

Tamara L. Falicov

Programa Ibermedia

Co-Production and the Cultural Politics of Constructing an Ibero-American Audiovisual Space

Programa Ibermedia: An Overview

Programa Ibermedia (hereafter called Ibermedia) is a co-production film fund sponsored by Spain, Portugal, and thirteen member countries in Latin America. Its purpose is to promote the development of projects directed towards the Ibero-American market. Funded primarily by and housed in Spain, this film-funding pool receives funds from each member country to comprise an Ibero-American audiovisual fund. As of 2006 the Ibermedia member countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Panamá, Perú, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with Panama joining in 2005 as the most recent member. Each country makes an annual commitment (minimum \$100,000) to the collective fund. The countries then compete via production companies for backing in various programs, such as a script development fund, a co-production fund, a training grant, and a distribution grant.

Ibermedia is a funding mechanism supervised by an Ibero-American organization called CAACI (La Conferencia de Autoridades Audiovisuales y Cinematográficas de Iberoamerica, or Conference of Ibero-American Audiovisual and Film Institutes). The heads of national film institutes established this fund in 1997 during a meeting at Margarita Island, Venezuela, creating a pool of

funds for filmmakers and production houses to collaborate and compete for a chance to make a film, along with the help of one or more countries. Ultimately, the objective of Ibermedia is to promote the interchange of audiovisual professionals of member countries (see www.programaibermedia.com).

Ibermedia's function was described in a document produced during the Summit of the Americas in 1996:

The question is how one could contribute to the development of an Ibero-American film and television industry that is competitive in the world market, that is oriented towards the technological future, that is capable of projecting its own culture, and in addition, will contribute to creating employment and reducing the commercial deficit.¹

Ibermedia is modeled after the success of the European Union film program, Eurimages, in which each country (Western and Eastern European, including Turkey) contributes to a fund in accordance with what the nation can afford. Ibermedia has also looked to the European Union's film production initiative, MEDIA Plus Programme, as a model. The idea of a pan-Ibero-

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American fund translates into an audiovisual market that is 450 million strong. This helps overcome the inability of some countries to amortize production costs, especially in smaller Latin American countries.²

In Ibermedia's case, Spain pays the highest sum per year—roughly two million dollars, currently comprising 60 percent of the fund. Other countries each pay according to what they can afford. Argentina, for example, used to contribute \$200,000 each year. After the post-2001 financial crisis, its contribution was reduced to \$100,000.³ Uruguay struggles to put in \$100,000, and Mexico is the second-largest contributor, at \$500,000. Brazil contributes \$300,000, and Colombia, Cuba, Portugal, and Venezuela each put in \$100,000.⁴

All member countries are eligible to compete for the large sums of money that are awarded to film projects in various stages of completion. Ibermedia prides itself on the fact that all member countries have a chance of reaping large benefits.⁵ Development grants are awarded most typically to first-time filmmakers, as they provide workshop training funds to help the director improve upon and polish the script. The co-production fund is not as likely to be awarded to first-time projects, as only up to 50 percent of the funding may be awarded by Ibermedia; the rest must come from additional financing sources. The eligibility requirements for the co-production fund include that films must be in Spanish or Portuguese; the competition is a loan, not a grant; and the director, actors, and technical crew must be from an Ibero-American country. Competitions were held annually until 2006 and are now held twice a year.

Since Ibermedia's inception, the majority of selected films have been completed and released, and many have gone on to win international prizes. From its inaugural year to 2003, 530 projects were selected; out of those, 104 were co-production projects, 137 were awarded distribution and promotional credits, 121 were awarded script-development grants, and 168 were given training grants for film professionals.⁶ For the year 2000, 2.3 million dollars was allotted to 23 projects, all of which cobbled together other forms of private and state funding.⁷ In 2004, 32 co-production projects were funded, representing production companies from thirteen countries. A total of 4.2 million

dollars was awarded. Out of the 32 projects, 5 were given to Spanish companies and 8 involved Spain as a co-producer.⁸ Films that have benefited from Ibermedia funding include *Rosario Tijeras* (dir. Emilio Mallé, Colombia-Mexico-Spain-Brazil, 2005) *Machuca* (dir. Andres Wood, Chile-Spain-UK-France, 2004) and *La ciénaga* (*The Swamp*, dir. Lucrecia Martel, Argentina-France-Spain, 1999).

Since 2003, a major emphasis for funding has been on the perennially weak distribution link Latin American film producers typically confront. Ibermedia offers a fund that assists distributors in subsidizing the distribution of Latin American films throughout Ibero-America. For example, in 2004 Macondo Cine Video was given a subsidy to distribute the Uruguayan-Argentine co-production *Whisky* (dir. Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll) in Mexico. Similarly, Atlanta Films from Portugal was funded to distribute Lucrecia Martel's Argentine-Spanish film *La niña santa* (*The Holy Girl*, 2004).

Despite the focus on various grant competitions, the most popular fund and competition is the co-production competition, and this article will focus on that competition, which in 2003 accounted for 80 percent of Ibermedia funding.⁹ I will examine how this form of film finance has been utilized in the past decade. Specific co-productions will be analyzed in terms of their themes and content to understand more fully how co-production funding might impinge upon a film's narrative. This essay will discuss the strengths and pitfalls of the case of Ibermedia.

What Is Co-Production?

Co-production is a funding model used as early as the 1920s.¹⁰ European cinema has utilized this measure as a strategy to ensure distribution throughout the continent, and as a means of accruing production funding through various state and private-sector funding outfits. As Baer and Long point out, the 1990s and 2000s have seen an outpouring of international co-productions due to their emblematic status as globalized products. They are "financed by global capital, featuring international casts, shot in several countries and often several languages, and foregrounding the hybrid status of their production contexts in both their formal construction and narrative content."¹¹

In the case of Ibermedia, co-production is categorized as either “technical-artistic” or as a purely financial arrangement. The former implies that the amount a country invests determines the percentage of actors and/or technicians that will work on a film. The latter category is a strictly financial arrangement that has no bearing on the artistic or technical aspects of production.

For example, Argentine director Fabián Bielinsky’s film *El aura* (*The Aura*, 2005) was a financial co-production: Spain’s Tornasol Films and France’s Metropolitan Films had minority financial investments alongside Argentina’s majority investment.¹² An artistic-technical co-production attempts to integrate actors from the co-producing countries into the narrative. Aristarain’s *Martín* (*Hache*) (Argentina-Spain, 1997), typifies this arrangement. The story follows an Argentine teenager sent after a near drug overdose to spend time with his Argentine father, who is living in Madrid. The cast comprises an Argentine actor (Cecilia Roth), two Argentine-Spanish actors (Federico Luppi, who lives in Spain with dual citizenship, and Juan Diego Botto, born in Argentina, but who has lived in Spain since he was a child), and a Spanish actor (Eusebio Poncela). The binational narrative works as a natural bridge between the two countries and thus results as a credible co-production plot. These productions are considered “natural” co-productions in the sense that their narratives lend themselves to this form of production.¹³ This essay will focus on the merits and missteps taken with the use of the technical-artistic subcategory of co-production.

There has been much debate regarding how co-produced films can have potentially damaging effects on the narrative content of films. In the European context, the term “Europudding” describes the detrimental effect that occurs with attempts at constructing a pan-European culture, which may result in a polyglot mess. In Ibero-America, more than the issue of language (mainly Spanish and Portuguese), is the issue of economic differentials between Spain and the rest of Spanish-speaking Latin America. Rather than a Europudding, co-production might be seen as something akin to a “Latin American” *molé* with a sprinkling of Spanish manchego cheese. In other words, some technical-artistic films have an

“added-on” or “supplementary” feel to them when the Spanish actors present don’t integrate well into the script. This differs from Spanish–Latin American co-productions of the 1930s and 40s that included actors from many countries in a hybrid, “tutti-frutti” configuration that incorporated the songs and dances of the respective countries.¹⁴ Paul Julian Smith rightly observes that this choice of including cast and crew from both countries has been done in order to qualify a film as a “national” picture in both countries and thus meet the criteria for state subsidies.¹⁵

A recent film that successfully integrates both nations into the narrative also illustrates these power dynamics between Spain and Latin America in the Spanish-French-Cuban co-production *Habana Blues*, directed by Benito Zambrano (2005). This film not only won the Ibermedia co-production award, but it was also granted a MEDIA program grant for 168,000 euros for its submission as a Spanish film, and support from Eurimages.¹⁶ The plot revolves around two Cuban musicians who secure a recording contract from Spanish record producers. The film self-consciously raises issues of producing cultural products for the Spanish market in a scene where there is heated discussion between the Cubans and the Spaniards. A musician balks when he is told that the record is for the Spanish market and he must change a stanza in his song because it is “too local.” One of the record producers explains that “We have to think of our [Spanish and Latino] audience. . . . Business is business.” The filmmaker is ironically commenting on the contradictions that arise when countries with more power, resources, and influence “collaborate” with smaller ones.

The film, refreshingly enough, does not result in a disjointed mix of Cuban and Spanish, due to its realistic rendering of life for Cubans during the “Special Period” (following the fall of the Soviet Union). This film continues in the tradition of co-productions that Laura Podalsky notes register “how nations define themselves against other nations.”¹⁷ In *Habana Blues*, in a later plot twist, the Spanish producers become beholden to their United States parent company, which has stipulated that the Cuban band members must market themselves as dissidents for the U.S. market. The tension revolves around a disingenuous and mercenary

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transnational record company and an “authentic” Cuban musician with integrity.

How Co-productions Impinge on Film Narratives: The Case of Spaniards in Latin America

A large percentage of co-productions are the “technical-artistic” type, and many Latin American producers prefer to co-produce with Spain (in the case of Brazil, there is a common affinity to Portugal—a topic that exceeds the scope of this essay). In addition to the financial incentive is a geographic one: Co-producing with Spain gives these countries a gateway to Europe. The result? One finds the over-representation of Spanish actors in Latin American co-productions.

For the purposes of this study, it is possible to categorize, albeit unscientifically, various tropes of Spaniards typically found in contemporary co-productions. By delineating the various ways in which Spaniards enter into specific Latin American narratives, we find how it is that economic imperatives of funding can shape film narratives in specific ways. While I have tried to provide examples from Ibermedia-funded films, I have also included co-productions funded privately or through means other than Ibermedia. This list is by no means exhaustive. Following are examples of four common tropes: the sympathetic Spaniard, the Spanish anarchist, the evil or racist Spaniard, and the Spanish tourist.

The Sympathetic Spaniard

In Solveig Hoogesteijn’s Ibermedia-funded Venezuelan-Spanish film *Maroa* (2005), Tristán Ulloa plays Joaquín, a youth orchestra teacher from Spain who works in a reform school in Caracas. He notices the talent of street urchin Maroa (Yorlis Domínguez), and mentors her as she learns to play the clarinet. He is sympathetic to her plight and chided by Maroa about the fact that his foreigner status makes him “clueless” about life on the streets in Venezuela. The presence of his character is somewhat bizarre, as one doesn’t often see foreigners helping truly disadvantaged children, but the director manages to turn him into an outsider character, and one that can relate to Maroa’s marginal status as a street child. He then

becomes a sacrificial lamb in that he gets deported back to Spain for his good intentions.

In an earlier film, *Un lugar en el mundo* (*A Place in the World*, dir. Adolfo Aristarain, Argentina-Spain-Uruguay, 1992) the protagonist Hans (José Sacristán) is a good if not disillusioned Spaniard who assists the Argentines Mario (Federico Luppi) and his wife, Ana, (Cecilia Roth), who have decided to move to the rural province of San Juan, Argentina, after living in exile in Spain. The three work together to fight a ruthless landlord who tries to crush their newly formed wool cooperative.

The Spanish Anarchist

The stereotypical Spanish anarchist can provide a left-leaning filmmaker a character to act as a foil against other characters. Tzvi Tal discusses the image of the idealistic Spanish anarchist figures in both Puenzo’s *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*, Argentina, 1985) and Larrain’s *La frontera* (*The Frontier*, Chile-Spain, 1991) as a way for the scriptwriter to discuss democratic ideals while simultaneously “eliding the contradiction between the past revolutionary idealist and the present day pragmatism that the Left was facing at the time the film came out post-dictatorship.”¹⁸ In other words, the ideals of the left were safely embodied by the Spanish anarchist and avoided having to invoke the recent leftist guerrilla legacies in Argentina and Chile. Neither film was funded by Ibermedia, but both films were assisted financially by Spanish national television, Television Española (TVE).

In *Caballos salvajes* (*Wild Horses*, dir. Marcelo Piñeyro, Spain-Argentina, 1995) the character José, played by Héctor Alterio, is a self-proclaimed anarchist who lost family and retirement funds during the Argentine military dictatorship. He is characterized as Argentine, but his accent slips into Spanish throughout the film. When he calls himself an anarchist, the viewer may associate him with a Spanish émigré to Argentina, although this is never mentioned. In actuality, the actor Héctor Alterio was in Spanish exile for many years after 1974, when he received death threats from the Argentine paramilitary group the Triple A (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance), which had ties to the military government. He resided in Spain until the triumph of democracy in 1983, when he

returned to Argentina. His grown children, both of them actors, live in Madrid. Scholar Marvin D'Lugo has noted how both Héctor Alterio and Argentine actress Cecilia Roth's "star persona[s] have crossed over to both markets, which leads to the blurring of the national."¹⁹ (See also Gonzalez Acevedo, 2005.)²⁰

The Evil/Racist Spaniard

In Carrera's *El crimen del Padre Amaro* (*The Crime of Father Amaro*, dir. Carlos Carrera, Mexico-Spain-Argentina-France, 2002), Spanish actor Sancho Gracia plays the role of Father Benito Díaz, a priest in Mexico. Although he is painted as a corrupt individual, he is not framed any more culpably than any other questionably suspect character in the film, such as Padre Amaro himself, the local narco-traffickers, or the bishop. However, it is telling that the Spaniards are part of the decadent, morally suspect Catholic establishment. Although I have placed them in the "evil Spaniard" category, others have commented that the presence of Spanish priests in Latin America has become "naturalized" and that they symbolize neutral figures who are not out of the ordinary. Libia Villazana commented that the Spanish priests in this film were a natural component of this co-production, as Spanish priests are commonplace throughout Latin America.²¹ The film received both a development grant and a co-production grant from Ibermedia.

Critics have noted that Maribel Verdú's character Luisa Cortés, in Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (Mexico, 2001) manipulates best friends by being a love interest to both of them and spurring them to jealousy. She is considered an allegory for the vampiric Spanish colonizer, sucking dry the youth of Mexico.²² This film was funded with private funds from Mexican companies, as was *Amores perros* (2000); both utilize lead Spanish female actors who are rising stars in their country. Interestingly enough, both characters embody tragic figures in the end—Luisa dies, and Valeria (the lead female character in *Amores perros*), who is a former supermodel, has a leg amputated, precipitating the end of her career. One might speculate that the directors were being savvy about marketing the film in Spain as well as Mexico by hiring European

actresses. Emily Hind has suggested that perhaps there could be the category of the "doomed Spaniard" as other Spanish characters have died in contemporary Mexican film.²³ One might consider that the directors/writers were wreaking a subtle but symbolic form of "Moctezuma's Revenge" to the (former) colonizer.

An ugly side of Spaniards comes out in *Lugares comunes* (*Common Ground*, dir. Adolfo Aristarain, Spain-Argentina)(2002). Fernando and his wife Liliana (Federico Luppi and Spanish actor Mercedes Sanpietro) have flown to Madrid to visit their son and family, and Liliana, herself a Spaniard in exile in Argentina, has a conversation with her daughter-in-law, Fabiana (Yael Barnatán). During their discussion, Fabiana tells her mother-in-law how much she would like her to come to Madrid and help take care of the children, rather than an "illiterate Ecuadorian maid, or an African immigrant." She then exclaims, "We are being invaded."

The Spanish Tourist

In Cuban films of the Special Period, there has been a sure fire means to incorporate Spanish actors (and other co-producers) in the image of the omnipresent tourist in Havana or Varedero Beach. There are many examples of this in contemporary Cuban cinema.²⁴ In the case of Alexis Valdés' *Un rey de la Habana* (*King of Havana*, Cuba-Spain, 2005), the Spanish tourist who has arrived into town to marry the protagonist's sweetheart, is depicted as arrogant, spoiled, and ultimately, a buffoon.

Un rey de la Habana is told from the point of view of Papito (Alexis Valdés), who has forever loved Yoli (Yoleima Valdés), the girl next door. When she mistrusts him, she then meets, Mr. Arturo (Alexis Valdés), an older Spanish tourist who comes to Havana bearing gifts for the whole family. True to the comedic genre, many family members are discussing the way they will sell his gifts on the black market, and they aim to see how they can bilk him for all the money they can obtain from his clutches. The Spaniard is depicted in one scene bellowing that "Spain is a superior country." Clearly, the family is withstanding his obnoxious behavior out of economic necessity. Moments later, when he tries to have a sexual encounter with

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Yoli, he has an overdose of Viagra, prompting a heart attack, and a frozen erection after death. His corpse is found that way, thus making his death a comical and undignified situation. This film, which parodies the unequal relationship between Cubans and tourists also reveals in a playful manner the urge Cubans might have to make the Spaniards look clownish and tactless. This form of parody signals a resentment of the economic and social power that tourists such as Spaniards might hold over their Cuban brethren's heads. As in the Cuban-German co-production *Hacerse el sueco* (*Playing the Swede*, Cuba-Spain-Germany, 2001), in which a German tourist disguised as a Swedish scholar pulls off a complicated robbery and thus is considered an unsavory character, these depictions could be seen as a subtle form of challenge and resistance to the foreigner-Cuban power dynamic.

Directors' Strategies to Confront these Limitations

While some scriptwriters and directors are able to incorporate actors into storylines that are credible and natural, there are those who find ways around the restrictions or else poke fun at them. In one case, a director hired actors with dual citizenship to help meet technical-artistic investment requirements. For the Ibermedia-funded Chilean-Spanish-UK-French co-production *Machuca*, director Andres Wood hired Federico Luppi, who has dual Spanish and Argentine citizenship, to play the part of an Argentine businessman who frequently has trysts in Santiago, Chile, with the main character's mother. It was a way to resolve the Spanish actor requirement while maintaining an appearance of verisimilitude to 1970s Chile.²⁵ Colombian director Victor Gaviria plays a joke on his audience in *Sumas y restas* (*Addictions and Subtractions*, Colombia-Spain, 2004) when out of the blue a random Spanish waiter appears in a scene in a Medellín restaurant. This was the director's ironic nod to some of the narrative awkwardness that has played out in the technical-artistic co-production realm. Thus, the trope of the "random" Spaniard is now immortalized by Gaviria's film.

Despite these occasional narrative flaws, many co-productions achieve credibility and box office success with Ibermedia support.

Positive Attributes of Programa Ibermedia

State-government funds allocated via film institutes often propagate cycles of veritable feasts or famine, depending on the economic situation and the cultural policies in place. This volatility stands in contrast to Programa Ibermedia, which has proven to be a stable and consistent model. For example, Uruguay has had problems paying the \$100,000 member contribution, which has resulted in petitions, protests, and even threats of hunger strikes by filmmakers and members of the film sector. It is clear that Uruguay would not have as much success arranging funding without its involvement in a co-production fund of this sort. As Uruguayan producer Jorge Sanchez Varela points out,

Undoubtedly, the Ibero-American producers realized that it is much more viable to work together on a project than each individually. And, in the case of Uruguay, it is even more notorious: a project solely funded by Uruguay is pretty difficult in trying to accumulate the resources, and then try to sell the project in the international market—this is because the internal market is not large enough to recoup the costs of even a pretty good film.²⁶

After resolving fiscal problems, Uruguay was reinstated into the program in 2005. That year five projects were funded (two co-productions and three script development projects) totaling \$260,000.²⁷

Any country that wins a competition may select any other member country or countries with whom they would like to collaborate on a co-production. Therefore, one could conceivably only have the wealthiest countries on board consistently being chosen to collaborate. However, an economic advantage in turning to smaller, relatively poorer countries like Bolivia is their lower production costs. This helps their local film sector financially with the money spent during on-location production.

Ibermedia-funded projects have been remarkably successful in terms of winning awards and recognition. Some more recent award-winning films are *Aro Tolbukin* (Mexico-Spain, 2002), *El crimen del Padre Amaro* (*The Crime of Father Amaro*,

Mexico-Spain-Argentina-France, 2002), and *En la puta vida* (*Tricky Life*, Uruguay-Argentina-Cuba-Spain-Belgium, 2001). Actors working on Ibermedia films felt it helped them gain insights in interacting with professionals from other countries. Pablo Echarri, an Argentine actor who starred in a Spanish-Argentine-French co-production, *No debes estar aquí* (*You Shouldn't Be Here*, 2002), felt that working on co-productions was useful to his craft:

You have to understand that an actor is not owned by his country. As part of your personal growth there is the possibility of widening your horizons. Spaniards like Argentine actors a lot. There are actors such as Héctor Alterio, Federico Luppi, that continue to be important in Spain. I cannot know what destiny lies ahead of me. I am not going to be hypocritical as to say: no, I will always stay here.²⁸

Clearly, despite the narrative awkwardness that can arise as the result of including Spaniards in a Latin American storyline, it is still true that having a star vehicle from Spain, such as Immanol Arias or Tristán Ulloa, may translate into bigger box office numbers for a relatively wealthy market such as Spain.

Negative Attributes of Programa Ibermedia

There have been some veiled criticisms of Programa Ibermedia in terms of transparency and power dynamics. For example, the literature on the judging procedure states that the representatives of each member country (generally film institute officials) who form part of the Ibermedia Intergovernmental Committee (Comité Intergubernamental Ibermedia, or CII) are responsible for judging projects on an annual basis. They also approve the budget and allocate it to the various competitions after they are reviewed by the Ibermedia staff (Unidad Técnica Ibermedia, or UTI). The staff are credited for checking the irregularities in the proposals, and are seen as the ones who make technical decisions.²⁹ There have been criticisms that the judging does not vary year to year, but the reality is that the judging is done by

the heads of film institutes, who do vary every few years with shifts in government administrations. The CII not only evaluates which proposals will get funded, but also determines what amount of money each project will be awarded.

Another problem has surfaced with regard to Ibermedia's funding structure. On the one hand, it is considered to be democratic due to the fact that each country pays what it can afford. On the other hand, the largest donor in the group is Spain, and the operation is housed in Madrid. While this expense might be seen as a donation to the fund and a clear benefit to the organization, Spain is not simply acting altruistically. A member of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, Alberto García Ferrer, presented the results of a study conducted about Programa Ibermedia, claiming that Spain did not enter films into the competition, and that it merely gave funds to benevolently assist Latin American film workers accrue hours of labor through Ibero-American film projects.³⁰ This assertion was patently false, as Spain does participate and win in Ibermedia competitions.

In fact, Ibermedia administrators do not think it is problematic that Spain has more decision-making power due to its monetary contribution to the fund. Victor Sanchez felt that Spain's position was justified, stating that "because Spain funds one-half of the fund, there is nothing wrong with allowing it to have a bigger voice so as to oversee a lot of these projects."³¹

Moreover, Spanish funds originate from the Minister of External Relations, a government agency whose sole purpose it is to maintain good relations with other countries, including former colonies. In essence, Programa Ibermedia is seen by the Spanish as an avenue to gain prestige through its cultural collaboration with Latin America. As a point of comparison, the European co-production fund Eurimages has also been criticized in much the same way, except that critics allege that Eurimages is an extension of the French system, which has given French producers an unfair advantage.³²

Although Latin Americans may feel that Spain's involvement reeks of a past paternalistic relationship and a present attempt at neocolonialism, this is partially—but not completely—without merit. For one, Spain does, in the end, lose money in

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this endeavor (to be explained below), but it gains in terms of gaining prestige for assisting in the production of quality, award-winning films. Ibermedia administrator Victor Sanchez opined, given the past colonial relationship between Spain and Spanish-speaking Latin America, the following sentiment:

I am a Spaniard. I am not going to completely trash my culture, but it is true, perhaps we are trying to redeem ourselves for historical debts we owe to the region. But when countries in Latin America do well via stable economies and healthy film industries; that helps Spain too.³³

In his reading, Spain has been trying to redeem itself to Latin America for the five hundred years that it colonized the region. Although it is probable that Spain has set up collaborations in the realm of culture in an attempt to rectify past wrongs, this must be situated in the global economic context: Spain maintains a distinct monetary advantage when it co-produces with poor Latin American nations such as Cuba or Bolivia. Clearly, the cost of making a film in those locales is far more economical for Spanish producers. Nonetheless, Spain's involvement with Ibermedia is said to be a "loss leader" in this proposition. The organization formulated statistics in 2005 that demonstrated that in fact, to that point in time, Spain had lost money in this film fund proposition. It found that the countries that put in a smaller annual contribution had a greater benefit in the long run. According to the organization, Spain gets less money than it puts in: Peru and Bolivia get \$1.70 for every \$1.00 that Spain contributes, Brazil gets \$1.18 for every \$1.00 that Portugal contributes, and the rest of the member nations gain \$1.60 for every \$1.00 contributed by Spain.³⁴

The bottom line is that Spain still maintains the largest film industry in Ibero-America, and Latin America as a whole is the largest market. Thus, while Spain has an obvious agenda for their heavy involvement with Ibermedia, it has proven to be the most beneficial and successful film finance pool the region has currently. In Brazil's case, there are often Brazil-Portugal co-productions due to the language affinity, but Portugal serves more as a

gateway country than an economic resource.

Ibermedia can be considered a victim of its own success. Countries such as France, Italy, and even the U.S. studio cartel, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), have requested membership in Ibermedia, but Spain felt that it would compromise the spirit of the Iberian and Latin American aspect of the fund.³⁵ They feel threatened by these other countries' participation, even if it would mean an increase in the funding pool.

Outgrowths of Ibermedia

Other Latin American nations from Central America have been excluded from the fund due to monetary issues. In 1998 Costa Rica pledged \$50,000 to Ibermedia, but had to withdraw the next year. When it became clear that the annual membership cost of \$50,000 was prohibitive for Central American countries, the CAACI allowed these countries to pool \$50,000 to enter the fund collectively, but stipulated that they had access to enter to every competition except for the co-production fund. At the time of this writing, these countries have declined to join.

As an alternative, CINERGIA, an organization created in 2004 by the head of a private film school in Costa Rica, María Lourdes Cortés, pooled together funds from her university, Veritas; a Dutch foundation called the Hivos Fund; and the Foundation for New Latin American Cinema (founded by Colombian Nobel Prize laureate Gabriel García Márquez). Based in Cuba, it has the purpose of creating a Central American version of Ibermedia. Member countries include Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá, and Cuba.

This fund grew out of the realization that Central American countries needed a smaller regional fund to help producers professionalize more before competing against larger industries such as Argentina and Brazil.³⁶ Cortés observed that the smaller member countries of Ibermedia had a harder time competing against the more developed ones. For instance, Puerto Rico, which became a member in 2002, was not awarded a co-production credit until 2004 due to logistical and monetary problems.³⁷ CINERGIA has helped

Central American filmmakers not only financially, but also by inviting directors to participate in screenwriting workshops, where they meet well-known distributors and producers from other parts of Latin America and Europe. CINERGIA hopes to encourage the creation of a regional pan-American source of collaboration.

Conclusion

Programa Ibermedia remains the most successful film finance pool in Latin America. Nonetheless, it is a state-administered film fund like those in Europe, which do not transcend problems of paternalism and the inherent power dynamics that surface when there are inequalities of power and resources. Still, the fund has tried to be democratic, and to date there have been films initiated or produced from every member country, no matter

how small. Ibermedia's support of technical-artistic productions has made it complicit in the problem of how economics can have a hand at shaping culture to meet its directives: The brief overview of Spanish character tropes in Ibero-American film is the beginning of a more comprehensive study of how these narratives of cultural collaboration can work seamlessly or lack credibility.

Note: Travel funds to enable this research were generously provided by the Program of Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States Universities and the Hall Center for the Humanities Travel Grant at the University of Kansas. Thanks also to Laura Podalsky, Shannon Roesler, Paula Rodriguez Marino and Teresa Hoefert de Turégano for their thoughts and insights.

Tamara L. Falicov is an Associate Professor in the Departments of Theatre and Film and the Center of Latin American Studies at the University of Kansas. She is the author of *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007) and on Roger Corman's co-productions with Argentina. She is the recipient of an NEH summer stipend, a Rockefeller Humanities Fellowship, and Fulbright Student Fellowship to Argentina.

Notes

1. Ibermedia, Summit of the Americas (Chile: November 10–11, 1996): x.
2. Federación de Asociaciones de Productores Audiovisuales Espanoles (FAPAE), "Ibermedia" (Madrid: April 1997): 5.
3. Zuri Fermín, Ibermedia administrator, personal interview (May 30, 2003).
4. Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, "The International Politics of Cinematic Coproduction: Spanish Policy in Latin America," *Film and History* 34.2, 2004, 19.
5. See note 3 above.
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