultural autonomy for Venezuela. Unlike the commercial distributors in Venezuela like Lancia or Cines Unidos, Amazonia’s objective is to give access to a national/regional cinema. Therefore there are generally limited clashes of interest among the commercial distributors and Amazonia. While it is the most business-like arm of the film platform, Amazonia is working on a project, “el proyecto especial,” that works to bring Amazonia distributed films to schools and retirement homes in order to provide access to Venezuelan films for all Venezuelans. To be included in this initiative, the communities through their schools contact the local states’ ministries of culture and request to be included in this access program.

Overall we can see that the five organizations that form the National Film
Platform share a participatory focus to change the role of and access to film in Venezuela. There are communication and publicity challenges for each of the organizations. These communication challenges are not new to this initiative but do result in frustrations for many who want to take advantage of one of the National Film Platform opportunities. For example, there are complications with schedules for the national, regional and community cinematecas even in downtown Caracas. Also there is a challenge when it comes to the accessibility of Venezuelan produced movies. On a 2009 research trip I attempted to buy some of the Venezuelan classic films in the state Film Store, but the Venezuelan classics were not available. The recent films produced by la Villa del Cine were also unavailable at the store. Therefore with the new investment the challenge is no longer production but rather access and distribution. When I interviewed individuals who worked on the distribution of the publications and film collection of the Cinemateca, they expressed the problem of access. In general the Cinemateca is trying to recuperate thirty years of neglect in the restoration of Venezuelan film, the national film archive and the availability of films. Therefore the Cinemateca team has worked to reproduce a collection of four movies with the film options, interviews, subtitles and behind the scenes stories. The team chose four films to begin the process, 1. *Golpes a mi puerta*, 2. *La Casa de agua*, 3. *Falsas y otras historias*, and finally, 4. *Charles Chaplin (Mutual Period)*. These films have now been restored and re-released through the Film Store at the Caracas Cultural Center CELARG (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos)-Foundation. The film store in Altamira in Caracas is one of five film stores in the country where cinema publications are also sold. There is still work yet to be done to make Venezuelan film classics accessible to the public.
This participatory focus of the Cinemateca and of the agencies that make up the Film Platform is part of the most unique inclusion project in the history of Venezuelan filmmaking. However, while both the Cinemateca and CNAC sponsor and conduct film workshops, the greatest challenge for these workshops is advertising. There is a level of knowhow, inside knowledge, cronyism, or possibly the all encompassing term of "cultural capital" that is required to find out about these opportunities since the majority of these organizations, while they have changed from the previous infrastructure to the current platform, continue to struggle with monopolies of information.

Regardless of the amount of work that remains to be done in terms of communication within the organizations, Venezuela, unlike many parts of Latin America, with this film initiative is able to confront the common problem of domestic distribution. The Film Platform uses its recently established network of community and regional cinemas in conjunction with the national theaters to give a forum for Venezuelan, international and independent films. While many now have access to contemporary Venezuelan state-supported film in theaters, the Film Platform has yet to make money on these films internationally. Many fear that, with film programming, distribution for national cinema, and access to a set programming of what the Film Platform determines as "different" cinema, there is a risk of indoctrinating the communities with revolutionary ideology through film. While this is a fear, I would argue that, with the above complex network of non-hierarchical organizations, a homogenous ideology is highly unlikely to be supported through the Film Platform. I also would argue that from what we can see from Venezuelan film history, Latin American film, and U.S. foreign policy through film, an ideologically steeped cinema is not revolutionary in Venezuela or Latin America.
Instead it is the norm.

On a theoretical level this initiative differs from the previous film and cultural projects in Venezuela due to its focus on fostering public participation. Since this initiative is composed of an overwhelming number of organizations that overlap in their work and at times do not work together, to navigate the film platform often proves complicated, which undermines the participatory objective. While its mission is to foster participation it is not necessarily a user-friendly project. I am not innocent of the politics and complex realities of the ground level of the Platform. The realities that I witnessed in my research trips throughout Venezuela did challenge a utopian vision of this project and further showed the complicated world of film in Venezuela—beyond merely nostalgia for the past or political party lines.

During my research trips each person I contacted at every level of the film industry and Platform was willing to either sit for an interview, discuss the organization, invite me to film openings, film forums, workshops and even to give me copies of films and publications the Platform produced. I would not dare to even attempt to achieve this type of access to the film industry in the US; however, to understand whom to talk to in Venezuela took serious research in itself. Also after my 2008 research trip, I returned nine months later in 2009 only to find that many of the presidents of the five organizations had been unexpectedly changed as well as the cultural minister. These changes meant a setback in work for the Cinemateca, a change in direction for the film networks as well as for the CNAC. I was pleased to hear in 2010, a year later, the previous generous and community-focused Cinemateca president Sarrabia had been re-instated. Unfortunately many of the other organizations have since changed presidents
again. This constant shift in leadership at the cultural level, while fostering dialogue and imped ing any president to become too comfortable in their position, can also be disruptive to the teams working towards the goals of the National Film Platform and continuity.

1.5 A Visit to a Community Cinema:

In my 2009 research trip, beyond the interviews with the administration, I also visited various communities and took part in the film workshops. I would like to share a detailed account of one particular visit that was exemplary of a continued communication challenge to taking advantage of these programs that I have seen throughout the country. The Cinemateca invited me to visit one of the most successful community cinemas that was the first cinema inaugurated in a private space in La Pastora parish in Caracas. The community that the cinema serves is in a barrio, which in Venezuela means a developing community similar to a favela in Brazil. The National Cinemateca chose to place the community theater within the Santa Rosa Catholic University since it was the only space near the community that was large enough to accommodate the population. The University is located on the edge of the barrio that is surrounded by twenty established communal councils (the community-based Chávez supporting organizations). On September 10, 2009 I visited the community cinema, and the contact person showed me the film collection, the programming and the cinema space itself. He also introduced me to the team of professors, students and interns that work to run the public cinema that was inaugurated in September 2008. Weekly the team schedules film events, including forums and children’s films. While the programming for this cinema is in a constant flux, they try to include a cinema forum, but the allocated space does not lend itself to
discussion. The room is long and narrow, in the shape of a hallway that is composed entirely of hard surfaces, metal, windows, plastered walls, and a cement floor. The sound bounces from one side of the room to the other, making it nearly impossible to listen to the movies beyond the first row. When I asked one professor about the acoustics problem, he explained that the acoustics in the cinema are so problematic that he cannot use the room for classes to exhibit the students’ work nor to analyze films. He complained to the director who complained to the principal of the school who complained to the National Cinema State Network; however, they have not improved the room. There was discussion of placing carpets and curtains in the room to absorb the sound, but these improvements have yet to be done. Therefore many students, including the film students, at the university do not use the space and, while the space has a very useful and extremely political objective, due to logistics it often remains empty beyond the first row.

I also interviewed a student writing her thesis on this particular community cinema and the use or lack of use of the cinema by La Pastora slum. She explained that the surrounding community does not know about the cinema and does not find out about the programming. She also explained that the student body itself does not know about the community cinema that is located within the university.

After my interviews I returned to interview one of the directors of the community cinema in La Pastora. I asked to talk about the challenges or drawbacks of the community cinema program. He likened the cinema's issues to those of the country: there are two main problems of the community cinema program and of this particular cinema: publicity and communication. He said this lack of publicity and communication
extends beyond the film movement throughout the entire country on all levels. He also said the Venezuelan audience is not well versed in independent or documentary film. Instead it is an audience that has been exposed to and truly likes Hollywood romantic comedies and action films. There is a general rejection of films that are heavy or discuss Venezuelan realities. However films like *Miranda Regresa* (*Miranda Returns*, first Film Platform blockbuster released in 2007) are very well received, possibly due to local pride and the film’s Hollywood-like aesthetics. There is also a general lack of knowledge of Venezuelan film history since the classics are not available through the community cinema’s programming and are also not available in the original versions in any stores. The only way to show these films would be through pirated copies, yet the community could lose their cinema if they were to show pirated films due to the regulations of the National Cinemateca. Another way around this problem would be for the Cinemateca itself to send copies of these Venezuelan classics to the community cinemas. However, these films have not been legally converted to DVD nor do they have the rights to distribute this work. Many of the films that the Cinemateca has in its possession have not been properly preserved due to neglect and are not accessible to the public since the Cinemateca was not a priority of previous administrations. The Cinemateca is working on this project now to make these works available to the public; this is a time consuming process.

My conclusions after visiting three other communities was that, although my original hypothesis was that this film movement was going to control film audiences, this massive investment in the community cinema network often underlines a much larger problem. This public investment at times does not reach the community due to a
historical lack of communication that this project may or may not be able to overcome. Regardless of the President's interest in democratizing representations of Venezuelans or educating cinema audiences, Venezuela's historical relationship with State film, Hollywood, and a very centralized government make any such initiative difficult to execute. From my five interviews with the helpful presidents of the organizations that horizontally (rather than hierarchically) form the Film Platform, I realized that this initiative is composed of a cumbersome labyrinth of agencies that require an enormous amount of knowledge of how the system works and insider information to take advantage of funding opportunities. This reverses or challenges the participatory focus and further highlights the gap between the theoretical initiative and its community-level practice (exemplified in the hard surface hallway cinema that often remains empty). From what I have seen, this bureaucracy could also work to protect Venezuela from this potentially homogenizing identity project.

1.6 The Margarita National Film Festival: A Visit to the Public Film Workshop

While in future chapters I will discuss the continuous challenges and accomplishments of the National Film Platform, one event that cannot be overlooked is the Venezuelan Film Festival on Margarita Island, Venezuela. During my research trips in 2009 I was also able to attend the second annual Venezuelan Film Festival in Margarita, Venezuela to learn of another aspect of the film initiative: the film festival. While I could dedicate a chapter to this festival in itself, located in the anti-Chávez state of Nueva Esparta, there is one particular experience of one of the festival's public film workshop that I need to include. I attended the public workshop entitled: "Forum on the National System of Public Media" at the Universidad del Oriente, Guatamare, Porlamar,
Margarita. The forum was to be given by the president of the National Autonomous Center of Cinematography (the financial arm of the Film Initiative); also presenting would be the famous Venezuelan film director Roman Chalbaud and an invited guest from Cuba. The forum was supposed to begin at 9:00 am. After waiting an hour for the speakers to arrive in a half-full room, a representative from the film initiative announced that the presenters were busy and unable to present. At 10:30 am the representative announced that he would be presenting a different talk instead. His explained that his new talk was entitled "I want to make my own film. Where can I look for funding?: The funds that are available and how to apply for them". The presentation was useful and echoed part of this chapter in my dissertation, with a short summary explaining how theoretically the initiative works. Some aspects of the perplexing and unknown workings of the new film initiative and the funding opportunities were overlooked. While I was interested in the substitute presentation the audience was not quiet about their disapproval about the change in programming. The audience also disappointed with the seemingly transparent presentation of funding opportunities. Various audience members were quite vociferous about the lack of transparency in the funding opportunities and the realities of the film initiative. Still others were assertive about their disapproval of the film administration not even appearing for the presentation. A debate exploded that equated these challenges, the lack of transparency and disapproval of the film administration, to the greater tense political climate of the 2009 Organic Education law and of course to Chávez himself. The debate reminded me of a scene in El Libertador Morales, a film that I analyze in Chapter three of this dissertation. While discussing film funding, the people
were touching on some of the most important topics of debate in all of Venezuela: transparency, cronyism, Caracas-centered projects and center versus periphery.

After the CNAC administrator tried to explain and reduce the cumbersome web of the National Film Platform into a concise presentation, he began to talk about the types of funding that the CNAC offers. Again a dispute broke out in the audience complaining that, while the CNAC may say that they welcome applications from throughout Venezuela, the only ones that are funded are Caracas-based projects and/or the funds are given to those that have contacts in the CNAC. At this point the CNAC representative began to explain that there is a disconnect between Caracas and the "provinces"--repeating a somewhat antiquated discourse. The representative explained that as filmmakers and enthusiasts the people of Nueva Esparta need to discuss this with their CNAC local representative. The audience quickly answered that they have been without a representative for six months. While they have written to have a new representative, they have not received approval of a representative. The CNAC official explained that he did not know about this.

Another part of the debate that erupted was about the controversy to have the workshop in the Universidad del Oriente and the lack of students who were in the auditorium. One woman stood up and said that the lack of students was probably because they were probably all rich, anti-Chávez kids and that she was sure that the school administration did not want them to participate. One of the few students in the audience responded to this interpretation of the lack of students in the crowd. She explained that the reason why the students were not there, regardless of their political views, was because they did not know about the CNAC talk or even the festival. There was no
publicity about the event, and the single banner on the island announcing the festival was placed downtown only on the first day of the short festival without any information on where the events would take place, without contact information or even an address. No one was aware where the official schedule was, and the film students were not invited to take part. The student explained that whenever there is an event on film within the university, regardless of political parties, the students fill the room and many are left standing. Another lady echoed this explanation, saying she only found out through a friend who works for the Film Platform. Then the first lady, convinced it was due to political differences, explained that if they wanted to be there they would be there--regardless of the excuses.

While it may seem tedious to discuss these details of my experiences at the community cinema, the Amazonia films sponsored Margarita film festival and CNAC workshop that was quickly renamed, it is important to take a look at the labyrinth of the Film Platform beyond the organizational and policy levels to witness the growing pains of such a massive initiative. A constant theme throughout this chapter, in the current Film Platform, and in the films themselves is a continuous lack of communication in Venezuela. This lack of communication is unfortunately not new to Venezuela, and is not a recent product of the Chávez administration. Instead the monopoly of information and the Caracas-centralized programs have been standard for many years within Venezuela and abroad.

In a positive light these cumbersome state agencies and difficulties in communication also highlight the lack of complete control that this initiative has, which can result in funding film projects that criticize the revolution itself. For example, the
same film cooperative Calle y Media that won the CNAC documentary Yulimar Reyes award for their film *The Old Man and Jesus: Prophets of Rebellion*, and receives funding as a film school to help train community filmmakers, is also the same cooperative that later made *Abajo el COLONialismo...Pachamama Libre*. The film documents the popular dismantling of the Plaza de Colón resulting in Colón's statue being dragged through the streets of Caracas on the 12th of October 2004. While this documentary film celebrates the day of indigenous resistance and likens Bush to Columbus, the public destruction of this statue was an international embarrassment for Chávez. To show his outrage at this act President Chávez appeared on national television, the mayor of Caracas publicly apologized to the Spanish Ambassador and the local police later opened fire on the demonstrators-- all of which the cooperative Calle y Media catches on tape in this short and powerful documentary. The film ends with a public plea to "Compañero, Hugo" to not allow the revolution to become institutionalized and bureaucratic and to not forget the real revolution. Through my brief experience getting to know the talented people that make up this cooperative Calle y Media film based in the barrio of La Vega in Caracas, and their documentaries, I realized that their work exemplifies the possible constructive side of the cumbersome bureaucracy of the Film Platform. While receiving government support for their community film education initiative, the cooperative made the film *Abajo el COLONialismo ...Pachamama Libre* criticizing the government's response to the popular demolition of the statue of Columbus. Also while discussing the initiatives in public funding and investment, many individuals expressed their support of both Chávez and the revolution, yet were critical of the bureaucracy of the state and the execution of the social programs. Calle y Media's existence and complicated relationship
with the state is exemplary of the lack of complete control of the National Film Platform-the cumbersome bureaucracy may protect a level of criticism of and support the same revolution.

From what I have seen up until now, this bureaucratic labyrinth could also serve to keep Venezuela from a more homogenizing identity project through film. If we return to John King's work, he writes explaining that the film industry began in the 1970s in Venezuela (216). This oversight of Venezuela's film/state past may be a product of this lack of communication. Venezuela's film archive, industry, and the relationship between film and the state are understudied even within Venezuela's borders, and even less internationally.

This chapter is a start to add to López and King's inspiring works on Latin American film to add to the film/state relationship of Venezuela whose cinema past has remained understudied and overlooked. The Chávez administration has launched itself into a controversial spotlight, becoming the leader in film, cultural, and social initiatives through the National Film Platform. Similar to the debate during the public film workshop in Margarita, the Platform is celebrated by many and loathed by others, and often is seen as a recent political hijacking of Venezuelan film without considering its complex past. In this chapter I hope that I was able to show a few of the many facets, both accomplishments and challenges, of the extended network that makes up the Film Platform. This network, like many of Venezuela's achievements and challenges, serves as a microcosm of Venezuela that predates the Chávez administration and is a problem that the administration has yet to solve.
Chapter II: Is Venezuela Following the New Latin American Cinema Tradition?

2.1 Introduction:

On June 4, 2006 during his weekly television program, Aló Presidente, President Chávez explained the critical need for state investment in film and, more specifically, in the Villa del Cine. He proposed that this investment was not merely about making movies. Instead he said the initiative was a move to break Hollywood’s monopoly on movie screens throughout Latin America; the national film investment is a challenge to US cultural hegemony. As President Chávez contextualized the new national film initiative during Aló Presidente:

Ayer ...le asignamos unos recursos al Ministerio de la Cultura para continuar haciendo una segunda etapa de esa maravilla —¿no la vieron ayer?—la Villa del Cine. Vamos a hacer películas de calidad para competir con las mejores películas de Hollywood, como dicen. ¡Si nos tienen una dictadura de película!: de cien películas que pasan en América Latina, 96 vienen de Hollywood. (Aló Presidente, Programa 257)

While the project to challenge Hollywood’s domination of Latin American film is contemporary in Venezuela, the movement has deep roots in the region and in Venezuela. In the Venezuelan case we now see a film movement to support the twenty-first century Bolivarian Socialist Revolution. This begs several questions: can Venezuelan revolutionary film be compared to the masterpieces that have come before it from Cinema Novo, New Latin American Cinema and the ICAIC? Is the New Latin American Cinema movement still alive in Latin America today? Is the Venezuelan model merely a
poor copy of the revolutionary use of film from the New Latin American Cinema Movement? Before we begin to define revolutionary film, and the exceptional models that both Brazil and Cuba offered (and in the case of Cuba continues to offer for Venezuela) in making it, we can ask ourselves: if films are now made, in the Venezuelan case, within and controlled by the state, can they still be considered revolutionary?

When I first began to look at the National Film Platform and the objective to create a "Revolution of Consciousness", I immediately weighed the initiative against other past revolutionary film programs in Latin America. I began to compare works such as the first blockbuster hit of the Villa del Cine's *Miranda Regresa* in 2007 with Brazil's *Vidas Secas* (1963) or Cuba's *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (1968). I defined revolutionary film in terms of what I had understood as the all-encompassing celebrated movement of New Latin American Cinema whose base was said to be Cinema Novo. At first I decided that the entertaining topics, Hollywood-like aesthetic and intricate costumes from *Miranda Regresa* (2007) would never live up to the "real" revolutionary film based on the aesthetics of hunger and the social criticism of the 1950 and 60s. In a way I was hoping for a film reminiscent of Cuba's *Lucía* (1969) while watching Venezuela's *Miranda* (2007). For me the only possible revolutionary film was the idealized collective wave of New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s. While Cuba's heavily subsidized ICAIC was considered a primary contributor to the movement, I had assumed that, with the exception of Cuba, revolutionary film in Latin America meant independence from the state and often working against said state.

In this chapter I place Venezuela's revolutionary cinema in a Latin American context in dialogue with the region's revolutionary cinema models and celebrated New
Latin American Cinema tradition. I show how my idealization of New Latin American Cinema and the revolutionary film past were merely that--idealized glorifications. With closer analysis I realized that the evolution of Cinema Novo, New Latin American Cinema, and the ICAIC have much in common with contemporary Venezuela and continue to contribute to the world of Latin American film, each intertwined with country-specific national politics. Along with an analysis of both Cuba and Venezuela, I focus on the current role of New Latin American Cinema. In actuality it continues to have an extremely important role in Latin American film production through the annual New Latin American Cinema film festival in Havana, and in Venezuela's conference of New Latin American Cinema documentary makers.

Since the 1950s, cinema has been used throughout Latin America, combining aesthetics and politics through film to promote awareness of the injustices, poverty and the neo-colonization of Latin America. Using limited technology, many filmmakers worked to make local films to combat the cultural hegemony that the US had gained through a monopoly on film technology. The US film industry proved to have world dominance through another monopoly: its large domestic audience. Given this control over local audiences, the US film industry historically has profited from selling films abroad without the need to tailor content to foreign audiences or to cover costs overseas. The US film industry offered, and continues to offer, films to cinemas throughout the world at low costs, since said films have already covered their costs through domestic sales. These Hollywood films make it more profitable for cinemas to show imported US films rather than low profit domestic films. Film and Cultural Studies professor Graeme Turner further expands on this US domination in the world film industry by linking it to a
political domination. Turner writes, "the story of the feature film industry is inevitably tied up with American domination, and movements within the American industry affect all the others" (9). One of the ways that the US film industry reached this domination has since been outlawed in the US but helped to establish US film control in the early stages of international film markets. Turner explains;

it became more apparent that control over the industry could be guaranteed if a company could produce, distribute, and screen its own movies. This change in structure, called vertical integration, began after the First World War. Throughout the 1920s Paramount, Loews, Fox, and Goldwyn embarked on programmes of expansion, integration, and most importantly, acquisition of first-run theaters in the major cities. Restrictive practices, such as Paramount's block booking followed (11).

While vertical integration was outlawed in the US in 1938 and block booking in 1948, both activities helped strengthen the US film industry's control over world markets. The practice also helped to prevent future competition during the incorporation of sound and the formation of national film industries. The US domination of Latin American film industries also meant a profound level of cultural dominance in the region. Turner further expands on the cultural weight of films: "ideology is read from film texts, consciously or unconsciously, and the relationship between each text and its culture is traceable to ideological roots" (147). The abundance of imported films steeped in US ideology meant cinemas were importing much more than escapist entertainment.
2.2 New Latin American Cinema: A Unified Movement?

This cinematic cultural domination by the US highlighted Latin America’s need to cultivate and protect local film industries. In response to diverse factors filmmakers from across Latin America began to make films that would form a movement known as *New Latin American Cinema*. New Latin American Cinema became a general term that incorporated most Latin American filmmakers, consciously using their cameras to denounce social injustices and/or poverty throughout Latin America and to demand local representation in the movies. A select group of filmmakers that identified with the term had their first meeting, coining the term *New Latin American Cinema*, in Uruguay in 1958, followed by the 1967 meeting for Latin American filmmakers in Viña del Mar, Chile. There was a wave of Latin American filmmakers using their films as spaces for social criticism, turning away from the market driven commercial cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these new films began to blur the supposed divisions between fiction and documentary.

This new wave of filmmaking became known as the New Latin American Cinema movement. The movement included conflicting factions throughout the region--such as combining national programs in Brazil with underground film in Argentina. New Latin American Cinema became and continues to be the symbol of revolutionary film, the idealized tradition and a supposed collective movement throughout Latin America. However, through a careful study we can begin to question the 'unified' New Latin American Cinema movement consisting of various film movements from subversive film to national narratives.
While there are examples from this movement from across the continent, one film in particular is considered to have solidified the film movement that would later politicize even the mere act of viewing film. In 1968, at El Primer Encuentro de Documentalistas Latinoamericanos in Mérida, Venezuela, Solanas and Getino premiered their ground-breaking film, *The Hour of the Furnaces: Notes and Testimonies on Neo-colonialism, Violence and Liberation*. Professor Zuzana Pick of film studies explains,

in 1968 the Argentine documentary "The Hour of the Furnaces" [Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1965-1968] was given its Latin American Premier at the First Encounter of Latin American Documentary Film, organized by the University of the Andes in Mérida [Venezuela]. The showing of this film engaged filmmakers and critics in considering the national peculiarities of Latin American cultural production....Although filmmakers had already altered the social modalities of documentary, the New Latin American Cinema--as a movement--provided them with the opportunity to redefine a radical conceptual framework for their practices.

In the next few years, politically motivated documentarists demonstrated the capacity of cinema to mobilize (21).

The film employs a collage of genres using interviews, testimonios, documentaries, local and imported music and voiceovers to represent the struggle of the poor and the systemic oppression of Latin American governments towards its people. The collage format also includes interviews of workers on issues of labor rights, wage disputes and societal injustices. *The Hour of the Furnaces* was later banned by various governments
throughout Latin America, including Venezuela, making the mere act of seeing the film into a subversive political act.

One year after the immediate success of the premiere of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, Solanas and Getino cemented what would become the New Latin American Cinema Movement by publishing a manifesto as an addendum to the film. The manifesto, entitled “Towards a Third Cinema,” served as a call to arms for Latin American filmmakers to fight against the controlling US escapist "First Cinema" and the European individual artist's "Second Cinema". Solanas and Getino created the term "Third Cinema" with their published manifesto in the cinema journal *Tricontinental*. Overlooking both aesthetic and political differences in Latin America, Third Cinema was an attempt to achieve representation and inclusion in the Latin American film-making processes. The film and manifesto solidified the New Latin American Cinema movement, calling for film as a tool in social liberation and decolonization.

2.3 Retroactive Cinema Novo Roots?

Ironically the anti-imperialist film, *La Hora de los Hornos*, and the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement gained momentum as the film received recognition by European audiences. The successful international premiere of *La Hora de los Hornos* at the 1968 Film Festival in Pessaro, Italy, helped launch both the film and movement. Pick further explains this irony, "[b]olstered by the presence of films in European festivals and the unprecedented cinematographic output by Latin American filmmakers, the movement embarked on an inevitable process of canon formation" (22). The movement began to adopt and establish a common past history, claiming a heavy influence by the previously formed film movement in Latin America known as Cinema Novo in Brazil. Pick writes:
Filmmakers and critics retroactively identified, through films produced in different countries from the mid-1950s, the practices that could be seen as prototypical of the New Latin American Cinema. In addition, practices of the films produced in the brief period from 1967-1969 were incorporated insofar as they were seen as embodying either the ideas of a Latin American revolution or the achievements of national cinemas (22).

Pick identifies the ironic canonization of the New Latin American film movement that later claimed roots in Brazil's famous Cinema Novo. The diverse and country specific model of Brazil's Cinema Novo retroactively became the base of the New Latin American Cinema movement, and later Cuba's ICAIC became the model to be followed. While the New Latin American Cinema movement is the example for contemporary Venezuelan state film, some have begun to doubt the existence of this unifying continental movement. At times the all-encompassing New Latin American Cinema tied subversive projects with national cinema, and guerrilla cinema with official state initiatives. By canonizing such a movement based on rupture, the movement as such overlooks regional differences and actors, having the more active state actors overshadow less active ones, a type of literary 'Boom' for filmmaking. As Pick explains: "In a sense, the anti-imperialist and pan-nationalist rhetoric used by practitioners and critics associated with the [New Latin American Cinema] movement did not always adequately reflect the movement's project of acknowledging, rather than overruling, the political and cultural agendas of particular national tendencies or movements" (23). In some respects defining a New Latin American Cinema as a singular movement with a particular origin was an act that created unity, but the strength was in the lack of union and rupture with
previous national movements. In the 1990s Chanan reflects on New Latin American Cinema explaining that "the term for the continent-wide movement which emerged in the 60s, came under question, either because... it should be in the plural, not the singular, ...or the term was idealist and voluntary, since the movement it was supposed to identify had no real unity" (1).

Pick categorizes Cinema Novo and similar movements from the 1950s as the "Pioneers and Early Manifestations" in her work on New Latin American Cinema (16). Consisting of the works of Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Carlos Diegues and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, the Cinema Novo movement was built on an Italian neorealism method of filmmaking. The method incorporated direct cinema techniques including few aesthetics, simple lighting, or in Glauber Rocha's famous words "a camera in the hand and an idea in the head." While today it is considered a cohesive movement, Cinema Novo was and continues to be a diverse concept loosely divided into three phases. As John King quotes Rocha in Magical Reels, "Cinema Novo is not one film but an evolving complex of films that ultimately make the public aware of its own misery" (108). Many look to Cinema Novo's depictions of poverty and social injustice as the base of the rupturing and revolutionary New Latin American Cinema, and yet Cinema Novo was deeply rooted in the idiosyncrasies of Brazil and state politics. One of the key problematic aspects of Cinema Novo, when compared to what would later become known as the all-encompassing term New Latin American Cinema, is the relationship between the Cinema Novo filmmakers and the Brazilian state. Unlike the subversive act of viewing La Hora de los Hornos and the film's underground criticism of labor rights within Argentina, many of the Cinema Novo filmmakers were funded by the Brazilian
state. During the establishment of what would become known as Cinema Novo the Brazilian President Kubitscheck won these filmmakers over in his colossal efforts to modernize the nation. King explains: "Kubitscheck was careful to woo the intellectuals...the idea that an intellectual elite should be the analyzers and critical conscience of a nation's underdevelopment was central to the early work of the Cinema Novo directors" (106).

In its beginning stages Cinema Novo did not necessarily represent the rupture and independence that we now associate with it, much less as the defining characteristic of New Latin American Cinema. Instead the first phase of Cinema Novo "in broad terms...supported the [Kubitscheck] project of a modernizing Brazil led by progressive elements of a national bourgeoisie" (106). While denouncing the Brazilian social injustices towards the extreme poor, many of the films are supported by the government and still promote the official project of national progress. Cinema Novo films often exposed the harsh realities of the slums; however, unlike New Latin American Cinema the struggle of the working class did not enter into the works of the first phase of Cinema Novo. King writes that during the early part of Cinema Novo there was "a tacit agreement among film-makers not to criticize too openly the developmental projects of the national bourgeoisie, the basis for Brazilian modernization. Indeed certain film-makers received funds from such national groups as the Bank of Minas Gerais" (111).

The relationship between the filmmakers and the Brazilian state was not an innovative investment of the development politics of President Kubitscheck but rather a continuation of previous film politics. From as early as the 1930s dictator and later president Gétulio Vargas established the original Brazilian film infrastructure subsidies
for domestic films. These funds were essential in the creation of films critical of Brazilian society such as the Cinema Novo masterpiece *Cinco vezes favela* (1962) from celebrated directors such as Miguel Borges, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, et al. As of 1930 Brazilian dictator Gétulio Vargas realized the importance of using film to benefit his own regime. Unlike the Venezuelan state's early relationship with the film industry, beginning in 1913 under the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez, the Brazilian government surprisingly did not have a concrete state film policy until the 1930s. According to Professor Anita Simis in her *Estado e Cinema no Brasil*, the Brazilian state lacked an established film program until the 1930s due to special interest groups within the government that helped foreign films, primarily from Hollywood, dominate the Brazilian market (87-88). She further explains that Vargas was able to take advantage of the previously ignored industry by fostering an exceptional relationship between the government and the intellectuals:

> A intervenção do novo governo ocorreu no plano da produção, distribuição, importação e exibição e, consequentemente, o cinema deixava de ser uma atividade regulada apenas pelas leis do mercado. O Estado passou a regular a atividade, atendendo a reivindicações dos diversos setores agora organizados em entidades corporativas e projetando-se como o árbitro acima dos interesses particularistas. A relação entre estas entidades, que compreendiam desde educadores até produtores com as autoridades federais, era direta (92-93).

By establishing state intervention in the Brazilian film industry, Vargas was not only protecting and promoting the industry; he was shrewdly developing a force ultimately used to benefit his dictatorship and later presidency. For example, in 1937 Vargas created the INCE: Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo, which became an informal education
system for the masses. The films endorsed both a singular unified Brazilian identity as well as Vargas’ paternalist government. In 1939 Vargas set a Brazilian screen quota to encourage Brazilian-made films and ensure their screen time in private Brazilian cinemas throughout the country. Also during the Estado Novo Vargas established the DIP: Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda do Estado Novo. This agency ensured that mandatory propaganda messages were displayed at the beginning and the end of all movies shown in Brazil.

O Estado Novo and the resulting 1939 decree to guarantee a minimum quota of Brazilian films helped establish funding and audiences for Brazilian film, fostering an environment for the socially critical Cinema Novo in the 1950s that continued a complicated state-intelligentsia relationship. After the initial establishment of Brazilian film infrastructure, President Kubitschek continued this support of intellectuals and artists enchanted by the concept of developmental nationalism with the establishment of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, "which formulated an important analysis of Brazilian society, condemning the underdevelopment of all sectors of society" (106). Later President Quadros continued the state's role in 1961 by establishing o Grupo Executivo da Indústria Cinematográfica (GEICINE) to analyze the challenges and difficulties of the Brazilian film industry, and later in 1964 the Instituto Nacional do Cinema was established to determine quality and funding of Brazilian films.

By mentioning the early Estado Novo establishment of film infrastructure during Vargas, Kubitschek and Quadros and the close ties with Cinema Novo, I am interested in emphasizing that much of what would later be appropriated as the roots of the New Latin American Cinema had a peculiar relationship with Brazilian politics.
In the Cinema Novo case these films were able to survive with assistance from a structure established during the Vargas dictatorship that made Brazilian private cinemas show a percentage of Brazilian-made films, and gave heavy funding to filmmaking and education in attempts to form a new imaginary of Brazil. Some could even say that the Cinema Novo comes from a heavily paternalist if not outright dictatorial past. While Cinema Novo was considered a break from Brazilian film aesthetics to reveal the horrid conditions of poverty, this 'revolutionary' form of film was supported and financed by that same government with tacit agreements about topics to avoid. We see that even the avant-garde films of Cinema Novo, often considered to break from the hegemonic state and the model of New Latin American Cinema, were deeply intertwined with the state and the grand narrative of progress, similar to the current Venezuelan project.

2.4 Cuba: A Revolutionary Film Model?

After retroactively defining Cinema Novo as the base of New Latin American Cinema, Cuba took center stage in New Latin American Cinema, which continues to serve as a model for Venezuela's current system. This cultural leadership in terms of film and in dialogue with the countries of Latin America reenforces Cuba's already strong relationship with Venezuela. While considered continent-wide, one challenge of the New Latin American Cinema movement was and continues to be the cultural and "ideological hegemony of the Cuban Revolution" (Chanan 1). Cuba was considered (and is still considered) the model of revolutionary film--possibly replacing one hegemonic model (Hollywood) with another (Cuba). Three months after overthrowing Batista in 1959, Fidel Castro prioritized film as a tool for the Cuban Revolution and created the Culture Division of the Rebel Army, which later became known as the Instituto Cubano del Arte.
Both the Culture Division of the Rebel Army and later the ICAIC worked to inform and promote the revolution using documentary and feature films.

In dialogue with the theoretical background of Cinema Novo and Third Cinema, Cuba's award winning director Julio García Espinosa added to the discussion of the changing role of film in Latin America, and more specifically in Cuba. In his essay, *Por un cine imperfecto*, García Espinosa praises a new type of cinema: "una nueva poética para el cine será, ante todo y sobre todo, una poética interesada, un arte interesado, un cine consciente y resueltamente interesado, es decir, un cine imperfecto" (10). According to García Espinosa an imperfect cinema does not need to hide behind the expensive costumes and extras of other cinema. Nor does imperfect cinema need to base itself in the modernist idea of the artist as a chosen person who suffers through art, creating a neurosis. García Espinosa paraphrases Rocha, "La divisa de este cine imperfecto ...: 'No nos interesan los problemas de los neuróticos, nos interesan los problemas de los lúcidos', como diría Glauber Rocha" (10). In this manifesto we see the continuous international exchange on the role of film in Latin America and its theoretical role within the revolution in the Cuban context.

The overarching focus of imperfect cinema is not only a different type of cinema but also a change in the focus of the cinema. García Espinosa explains:

El cine imperfecto halla un nuevo destinatario en los que luchan. Y, en los problemas de éstos, encuentra su temática. Los lúcidos, para el cine imperfecto, son aquellos que piensan y sienten que viven en un mundo que pueden cambiar, que, pese a los problemas y las dificultades, están convencidos que lo pueden
cambiar y revolucionariamente (11).

In many ways imperfect cinema repeats the Third Cinema’s themes of decolonization, participation and revolution. The transformation of the Cuban model meant not only a change in the types of film produced but also the audience, circulation and use of film. The ICAIC sought both a new cinema and, most importantly, a new critical Cuban audience. Alfonso J. García Osuna explains in *The Cuban Filmography: 1897 through 2001* that the focus was not only to change the making of film, but also to create a new spectator: "the formation of a film public that would be capable of appreciating and even demanding a new art form, one that reflected its condition and that was free from the colonizing imagery of the capitalist world" (39). In efforts to form this new audience, the ICAIC produced films about the Cuban people and brought these films to the countryside to Cubans who did not previously have access to cinema, literally creating a new audience for film. Contemporary Venezuela has since focused on creating a new audience and bringing film not only to the countryside but to inspire those that live there to create their own films.

The project to create this new spectator bringing film to remote areas of the countryside in Cuba is known as the ICAIC's Cinemóvil program. In a nine-minute film entitled *Por primera Vez* ICAIC director Octavio Cortázar documents an example of this Cinemóvil project as the first contact with film in one rural area in Cuba. In this film, instead of focusing on the films that were shown, the camera watches the audience's faces as they see film projected on a portable screen for the first time, echoing the title. In this short documentary the rural audience, never having viewed a film in their lives, give testimonies on what they believe cinema is. Cortázar's piece is a meta-film experience.
The extra-diegetic audience only sees glimpses of the Charlie Chaplin film shown in rural Cuba. Instead the camera focuses on the audience watching the film. The film ends with a screen explaining that on April 12, 1967, in Los Mulos in the Baracoa Region of Cuba, 100 people saw film for the first time.

Cortázar focuses on the Los Mulos community as an example of the ICAIC Cinemóvil project that extended throughout the country. The film not only documents the first film experience for a remote community but also the far reach of the national film project in its efforts to teach a new Cuban society. This artistic film celebrates a seemingly innocent project, bringing the joy of film to the people in an idealized countryside. This project also helps to include the rural communities in the government's discourse. Short enough to be shown before feature length films, it allows for the urban concentration of Cuban film audiences to see the revolution's investment as a positive one, as seen on the amazed and glowing faces of the peasants while watching film for the first time. Further expanding the Cuban audience that would have access primarily to government sponsored films, the film serves as propaganda of its own project. In effect, Cuba’s self-serving investment created a new demand amongst the people for a novel medium of government propaganda.

Beyond expanding the reach of the film industry by creating new audiences, the ICAIC, similar to Cinema Novo, was also considered and continues to be a model for New Latin American Cinema. Unlike Cinema Novo filmmakers and their changing relationships over a series of presidents and varying levels of government support, the ICAIC was established by Fidel Castro specifically and explicitly to support the Revolution and government. Given this explicit state-initiated background, we would
immediately assume a tacit or explicit agreement to avoid criticism of the government. However, often times while watching ICAIC masterpieces such as Tomás Guitiérrez Alea's Memorias del Subdesarrollo (1968), we are caught off guard by the possible subversive interpretations of these films, criticizing bureaucracy, inefficiency, idealism, or even failure of the system. In such a tightly run country, it continues to be a marvel that some of these films are blatantly critical of their realities and have been released since the formation of the ICAIC. The criticism may seem paradoxical given Fidel's famous speech criticizing cultural liberalism in an address given in 1961 known as Words to the Intellectuals, "Within the Revolution everything, against it, nothing" (Chanan 294). However, the ICAIC has consistently held a constant dialogue with Castro defending the right to "experiment in the most varied styles and techniques" (Chanan 295). While the ICAIC is considered the revolutionary film ideal it continues to fight to protect film and expression, not all projects are funded and of those made not all are shown. However Cuban cinema in general has worked to create a reflective and questioning audience and a new cinematographic language--making double meanings hard to ignore. Given Fidel's clear definition of the role of art within the revolution, the ICAIC has creatively woven a web of meaning and images that use this definition as a point of tension to further push for further criticism within the Revolution.

While the ICAIC and Cuban film have served as a model throughout Latin America of marrying film and state as well as a pivotal part of New Latin American Cinema, Michael Chanan writes of the idiosyncrasies of the Cuban film industry that prevent it from being a replicable model. These idiosyncracies, like the peculiar relationships between Brazilian filmmakers and the state, make Cuba's model an
extremely difficult one to repeat in the rest of Latin America. The project of creating the ICAIC and the Cuban film industry was a massive undertaking that was only achievable because the Cuban government owned and continues to own all aspects of the industry from production to distribution. This model of vertical integration enables the industry to sustain itself (aided of course by generous state subsidies). Chanan explains that in a capitalist model a Cuban film industry would be impossible due to a loss of profits. In the Cuban model “provisions are made in the decree by which the ICAIC was set up to envision and empower it to intervene not only as a production house but also as both a distributor and an exhibitor, in order to alter these conditions, knowing that unless indeed they were altered, films produced in Cuba would never stand a chance” (Chanan 63). The resulting highly controlled Cuban model was and continues to be an example of the previously discussed vertical integration that in the US was outlawed in 1938.

While the ICAIC controls all aspects of Cuban filmmaking, protecting both film and filmmakers from external market demands, the Cuban films still suffer from the US embargo on Cuba. Due to the high costs of film stock and the foreign currency that is required to purchase the stock, for years Cuba has not been able to buy an abundance of raw film materials, an aspect of the filmmaking process beyond the ICAIC's control. While the Revolution has greatly invested in this costly endeavor, the benefits of film investment outnumber the costs. The Revolution has helped maintain Cuba's status as a model for state film funding and created its own internationally-respected film school: San Antonio de los Baños. The investment symbolically supports and financially benefits the Revolution. The film school brings film students from across the globe and provides a source of revenue for the government. Also Chanan explains that the films are
large successes at the Cuban box offices, and the Revolution limits and maintains a strong hold on stars' salaries while also steadily employing a great number of production specialists, which keep film costs down and increase the efficiency of production (Chanan 64). These Cuba-specific details make its film model difficult to replicate.

2.5 Thirty-two Years Strong: The Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana

Regardless of the ambiguous definition of this all-encompassing movement, Habana continues to serve as a hub to further discuss the contemporary role of the problematic topic of New Latin American Cinema in the annual Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Habana. This prestigious event and the resulting Corales awards first began on December 3, 1979 to promote Latin American film, giving a forum for New Latin American Cinema that differed from Hollywood's reign of the silver screen.

While the festival is now on its 32nd year, the criticism of a unified New Latin American Cinema has grown louder. Nonetheless, the film festival continues and has expanded to include films from Portuguese speaking Latin America, Spain, Russia, the US, and as far away as parts of Asia. The films may not all appear aesthetically similar, but the festival continues to celebrate the ambiguous and sweeping concept of New Latin American Cinema, building on a supposed Cinema Novo past, giving a prestigious forum for a different cinema. Held annually in December, this event serves a number of purposes. First, it brings together some of the most celebrated minds from across the globe in independent, national, and socially critical film for debate, film openings, continuous screenings, press circles, workshops and discussions to keep a critical look at film in Latin America. Also the event floods the streets with filmmakers, enthusiasts,
actors, and crew from around the globe. The resulting Corales prizes have significant value in the world of film and help to determine the future of many of these films. Based on the jury and audience awards, a selection of these films will receive a Coral, which will give the film esteemed status and will determine the potential of the film in festivals beyond Havana (e.g. Sundance, NYC Havana Film Festival, SilverDocs, to name a few of the US festivals that become the destination of these films). The annual celebration of this festival in Havana continues to strengthen the decisive role that Cuba's ICAIC, Cuban film and Cuban audiences play in defining New Latin American Cinema and the future of many of the region's films. It is one of the longest running film festivals in Latin America. The festival continues to maintain the position of Cuba at the center of Latin American film, bringing together the celebrated minds of film.

After considering the implied hegemony in making the Cuban system the model for film and culture while also assuming a regional pan-Latin American identity and similar past, I was fortunate to attend and reflect on the current New Latin American Cinema Festival in Havana in December of 2010. The central role of the annual Havana event is to continue the original ideas of New Latin American Cinema, foster a pan-Latin identity and a film dialogue within Latin America, at least amongst a sector of celebrated film and literary artists not too different from the role of the intellectuals in Cinema Novo.

As an example of this revered past and identity, as the Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (FNCL) completed 25 years, one night of the festival was dedicated to honor the co-founders Gabriel García Márquez and Fidel Castro as well as the FNCL's efforts to make Latin American film available to Cuban audiences. This event embodies
the commemoration of a pan-Latin American cinema, identity, and the accomplishments that the new Latin American Film Movement and Cuban film in general have made for over 50 years. To travel to and take part in the euphoric celebration of the festival, reporters, audience members, filmmakers, and guests convened at the New Latin American Cinema festival's center--Havana's luxurious Hotel Nacional. The location of the film festival was interesting. A festival, rooted in fighting poverty, political action, criticism, and anti-Hollywood techniques, is celebrated at the most posh and expensive pre-Revolution hotel in Havana, said to have been the hotel of choice for Al Capone. Paradoxically, only recently in 2008 was the ban lifted to allow Cuban citizens to enter tourist hotels like the Nacional. Cubans, although now allowed to enter, cannot afford to buy a coffee costing 2.00 CUC (4 US dollars). At the Nacional we all boarded two state-provided buses to travel to the FNCL celebration. We traveled 45 minutes to the FNCL main theater and conference space named La Sala Glauber Rocha--a tribute to the Cinema Novo founder and filmmaker. At this official celebration I watched as Gabriel García Márquez was honored while Julio García Espinosa (the founder of the idea of imperfect cinema) applauded. In this celebration of a cinematic feat that has flourished despite controls on raw materials and market constraints, I was quickly reminded of Chanan's criticisms of the hegemonic role of Cuba in the New Latin American Cinema movement and the umbrella term that overlooks country specific differences. While anti-imperialist in focus, the movement is still faced with unequal privilege.

After the official event, we waited for the two state-sent film buses to return and pick up the filmmakers, journalists, students, and Cuban people interested in film to return to the Nacional in the center of the city. However, only one bus appeared to take us
back; the other bus never came. The honored Gabriel García Márquez was quickly whisked away in a shiny new BMW while we waited. The first bus bursting with people also held the official director of the FNCL event. She explained that the other bus would be coming shortly. As one Cuban woman yelled to get the bus moving, another yelled that they did not fight the Revolution to leave people standing on the street with no means of getting home. After 40 minutes of debating and yelling the other bus never came. The 30 of us waited as the non-revolutionary bus pulled away. Our new Cuban friends turned to us and said, "Now you can see our reality. Welcome to Cuba." I decided to share this anecdote in my chapter dedicated to New Latin American Cinema's past and present to further analyze the idealized Cuban model celebrated to embody the New Latin American Cinema movement—a movement that regardless of its problematic definition continues to represent an ideal of revolutionary cinema. On a small scale this anecdote echoes the possible idealization of the FNCL and ICAIC. Even in Cuba, the movement's model, injustices still exist. As with Chanan's hesitations about the idealized umbrella term of a single New Latin American Cinema, we can see that such a term and movement overlook realities such as this one brief example of artistic privilege and continuous struggle for access that I will discuss in the second part of this chapter.

Even after representing the Cuban people, exposing inequality, and working to bring film to 'the people' through programs like the Cinemóvil and the FNCL, this use of revolutionary film is far from ideal. In efforts to help recuperate and return to the ideals of imperfect cinema and make filmmaking more accessible, Cuban Director Humberto Solás in 2003 founded the Cine Pobre Film Festival in Gibara, Holguín, Cuba. The spring festival is the main forum for alternative cinema or, as the New Latin American
Cinema has become more famous, it is an alternative to the original event (the original event was itself meant to be an alternative space for film). In the Cine Pobre festival many of the films are shot in digital instead of the expensive 35mm format. Venezuela's Villa del Cine gave the postproduction and conversion from digital to 35mm as the prize for the 2010 festival. The winning film, *Casa Vieja* by Lester Hamlet, after postproduction and format conversion went on to compete at the Havana Festival. The film also proved to be a success at the 2010 festival in Havana. It is an example of the thematic diversity that the state-sponsored films represent and the radically different relationship between film and the Cuban state when compared to other national programs such as Venezuela's. In direct contrast with the official melodramas of contemporary Venezuela, *Casa Vieja* reminds the audience that film remains a space for public criticism. While at the December festival the film on Cuba's national hero José Martí, *El Ojo del Canario*, took away most of the prizes, *Casa Vieja*'s critical look at a Cuban family still managed to win the audience award Coral. This highly symbolic film shows one last attempt to bring a Cuban family together on the eve of their father's death after forty years of suffering. The film shows the cracks within the family beyond the agony of their problematic father who spent his time literally creating all different sizes of cages for his family. The film is riddled with double meaning, including the local uncle who wears an Obama t-shirt to the funeral of his deceased brother. The film was shown twice at the festival and both nights resulted in lines wrapping around the Pyret cinema in downtown Havana. While much more enjoyable than the extensive social criticism of the 1968 revolutionary film *La Hora de los Hornos*, *Casa vieja* is emblematic of the tension between official control and the space in between that New Latin American Cinema had
previously fought for. Unlike Getino and Solanas's vanguard revolutionary film, this work is easy to follow and even comical. A film such as this one, product of the festival that has become the alternative to the now mainstream movement of New Latin American Cinema and winner of the Venezuelan Villa del Cine's postproduction prize, makes one wonder about the contemporary identity of New Latin American Cinema. The film continued on to take part in the April 2011 NYC Havana Film Festival in Queens, NYC--a trajectory and hierarchy that is problematic given the original focus of the original festival.

2.6 Venezuela's Role & New Latin American Film: *Forty Years After Mérida*

While Venezuela contributes to both the Festival de Cine Pobre and the New Latin American Cinema Festival, it also contributes to this ambiguous continental film movement on a theoretical level. Venezuela’s contemporary use of film and culture continues a dialogue with these previous uses of state-directed film in Latin America while also debating the revolutionary third cinema in a contemporary context. For example, Chávez used Cuba’s revolution as a model to establish a cinema city (La Villa del Cine) and to promote national film production that falls within the scope of the revolution. During this time we see a move to recuperate the ideas of New Latin American Cinema; however, it is a return to an already confusing, loosely related mass of movements. The Venezuelan initiative continues calling for film to reflect the identities of Latin America, and more specifically Venezuela. The similarities between the movements may be the constant search for a set identity and the intervention by the state; the results are varied, but the movement continues.

The first official meeting for the New Latin American Cinema occurred in 1968
in Mérida, Venezuela; so therefore it was only appropriate that in 2008 the first meeting of the twenty-first century also occur in Venezuela, this time in the Caracas Hotel Alba, the former Hilton that had been nationalized. In Venezuela La Cinemateca Nacional, in addition to its other projects also works on advancing and contributing to the theoretical discussions on the role of film and, more specifically, documentary in Latin America. To contribute to this objective, La Cinemateca Nacional organized the first ever “Primer encuentro de documentalistas latinoamericanos en el siglo XXI” ran from November 1st through 8th, 2008. The first landmark meeting in 1968 Mérida was one of the first opportunities for Latin American documentary makers of the New Latin American Cinema Movement to meet each other. In 1968 many of the Latin American documentary makers worked against their respective governments, and some used their craft to document injustices and violence and included possible alternatives to said governments. In Caracas, during the 2008 meeting entitled "Forty years after Mérida," many of the documentary makers were now part of, funded by and defended official politics. The initial objective of the first meeting was a push towards a collective and unified Latin American identity, a regionalist collective voice, and a dream of a unified Latin America. After forty years in 2008 the idea has resurfaced and according to the most vociferous participants at the conference, the political climate has changed in Latin America since 1968 with governments closer to the left, and the challenge of film in Latin America has changed from production to distribution. However, I argue that, like the canon of New Latin American Cinema that has an over-representation of Brazil, Cuba and Argentina, the contemporary progress in film is not celebrated by all of Latin America--actually it is limited to five countries in the region: México, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and now
Though it had been forty years since their first meeting, Getino was present at the 2008 event, accompanied by Brazil's Orlando Senna, Cuba's Rigoberto López, Chile's Miguel Littin and many others representing the 'original' revolutionary movement. According to award-winning Chilean director and meeting participant Miguel Littín, contemporary reality does not have the production limitations of forty years ago. Littin instead explains that the new need is for a protected space for Latin American film and, more specifically, documentary so that film from Latin America is not only made but also seen by its own audiences --for Latin America to get to know its cinema. Argentine documentary maker and film critic Susana Velleggia, one of the few women present at the meeting, in her presentation offered a concrete example of the problem of distribution. In Argentina, for example, the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean 4* played in half of all Argentine cinemas. However, domestic Argentine films are still lacking an audience and cinemas that are willing to play their films. While there are film laws to protect the projection of domestically made films, these laws are not enforced and often times they are primarily focused on investing in the production rather than the distribution of films. As Octavio Getino explained in his speech on the film industry, throughout Latin America protection initiatives, such as the one Velleggia references, exist to both safeguard and fund Latin American film, though most of these laws remain unenforced. Also another inequality of globalization is the control of the five largest multinational film distributors, principally run by the US, which distribute over 90% of children’s films in the world–thus investing in future audiences in Latin America. Therefore the only way for industries, such as those found in Latin America, to attempt to
have representation there is to have enforced import quotas, especially for children's films, to manage and limit the market.

Getino further explains that filmmaking in Latin America (especially experimental filmmaking) faces the challenges of circulation, a lack of distribution, and a monopoly of commercial films over locally independent works. There is a general shortage of audiences for film that is less commercial, regional, or independent. Also according to the general consensus of the filmmakers there is a need for public programs to promote critical audiovisual education and the formation of new audiences to develop a critical consciousness. These public programs would require an audiovisual literacy and critique, which would result in a participatory audience and would also demand a high standard of quality.

Getino explains that there is a need for public policy for co-production and co-distribution to consolidate regional resources. This call for collective work differs from the national focus of projects such as the ICAIC, Cinema Novo or even contemporary Venezuela. There is a need for a creative identity for both national and regional Latin American Cinema while keeping in mind an international audience. Getino proposes to go beyond the nation to achieve a regional identity in order to compete with the US. The power of the US film industry is not only over the economic market but also the market of ideas and symbols. It is the point of comparison for the majority of the world's movies. Therefore a great many of the audience members are literate only in US cinema. However, in his presentation Getino falls into the binary trap of a collective and unified Latin American identity against the US film industry, which reduces the complexity of both regions rather than helps to explain their complex realities. Regardless of this
problematic collective identity, the filmmakers used their presentations to push for a regional identity and space for the circulation of documentaries and Latin American films. This shared space proved to be the ultimate objective of many of the documentary makers' public presentations during the conference. These initiatives would also open a space for inclusion of differences within the representation of the nation. However, public policies cannot work on this alone; there also needs to be a distribution system for these films.

In efforts to address the distribution, Brazil has used television to create a space for Latin American documentaries. To help alleviate this distribution problem, the Lula government since 2002 worked to change Brazilian cultural politics and the access to Brazilian cinema. Telebrás was created while also investing in film culture, in the democratization of culture and production of documentaries. As of 2003 DOCTV was created in Brazil to produce and show documentaries on television on a channel that is supported by the government to compete with the O Globo conglomerate.

This Brazilian initiative opens a space for Latin American documentary; however, how does a documentary channel determine what is documentary and what is fiction? While Latin America's most famous documentary makers discussed the future of documentary film in terms of New Latin American Cinema, they continued to mention films like Memorias del Subdesarrollo--a film whose genre has continued to slip through genre definitions. When discussing the important role the governments had in fostering documentary, one individual asked the panelists to define documentary. A panelist promptly joked, it is what documentary specialist Bill Nichols says it is (see discussion on documentary in chapter four). Various members of the meeting explained that
documentary told the truth, instead of a made-up story. There was still a general belief in a binary system between the truth of documentary and the lies of fiction; how can such a project be based on documentary when a definition of documentary is not first established?

Argentine documentary maker Velleggia went beyond the concept of questioning the national documentaries to further place doubt on regional and national film projects. She points out the problem of seeking a national cinema since such a project repeats a formula from colonialism. She explains in her presentation at the conference that modernization and the construction of the nation through nationality are products of the oligarchy. Therefore when countries began to create national identities instead of creative projects, the national identity projects were actually imitation projects, like the latifundia societies not breaking with the social organization of the past. Therefore historically institutional representation like film became a hegemonic tool that began to construct believable and life-like realities, leaving behind all vanguards, almost suffocating film. The cinema that did not represent the believable and reproduce the hegemony was considered the New Latin American Cinema, which in the Argentine case was underground and hidden due to the dictatorship. Therefore the relationship between those films and their audiences was by definition political--since the subject matter strayed far from state guided narratives.

In general there was a broad notion of 'progress' since the previous 1968 meeting in Mérida in terms of the production and distribution challenges in the various regions of Latin America. Many of the Latin American Documentary Makers' observations and remarks reduced Latin America to a single and homogeneous identity. However, the
representatives of each country shared different realities. The situation of film
representation and production in Latin America varies from country to country with
extreme contrasts amongst Central America and some countries of South America.
While select countries such as Argentina, Chile and México may have overcome the
difficulties of production and are currently focused on distribution challenges, many
Latin American countries still suffer difficulties in terms of production. Within Latin
America 40 percent of production comes from México, followed by 25 percent from
Brazil and 20 percent from Argentina. The remaining 15 percent represents the vast
majority of the remaining Latin American countries. According to the production figures
discussed at the 2008 conference, within Latin America there are three categories of
movie producing countries: a. High Production (more than 15 full length movies per
year): Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, b. Medium Production (between 10 and 15 full length
movies per year): Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, c. Low Production: (fewer than 10 full
length movies per year): Cuba, Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay. However, there are
many Latin American countries that are not even considered in these categories like the
countries of the Caribbean, the Central American countries, Ecuador, Peru, etc. Therefore
when Chilean director Miguel Littín pointed out that production is no longer a challenge
for Latin America film but rather the new challenge is distribution, the numbers show
otherwise. Distribution may be the primary challenge in the case of México, Brazil and
Argentina; however, those countries are actually exceptional in Latin America rather than
representative of the norm. When considering these three exceptional countries to
represent the norm, aren’t they falling into a trap of hegemony? This minority does not
begin to represent the diversity of the other countries, nor do the majority of the films
from the three high producing countries represent the diversity within their own countries.

To further address the topic of diversity, the majority of the participating documentary makers present at the 2008 meeting were Argentine despite the Venezuelan location. While they focused on representing the different realities of Latin America, they were not representative of the diversity of Latin America. In general, the people in attendance, regardless of nationality, were white men. There were few members representing Central America, the Caribbean (other than Cuba), Ecuador, Peru, or even for that matter Venezuela. The few women in attendance were from Argentina, with one woman from Venezuela in indigenous dress. This lack of diversity reflected one of the great challenges of Latin American film that, while internationally famous in its social fight for equality, has changed little since the original meeting in 1968. In other words, it still reflected the past of access to film, production, and representation by an elite few.

While the participants at this historical event were primarily white men and/or Argentine, there is another aspect to be analyzed in the weeklong massive film investment in the festival hosted by Venezuela's National Film Platform and in particular the Cinemateca Nacional. The examinations of the problematic concept of New Latin American Cinema, the Latin American dialogue on film and revolution, and Venezuela's contributions to that dialogue remained among a select few. While public participation, critical audiences and film education were constant topics at the festival, the practice showed a different reality. In fact I was fortunate to be one of the few audience members present for the seven day long debate and festival celebrating the history of New Latin American documentary (without defining the genre) and the fathers (because there were
few mothers present) of New Latin American film and Latin America's revolutionary art. Unfortunately I daily was one of an average of eight audience members. Sadly, the following week while attending my Latin American film course at the Chávez administration's public Bolivarian University, I asked my film professor why he did not attend or promote the event. He was shocked when he heard of the past event and was visibly upset that he was not contacted. This short conversation was an example that the historic meeting suffered a constant challenge that most of the Venezuelan National Platform faces (and many programs in general)--a severe lack of communication and publicity--or not including the relevant people in such an important theoretical investment.

The discussions that took place on the role of film in Latin America and revisiting the manifestos (and revolutionary film leaders) of the past, repeated the pattern of discussing the 'people' instead of including 'them'. Despite the efforts to break down the elitist role of film in Venezuelan society by creating many participatory opportunities, the Cinemateca created a forum by building on a debated New Latin American Cinema past with one key element excluded --the local people. Yet despite the absence of a local and diverse audience, throughout the event the invited filmmakers referred to Venezuela as the new model to follow in terms of film funding, state intervention in production and distribution and creating new audiences. Again the filmmakers were looking for an example to follow which may fall into some of the same problems as the hegemonic role of Cuba in defining Revolution and Revolutionary film.

We can see that Venezuela's efforts to contribute to an idealized revolutionary film past also faces many of the past challenges while also creating new opportunities for
filmmaking and viewing. In the 1960s, with initiatives such as the Cinemóvil of Cuba, the focus was to bring film to the people, building a new audience. Now in contemporary Venezuela, the discourse of the Platform focuses on the people not only as audience members but also as creators of their own films. While in some ways the Platform pushes for more local participation, we are able to see that international events such as the 2008 meeting of Latin American documentary makers continues to remain insular and has not achieved the objective of public participation put forth by the Platform. In the 2008 Caracas event we can see that the inclusion of many of the documentary makers beyond the original filmmakers is still unfortunately far from being realized. While theoretically focused on inclusion, there were few to no participants beyond the original formally trained documentary makers. In this sense the community, film students and local filmmakers are the focus but are still the last part of this national representation project to be included--a challenge similar to the previous film initiatives in Cuba and Brazil.

Beyond the lack of public audience participation, the Venezuelan national film effort is further complicated because it faces some of the same unresolved challenges of the original loosely defined New Latin American Cinema Movement. The Venezuelan Platform concentrates on celebrating a 'truly' Venezuelan national identity through film--attempting to define the national in an international industry of co-productions, resource sharing, training, and a long history of regional collaboration through meetings and conferences. The international meeting of filmmakers symbolizes the years of borrowing and collaboration throughout the region from Cinema Novo to the ICAIC and the problematic umbrella definition of the New Latin American Cinema. In the face of this
regional program Venezuela continues to attempt to build a national film industry through collaborative work with Cuba and building on the region's idealized Cinema Novo past. This regional/collaborative initiative further problematizes the national film platform given the hundreds of people and different funding sources that contribute to a Latin American production--making the national 'authentic' identity of a film nearly impossible to determine. The struggle to find and celebrate that which is truly Venezuelan, Latin American or New Latin American faces many of the multiple complications of identity that have been discussed in literature for years. Still in film the identities are exponentially more complicated due to the immense amount of diverse funding, individuals and public programs that work together in making a single film. This discussion of both New Latin American Cinema's past and Venezuela's present shows that we need to question the idealized New Latin American Cinema past while rethinking the future formula of national cinema beyond the limiting definitions of the past. In a tradition that is based on rupture with the past, exchanges beyond national boundaries and cross-country dialogues, in Venezuela the search for the national narrative through film continues.
Chapter III: Doña Bárbara Gets a Facelift:  

*El Libertador Morales* Redefines Civilization and Barbarity

3.1 Introduction

The movie *El Libertador Morales* is a product of the National Film Platform and premiered in Venezuela on July 31, 2009. It was such a domestic success that it remained in box offices and continued to make money for two months in commercial theaters. From there the film has maintained a following in the public regional cinemas and entered the community cinema network in October of 2009. In September of 2009, the film was chosen by the CNAC: Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía, the financial arm of the National Film Platform, to represent Venezuela at the 2010 Oscars for the best foreign film category. Also the film won the audience prize at the 2009 Festival de Cine Latinamericano y Caribeño in Margarita sponsored by Amazonia films and was also recently chosen to represent Venezuela at the October 2010 Washington, DC Latin American Film Showcase --a free film festival organized and sponsored by the cultural attachés of Latin American Embassies in Washington, DC.

*El Libertador* is an example of the participatory initiative of the National Film Platform since it was written and directed by amateur director Efterpi Charalambidis, chosen from a national open call for scripts sent to the Villa del Cine in efforts to promote new filmmakers and amateur actors in efforts to better represent Venezuela. Also due to the film medium of these fictions and the popular film movement in the streets and public theaters, access to this film is not limited to the elite and middle class. It is a film that has been enjoyed throughout Venezuela free of cost--making this foundational fiction even more available than Venezuela's previous national blockbusters.
3.2 A Return to *Doña Bárbara* and *Foundational Fictions*

This film is deeply steeped in nation re-building discourse. To discuss *El Libertador*, and in the next chapter documentary films from this National Film Platform, Doris Sommer's innovative work *Foundational Fictions* guides me in my analysis of the popularity of the film and the nation building message of the film itself. To lead me through this analytical process and to answer the troubling questions about the politics of this film in particular, I agree with Sommer's decision not to focus on whether these works have the right or not to offer these nation-building projects. Instead, she focuses on how turn-of-the-century and early twentieth century national narratives work as nation-building projects and why they had such an impact. This is what I too am interested in with these films but, different from Sommer's work, I am analyzing a contemporary national remodeling project in Venezuela. This is a government-run film program to promote the work of amateur and new filmmakers, directors, and writers. The propaganda in these films, and in *El Libertador* in particular, is simple and explicit, but just how does it make itself visible, why is it so seductive and what is the national plan that this movie offers? How does it attempt to respond to/or replace the previous novel and box office hit *Doña Bárbara* that Sommer analyzes as Venezuela's quintessential foundational narrative?

Due to the similarities and at times conflicting plans of these popular narratives I have dedicated this chapter to an analysis of this recycling and reshaping of *Doña Bárbara*--Venezuela's previous canonical text whose author, Rómulo Gallegos, later became Venezuela's first democratically elected president. Sommer offers a concise
summary of the novel *Doña Bárbara* that I will use as a point of comparison with *El Libertador*:

Gallegos stages the re-conquest as a tale of triumphant civilization, in the person of aptly named Santos Luzardo, who has come home to the llano after graduating law school in Caracas. His first intention was merely to sell the family ranch and to spend the earnings in Europe. But the llano makes claims on its rightful master, and Santos stays to put his ranch in order. In the process he must subdue the barbarous woman who has been rustling his cattle and seizing his land. Her very identity as a domineering woman is a signal for censure, a rhetorical trespassing of populism's gendered code. Gallegos makes her the 'personification' of the seductive land and of lawless usurpations an oxymoronic obstacle to Santos's demand for legally binding terms...Borders, fences, frontiers are civilization's first requirements, the kind of writing that refuses to risk barbarous misreadings...With his land, Santos also reins in Bárbara's wild daughter, Marisela. Abandoned at birth by her mother, Marisela had been living in a swampy no-man's-land...[Santos] saves Marisela from Mr. Danger, Bárbara's lascivious associate...Marisela, though, has by now acquired the civilized contours of the perfect wife.

To acquire the necessary shape and tone, Marisela had first to learn how to groom herself, and especially how to speak standard Spanish, like a city girl. Her regional, traditional language, that which distinguishes her as a llanera, is corrected in this cultural improvement or whitening...to follow his elite and self-consciously regulated code, to banish the undisciplined grunts and cries
that amount to a linguistic pathology. And Santos's teacherly promises of improvement are his most effective seductions, as if educator Gallegos were pointing to his own political seductiveness [...] (276-277).

Gallegos wrote *Doña Bárbara* in 1929, making his proposed plan clear to move to the civilizing urban center through a melodramatic romantic relationship, breaking from the dictatorial regime of Juan Vicente Gómez towards a promise of democracy. As of 1998 Venezuela has faced another substantial change in many aspects of society. In a decade of transformation for better or for worse in Venezuela, from a capitalist society to one that is self-defined as a form of "twenty-first century socialism" based on public participation, there is a need to retell the story of the nation. The film *El Libertador* appears to respond to *Doña Bárbara's* previous idealization of the civilizing urban center, to aspire to a European lifestyle by speaking 'properly', and respecting the modern boundaries of space through fences and gates.

When comparing the two works, there is one difference that further complicates the comparison; *Doña Bárbara* was originally a novel and *El Libertador Morales* originally a film. Their genres add to, rather than detract from, their proposed plans for the nation and their political context. As *Doña Bárbara* calls for a centralized urban government by a select few, *El Libertador Morales* on a surface level promotes participation by all members of society. This is reflected in the genres of the two works, the novel: a privately enjoyed work by the highly literate, versus an easily accessible film. The collective spirit of the recent narrative is heightened in the genre of the work. Unlike the foundational Latin American novels of the late nineteenth and twentieth century directed to an elite literate audience, *El Libertador* is a film produced by La Villa
del Cine to be viewed in commercial and public regional and community theaters and further reinforces the accessibility and community experience of the film in contrast with the private act of reading. The collective experience is not limited to the reception of the film by the audience, but also forms part of the filmmaking process. Venezuelan film expert Luís Duno-Gottberg further explains, "el cine podría ofrecer grandes posibilidades artísticas para una emancipación social lograda a través de la organización del trabajo colectivo" (269). In this light, film itself by nature contributes to a collective project given the large teams that work together to create a film.

_Doña Bárbara_ was a success as a novel and ironically was even enjoyed by the then dictator Gómez himself. To further complicate this comparison _Doña Bárbara_ reached blockbuster status when it was reintroduced as a film in 1943. As Professor Luisela Alvaray explains, while the written novel was a success, the film version starring María Félix as Doña Bárbara launched the film as the Venezuelan story. While the film marks the beginning of the blockbuster success of the Venezuelan film industry, ironically the film was not a Venezuelan production; instead: it was produced and acted by Mexicans--however, this fact did not affect the national success of the film. The film version of the work made Gallegos's plan for the nation's 'progress' even more explicit, clarifying any areas of the plot that caused confusion. As Alvaray explains:

Pitting civilization against barbarism was Gallegos's way of emphasizing the necessity of modernizing Venezuela in order to put an end to a brutal despotism. This opposition, however, is treated in relatively complex ways in the novel, which gives the characters mixed motives. The film is more Manichean...the psychological motivations of characters are simplified, and the moral division
between good and evil is clear and unambiguous. ...In the end, romance
overcomes all obstacles and reinforces conventional female and male roles (36).

The direct binary system between good and evil in the film version makes the country's
plan evident: "it portrays the confrontation between the forces of progress and rationality
embodied in the character of Santos Luzardo...and the primal and wild forces of nature
personified by Doña Bárbara" (36).

The imprint that this novel and film left is still tangible in contemporary
Venezuela. To explain current politics President Chávez cites the characters from the
book on his weekly Sunday television show Aló Presidente where he addresses the
Venezuelan people and remarks on domestic and international affairs. This direct
reference to the antagonist in Gallegos's Doña Bárbara strengthens the relevance of the
narrative to present day Venezuela and shows a continuation of nearly a century-long
battle over the rights to petroleum, land, and language. From April to June of 2006 on his
weekly television program, Aló Presidente, the president made five direct references to
Gallegos's character Mr. Danger and his looming threats, building an explicit relationship
between Mr. Danger and then President Bush: "mándale un saludo ahí a 'Mister Danger',
mister Bush" (Aló Presidente). As President Chávez directly refers to the antagonist of
Doña Bárbara we see a continuation of the relevance of this narrative and how Mr.
Danger is a commonly recognized enemy in the Venezuelan imaginary.

While Mr. Danger, and the characters from Doña Bárbara, have been
incorporated into President Chávez's discourse, according to Sommer's analysis
Gallegos's interest in freeing Venezuela from Mr. Danger and foreign control in 1929
was not exactly the same fight of the current Bolivarian Revolution. Instead, it was the
realization of the elite classes in Venezuela that they were not reaping the benefits from their national petroleum and rubber industries (259). The foreign control of the market led the elite to foreign dependency and, coupled with the Venezuelan dictatorship, helped push the elite to rally "behind a militant patriotism" (259). Gallegos used his novel to depict the contemporary control and challenges of his country and propose a solution; a binary system between male civilization and female natural barbarism was established. In Gallegos's novel there was little room for interpretation. The 1929 Doña Bárbara reflects the interest of the elite to share some of the dictator's power and the need for the countryside barbarity to be tamed by the grammatically correct urban center of European origin.

In this novel Caracas was the answer to Venezuela's problems--the symbol of civilization, a step away from barbarity, threats of foreign exploitation, and challenging gender roles. The novel called for a break from the tyrant Doña Bárbara that was a symbol for then Dictator Gómez. However, in this novel with the split from this controlling tyrant, Gallegos [and what would later become the political party Acción Democrática] felt that the Venezuelan people were still not ready to govern themselves; they needed to be taught by the civilizing urban center. This novel calls for a governing class to transition the people from totalitarian dictatorship towards a democracy under the assumption that the people were not prepared to participate directly in the governing process.

3.3 El Libertador Morales and a New National Plan through Melodrama

In El Libertador at first we see a different reality: possibly an answer to Doña Bárbara that echoes the dialogue between the renowned essay Ariel by Uruguayan writer
José Enrique Rodó in 1900 and Cuban literary critic and poet Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Caliban* of 1971. Similar to these two works, it is as if *El Libertador* were the continuation of/or response to *Doña Bárbara* in order to show the failure of Gallegos's plan or the reality that the Venezuelan people are ready to participate in governing themselves. *El Libertador* could be considered the sequel to *Doña Bárbara*; years later in the barrio, we ask ourselves, whatever happened to Santos Luzardo and Marisela? Was the urban center the civilized place that it had promised to be?

*El Libertador* creates a representation of Venezuelan history that makes Chávez and public participation the next logical step for contemporary Venezuela from its *Doña Bárbara* past. Rejecting the idealized European urban center, *El Libertador* and many of the Villa del Cine produced films present similar binary oppositions. Most of these epic stories (from national to local heroes) have a male superman that leads the community, town, or country in a fight for justice. These are all well-read Venezuelan heroes that manage both charm and group leadership while seducing their Venezuelan attractive female counterparts and convincing these women to join the fight for justice and freedom. For the most part the female characters hold supporting roles and fall in love with the male leaders, as is the case in the films *El Libertador, Macuro, and Miranda regresa*. While based on a symbolic simple romance, as Sommer explains about foundational fictions, the power of these films and the nation-building narratives is their convention.

The nation building novels were not merely seductive stories to amuse their readers but also are prescriptive to teach their readers how to behave and to even bring together and unify differing and conflicting groups in society. Sommer writes that by
"[i]dentifying with the heroes and heroines, readers could be moved to imagine a dialogue among national sectors, to make convenient marriages" (14). These fictions served as extended metaphors for the nation. Through the fictional marriage their audiences could envision a possible peaceful narrative bringing together different members of society. According to Sommer one of the uses of these love stories is to personalize the nation and to make what is public private and that which is private public—thus giving the nation a relatable story. Sommer goes on to explain that these are not merely allegories that parallel the narrative stories but rather are two levels that feed each other; "the allegory in Latin America's national novels is an interlocking, not parallel, relationship between erotic and politics" (43).

Many of these allegorical films develop the private and public relationship from the beginning of the film—celebrating the state investment with the touching love story. To establish the film-state relationship the films produced by La Villa del Cine and distributed by Amazonia films each open with images of the wildlife of Venezuela and the symbol of the National Film Platform: el Perro y la Rana and the words:

“República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Distribuidora Amazonia Films
Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura”

Following this image are scenes of Venezuelan Amazonian wildlife and an indigenous woman painting the symbol of el Perro y la Rana on the chest of an indigenous man, with natural red ink from the inside of a seed. This symbol next appears digitized on the screen with the words Fundación Villa del Cine. The opening trailer announcing a single
sponsor is in contrast to most contemporary Latin American films that usually have a collection of diverse sponsors such as Ibermedia, Petrobras, and Canal+.

This opening trailer serves as a frame for the film. It sets the tone and positions the film within a government-sponsored project and discourse. It makes the context explicit and sets the discourse of these films by revealing the only financial sponsor of the film: twenty-first century socialism and Chavismo.

This omnipresent trailer almost works as a branding tool for these films has affected their reception. While in Venezuela in 2008 on my second research trip, I was able to interview the then president of the Villa del Cine, Lorena Almarza, to ask about how these government funded films have been received by Venezuelan audiences and film critics. She explained that while the films have been well received by some audiences, Venezuelan film critics have shied away from critically reviewing and analyzing the works, automatically disregarding them from the beginning as merely political propaganda or untouchable due to their political origins. According to Almarza, when academics do consider the films produced by La Villa del Cine they do not analyze the cinematographic aspects, character development or plot lines. The limited criticism that does exist is primarily focused on the films as propaganda.

Upon seeing these films I agree that it is difficult not to place these films into the context of contemporary Venezuelan politics--using the films as extended metaphors for national projects. Considering Sommer or an analysis of discourse, instead of ignoring the blatant political subtext of these films, I would argue that this subtext is actually part of the film history of Latin America and would rather analyze how this subtext is made--and why. Rather than seeing the products of the Villa del Cine as tricks or ways to
manipulate the audience to support the Chávez administration as a novel or dictatorial trick, we have to remind ourselves that the binary system of good versus evil in a movie with a specific conflict that is then neatly resolved is not merely politics--but something much more powerful: melodrama. This is pivotal to Latin American film and television--it is not a trick but rather a tradition. We can analyze the resurgence of this tradition in Venezuela and the current use of this tradition in the case of contemporary Venezuela. This tradition is not only a characteristic of state-run film industries like Venezuela's but also is omnipresent in the private sector such as Hollywood and Venevisión's popular telenovelas. The stories reduce the confusion of life into a manageable formula of good versus evil where good always wins over evil. This formula has formed Latin American identities, nations and film industries for years. While the cinema vanguards, such as New Latin American Cinema, often claims to have rejected and continues to reject melodrama's clean reorganization of the world into good and evil where good always triumphs over evil, they often used the same formula to transmit their vanguard ideas. Critics such as Sadlier, et al, contend that even when Cinema Novo and New Latin American Cinema intended to break with the melodramatic past they often resorted to melodrama to communicate their socially responsible themes. Melodrama's success in Latin America is impossible to ignore and, as Sadlier writes, "[their study] helps us understand why it has been the most durable form of popular art in the Latin American Cinema" (15).

Upon analyzing the popularity of melodrama and its wide use throughout Latin America, I began to reflect on my conversation with Villa del Cine's then president Lorena Almarza. She hoped that critics would one day analyze these films disregarding
the political source that funded the films and their possible political messages. I would suggest the analysis of their message or omnipresent political discourse is as inevitable as is the importance of the construction of the plot, characters, and cinematography to create the good versus evil binary system. I would add that, in the terms of discourse and then president Lorena Almarza's plea to analyze critically these films beyond Chavismo, it is nearly impossible to avoid the context of these films, since the context forms part of the films themselves. These films begin with that discourse not only on a philosophical level but also immediately in the first minute of the opening trailer of the Villa del Cine and the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura, sharing with the audience the sole sponsor of the film, the explicit national celebration of Venezuela in the trailer's images and placing the film within the government's discourse.

After the first minute of the opening trailer that serves as a frame for each of the films made under the Venezuelan Film Platform, *El Libertador Morales* then opens with music and images that greatly contrast with the peaceful, natural sights and sounds of the Amazon. First we see a wide-angle shot of the frenetic traffic of Caracas with the barrios in the background and the crowded and traffic-filled main avenues of contemporary Caracas. The image quickly changes to a close-up of many legs walking through downtown Caracas and the busy urban streets. Among high-heel shoes and a sea of pants the motorcycles weave among the pedestrians. Salsa music accompanies these images. It is heavily influenced with a drumbeat typical of Venezuelan music from the coast while the camera shows the urban murals that are omnipresent in Caracas on the walls of highways and streets. These murals serve as a backdrop for the opening credits of the film. Also serving as a backdrop are the streets of central Caracas with heavy traffic in
all four lanes plus double parked cars and buses. The street is filled with old and new
cars, taxis, buses, trucks, and motorcycles weaving in and out of the maze of traffic. This
image of Caracas also includes the informal merchants that line the avenues selling
everything from Coca-Cola to cellular phone chargers. The sounds of traffic and people
yelling blend into the heavily drummed salsa beat, and the traffic appears to dance to the
beat of the Venezuelan drums. This image is crowded with cars and machines: the
vehicles take center stage of this less than humane salsa beat traffic.

The opening of the film continues showing the reality of omnipresent traffic in
Caracas, already establishing the local--the odd but daily juxtaposition between the urban
graffiti murals of the past heroes Bolívar and Miranda, and the grind of the daily realities
of often stagnant traffic. The first public mural we see is a graffiti painted face of Bolívar
with the flying tri-color Venezuelan flag in the background. In this mural even Bolívar is
in movement in this bustling city center. The mural is painted as if Bolívar had wind
blowing through his hair as he gazes forward accompanied by a Venezuelan flag that is
the same size as Bolívar, at the level of his head. In this depiction it is as if the flag had
come directly from his head, making him the symbolic creator of the nation. We see the
massive size of this mural and its accessibility in central Caracas, when in the next image
a bus passes it by and the large bus only covers the forehead of Bolívar. Through the bus
and the traffic we can still see the mural of Bolivar in this scene as the opening credits
read "Rafael Gil," the actor that will play El Libertatador Morales in the film. This
juxtaposition of a public graffiti mural with a popular art Venezuelan flag and a passing
bus through whose windows we can still see Bolívar is a premonition of the coming
story. The one object that separates the mural of Bolívar and the bus is a chain link fence
that is reminiscent of the symbol of order of Doña Bárbara and the failed promise of modernity and progress. The fence will continually appear in various forms throughout the film. While in Doña Bárbara it is a symbol of rule of law and organization, throughout this film, the fence or gate will symbolize injustice and division of the community. Ironically in this image the fence is separating Bolívar from the people. This Rafael Gil opening credit in front of the tinted windows of the bus, the chain link fence, and Bolivar's popular culture face is a summary of the entire movie. Rafael Gil will play El Libertador Morales, a modern Bolivar-like character that quotes Bolivar while easily moving through the chaotic streets of Caracas, falling in love with a beautiful woman and becoming the natural leader of the people to establish a new community, breaking with the past corruptions of previous governments and promises of modernity to rewrite the national founding love story.

The camera's focus on the urban murals reflects the changes in contemporary Caracas and at the same time the return to previous nation building discourse. These urban murals have been the topic of great debate. From the New York Times to Latin American Studies Association presentations; some consider these murals direct propaganda while others consider them public education. Still others such as "El Primer Festival de Intervenciones Urbanas de La Pastora 2010" call these public works “Arte sin curador” ("La Pastora se llena de Pintura"). One thing for certain is that Bolívar and Miranda's eyes are omnipresent throughout contemporary Caracas, along with massive depictions of twentieth-century Venezuelan history such as el 23 de enero, the Caracazo, and a century of unjust relations with the US.
The murals in the opening images of this film not only serve as a metaphor for the plot of the movie but also determine the location of the movie and give the film a definite sense of place, further strengthening the national narrative. Often the global film distribution market determines the no-place or anyplace of many commercial movies, or worse, movies that represent one iconic city are often times filmed in a less-expensive city and appear to be the iconic city. This film is unquestionably filmed in Caracas, which is not necessarily the most recognizable nor marketable city in terms of common romanticized stories for a globalized audience: instead these films are clearly made for Venezuelan audiences. The beginning images of this fictional film serve as a proof of place; the controversial murals are a reminder that not only is the work filmed in Caracas but also that the work is filmed in contemporary Caracas during a highly politicized era. With opening images of traffic, city views, idiosyncrasies of Caracas, local music, gestures, the informal economy, blazing sun, and the hustle and bustle of the city, this could only be Caracas. It does not happen to be Caracas, and the city will also play a major role as it does in Doña Bárbara. This time however El Libertador attempts to offer a different reading of the city.

The manifestations of local idiosyncrasies are not hidden in fear of not being accessible to a global audience. Instead the peculiarities of Caracas are celebrated, highlighted and are the focus of the film, which is typical of a nation building narrative. This fact leads to the realities of the previous images that framed the film before it began: the trailer of the Amazon rainforest to communicate the production funding and the team of La Fundación Villa del Cine. The film, like most of the Villa del Cine productions, does not need to compete in a foreign market to recuperate its funding nor do they need
to represent an easily accessible version of their city understood through comprehensible cultural images. Instead the films are investments in the state by the state, paid for by the Venezuelan state.

From this image the camera then changes to show another public mural. This time it portrays Bolívar and a dove leading a group of Venezuelan people. The people represented here have features that appear to grow out of Bolívar's body and uniform. They represent various races with markings of indigenous, African, and European people each at the same level and scale in the mural. This mural portrays an idealized and peaceful combination of the races that make up Venezuela. This harmonious representation of races is similar to the discourse of Latin America's idealized representation of racial mixing that was fundamental to novels such as *Doña Bárbara*. Similar to *Doña Bárbara*, we see this constructed racial narrative repeated in these murals; however, this time it is to reinforce a common history making the twenty-first century revolution the next plausible step in the progress of the nation to continue this narrative of racial equality.

The national founding narrative in this mural shares the screen with two bright yellow hanging traffic lights, traffic sounds and salsa music. The constant traffic in Caracas in these opening images is another continuous reminder of place: according to CNN Money.com Venezuela is home to the cheapest gasoline on the planet. Also the omnipresent traffic is symbolic of one of the controversial achievements of the Chávez administration that re-nationalized PDVSA, the Venezuelan oil company, thus symbolically returning the country's main natural resource to the people or, continuing with the response to *Doña Bárbara*, symbolically ridding itself of Mister Danger: the
foreign exploiting investor. The right to low gas prices is not only part of Venezuelan pride, but also plays a major role in Venezuelan past and recent history. This traffic symbolizes the easy access Venezuelans have to gasoline. If the city of Caracas is a character in this film, then the traffic and more importantly the gasoline is the blood for this character--which is not too far from a Venezuelan reality. The omnipresence of oil represented in the form of gasoline pumps and traffic are in sharp contrast with Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara*. While oil was then and continues to be today the lifeline of Venezuela's economy and the primary point of contention in foreign exploitation highlighted in *Doña Bárbara*, it is not explicitly mentioned in the 1929 novel. As Sommer explains: "Doña Bárbara is Gallegos's fantasy of return and repair. It proposes a double emancipation, from an internal tyrant and her external ally; that is from the local boss, Bárbara (Gómez), and her North American accomplice, Mr. Danger (oil industry)" (275). Upon discovering Venezuela's oil the dictator Gómez (*Doña Bárbara*) sold the rights to exploit the oil to foreign companies and investors (Mr. Danger). Sommer points out that surprisingly in Gallegos's novel the focus is on cattle and not oil. While oil was at the forefront of the political climate in Venezuela, it is absent in the 1929 novel of the soil: *Doña Bárbara*. Unlike *Doña Bárbara*, in *El Libertador* traffic and gasoline are not hidden from the narrative. Instead they become omnipresent national symbols in this film, and the majority of the Villa's productions are explicit about their narratives of oil. *El Liberatdor* reinforces the importance of oil to daily life for over a century in Venezuela.

In the center of Caracas, as the camera scans the moving traffic from various angles, we see the fruit stands, arepa booths, people walking, jumping on and off the bus
and the gestures used in this vivid world of traffic. Both the buildings of the east of Caracas and the barrios are visible from the center of the bustling and informal city. The motorcycles weave around the buses as a motorcycle driver hits the side of a passing bus—the bus has the words "Silencio" hanging from the windshield, showing the route of the bus to the Silencio metro station. While referring to the bus route, the word "Silencio" is ironic in this bustling center-street filled with horns, whistles and loud traffic where silence is impossible.

The camera flashes to show part of another, more complex mural, part of a series of murals entitled Venezuela, una memoria viva designed by Jan Pierce and his assistants. This particular mural entitled Siglo XIX: El siglo de la guerra is of Bolívar, his books, Francisco de Miranda, Simón Rodriguez, the French Revolution, the Venezuelan flag, Andrés Bello, and soldiers at war. This urban mural series is a collection of ten murals that represents the history of Venezuela over the centuries and serves as a history lesson to all that pass by. The bright colors and popular art of these murals bring Venezuela's past into the present, connecting the continuation of the historical narrative with the current narrative and revolution. Chávez is absent from this collection of murals, just as he will be absent from the movie itself, but his presence is assumed, alluded to and felt throughout the film. This particular set of Pierce's murals, similar to the movie itself, helps to explain the current need for a figure like Chávez and a push towards twenty-first century socialism without making explicit references to the Republic's current president.

Next the camera jumps to a crane shot of a four-way intersection in the city as the traffic moves like an urban dance throughout the busy streets. After the crane-shot we finally have a close-up on one single motorcycle in the center of Caracas. It is covered
with stickers of Bolívar, and patriotic quotes: "unión, justicia, igualdad"(1.55),"virtud y honor", "El Libertador"(1.58), images of Bolívar with his horse, profiles of Bolívar and a bust of Bolívar--all stickers adhered to the side of the motorcycle. This close-up on the motorcycle and the popular art of mixing the founding father with popular bumper stickers is the focus for various shots as the camera scans the sides of the motorcycle, showing the important role the motorcycle will play in the film. The juxtaposition between the history of Venezuela and the fast moving culture of the center of Caracas with traffic, popular art, and bright colors is captured in these images of the motorcycle and brings moving life to the founding father's words--similar to the graffiti urban murals from the previous images.

As the camera zooms out to include the driver and rider of the motorcycle we see two men on the motorcycle both wearing helmets. The man driving wears a uniform and the passenger a suit. We see another moto-taxi driver, dressed in a red shirt and uniform, but without a helmet. Unlike El Libertador's bright yellow motorcycle with a safety windshield, Libertador stickers, a sign that reads Taxi and reflectors, the fellow moto-taxi driver has a smaller motorcycle, without any of the safety features or founding fathers' quotes. The fellow moto-taxi driver weaves into El Libertador's lane.

El Libertador yells: "Mira, ¡ponte el casco!"

The moto-taxi driver friend speeds ahead and responds: "Después, después"

(2.30)

In this short dialogue the audience immediately understands the title of the movie, the character's upstanding respect for law and safety in deep contrast to the informal traffic ways of the center of Caracas. Unlike the fellow moto-drivers who weave in and out of
traffic, El Libertador stays in one lane behind rather than beside cars and rigidly obeys the traffic lights. While obeying traffic laws may not be a radical example of an upstanding heroic character, in the context of gasoline as the lifeline of both the Venezuelan economy, chaotic traffic of the center of Caracas, and the historical role of the moto-taxis that have been above traffic laws--this law-abiding driver is exceptional.

The passenger is upset with El Libertador's decision not to run the red light and instead to stop while the others motorcycles fly by (2.46). The passenger complains, "pero, bueno, brother, ¡cómete la luz!" El Libertador calmly responds "Disculpe caballero, nunca me como la luz". Instead of appreciating the safety measure, the passenger becomes frustrated, gets off El Libertador's moto-taxi without paying and takes another moto-taxi. The passenger returns El Libertador's passenger helmet and we see a close-up of El Libertador's helmet. It is bright red with a sticker on it that reads "Manuelita". This is the name of the mistress of Bolívar, Manuela Sáenz. This scene is directly before El Libertador meets his own love. El Libertador continues his work delivering a letter to an office, and we see the behavior of the other workers in the office building. From the custodian to the water deliveryman, El Libertador greets each of them using the formal "usted" form and showing respect to the workers who do not seem to notice him. In his brightly colored clothes, in contrast to the drab clothes of the office workers, he represents the tri-colored flag of Venezuela with a blue shirt, red helmet and the large yellow envelope that he carries in his hand. He is the colorful and respectful essence of Venezuela, reflecting the colors and messages of equality that we previously saw in the street murals.
Upon arriving at the lawyers' office where he is supposed to deliver the letter, we see that he immediately likes the office receptionist: an attractive Venezuelan woman, with long black hair, painted nails, a made-up face and pink shirt. As he introduces himself to the receptionist while delivering the envelopes, we see objects and images in the background of the office that continue the theme of the omnipresence of Bolívar and artifacts of Venezuelanness strengthening the sense of place. The receptionist accepts the envelope without looking up at El Libertador; we see the national orchids of Venezuela at the far-left corner of the screen and, above and serving as a bridge between the receptionist and El Libertador, is a painting of Simón Bolívar on horseback. El Libertador begins to quote Bolívar in attempts to express the receptionist's beauty. As he does so he also places his helmet on the counter. The stickers on the helmet serve to establish the future relationship between El Libertador and the receptionist. While he begins to quote Bolívar we see a medium shot of him with the top of the helmet still visible in the image. In this shot we see a sticker of Bolívar, then the camera switches to another medium shot—this time of the receptionist, and in turn we see the side view of the helmet that has a large sticker that reads "Manuelita". From this scene we know that El Libertador will assume the role of Simón Bolívar and the receptionist will become his beloved Manuelita.

In case the audience misses any of these hints in the images and relationship between these characters and their surroundings, the dialogue reinforces this future relationship. To show that he is taken by the beauty of the receptionist El Libertador quotes Bolívar in his letters to his lover Manuela Sáenz: "Supliste una belleza y rocio tu telar es como un ángel que da ánimo a mis sentidos. Así se hubiera inspirado el amor
como al ver a usted”. The receptionist looks at El Libertador in confused disbelief and, instead of responding, she merely signs the receipt for the dropped off letter. In this part of the movie we see that El Libertador not only quotes the teachings of Bolívar in terms of obeying the law but also to court the receptionist. He begins to embody the Bolivar-like character, bringing Bolívar's words into context in contemporary Caracas on a personal level. This step to connect the national to the personal, and using political discourse to build the nation and also a romance is reminiscent of Doña Bárbara and foundational fictions in general: it is a way literally to marry the country together.

As she tries to get rid of him, he leaves her his card and information in case she is in need of a taxi. He picks up his helmet, and the camera closes up on the helmet with the word Manuelita that serves as a frame by which the camera focuses on Daisy, the receptionist. The reading of this film as a metaphor for the nation becomes inevitable. We know that she will soon play the role of Doña Barbara's Marisela in a love story with El Libertador.

The camera returns to the moto-taxi stand in the center of Caracas, which is close to the Plaza Bolívar. As El Libertador begins to explain to his fellow moto-taxi drivers the importance of driver safety and security, the camera zooms in on the newspaper headline, "Roban comercio de electrodomésticos en La Parroquia". The moto-taxi drivers begin to discuss the true lack of safety in their barrios. This dialogue not only conveys the problem of security in the community where the taxi drivers live, but more importantly the general feeling of helplessness to change this unsafe reality. The topic of a constant lack of security is also one of the greatest problems beyond the film in
contemporary Caracas. Thus begins the allegorical recipe to teach the audience what is needed to address this challenge.

From the close-up of the daily newspaper the camera quickly changes to a community meeting with five rows of seats facing the camera--conversing and waiting to discuss the community situation. We later find out that this is a meeting of the consejo comunal\textsuperscript{d}. This full shot shows the bodies of the individuals in their relation to the crowded community space filled with a mix of folding and plastic chairs (similar to the community cinema environment). There is a slightly diverse community, but generally, however, this is an elderly, female and European descent crowd. As El Libertador enters the room in a medium shot we see that the bars from the windows make a shadow on his face. This shadow symbolically continues the symbolism from the beginning of the film: the separation between the urban mural and the people. It is also a forewarning of El Libertador's future short time in jail and is reminiscent of the fence that in \textit{Doña Bárbara} is used to represent the previous failed promise of modernity and organization. In \textit{El Libertador}, ironically, these divisions will represent injustice.

One community leader tries to open the meeting asking for silence, and in a heavily Portuguese-accented voice he finally yells "¡Silencio, caralho!" The people take their seats as the Portuguese-accented man begins, "Como presidente del consejo comunal"... he is interrupted by the secretary saying, "vocero principal se usa" as the

\textsuperscript{d} "El Consejo comunal es la nueva estructura Social, que funcionara como el ente planificador de proyecto de necesida[d] y de proyectos de producci[ó]n que desarrollen nuevas fuentes de trabajos y[es] impulsen el desarrollo social y econ[ó]mico de la comunidad un mecanismo de la participaci\~{o}n ciudadana" ("¿Qu\'e es un consejo comunal?\")
vocero/community leader continues: "Eso mismo, vocero principal", que demando a la...consedora -he is quickly interrupted again as the secretary corrects his Spanish, "Consejera" and he responds, "Es lo que dije yo consejeira...que abrem uma investigação y meten presos esos ladrones". He is interrupted, this time by a member of the audience, an elderly man with a heavy Castilian accent "¡Esta situación es increíble! (7:07).

While this appears to be a basic community council meeting, there are some aspects that I would like to comment on. First, this representation of the barrio and community is white. There are few mixed or Afro-Venezuelans present at this community/barrio consejo comunal meeting except for El Libertador and the police officer. Also while the mix of the Portuguese speaker's accent in this Caracas barrio is comical and even common in Caracas, but not necessarily in the barrio, what does this representation say about the barrio? The second man to address the meeting is an elderly white man from Spain with a thick Castilian accent. European immigration is historically part of the realities of Caracas, "in the early 1950s ... large numbers of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants arrived [to Venezuela], attracted by massive government construction projects" (Haggerty). It is important to point out the European Community actors who are highlighted in this consejo comunal meeting, but the question remains, why do they speak and not the local people with Venezuelan accents? I do not argue that we will see that this is an uplifting film with a clear message about the importance of community organizing, leadership and taking responsibility for one's neighborhood;

c "De la función del vocero o vocera delegado principal... ser el coordinador de las reuniones ordinarias de los miembros integrante del consejo comunal, llevar el tiempo del derecho de palabra, convocar a reuniones, verificar que todo sea aprobado por la mayoría integrar las comisiones, cuando tengan que dirigirse a un ente a nivel municipal, estadal y Nacional, ser el vocero o vocera delegado como representante del sector vecinal por la comunidad ante el consejo Parroquial." (Rivero)
however, is it a coincidence that the scenes of the barrio to portray a pro-active barrio are white European barrio elderly men and women? Maybe this is an attempt to challenge previous representations of the barrio as a scary, chaotic place of young delinquents who are constantly planning the next robbery. The representation of the barrio differs from the previous racialized, violent representations of the barrio in the socially conscious films from el Nuevo Cine Venezolano of the 1970s, showing the social injustices in the depths of the barrio in *Cuando quiero llorar no lloro, Soy un delincuente*, repeated in the 1990s in *Huelepega: Ley de la calle* or the more recent *Secuestro Express*. These previous representations of the barrio, however, are also racialized. In many of the canonical Venezuelan films, especially from the golden age of Venezuelan film of the 1970s, the barrio represents a daunting part of the city filled with delinquents that are often represented as young, male, and racially mixed. In contrast, this first scene of the consejo comunal appears to reverse the previous frightening representations of the barrio through this organized meeting of the elderly, female European descent community. This representation reversal, like the previous canonical images of the barrio, falls into a similar racial binary system of good and evil, showing white Europeans in the barrio in attempts to temper the previously feared urban space.

The binary system of good and evil in this scene has a striking resemblance to both Gallegos's novel *Doña Bárbara* and later the film, whose screenplay Gallegos authored with Fernando de Fuentes. Both of these works prescriptively show the binary system of good and evil and the 'correct' path towards development without leaving space for what Doris Sommer refers to as "misinterpretation" (273). Similarly, *El Libertador* leaves little opportunity to read against it. The barrio in *El Libertador* is a financially
comfortable community that is faced with a single source of violence: the corrupt relationship between the thieves and the well-dressed police chief. Instead of the depiction of a poor over-sexualized young barrio population of Afro-Venezuelan and indigenous descent from the previous film representations of the barrio, this one is made up of European, elderly, white small business owners. While this is a comedic representation of the barrio that in the end shows a future possibility of these spaces through community work and organization, this representation also runs the risk instead of not breaking down race and space stereotypes of previous Venezuelan representations of the barrio. The film may fall into the traps of reinforcing those stereotypes along racial and ethnic lines. This barrio has a future--however, does it represent any barrio? Is it on the silver screen because it faces one outside and controllable source of violence and is otherwise a well maintained, fed, educated and European community? How would this representation fit in with the overarching objectives of the Villa del Cine? Or even the construction of the Venezuelan racially mixed hero from the street murals?

To answer these questions there is an alternative way to interpret this whitened European barrio: when faced with danger, violence, and injustice the only member of the community that is able to organize, listen, and demand justice is not the well-heeled police chief or European small business owner. Both of these historically respected leaders have proven to be incompetent in this barrio representation. Or referring to Doña Bárbara, these characters have failed at establishing the rule of law in the barrio. Instead the barrio is in need of a new option. This new option is El Libertador; however, by quoting the founding fathers of Venezuela he shows that he is not really new but rather is a return and continuation of the 'true' past of Venezuela. In the end this representation
shows that the barrio all along only needs a Venezuelan man that understands the ways of both the street and the law, that respects all members of society equally. This local man of mixed racial background, former policeman, is able to speak in a way that makes Bolívar's lessons palatable in a contemporary setting, making the people follow Bolívar's words and love his ideas, combining the head and the heart, the nation and the family.

Another interesting peculiarity of the consejo comunal meeting is that the 'vocero' of the barrio refers to himself as the "president": this could merely be a question of vocabulary since the term 'vocero' does not exist in Portuguese. It also, however, could be an example of the cosmetic paradigm switch from the barrio president to the barrio vocero or spokesperson for the barrio in the consejo comunal system that is the proud contribution of the Chávez Administration. This change in terminology, while slight, in theory does represent a change in focus of barrio politics, from top-down or a president-centered organization to a more participatory group where the vocero speaks on behalf of the people--relaying the decisions and opinions of the people but is not the leader of the people. The change in terminology, while important, is ironic in this scene since clearly the vocero (previous president of the community) does not recognize the difference between these two terms. Instead they are synonymous for the speaker, and the change in this scene is a superficial one.

The superficial change in the community council is also reflected in the organization of the chairs in the meeting. The community members sit in rows one in front of the other facing the vocero, and the environment continues to be a president-centered one. The community members do not converse with each other as equals;
instead the vocero explains the complaints at the meeting, and the police chief has the
authority in the meeting regardless of the objective of the community councils.

The police chief has the final word in this meeting. Unlike the other informally
dressed characters, the chief is dressed in a suit, a pressed shirt, and wears a gold chain,
watch and ring. This representation is strikingly similar to the representations of a corrupt
bureaucrat in other recent Villa del Cine feature films such as Macuro. The police chief
explains in a typical bureaucratic register that they are doing everything possible to get to
the bottom of the robberies, but another community member interrupts the police chief.
This time the speaker who interrupts is a woman with a heavy Portuguese accent, "Vocês
instigam mucho, pero ellos siguen roubando." In the back of the community meeting,
seated quietly, El Libertador Morales thoughtfully attends the meeting in silence and then
raises his hand, waits to be called upon and stands up to address the community. He asks
the police chief to see what is happening in the community and then he begins to quote
Simón Bolívar: "Señores, no se puede permitir que el robo, la traición y la intriga
triunfen sobre el patriotismo y la rectitud." Not only does El Libertador bring Bolívar's
words into the contemporary context of the community council, but also his constructive
words contrast with the previous Portuguese woman's informal complaints.

In this first community scene, the consejo comunal participatory initiative does
not change the barrio, but instead it is merely a cosmetic change replacing the title
president with "vocero" without a more profound transformation. This scene later shows
that the corrupt white-collared police chief continues running a ring of bribery and fraud,
maintaining a relationship with the barrio's thieves. The consejo comunal will change;
however, it will not reach its goal of becoming an equal and participatory forum. Instead,
the police chief will be replaced with El Libertador: a humble hero in touch with the local reality. Unfortunately throughout these transforming consejo comunal scenes, the people of the barrio do not fully take the initiative of a participatory organization and continue to look to a specific man to lead them. The leadership is not an action to be exercised by all; instead the community continues to wait for a leader to save the barrio.

To further develop the possible dialogue with Venezuela's canonical text and film *Doña Bárbara*, this barrio is not what Santos Luzardo dreamt of in his idealized depictions of the European urban center; but we see that it could have been where he ended up living. This barrio is composed of European immigrants, that when faced with adversity, are not able to solve the problems and thefts of their community; nor are they able to rely on the symbols of civilization: the police chief and the jail. The robberies continue and in spite of their 'civilized' backgrounds, they are helpless in terms of protecting their barrio. Santos Luzardo and his comrades wait for a local hero to save them from adversity. This depiction of the barrio shows the failure of Gallegos's modern urban dream of order, organization and police. Instead we see each of these concepts and institutions fall short, and the community is only saved by reverting back to the words of the founding fathers of the country.

This scene continues with an attractive Afro-Venezuelan woman in a red shirt supporting El Libertador by exclaiming: "Palabras del Libertador" (8:06). She is not only one of the few people wearing red, the symbolic colored shirt of Chavismo, but also she is one of the few, like El Libertador, that is of a mixed ethnic background in this European-descent barrio. This scene is symbolic, because El Libertador, instead of merely insulting the police, calls for change with a respectful register in Spanish. His
patriotic words are reminiscent of President Chávez, and the red t-shirt and words of the Afro-Venezuelan woman make Chávez's support even more present since the red shirted supporters are the symbol of his political base.

As the Chávez supporter begins to sit down, a heavier and whiter woman exclaims "ayyy ya se emocionó la bolivariana ésta."
The Chávez supporter responds calmly but firmly "Bolivarianos somos todos, ¿oíste, mi amor?"
The anti-Chávez speaking woman responds aggressively pointing a finger at the beautiful woman "¡Tú y tu presidente!"
The sole Chávez supporter responds "Nuestro presidente se ha escogido por voto P-O-P-U-L-A-R" (8:15)
The anti-Chávez speaker begins to lose control and yells, "¡Yo no voté para este señor!"
Again we see that not only is the Chávez supporter well informed, but she is also a supporter of democratic elections and the democratic process. The anti-Chávez character loses her temper; she is not only against the government but also refuses to recognize the results of the elections. This establishes yet another explicit binary relationship between good and evil, chavistas and opposition that will implicitly grow throughout the film.

General pandemonium and discussion breaks out and El Libertador interrupts the chaos by saying: "deja la querella política, lo que queremos es resultado. Y usted señor oficial tiene que cumplir con la ley como es su deber". The police chief answers: "No recibimos órdenes de nadie en esta sala y mucho menos de un ex-policía" (8:31); while pointing his finger at El Libertador, we see the chief's stained teeth, effeminate arched
eyebrows and lips that give the audience clues as to the corrupt dealings he will have in the film.

In these scenes El Libertador is at the back of the community room in the final row of chairs, while the police chief is in a position of power at the front of the room. They address each other with a sea of people seated between them. The political differences are reinforced with the characters' clothes. El Libertador is dressed in his light blue work shirt, with his red Manuelita helmet tucked under his arm, while the corrupt police chief at the other end of the room completes the tricolor Venezuelan flag with a yellow pressed long sleeve dress shirt which denotes his white-collar work inside the air conditioning instead of the heat on the streets of Caracas. El Libertador's work clothes are reminiscent of President Chávez's iconic work shirts and military clothes that have become his signature style, symbolically connecting him to the working class and the 'people'. This informal style contrasts with the previous presidents Carlos Andrés Perez and Rafael Caldera, both of whom were continuously photographed in suits and formal attire symbolically connecting them with big business and Venezuelan wealth. The clothes in this scene help to strengthen a visual contrast between these two characters while also hinting at the symbolic use of clothing in Venezuela's current government in attempts to break with Venezuela's past not only literally but also symbolically.

As the scene changes there is a close-up of a gun-like object that is actually the nozzle of a gasoline pump. This image, accompanied by the scene's dramatic music, further strengthens the gun-gasoline-life metaphor and makes more explicit the reality of oil, or in this case gasoline, as Venezuela's lifeline, a reference that was previously avoided in Doña Bárbara.
The camera slowly changes to a medium night shot and we see that El Libertador waits as a man fills the gas tank of his yellow motorcycle. El Libertador is still in his blue work shirt sits with his red helmet on, and the yellow motorcycle continues with the omnipresent tricolor Venezuelan flag representation (8:45). As El Libertador pays the gas attendant, a picture of a woman falls from his wallet. The dramatic music continues as the camera shows robbers breaking into the dark community hardware store.

Next the camera flashes to introduce the audience to a very important character in the plot and in the analysis of this film: Palo de Agua, whose name literally means 'rainstorm'. The dramatic music abruptly ends as we meet this homeless man pushing his rattling shopping cart filled with used bottles, cans, trash, and other unwanted items. This homeless man's innocent night stroll is a foil to the following scene of close-ups of hands smashing glass cases and stealing various tools from the hardware store. The music switches again and we hear the engine of El Libertador's taxi as he returns from filling up with gas and stops to say hello to the homeless man, Palo de Agua, who looks ecstatic to see him. The homeless man hurries over to shake El Libertador's hand and continues nervously repeating with great urgency to El Libertador "¡Va a llover, va a llover!" El Libertador tells him "¡Que no está lloviendo, Palo de Agua! ¡Mira no hay ni una nube!"

After talking to Palo de Agua we see El Libertador on his motorcycle returning home at night through the barrio. In this frame we also see another one of the urban murals that serves as a backdrop for El Libertador and his motorcycle. These urban murals are more than examples of public art or subliminal messages --the symbols throughout this movie are anything but subliminal. Instead they are direct messages that reinforce El Libertador's words. In this particular mural the urban graffiti mural includes
the words "Vida de Ciudad" and depicts elements and idiosyncrasies of Caracas urban life including a tri-color umbrella stand that serves as an informal call center, the omnipresence of stagnant traffic and irate gesticulating drivers, a person digging through the trash and people dressed in bright clothing. The image is a street scene that highlights informal urban life in the public spaces of Caracas. This informal life is in stark contrast with the upstanding helmet-wearing protagonist that slows down in front of the mural looking towards the left, similar to the sticker of a portrait of Bolívar that comes into view on his windshield. He slows down and notices the light on in the second floor of the De Sousa Hardware Store. The next scene shows a car with a missing fog light that is parked in the tight space between two poorly cared for buildings. This small detail contrasts with El Libertador's safe and well-maintained motorcycle. The missing fog light hints at the less than legal activity within the store. While a simple detail, in the context of the vital significance of the vehicle in the Caracas daily life, it is yet another detail that adds to the binary relationship between good and evil where good in this movie is humorously and ironically defined by vehicle safety.

Behind the car we see a mixture of different power lines hanging low and attached from various buildings in many directions. This further develops the reference to the looming illegal activity that is occurring in the store. However, the mess of power lines also represents the ugly side of development— the 'development' gone wrong. Instead of the assumption that modernity brings progress, we can see the lack of progress or the underdevelopment that Santos Luzardo did not have in mind when he praised the civilized city center.
This dark alley with the robbers' parked car contrasts with the well-lit streets and storefronts where we see El Libertador. As El Libertador carries his helmet and quietly spies on the robbers filling the car with stolen goods, they grab him. The three robbers are dressed in black in stark contrast with El Libertador's light blue work shirt. With a gun to his stomach, the lead robber Chaparro, with a missing tooth, a gold chain and a darker face, says to the other two robbers: "Se cree [El Libertador] la reencarnación del padre de la patria." This is the first of various confrontations El Libertador will have with the robbers. Here we see the gold chain, bad teeth and effeminate clothing, differences repeatedly associated with evil throughout the film that begin to draw the connection between the robbers, the corrupt police chief, criminality and femininity. This use of explicit color and costume symbolism is similar to that used in Doña Bárbara: Marisela is dressed in white throughout the film and Doña Bárbara in black. In El Libertador good is represented by the colors of the Venezuelan flag in functional work clothes while evil is dressed in formal white-collar clothes, jewelry, suits, or black and purple clothes and masks of robbers.

In this scene two of the robbers beat up El Libertador while the third vandalizes his motorcycle, paying close attention to vandalize the patriotic stickers, scratching out and attempting to erase Bolivar's quotes: Justicia, Libertad, and the face of Bolívar. This is symbolic of the robbers directly violating the words of the founding father; their actions are un-Venezuelan. The scene ends with Chaparro saying "cuidado con lo que dices" (12:29). Again we see the recurring topic of language; El Libertador continually quotes Bolívar, whose words demand upstanding behavior. By scratching out the quotes the robbers are attempting to silence Bolívar's words that surround the city, not only in El
Libertador's speeches but also throughout the city in the form of murals. We will see that the robbers' efforts are made in vain since Bolívar has left an indelible print on this city and its people. This also hints at the power of language; El Libertador is considered a threat not because of violence but rather his words. These words are omnipresent even on stickers ironically and comically considered threatening to the armed robbers.

As the trio drive away El Libertador is left bleeding on the ground--the scene shows a bloody El Libertador in sky blue clothing, a red object on the ground and the yellow motorcycle, and again the audience is reminded of the omnipresent flag of Venezuela. The only character that comes to his rescue and appears with his shopping cart is the homeless Palo de Agua. Upon seeing El Libertador, Palo de Agua tries to lift his spirits by showing him a book that he pulls out of the 'trash' from his shopping cart. He opens to a picture of Simón Bolívar that reads "Documentos del Libertador". The picture that we see is the profile of Simón Bolívar's face and the exact same close-up of El Libertador's face. The only differences are the elegant clothing of Simón Bolívar and El Libertador's bloodstained face and uniform, and Bolívar's pale face compared to El Libertador's darker face. Palo de Agua's innocent cart of 'trash' proves to be deceptively important in this scene since hidden amongst the 'trash' are images of Bolívar. This helps to establish Palo de Agua's patriotism and loyalty that we will later see as he becomes the previously overlooked character turned hero of the movie as a result of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Palo de Agua, stuttering, tells El Libertador to use the picture to cover the ruined stickers of Bolívar on his motorcycle: "Bolívar, aquí, aquí, calcomanía, aquí" (13:32). He answers "Gracias, Palo de Agua, pero hace falta más que eso" (13:45). As El Libertador
picks up his motorcycle to walk away, Palo de Agua picks up the red object that is lying on the ground--it is the mask of one of the robbers. This is symbolic of what is to come--a masked El Libertador with the help of Palo de Agua will break down the police chief's security façade and will expose the institutional corruption in his community.

The following scene jumps to another form of public art prominent in this film: the tattoo. In a close-up of the Venezuelan flag with Bolívar on horseback the camera zooms out to show that this depiction of Bolívar is a tattoo on El Libertador's back. As his mother cries over El Libertador while she tends to his face, we see in the background another framed painting of Bolivar and the tri-color flag of Venezuela. El Libertador's son Simón enters the house asking for a blessing and reaches for a beer in the refrigerator. Here we see on the refrigerator three magnets of the forefathers--the kitsch and popular mixes with the historical and nearly sacred.

Simón, who while dressed with piercings and chains in a Venezuelan school uniform, looks strikingly similar to the omnipresent profile of Simón Bolívar. As El Libertador reprimands his son for not studying enough and drinking, we see a cross dangling from El Libertador's neck--he makes his son recite the words of Simón Bolívar about an intense work ethic. While the camera shows El Libertador's patriotic tattoos we also see his muscular bare chest, showing that El Libertador is not only the upstanding leader of the community that pays attention to the homeless and protects his community, but also he is Christian, handsome and physically fit. Later while his son sleeps, the camera zooms in on the photo Simón wears around his neck on his bare chest--it is the same picture that El Libertador carries in his wallet. We will later find out that it is a picture of Simón's deceased mother.
On Simón's bare body we see a tattoo that reads "justicia" (16:11). By tattooing the words and images of Simón Bolívar on the strong bodies of these men, we see an attempt to bring Bolívar's words into today's world and aesthetic. These tattoos, similar to the graffiti murals, show the relevance of Bolívar's example in a contemporary setting and a reawakening in the collective memory about the founders of Venezuela. However, instead of attempting to return to that time, these contemporary cultural artifacts bring life and contemporary meaning to the words of the founding fathers in today's world, showing a close relationship between Bolívar's words and the body. Similar to the relationship between the urban murals and the walls of the city, the words have become part of the body of these individuals and cannot be separated from them. The mark that these words and murals have on both the body of the individual and the urban center are nearly indelible. In this context to be Venezuelan and heroic is to embody Bolívar's words and actions in a contemporary society or, better said, to follow Bolivarianism.

Returning to the debate scene in the consejo comunal, the Bolivariana in the red shirt is the 'true' Venezuelan. With this reading, to be against Bolivarianism is to be against Bolívar and the fabric of the Venezuelan body and urban center. Opposing this common binary populist discourse opposition would be un-Venezuelan.

The camera zooms to an extreme close-up on Simón's body as he moves in his sleep, taking a profile pose against the red pillow case with blue and yellow designs, and he has a striking resemblance to the picture of the bust of Bolívar that Palo de Agua had previously shown El Libertador. Next we see a portrait of three people in the background of this scene. Through the camera superimposing Bolívar's painting over Simón's sleeping profile and followed by El Libertador's thoughtful face looking towards the sky
over the painting of Bolívar--the camera establishes a new trinity of Venezuela and reinforces the Bolivarian project that links this reading of the past with the present--the sacred with the ordinary--replacing the trinity that El Libertador's cross represents with a different trinity.

Accompanied by melodramatic music, El Libertador replays in his mind a blurry scene in slow motion where he walks down a dark street with the woman pictured in his son's necklace. As El Libertador strolls with this woman two masked men with guns rob him, but although he defends her, the robbers shoot and kill the woman from the wallet photograph. With the sound of the gun shot the camera returns to the bruised face of El Libertador, and through flashbacks we hear similar voices as he replays the previous scene of the robbers beating him up. The music is similar, and the blurry focus of the camera is the same. We then see beside his bed a large horizontal portrait of Bolívar standing holding the constitution in his left hand. The portrait of an elegantly dressed Bolivar is slightly above El Libertador's head as he looks down onto El Libertador (17:35).

In a later scene we see Palo de Agua at night rummaging through the trash outside of a bar while a man informally sells coffee out of decanters in the street. In the trash Palo de Agua finds red socks; as he puts them on he notices the police chief grab a woman as she passes by, and the chief is friendly with the man that had beaten up El Libertador the night before. The robber is easily recognizable due to the lightning bolts shaved into his closely shaved hair. Neither of them notices Palo de Agua, but Palo de Agua recognizes the voices of the robbers. For many he is an invisible character in the barrio, but he pieces together the previous night's robbery and corrupt dealings with the
police. Palo de Agua enters the bar and buys a beer with the few coins he has. Still unnoticed by the police chief, he overhears the police chief planning the next robbery with the thief.

The camera quickly changes to El Libertador as he cleans his wounds in the mirror. We see a profile shot of El Libertador that is strikingly similar to the stickers of Bolívar stuck to the mirror that he is using to tend to his wounds (20:45). He is interrupted by a voice calling to him "¡Libertador, Libertador!" He heads to the balcony to find Palo de Agua and asks:

El Libertador: ¿Tú estás loco?

Palo de Agua: ¡Va a llover, va a llover, Libertador! ¡Baja, baja, baja!

El Libertador: No, no va a llover, chico. ¡Anda a dormir!

Palo de Agua: ¡Baja, baja, baja!

El Libertador heads outside to talk to Palo de Agua but first hands Palo de Agua a sandwich. As Palo de Agua hungrily eats he shows El Libertador the red mask that he had found the night of the robbery beside El Libertador's bruised body. Using gesticulations, pantomime and broken language, Palo de Agua explains to El Libertador who the robbers were and their plan for the next break-in. At this point El Libertador asks for Palo de Agua's help, and together they devise a plan to lead the police chief to the site of the next planned robbery to catch the robbers in the act.

Instead of protecting the barrio against crime, the police chief waits to meet with a date just as the three robbers break into the photography shop. With the sirens on, the policeman waits for his date and asks the robbers not to make their break-in so obvious. The lead robber rolls a joint in front of the police chief and explains that he does not need
to worry; therefore the police chief ignores the break-in. The plan to have the police chief catch the robbers in the act fails, and El Libertador has to take justice into his own hands. El Libertador steals the stolen goods back and returns the goods to the consejo comunal instead of turning them over to the corrupt police.

In this dichotomy between good and evil, the definitive example of good is Palo de Agua, the character that embodies the good of the barrio and the barrio in general. A previously ignored part of the community, he is the character that has the power to solve the mystery of the corruption and delinquency in the neighborhood. However, if he has the answer to the mystery, before El Libertador's leadership, Palo de Agua was a forgotten member of society whom no one could understand or bothered to listen to. The theme of language resurfaces as we analyze this character. He does not 'speak' the same language as the other members of the community. Instead his grunts and anxious yelps are ignored as if he were the barbaric, animal or childlike character in this foundational fiction. In this sense Palo de Agua is one of the Marisela-like characters. El Libertador pays attention to him and decodes his language by communicating and listening to him while also caring for him by giving him food. In turn Palo de Agua is El Libertador's most loyal follower. Continuing the complex topic of language, El Libertador realizes by paying attention to Palo de Agua, that not only is he not unintelligible and childlike, but also that he has plenty to say that will save both El Libertador and the community from the theft in the barrio. He is the missing link in the barrio, and rather than ignore him, or cover his "barbaric" uncivilized language with the grammar school that Marisela is subject to, he alternatively shows that although he has been considered barbaric and
childlike, he is the true hero of the movie. El Libertador listens to what Palo de Agua has to say and in both cases his predictions prove to be true.

In a later scene El Libertador waits at the red light as we see his fellow moto-taxi driver return to wait for the light to turn green. As they wait Daisy calls El Libertador for his moto-taxi services. In this scene, El Libertador's decision to obey the traffic laws enables him also to hear the phone ring--reinforcing the importance of obeying the traffic laws, or as Sommers discusses polis and eros. As the camera follows the ride to pick up Daisy, we see another important urban piece of art connecting the city center with the organized middle class neighborhood of Chacao. Unlike the previous graffiti murals, we see *Módulo cromático* by Venezuelan artist Juvenal Ravelo. This is a public-painted mural and has become a symbol of Caracas. It is an abstract mural composed of painted lines making a houndstooth design--not the direct message of the graffiti murals but still a symbol of previous examples of social consciousness and participation through art. This mural, unlike the others, was an installation made by surrounding communities and the artist himself to break down the exhibit walls and work with the community to beautify the city. Again we see a continuation of incorporating these city symbols with the imaginary and representations of Bolívar's narrative and central ideals.

During the conversation between El Libertador and Daisy as they pick up her sickly son from school, she asks about the origins of his name:

Daisy: “¿Cómo de verdad que te llamas el Libertador?”

El Libertador: “Correcto, señorita”

Daisy: “Tienes nombre de avenida”
Instead of associating El Libertador with Simón Bolívar, known for the independence of Latin America and son of what would become Venezuela, she relates his name to the main thoroughfare in Caracas, Libertador Avenue that runs the entire length of the city. This dialogue puts Daisy in the position of a naïve character unfamiliar with the history of her country. While the names, dates, and quotes are lost on her she learns to understand the lessons that El Libertador teaches her by his example through justice, following the law and safety. Even as this is a comedic and innocent representation of Daisy, it also plays with a representation of this character as needing to be educated and to learn about her own history by a knowledgeable, albeit somewhat anachronistic and paternalistic, character. This representation of Daisy reinforces her similarities with Marisela, and her need for a Santos Luzardo-like character. El Libertador will teach Daisy of the history of her country not only making her his girlfriend and future wife but also a knowledgeable citizen. Throughout the film this Bolívar-quoting hero’s words and references are lost on many of the people of this microcosm, showing the great need for El Libertador's project to educate his fellow community members about their history (or at least his and the official version of it).

Next we see El Libertador go to Palo de Agua's 'house' or space that he has occupied and made into a home with trash and a tarp. El Libertador brings him food and sits with him while he explains that they will need to continue their fight against the robberies and violence. El Libertador confers on Palo de Agua the role as his loyal companion as if bringing him into knighthood with Palo de Agua on one knee.

As the scene changes to the police station with Chief Linares, the robbers enter to talk to the chief. Chaparro threatens Chief Linares that he will no longer give him a piece
of the robbed goods unless the Chief catches the person that has interfered with their scheme. In this scene we see Chaparro looks strikingly similar to Chief Linares, further continuing the connection between corruption and effeminate features.

In a following scene El Libertador on his motorcycle takes Daisy to a side spot with plenty of light to give her a gift, a book: *Cartas de Amor entre Bolívar y Manuelita* (41:37) "para que veas donde me inspiro"- "eso quiere decir que tú no eres nada original" (42:00). She explains that the only things that she reads are the horoscope and the lottery, and if she were to win the lottery the only thing that she wants is the health of her child--the money to pay for a surgery. The scene ends in a long and passionate kiss between El Libertador and Daisy overlooking the barrios--showing this view as romantic rather than the usual fear associated with the barrios. Giving the book to Daisy resonates with the paternalist relationship with language between *Doña Bárbara's* Santos Luzardo and Marisela. Unlike Santos, El Libertador does not take Daisy to the center of Caracas to send her to school. Instead the first gift he gives her is a book of love letters between Simón Bolívar and his lover Manuelita; he encourages her to return to the words of the founding father. This scene further develops Sommer's theory that the national allegory in Latin America needs to combine love and politics (43).

In the next scene in the streets of the barrio Palo de Agua looks through the trash. The three robbers enter and one hits Palo de Agua on the head and asks, "¿Qué pasa, Palo de Agua? ¿Estás buscando un café con leche?" (45:42). The robbers laugh at Palo de Agua, adding to his invisibility or scorn in this community. Later Palo de Agua and El Libertador enter the hideout of the robbers and re-steal the stolen goods to return them to De Sousa.
The camera next shows another meeting in the consejo comunal with seats still facing the police chief, not fostering a participatory environment. As the people and the police officer, of mixed background similar to El Libertador, celebrate the returned goods and justice, the police chief Linares explains that "De Sousa sigue siendo el principal sospechoso" (48:01). There is a disconnect between the police administration and the police and, while these meetings take place in the consejo comunal, they still are not participatory and are run by the police chief. During the meeting, in defense of the mysterious person that is returning the goods and bringing justice to the barrio, De Sousa's wife says that he is a "santo", and Leticia says, "Es un justiciero, es diferente, no es ningún maleante" (49:00). As the consejo comunal celebrates the mysterious justiciero, that is the savior they had been waiting for, the robbers glance at each other uncomfortably. This savior-like praise also echoes the first consejo comunal meeting when the community members waited for a leader to help them out of their adversity. Similar to Doña Bárbara's proposal to replace then dictator Gómez with another populist leader, El Libertador soon will replace the corrupt police officer's authority, but will continue to be a single nearly sacred figure that solves the problems of the community.

The camera then flashes to a scene in the chief's office, in yellow tinted light, with a mixture of similar kitsch items on the desk and a whiskey decanter in front of the fan; Chaparro says "tú eres un incompetente," and the chief answers "y tú eres un pendejo que te dejo robar" (49:09). "Mira si yo caigo caes tú" the thief Chaparro answers. This scene not only further articulates the questionable agreement between the police chief and the thief, it also adds to the recurring topic of language throughout the film. The informal and slang exchange between these two characters is in sharp contrast to El Libertador's
respectful formal speech in the consejo comunal. This scene reinforces the relationship between language and leadership.

The camera flashes to the center and daily chaos of Caracas, and as the salsa beat accompanies these scenes the justiciero makes the headlines of the newspapers. The camera focuses on a new urban mural: this time it reads "A correr hampones llegó el JUSTICIERO" (50:01). In these fictional murals, El Libertador replaces Bolívar's face just as one powerful leader replaces another.

In the next scene we see El Libertador and Daisy making love. While in bed, Daisy asks him to tell her the story of what happened to Simón's mother. As El Libertador has a flashback of the fateful night when they were held at gunpoint and his wife was killed, he says "Luego te cuento, mi Libertadora" (53:30). In this line we can see that El Libertador also needs to be liberated or freed from his past and nightmares over the night of his wife's murder. His relationship with Daisy is beginning to heal the wound from that fearful night, and in his work in justice he is also helping himself understand that night. There is a symbiotic relationship in the community, where the community is also helping El Libertador feel useful again. In this scene similar to Gallegos's novel, El Libertador is part of a Venezuelan love story of the nation through fusion in the form of marriage. Marisela and Luzardo are both libertadores, the same as El Libertador and Daisy--he teaches her to be a better citizen and she helps free him from his past.

In the following scene we see a long shot of Daisy and her son both dressed in yellow, navy blue and red, walking to school--this is in contrast with Daisy's previous clothing. Chaparro in his purple shirt and black pants starts to flirt with Daisy and to
remind her that Junior's father William was his good friend--and that if she ever needed anything he would help her with her son's health. Chaparro tries to court Daisy, who is obviously steadfast in her love for El Libertador, in attempts to wedge himself between El Libertador and Daisy to force El Libertador to stop interfering with his schemes. This also creates the beginnings of a type of love or power triangle that will develop in difficult moments throughout the plot and is fundamental in a Latin American melodrama.

Jumping to the next scene, Palo de Agua proves to outwit the robbers with his shopping cart filled with "trash" which serves as the perfect place to hide the re-stolen goods. Palo de Agua outmaneuvers the robbers and police and returns the stolen goods to El Libertador, carrying them unnoticed in his cart of 'trash' through the streets of the barrio. As he hands the stolen goods to El Libertador, trying to explain in broken syllables an unintelligible explanation of what happened to the robbers, El Libertador understands him and translates his words into 'correct' Spanish. Suddenly it begins to rain torrentially, like a palo de agua, and el Libertador exclaims, "¡Tenías razón! ¡Palo de Agua, está lloviendo!" (105:30).

This scene shows El Libertador and Palo de Agua as a team and Palo de Agua's vital role in catching the robbers and the stolen goods. Palo de Agua is not only El Libertador's assistant, but also he is the one that originally discovered the robbers' plan and is hiding the merchandise to return it to its rightful owner. In this case the police and criminals do not acknowledge Palo de Agua's existence; they also discount him as a possible threat to their schemes. As it begins to rain, the rain also symbolizes that Palo de Agua was correct and that although many in the barrio consider him to be crazy or not
communicating 'correctly', he was in fact telling the community of what was to come. El Libertador was the only one that listened to Palo de Agua.

In this triumphant scene, one of the robbers sees El Libertador and shoots, hitting Palo de Agua as the police car is pulling up with Chief Linares. Chief Linares does not even notice Palo de Agua writhing on the ground and is more interested in discovering who is behind the mask of the mysterious justiciero. When he finds it is El Libertador he happily handcuffs him telling him that he is under arrest, without tending to the wounded Palo de Agua. We see Palo de Agua as he lies on the ground stuttering from the wound with his white doll on his shoulder. He is a childlike character that saves the community but is not considered to be a full member of that same community. Instead of taking care of the wounded Palo de Agua, the chief demands that the officer thoroughly check El Libertador and take off his mask. When they find a gun on him Chief Linares has him taken away--without any explanation as to what his crime was. Throughout the entire scene Palo de Agua remains on the ground stuttering for help, but no one but El Libertador pays him any attention.

As the news makes the front page of the daily papers and the radio helps to tell the story that El Libertador was in fact the mysterious justiciero, the people come to demand his release. This is a wink at the powerful and hyperactive role of the media (both mainstream and alternative) in contemporary Venezuela.

Next the camera shows the people demanding his release behind a high white closed gate that separates the people from the officials. This scene is strikingly familiar and resembles the storming of Miraflores by the Chávez supporters during the coup d'état of April 12, 2002. The people yell as El Libertador sits in his cell waiting to be released
for a crime that he did not commit but is serving his time. If there was any doubt of the
metaphor of El Libertador as a modern Bolívar, the dialogue between an incarcerated El
Libertador and Chief Linares with cell bars separating the two clarifies any remaining
doubts:

Chief Linares: Te metiste en un lío, ¿sabes?... Ahora lo que no entiendo, Morales, es por
qué y para qué.

El Libertador: La dispensación de la justicia consiste en la libertad práctica y en el
cumplimiento estricto de las leyes para que el justo y el débil no teman.

Chief Linares: ¡Jajajajaja!

In this scene Chief Linares on one side of the cell bar directly faces El Libertador. The
camera offers a close-up on the pale, pasty face of Chief Linares. This close-up also
reveals an effeminate mouth faintly painted red with lipstick, and a large gap between his
stained teeth. In contrast, on the other side of the bars, we see the shadow of the cell bar
on the profile of El Libertador. He does not face Chief Linares to speak to him, and
instead we only see El Libertador's profile as he speaks and stares forward into his cell.
In this continuous profile shot we see a resemblance between El Libertador and the many
profile images of Simón Bolívar throughout the film from high art to stickers. The
dialogue between El Libertador and Chief Linares ends with Chief Linares threatening El
Libertador saying: "Por ley y sin ley, tú vas preso. Por tus pensamientos y todo para que
sigas pensando y pensando pero allá en el penal." Meanwhile unjustly serving his time in
jail, El Libertador asks Daisy to be his wife.

As the people protest outside of the police department, the community people
speak to the media that swarm the demonstration. The woman that had been previously
referred to as Bolivariana in the consejo comunal meeting says in her interview with the press, "ese hombre es la reencarnación de Bolívar" (1:09:15). The surprising interview is by the woman that previously had tried to insult her by calling her chavista. The woman that previously had stated that she did not consider Chávez her president gave a passionate testimony on behalf of El Libertador, "Ese muchacho es un héroe" (109:16).

These two women that beforehand stood on opposite sides of the same issue join in support of El Libertador. While these women finally come together and agree to support the same leader of their community, both continue to look towards another to lead instead of realizing the participatory initiative.

This scene not only proves the innocence and lack of justice in the imprisonment of the community hero El Libertador, but also the Venezuelan media and audience's obsession with dramatic representation and the search for a hero. The over-abundance of media is also reminiscent of the previous 2002 coup, the omnipresence of the media and the dramatization of events and testimonies for the media. The media follow to interview Palo de Agua as he is released from the hospital. While on camera, Palo de Agua says, "'Va a llover. Va a llover" and is quickly disregarded by the reporter as she faces the camera with a look of confusion about his last utterances. This treatment by the media highlights an inability to represent and understand the 'true' hero of this story. As El Libertador is released the media swarm around him and do not allow him to get to his people, but instead try to change the story. In this scene the media forms a type of barrier that separates a hero from his people. This barrier is reminiscent of the opening scene with the chain-link fence that separates the mural of Bolivar from the people. While the looming reporter tries to reshape El Libertador's story, he responds "Chequea la
This brief exchange with the reporter Criticizes the role of the media in Venezuela, echoing the current tensions between media and politics.

While celebrating in the streets, El Libertador looks for Daisy, and his mother says that she is at the hospital since Junior is badly in need of an operation, but that Daisy does not have the money. He tells her, "confie en nosotros". The camera returns to the consejo comunal, this time to help raise money for Junior's operation. While the police officer, Chief Linares, is not present, the community members still look to El Libertador to collaborate for donations for Junior. El Libertador takes the collected money to Daisy for her son's surgery; instead he finds that, to El Libertador's disgust, Chaparro has already paid for the surgery with his stolen money. The scene is crucial to further developing the necessary power/love triangle necessary to melodrama combining the public and personal.

When El Libertador returns home he is intercepted by Chaparro and his two helpers that beat him up; as this is happening and they are about to kill El Libertador, the community runs out and beats up the three of them with frying pans, bottles, and plungers, saving El Libertador. The pouring of the people onto the streets to protect their leader is strikingly similar to the events of the 2002 coup, further strengthening the reading of President Chávez as El Libertador to the Venezuelan people. The police, no longer led by Chief Linares who is now in prison, take the three in handcuffs to the police department.

Next we see this story make headlines in various newspapers. The continuous inclusion of newspapers in this movie shows the bombardment of messages that the
Venezuelan people are faced with, from constant street art, urban murals, graffiti, portraits, stickers of founding fathers, and a great amount of tattoos (even the tattoos have a political content); the media takes an active part in reacting to, telling about and also in forming Venezuelan realities and hold a great amount of weight and circulation in the society. Nothing is silent in this movie -- even the walls and jewelry have an explicit message.

After this scene, we then see Junior in the hospital and a close-up on Daisy. She asks El Libertador to forgive her. El Libertador takes the money that the community had raised in donations and gives it instead to a couple in need in the community, and soon El Libertador is made el nuevo comisario: Deputy.

The camera then returns to the East of Caracas where El Libertador, back to driving a moto-taxi, sees his friend Leo again. This time, the fellow taxi driver is wearing a helmet-- an extremely fashionable one at that. They chat as they wait together at a red light. Leo makes his passenger wear a helmet, too; it is the same passenger that had previously made fun of El Libertador's safe driving in the opening scenes of the movie. While waiting at the red light, El Libertador receives a call from Daisy asking for him to come and pick her and Junior up from the hospital. El Libertador leaves smiling for the hospital.

The film begins and ends with the exact characters in relatively the same place in Caracas; this time we see much less chaotic streets, without choking traffic. The people follow the traffic laws, and the dialogue ends with Leo saying: "Ya me puse el casco, me tapé la mecha, arreglé la luz, ¿qué más quieres?" In the credits, the salsa music begins again and we see the movie continue with the wedding between El Libertador and Daisy
with a veil on her helmet. We then see El Libertador Morales on one of the talk shows from cable television in Venezuela: it shows a superficial, blonde woman interviewing El Libertador. El Libertador is clearly out of place and uncomfortable with the trivial questions that she asks, while the talk show host does not know to address him:


El Libertador: "No es una decisión, no señorita, es un deber. Yo no podía cruzarme de brazos viendo como gobierna el hampa y como los representantes de la ley se hacen de la vista gorda. Bolívar dijo una vez, y eso es muy en serio, Señorita, 'no basta con ser un pueblo libre y fuerte sino que hay que ser virtuoso'."

Periodista: "Tienes toda la razón Libertador, o justiciero. ¿Puedo llamarte justiciero?"

El Libertador: "¿Usted quiere?"

Periodista: "¡Uy sí, que lindo! Y Bueno eso de arriesgar tu vida, es como muy peligroso, ¿no?..."

El Libertador: "La presencia del peligro y de las dificultades estimulan mi espíritu..."

Periodista: "¿Sí?"

In this closing scene once again we see the shallow role of the media that is a constant throughout this film. The media's trivial coverage and position in society is gendered, represented by female reporters often twisting rather than revealing local stories and overlooking the real heroes, as is the case with Palo de Agua. Citing imported versions of
heroes instead of using local points of reference, this final representation shows the media is incapable of comprehending the patriotic acts of El Libertador and the importance of the participatory revolution badly needed in Venezuela, and looks outward to the US and Europe for heroic models--"Batman and Robin". The media is portrayed as a shallow obstacle rather than a forum to relay and discuss what is happening at the grassroots level.

This film also shows the epitome of the construction of the modern hero, the new man and woman in Venezuela, the importance of having faith in collective strength and the need to fix or replace the broken and corrupt justice system. *El Libertador's* plot and character development reflect the contemporary discourse celebrating popular participation, community responsibility and ethics with the negative opposition of individualism, corruption and a lack of devotion to the community--and in turn the nation.

3.4 *El Libertador Morales* vs *Doña Bárbara*--Different Objective with a Similar Recipe

The film's plot shares a codified binary system of right and wrong, patriot and thief similar to the canonical novel *Doña Bárbara*, however the binary system has changed drastically. The protagonist is now the racially mixed local hero that relies on the words of the founding fathers rather than the broken laws and justice system. In this version the Europeans look to the local barrio member to rescue them from corruption. Finally the poor and incoherent Palo de Agua is not a brute to be civilized but rather an overlooked hero that helps to rid the barrio of injustice.
Both narratives have arrived to the scene at crucial points of political change in the history of Venezuela serving as a model for the future and the ideal "new" citizens that join different Venezuelans together through love and marriage. Both stories end in 'bliss' and 'stability' where good defeats evil and the male heroes 'civilize' the females. These protagonists are upstanding men that believe in the law, ethics and justice. In their attempts to help save their communities they fall in love with women less 'educated' than they are and that do no speak in the same register as they do. Santos Luzardo and El Libertador teach their female loves the ways of justice, civilization and language as they work to conquer evil in their communities.

While female characters are the students of Santos and El Libertador; the evil characters in both narratives are also feminine. In the case of El Libertador the narrative does not have a female antagonist per se, however, throughout the film the characters that represent evil are consistently effeminate. The close-ups on Chief Linares, Chaparro and the fellow thieves reveal feminine expressions, traces of make-up, thin bodies noticeably smaller than El Libertador, and wearing bracelets, rings, and necklaces. Also the vapid and superficial news reporters, that attempt to distort the heroic stories from the barrio, are female characters as well. In both cases the contemporary narrative continues Doña Bárbara's gendered representation of male civilization and female or effeminate barbarism.

El Libertador and Doña Bárbara, while alike, reflect the difference in contemporary political discourse in much the same way that Caliban answers to the Uruguayan work Ariel. If Santos Luzardo went to the llano to sell his family's lands on the plain and return to the city of Caracas to teach Marisela the civilized ways of the city
with demarcated lands, fences, and laws, El Libertador shows the problems lurking beneath this idealized version of the city that Marisela will find upon arrival. Unlike Luzardo, civilization, while still clearly defined in this narrative, is not found protected behind gates and fences or behind the façade of objective law and justice system. Instead in this narrative we see that gates, such as the safe doors of the police station only protect barbarity. The prison bars separate El Libertador from his freedom and from the people of his community, while at the same time protect and foster corruption. The corruption that the justice system protects is Chief Linares, like Doña Bárbara, the internal threat to justice within the barrio and Chaparro and his gang of robbers, similar to Mr. Danger, the external partners in the rampant barrio crime.

We also see that while the fence is the symbol of civilization and progress for Santos Luzardo, ironically, instead of 'progress' the urban fences help make the home for the homeless where Palo de Agua ties his tarps to create a 'home' in the street. The fence also separates rather than connects the people and obstructs communication as the community members are left outside the gates of the prison and demand that El Libertador is set free. In the end of the film the fence serves its original purpose and the film concludes with the police chief behind bars.

We see that it is not the fence, bars, or city alone that protect justice, civilization and the law but rather the participation of the people themselves. In El Libertador we see that the police chief--the symbol of the state's bureaucracy, does not protect civilization. Instead, he facilitates corruption and the thieves that do not respect the law, personal property, or contribute to society. In this sense the law is used to exploit rather than protect civilization showing the holes in Santos Luzardo's original plan.
While the two foundational male heroes share various characteristics, they differ greatly in their personal backgrounds. Santos Luzardo is a man from the plains of Arauca and a graduate from law school in Caracas that longs to live in Europe (i.e. 'true civilization'). Unlike Santos Luzardo, we know that El Libertador is a humble former policeman that drives a moto-taxi throughout the city of Caracas and lives with his mother and the child he had with his deceased wife. He does not look to Europe to find his utopia; he finds his ideal in Bolívar's words, deeds and the history of Venezuela. In the last scene of the movie, while the credits roll the superficial talk show host says it best "[El justiciero] es venezolanísimo". As Santos looks to Europe, in the barrio scenes we see that not only does El Libertador idealize a Venezuelan founding father instead of looking to Europe; also from the European consejo comunal meeting, we realize that Europeans have immigrated to Venezuela to live in the barrio in Caracas.

At first glance this is an incredibly problematic representation of the barrio since it is a European version of the barrio. However if we consider this European representation of the barrio--or melting pot combining Venezuelans born in Venezuela, mixes of 'races', and Europeans, in light of Santos Luzardo's ideal of Europe, then we see Venezuela as the new ideal. As a place that is so ideal the Europeans left their previous utopian countries to live here with El Libertador, el consejo comunal, and the urban works of art of Bolívar. The new ideal is not only Venezuela but in particular the barrio. Previously represented as the barbarity within the civil city we see that the barrio is not the cause of barbarity, but rather the corruption comes from the old system: Chief Linares himself.
One distinctive sign of civilization and barbarity in *Doña Bárbara* was language. Santos Luzardo took Marisela to Caracas to correct her language so she would speak 'properly'. As language is a form of power and to correct one's language is a form of stripping their identity, we see a different relationship with language in El Libertador from the very first dialogue in the film. In this narrative the dialogues between characters add to the representation of local identity and humor. The movie begins with the motorist Jaleo saying to el Libertador, “Coño, Libertador, ¿será que tú nunca te vas a comer una luz roja? Vale, no jo…”’. This opening comment shows Jaleo's surprise towards the law abiding ways of its main character while also highlighting his popular informal Caracas slang, further strengthening the local flavor of this film and its popular discourse. El Libertador’s response to this question is equally telling of Venezuelan contemporary discourse, consistently including Bolívar's words in everyday life, “Nunca, Jaleo, nunca, a lo decía el homónimo ‘La enseñanza de las buenas costumbres y los hábitos sociales es esencial, señor, y hay que dar ejemplos’”. Two seconds after explaining the importance of justice to his fellow moto-taxi driver in a high convoluted language, a passerby hits el Libertador’s helmet and el Libertador yells in popular informal slang: “Bueno, ¿Qué Pasó? Vale”.

This combination of Bolivar's quotes, comedy, jokes and timing is similar to President Chavez's own current political discourse that also weaves nineteenth century nation-building language with contemporary Venezuelan slang. This fusion of language makes El Libertador’s, and Chávez's, statements accessible to the audience throughout the film and softens the pedantic quotes of Simón Bolívar and other Venezuelan founding
fathers. Echoing Chávez's peculiar hybrid language also strengthens the reading of this well-liked character as a fictional version of Chávez.

The hybrid language is also a reminder of place; it gives context to the Caracas slang and Bolívar's letters--a vital part of contemporary political discourse. But unlike Santos Luzardo, El Libertador shows that the city is a fusion of various languages and cultures. To return to Luzardo's division between civilization and barbarism, the two would co-exist in this microcosm of the barrio in the city of Caracas. Instead of the city only representing civilization and culture, corruption is also rampant in Libertador's representation of the city. 'Barbarity' is therefore redefined in *El Libertador* to represent corruption, stealing, breaking traffic laws and even littering. 'Civilization', unlike in the world of *Doña Bárbara*, is redefined as patriotism, participation in working towards a better community, taking responsibility for one's actions and learning about the founders of Venezuela. This version fractures the representation of the city as the embodiment of civilization. Instead civilization and barbarity share the urban space. However in attempts to break with the representation of civilization and barbarity in previous representations of Venezuela such as *Doña Bárbara's* idealization of the city, and *Soy un delincuente's* representation of the barrio as the womb of delinquency, *El Libertador* falls into the same trap of spatial barriers. The barrio is represented as an idealized community space of love with a few rotten characters from the old bureaucracy and higher class such as the police chief. Instead of continuing the breakdown of the dichotomy between civilized city and barbaric countryside or civilized urban center and barbaric barrio, *El Libertador* reinforces another dichotomy. This time the civilized area is the barrio and the robbers and police chief that interfere with the barrio are the barbaric members that need to be
disposed of. In each case, *Doña Bárbara, Soy un delincuente*, and *El Libertador*, the
explicit dichotomy between good and evil is maintained--only shifting are the characters
and spaces that constitute good and evil.

Further continuing the topic of language and civilization, towards the end of the
film when Palo de Agua is released from the hospital the comical scene between the
mainstream media interviewer and Palo de Agua serves not only as a comical relief but
also to illustrate the media's lack of understanding of the language of the poor and
homeless. As Palo de Agua exits, the television reporter rushes to ask him questions
about his heroic deed and his only answer is "Va a llover. Va a llover" with a large smile.
The reporter looks puzzled at the camera as the image quickly changes. It highlights the
reporter's inability to listen to this continuously excluded and ignored character. This
scene in particular, while brief and funny, is suggestive of Spivak's essay, "Can the
subaltern speak?" In her work she explains that instead of imposing a language of power
on the marginal, the person of power, academic, etc, needs to learn to listen to the
subaltern. In this sense, El Libertador, unlike the television reporter, knows how to listen
to Palo de Agua instead of merely ignoring his words, which is the role of the person of
power that Spivak proposes. However by listening to Palo de Agua, El Libertador
becomes the great hero of the movie, which ultimately falls into the same traps that
Spivak warns against: using the subaltern for one's own purposes. El Libertador is the
celebrated hero due to the words and ideas of the ignored character Palo de Agua. The
liberation of the barrio and El Libertador's heroism depend on the invisibility of Palo de
Agua in this community.
Through film, *El Libertador* is able to bridge the gap between the western written history of the "Lettered City", or the cult of the written word, and the 'barbarity' of oral tradition. This bridge between both of these languages is able to survive due to the accessible film medium. In the end while El Libertador succeeds in teaching his fellow citizens to respect traffic, safety and justice: or the rule of law-- El Libertador, like Santos replaces Gómez, also single-handedly replaces Santos maintaining the heroic cult-like relationship to a sole leader to rescue the community from 'ignorance' and corruption. Cosmetically *El Libertador* is a drastic change for Venezuela but has a similar role of fatherly teacher to his people ultimately replacing one binary relationship of good and evil with another.

This film recycles Latin America's never fail melodrama. As Luisela Alvaray writes of *Doña Bárbara*: "In the end, romance overcomes all obstacles and reinforces conventional female and male roles" (36). However, in *El Libertador* the contemporary differences are who is writing and directing the narrative, the intended audience, and the celebrated hero. While the melodramatic formula remains the same this representation of the Venezuelan barrio makes El Libertador and public participation--or Chávez and the consejo comunal, the next logical steps for contemporary Venezuela attempting to break with its previous *Doña Barbara* past.
Chapter IV: Documentary Film in the Venezuelan National Film Platform:

Víctimas de la democracia & Venezuelan Petroleum Company

4.1 Introduction

The Venezuelan National Film Platform, established in 2005, not only sponsors fictional films but also supports documentaries that incorporate previously excluded perspectives on Venezuela's history to add to a more inclusive historical portrait of Venezuela. The various organizations that make up the National Film Platform have actively distributed these documentaries throughout the country with impressively large audiences and popular feedback. The Cinemateca Nacional has continuously incorporated and promoted these films through the regional and community film networks in repeated programs. Also through the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura's program Cine para Llevar, then Minister Héctor Soto began the free mass distribution of Venezuela's recent films from the National Film Platform on December 9, 2008. The initiative included eight of the most celebrated and well-received Venezuelan National Film Platform films as of 2008. The chosen Villa del Cine and CNAC films in DVD form were distributed at no cost with the Mission's weekly Todosadentro newspaper, in the daily newspaper Diario Vea, at various public points in the city of Caracas, and throughout the country in the extended omnipresent state-run bookstore network Las Librerías del Sur. According to then Cultural Minister Héctor Soto:

la propuesta exhibe un conjunto de filmes valiosos de la cinematografía venezolana que abordan diversos temas... este plan constituye la oportunidad de entender que el cine no solamente se debe ver en las salas de cine también puede entrar en el hogar, en un festival, puede formar parte de la crítica cinematográfica
a través de las revistas, es por ello que nosotros queremos diversificar las posibilidades para que el pueblo siga insertándose.

http://www.ministeriodelacultura.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6798&Itemid=192

The popular and free distribution of films included approximately seventy-six thousand DVDs. For this program the films that were chosen were *Miranda Regresa* (Luís Alberto Lamata), *Cipriano Castro, 100 Años de actualidad* (Laura Vásquez), *Víctimas de la Democracia* (Stella Jacobs), *Cuando la Brújula marcó el Sur* (Laura Vásquez), *Yo soy el Otro* (Marc Villa), *Orinoco* (Michael News), *Venezuela Petroleum Company* (Marc Villa), and *Puente Llaguno: Claves de una masacre* (Ángel Palacios). Of these eight films that were freely distributed throughout the country for three months, seven are documentary films. *Miranda Regresa* is the only non-documentary film included in the *Cine para Llevar* program. The program was another one of the ministry's efforts to disseminate Venezuelan film and further make Venezuelan films from the National Platform more accessible to people beyond the confines of the movie theater.

4.2 A Public Debate to Define Documentary

Considering this national film distribution effort, we can see the important role that documentary films have in the *Cine para Llevar* initiative and also in the National Film Platform. The ministry chose these films because of their cultural value and the stories that they represent. On a national level we see that *Cine para Llevar* is not the only program that promotes documentary film. The National Film Platform throughout its organizations reserves both funding and programming specifically for documentaries. The National Film Platform neatly divides financial and production support between
documentary and fictional films, allotting an amount of funding for established and amateur documentary makers. Although funding is allocated none of the organizations define what documentary is or how it differs (if at all) from the other funding category: fictional film.

While on a theoretical level the definitions of the genres are complicated, organizations within the National Film Platform such as the CNAC continue to offer separate funding for documentary and fiction. During the 2009 Margarita Venezuelan Film Festival's CNAC public presentation entitled *El Sistema Nacional de Medios Públicos* (that was cancelled and renamed *Quiero hacer mi película, ¿qué opciones tengo?*), the differences between documentary and fictional film came into question. During this presentation on funding, previously discussed in chapter one, a CNAC administrator presented on the web of funding and organizations from the National Film Platform. When the CNAC representative began to explain the types of funding that the CNAC offers through its open calls for scripts, he mentioned that there was a call for documentary and a separate call for fictional films. Upon mentioning these two open calls for works, a debate ensued among the audience members about what, if anything, was the difference between the two categories. Some audience members contributed by stating that documentary represented the "truth" while fiction was a made-up story. One participant inquired about funding, explaining that he wanted to make a film about a true story that had already happened, and therefore he was going to have to recreate the story. He asked the CNAC presenter if he should apply through the documentary or fiction category. When the participant asked this question another debate exploded on whether the project should be considered documentary or fiction. The CNAC official did not take
part in the conversation; instead he advised the participant to apply to the category that he felt best described his project. As the CNAC official explained this, various members of the audience were scandalized by the idea that documentary could be any less than the 'truth' and that there was subjectivity in determining the category of the film.

This ongoing debate highlights the unresolved issues surrounding these two genres. In an age of YouTube, reality TV, live news coverage, social media and the far-reaching investment in the Venezuelan National Film Platform, especially in terms of documentary, the continuous discussion of truth versus fiction, fact versus story is even more pertinent. The documentary genre combines many of the objectives of both testimonies and ethnography, presenting its ‘eye-witness’ accounts on the screen including both the language of the subjects of the film and the actual images of these subjects.

4.3 The Aesthetics of Documentary and its Role in Latin America

While documentary is also a subjectively produced cultural artifact, Bill Nichols, in his influential book *Introduction to Documentary*, elucidates the aesthetic of documentary and the making of a believable and ‘true’ film as a developed history of documentary making. Similar to the well-debated written genres of testimonio and ethnography, documentary also faces the challenges of narration, voice, and censorship through editing. However, unlike testimonio and ethnography, documentary is able to represent another’s story further supported by the use of images. To further discuss the origins of this problematic term we turn to Brian Winston’s work *Claiming the Real: the Griersonian documentary and its legitimations*. Here Winston builds on Nichols’ work on the history of documentary to further analyze the making of ‘truth’ in documentary.
He focuses his work on John Grierson, the founder of the British documentary film movement and Grierson's idea of documentary as "the creative treatment...of actuality" (16). Winston analyzes the contributions of Grierson to the realist documentary and explains that it was Grierson who first used the term documentary in English in 1926 when reviewing the film *Moana*. He further complicates the issue explaining that 'docu' comes from the word document or something written. The term document was considered a legal one and soon morphed into the concept that we have today of evidence. While the term itself raised the problem of genre, Winston goes on to explain that Grierson knew that he was making interpretations and not mimesis.

As documentary changed in England, so did documentary in the US. Winston attributes the founding of US documentary to filmmaker Robert Flaherty who explained that documentary blurred the lines of art and mechanical production. Flaherty, the first US successful documentary maker with his work *Nanook of the North* in 1922, used documentary to relay the argument or politics of his films (40). In this case documentary is a blatant ideological tool rather than merely a way to record proof. Although Winston focuses primarily on the British and US foundations of documentary through Grierson and Flaherty, his work on the ideology behind the use of documentary is considered to be foundational for documentary as a whole, especially in Latin America.

To further complicate the audience's concerns on defining documentary and fictional film, Bill Nichols in his definitive work on the introduction to documentary explains that "every film is a documentary": the difference is in the type of story that the film tells. He explains that we could divide the types of documentaries into "wish-fulfillment and documentaries of social representation" (1). In making this division,
Nichols further explains the use of documentaries of social representation (from here on *documentaries*), to explain that "documentaries do not simply stand for others, representing them in ways they could not do themselves, but rather they more actively make a case or argument; they assert what the nature of a matter is to win consent or influence opinion" (4). This final aspect of documentary is one that we need to consider when analyzing documentary; while often stripped of the aesthetics found in "wish fulfillment documentaries" (i.e. fictional films) a documentary is not innocent of a specific reading or viewpoint. While it has a relationship with historical figures or happenings often times shared with their audiences, it is still a construction of reality that remains creative: "Grierson's famous definition of documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality' undercuts the very claim to truth and authenticity on which the documentary depends" (24). Nichols' essential work on documentary highlights a crucial part of documentary--its argument or objective. Documentaries are often made to take a stand, prove a point, or reveal an underrepresented opinion; Nichols reveals that objectivity is not an option in documentary.

I would add that documentary not only makes an argument but also is able to make its argument and continue to appear objective through an aesthetic of reality. This documentary realistic aesthetic gains authority in how it is organized. The documentary often consists of testimonies from victims, eyewitness accounts, the appearance of "simple" cinematography (e.g. hand held cameras, basic zooms, few dazzling Hollywood camera tricks, simple soundtracks) and coupling first person testimony with the "voice of God," third person omniscient off camera narration. Documentary more often than not also includes plain clothes or simple costumes for its speakers, little make-up and special
effects, and close-ups on the first person witnesses combined with panoramic shots to give an almost encyclopedic sense of place.

Given the politics embedded in defining documentary there is no easy answer that would quickly quell the anxious discussion that arose on the Island of Margarita, Venezuela, over a definitive distinction between fiction and documentary film. The fiction versus documentary debate that occurred is one that has continued for over a hundred years without a resolution that rejects a pure binary system of both genres. It is safer to assume that there tends to be a certain type of treatment of images that tend to appear in documentary that tend not to be as prevalent in fictional films. We have seen in Latin American film works that combine both of these tendencies, and the results are powerful cultural artifacts that do not neatly fit into either of these constructed and limiting categories, e.g. Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea 's masterpiece *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*.

Latin America has had another relationship with the documentary genre that is intertwined with the interests of the various Latin American states. In Latin America the complications associated with documentary and the aesthetics of the 'real' date back to the early cinema of the region. In fact, part of the attraction to early cinema in Latin America was the scientific aesthetic film represented on the silver screen. As Ana López explains in her work *Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America*, "the cinema's veneer of scientific objectivity--its ability to display the physical world--perfectly rationalized its more thrilling appeals" (57). The ability to show the 'real' was part of the attraction to film. López further explains that in the case of Mexico, the region's film frontrunner, the advancements of film coincided with the scientific and positivist movement during the
Porfiriato: "[I]linking the cinema with the also new and booming illustrated press and arguing that it was against the medium's nature to lie" (58). This relationship between film and the 'real' was established with what would become known as documentary. In this association between the real and the movie screen, López writes that film became associated with the modern and civilized "thoroughly aligned with the civilizing desires of the urban modernizing elites and disassociated from the 'barbarism' of national 'others'" (57). In this relationship establishing the real with the movie screen, the possibility of early film to be anything but the truth was considered controversial. López writes of the 1896 controversy over the film *Duelo a pistola en el bosque de Chapultepec*, "a reconstruction shot by Lumière cameramen Bertrand von Bernard and Gabriel Veyre of a duel between two deputies" (58). The film resulted in controversy due to its nebulous relationship to the real—a relationship that was impossible to conceive given the celebrated scientific-like nature of film. López also explains that in the outrage over this film, the científicos worried about the "uninformed" mistaking this film for reality.

The arrival of film in Latin America produced a need to assert the modernity of Latin America, claim the identity of Latin America and to promote and define nationalism; it immediately became an identity-defining project. The arrival of film also coincided with the epoch's obsession with rationality, positivism, and scientific observation; thus film was used to “document” scientific experiments in Latin America and the medium’s inability to lie was celebrated. As the author shows, the Porfirian government in Mexico used film to celebrate the positive sides of the government while avoiding poverty and other devastating realities of modern life.
In order to match the focus on positivism "the filmmakers attempted to assume the impartiality required of the positivist historian and thus produced a spectacular transitional form that engaged narrative protocols while remaining wedded to documentary objectivity and that aimed...to inform" (68). In order to resemble the positivist history, López explains that the filmmakers (documentary makers) used the aesthetics of science to earn authority. In the Mexican Revolution film was used to claim impartiality, "assum[ing] the point of view of those in power" (68). In other words López shows from its beginnings in Latin America film held the quasi-scientific role of documentary that gained its authority through an aesthetic of the 'real' rather than the possibility to represent the 'real'.

While claiming the real Latin American film was linked with creating the national narrative and nation building. Ironically, throughout Latin America (excluding Mexico), the pioneers in Latin American film were first generation immigrants; this fact also lends itself to the fixation on portraying and defining national identity. In the case of Mexico, the revolutionaries became consumed with the use of film to create the revolutionary documentary beginning in 1913. Three years later, the Mexican film industry changed its focus, following the French film d’art, to create films distancing themselves from real-life portrayals and to leave the Revolution behind in hopes to better the image of Mexico in Hollywood. Here we see the first break in objectives and aesthetics--film was no longer being used to support national identity but rather to compete in the international film market. Only in 1915 did Mexico begin to have real 'actors'; previously the main characters of movies were live historical figures. Given this previous relationship with "real" actors, the concept of documentary versus fiction did not exist as separate entities
since documentary (with all of its problematic definitions) was the only genre; it was film in Latin America.

Both Nichols and López reveal the subjectivity of documentary. Nichols highlights a continuous presence of an argument or opinion that the documentary makers want to make, while López analyzes the state-directed quasi-scientific use of early Latin American cinema in national modernity projects. Equally they cast doubt on the possibility of a non-political documentary.

However, national film projects, such as Venezuela's, continue to exist, undertaking the difficult, if not impossible, task of speaking for the underrepresented or contributing to History. The documentary aesthetic continues to command a high level of authority regardless of studies deconstructing its power. In the remaining portion of this chapter I analyze two Venezuelan documentaries that use a collage of archive images, off camera narrators and testimonies to gain authority and work to create a new normative national history. These first hand accounts in Venezuelan documentaries attempt to include the previously excluded and give the 'true' version of Venezuelan history.

The films I selected, _Víctimas de la democracia_ and _Venezuelan Petroleum Company_, are products of the National Film Platform that audiences have praised both domestically and internationally. Both films are continually shown throughout Venezuela in the national, regional and community film networks. Also the two films were mass distributed through the _Cine para Llevar_ free DVD program, and have been included in programming internationally in Venezuelan Embassy film cycles. I chose these two documentaries to analyze due to their immense audience support, domestic
success and continued inclusion in domestic and international film programming. These films are examples of a rare cinematic phenomenon: documentaries that have become relative blockbuster hits. Better still for the purposes of this chapter, each of these films depicts important aspects of Venezuelan history.

4.4 Víctimas de la democracia

The first film, Víctimas de la democracia, released in 2007 and directed by Stella Jacobs, challenges the commonly shared perspective that Venezuela was an exception in Latin America having the region's longest standing democracy that according to many only now has popular unrest. Disputing the interpretation of Venezuela as an exceptional democracy, the documentary represents the communists, socialists, labor and guerrilla movements that played a key role in toppling the military dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez. After forcing Pérez Jiménez out of the country on January 23 1958, these political actors were officially excluded from the 'model' democracy' and celebrated fourth republic. The remaining three non-communist parties reached an agreement that would become known as the 1958 Pacto de Punto Fijo named after the city of Punto Fijo where the pact was made--the capital of Carirubana Autonomous County in the western Venezuelan state of Falcón. The city of Punto Fijo is also home to one of the world's largest oil refineries, which will later prove important in the next film.

The objective of the Punto Fijo Pact was to lead Venezuela to democracy. The pact limited the future of presidential politics to a select number of parties including the AD [Acción Democrática], COPEI [Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela], and the URD [Unión Republicana Democrática]. Therefore the three parties, while not entirely different from each other, became the pacted system that would share power within the
presidential office of Miraflores and the National Assembly, thus blocking the creation of new parties and silencing the socialist and communist pre-existing communities that had been fundamental in bringing an end to the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. This pact strengthened a guerrilla movement throughout Venezuela fighting against *Punto Fijo*. Those who fought in opposition to this pacted ‘democracy’ or challenged the limitations of this system were considered enemies of the state by then-president Betancourt, followed by presidents Leoni and Caldera. The guerrillas were depicted in Venezuelan history as terrorists attempting to obstruct democracy, but the current National Film Platform first sponsored the representation of these individuals as the true heroes of Venezuela in this 2007 film.

*Víctimas de la democracia* (2007) tells the story of the guerrilla movement to expose the ‘truths’ of a previous façade of democracy in Venezuela and an overlooked popular movement against the pacted government. This film presents leftist popular participation, mobilization and revolution as a long-standing tradition rather than a recent product of Chavismo. Venezuelan historian Margarita López Maya and social scientist Luis Lander, in the study entitled *Venezuelan Exceptionalism Revisited: The Unraveling of Venezuela's Model Democracy*, negate the previously accepted representation of Venezuela as an exceptional and inclusive democracy free of public unrest by comparing the number of public protests year by year between 1959-2003. The authors conclude that while there are specific periods of above average popular activity, there was already a steady amount of public unrest during the supposed 'democratic' period. As López Maya and Lander explain this idealized democratic period in the 1960s, "the idea that protests and mobilizations were less violent in earlier decades is simply an illusion"
In 2007 director Stella Jacobs and the Villa del Cine revisited these “enemies of the state” making a documentary on the now considered true heroes of democracy. This documentary tells a different side of the story of the government's treatment of the leftist movements during the Fourth Republic. Focusing on the Falcón State in western Venezuela, the documentary represents the cases of torture of students, workers and guerrilla leftists during the 1960s--Venezuela's supposed celebration of democracy. The documentary follows the recovery of the bones of a disappeared person in a mass grave as fellow leftists tell of their stories of torture during the 1960s in Venezuela. In summary, according to the official synopsis of the film on La Villa del Cine's website, the documentary focuses on the "represión brutal sobre la población campesina y la actitud heroica y revolucionaria, de la misma".

The film opens with a black and white image of the Venezuelan countryside and an off screen voice dedicating the film "por los nuestros". The screen turns black and the audience sees the following words in white type: “Hay un capítulo en la historia de Venezuela que nunca se incluyó en los libros de texto, sólo permanece en algunas imágenes, recortes de prensa, y en la memoria de quienes lo vivieron.” These opening words frame the documentary as a fact-finding mission that will help correct the omitted stories of the official history of Venezuela. Another quote appears on the screen: “esta historia repetida… en una América Latina plagada de dictaduras y pueblos reclamando justicia.” The second quote further frames the film not only to correct Venezuelan history but also to contextualize it within and connect it with the histories of the rest of Latin
America.

The documentary then moves to a testimony by Armando Barrientos, one of the guerrillas living in the countryside of the state of Falcón. He fought with the Chirinos Front against the Betancourt democracy decades before, and now Armando searches for the mass grave and disappeared bodies of his fellow guerrillas. The camera moves to the scene of an archeological team that began an official dig in 1997 in a national effort to find and return the bodies of the disappeared to their loved ones. The program is called "el programa para el rescate de los desaparecidos". The dig leads the archeologists and the family members of the disappeared to publicly question the upheld notion of an exceptionally democratic past.

As the archeologists in the film piece together the bodies, the camera pieces together the history of the 1960s guerrilla movement through a collage of newspaper articles, video footage and photo archives while using the testimony of surviving guerrilla members and their families. The video footage and black and white pictures help explain the history of the guerrilla movement first organized against the dictatorship, the military coup, and finally the union leaders’ struggle for workers' rights. These guerrillas officially were marked as enemies of the state after taking part in the August 4, 1959, demonstration in the streets of Caracas. A peaceful demonstration quickly turned to mass bloodshed when then President Betancourt instructed the military to shoot first before figuring out an individual's role in the demonstration with his famous words “dispara primero, averigua después.” The violence against the socialists, communists and union members increased, resulting in a move for the guerrillas to hide and retreat to the mountains throughout the countryside of Venezuela. The military and police captured
and tortured some of the less fortunate guerrillas that soon disappeared, never to be heard from again.

According to the film the only way the guerrillas were able to remain informed about the disappeared peoples was through Cuba's illegal Radio Havana. While the film pieces together the history of this movement through testimonies, it begins also to explicitly piece together a long-standing revolutionary relationship with Cuba. One of the survivors explains the important role that Fidel Castro played in keeping the guerrillas informed and alive, thus highlighting the importance of Cuba in Venezuela’s history. Throughout the film the relationship with Cuba is further implied with the archival footage of the Venezuelan guerilla hiding themselves in the mountains and forests of Venezuela. In these images there is a striking resemblance to those of Che and Fidel in the Sierra Maestra before the Cuban Revolution, further connecting the guerrillas of Venezuela with Cuba.

The archeologists discover bones, dentures and relics of disappeared people in mass graves, and the testimonies explain the types of torture that the guerrillas suffered and that few survived. Three quarters of the way through this 42-minute documentary, we hear the climax of the documentary: the testimony of Williams Morón who fought in the Chirinos Guerrilla Front. He tells of the torture that he barely survived when captured by the government’s anti-guerrilla brigade. He explains:

Fui secuestrado, …me secuestraron con intenciones para matarme …me llevaron al Yumare [Teatro de Operaciones Anti-guerrillero en Yumare]. Todo el mundo hablaba de lo terrorífico que era Yumare. Bueno tenían ahí unos aparatos para
aplicar electricidad…me metieron electricidad en las bolas, en el pene,… en la oreja… eso fue terrorífico, este cuento puedo echar ahorita porque estamos en otro gobierno…revolucionario progresista por eso estamos echando este cuento porque si hubiéramos en la época de los AD [Democratic Action: self-identified as a social democratic party] y Copeiano [Christian Democratic Party] nada de esto estaríamos contando aquí.

At this point in the documentary, Williams Morón begins to make the connection explicit for the audience between the 1960s guerrilla movement (the original abandoned fight) and the current revolution in Venezuela. His testimony serves as a bridge between the guerilla past and a continuation of the revolution in the present. When he finishes his testimony, the camera zooms out and we see that Williams is wearing a red baseball hat. This hat is an implicit connection to contemporary Venezuelan politics since the red baseball cap is one of the symbols of Chávez supporters.

We hear the final testimony from the children of one deceased female guerrilla fighter. Both of the fully-grown children recount the heroic story of their mother and how the guerilla movement gave this illiterate woman an opportunity to learn side by side with her guerilla peers. In this final testimony the grown children explain the recent death of their mother and her realized dreams of the revolution. They explain, “Fíjate que ella se muere días después del golpe de 11 de abril y me pidió a mí que le traiga un televisor porque quería seguir viendo a Chávez. A ella se le cumplieron sus deseos.” In this final statement, the children of the aforementioned woman make explicit an implied connection and continuation of the fight and heroes of the 1960s revolution and the present day Bolivarian Revolution. Portrayed as continuing the original fight of
the victims of the façade of democracy, Chávez is the figure of freedom that prevailed after the April 11, 2002, coup d’état against him. This connection also makes Chávez the vindication of the guerrillas and their struggle.

The documentary ends with the return of the remains of the disappeared to their loved ones and a mass funeral for the documentary's heroes of democracy. The film concludes with the faces of the guerrillas superimposed over tranquil pictures of the Venezuelan countryside accompanied by music from the cuatro, the traditional Venezuelan string instrument. Off-screen singers sing until the screen goes dark “¡Lucharemos por ti pueblo amado! ¡Adelante guerrilleros! ¡Viva la revolución!” This song completes the connection between the past guerrilla movement and the present revolution. It redefines the guerrillas as the true heroes of democracy and by doing so highlights the continuity and revolutionary tradition of the heroic struggle of Venezuela’s present day revolution. This rescues a part of neglected Venezuelan history to further the current nation-building narrative and to show the continuity of the current move towards a socialist revolution.

While this is a part of Venezuelan history that badly needed to be represented since these guerrillas were once considered the enemies of the state, I question the binary system between good and evil that the film offers. This re-scripting of good versus evil does not ask the audience to reconsider the role of the guerrillas in the 1960s movement against the then limited democracy after the eight years of the Jiménez dictatorship and one-year military junta. Instead the film redefines for its viewers the roles of heroes and evil characters in the documentary. Again, similar to the fictional film El Libertador Morales, we see a work re-script the national narrative highlighting previously excluded
or ignored stories while excluding others. There are limitations to this addition to the official history. Instead of showing the great complexities of Venezuela after the eight years of dictatorship and a yearlong military junta, the film chooses one side as the winners and the other as the losers without including the violent realities of both sides. While a political decision to celebrate one side over the other, this interpretation revisits the absolutism that López Maya and Lander attempt to question in their analysis. By over-simplifying this history the camera does not complete the National Film Platform's objective of creating a new participatory audience. The film misses the opportunity to show how the official history of 1959-1964 Betancourt Administration was formed to invite the audience to participate in deconstructing official history.

It does not dedicate much of the film on how the government at the time was able to represent these guerrillas as public villains, which is one of the principle limitations of the film. It focuses on a critical time in Venezuelan history and centers around a controversial group that was working towards another possibility beyond the three party political system. The film replaces one official history under "democracy" with another of rebellion and revolt. In re-using the same formula it fails in its revolutionary film attempt.

The aesthetics in this documentary contribute to the film's heroic story of the 'true' democratic rebels. Unlike the simple telenovela aesthetics of El Libertador Morales, the camera in Víctimas de la democracia plays with light and angles by, amongst other means, superimposing faces of the deceased guerrillas on modern-day images of Venezuela. This juxtaposition highlights the relevance of these stories to contemporary Venezuela.
Similar to the fictional melodrama from the previous chapter, *El Libertador Morales*, the testimonies are presented through close-ups of the speakers to personalize these stories of terror and torture and to foster an intimacy between speaker and spectator. Using close-ups on the speaker's face and the first person narratives, the documentary uses these personalized stories to cultivate a viewer's empathy with these individuals. The speakers are human beings rather than anonymous members of a guerrilla movement, and by focusing on their stories and close ups we return to the workings of melodrama similar to the fictional film *El Libertador Morales*. As Mariana Baltar explains in her article, "Weeping Reality: Melodramatic Imagination in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary," documentary often borrows from melodrama by focusing on individuals to appeal to the audience's emotions. Baltar writes of Brazilian Coutinho's documentaries: "[A]lthough not entirely based on the mode of excess that characterizes melodrama, these films appropriate its elements in order to strengthen the viewer's affective engagement and identification with their subjects" (131). Similar to Coutinho's use of intimacy in Brazilian documentary, we see in *Vicitmas de la democracia* a comparable use of melodrama within documentary to gain legitimacy, further showing the shared language of both documentary and fiction.

Throughout the film there are few full body shots and even fewer group images continuing the non-threatening, personal side of these once outlaws, now heroes. After the audience has identified with the speakers, feeling empathy for their suffering, the camera zooms out and the symbolic Chávez paraphernalia is made visible. These symbols of supporters of Chávez further cement the connections the film makes between
the 1960s guerrilla movement and Venezuela’s present day revolution. The film gives a history and authenticity to the contemporary revolution in Venezuela.

Even the setting of the testimonies adds to the veneration of these heroic characters and to the symbolic messages of the current revolution. The speakers are not filmed in the middle class neighborhoods of Caracas. Instead the testimonies are each filmed in the Venezuelan countryside. During the Chávez administration the countryside has been explicitly idealized to represent the authentic beauty of Venezuela and its people (promoted through the Misión Cultura and Las Leyes Resortes). The setting of this film further develops this countryside ideal of innocent heroes and loyal patriots. Continuing the link between guerrilla Venezuela of the 1960s and modern-day socialism Chávez, himself comes from the traditional countryside of Venezuela. These connections give the current revolution both an historical epic and a sense of place.

After taking a look at this documentary we could return to Nichols' perspective on documentary film and the ever-present argument of the documentary maker. In the case of Víctimas de la democracia, at first the argument appears to place doubt on the official versions of history. As the film continues to develop, this reading is quickly replaced with a different interpretation--a new official version of history but not an opening for other histories. The lasting argument is that Betancourt was not the father of democracy, and that the 'democratic' pact itself maintained a level of injustice for many who were the true supporters of change and freedom. As an audience we begin to question the interpretation of Betancourt as the father of democracy and are left with a new name to replace his: Chávez.
This discourse returns to the binary relationship between civilization and barbarity that is consistently repeated in the films sponsored by the National Film Platform. While Sommers explains that it is a crucial aspect of narrating the nation in the foundational fictions throughout Latin America after independence, Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski explain another multi-faceted reality in terms of Venezuela and this binary system. The authors write that the binary opposition between civilization and barbarity in Gallegos' founding fiction is a mainstay in Venezuelan state practices: especially in state politics towards the poor and is often used after the fact not to celebrate Venezuela but rather to cover violence and state errors. In their chapter “Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela”, Coronil and Skurski show how the state is able to cover any violence it commits by returning to the civilization/barbarity debate to diminish the worth of the victims (usually the poor). Using a discourse of fear, the victims of the violence are immediately converted into barbarians. The authors use two historical examples in Venezuelan history - namely the 1988 Amparo Massacre and the 1989 Caracazo - to further explain the continuous reframing of victims as barbarians. In both tragic examples of contemporary Venezuelan history the poor were officially considered as barbaric and due to their barbarity there was no reason to provide proper burials, register them in the death toll or notify their loved ones. They were erased, and no one knows exactly how many people died in the 1989 Caracazo. Also the military (DISIP) has not recognized their tragic mistake of killing 14 people in the 1988 Amparo Massacre. The people were simply considered guerrilla terrorists. Following this argument, I would conclude that the civilization/barbarity relationship is one based on violence and fear--and while the actors
may shift, as we have seen in *Víctimas de la democracia*, the formula allows the state complete control in determining value.

*Víctimas de la democracia* offers examples of the civilization versus barbarity concept. Through interviews, diggings in mass graves, and reanalyzing history, we see that the victims who were excluded from the transition and the subsequent Fourth Republic. The film shows that these individuals were originally presented by the state as terrorists instead of heroes. The binary formula is neither questioned nor exposed. In this film, while representing previously demonized actors in history, we see a cyclical discourse -- only this time the actors have exchanged roles.

In my opinion this film could have challenged this binary relationship beyond the route of easy politics with its fear, threats, and hatred. Instead the film embarks on a difficult journey to include those previously excluded from Venezuela's official history. While facing this inclusive challenge, the film does not expose the making of this social dichotomy--instead the film uses circular logic.

In their work Coronil and Skurski explain how the “pueblo” or the people, or the poor, are defined and reassigned value throughout Venezuelan history. In times of Venezuelan economic success they are considered the base of democracy with the ability to progress. However, in times of limited petroleum wealth the same pueblo are considered savages who are threats to society. Therefore both state politics and economics determine societal identities. Similarly, while in the National Film Platform we see an influx of opportunities to contribute to writing the plot and representation, we still continue to see a vision of center and periphery that, while in constant flux in Venezuelan history, remain as finite categories.
The second full-length documentary *Venezuelan Petroleum Company* tells a story of one of the primary discoveries in Venezuelan society that dramatically changed the national realities from a primarily agrarian society to an industrial one, rooting the national discourse in a binary metaphor of a rural past with an urban narrative of progress. This documentary not only follows the relationship between Venezuela and oil, but also between Venezuela and the US oil companies.

The documentary begins silently with a quote in white font on a black background: "El único juez de este rincón es mi Colt de seis tiros. La única pena del código es la Muerte." -Edwin L. Drake (Pensilvania S.XIX). Following this quote the screen in silence reads: "El primer comerciante petrolero". We see that the film shows a zero-sum game where the US petroleum businessman gains at the cost of the Venezuelan people; Drake is above the Venezuelan justice system and rules with his pistol. These quotes will frame the politics of the film.

From this point on we hear that the sound of petroleum machinery accompanies the first part of the movie and the animated depiction of Venezuelan native village people in contrast with corpulent, heavy white men with Southern US accents in English. The village people are shown to be innocent, primitive, and dressed only in loincloths while the antagonists are large, portly white men with blue eyes, thick Texan accents and elegant suits. The first spoken lines of the film are in English, spoken by the heavy white men, and the film is subtitled in this section to begin to mark the difference between the US imperialists and the Venezuelans who are depicted as Afro-Venezuelans and
indigenous people. The first words spoken between the heavy set US men and the scantily clad indigenous Venezuelans reveal the position the film will take. The US man with a Texan drawl yells: "Let's go, motherfuckers. ¡A trabajar!" The opening line helps to establish the objective of the film: to re-interpret the modernizing grand narrative of the discovery of petroleum. Only this time oil is represented as the nation's curse, and the savages are the foreign oil investors—in this case from the United States.

The camera shows an animated version of the discovery of oil telling the story of the famous explosion of El Choro Barroso 2. In this animated depiction the local indigenous population play their drums to the explosion of the oil well while carrying a statue of the Virgen de Coromoto and subsequently bathing the Virgin in the oil, thought to have been a sign from God while the corpulent US representatives watch.

Venezuelan historian Tinker Salas' most recent work *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture and Society in Venezuela*, also documents the cultural rite the villagers performed the day that the gusher exploded with oil in Choro Barroso no. 2. He writes: "after nearly a decade of exploration, a gusher at the Choro Barroso no. 2 well near the town of La Rosa on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo on 14 December 1922 captured the attention of the nation and the world" (6). Tinker Salas also tells of the eight drummers, the followers of San Benito, traveling to the site of the gusher to baptize a statue of the Virgin in its black liquid, though he points out in his historical account that it was a European Company that made the discovery, not a US one. Tinker Salas writes: "[t]he United States consul in Maracaibo reported on the event and sent pictures of the erupting well to Washington, lamenting that a European and not a United States company had made the discovery" (56). While this may seem like a small detail, it does further
complicate the documentary's simplified representation of the important Choro Barroso no.2 gusher that pushed Venezuela onto the world's stage as a major oil producing country.

In his research on foreign oil exploitation during this period Tinker Salas explains: "[t]he category of 'foreigners,' presumably from the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands, was rather amorphous, also including significant numbers of West Indians and even Chinese from the Caribbean islands under British and Dutch control" (51). This shows the exploitation of oil in Venezuela, while violent, was not solely a US endeavor.

The title of the film itself also contributes to the focus on the US role in oil exploitation in Venezuela. It is the only film from the Cine Para Llevar program and from the Villa del Cine that has a title in English, echoing the role of the United States in the petroleum industry. At the time of the Choro Barroso no.2 there were three major oil companies in the area. Tinker Salas writes: the "[t]hree enterprises-- the Creole Petroleum Corporation (a subsidiary of Standard Oil Company of New Jersey), the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company [The Hague, Netherlands/London, England], and Mene Grande (a subsidiary of Gulf Oil)--emerged as the leading producers" (3). While the US was clearly well represented in the exploitation of oil, it was not the only country involved. The title of the film, *Venezuelan Petroleum Company*, is similar to the name of the US subsidiary: Creole Petroleum Company. As the film continues to develop and points to the US as the sole oil exploiters, the audience soon realizes that the similarly sounding title is not a coincidence.
As the animation continues the clothes of the two groups continue to represent the differences: the portly Texans in white suits and the indigenous and Afro-Venezuelans naked or dressed in basic colorful clothes. When oil is struck, the village is covered in oil and the priest explains that it is a sign of the devil. In this cartoon-like depiction the off-camera narrative voice explains that "el Pozo Barroso 2 había expulsado al cielo camimense más de un millón de barriles de petróleo en una semana. A partir de este evento Venezuela se consolida como uno de los mayores reservorios de crudo del mundo" (min 4.39). The next screen reads: "Ya nada sería igual" (4.52).

This documentary is a pastiche of animation, archival pictures, period news articles and later video footage that follows the relationship between petroleum and the Venezuelan people. It re-narrates this monumental event in Venezuelan history and the close relationship between oil and the formation of the contemporary Venezuelan nation. The narrative off-camera female voice explains that the explosion of petroleum for some was a discovery, for most a curse: the land was covered in petroleum, killing people and animals nearby.

The narrative voice is followed by testimonios from those who survived el Choro Barroso no.2 explosion. The camera quickly changes to focus on a woman whose name we later find out is Maria "Chinca" Ferrer. At 105 years old she is a living survivor of the Choro Barroso no.2 explosion. She tells of the explosion and of the disaster that it left in its path. Ironically while depicted as indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan in the animated representation of the local people, many of the people who give testimonies, including María Ferrer, are not indigenous or Afro-Venezuelan. This topic of race is revisited later on in the film as a dividing factor among the Venezuelan people.
The narrative voice explains that after the oil explosion wounded or killed everything in its path, a new type of flora and fauna began to grow:

Poco a poco fue surgiendo una vegetación fantástica torres de madera y hierro en filas simétricas. A los teladros les nacieron ojos para hacerlos más fantásticos: ojos verdes y encarnados que perforaban la negrura del cielo nocturno en sectores aislados del pueblo, y más allá de lo que fue pueblo la luz eléctrica fabricó extraños limbos lagunales. (6:10)

This points to a criticism of the celebrated notions of "development and progress" that show the violence of development towards both the local people and nature. This representation of development and progress is a sharp departure from previously positive depictions of modernization in Latin American film and more specifically oil in Venezuela.

After representing the violence of the discovery of oil, the off-camera narrative voice explains a point that will be omnipresent throughout the documentary,

Aquí encontré a las compañías petroleras especialmente a las americanas...Sin el debido respeto a las disposiciones de la autoridad regional resistiendo pagar a los impuestos del estado y del municipio y pretendiendo pasar por sobre todo y arreglando todo a checados. Es decir alargando nuestra codicia pero deprimiendo nuestra moralidad (6:53).

At this point the documentary does two things. First the narrator clearly defines the violent relationship between the U.S. petroleum companies and the Venezuelan people as one form of a relationship. This relationship is based on a lack of respect on the part of the US companies for the local rule of law, taxes and culture. But also the narrative voice
establishes the intended audience of this documentary when she uses the pronoun "we". The binary system is established almost immediately: those who benefitted from the oil were "them", the U.S. companies, and "we" suffered. Interestingly enough this also repeats the notion of a pre-oil innocence and equal identity. In this way, the Venezuelan people, similar to the land, are violated but do not actively take part in this relationship. There is a certain nostalgia explaining an ideal pre-oil era and equality among all Venezuelans--not reflecting the latifundista history of Venezuela. Later in the film we will see how the pronoun we is redefined. By establishing this identity the narrative voice also excludes a number of Venezuelans who did benefit from the discovery of oil. From this point on we are seeing a construction of what Venezuelan cultural analyst, Julie Skurski, calls "Anticolonial nationalism [that] frequently claims as its goal the recovery of an authentic communal past" (610). In doing so it glosses over all difference, any racial, gender, and /or religious marginalization and/or privilege and also simplifies the various stories of those who contribute to the national population. Skurski explains: "it evokes the image of a unified past from which the present is derived, in contrast to the ruptures and fragmentation induced by colonizing powers" (610). Skurski writes that it is a way for the state to gain its authority: "strong-man regimes utilized these abstractions as instruments of legitimation and concealment. As a result, a divorce between the state's unifying claims and the exclusionary practices and beliefs they sustained became institutionalized in the post-Independence period" (611). While Skurski focuses primarily on Doña Bárbara and the construction of national identity in Venezuela's post-Independence period, we see a similar process occurring in contemporary Venezuelan state discourse and state-supported films such as Venezuelan Petroleum Company.
The documentary further develops the argument that oil corrupted the previously ideal Venezuela and more specifically that only US oil companies caused this corruption. Through the mosaic of cultural artifacts, we see what soon became the realities of the neighboring communities near Lake Maracaibo where the majority of the oil extraction took place. The poor Venezuelans worked, represented racially darker than the white wealthy petroleum investors ("gringos") who lived within gated communities separating them from the Venezuelan workers and the harsh realities of Venezuelan life. This begins to establish the great divide between two Venezuelas--however, the narrative voice shows that there was the real Venezuela and the foreigners of the gated communities. As the story unfolds the fence is omnipresent in the archival pictures of the time period. This same fence, in Gallegos’ modernizing story of progress, represents order and the rule of law; in this documentary it represents exclusion and inequality. The fence divided the land to protect the campo petrolero from the sterile land where nothing could grow beyond the fence.

After showing this harsh reality of privilege and inequality, the camera switches to the propaganda from the 1930s of beautiful Venezuela. As the voice-over explains the riches of sunny Venezuela such as coffee, the camera shows archival pictures of beautifully dressed people enjoying themselves within the gated communities of Venezuela. The music is distorted to accompany the images of the other side of the fence of the shoe-less children playing with empty oil drums in the unpaved streets.

After showing the segregated realities of these two Venezuelas, the camera returns to a key testimony by Manuel Taborda, the protagonist of the documentary Testimonio de un obrero petrolero. He was the union leader in the petroleum strike of
1936. In the footage taken from the aforementioned documentary, Manuel Taborda explains the punishment, torture and abuse that the Venezuelan petroleum workers were subject to. Similar to slavery practices, metal stocks for the neck and ankles were the first items built when an oil camp was created. He highlights a crucial point that remains underdeveloped throughout this documentary—Venezuelan policemen patrolled these stocks, not "gringos". He does not distinguish between the "gringos o holandeses o ingleses" but he does quickly explain in his testimony that not all of the "gringos" were horrible. He explains "siempre había una excepción entre los gringos"—one American, Mr. Evans, in particular told the Venezuelan workers that it did not make sense that they worked so many hours and got paid so little.

This testimony ends in an explanation of the Petroleum strike of 1936 and the creation of the petroleum unions. While the film explains the 1936 oil strike, the camera travels back and forth between archival images and contemporary testimonios of individuals in red shirts (the first symbol in the movie of contemporary Chavismo). While discussing the strike of 1936 Olga Luzardo, participant in the 1936 strike and dressed in a red blouse, explains, "Nos acusaban de ser comunistas." The reaction to the petroleum strike echoes the topic of the previously mentioned *Víctimas de la democracia* with 1937 Venezuelan newspapers headlines that read "¿Hay comunistas o no en Venezuela?" As the camera focuses on these exaggerated newspaper headlines assuming a link between the petroleum union workers and communism, the camera also begins an underlying theme of this documentary: Venezuela's questionable mainstream media and the power of said media. This media theme will develop through the second half of the film with the media coverage of the oil strike that nearly paralyzed the country and later a media-led
coup in April 2002. While the power and toxicity of the opposition's media is implied through images, the film does not show how the media was able to manipulate those images.

The background of the original 1936 oil strike and the history of the union movement show the need for the current nationalized petroleum company PDVSA and the use of oil profits for social programs. Continuing to the 1950s and 1960s, the documentary draws the necessary connections between the exclusion of the socialists and communists under Rómulo Betancourt and the façade of democracy: "después salieron los políticos para decir que había democracia." This echoes the previous film, *Víctimas de la democracia*, and the empty democratic system, giving more authority to this new official reading of history.

At this point the documentary quickly covers the subsequent failed attempt to nationalize oil, which in the 1970s under Carlos Andrés Pérez did not bring much change. Similar to the transition to 'democracy' and appearance of freedom during the Fourth Republic that we saw in *Víctimas de la democracia* it was a change in name alone. The same companies continued to manage the oil without attempting to nationalize the refinement process. To remark on this lack of cultural change, the camera returns to three men who are seated at the edge of Lake Maracaibo and give their testimonios throughout the documentary. As they begin to tell of the institutional racism within PDVSA, the camera shows that the speaker is wearing a Misión Sucre shirt (a Mission the Chávez government launched in 2003 to make tertiary and professional education available to a larger population in Venezuela). The man explains that within PDVSA the workers who were darker and criollo were mistreated and were never able to become managers or
advance in the company. The film focuses on the racism the Venezuelans faced in the nationalized company, a type of racism from fellow Venezuelans. The film continues this topic of race, implicitly defining the 'true' Venezuelans along racial lines.

To strengthen the critique of the 1976 superficial nationalization of oil under Carlos Andrés Pérez, the camera switches to a commercial used in the 1970s to celebrate this form of nationalization that called for the "internationalization of the oil industry" (to continue to refine oil outside of the country). In the commercial the camera shows an enormous eagle flying over the water, later grasping a piece of wood in the water while an absent narrative voice heroically declares, "Misión de gran alcance, firmeza...Maraven [Venezuelan oil] abre las puertas a los inversionistas nacionales e extranjeros" (min 43). This image of the flying eagle and the façade of nationalization of the oil company reappear three times when the camera jumps to the supporters of the 2002-2003 petroleum strike. While the eagle was used in 1975 to represent an internationalization of the petroleum company, it also is the symbol of the United States and is the opening symbol of the documentary. The eagle symbolizes the Venezuelan Petroleum Company whose seal is strikingly similar to a US dollar. The repeated images of the flying eagle, whose talons are grasping at an innocent twig floating in the water, frame the absent speakers and subsequent scenes. The speakers that defend the privatized nature of a nationalized industry and the 2002-2003 petroleum strike are therefore Venezuelans who symbolically are equated with the US --or better yet, due to their petro-politics, are no longer considered Venezuelans.

As the camera jumps to the 2003 oil strike, a different type of testimony is used--this time it is an interview with Luís Giusti on television. Instead of a close-up on his face
and informal clothing as we see in the previous interviews, we see this speaker in a dark blue suit further from the camera. Giusti, the ex-president of PDVSA, explains the importance of maintaining the private nature of the national oil company. As he speaks the screen splits into four frames--making his presence even less important. Not only does the camera not focus on his expressions but also literally reduces his importance on the screen. The frames are four mirror images of a talking head of Giusti in his dark elegant suit; he is talking to himself with no one listening.

The camera continues to show the media coverage of the oil strike--again we see the screen split into four--physically reducing the importance of the media coverage of various channels in support of the strike. The camera re-focuses on one single image that takes the full screen: an oil worker simply dressed on a boat in Lake Maracaibo. The worker explains that, to the shock of the oil strikers, he worked with others who were able to combat the strike and save the nation's oil industry. The single image of the oil worker who helped to end the strike is in stark contrast with the repeated split-screen images of the former PDVSA president and media coverage of the strike. The camera is able to reinforce the interpretation of the worker as the country's hero and the previous president and media as insignificant villains.

In case this hero/villain relationship is lost on the audience, the oil worker is replaced with George Bush in the Oval Office explaining "I am a war president with war on my mind." The documentary quickly becomes an MTV-like collage of images, music and repeating Bush's quote "War on my mind". In contrast with Bush we quickly see the countryside and a single campesino explaining the importance of protecting mother nature. The peaceful, mixed-race, environmentally aware campesino represents the pure
Venezuelan found in the countryside while Giusti's white face and elegant suit are equated with Bush.

The final testimonies leap from the use of oil profits for domestic development in social programs to international politics. Through these final testimonies the film begins to reinterpret Venezuela's oil history and its current relationship with oil to create another official history: "el petróleo ...es de todos ...es cuando los recursos provenientes del petróleo eliminan el analfabetismo, eliminan la mortalidad infantil...la siembra de petróleo es revolución, pues." This second to last testimony implicitly references the Chávez administration's use of oil profits in recently created social missions such as those that work to reduce infant mortality and illiteracy. In these direct references to Chavismo, the film, that works to find the 'real' meaning of petroleum for Venezuela, also gives authority to Chavismo by including it in this re-writing of official history.

To conclude Jhonny Salcedo, poet and dramaturge and member of the Misión Cultura, sits in front of Lake Maracaibo. Using informal gestures, similar to Chávez's, he explains:

el petróleo tiene que servir... para mover valores...para que no haya guerra en el Medio Oriente, para que los israelitas no tienen que estar invadiendo a Libano y los Estados Unidos invadiendo a Irak por petróleo sino vamos a compartirlo como lo que estamos haciendo los venezolanos...tranquilo se lo vendamos...yo le digo a las grandes avenidas de Nueva York...todo eso que ellos tienen es gracias al sacrificio de nosotros... a nuestro lago contaminado.

Expanding the oil narrative to include Bush, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon and even the avenues of New York recasts Venezuelan oil to an even larger epic story. The film ends placing
the suffering of the Venezuelans and the Venezuelan current model of petro-politics as the lifeline of the entire modern world and the answer to world conflicts.

On one hand the film works on breaking down the interpretation of oil as bringing modernity to Venezuela and as Venezuela's lifeline. On the other hand, while initially attempting to defy the collective façade of oil as modernity, it concludes by creating an even larger narrative to include Venezuela's oil as the lifeline of all of modernity.

This re-interpretation of history supports the current government even though Chávez is not explicitly referenced once in the film. The film references its production sponsor--the present revolution, and neatly ties any possible loose ends for its audience. These films are key actors in disseminating the ideas of what President Chávez has called the 21st century Socialist revolution, even though in this final film Chávez is omnipresent yet never named.

In these two documentaries we see personalized stories of injustice establishing clear connections between an original idealized Venezuelan identity, a turbulent past, and popular rebellions that led to the current revolution and 'true' democracy. In both of these films we see a return to a similar celebration of rebelliousness as the unifying characteristic for the heroic characters. From insurgence against the democracy of the 1960s to a continuous history of oil strikes and resistance to the 2002 coup d'etat, rebellion is equated with 'true' Venezuelan national identity. The anti-colonial national identity defined by rebellion also excludes all others as not Venezuelan.

In both of these films we see missed opportunities. They re-tell another history of both the guerrilla movement in Venezuela and the immense number of injustices that oil brought with its discovery, yet there are various points the films do not make. The films
do not work to uncover the tools used to create the façade of progress or the media manipulation throughout Venezuelan history. The films, while combating the official version of history, replace it with a new official version of history instead of educating about the subjectivity of history or, as cultural theorist Spivak explains, without exposing the invisible hand that is the author, editor, or academic—the representation of an economic interest in this version of history. In this sense it is not an educational and critical piece for the audience to better analyze history—which in itself would be participatory and revolutionary—but instead repeats the same formula of the previous history. The audience does not participate in making connections between the past and the present. There is no ambiguous space in these films for film debates, forums or audience conclusions, the original objective of the National Film Platform. Instead these films offer explicit, top-down lessons in Venezuelan history and social movements that leave no room for confusion (or discussion). The Venezuelan audience does not have the opportunity to develop a personal interpretation of either of these films; however, these films are considered to be revolutionary tools although they merely work to re-fix the national narrative.

How do these documentaries achieve the National Film Platform's broad objective of a revolution of consciousness? I would say that in both of these films we see films used in a revolution but not necessary revolutionary films. I consider films revolutionary when they open a space to propose questions that few have dared to ponder and leave such difficult questions open for reflection. These films both show the failure of the official narratives of Venezuela's exceptional 'democracy' and the 'progress' that resulted from oil. They quickly replace the official histories with new narratives such as
Chavismo and preaching popular participation without cultivating it. Often viewed in community or commercial cinemas, these films could have provoked discussion. By giving an analysis of the holes in the master narrative of the 'longest running' Latin American democracy that excluded so many--the film could invite the audience to participate in contemplating and discussing the proposed question that does not have a simple answer. A film questioning the birth of Venezuelan modernity through oil or democracy under Betancourt would invite the audience to participate and contribute to their own histories of their country, practicing popular participation rather than preaching it.

Returning to the original question, how is documentary different from its more attractive sibling fictional film? My answer would be that it tends to focus on a historical event, with a definitive argument, and an appearance of simplicity. This same definition could be used to define many fictional films as well. These celebrated documentaries share many of the same characteristics of their "fictional" counterparts, especially one in particular: the use of melodrama. In the representation of these historical moments in Venezuelan history we see a return to the binary relationship of civilization and barbarity, as seen in our analysis of El Libertador Morales in the previous chapter. In the clear-cut relationship between good and evil the documentaries do not complete National Cinema Platform's participatory audience objective. Instead we see that again one version of history replaces another instead of opening a space for them to coexist. These films fall into the same traps as previous attempts at national myth making.
Conclusions

I analyze the current Venezuelan national identity-building project through film and cultural investment known as the 2004 National Film Platform. I examine the maze of components that make up the National Film Platform's initiative to foster popular participation in the film industry working towards a "Revolution of Consciousness". While some aspects of this immense program are innovative, I show that many of the organizations and objectives continue with the region's tradition of New Latin American Cinema.

In my first chapter I demonstrate that the Venezuelan state infrastructure has deep roots in the film industry. I argue that this political investment in film is a Venezuelan tradition rather than a recent revolutionary concept under the Chávez administration. The current difference is the participatory focus of the Platform that promotes Venezuelan public participation at all levels of the filmmaking process and extends access to film through the national, regional and community cinema networks. To achieve this participatory focus the Platform is composed of a combination of five loosely connected organizations that horizontally share the objective of promoting new Venezuelan narratives on the silver screen. A number of these organizations date back to past governments, while others are recent products of the Chávez administration. This labyrinth of organizations is an overwhelming top down system that, regardless of the participatory focus, requires a great amount of knowledge for the public to benefit from these initiatives.
Although overwhelming to manage and top down in its approach, I argue that the Platform's bureaucratic labyrinth of film initiatives also protects a level of artistic freedom. The horizontally organized maze of five organizations makes complete control over the various programs sponsored by the National Film Platform nearly impossible. While some projects are regarded as simple propaganda tools, others do help educate on the making of film through film education workshops and offer public film proposal competitions. These cumbersome organizations highlight the lack of complete control that this initiative has. I show that this lack of control and cumbersome network of organizations has also resulted in funding film projects that criticize the revolution itself.

While the films from the National Film Platform are enjoyed by many I also discuss the opposition's disapproval of them in fear that the Platform is a recent Chávez propaganda initiative. I explain that the state/film combination is not a new relationship in Venezuela; instead it is a continuation of a century-old tradition combining politics and film. I also argue that while some projects are simple propaganda tools, others in theory do offer opportunities to create and contribute to the filmmaking process and representation of Venezuela through film education investment and community film competitions. I conclude the first chapter examining the official discourse in comparison to ground level research by including an analysis of my community visits and attendance at the Margarita National Film Festival. Through my research I show that there can be a difference between the objectives of the Platform and the execution of its programs that may result in enabling artistic freedom or frustration with the government programs.

In my second chapter I look at the Venezuelan National Film Platform not only as an investment in local filmmaking and cinema networks but also as a contributor to the
celebrated revolutionary film tradition of New Latin American Cinema. While the Platform's objective, similar to New Latin American Cinema, is to promote a "Revolution of Consciousness" there is a question if such an objective can be reached if the Platform is part of the government. I analyze Venezuela's pivotal role in forming New Latin American Cinema in 1968 and in continuing the theoretical conversation of film as a tool for revolution, hosting the 2008 reunion celebrating forty years of New Latin American Cinema.

Before I discuss Venezuela's role in this continuously celebrated movement, I expand on Michael Chanan's deconstruction of New Latin American Cinema as a unified movement. Chanan exposes the hypocritical canonization of the revolutionary film movement that combined unrelated anti-government works such as *La Hora de los hornos* (1968) with government-sponsored programs such as Cuba's ICAIC throughout the region regardless of their differing objectives. He also discusses the retroactive recognition of Brazil's Cinema Novo as the origins of the New Latin American Cinema movement. I further explain that the idealized collective New Latin American Cinema movement, regardless of these ambiguities, continues to serve as a model for Venezuela's contemporary National Film Platform. I explore the recognized source of the movement, Cinema Novo, which has been recognized as one of the models for revolutionary films. While Cinema Novo was revolutionary in its aesthetics, I argue the filmmakers often maintained tacit agreements to not criticize national development projects to maintain their government funding. I question the relationship between Cinema Novo filmmakers and the Brazilian government and this otherwise romanticized model film initiative that was, similar to Venezuela's current National Film Platform, tied to the government.
I then build on Chanan's criticism of Cuba as the model for New Latin American Cinema and for Venezuela in particular. Chanan exposes the limitations of creating a set ideal for vanguard cinema. I explain that Cuba as a prototype in a revolutionary film movement runs the risk of limiting revolutionary cinema due to country specific circumstances that are particular to Cuba. I continue this analysis of Cuba beyond the 1960s and the problematic definition of New Latin American Cinema by analyzing the central role that Cuba continues to have in both educating filmmakers throughout Latin America (especially for Venezuela) and as the site of the longest running Latin American film festival. I explore the New Latin American Film Festival in Habana, in its 32nd year, still considered the center of the New Latin American Film Tradition. With my first-hand account of the 32nd film festival, I explain that while Cuba's model remains central to the revolutionary film movement, it is peppered with inequalities and privilege that often ironically maintains a filmmaking elite within a revolution.

I conclude the chapter analyzing how the Film Platform, along with its work on creating a network of cinemas and national film programming, also works to contribute to the discussions on the role of film in Latin America. Forty years after the initial meeting that launched the New Latin American Cinema movement in Mérida, Venezuela, on November 1, 2008, Venezuela began the “Primer encuentro de documentalistas latinoamericanos en el siglo XXI”. Again the leaders in Latin American film convened in Venezuela to discuss the role of cinema in forming a unified Latin American identity while also glossing over country differences to celebrate the past forty years as collective progress. Different from the ground-breaking Venezuelan event in 1968, when many of the Latin American documentary makers worked against the government and used their
craft to document injustices and violence, in 2008 numerous documentary makers now formed part of the government. While a problematic and ambiguous concept, I show how, at the 2008 Caracas reunion of Latin American Documentary makers, the New Latin American Film tradition continues.

In my third chapter I turn my focus from the organization and theoretical part of the Platform to concentrate on the films themselves that are products of the Platform. These films have gained national popularity both within commercial and public cinemas and yet receive limited academic attention. I focus on one blockbuster hit in particular, El Libertador Morales, a film that I argue serves as a response to the previous canonical blockbuster film, Doña Bárbara. I use Doris Sommer's work on Foundational Fictions as a theoretical framework to analyze how this popular narrative works, seducing its audience to bring them on board with the current political process. Similar to Doña Bárbara, El Libertador Morales leaves limited room for reading against the film. Instead it is a melodramatic love story that explicitly joins different communities together through marriage under the exceptional leadership of a single male character that is strikingly similar to President Chávez himself. The main character, El Libertador, like Chávez, weaves Bolívar's words from the founding of Venezuela with contemporary pop culture, building a narrative that combines historical discourse with contemporary participatory politics. Unfortunately, like many of the seductive foundational fictions that Sommer analyzes in her influential book, El Libertador Morales is a film based on a binary system of good and evil where good must conquer and eliminate evil instead of finding a space for dialogue. I argue that this entertaining film is similar to Venezuelan
politics; unfortunately it does not challenge the definitive angel/demon formula of past founding narratives.

*El Libertador Morales* is a product of the National Film Platform's open call for scripts and new directors and employs new actors; it creates a national success on limited star power. The film, however, is not new or revolutionary in terms of constructing its narrative of the struggle between good and evil that is set in a contemporary barrio of Caracas. The film does not challenge melodrama's formulaic binary system of good and evil and reverts to the traditional categories of "them" and "us" that are omnipresent in national narratives and Venezuelan politics.

I focus on how these films construct their narratives both aesthetically and in terms of the narrative that the film offers. *El Libertador Morales* uses a melodramatic simplicity that neatly divides Venezuelan issues on politics, poverty and crime into a manageable problem that is solved by one Bolivar-quoting man that arrives to the barrio to save the people and restore peace and order. In the end I show how *Doña Bárbara's* previous hero Santos Luzardo is replaced by a man of humble means that becomes the chosen leader of the people--stunningly similar to the story of Chávez.

In my final chapter, I focus on two National Film Platform documentaries, *Víctimas de la democracia* and *Venezuelan Petroleum Company*, that have reached exceptional success throughout the national, regional and community networks. I show that the documentary genre has a principal role in the National Film Platform to attempt to 'correct' previous narratives of Venezuelan history. While there is an abundance of documentaries produced by the Platform, I argue there is little difference between these documentaries and 'fictional' films. I build on the theoretical work of documentary expert
Bill Nichols, who explains that the primary difference between the two genres is that documentary film tends to have an argument or perspective that it attempts to share with the audience. In my analysis I add that documentary not only makes an argument but also is able to gain support for its argument by appearing 'objective' through an aesthetic of reality. The two documentaries that I have chosen to analyze represent two of the most controversial narratives in Venezuelan history--the 'progress' of oil and the exceptional Venezuelan 'democracy'. Both were previously represented in the official histories as popular progress, launching the country to modernity and equality. These documentaries attack this previously accepted interpretation of history by showing the Venezuelans that were excluded from the promised 'progress' of oil and the dream of democracy. The films recast these celebrated moments in history as regressions instead of national progressions towards equality, showing that the 'progress' was enjoyed by a select few while most Venezuelans suffered from the vapid dream of petroleum profits and democracy.

I make the case that, while the films deconstruct the official version of Venezuelan history, the documentaries do not challenge the historical binary formula of heroes and villains in Venezuelan history. By using the authority-demanding aesthetics of documentary, such as eyewitness accounts, testimonies and the façade of simple photography, these two celebrated films replace one official history with another one. I explain that the films do not expose how the previous narratives of collective national 'progress' were able to gain their status of the official history of Venezuela. The documentaries do not offer an opportunity for the audiences to participate in the interpretation of history. Instead they both deconstruct the past to rigidly build a single
new interpretation of the present--recasting all of the past events as if they were to neatly lead up to the current Bolivarian Revolutionary process. In this way we see that both of these celebrated documentaries are similar to the fictional blockbuster hit El Libertador Morales and the national melodramas of the past; they do not offer much space for open interpretation and instead they 'correct' previously misrepresented moments in history. These films repeat the formula of defining a specific "them" and "us" or as Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski explain in "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation", the Doña Bábara civilization vs. barbarity extended metaphor is a constant in Venezuelan politics. The characters that represent good and evil are constantly shifting depending on the needs of the government. While the authors primarily analyze the government's reuse of the civilization vs. barbarity relationship in terms of two past tragedies in Venezuelan history, the Amparo Massacre and the Caracazo, I argue that we see a similar formula in contemporary Venezuelan narratives and politics. This return to a binary formula of civilization and barbarity is a continuation rather than a break with previous Venezuelan politics. In many of these films the characters change but the relationship remains the same: idealized national saviors faced with villains that must be banished.

This combination of the government with the film industry does not run a new risk of propaganda in Venezuela but rather continues a tradition. While the new National Film Platform might look towards Cuba for the model for New Latin American Cinema and as a model for revolutionary film, the Venezuelan model is different in its non-hierarchical labyrinth that I have seen facilitate artistic freedom through its inefficiency. Another key difference from previous state/film relationship is the current attempt to
include the Venezuelan people at each stage of filmmaking--differing radically from the Cuban and Brazilian models.

At the first stage of my research I was at first disappointed to not find Venezuelan films that were similar to Cuba's *Lucia*, or *Lista de Espera*, or Brazil's *Vidas Secas*. However, I realized I was continuing to look towards Cuba and Brazil as the only models in revolutionary cinema, further strengthening the ironic canonization of revolutionary film from New Latin American Cinema. Unlike the internationally celebrated films from the climax of New Latin American Cinema, (e.g. *La hora de los hornos*), these Venezuelan films are popular and are seen in mainstream commercial cinemas and public cinema networks openly throughout Venezuela. In this dissertation I show that while they share the objectives of New Latin American Cinema and are heavily versed in the discourse of the movement, aesthetically these enjoyable films have more in common with the seductive foundational fictions from the turn of the century and early twentieth century that Sommer analyzes. They are popular narratives for the people that combine love and country, creating a new prescriptive version of the Venezuelan people and nation. Due to their omnipresence in Venezuela and popularity these films cannot remain ignored by film critics solely because of their government funding. Instead the films demand analysis to better understand how these films are able to seduce audiences with their political stories and cultivating more support for the current political process.

Regardless of their political content, Chávez as a person is generally absent from the films themselves. Nonetheless, his projects, such as the Consejos Comunales, personal origins, and iconic symbols of his government are omnipresent throughout these films, and he himself remains the implicit star of many of these films.
This is a heavily narrated and filmed revolution of words and images where President Chávez constantly quotes \textit{Doña Bárbara} and some of his strongest political tools are films. Regardless of the political nature of these films I argue that the massive investment in filmmaking also encourages a great number of Venezuelans to become the narrators of their own stories. In the future I hope that this initiative may later lead to a more democratic representation of people and encourage Venezuelans to become involved in the filmmaking process, demystifying this powerful art of creating images and narratives in this complex country.
Bibliography

1,2,3 Mujeres. Dir. Andrea Herrera, Anabel Rodríguez and Andrea Rios. Fundación Villa del Cine, 2008. Film.


<http://encontrarte.aporrea.org/creadores/visuales/36/a9909.html>


*Casa Vieja.* Dir. Lester Hamlet. ICAIC, 2010. Film.


"Cine para Llevar." Ministerio de la Cultura Official Website.


<http://www.cnac.gob.ve/>.


<lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/vrp/coronil.pdf>


*El ojo del canario.* Dir. Fernando Pérez. ICAIC, 2010. Film.


Huelepega: Ley de la calle. 1997. Film.


*La hora de los hornos: Notas y testimonios sobre el neocolonialismo, la violencia y la liberación*. Dir. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. 1968. Film.


"Las Misiones Bolivarianas." 2007 de la embajada venezolana de EEUU.


<http://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:GVs0mk5h8f8J:scholar.google.com/&hl=en&as_sdt=0,22>


Marcano, Sergio. "Crónicas del Cine Venezolano: La edad de oro 70-80 y el público."


