

Cuban Fiction Films of the 1990s: The End of the State's Absolute Control over Film Production

Cine cubano de ficción de los 90: fin del control absoluto del Estado sobre la producción cinematográfica

  Mariuska Quiñones Aguilar¹

  Ernesto Santiesteban Leyva²

¹ Carrera de Ciencias de la Información, Facultad de Informática Matemática, Universidad de Holguín, Holguín, Cuba

² Departamento de Historia de Cuba y Marxismo Leninismo a, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Holguín, Holguín, Cuba

Fecha de recepción: 14.02.2025

Fecha de revisión: 02.04.2025

Fecha de aprobación: 08.04.2025

Cómo citar: Quiñones Aguilar, M., & Santiesteban Leyva, E. (2025). Cuban Fiction Films of the 1990s: The End of the State's Absolute Control over Film Production *Espergesia*, 12(1), e120105.

<https://doi.org/10.18050/rev.espergesia.v12i1.3564>

Autor de correspondencia: Mariuska Quiñones Aguilar

Abstract

During the 1990s, Cuban fiction cinema underwent a profound transformation process, marked by the crisis of the socialist model and the beginning of the Special Period. This context conditioned national audiovisual production, weakening the absolute control that until then had been exercised by the State over the film industry through the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC, from Spanish initials). The main objective of this research was to analyze how this structural change impacted the production dynamics, the themes addressed and the relationship among cinema, history and national identity in the fiction films produced during that period. An interpretative qualitative methodology was applied, based on the textual analysis of eight representative films of the period, complemented with a documentary review of academic sources specialized in the subject. The approach articulated tools from cultural studies, representation theory and postcolonial studies. The results showed that, in the face of the crisis, filmmakers turned to co-productions, self-financing and digital technologies. These strategies favored greater creative autonomy and the emergence of narratives that broke with traditional revolutionary rhetoric. As a result, it was possible to explore themes hitherto little addressed, such as migration, orientation, social and institutional critique, among others such as spirituality and tolerance. It was concluded that the 1990s marked the beginning of the end of the State monopoly on fiction films in Cuba, giving way to a more plural, critical and aesthetically renewed audiovisual field.

Key words: Cuban fiction cinema; Special Period; film production; State control; critical narrative.

Resumen

Durante la década de 1990, el cine cubano de ficción atravesó un proceso profundo de transformación, marcado por la crisis del modelo socialista y el inicio del Período Especial. Este contexto condicionó la producción audiovisual nacional, debilitando el control absoluto que hasta entonces había ejercido el Estado sobre la industria cinematográfica a través del El Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC). El objetivo principal de esta investigación fue analizar cómo este cambio estructural impactó en las dinámicas de producción, las temáticas abordadas y la relación entre cine, historia e identidad nacional en las películas de ficción producidas en ese período. Se aplicó una metodología cualitativa de tipo interpretativo, basada en el análisis textual de ocho filmes representativos de la época, complementado con una revisión documental de fuentes académicas especializadas en el tema. El enfoque articuló herramientas de los estudios culturales, la teoría de la representación y los estudios poscoloniales. Los resultados mostraron que, frente a la crisis, los cineastas recurrieron a coproducciones, autofinanciamiento y tecnologías digitales. Estas estrategias favorecieron una mayor autonomía creativa y la emergencia de narrativas que rompieron con la retórica revolucionaria tradicional. Por lo que fue posible la exploración de temas hasta entonces poco abordados, como la migración, la orientación, la crítica social e institucional, entre otros como la espiritualidad y la tolerancia. Se concluyó que los años noventa marcaron el inicio del fin del monopolio estatal sobre el cine de ficción en Cuba, dando paso a un campo audiovisual más plural, crítico y estéticamente renovado.

Palabras clave: Cine cubano de ficción; Período Especial, producción cinematográfica; control estatal, narrativa crítica.

INTRODUCTION

The Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), founded in 1959, was the axis of the Cuban State's cultural policy on cinema. Born in the euphoria of victory, the ICAIC centralized the production, distribution and exhibition of films and became a privileged site for the symbolic construction of the revolutionary and national identity. Under its patronage, a cinema dedicated to the principles of socialism was established, whose specific objective was to instruct, mobilize and reaffirm the ideological unity of the Cuban project (Chanan, 2004). But in the 1990s, this hegemonic position faced great tension: the collapse of the socialist camp, the decrease of funds provided by the State, the opening to international co-production systems, the rise of independent filmmakers and the gradual adaptation to new digital technologies transformed this form of filmmaking led by the ICAIC into more hybrid and even more autonomous ways of producing audiovisuals (Díaz & del Río, 2010).

In the context of the structural crisis of the "Real Socialism" model and the cessation of financial assistance from the Soviet bloc, Cuban fiction cinema in the 1990s underwent profound changes that modified not only its material conditions of production, but also its narrative logic, its relationship with the State and its articulation with the nation's social imaginaries. The so-called "Special Period in Times of Peace," declared by the Cuban government after the fall of the Soviet Union, was the response to an unprecedented crisis that significantly affected all areas of cultural life, including cinema (Consuegra Sanfiel & Ayala, 2017). Faced with such economic instability, filmmakers had no choice but to find alternative sources of financing, production and distribution. This fact marked the end of the Cuban state's absolute control over cinema.

In this sense, fiction cinema was and is a hotbed of critical questioning of the national reality. The new conditions favored the development of texts that approached the social, economic and cultural crises of post-Soviet Cuba from different angles. Films such as *Fresa y Chocolate* (1993), *Madagascar* (1994) or *La Vida es Silbar* (1998) not only demonstrated a formal and thematic renewal of Cuban cinema, but also signified the transition towards a cinema less subordinated

to the ideological regulations of the State, more plural and open to dialogue with the world (Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023).

The relationship between cinema and history acquired complex subtleties in this new situation. Long relegated to the background as a secondary/decorative medium in historiographical studies, over time, fictional cinema was rehabilitated as a legitimate site for historical representation and the construction of social memory. In this regard, researchers such as Rosenstone (2014) and Marí (2018) argue that, even with all the narrative licenses, cinema can be an excellent tool for reflecting on history, portraying the opposing forces, tensions and dreams of an era. In the Cuban case, this assumption is particularly important. The fictions of the 1990s tended to provide narratives that, beyond their plot, were symptomatic of the nation's symbolic condition: from the reevaluation of revolutionary values to the emergence of dissident voices and forgotten experiences.

It is crucial to add that this transformation was not a complete break with the state apparatus. ICAIC. In other situations, such as Guantanamera (1995), international co-production accompanied by institutional sponsorship also created films that constructively criticized the apparatus from the inside out. In other cases, such as *Lejanía* (1995) or *Las Profecías de Amanda* (1999), a greater authorial autonomy could be seen linked to new expressive and thematic possibilities that moved away from the traditional heroic rhetoric (Baron, 2018; González, 2024).

In the midst of this panorama, the International Film and TV School of San Antonio de Los Baños (EICTV, from Spanish initials), created in 1986, served as a catalyst by positioning itself as a space for learning and research. EICTV created exchanges between Cuban and international filmmakers, facilitating a more transnational and less ideologically determined aesthetics. This space was essential for the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers, who often chose independent or semi-clandestine production models, subverting institutional monopoly configurations (Kabous, 2018).

On an aesthetic level, during the 1990s, Cuban fiction cinema went from epic megalomania to a more intimate, fragmented and symbolic type of narrative. Allegory, black humor, feminine

subjectivity and the weapons of magical realism were repeated to account for a fed-up, disenchanted and insecure reality. This formal renovation was not only technical, but profoundly political, as it meant reorganizing the ways of looking at and narrating the Cuba of our days away from the revolutionary epic towards the everyday dramas, big and small, of particular men (Dalton, 2016; Deaver, 2013).

The approach to previously forbidden subjects -emigration, homosexuality, corruption of institutions, spirituality and racial discrimination- was positioned as one of the unique characteristics of this cinematography. The film *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate) was transformative in this sense, highlighting the importance of communication between opposing identities, as well as the critique of political dogmas, and the validation of otherness within the revolutionary mold (Santí, 1998). Such a discourse alone made it possible to enrich Cuban cinema with a new language, but it also established the relative ideological openness of the cultural authorities with respect to the international legitimization of the latter (Agosta & Keeton, 1994).

On the other hand, there was a growing number of women in creative and technical positions in cinema at that time. This participation, although limited, diversified narrative perspectives and generated a more complex and nuanced vision of Cuban reality, notably in the areas of subjectivity, the body and memory. Thus, discourses were formed that, from the intimate and domestic, opposed the grand narratives of the revolutionary project.

However, the influence of Cuban fiction cinema in the 1990s went beyond the borders. It was presented at foreign festivals and won awards and recognition, which helped consolidate its prestige. This foreign projection not only validated the intentions of the project's creators, but also contributed to a re-evaluated vision of post-revolutionary Cuba from more universal postures, without ever detaching itself from its cultural idiosyncrasies (Venegas, 2009), complemented with a kind of aesthetic experimentation, aligned with the new ways of thinking, feeling and narrating the Cuban experience.

The objective of this study was to analyze the transformation of Cuban fiction cinema in the 1990s, with emphasis on the progressive loss of absolute state control over film production, exploring how this transition made possible a thematic, stylistic and institutional diversification that reconfigured the cultural and historical representation of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

This study was framed within a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, with a cross-sectional review design of documents that addressed Cuban cultural historiography in general and studies on the Cuban film industry in the sociocultural context of the 1990s in particular. The object of study was a series of Cuban fiction films produced in the 1990s, both within the framework of ICAIC and on its margins, with the incipient appearance of independent cinema (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Selected Cuban fiction films from the 90's

Nº.	Title (year)	Director/s	Coincidences with the fiction filmography from the 90's.	Highlights (stylistic and thematic divergence)	Socio-cultural significance
1	<i>Hello Hemingway</i> (1990)	Fernando Pérez	Production in the Special Period, influence of ICAIC, search for identity	Melancholic and literary tone, centered on a teenage girl	Portrait of Cuban youth and intellectual aspiration in crisis

2	<i>Adorables mentiras</i> (1991)	Gerardo Chijona	Context of economic crisis, social satire, link to ICAIC	Comic tone, satire of the press and personal relationships	Social criticism through humor, showing popular resilience
3	<i>Fresa y chocolate</i> (1993)	Tomás Gutiérrez Alea y Juan Carlos Tabío	Special Period, social criticism, state support, international co-production.	Directly addresses homosexuality and political dissent	Turning point in cultural tolerance, visibilization of minorities
4	<i>Madagascar</i> (1994)	Fernando Pérez	Introspective exploration, symbology, feminine themes, discursive change	Fragmented narrative, poetic and generational language	Symbolic exploration of generational and ideological crisis
5	<i>Guantanamera</i> (1995)	Tomás Gutiérrez Alea y Juan Carlos Tabío	Production in the Special Period, influence of ICAIC, socio-political criticism, international co-production.	Use of funeral humor and institutional satire; narrative structure based on a symbolic journey.	Reflection on bureaucracy, death and migration as metaphors of ideological decadence
6	<i>Lejanía</i> (1995)	Jesús Díaz	Personal narratives, migratory reflection, subtle critique of the model.	Focus on affective family distance and migration	Introspective look at loss, exile and disaffection
7	<i>La vida es silbar</i> (1998)	Fernando Pérez	Religious motifs, rupture with official discourse, symbolic language	It incorporates urban surrealism and implicit religious criticism	Rereading the religious space as cultural resistance
8	<i>Un paraíso bajo las estrellas</i> (1999)	Daniel Díaz Torres	Economic crisis, international co-production, tension between tradition and personal desires	Musical comedy with popular and nostalgic focus	Reconstructing the Cuban imaginary from the intimate and the popular

Table 1 presents a comparative synthesis of eight Cuban fiction films produced during the 1990s, in the context of the “Special Period”. Coincidences around the economic crisis, the influence of the ICAIC and the changes in cultural identity are highlighted. At the same time, stylistic and thematic divergences are evidenced, from intimate approaches to humorous treatments. Finally, the sociocultural significance of each work is assessed, underlining its role in the critical representation of post-revolutionary Cuba.

From a methodological perspective, a textual analysis of the films was carried out, focusing on their modes of representation of historical events and social conflicts linked to the Special Period and the reconfiguration of the national imaginary. This analysis was complemented by a documentary review of academic sources, which allowed contextualizing the structural changes in the Cuban cinematographic field of the time. From the ethical point of view, all the sources used were cited in the text and referenced at the end in order to safeguard the intellectual property of the studies analyzed.

All these studies were decisive in approaching cinema as a form of historical interpretation and production of social meaning; in the theory of representation, useful for examining how narratives about nation, memory and identity were constructed; and in approaches to Latin American and postcolonial cinema, which helped to interpret the ways in which Cuban cinema was reconfigured in the face of the loss of the state monopoly and the opening to new forms of production and circulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The culmination of the process of collapse of European socialism with the disintegration of the USSR and the consequences for Cuba of this new geopolitical reality were disastrous (Consuegra Sanfiel & Ayala, 2018), since to the extinction of its allies should be added the intensification of the economic and financial embargo by the USA, the weight of the long-standing costly economic mistakes made by the Cuban leadership in the conduct of socialism, and the prolonged decline in the prices of raw materials -cane sugar among them- in the world market. All this led to an

unprecedented socioeconomic crisis in Cuban society, which affected every sphere of its existence. To face it, the Cuban State developed an economic and political strategy called Special Period in Times of Peace (Consuegra Sanfiel & Ayala, 2018), whose objectives were to resist the onslaught of the crisis, to seek the country’s reinsertion into the world economy, and to safeguard the social gains of the Revolution.

In the field of the film industry, the Special Peacetime Period saw national film production reduced almost to zero, and the solution to overcome this situation was to stimulate film production with other countries. The boom in co-productions began. In addition, a strong movement of independent creators appeared under the protection of the gradual proliferation of new digital technologies.

The severe and prolonged socioeconomic crisis deprived the art world in general and its cinematographic manifestation in particular of resources of all kinds, and this resulted, among many other effects, in the drastic decrease of fiction films. But this was not the most important cause of this phenomenon: The loss of interest of considerable segments of filmmakers and their audiences in productions dedicated to examining and/or artistically exalting the transcendental chapters of the process of the formation of Cuban nationality and the concomitant patriotic values also contributed to its materialization, while the themes aimed at social criticism and the re-evaluation of the recent state acquired an unprecedented vigor, which entailed the emphasis on lacerating topics conceived as ta-boos until then, such as emigration and administrative corruption, among others, which is why substantial means were channeled in that direction.

The aforementioned explains why the only fiction films directly dedicated to history released at the beginning and end of the decade were: one that narrates the nightmarish journey through a territory plagued by uncertainty of a motorized column of Cuban combatants immersed in the war in Angola (*Caravana*, 1990, Dir. Rogelio París) and another one whose theme went back to the Caribbean influence of the French Revolution, based on a classic contemporary Cuban novel (*El Siglo de las Luces*, 1992, Dir. Humberto Solás). There was also a third one that had as its center the reconstruction of a spectacular but strategically insignificant episode of the

anti-Batista revolutionary struggle, composed as a story with little basis in reliable historical sources and elaborated according to the canons of a psychological thriller -which is why it was included in the selection-, and directed by an outstanding Argentine filmmaker (*Operación Fangio*, 1999, Dir. Alberto Lecchi).

In the midst of this crisis, certain alternatives emerged to mitigate this situation, such as co-productions, self-financing and the use of digital technology (Díaz & del Rio, 2010). These alternatives materialized in productions such as *Hello Hemingway* (1990), *Adorables mentiras* (1991), *Fresa y Chocolate* (1993) -the first Cuban film to be nominated for an Oscar and the highest grossing film of the 20th century in Cuba-, among others (See Table 1). A peculiarity that would run like a transversal axis throughout this cinematography was that it focused on various gradients of social criticism, directed against the fissures of the current political system, in discourses in which the approach to taboo topics would become common (although they coexisted with) such as emigration, homosexuality, homophobia, religion and the rebirth of private property in the sphere of services, among others. In such a scenario, historical cinema would have few opportunities left to transmit its formative message (García Borrero, 2012). Only films such as *Caravana*, by Rogelio París (1990), *El siglo de las Luces*, by Humberto Solás (1992), and *Operación Fangio*, by Alberto Lecchi (1999), achieved notoriety.

The film *Hello Hemingway* (1990, Dir. Fernando Pérez) was an emblematic work of Cuban cinema at the beginning of the Special Period (Amiot, 2008). However, although state control was evident, films like this one managed to subtly portray themes such as migration, inequality and aspiration in an environment marked by precariousness (Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023). Despite the material limitations, this film managed to transcend internationally due to its authenticity; embodying a key moment in Cuban cinema, which reflected a real tension among art, ideology and the Cuban State that deeply penetrated society.

For its part, *Adorables mentiras* (1991, Dir. Gerardo Chijona), presented an ironic representation of Cuban reality, addressing themes such as identity, disenchantment and resilience, in a less solemn but equally critical tone (Lanza Caride+, 2021; Fernandes, 2006). Its realization evidenced the delicate balance between the

ideological control of the State and the new expressive possibilities offered by the changing environment. In this sense, the work constituted an aesthetic testimony of the tension between institutional continuity and creative openness in Cuban cinema in that decade.

Fresa y Chocolate (Strawberry and Chocolate) (1993, Co-Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío) was a milestone in the history of Cuban cinema, both for its thematic daring and its cultural and political impact. The film represented not only an artistic response to material restrictions, but also an act of ideological openness. Its existence was made possible by international co-productions, mainly with Mexico and Spain (Agosta & Keeton, 1994). Despite the economic limitations, it had the support of the State, evidenced by the direct involvement of Alfredo Guevara, a central figure of the ICAIC and the official cultural sphere. The narrative of *Fresa y Chocolate* courageously addressed homo-sexuality and political dissidence, topics historically marginalized by the state discourse. The relationship between Diego, a gay artist, and David, a young communist, brought to the stage the possibility of dialogue, empathy and constructive criticism within the revolutionary framework. This discursive openness was recognized internationally with an Oscar nomination, becoming the first Cuban film to achieve this distinction (Santí, 1998). Moreover, its success was evidence of a transformation in the official cultural sensibility, willing to explore previously silenced tensions (Agosta & Keeton, 1994). It also reflected a structural transition of Cuban cinema from the state-subsidized model to a more flexible and pluralistic co-production dynamic.

The film *Madagascar* (1994, Dir. Fernando Pérez), on the other hand, offers an inward-looking - and symbolic - view of the dilemmas of personal and national identity in Cuban society. It did not prioritize stories over characters in the way narrative films did, especially characters (i.e. women) who are so feminine, subjective and self-aware from their own reality (Meja, 2007). Such openings, approached in a more symbolic and experimental cinematographic language, would be realized through the figures of a grandmother, a mother and a daughter, each representing three generations of Cubans and three different visions of the Revolution and its progress (Mennell, 2014). The visual and narrative style of the film, far from classic socialist realism,

reflected a profound crisis of senses, as it was also interpreted internationally as an example of the intelligence and resilience of the country's culture (Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023).

The film *Guantanamera* (1995, Co-Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío), symbolized a paradigmatic example of Cuban fiction cinema of the 1990s, combining a subtle critique of the bureaucratic system with a profound reflection on uprooting, death and collective memory. *Guantanamera* took up the tradition of "cinema with a conscience", but did so from a humorous and disenchanted approach, questioning institutional rigidity by showing the absurdity of certain social practices through a funeral journey crossed by logistical, affective and political obstacles. In it, migration, aging and death functioned as allegories of ideological decomposition, while the female figure - as in other works of the period - acquired a symbolically regenerative role. Despite the material difficulties, *Guantanamera* had state support and managed to consolidate itself as one of the most successful Cuban films internationally, which evidenced the ability of the island's cinema to connect with global audiences without renouncing its cultural specificity (Bernal *et al.*, 2023). In short, *Guantanamera* reflected the maturity of Cuban cinema by assuming a critical posture from within the system, without falling into pamphleteering or total denial of the revolutionary project.

Lejanía (1995, Dir. Jesús Díaz) addressed themes such as migration, affective distance and family introspection, distancing itself from traditional heroic discourses (Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023). The film explored the emotional fracture caused by emigration, addressing the dissolution of ties as a metaphor for national uprooting. The director managed to find a way to express a complex critical vision of post-revolutionary Cuban society with a sensitive and intimate approach. Thus, *Lejanía* materialized the evolution that Cuban cinema has undergone towards a more personal representation, due to the economic scenario and the need to rejuvenate the cultural discourse (Hernández Morales, 2007).

La vida es silbar (1998, Dir. Fernando Pérez) uses the tensions among identity, spirituality and ideological control in the Special Period to allow the entry of themes that were relegated in the past (religion, marginality, female subjectivity); being, therefore, one of the most emblematic films of the island's cinema in the 1990s (Tornés

Bernal *et al.*, 2023; Dalton, 2016). *La vida es silbar*, with its religious symbols, symbolized a form of resistance and a search for meaning in a profoundly changed country (Dalton, 2016). It offered a surreal Havana of disillusionment, longing and emotional denial. It is worth noting that this film transcended borders to become a manifestation of aesthetics and culture beyond Cuban territory, thanks to the support of co-production and its narrative audacity.

For its part, *Las Profecías de Amanda* (1999, Dir. Pastor Vega) is a representative sample of Cuban cinema at the end of the 20th century, a period when the national film industry extended its discursive limits by incorporating in its thematic range diverse themes ranging from migration and memory, to racial injustice and spirituality. The film treated these themes in a symbolic and Afro-Caribbean way, drawing attention to conventional aspects of identity (González, 2024; Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023). Simultaneously, the gradual introduction of digital technologies gave directors like Pastor Vega the opportunity to explore new narrative forms and portray the nuances of the contemporary Cuban subject (Baron, 2018). In this way, he was able to merge the mythical and the everyday, redefining the Cuban national reality, in accordance with the transformations in Cuban social and institutional cinema, beyond any state aesthetic glance.

Finally, *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (1999, Dir. Daniel Díaz Torres), represented a valuable synthesis between the revolutionary tradition of Cuban cinema and the new audiovisual languages that emerged during the Special Period. Framed in a context of economic crisis, partial de-ideologization and cultural openness, the work became an aesthetic vehicle to explore, with irony and sensitivity, the tensions between the heroic past and the individual aspirations of the present; where the adoption of digital technology, the opening to international co-productions and the shift towards more personal stories marked this new stage (Venegas, 2009; Hernández Morales, 2007). This film explored these tensions through a young dancer torn between her family's ideological legacy and her own desires for creative freedom. With its playful, musical and dramatic-comedy tone, it incorporated symbolic elements that subtly challenged official narratives, while also evidencing the persistence of state control over filmic content (Tornés Bernal *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (1999, Dir. Daniel Díaz Torres) marked an important point in the integration of the tradition of Cuban revolutionary cinema and the new audi-ovisual languages developed during the Special Period. With the economic crisis, partial de-ideologization and cultural openness of the time as a condition, the work became the aesthetic vehicle to explore, with irony and sensitivity, the divergences between the heroic past and the individual desires of the present; a stage characterized by the appropriation of digital technology, the opening to international co-production and the transition towards more personal narratives (Venegas, 2009; Hernández Morales, 2007). In other words, it resorted to an aesthetic that combined popular codes with international cinema referents, adapted to the Cuban context (Hernández Morales, 2007). This aesthetic hybridization underlined the capacity of Cuban cinema to dialogue with the world without losing its cultural specificity. It is worth noting that the film revolved around the possibility of building a “paradise” based on cultural self-determination, generational reconciliation and the right to desire.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of fiction films in the 1990s made it possible to detect a structural change in the processes of production, representation and distribution of fiction films. This stage, framed by the dissolution of the socialist bloc and the beginning of the Special Period, implied a gradual dismantling of the absolute control that the Cuban State has historically exercised over the island’s film industry through the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC). Likewise, given the scarcity of resources, filmmakers began to look for other ways through international co-productions, self-financing and the use of digital technologies, and through them, more independent and diverse proposals emerged.

The films examined reflected a transition from old epic stories to more intimate, symbolic, critical and grounded in reality. Contents such as emigration, sexuality, religion and corruption were treated with a hitherto unknown freedom of expression, testing the limits set by the State.

In addition, a greater participation of women in creative positions was noted, which enriched and diversified the points of view represented and the thematic variety in Cuban fiction cinema.

Despite the fact that State interference in certain procedures persisted, fiction filmmaking in the 1990s added a more plural field of production, in dialogue with the internal tensions of Cuban society, as well as with the international exhibition circuits. Finally, the results of this research confirmed the hypothesis that the 1990s had marked the end of the state monopoly on film production and had paved the way for a more critical, hetero-geneous and aesthetically and socio-culturally complex Cuban cinema.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study provided a critical understanding of the process by which Cuban fiction cinema in the 1990s transitioned from absolute state control to more autonomous forms of production. By linking film analysis with the historical context, it allowed us to recognize the cinema as a key tool for interpreting socio-political and narrative transformations in Cuba.

Limitations

One of the main limitations was the scarce availability of original research published in high-impact scientific or specialized journals that systematically and rigorously analyzed Cuban fiction cinema in the 1990s, especially with regard to the progressive end of the State’s absolute control over film production. This lack affected both the studies focused on specific films and those with a panoramic approach, limiting the critical contrast and the historiographic deepening of the subject.

Mariuska Quiñones Aguilar: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Visual-ization, Writing - Original draft, Writing - Review and editing.

Ernesto Santiesteban Leyva: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing - Original draft, Writing - Review and editing.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest

REFERENCES

- Agosta, D., & Keeton, P. (1994). One Way or Another: The Havana Film Festival and Contemporary Cuban film. *Afterimage*, 22(2), 7-10. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.1994.22.2.7>
- Amiot, J. (2008). Discurso oficial y mito del punto cero, una historia en/de "Cine cubano". *Archivos de la filmoteca, revista de estudios históricos sobre la imagen*, (59), 37-52. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2701105>
- Baron, G. (2018). Cuban cinema, crisis or transition? Negotiating a cultural tightrope. *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 10(1), 53-70. <https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/intejcubastud.10.1.0053>
- Chanan, M. (2004). *Cuban cinema* (Vol. 14). U of Minnesota Press. <https://archive.org/details/cubancinema0000chan/mode/2up>
- Consuegra Sanfiel, A. & Ayala, M. (2017). El modelo económico cubano: del derrumbe del campo socialista al proceso de actualización (1990-2014). *Revista de la Red de Intercatedras de Historia de América Latina Contemporánea*, 4(7), 139-156. <https://ri.conicet.gov.ar/handle/11336/52277>
- Dalton, D. S. (2016) Santería and Resistance in Tomás Gutierrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's Straw-berry and Chocolate and in Fernando Pérez's Life is to Whistle. *Journal of Religion & Film*, 20 (3), 1-34. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.20.03.26>
- Deaver, W. O. (2013). Fresa y chocolate: A Subtle Critique of the Revolution in Crisis. *The Coastal Review: An Online Peer-reviewed Journal*, 4(1). 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.20429/cr.2013.040105>
- Díaz, M., & del Río, J. (2010). *Los cien caminos del cine cubano*. Ediciones ICAIC. https://books.google.com.pe/books?id=db66EAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=es&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Fernandes, S. (2006). Recasting ideology, recreating hegemony: Critical debates about film in con-temporary Cuba. *Ethnography*, 7(3), 303-327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138106069520>
- García Borrero, J. A. (2012): *Cine cubano: la pupila insomne*. Editorial Arte y Literatura. <https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/>
- González, H. G. (2024). Espejismos de igualdad: la representación del negro y de lo negro en filmes cubanos de ficción, 1959-1999. *Perspectivas Afro*, 4(1), 59-80. <https://revistas.unicartagena.edu.co/index.php/PersAfro/article/download/4905/3796>
- Hernández Morales, S. L. (2007). *Cine cubano: el camino de las coproducciones*. Universidade Santiago de Compostela. <https://minerva.usc.gal/entities/publication/200b29fd-5c3a-4e39-9460-cdc36457a3de>
- Kabous, M. (2018). Filmer [à] Cuba depuis la Période Spéciale. *Cinémas d'Amérique latine*, (26), 142-155. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cinelatino.4546>
- Lanza Caride, J. L. (2021). Imagen, nación e identidad cubana en el discurso de Hollywood, *ÍSTMICA. Revista De La Facultad De Filosofía Y Letras*, 1(28), 99-124. <https://doi.org/10.15359/istmica.28.6>
- Marí, F. (2018, 3 de abril). *El cine como fuente histórica*. Lasdaoalplay. <https://www.lasdaoalplay.com/el-cine-como-fuente-historica/>
- Meja, G. (2007). Madagascar: Un viaje interno. *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, 3(2), 101-108. https://doi.org/10.1386/shci.3.2.101_1
- Mennell, J. (2014). Dreaming the Cuban nation: Fernando Perez's Madagascar. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 33(66), 89-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2008.10816954>
- Rosenstone, R. A. (2014). *La Historia en el Cine: el Cine en la Historia*. Ediciones Rialp, S.A. https://www.casadellibro.com/libro-la-historia-en-el-cine---el-cine-sobre-la-historia/9788432144035/2318226?srsId=AfmBOooBeGvuSn9UQBN_IYTc24a1JaGh1Br5TrsMSbvwowxwGW25FIIX
- Santí, E. M. (1998). Fresa y chocolate: the Rhetoric of Cuban Reconciliation. *MLN*, 113(2), 407-425. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.1998.0031>
- Tornés Bernal, M., Díaz Rodríguez, Y., Pupo Osorio, C. A., & Torres Barrero, L. (2023). Effects of the 'Special Period' on Cuban Cinema in the 1990s. *Espergesia*, 10(1), 117-132. <https://doi.org/10.18050/rev.espergesia.v10i1.2632>
- Venegas, C. (2009). Filmmaking with foreigners. In *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s* (pp. 37-50). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230618329_3