

## Film Censorship in Argentina: 1958-1976

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Starting in the late 1950s, civilian and military authorities gradually began to control freedom of expression in their quest to protect moral values, suppress dissent, and sanitize the circulation of ideas deemed dangerous.<sup>2</sup> Cinema was the first medium to feel the state's regulations. One possible reason for this interference may have been the fact that it was the most popular form of audiovisual consumption, for only in the late 1950s did TV slowly begin competing with cinema.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I trace the emergence and impact of legislation that regulated film in Argentina from 1957-1976—a tumultuous period given that military governments continually interrupted democratic administrations. Contrary to what has been long held that censorship began during the *revolución libertadora*, I make the case that censorship legislation was first passed during the *democratic* government of Arturo Frondizi (term of office 1958-1962). This legislation prioritized: the projection of a poster-image of the nation, the protection of Catholic values, and the promotion of shared national beliefs. This early legislation paved the way for the instauration of film censorship in 1968, as well as the regulations on censorship approved until March 1976, when a new dictatorship took over, but was met with antagonism from several different social actors at that time.

### Film Legislation during the *revolución libertadora*

In 1955, a *coup d'état* led by the Armed Forces ousted President Juan Perón (second term of office 1952-1955) and established the *revolución libertadora*. During the government of General Pedro Aramburu (term of office 1955-1958), a new cinema law was passed. Because of the non-democratic nature of the *revolución libertadora*, legislation approved during these years, namely Law 62/57, has been considered repressive given that it restricted the films that those under 18 years of age could watch. This practice, however, was already in place in Great Britain and the United States (Roberston 1989 and Wittern-Keller 2008). In addition, Law 62/57 protected freedom of expression, particularly articles 4 and 22 which limited censorship and provided film the same status as other mediums of mass communication, a progressive decision.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Law 62/57 adhered to the spirit of the national Constitution, and was seen as something “insólito desde el punto de vista de la libertad de expresión cinematográfica, sobre todo porque proviene de un gobierno autoritario” (Oubiña 74).

Nonetheless, other pieces of legislation about cinema were passed to provide oversight to this sector. Complementing Law 62/57 Decree 16,386 of 1957 dictated that the release of films—either domestic or foreign—be subjected to the approval of the to-be-created National Institute of Cinema (INC), which also mandated the creation of a commission to classify films as stated in Decree 3,772/57 (Aguilar Goti 18). Despite the fact that these measures further scrutinized Argentine film, the creation of the INC was the result of a campaign led by the different sectors of the film industry looking for an efficient organization to manage film production and consumption (Falicov 29). Therefore, both film classification, especially for minors, and the creation of an institution that would centralize all aspects of the film industry were oriented to put Argentine cinema on an equal footing with other film industries. Important and more restrictive changes were, however, introduced during the following presidential term.

### A Glossy Image of Argentina

The democratic government of Arturo Frondizi (term of office 1958-1962) ushered in new possibilities as developmentalism, a program to put an end to the country's economic dependency, was implemented.<sup>5</sup> The state would oversee not only plans for growth, but also the relations between international investors and the national bourgeoisie. Developmentalism was seen as a crucial step towards modernization, which would transform Argentina—once and for all—into a truly powerful nation. Parallel to this push for economic development, there was also a renewed interest in the arts and sciences that would also help the country's artistic and intellectual growth. Despite the faith in economic, scientific, and intellectual progress, however, cultural citizenship was restricted as the state began passing laws affecting film production and consumption.

Control over the film industry and culture expanded under Frondizi's tenure. Acknowledging the importance of film, President Frondizi declared that cinema “es un medio de poderosa irradiación, capaz de influir en las mentalidades y en conciencias anulando los valores éticos y culturales que hacen a la esencia de una comunidad nacional” (Avellaneda 22). For Frondizi, film had to align with the nation and its development, that is to say, support modernization. One of the filmmakers who challenged the progressive idealism of those years was Fernando Birri (1925-), who had studied at the Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografia in Rome. Upon returning to Argentina, he founded the Instituto de Cinematografía at the National Litoral University in Santa Fe in the late 1950s. Birri understood cinema as an ideal instrument to mobilize the poor masses and *advance their growth*, while also creating a national and regional movement that would end with the privilege of the upper and middle classes. To do that, cinema had to show the country's conditions in a realist and critical way (Bernini 156). But, according to Birri, in Argentine cinema “el argentino no se reconocía a sí mismo, ni reconocía el rostro de su ‘Gran madre’, de su propia nación” (quoted in Varea 15). To redress this state of affairs, Birri's vision was crystallized in a short documentary, *Tire dié* [Toss Me a Dime] (1959) and his first-feature length film, *Los inundados* [The Flooded Ones] (1961). Made up of interviews with several slum-dwellers shot from 1957 to 1959, *Tire dié* displays children begging for alms and/or running on the roofs of trains. Some are illiterate while others are sick and lack medical attention. *Los inundados* was set in a similar milieu as the documentary and was based on a short-story by Mateo Booz.<sup>6</sup> Resorting to satire and picaresque, *Los inundados* uses social critique to depict the living conditions of poor residents in areas that are frequently flooded (Bravi n/p). Birri's portrayal of the country's reality conflicted with Frondizi's developmentalism. Consequently, his anti-propaganda films were prohibited because, as Gumucio Dagron puts it, “they show to the world an image of Argentina that the ruling class would like very much to hide, insofar as they allude to the class's responsibility—or irresponsibility” (86). Although developmentalism encompassed the idea of an incomplete advance, presenting the circumstances that made it necessary on the silver screen was not allowed. Furthermore, during Frondizi's presidency, Catholic groups keenly participated in monitoring film releases.

### Promoting Catholic Values

Catholic sectors that together with the Armed Forces took part in ousting Perón were also active in the cultural scene and resisted social change. Scholar Fernando Ramírez Llorens calls this resistance “traditional blockade” and defines it as “a process by which slowly but surely the State, with the active participation of lay Catholics, is going to toughen up control over film exhibition and later film production” (333). It should be noted that the Argentine Catholics were doing what their counterparts in other countries had done in the 1930s, so what was unusual was not their stance but the timing regarding film control.<sup>7</sup> The Argentine Catholics' traditional blockage that restricted film content was headed by Ramiro De Lafuente, a member of the Argentine Catholic Association (ACA) and the first director of the commission in charge of rating films. According to Mariano Calistro, De Lafuente “inicia una campaña de moralidad, implacable e intolerable” (120). Indeed, under his influence, the composition of the commission in charge of rating films

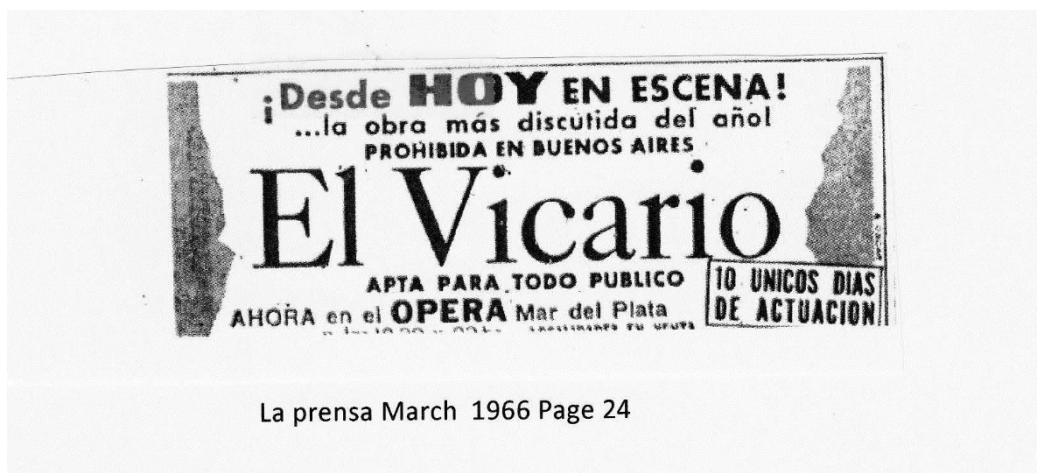
made up by representatives from the Ministry of Education and Justice, three from the National Council of Education, a member of the INC who would preside, and two producers and two exhibitors (the latter without voting rights) was modified in 1959. Decree 9,660, crafted by De Lafuente, allowed seven representatives of civic organizations, such as the League of Family Fathers, the League of Family Mothers, the Christian Family Movement, the Family Institute and the International Union to Protect Children, to join this commission (Avellaneda 15). These Catholic organizations were, thus, given power to select content and rate films.<sup>8</sup>

Catholics were also successful in passing new censorship legislation, even though it conflicted with the national Constitution. In 1963, civilian President José María Guido (term of office 1962-1963) signed Law 8,205, suspending articles 4 and 22, which had upheld freedom of expression as stated in the Constitution. In addition, Law 8,205 created the Consejo Honorario de Calificación Cinematográfica with the mandate to make cuts in the films that were submitted for its approval, and whose first elected president was De Lafuente (Avellaneda 16-17). Contrary to Law 62/57, Law 8,205 was eminently anti-modern in the sense that, as Francisco Colom González puts it, “el sujeto moderno, libre del anclaje de la fe y la tradición, nació del proceso de pensarse soberano de sí mismo” (15). As such, it met the staunch opposition of political parties and professional organizations associated with the film industry.

Content restrictions supported by Catholics were maintained during the democratic government of Arturo Illia (term of office 1963-1966), but their legality was contested. One instance of debatable morality in which Catholic organizations intervened affected the screening of a foreign film. Considered a masterpiece of modernist cinema, *The Silence* by Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman included several provocative scenes of sex, female masturbation, urination, and a couple making out in a public place. *The Silence* was shown for two weeks in Buenos Aires in 1964 before its copies were seized (Grossi 47). If we consider, following John King, that in Argentina “people flocked to the films of Ingmar Bergman” (169), this event generated significant discontent among the Argentine fans of the Swedish filmmaker and *cineclubistas*. Moreover, three Argentine films that faced problems because of nudity or censored scenes during that year were *Primero yo* [Me First] (Fernando Ayala 1963), *Circe* (Manuel Antín 1964), and *La mujer del zapatero* [The Shoemaker’s Wife] (Armando Bo 1964) (Varea 28).<sup>9</sup>

In February 1966, another resonant case of traditional blockade, concerned a play—a different audiovisual form. Because this incident illustrates the mindset of Catholics, it is worth discussing in detail. *El Vicario* [The Deputy] was a polemical drama by German playwright Rolf Hochbuth (1931-) which criticized the role of the Church during World War II. Cardinal Antonio Caggiano asked the Buenos Aires Mayor, Francisco Rabanal, to ban it, citing the denigration of the memory of Pope Pius XII who was portrayed as indifferent to the plight of Jews during the Holocaust (“El Cardenal” 19).<sup>10</sup> In addition to Caggiano, the Association of Female Catholic Writers and Publicists, the College of Priests of Buenos Aires, the Federation of Catholic Circles of Workers, and the National Council of the Christian Family Movement supported and helped secure the ban, stating that the play had even been forbidden in Israel. Defending freedom of expression, attorney Carlos Sánchez Viamonte announced that he would appeal the resolution on the grounds of unconstitutionality. In a piece signed by J. P. on February 13, which appeared in *La prensa*, the author summarized the arguments for both sides, but also urged the lifting of the prohibition, mentioning the solid prestige of Pope Pious XX and stating that “el público mayor edad no necesita de andadores” (“A propósito” n/p). On February 15, *La prensa* reported of an injunctive relief that Osvaldo Terranova, copyright holder for the play’s performance, pursued, stating that the ban was not based on any law, and thus went against the freedom to publish, work, and engage in legal business. Despite the fact that Buenos Aires city council member Walter V. Costanza called for a special meeting to discuss the ban, *El Vicario* ended up being performed in Mar del Plata, over ten days, coinciding with the prestigious Mar del Plata International Film Festival attended by international film stars and famous directors (“Acción” 20). This case not

only shows the way Catholic organizations operated to restrict content, but also the challenges that they met while the freedoms and rights stated in the Constitutions were in effect.<sup>11</sup>



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### Promoting National Beliefs

After 1960, when a Socialist regime was established in Cuba, legislation was passed in Argentina to strengthen and defend national ideals in film, but such imposition was far from popular. This process began with the passing during Frondizi's government of Decree 5,797/61 which authorized the promotion of the integrity of the family, national sovereignty, and symbols of the nation.<sup>12</sup> But during Illia's presidency, there were several attempts to end the restrictive legislation that affected cinema. Members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Senators belonging to the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo (UCRP), Illia's own party, sought to repeal Law 8,205 which curtailed the freedoms granted by the Constitution. This move was supported by all the sectors associated with the cinematographic industry: Sociedad Argentina de Escritores [The Argentine Association of Writers], Sociedad General de Autores de la Argentina [General Association of Authors of Argentina], Asociación Argentina de Actores [Argentine Association of Actors], Directores Cinematográficos Argentinos [Argentine Film Directors], Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de la Argentina [Argentine Association of Film Journalists], Asociación General de Productores de Películas [General Association of Film Producers], among others. A 1965 editorial of *Tiempo de cine* stated, "expresaron su protesta de viva voz en actos públicos y manifestaciones callejeras, algunas de la cuales concluyeron en la cárcel. ¿Qué interés tiene este sector? El derecho de la libertad de expresión, garantizado por la Constitución Nacional, la Cámara de Senadores y el sentido común" ("Notas" 2).<sup>13</sup> The editorial also criticized the fact that the Catholic organizations whose members were part of the Honorary Council of Cinematographic Classification exerted political pressure over the Chamber of Deputies to avoid ratifying the legislation crafted in the Chamber of Senators to end this type of control.

The enforcement of Decree 8,205 under Illia's government led to an instance of abuse of control to the detriment of a foreign film. The film *Morir en Madrid* [To Die in Madrid] (Frédéric Rossif, 1963) provided a harsh critique of General Francisco Franco (1892-1975).<sup>14</sup> Shot in black and white, it relies on archival footage to show the socio-economic conditions of Spain in the 1930s that paved the way for the Spanish Civil War. In 1964, the distributor sought the permit to exhibit the film, but in an effort to stop its release, the National Honorary Council of Cinematographic Classification (NHCCC) delayed its approval and sent the film to the Ministry of Foreign Relations, in a step beyond those stipulated by the law and in an effort to enlist diplomats to intervene in its prohibition. Having fulfilled his part, the distributor showed the documentary, but the film was banned and seized by the authorities of the Council (De Lafuente and Juan Martín Viedma).



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### Censorship during the Argentine Revolution

In June 1966, General Juan Carlos Onganía (1914-1995) deposed President Illia and established the Argentine Revolution (1966-1970), a military government that used traditional forms of control, such as curtailing civil liberties and banning political parties with the goal of suppressing disagreements and prioritizing the country's modernization (Rock 347). Adolfo Grassi who had led the INC was replaced by Colonel Oscar Vedoya from July 1-13, 1966, and later, by Lt. Col. Adolfo Ridruejo, who took over as a general administrator and would remain in this post until the democratic transition of 1973. Complementing the designation of new authorities to head the INC, film censorship to defend the Argentine way of life was part of Law 16,995 passed in September 1966. Its Article 13 denied a classification to domestic films that did not support the "national way of life," that is to say, films had to be fully aligned with Catholicism and the values of the Western Hemisphere. This control was based on Pope Paul VI's characterization of the film industry as one that "está cargada de responsabilidades sociales" (Pablo VI).

Censorship was inextricably linked to the Armed Forces' attempt to gain legitimacy for their unconstitutional regime. By presenting themselves as defenders of the national, they sought to deter or minimize the dissemination of Communist ideas. Laura Podalsky correctly notes that "Even as the military government deployed censorship to combat leftist ideologies and the decay of moral standards, it posited its own conservative, nationalist vision—the 'Revolución Argentina'—infused with universal ideas and spiritual values" (206). During the Onganiato when the Constitution was temporarily suspended, legislation concerning the film industry tightened censorship and was in effect until 1984. In May 1968, another cinema law, Law 17,741 was passed. Article 9 mandated the INC to classify films through the Junta Asesora Honoraria [Honorary Advisory Board], while Article 23 detailed the mandatory certificate for exhibition of national and foreign films, stating that "El instituto podrá negar este certificado por razones comerciales o por atentar contra el estilo de nacional de vida o las pautas culturales de la comunidad argentina" ("Ley 17,741" 206). According to the newspaper *La capital*, the most contentious aspects were Article 3

which regulated the exclusion of certain films from exhibition and Article 23 which mentioned the Argentine style of life and the cultural features of the Argentine community (9). Consequently, there were three steps before a film could be shown. A film had to be first checked to assert its Argentine nationality, then its morality had to be ascertained (censorship), and finally it had to be classified by the Honorary Advisory Board to the INC (interventor Ridruejo).

The new regulation affected, in its first year, an eclectic group of films. *Ufa con el sexo* [Puff with Sex] (Rodolfo Kuhn 1968) met with the disapproval of censors and was released at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival only in 2007. Despite the fact that the film did not have either nudity or sex scenes, it was banned for its daring treatment of love and sex (Basile 49-50). Armando Bo's productions, in which sensual actress Isabel Sarli starred, faced delays in being released.<sup>15</sup> At the end of 1968, *El heraldo* reported on films that were initially classified as B by the Honorary Advisory Board, but whose category was changed to A by Ridruejo. Those films were Nicolás Sarquís's opera prima *Palo y hueso* [Stick and Bone], the Argentine-Chilean co-production *Eloy* directed by Humberto Ríos, the Mexican-Argentine *La cama* [The Bed], Armando Bo's *Carne* [Meat], and Leonardo Favio's *El dependiente* [The Salesman]. Of all these films, the B classification for *El dependiente* was extensively reported given the film's good reception abroad. None of these seemed to have violated the Argentine way of life.

A different case was the film production of a new group of politicized filmmakers. In 1968, the Cine Liberación group entered the cinematographic scene. Filmmakers Octavio Getino, Jorge Cedrón, and Fernando Solanas, all saw film as a powerful medium to enlighten the illiterate rural masses as well as students and working-class men who could develop class-based solidarity to fight for radical social change (Burton 1986; Lusnich and Piedras 2011). They sought to increase awareness among Argentines of their own country and the region's dependency and "backwardness." In May 1968, *La hora de los hornos* [The Hour of the Furnaces] (Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas) was prohibited in Argentina but released abroad.<sup>16</sup>

Expanding the scope of Law 8205/63, Law 18,019 promulgated in December 1968 was the central bill allowing film censorship. In December 1968, Guillermo Borda, Minister of the Interior, announced the creation of the Ente Nacional de Calificación Cinematográfica [from now on the Film Rating Board], in which neither filmmakers nor actors were represented. The Film Rating Board began its functions on January 7, 1969 censoring films that promoted infidelity, abortion, and prostitution thus conspiring against marriage and family, endorsed lasciviousness and/or went against good customs (Sayago 135). In the summer of 1968-69, as a reaction to that law, journalist Bernardo Neustadt organized a meeting between Minister Borda and acclaimed writer Ernesto Sábato who warned the former against the dire consequences of censorship for the national film industry: "Se puede terminar con los pocos restos del cine nacional. Y si se aplica la ley en forma rigurosa, se va a matar la creación cinematográfica" ("El fin" n/p).

By 1970, Sábato's words had hit the mark. Argentine cinema had lost a considerable number of viewers, a fact that *La gaceta* attributed to the perverse effects of censorship: "El millón de espectadores perdidos cabe atribuirlos a la acción de la censura que aleja de las salas a multitudes de niños y adolescentes con sus exageradas prohibiciones para la minoridad y también a multitudes de adultos, con el déficit de atracción que sus cortes infligen a muchas películas, por no hablar de las que son totalmente prohibidas" ("La concurrencia" 436). For Fred Sill, director of Paramount Films Argentina, censorship was one of the main challenges to the film industry because "desalienta al productor extranjero. Porque la censura crea un clima de inestabilidad y nadie quiere arriesgarse a que, de buenas a primeras, le prohíban una película que puede exhibirse en cualquier otro país del mundo ("Agoniza" 17).

Censorship, for example, affected the release of Raymundo Gleyzer's *México, la revolución congelada* [México, the Frozen Revolution], whose suppression was requested by the Mexican Embassy in Argentina. The Argentine Association of Film Critics denounced the resolution of the Board of Cinematography, stating that "ahora la censura además de tener carácter político se subordina a los requerimientos de un país extranjero, lo cual supone una abdicación de las más



elementales normas de nuestra soberanía. Un país dueño de su destino jamás acepta imposiciones ajenas cualquiera sea el terreno en que estas se manifiesten” (Ferreira 206). For a government that had made defending national values its banner, yielding to the pressures of other governments constituted a remarkable inconsistency.

As the Revolución Argentina came to an end in 1973, a new cinema law, Law 20,170 was signed on February 21.<sup>17</sup> Its Article 13 stated that films should be denied classification if they went against the interests of the nation (Avellaneda 42). *El heraldo* decried the passing of this piece of legislation weeks before elections, noting that given that the Argentine state did not seem to care for film production, it could have well waited three more weeks to have the project analyzed by Congress. According to *El heraldo*, Law 20,170 “fija una total intervención del estado en el futuro del cine argentino” (“Sorpresa” 57). Law 20,170 changed the classification process of films: now it was to be done after a screening that rated films on whether they could benefit from compulsory exhibition and could be exported. Finally, they had to be assessed on whether they could be classified as of special interest, a category reserved for films exalting the moral, historical or communal values of the nation and were of indisputable quality.

### Censorship during the Third Peronist Government

The electoral victory of Héctor Cámpora (term of office 1973) allowed Perón’s return to Argentina in 1973 after 18 years of exile as well as his candidacy and eventual success in new elections. The transition from military to democratic authorities entailed a change in the authorities of the INC as well as in the Film Rating Board. Ridruejo was replaced by actor and director Hugo del Carril (1912-1989), who confirmed his commitment to national themes in Argentine cinema (N. B. 46). Another of his goals was the drafting of a new law that would replace Law 20,170. For Mario Soffici, Subdirector of Cinematography, one of the necessary conditions to have a healthy national film production was stability. He added: “Debemos dar un mayor estímulo a la producción nacional y a su vez una mayor libertad creativa” (“En 45 días” 229). Authorities also changed in the Film Rating Board. In August 1973, Octavio Getino, writer and co-director *The Hour of the Furnaces* with Fernando Solanas, was named head of the Board. Getino was mandated to reverse the most constraining aspects of the censorship legislation: “Mi misión principal dentro del cargo será la de elaborar en el término de tres meses un proyecto de nueva ley de calificación cinematográfica que reemplace a la 18,019 que está actualmente en vigencia y con la que, por otra parte, me voy a manejar en mi gestión pero interpretándola bajo la filosofía de una nueva orientación (“Nueva ley” 256). As head of the Film Rating Board, Getino was advised by an Honorary Advisory Council made up by sociologists, priests, children’s advocates, psychologists and representatives of the Confederación General del Trabajo [General Confederation of Labor] (CGT).<sup>18</sup>

While these new authorities and policies signaled the democratization of the Argentine state and constituted a break with the recent authoritarian past, these projects were derailed for several reasons. First, Hugo del Carril resigned as the head of the INC in January 1974. The respected Soffici took over and whereas he made it known that first on his list of priorities was the passing of the new draft of the cinema law, the task was far from simple. Second, Perón died in office less than a year after his return to Argentina. The continuation of his regime was made possible by the succession of his wife María Estela Martínez de Perón as president. Nonetheless, during her presidency, Getino left the Film Rating Board that was in charge of censorship and was replaced by Miguel Paulino Tato, who played a crucial role in the perpetuation of film censorship.<sup>19</sup> Like De Lafuente, Tato was a Catholic, whose goals were clear: “iniciar la apertura a la descolonización mental atacando los “westerns” del subgénero italiano y similares, desterrar los filmes sobre “artes marciales,” proteger al cine nacional de mentalidad argentina y lograr la desaparición de 100 a 150 filmes foráneos por año de las pantallas del país” (“Tato fija” 442).

Tato's remarks showed continuity with the policies outlined by Getino in front of the Film Rating Board, which emphasized decolonization, nationalism, and a cinematic production that privileged national topics. What was new in Tato's implementation of censorship was banning some genres to eliminate the foreign films available for the Argentine public, a move that would rid the country, in his opinion, of the offer of low-quality films, and free screens for the showing of Argentine films. Tato also justified his censoring decisions, saying that he sought to protect the morality of Argentines. Curiously, his deployment of the Law 18,109 also indicated his alignment with the *revolución argentina* given that he was using legislation passed during the term of office of General Onganía. Thus, it is not surprising that he was ratified in his position after the military *coup d'état* of March 1976, remaining in it until 1978 when he resigned (Spinsanti n/p).

One noteworthy facet of censorship is that it was not just used to either rate films and/or ban them either partially or completely: it was deployed from the very beginning of the process. Producers who wanted to apply for credit to finance their films have to present the scripts and had them approved before starting to shoot. Two projects were denied loans based on their scripts: *El pibe Cabeza* [Kid Cabeza] (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson) accused of defending crime, and *Mi novia el travesti* [My Fiancé the Travesty] (Enrique Cahen Salaberry) accused of corruption and promoting homosexuality.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the rating of films, of the 38 Argentine films released in 1974, 18 were restricted for those over 18 years of age and 3 were restricted for those under 14 years of age while 17 were without restrictions ("Hablan" n/p). The persistence of censorship, though forcefully resisted, indicated a climate of authoritarianism. Quite predictably, unions negatively reacted to Tato's measures, as did other sectors of the cinematographic industry. For instance, the Argentine Association of Actors decried the resolution to maintain during democracy this mechanism of control that was contrary to the will expressed by the Argentine people.<sup>21</sup> As film critic Luciano Monteagudo rhetorically asks, "¿Qué distribuidor iba a arriesgarse a comprar en el exterior una película que luego podía terminar arrumbada en un armario o desfigurada si llegaba a las salas?" (n/p). Indeed, Tato was feared for his arbitrariness, and that dread generated a contraction of the Argentine cinematic industry.<sup>22</sup>

As the implementation of censorship continued, so did opposition against it. In March 1975, when the film *Mi novia el travesti* encountered problems with the Film Ratings Board, an editorial from *El heraldo* characterized it as "a pariah film in its own country" ("Nueva crisis" 68). The opinion piece also decried the lack of respect for the freedoms specified in the Constitution.<sup>23</sup> In 1976, Torre Nilsson's film, *Piedra libre* [Free for All] garnered an award in the Taormina Film Festival but was censored in Argentina. At first, it had a release date in April, but after the military *coup d'état* on March 24, 1976, the date was pushed back. Quite understandably, Torre Nilsson was not pleased with this decision and decided to remain in Europe where he was attending film festivals. At the end of May, he presented the film in Cannes where it was shown in two sessions of Market of Cinema and he took advantage of a press conference to denounce the workings of censorship in Argentina ("*Piedra libre* en Cannes" 118). Once back in Argentina, in dialogue with a staff member of *El heraldo*, Torre Nilsson indicated "esta prohibición revela un no respeto hacia el derecho, un no respeto hacia la ley cinematográfica" (Aztarain 112). On June 17, Judge Jorge Enrique Cermesoni rejected the film's prohibition dated April 14, stating that the reasons mentioned were insufficient given that the Board had classified it on March 22 ("Fallo que revoca" n/p). This decision was appealed by the Film Rating Board and the case was moved to the Federal Chamber of Appeal which, on July 13, determined that the film could be exhibited but set the date of July 28 as the deadline to appeal that decision. While the Film Rating Board did not present an appeal, the INC did, taking the matter to the Supreme Court. While that process continued, however, the film could be shown with the original classification of "prohibited for those under 18 years of age," but without the benefits granted in the cinema law. The *premiere* was scheduled for August 19 ("*Piedra libre* se estrenará" 210) but *Piedra libre* was finally released in September. This case negatively affected the film industry.



A new military government implied new authorities supervising the film industry as well as new more restrictive directives for this sector. Whereas Capitan Jorge Bitlewston was designated to lead the Institute, Tato was ratified as head of the Film Rating Board. On May 5, the Secretary of Public Information, under the direction of Captain Carlos Conti issued “Pautas para la orientación y calificación de la industria cinematográfica,” mentioning three groups of films: “las que exaltaban al hombre en su lucha eterna [...] por su religión, las de mero entretenimiento, y las que ‘atentan contra los propósitos de reintegrar y revitalizar nuestra comunidad’” (Getino n/p). Consequently, with the return of military authorities, the censorship classification of the mid-1960s continued to be applied to both Argentine and foreign films.

To conclude, cultural citizenship, that is to say, the citizenry’s rights of freedom of expression was restricted by gradual anti-modern methods during the 1958-1976 period. While the initial measures regulating film for this period were approved in 1957, my findings suggest that laws defending minors and supporting the rating of films that were approved by the government of Aramburu were not necessarily authoritarian themselves and were already used in other countries such as Great Britain and the United States. However, the democratic government of Frondizi expanded the control over the film industry as it sought to promote the country, defend Catholic values, and uphold national principles. These three rationales were maintained, with considerable opposition, during Illia’s presidency. Onganía’s *revolución argentina* further limited film content, particularly after the passing of Law 18,019 which was maintained until 1984. Despite the fact that with the return of democracy in 1973, both the INC and the Film Rating Board were mandated to work on new legislation to replace Law 18,019 of censorship and the new cinema law, Law 20,170, passed before that year democratic elections, political tensions did not make possible the implementation of new legislation before the *coup d’état* of March 1976. Nonetheless, from mid-1973 to March 1976, several sectors expressed their dissatisfaction with the brand of film censorship imposed by Tato. After March 1976, however, opposition to the application of Law 18,019 and Law 20,170 was unfeasible as the Constitution was suspended.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> As Jessica Stites Mor mentions, film censorship began during Peronism (52).

<sup>3</sup> Laura Podalsky explains that there were 850,000 TV sets in Argentina around 1961-62, a number that increased to 2, 480,000 in the years 1967-1968 (215).

<sup>4</sup> Juan Carlos Goti Aguilar notes that the law specified that "fuera de ello, no podrán imponerse prohibiciones ni efectuarse cortes en las películas, sino por resolución judicial, dictada en proceso penal por juez competente" (17). Claudio España also highlights the novelty of article 4 (74).

<sup>5</sup> Developmentalism was a program of national expansion based on heavy industrialization, which would, in turn, free the country from its need of imports (Szusterman 79-81).

<sup>6</sup> *Los inundados* was screened at the Venice Film Festival, where it garnered an award for Best First Work.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this, please see James Robertson for Great Britain and Laura Wittern-Keller for the US.

<sup>8</sup> On January 1966, the newspaper *El mundo* reported the meeting of a "morality commission" in the town of Villa Dolores, Cordoba that met to rate the Swedish film *Dear John* (Lars Magnum Lindgren 1964), which had nudity scenes.

<sup>9</sup> *Primero yo* deals with a father (Alberto de Mendoza) who competes with his shy son (Ricardo Areco) and sexually abuses his girl-friend (Marilina Ross). *Cirve* is based on one of Julio Cortázar's short stories and revolves around a *femme fatale* (Garciela Borges) who has poisoned her two fiancés and is discovered when she tries to kill the third one. *La mujer del zapatero* is a comedy starring Isabel Sarli who plays the role of a woman desired by all men who betrays her husband so as to pay his debt to the shoemaker.

<sup>10</sup> Most of Hochbuth's plays are controversial. *The Deputy* was performed in Berlin and London in the Aldwych Theater in 1963. It was later made into a film, *Amen*, directed by Konstantinos Costa Gavras in 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Opposition to censorship during the 1963-1966 period contravenes Fernando Ramírez Llorens' assertion that Catholic paternalism was aligned with the military authorities' policies (335).

<sup>12</sup> Goti Aguilar refers to a different Decree 5665/61 which incorporates language pertaining to the national community so as to make an explicit statement against Communism (21).

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<sup>13</sup> Ramírez Llorens calls attention to the silence of North American film distributors (334), but Hollywood had adopted policies of prior restraint and self-censorship through the Production Code Administration so as to avoid lengthy lawsuits. For more on this, please see Witten-Keller.

<sup>14</sup> Franco was a conservative who was also known as *the caudillo de la última Cruzada* [Leader of the Last Crusade]. He relied on Opus Dei members to modernize Spain.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this, please see Podalsky pages 204-205.

<sup>16</sup> In June, *La hora* was presented at the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro (Pesaro Film Festival).

<sup>17</sup> Onganía was replaced by Roberto Levingston (term of office 1970-1971). Alejandro Lanusse (term of office 1971-1973) led the transition to democracy.

<sup>18</sup> Some of the foreign films that were screened after being censored included: *The Devils* (Ken Russell 1971), *The Decameron* (Pier Paolo Pasolini 1971), *State of Siege* (Costas Gravas 1972), and *La grande bouffe* [The Great Feast] (Marco Ferreri 1973) (“El fin” n/p).

<sup>19</sup> Tato was a film critic who during the early 1940s was a fascist sympathizer (Falicov 22).

<sup>20</sup> *El pibe Cabeza* [The Kid Cabeza] and *Mi novia el travesti* [My Fiancé the Travestite] were finally released in 1975—the former with the title *Mi novia el* [Mi Fiancé Him]—and *Los años infames* was released as *Proceso a la infamia* [Procces to Infamy] in 1978.

<sup>21</sup> “La Asociación Argentina de Actores reafirma una vez más que cree firmemente que la madurez política demostrada por el conjunto del pueblo argentino en las últimas elecciones lo habilita tanto como su derecho natural a saber qué puede y quiere de “su” cine” (“Actores están alertas” 405).

<sup>22</sup> Fernando Martín Peña lists three projects either directed or produced by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson that were censored by Tato. During the shooting of *El pibe Cabeza*, the Film Rating Board denied the loan and economic benefits of industrial recuperation. Tato’s intervention also affected *Los gauchos judíos* directed by Juan José Jusid and produced by Torre Nilsson and *Piedra libre* which was classified as restricted for those 18 years or older on March 22, 1976, to be later censored (32).

<sup>23</sup> Stites Mor explains that “by the mid-1970s, the [film workers] union was vocal in calling for the protection of mature content as an issue of civil liberty and critical to the liberation of women” (65).