

**Shedding Skins: Curating Central American women filmmakers'
minor cinema after 2010**

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MA Film Programming and Curating

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Introduction

‘Any narrative of twenty-first century cinema could be, and perhaps should be, written through feminist films’

—Sophie Mayer, *Political Animals*¹

In May 2019, three Central American films made history at Cannes, the most prominent event in the international festival circuit.² For the first time ever, three filmmakers from the region screened films in competition at La Semaine de la Critique, the influential sidebar focused on first- or second-time directors.³ Guatemalan director César Díaz brought home three awards for post-conflict drama *Nuestras madres*, including the *Caméra d’Or*, arguably the most important prize ever received by a film from the region.⁴ The other two filmmakers, Sofía Quirós and Valentina Maurel, were back for the second time, having premiered short films in competition in 2017 (another breakthrough for Central American fiction cinema). Quirós brought her feature debut, *Ceniza negra / Land of Ashes* (2019), Maurel a new short, *Lucía en el limbo* (2019). Far from coincidental, their presence pointed to a phenomenon increasingly noted by scholars, programmers and critics: women filmmakers (and producers) are at the forefront of this belated emergence of Central American cinema.

In a region that up until the early 2000s had little production and much less international attention, such significant steps point towards a promising future. The prize for *Nuestras madres* bookended a transformative decade for Central American production which

¹ Sophie Mayer, *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), p. 6

² Dorota Ostrowska, ‘Making film history at the Cannes film festival,’ in Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist (eds.), *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (London and NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 18

³ AFP, ‘Cine centroamericano es protagonista de la Semana de la Crítica de Cannes,’ *El Mundo* (22 April, 2019), online at <https://elmundo.sv/cine-centroamericano-es-protagonista-de-la-semana-de-la-critica-de-cannes/> (accessed 29 August, 2019)

⁴ Gabriela Batres and Vivian Nij, ‘César Díaz: “Necesitamos apoyar el cine”’, *Prensa Libre* (4 June, 2019), online at <https://www.prensalibre.com/vida/escenario/cesar-diaz-necesitamos-apoyar-el-cine/> (accessed 17 August, 2019).

began around the time that the International Film Festival Rotterdam Golden Tiger was bestowed upon Paz Fábrega's *Agua fría de mar / Cold Water of the Sea* (2010), an intimate, low-key exploration of a woman and a girl's coming of age.⁵ But before these and other recent milestones signalled a cinematic breakthrough from some of the most troubled countries in the continent, most efforts were met with discouraging silence, lack of distribution and little funding. Whereas other Latin American film industries (especially Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia) have attracted an ever-growing number of awards and commercial and artistic recognition through the years, Central America has been neglected in most surveys and analyses of local filmmaking (save for a brief period of scholarly and public attention during wartime, in the 1970s and 1980s).⁶ Scarce though it was, with only one fiction feature film made in the 1990s,⁷ audio-visual production in the region has nevertheless reflected the challenging conditions in which it was precariously nurtured, especially after relative stability and prosperity set in by the turn of the century.

Now that at last conditions seem relatively propitious for homegrown talent, with almost 200 local films shown in theatres between 2000 and 2017,⁸ academic and critical inquiry gradually unpicks the different experiments and tendencies that are emerging. Historian María Lourdes Cortés identifies three trends in recent productions: 'entertainment movies with no artistic pretensions,' mostly comedies and genre narratives, 'films with classical narratives and aesthetics,' with more professional production and sometimes successful at the local box offices (where most of the notable directors are men, like Abner

⁵ Liz Harvey, 'Rendering the Invisible Visible: Reflections on the Costa Rican Film Industry in the Twenty-first Century,' in María Delgado, Stephen Hart and Randal Johnson (eds.), *A Companion to Latin American Cinema* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. 328

⁶ Most academic studies outside Central America have focused on 'revolutionary' or 'guerrilla' films from El Salvador and Nicaragua, or in post-conflict documentaries from a human rights perspective. See John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Latin American Cinema* (London: Verso, 1990) Nelson, Ardis L. and West, Dennis, 'Central America in Film and Video: A Critical Annotated Bibliography, 1980-1992', *Film Criticism*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 33-66

⁷ María Lourdes Cortés, 'Filmmaking in Central America: An overview,' *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2018), p. 144

⁸ Cortés, 'Filmmaking in Central America' (2018), p. 144

Benaim, Esteban Ramírez, and Hernán Jiménez; Laura Astorga, Verónica Riedel and Dinga Haines have also walked in this direction), and ‘intimate and artistic movies,’ characterised by more personal approaches to the film language and unconcerned for traditional narrative.⁹ Although the precision of these labels can be debated for its adhesion to dominant American and European aesthetics and industries, they are helpful not only for describing particular experiences in each of the six countries, but also to locate what is not just a geographic collection of national cinemas. There are common traits and themes shared by filmmakers in different countries and echoes of each other’s experiences in terms of public and private funding, distribution, and narrative strategies.¹⁰ We can speak of a ‘regional cinema,’ with ever-changing contours and strong ties between all six nations.

It is in the latter trend identified by Cortés, ‘intimate and artistic movies,’ that we find that the presence of women is most prominent (although the two most celebrated fiction filmmakers currently are Jayro Bustamante and Julio Hernández Cordón). Women in Central America face many of the same cultural and economic hurdles when accessing the industry,¹¹ but scholars, programmers and filmmakers have commented on the many female filmmakers and producers involved in those films that, as Cortés explains, have gained international visibility through the film festival circuit. It is no coincidence, then, that directors such as Fábrega, Quirós and Maurel have marked some of the most recent milestones for Central American cinemas. They join the likes of Hilda Hidalgo, Florence Jaugey, Marcela Zamora, Laura Astorga, Tatiana Huezo, Pituka Ortega and Ishtar Yasin, some of the most widely seen directors abroad.¹² Other women from the newer generation, such as Veronica Riedel, Dinga

⁹ Cortés, ‘Filmmaking in Central America’ (2018), p. 148-150

¹⁰ Liz Harvey-Kattou and Amanda Alfaro Córdoba, ‘Central American cinema in the twenty-first century,’ *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2018), pp.139-140

¹¹ Andrea Cabezas Vargas, ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014). La construction d’un cinéma régional : mémoires socio-historiques et culturelles,’ PhD thesis, Université Michel de Montaigne - Bordeaux III, 2015, p. 144

¹² Cortés, ‘Filmmaking in Central America’ (2018), pp. 149-150

Haines and Soley Bernal, are also betting on more commercial fare, but in short (Laura Baumeister, Roya Eshraghi, Ana Elena Tejera) and feature formats (Alexandra Latishev, Antonella Sudassassi, Ana Bojórquez and Lucía Carreras), several directors are finding their way through the festival maze and gaining visibility, funding, and critical attention.

What, if anything, brings them together and what do their films say about the state of filmmaking in Central America? This curatorial proposal, *Shedding Skins: Central American women filmmakers' minor cinema after 2010*, aims to explore these questions through the programming of fiction features and shorts by female directors selected from work produced in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. In framing it as 'minor cinema,' it follows Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of minor literature, 'that which a minority constructs within a major language.'¹³

This concept has been explored by feminist scholars such as Alison Butler as an useful angle for studying women's cinema, 'always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions' and never quite enclosed by the 'host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits.'¹⁴ By framing it as such, the project aims to bypass frameworks that would render recent women's cinema in Central America as merely a reaction to traditional, male-dominated narratives, insufficient, in part, because women have shaped regional filmmaking since at least the 1980s, rather than being latecomers to an established field. Inheritors of a tradition of feminist documentaries (1970s-1990s),¹⁵ the new filmmakers appear to point towards a distinct way of filmmaking on its own, through fiction, documentary and essayistic filmmaking, a body of work whose depth

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1986]), p. 16

¹⁴ Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (2002), London and New York: Wallflower Press, p. 22

¹⁵ Explored in depth in María Lourdes Cortés, *La pantalla rota. Cien años de cine en Centroamérica* (San José, Costa Rica: Taurus, 2005), pp. 437-445; Cabezas Vargas, 'Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)' (2015), pp. 191-230

and breadth can only begin to be grasped as it grows and changes the landscape. *Shedding Skins* aims to interrogate the similarities, contrasts, connections and differences that speak of a mode of filmmaking that is only now emerging, finding firm ground to prosper, and reaching audiences that can then debate it.

Shedding Skins emerges from a view of Central America as a region that shares not only the most obvious characteristics (a colonial legacy, a dominant language, a hegemonic religious institution, the wounds of foreign military and political intervention), but also cultural and artistic aspirations, practices, and institutions.¹⁶ Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama have a common history, a deeply interconnected cultural network, and shared institutions and legacies that allowed historian María Lourdes Cortés to start speaking of a Central American cinema around the turn of the century, and scholar and filmmaker Hispano Durón to propose the label of New Central American cinema to describe production after its belated reemergence in the 2000s.¹⁷

Paying attention to Central American cinema means not just revisiting debates around national cinemas, but confronting what such a concept reveals or obscures in a region with semi-failed states, intermittent dictatorships and unmitigated violence. Some questions remain to be probed: What does it entail to make pictures in some of the most violent countries in the world?¹⁸ What does it mean to make a film like *Medea* (2017, Alexandra Latishev), a stark rebuttal of mandatory motherhood, in a country where even therapeutic abortion is banned (Costa Rica), in a region where even a natural miscarriage can lead to

¹⁶ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), pp. 18-25

¹⁷ Hispano Durón, *New Central American Cinema (2001-2010)* (2014), Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of Doctor in Philosophy, Film & Media Studies, University of Kansas

¹⁸ Although the situation has improved recently, even in the Northern Triangle, it remains fraught. Anonymous, 'The Northern Triangle is becoming less murderous', *The Economist* (18 December, 2018), online at: <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2018/12/08/the-northern-triangle-is-becoming-less-murderous> (accessed 12 August, 2019)

prosecution and imprisonment (El Salvador)?¹⁹ How do women's perspectives challenge the narratives of wartime heroism and revolutionary triumph (*Heredera del viento / Heiress of the Wind* (2017, Gloria Carrión)? What is the role of film aesthetics in a region with little funding, weak markets, scarce criticism and research, and profound social inequalities?

This project explores whether there are common characteristics in recent works by Central American women directors and whether they give shape to a definite trend or style; how fiction cinema practices can be understood through the concept of minor cinema; and how these films can be presented to audiences unfamiliar with any kind of recent Central American cinema. Similar scenes in the selected films inspired the title, *Shedding Skins*, which as will be seen, also connects it to theories of minor cinema: in both *Agua fría de mar* and *Ceniza negra*, strange snakes appear to women facing profound change in their lives, suggest an emergence of that which has been silenced.

The programme comprises four feature-length films and three short films to be presented in five separate screenings. It is designed to work as a touring programme that can be accompanied by talks and Q&A sessions that stimulate discussion and reflection on these cultural products. It is meant to function as a touring programme fit for screening in the United Kingdom, where Central American fiction cinema is rarely shown, as a call to reposition regional filmmaking within the broader context of Latin American film studies. As explained, it highlights fiction cinema, although hybrid or essayistic forms are considered; documentary has been excluded because it has received abundant scholarly attention and some Central American films do circulate widely through human rights film festivals, for instance (regretfully, this means the exclusion of important directors like Marcela Zamora, Tatiana Huezo and Ana Endara).

¹⁹ Annie Kelly, 'Latin America's fight to legalise abortion: the key battlegrounds,' *The Guardian* (9 August, 2018), online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/aug/09/latin-america-fight-to-legalise-abortion-argentina-brazil-chile-venezuela-uruguay-colombia-el-salvador-peru> (accessed 15 August, 2019)

This project accepts the challenges posed by Deborah Shaw in ‘Latin American Women’s Filmmaking: A Manifesto,’ issued to scholar engaging in feminist film research: ‘To have a comprehensive view of Latin America that includes developing film cultures that have been neglected’ and ‘To examine influences on women’s production and attempt to establish a cinematic genealogy of women’s filmmaking.’²⁰ Attempting to capture the ‘now’ is risking myopic readings or overeagerness for lesser films, especially in the absence of comprehensive studies of women’s cinema in the region. However, if we are to seek equality and inclusion in film as in society at large, a ‘new cinephilia,’ as Girish Shambu has called it, demands that ‘each cinephilic act of speaking, writing, citing, and curating must also be an act that intervenes in an unequal world.’²¹ These women filmmakers’ voices demand us to listen; only then can we ask the proper questions.

When presenting a programme such as *Shedding Skins*, even though it strives to capture the present moment, reflection on the history and context from which it emerges is useful for audiences unaware of either—furthermore, it is essential for a recuperation of feminist pasts.²² Bosma argues that film curating, as a means of ‘constructing meaning and adding value,’ can be based on three rough categories: ‘either on the intention to offer clear contrasts and to evoke interesting collisions, or on the search of similarities, aiming to offer precise matches in mood and style, or to offer a series of free associations.’²³ By presenting these films together, this project aims to highlight their similarities as manifestations of women’s minor cinema in Central America, but it stops short of offering single or rigid interpretations of what these resonances mean for either the artists themselves or different audiences’ reception of them. *Shedding Skins* does not seek to limit readings of Central

²⁰ Deborah Shaw, ‘Latin American Women’s Filmmaking,’ *Mediático* (17 December, 2017), online at: <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/mediatico/2017/12/18/latin-american-womens-filmmaking-a-manifesto/> (accessed 20 August, 2019)

²¹ Girish Shambu, ‘For a New Cinephilia,’ *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Spring, 2019), p. 33

²² Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 192

²³ Bosma, *Film Programming* (2015), p. 54

American women's cinema within one framework: it aims to open it up to debate. What, if anything, these filmmakers have in common, or think about their relation to 'women's,' 'world,' or 'Latin American' cinemas is not for the programmer to say, but rather something that audiences can discuss when confronted with the films and their ideas. This fosters an open discussion for 'enlarging the production, exhibition and preservation of feminist film' as espoused by Sophie Mayer and the London-based queer feminist film collective Club des Femmes,²⁴ one of the inspirations for this project.

By foregrounding the work of women filmmakers from a severely underrepresented film producing region, the programme takes an active political stance against the invisibility to which Central American cinema has been historically relegated.²⁵ It is aligned with what Maura Reilly defines as 'curatorial activism' in the art world:

[...] a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether—and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.²⁶

Although the film world and the festival circuit can offer a different landscape for non-white, male artists, slightly more welcoming than the museum and gallery system, issues of systematic exclusion and exocitization, as well as lack of representation, have been historically raised by scholars and critics—and the issues of neocolonialism and how festival funding can influence filmmaking itself has been abundantly discussed.²⁷ Without

²⁴ Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 189-190

²⁵ Cabezas Vargas, 'Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)' (2015), p. 429

²⁶ Maura Reilly, 'What Is Curatorial Activism?', *ArtNews.com* (11 July, 2017), online at: <http://www.artnews.com/2017/11/07/what-is-curatorial-activism/> (accessed 16 August, 2019)

²⁷ See Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (2018), p. 20; Cabezas Vargas and González de Canales Carcereny, 'Central American cinematographic aesthetics and their role in international film festivals' (2018); Laura Rodríguez Isaza, 'Branding Latin America: Film Festivals and the International Circulation of Latin American Films,' PhD thesis, The University of Leeds, 2012, p. 279

disregarding problems such as lack of financing, distribution and exhibition structures, a approach to film programming can also apply Reilly's call for a curatorial activism with the 'aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art.'²⁸

Chapter 1 will explore the question of Central American cinema and its status as a distinct cinematic region within Latin America, drawing on studies by Cortés, Hispano Durón and Andrea Cabezas Vargas, with a detour through the thought of artist and curator Virginia Pérez-Ratton. I also discuss issues of women's cinema and the decision to frame it as a 'minor cinema' for this project, following the lead of Deleuze and Guattari through the lens of Alison Butler and Vanessa Sequeira's analysis of Central American women's cinema. In Chapter 2, I will attempt to read recent women's films within the idea of 'Central American cinema' and the lens of minor cinema, and to propose further lines of inquiry around these films. Finally, Chapter 3 includes the programme notes for *Shedding Skins: Central American Women Filmmakers' Minor Cinema After 2010*.

²⁸ Reilly, 'What Is Curatorial Activism?' (2017)

1. Locating women's cinema in Central America

Is there a Central American cinema?

Due to its scarce output and weak cultural institutions, Central American cinema has rarely attracted the attention afforded to other Latin American film industries. Fewer than 50 feature films were completed in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama throughout the 20th century; only one came out during the 1990s, *El silencio de Neto* (Luis Argueta, Guatemala, 1994).²⁹ As economic and political conditions improved at the turn of the millennium, and especially after 2010, around 30 films from the region now premiere each year in the six countries,³⁰ albeit rarely with adequate distribution even within their home and neighbouring countries. But this resurgence means that scholarship is growing together with their international circulation.

Framing Central America as a region and making it visible within Latin American studies has not been an easy task. Historian Patricia Fumero argues that there is a 'total absence' of it as a 'cultural, linguistic, political or economic region' in many Latin American studies made abroad: 'Central America is in the margin of the margins.'³¹ Cultural production and criticism are, of course, abundant in the region, though it is usually invisible even within Central America itself.³² According to Fumero, Central American academics—from whom 'political commitment' was regularly demanded—have historically used very heterogeneous approaches, especially from social sciences, to study the complexities of life in the region, somewhat hampering the consolidation of comparative regional studies.³³ A notion such as

²⁹ Hispano Durón, 'Rompiendo el silencio: Diez años de Nuevo Cine Centroamericano,' *Revista Reflexiones* 91:1 (2012), p. 248

³⁰ Filmmaker Servio Tulio Mateo regularly updates the tally on his Facebook page 'Cineastas de Centroamérica.' No regional entity or institution keeps track of the films produced in all six countries.

³¹ Patricia Fumero, 'Los estudios culturales en Centroamérica,' *Revista Estudios* 27 (2013), pp. 129 [translation mine]

³² Arturo Arias, 'Configurando los estudios culturales centroamericanos,' in Héctor M. Leyva (ed.), *Actas del Segundo congreso centroamericano de estudios culturales (2009)*, (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Plural, 2010), p. 29

³³ Fumero, 'Los estudios culturales en Centroamérica' (2013), p. 134

‘Central American cinema’ is very recent, and only became consolidated after the publication of the wide-ranging *La pantalla rota. Cien años de cine en Centroamérica* (2005, Taurus), by Costa Rican scholar María Lourdes Cortés.³⁴ She also founded a crucial regional fund, Cinergia, now dormant, crucial in shaping the idea of a cinematic region.³⁵

The book’s subtitle, ‘One hundred years of cinema in Central America,’ seemed defiant in light of the limited cinematographic production in every country throughout the first century of film history. Previously, Central America had been grouped together mostly because of the scarcity of production rather than for any shared stylistic or thematic traits. As Cortés pointed out, even rigorous studies like John King’s influential *Magical Reels: A History of Latin American Cinema* (1990) were riddled with inaccuracies or imprecisions when profiling Central American cinema; most of the other studies available up to that point were unavailable, thus giving the impression that there existed nothing to study at all.³⁶ The largest Latin American nations had, of course, developed their own cinema industries since the earliest decades of film history, with Brazil, Mexico and Argentina emerging as the most prominent industries. But these industries were based on large-scale productions that were believed to be logistically impossible in small, war-torn nations constantly afflicted by natural disasters such as the Central American countries.³⁷ Whereas the idea of Latin American cinema more broadly gained global traction after the 1960s—with the rise of Third Cinema and Cinema Novo—Central American production remains among the less studied and less seen in the Spanish speaking world and beyond.³⁸

³⁴ ‘C’est à partir de l’ouvrage *La Pantalla rota. Cien años de cine en Centroamérica* de María Lourdes Cortés, publié en 2005, que surgit l’idée d’une étude du cinéma régional,’ writes Andrea Cabezas Vargas in ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)’ (2015), p. 14. This unpublished thesis is the most thorough recent survey of literature on Central American cinema.

³⁵ Durón, ‘Rompiendo el silencio: Diez años de Nuevo Cine Centroamericano’ (2012), p. 249

³⁶ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 23

³⁷ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 17

³⁸ Cabezas Vargas, ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)’ (2015), p. 14

As *La pantalla rota* ascertained, there had been filmmaking in Central America in the first decades of the 20th century in the form of travelogues and newsreels. Only El Salvador (1930), Costa Rica (1930) and Guatemala (1949) made fiction films during the first decades of the century, whereas Panama would only attempt it in the 1950s, and Honduras and Nicaragua in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively.³⁹ As Camilla Fojas summarized in 2004, a stable national cinema is more ‘a sign of stable industrial organization than of a flourishing national economy; from the earliest years of cinema, the nations of Central America have experienced neither for any sustained amount of time.’⁴⁰ For most of the 20th century, this history is riddled with singular film projects and aborted attempts at establishing an industry; most of the films adhered to the tropes of *costumbrismo*, the literary and artistic trend that emphasized traditions and national ideologies, usually predicated on the urban/rural divide.⁴¹ Dispersed through national archives, these films demand academic inquiry and curatorial projects that present it to new audiences, but they are not relevant to this programme because no women appear to have been significantly involved in direction or production.

By the 1960s, several attempts to establish local industries had yielded fluke box office hits and occasional artistic adventures. Guatemala and Costa Rica undertook the most serious efforts to consolidate a local industry; the former, betting on Mexican co-productions as a satellite for the massive film industry that had spread its influence throughout Latin America, the latter through private funding.⁴² After the 1960s, with their dictatorships, revolutions and seismic shifts of power during the Cold War, everything would change, as the revolutionary period brought about a new era for Central American culture.⁴³

³⁹ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 29

⁴⁰ Camilla Fojas, ‘Cinemas of Central America,’ *Diálogo*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2004), p. 98

⁴¹ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), pp. 69-113

⁴² Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), pp. 173-174

⁴³ Cabezas Vargas, ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)’ (2015), p. 23

After 1970, a ‘golden age’ for local cinemas began, flourishing in socially minded documentaries through which each country struggled to define their shaken national identities and the possibilities offered by leftist uprisings and liberation movements.⁴⁴ Explicitly tasked with aiding the nation-(re)building projects in some of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere or aligned with transnational revolutionary movements, the films produced throughout the 1970s and 1980s finally made it possible to speak of local cinemas in every nation. After the creation of a national film institute in Costa Rica, and towards the mid-1980s, documentarians crafted films influenced by the aesthetics and ideas of New Latin American; from 1972 to 1986, twice as many films were made than in the 70 years prior.⁴⁵

The cinema of this period finally drew attention to filmmaking and video-making practices in the isthmus. Many American, Latin American and European directors travelled to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala to make sense of the conflicts that were ravaging the poorest nations in the continent and to support the revolutionary movements that promised better futures.⁴⁶ Books such as King’s *Magical Reels* and José Agustín Mahieu’s *Panorama del cine iberoamericano*,⁴⁷ published just as the embattled countries signed peace agreements, highlighted the precarious state of these cinemas but at least made them visible within the legacies of New Latin American Cinema. They remained a footnote, though: King names his chapter on these cinemas ‘Movies in Big Brother’s Backyard,’ disregarding every kind of filmmaking prior to the Cold War and Costa Rica and Panama’s distinct histories, attributing the lack of films to ‘the extreme backwardness of the region.’

⁴⁴ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 218

⁴⁵ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 218

⁴⁶ King, *Magical Reels* (1990), p. 231

⁴⁷ José Agustín Mahieu, *Panorama del cine iberoamericano* (1990), Madrid: Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica

This is the period that Andrea Cabezas Vargas and Júlia González de Canales Carcereny call ‘the emergence of national cinemas’ or ‘the aesthetics of urgency’.⁴⁸ However fruitful, by 1990, revolutionary fervour had faded and film production had winded down to a minimum. Before Cortés’s groundbreaking study, most publications had only dealt with national cinemas and then only partially, prioritizing Sandinista filmmaking in Nicaragua or guerrilla audiovisual activism in El Salvador.⁴⁹ The 1990s brought certain political and economic stability, but cinema did not thrive. Cabezas Vargas and González de Canales Carcereny consider this a ‘transitional’ period, during which the ‘normalization’ of politics ‘put an end to the last remaining revolutionary movements and with them the hope of the consolidation of a contestatory national cinema.’⁵⁰ With state support diminished or altogether suspended, many filmmakers turned to advertising or to educational documentaries backed by international cooperation.⁵¹ This also meant that marginalised groups thus far excluded from cinema now became subjects of documentaries, such as indigenous and migrant ethnic groups and women. Little fiction cinema was made at the time.

As recently as 2005, Cortés argued that a factor preventing the rise of a local cinema was the fact that its governments had not realised the importance of the moving image and its role in making the country visible.⁵² Since then, and despite the persistent uncertainty regarding the stability of cultural institutions and international cooperation, the tide has turned. In their introduction to a 2018 issue of *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas*

⁴⁸ Andrea Cabezas Vargas and Júlia González de Canales Carcereny, ‘Central American cinematographic aesthetics and their role in international film festivals,’ *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2018), p.165

⁴⁹ See for instance Andris L. Nelson and Dennis West, ‘Central America in Film and Video: A Critical Annotated Bibliography, 1980-1992,’ *Film Criticism* 18:2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 33-66, in which most of the listed articles and books refer to documentaries, guerrilla filmmaking, and audiovisual activism (save for most examples in Costa Rica, exempt from war and foreign occupation, and Belize, excluded from this project by virtue of its linguistic differences).

⁵⁰ Cabezas Vargas and Júlia González de Canales Carcereny, ‘Central American cinematographic aesthetics and their role in international film festival’ (2018), p. 167

⁵¹ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 389-390

⁵² ‘No se ha interiorizado la idea de que un país sin cine propio es un país invisible’. Cortés, *La pantalla rota: Cien años de cine en Centroamérica* (2005), p. 17

dedicated to Central American cinema, Liz Harvey-Kattou and Amanda Alfaro Córdoba argue that ‘political stability and economic prosperity have increased while the costs of filmmaking have decreased,’ and that the globalisation of knowledge, more opportunities for Central Americans to study abroad and the creation of local institutions and companies have led to this newfound confidence and visible growth.⁵³

Historian and filmmaker Hispano Durón has called the cinema of this period ‘New Central American Cinema’, fostered by the aforementioned funds, festivals and institutions, but also for a common theme, the revision of recent history, which is ‘contributing to the consolidation of a regional identity.’⁵⁴ It is evident that each country has taken decisive steps, however weak or dissimilar, towards fostering a local audiovisual industry and that a regional focus remains present in festivals and institutions. Three major festivals all have Central American competitions: International Film Festival Panama, Costa Rica Festival Internacional de Cine, and Ícaro, a touring event based in Guatemala.

Many studies depart from the framework of national cinemas to explore production in Latin America and it is increasingly common to encounter the concept of transnationalism. It is useful for the Central American experience (with a large migrant population in the United States and dependent on international funds such as Cinergia and Ibermedia), since it helps to analyse ‘the movement, and displacement, of cinemas, directors, actors and film personnel across national and regional borders’ as well as production schemes.⁵⁵ There is tension between the current relevance of the concept of ‘national cinema’ in Latin America, as it helps examine the distinct filmmaking cultures in each country as well as the continued impact of colonialism and Hollywood’s structural dominance, and the concept of the transnational, which according to Dolores Tierney is mutable enough to encompass the

⁵³ Harvey-Kattou and Alfaro Córdoba, ‘Central American cinema in the twenty-first century’ (2018), p. 138

⁵⁴ Durón, ‘Rompiendo el silencio: Diez años de Nuevo Cine Centroamericano’ (2012), p. 5

⁵⁵ Dolores Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 5

national, decolonial frameworks and is also helpful to analyse transnational funding.⁵⁶ This is an open debate, as the neo-colonial character of cinema in Central America has only recently been significantly challenged: like Harvey-Kattou and Alfaro Córdoba explain, ‘Central American cinema mimics, subverts and/or hybridizes hegemonic practices, demonstrating that the moving image has become a battlefield for meaning in the region.’⁵⁷

This conflict is not limited to film art. In fact, it is in the field of contemporary art that we find some of the deepest and most sophisticated debates around the idea of ‘Central America.’ Many of the key institutions fostering contemporary visual arts emerged in the 1990s, such as the Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo (1994) and Teorética (1999), a contemporary arts centre, both located in San José, and itinerant biennials. These spaces allowed regional artists to come together around an idea of the region that despite being fractious and fraught with historical inequalities, could nevertheless imagine itself as a community, its fractures and its precarity not hindrances but integral to its development.

Virginia Pérez-Ratton, MADC co-founder and later founder and director of Teorética, articulated the notion of the ‘estrecho dudoso’ (‘dubious’ or ‘doubtful strait’, also the title of a book by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal), appropriating the name the *conquistadores* gave the thin isthmus that separated the Atlantic from the Pacific to describe the unstable and struggling cultural development in Central America. War, she argued, had ‘produced an awareness of the concept of *region*’ in context where the struggle for self-definition was constant and always unfinished.⁵⁸ This project borrows this concept as a tool for rethinking what makes it possible to think ‘Central America’ in cinema as well:

⁵⁶ Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (2018), p. 7

⁵⁷ Harvey-Kattou and Alfaro Córdoba, ‘Central American cinema in the twenty-first century’ (2018), p. 139

⁵⁸ Virginia Pérez-Ratton, ‘¿Qué región? Apuntando hacia un estrecho dudoso,’ in Víctor Hugo Acuña Ortega, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner & Dominique Pérez Ratton (eds.), *Virginia Pérez-Ratton. Travesía por un estrecho dudoso* (San José, Costa Rica: Teorética, 2012), p. 42

The artistic reality of Central America reflects a community developed not only within a determinate space—however permeable or mutable its limits—but within a determinate time as well. It becomes essential to assume that time is not absolute, that it does not pass in the same way in every place, and that every region in the world marks its own time, with its own rhythm and evolution. This is basic to erase the feeling of ‘backwardness,’ [atraso] a word not rarely used pejoratively to describe our complex realities.⁵⁹

If this idea ‘dubious strait’ proved fertile for imaginative and productive curatorial projects in the visual arts by embracing uncertainty, marginal histories, and local mutations of historical or foreign practices, I argue that a similar approach can cast cinematographic history in the region in a new light. Central American cinema would then not be merely a marginal, artisanal practice in ‘Big Brother’s backyard’ nor a tentative and scattered collection of attempts to make ‘proper’ films, as in Cortés’s telling, but rather a history of how cinema took root differently in every country it has reached, and how local filmmakers pushed through precarity and coloniality to create a specific audiovisual landscape that remains to be charted in its varied and, yes, precarious, dimension. In the context of cinema, this would imply an evaluation of not exclusively as subsidiary or derivative products that aspire to be something else, but rather products deeply rooted in the urgency, political and otherwise, to express our local disjointed realities.

The question of women’s cinema

⁵⁹Pérez-Ratton, ‘¿Qué región? Apuntando hacia un estrecho dudoso’ (2012), p. 46 [translation mine; there is an English language version on the original]

Every study of women's cinema must deal with the questions of whether, and how, 'women's cinema' itself can be constituted as a category. 'Women's cinema' remains an unstable concept with contentious definitions—and, arguably, that tension should be preserved when approaching female filmmakers' practices, given the extremely diverse works that result from them. As Alison Butler explains, the concept 'suggests, without clarity, films that might be made by, addressed to, or concerned with women, or all three.'⁶⁰ The many overlapping identities a filmmaker may wish to associate herself with (or not) further complicate the issue; some women filmmakers may not wish for her work to be identified with the label of 'women's cinema' at all, fearing an exclusion from discussion of her work in other terms.⁶¹

Although women have been involved in film production since the beginning of the medium—as actresses, obviously, but also as directors, producers and in other creative positions—, feminist film criticism only came to prominence at the height of second-wave feminism, as theorists and critics used feminist theory to analyse cultural products such as Hollywood cinema and its representation of women, especially in the work of Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey, two of the major voices at the emergence of feminist film theory.

A debate of the key concepts exceeds the limits of this project, but it is important to consider how the idea of women's cinema as 'minor cinema' emerged. Feminist critique analysed the representation of women on screen drawing from structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis to examine films about women, made by them, or made with them as intended spectators.⁶² Mulvey and Johnston were writing at a time when few women were making films, having been excluded from the Hollywood system and other industries as well. Their first task was to examine women's representation in mainstream and Hollywood cinema, which Mulvey did through a psychoanalytic lens. Arguing that commercial cinema

⁶⁰ Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, p. 1

⁶¹ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 2

⁶² Abileny Soto Arguedas, 'La crítica filmica feminista y el cine de mujeres,' *Revista Escena*, Vol. 36, No. 72/73 (2013), p. 56

offered women's bodies for contemplation and pleasure of the 'male gaze,' Mulvey called for the emergence of a feminist aesthetic, what women's cinema could become, envisaging the potential for 'defamiliarisation, rupture and reflexivity' in avant-garde cinema.⁶³

Claire Johnston argued, from a Marxist point of view, for the subversive potential in Hollywood films. Transforming the means of production and opposing of sexist ideology, women could make a 'counter-cinema' in films with the potential to posit an alternative to mainstream, male-centered narratives.⁶⁴ From the outset, Mulvey's theory was entwined with curatorial intervention, notably through the Women's Film event at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1972, which recuperated the most prominent (available) films made by women until then.

Writing a decade after the explosive interventions of Mulvey and Johnston, Teresa de Lauretis argued that feminism had permitted the emergence of women as active social subjects, and therefore, that 'the project of women's cinema [was] no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centered vision by representing its blind spots, its gaps, or its repressed.' Rather, it was to 'effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision.'⁶⁵ By then, women's cinema had multiplied, and many more women were foregrounding their experiences of race, class, sexuality, motherhood, etc., through films of the most diverse hues. For De Lauretis, a women's cinema could explore 'the particularity, multiplicity and mutability of social identities.'⁶⁶ Feminist filmmaking could therefore embrace a multiplicity of practices and contexts, breaking free from previous dualisms and oppositions, and even from the constraints of gender as a fixed identity.

⁶³ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 6

⁶⁴ Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema,' in Claire Johnston (ed.), *Notes on Women's Cinema* (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973), pp. 24-31

⁶⁵ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 135

⁶⁶ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 16

It is at this point that it becomes clear how Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' can become useful for an analysis of women's cinema: as 'minor' rather than solely oppositional. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, the French philosophers examine the literature of the Czech immigrant to the German language and relate it to what other minorities struggle with within the languages they are not quite at home in: 'How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve?'⁶⁷ Considering the exclusionary mechanisms that mainstream cinema imposed for women as makers, as represented subjects and as spectators, this formulation resonates with what female filmmakers' experiences. In *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (2002), Alison Butler identifies the three characteristics of minor literature in women's cinema: 'displacement, dispossession, or, as they term it, deterritorialisation; a sense of everything as political; and a tendency for everything to take on a collective value.'⁶⁸ In a sense constrained by the language in which it is not fully at home, the artists' work is always connected to politics by its mere reclamation of a voice: 'The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.'⁶⁹ That is the story of the specific forms of oppression of women in each culture.

Most significantly, Butler argues that the concept of minor cinema bypasses the avant-garde/narrative dichotomy for female filmmakers' practice, since it can encompass both the infiltration of the mainstream and the experimental; as she underlines, '[t]he communities imagined by women's cinema are as many and as varied as the films it comprises, and each is involved in its own historical moment' and does not 'depend on a

⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 19

⁶⁸ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 20

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 17

belief in women's absolute alienation from language and culture.'⁷⁰ The collective enunciation in which they engage allows for each individual expression to dialogue with each other and to open up a space within the 'major' practice in which they operate; women's cinema results 'neither included nor excluded from cultural tradition, lacking a cohesive collective identity, but yet not absolutely differentiated from each other.'⁷¹

What this means for women's filmmaking practices in Central American audio-visual production can only be surmised, I argue, through curatorial intervention, by juxtaposing these voices and listening attentively to their resonances—and their contradictions. As Mulvey later noted, if in the 1970s negative aesthetics seemed the primordial way forward, women's cinema is much more diverse nowadays. It becomes essential now to recognise and celebrate that plurality: 'Any *rediscovery* of women's cinema cites its previous instances, incorporates its history, its pioneers. Yet, unexpected narratives may also have emerged in the intervening gap in time. Hitherto unexplored or not yet relevant meanings may become visible in a new context.'⁷² In order to procure what Sophie Mayer calls 'representational justice' for women in cinema, it takes an active stance from criticism and programming, 'activist viewers of an activist cinema' that 'connects the film and the world.'⁷³

Women in Central American Cinema

The issue of women's cinema is also relevant and problematic in discussions of world cinema (however it has been rethought). Despite persistent barriers to access, women's films are becoming increasingly more prominent and, as Patricia White argues, are not only shaping the contemporary 'art house' aesthetic but also film politics through disparate works

⁷⁰ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 21

⁷¹ Butler, *Women's Cinema* (2002), p. 22

⁷² Laura Mulvey in 'Cinematic Renaissance and Women's Time: An Interview with Laura Mulvey' (2015)

⁷³ Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 8

that nonetheless project ‘a transnational feminist social vision.’⁷⁴ In the constant debate around world’ or ‘transnational’ cinema, women’s filmmaking must not fall off the radar; as White remind us, ‘feminist models of affiliation and connectivity’ are as useful as other predominant models to understand them.⁷⁵

In the case of Latin American women, it is fundamental to take into account not only the way the story has been told, through the postcolonial and auteurist lenses, but also the transnational character of their output: the narrow focus of the national has often obscured feminist film history as ‘uneven histories and exchanges and asymmetrical power relations, resources, and priorities among women have been missed by hegemonic models of film feminism.’⁷⁶ This can also have implications for the financing and discussion of women’s cinema in the Global South. We must now turn our eyes to the specific formations of women’s cinema in Central America.

One of the most recent studies of women filmmakers in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world takes a historical approach: Parvati Nair and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla’s 2013 *Hispanic and Lusophone Women Filmmakers: Theory, Practice and Difference*, in which they suggestively propose the metaphor of weaving to describe women’s filmmaking practices whilst recognising that this ‘limited field has mostly based on compilations of interview, without establishing conceptual and theoretical frameworks for interpreting such filmic practices.’⁷⁷ Embracing the plurality of women’s film, they nonetheless highlight that taken as a whole, their films are still undervalued in culture, usually confined to ‘women’s’ events and festivals.

⁷⁴ Patricia White, *Women’s Cinema World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 5

⁷⁵ White, *Women’s Cinema, World Cinema* (2015), p. 14

⁷⁶ White, *Women’s Cinema, World Cinema* (2015), p. 18

⁷⁷ Parvati Nair and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla, ‘Introduction: through feminine eyes,’ in Parvati Nair and Gutiérrez-Albilla, J. (eds.), *Hispanic and Lusophone Women Filmmakers: Theory, Practice and Difference*, (Manchester and London: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 1

Women filmmakers in Central America face similar disadvantages to their peers in countries with far more developed film industries; however, there is a sizeable presence of female directors and some, like Tatiana Huezo, Marcela Zamora and Ana Endara (in the documentary field) and Paz Fábrega, Hilda Hidalgo, Laura Astorga, Ishtar Yasin and Florence Jaugey (in fiction) have received international accolades. Comparative studies of women's position in the regional context are sorely lacking, but the recurrence of textual analyses of films such as *La Yuma* (2009, Florence Jaugey) and *El camino* (2008, Ishtar Yasin) signals the growing interest in the field. Cortés locates the beginning of women's cinema in the region in the 1970s, with films such as Kitico Moreno and Antonio Yglesias' 1975 *A propósito de la mujer* (Costa Rica), but it was Patricia Howell's 1982 *Dos veces mujer* (Costa Rica) that set the template for feminist documentaries, a fertile strand explored in the 1990s by filmmakers such as Jaugey, Martha Clarissa Hernández and María José Álvarez (Nicaragua), Katia Lara (Honduras) and Pituka Ortega (Panama).⁷⁸

Andrea Cabezas Vargas presented the most thorough analysis of female filmmakers in Central America in her 2015 doctoral thesis, which effectively evaluates the presence of women within the industry from 1970 to 2015. According to her tally, out of 426 mid-length and feature-length documentary and fiction films made in Central America during that period, 94 were directed by women and a further 15 co-directed with men; that is, nearly a fifth.⁷⁹ More impressively, women directed 112 films between 2000 and 2009 (or 28% of the total), and 83 from 2010 to 2014 (21%).⁸⁰ Another useful insight provided by Cabezas Vargas is that the production of films that touch upon gender issues is more elevated in Costa Rica,

⁷⁸ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 438-440

⁷⁹ Cabezas Vargas, 'Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)' (2015), p. 193

⁸⁰ Cabezas Vargas, 'Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)' (2015), p. 194

Nicaragua, and El Salvador, all after the 1970s and especially in the following decade, as the influence of British and American feminist ideas spread.⁸¹

Although far from parity, these are of course more encouraging figures than in other parts of the world.⁸² Cabezas Vargas suggests a plausible explanation already sketched out by Cortés: ‘Unlike men, traditionally self-taught, women had to pursue professional training that would validate, justify or legitimize, in a way, their entry into the world of filmmaking.’⁸³ Research into this issue seems necessary, but it is plausible, given the history of filmmakers from Kitico Moreno, founder of the Centro Costarricense de Producción Cinematográfica and educated in Britain, onwards; it also partially explains why women have been more prominent in Costa Rica than in the rest of the region,⁸⁴ given that country’s far wider access to education. Filmmaker Paz Fábrega argues that the prominence of women may be due to the fact that, since fiction filmmaking started out the 21st century as a marginal artistic expression in the country, it was less attractive to men, who were drawn to advertising (then thriving).⁸⁵

As for theoretical approaches to women’s films, war, migration and memory studies predominate, followed by feminist historiography, and psychoanalytic readings of specific texts. A productive framework that demands further inquiry, especially against the backdrop of exponentially growing production, is what Cortés had already noted in 2005 (reading through Julia Kristeva): the recurrence of ambiguity, the oneiric, and temporal and spatial

⁸¹ Cabezas Vargas, ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)’ (2015), p. 199

⁸² Women directed just 16% of 651 features shot in the United States in 2017; a fairer comparison with other Latin American countries seems necessary. See Michael Nordine, ‘Women directed just 16 percent of feature films last year, according to inclusion report’, *Salon.com* (4 July, 2018), online at: https://www.salon.com/2018/07/04/women-directed-just-16-percent-of-feature-films-last-year-according-to-report_partner/ (accessed 17 August, 2019)

⁸³ Cabezas Vargas, ‘Cinéma centraméricain contemporain (1970-2014)’ (2015), p. 195

⁸⁴ María Lourdes Cortés, *Fabulaciones del nuevo cine costarricense* (San José, Costa Rica: Uruk Editores, 2016), p. 118

⁸⁵ Liz Harvey, ‘Rendering the Invisible Visible: Reflections on the Costa Rican Film Industry in the Twenty-first Century,’ in Maria Delgado, Stephen Hart and Randal Johnson (eds.), *A Companion to Latin American Cinema* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. 328

fluidity in short fiction works like *Íntima raíz* (1984, Patricia Howell), *Blanco organdi* (1998, María José Álvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernández), *Florencia de los ríos profundos y los tiburones grandes* (1999, Ishtar Yasin), *De larga distancia* (2000, Katia Lara), *El mandado* (1998, Pituka Ortega) and *Sacramento* (1993, Hilda Hidalgo), among others.⁸⁶ ‘Without a doubt, Central American women are at the film vanguard in the region,’ she wrote then.⁸⁷ So how to make sense of it?

2. Arguing for a ‘minor cinema’ in Central America

Everything is political

A productive approach, and one of the most comprehensive so far proposed, is found in Vanessa Sequeira’s 2014 thesis ‘A dedramatized minor cinema: Regional perspectives from Central American Women Filmmakers.’ Sequeira proposes the concept to study what she calls Central American Regional Film Projects, sustained by ‘regional alliances’ of women that assert the particularities of these countries’ cinema within the overarching term Latin American cinema.⁸⁸ This is, according to Sequeira, ‘Cinema thought of, produced with, and directed by women filmmakers who have lived and understand (firsthand) marginality at its core. Central American women come from a marginal Latin American identity and are developing their narratives from a marginal gendered and imbalanced filmic industry.’⁸⁹ Following an assertion by Cuban critic Mario Masvidal that women in Latin America tend to make a ‘dedramatized’ cinema that turns its eyes to the ordinary, Sequeira analyses Yasin’s *El camino* (2009), Lara’s *El mandado* (1998), Ortega’s *¿Quién dijo miedo?* (2010), and Jaugey’s *La Yuma* (2010), fiction and documentary works that engage their societies’ woes.

⁸⁶ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), pp. 474-485

⁸⁷ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 485

⁸⁸ Vanessa Sequeira, ‘A Dedramatized Minor Cinema: Regional Perspectives by Central American Women Filmmakers,’ MA thesis, The Graduate School, College of Communications, Pennsylvania State University, 2013, p. 2

⁸⁹ Sequeira, ‘A dedramatized minor cinema’ (2013), p. 4

‘Each narrative adds to overarching framework of relationships, which in turn will help construct a bigger and more complex quilt-like Central American reality,’ writes Sequeira, asserting a suggestive, if problematic assertion of a minor ‘national’ cinema found in these women’s narratives that moves from the ‘national’ to the ‘regional.’⁹⁰ Although in Butler’s terms women’s minor cinema can certainly be situated within the context of the national, it cannot fully comprehend it.⁹¹ Profoundly imbricated in the definition of their respective national cinemas from the outset (like Moreno and Howell, but also in wartime video-activism), these women are also in opposition, or at least open to debate, to the predominant culture in which they operate. In order to examine what the implications of such a formulation can be, I argue, it is necessary to look at the broader filmic work now available; the first step to achieve is, naturally, to bring the films together and show them to audiences.

Tracing the emergence and proliferation of women’s cinema in Central America implies a recovery of many strands of history intertwined with the creation of the region’s distinct national cinemas themselves, although many cultural and institutional factors bind them together in a regional perspective. A focus on fiction cinema and hybrid practices may allow us to turn our gaze at more recent practices, and to divest potential new readings from the openly political and even partisan characteristics of feminist documentary from the 1980s onwards (although not entirely: once again, as Mayer insists, feminist cinema must care for past, present and future, their ‘interconnection’ and ‘each time’s need for each other’).⁹²

By focusing on the period after the emergence of New Central American Cinema, it is possible to illuminate new aspects of the cinema that female filmmakers are creating and to analyse their commonality. Women have directed 24 feature-length fiction films in the six countries after 2010, around the time that Florence Jaugey premiered *La Yuma* (2009) locally,

⁹⁰ Sequeira, ‘A dedramatized minor cinema’ (2013), p. 46

⁹¹ Butler, *Women’s cinema* (2002), p. 22

⁹² Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 192

that Hilda Hidalgo showed her García Márquez adaptation *Del amor y otros demonios* (2010, until then the most expensive Central American production) and that Paz Fábrega debuted with *Agua fría de mar* (2010). Costa Rican women directed 18 out of these 24 features; no women from Honduras have made a fiction feature so far. As far as documentary is concerned, El Salvador might be the country with the most prominent filmmakers, with Marcela Zamora, Tatiana Huezo and Paula Heredia.

Year	Title	Director	Country of origin (Director)	Length
2010	Del amor y otros demonios	Hilda Hidalgo	Costa Rica	95
2010	Agua fría de mar	Paz Fábrega	Costa Rica	80
2010	El último comandante	Isabel Martínez / Vicente Ferraz	Costa Rica	95
2011	Cápsulas	Verónica Riedel	Guatemala	103
2013	Princesas rojas	Laura Astorga	Costa Rica	103
2014	La pantalla desnuda	Florence Jaugey	Nicaragua	95
2015	Viaje	Paz Fábrega	Costa Rica	70
2015	Dos aguas	Patricia Velásquez	Costa Rica	75
2015	El lugar más feliz del mundo	Soley Bernal	Costa Rica	100
2015	Primero de enero	Erika Bagnarello	Costa Rica	85
2015	La casa más grande del mundo	Ana V. Bojórquez / Lucía Carreras	Guatemala	76
2016	El techo	Patricia Ramos	Nicaragua	75
2017	Hombre de fe	Dinga Haines	Costa Rica	98
2017	Medea	Alexandra Latishev	Costa Rica	70
2017	Violeta al fin	Hilda Hidalgo	Costa Rica	87
2017	Despertar	Soley Bernal	Costa Rica	123
2017	Más que hermanos	Arianne Benedetti	Panamá	110
2017	Volar	Brenda Vanegas	El Salvador	90
2018	Dos Fridas	Ishtar Yasin	Costa Rica	98
2019	Ceniza negra	Sofía Quirós	Costa Rica	82
2019	Aquí y ahora	Paz León	Costa Rica	80
2019	El despertar de las hormigas	Antonella Sudassassi	Costa Rica	94
2019	Te presento a mi novio	Soley Bernal	Costa Rica	100
2019	Apego	Patricia Velásquez	Costa Rica	90

Table 1. List of feature-length fiction films directed by Central American women filmmakers with an international premiere after 2010. Source: The author, Cortés (2016).

A transnational mode of production has become integral to Latin American filmmakers, since state support floundered or never flourished,⁹³ so a rigid sense of the ‘national’ seems insufficient. Five countries were involved in the production of *Agua fría de mar*: Costa Rica, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Mexico, *El camino* is best understood as at least a Costa Rica-Nicaragua production, with further support from Berlinale, *La casa más grande del mundo* was co-directed by a Mexican filmmaker, and so on. These characteristics are key to understanding what Sequeira describes as minor cinema in Central American Regional Film Projects. Certainly not all women filmmakers are embarking on the ‘intimate and artistic movies’ that Cortés describes nor do all men limit themselves to commercial fare (Ariel Escalante is close slow cinema, Victor Ruano edges toward experimentalism). Some women directors are more comfortable with classical narratives, though fiercely political and close to home such as *Princesas rojas / Red Princesses* (2014, Costa Rica), a film by Laura Astorga that traveled widely mostly through women’s film festivals, or the late-blooming rebellion of *Violeta al fin* (2017, Costa Rica), by Hilda Hidalgo, a pioneer during the first wave of feminist short fictions. But what also stands out is how different directors approach the political through individual stories where intimacy and sensation predominate over plot.

Sequeira used an extensive analysis of *El camino* in her exploration of Central American women’s films as a minor cinema. After *El camino*, some of the most prominent recent fiction films directed by women, though attuned to the same kind of social concerns, have been searching for a cinema of ‘intensities’ in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, an opening

⁹³ Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (2018), p. 2

up to the ‘intensive utilization of language’ they associate to minor literature, with a ‘withered vocabulary, an incorrect syntax.’⁹⁴ Through this passage to the very personal and away from straightforward metaphor and narrative, they reflect their dislocation from the home (cinematographic) language they inhabit, angling for ambiguity and openness. They do not necessarily abandon the social concerns of the era of feminist documentaries, but the political adopts new forms.

Given the novelty of *El camino* at the time, first among many of feature-length fiction films that would consolidate the women of the New Central American Cinema, a steady stream of scholarly articles has examined its metaphorical images, its ideological underpinning, and the industrial and institutional frameworks that made it possible (it is likely that few other Central American films have elicited so much attention). In *El camino*, young Saslaya and her little brother Darío aim to escape the disconsoling landscape of a dumpster in Nicaragua; they dream of reaching Costa Rica, where their mother works, though the shadow of sexual abuse and economic exclusion looms large over their fraught path. The film follows their adventures as they attempt to cross the border, surrounded by characters, almost all male adults, who carry their own burdens or who are directly threatening to the silent duo that traverses the dry plains south of lake Nicaragua.

Sequeira argues that *El camino*, as an instance of minor cinema, extends and offers an alternative to the socio-political concerns of Third Cinema: ‘Saslaya’s plight to sustain her survival parallels that of subject formation, foregrounded as a strategy of individual positioning and communal existence both for Minor filmmakers and as women from marginal localities.’⁹⁵ Through the post-colonial analysis of Ella Shohat, Butler reminds us that in most liberation struggles, such as the one Nicaragua went through, sexual equality was perpetually

⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 22

⁹⁵ Sequeira, ‘A dedramatized minor cinema’ (2013), p. 86

delayed behind the task of (re)building the nation.⁹⁶ Highly poetic and with little dialogue, the film insists nonetheless in foregrounding the specific vulnerability to which women, and especially young girls, face in a nation devoid of any safety net and whose social structure has been disfigured by mass migration to Costa Rica. Many symbols of oppression in the form of Catholicism (a figure of the Virgin Mary) and abandonment by the state abound (dilapidated official buildings); also fleeting symbols of hope (a butterfly). They imbue the film with a sense of the magical, of a fairytale gone sour, even of the oneiric, which Yasin has recently returned to in her portrait of the relationship between Mexican artist Frida Kahlo and her Costa Rican nurse, Judit Ferreto (*Dos Fridas*, 2019).

Critics like Cortés and Sequeira have described *El camino* as a mixture of ‘documentary’ and ‘fiction’ based on the lengthy sequences that show the daily life and struggles of the harsh landscape of Nicaraguan poverty.⁹⁷ I would argue that this vivid approach to ‘reality’ emphasizes the collective enunciation of which Deleuze and Guattari speak, by placing the children within the fragile tissue of Nicaraguan precariousness and by offering their story through the contrasting registers of the lyrical and the naturalistic; even the film’s fragile materiality and the history of its making speak vividly of the harsh marginalisation from which it emerges. Pushing language towards its limits, like Deleuze and Guattari find in Kafka, Yasin utilizes the poverty of the language—the graininess, the disjointedness, the jarring contrasts— as expression itself.⁹⁸ The film resonates with intensities that far exceed the limited interpretations assigned to them. The very history of the making of the film speaks of the diffumination of borders and the awkwardness of the film

⁹⁶ Butler, *Women’s Cinema* (2012), p. 100

⁹⁷ Cortés, *Fabulaciones del nuevo cine costarricense* (2016), p. 102

⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 23

within the language of the national, which it exceeds;⁹⁹ a form of weaving, perhaps, in the sense that Nair and Gutiérrez-Albilla propose.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, ambiguous, though devoid of the collective political denunciation that emerges in *El camino*, Paz Fábrega's *Agua fría de mar* (2010) was also a low budget affair, though hardly as precarious as Yasin's film. Mariana and Rodrigo, a young couple, travel to the south of Costa Rica, to Bahía Ballena, one of the many coastal towns in the country torn between the effervescent tourist trade and the impoverished local economy. They find a little runaway girl who suggests that she is the victim of abuse; her testimony will seem unreliable, but the doubt she has planted disturbs Mariana, who is experiencing her own sense of a changing and vulnerable body.

Yellow snakes emerge on the beach. They are not metaphors but the sensation of uneasiness; they convey awkwardness in the body, but also danger; they unnerve, but they are, one must not forget, quite at home, and it is humans who invade. Waves transform the landscape as the woman and the girl face their own discomfort; it reminds us of Mayer's assertion that in many feminist cinemas, 'characters often undergo a transformative aqueous experience, one that connects their bodily fluids with water in the natural world, re-embedding as humans in the water cycle.'¹⁰¹ Fábrega is not explicitly interested in the ecological aspect of this embedding, but there is certainly the feeling that displacement into 'nature' awakens intensities of feeling that dissolve Mariana's sense of self.

Once again, and though few geographic and social markers emerge in the film, the centering of women's experiences in such a context evokes a multitude of feelings that speaks of the 'cramped space' Deleuze and Guattari speak of, where the individual concerns

⁹⁹ Amanda Alfaro Córdoba, 'Comunidades cinematográficas: Las dinámicas de producción que dieron vida a *El Camino*,' *Revista Comunicación*, Year 32, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2011), p. 59

¹⁰⁰ Nair and Gutiérrez-Albilla, 'Introduction: through feminine eyes' (2013), p. 1

¹⁰¹ Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 49

speak of a collective story within it. Little advances in terms of plot, but the film plays on these sensations until the end. Harvey-Kattou contends that by locating the film in coast, the geographical and ideological periphery of normative Costa Rican identity (the *tico*), the film also undercuts notions of identity, gender, class, and family.¹⁰²

Agua fría de mar was poorly received in Costa Rica despite its European plaudits. Influential local critic William Venegas famously chided it for its ‘lack of plot’ and called it a pale imitation of Bergman or Tarkovsky,¹⁰³ a comparison that seems out of place and unrelated to the kind of women’s filmmaking towards which Fábrega leans. It was also an unusual affair for Costa Rican cinema in that five different countries were involved in its creation, in the most prominent local iteration thus far of the kind of transnational financing that has become essential for Latin American filmmaking.¹⁰⁴ Harvey even suggests that this then-odd transnational quality may have played a part in local audiences feeling it as not Costa Rican enough.¹⁰⁵ Connected to the sense of the oneiric that Cortés used to describe previous women’s cinema, it opts for the unsettling, the uncanny, the indeterminate.

Snakes and water play similar roles in *Ceniza negra* (2019), the first feature by Sofia Quirós, also from Costa Rica (the film is a co-production with Argentina, Chile, and France). In the film, Selva comes of age against the backdrop of the dense Caribbean jungles. Again set in the ‘geographic, wild, margins of the nation’,¹⁰⁶ it is also more a film of atmosphere than of straightforward plot, though much less abstract than in Fábrega, *Ceniza negra* evokes the uneasiness of growing through spontaneous dancing, recurring images of dead snakes,

¹⁰² Liz Harvey-Kattou, *Contested Identities in Costa Rica: Constructions of the Tico in Literature and Film* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 164

¹⁰³ William Venegas, ‘Miradas a la arena,’ *La Nación* (21 March, 2011), online at:

<https://www.nacion.com/2011-03-21/Entretenimiento/UltimaHora/Entretenimiento2720906.aspx?date=201132114316> (accessed 7 August, 2019)

¹⁰⁴ Tierney, *New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas* (2018), p. 4

¹⁰⁵ Harvey, ‘Rendering the Invisible Visible: Reflections on the Costa Rican Film Industry in the Twenty-first Century’ (2017), p. 328

¹⁰⁶ Harvey-Kattou, *Contested Identities in Costa Rica* (2019), p. 154

and the unsettling presence of a ghostly mother. Focusing on a historically marginalised community, black Costa Ricans of Afro-Caribbean descent, the film upsets mainstream narratives from the outset. Quirós eschews easy metaphors for a rich immersion in nature and in the spectral that constantly opens the coming of age story at its core towards the margins of the unexpected; once again, the very position of enunciation articulates a collective point of view, ‘a sort of stranger within [her] own language.’¹⁰⁷ Highlighting the interconnectedness of nature and human, of the dead and the living, and the sterile world beyond the enveloping greenness, the film articulates a singular space for itself.

Ana Bojórquez and Lucía Carreras take a different approach in *La casa más grande del mundo* (2015, Guatemala/Mexico), although to similar effect, that of emphasizing a young woman’s sense of discovery and of becoming herself. As her mother edges closer to giving birth, this indigenous girl must lead a flock of sheep through the cold mountains for the first time in her short life; distracted by her games, she loses the sheep and must traverse the fog in order to find them. Once again, fluids, vapour, transformation; once more, the emphasis placed on that most marginalised of groups, the indigenous population in a country where they suffered genocide. However innocent the film may seem, it speaks of a position within the world that these directors assert vividly and without any need for elaborate social commentary. The women’s isolation and the degraded house of the old man of the village speaks volumes about the gender divide that traverses an already fractured society.

Motherhood is a persistent theme in Central American fiction cinema. Cortés identifies the use of the child’s gaze toward reluctant or absent mothers as a way of dismantling stereotypes that incarcerate women still today.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, a film like *Medea* (2017, Alexandra Latishev) stands out not only by its focus on a unwanted pregnancy, but by

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 26

¹⁰⁸ María Lourdes Cortés, ‘Mujer y madre en el cine centroamericano actual,’ *Cinémas d’Amérique Latine*, No. 22 (2014), p. 165

its unapologetic style that makes no excuses for its characters and does not judge her either. María José, the young rugby player who constantly tries to hide her growing belly, seems to embark on a journey of self-destruction, but we never quite figure out why or where she thinks she is actually headed. Tightly framed by Latishev's composition, her body becomes a prison, almost like she was living in a foreign body. Whatever dialogue occurs, it is hardly revealing of her circumstances, save for a few jokes her family makes about their friends' social class. She seems disconnected from her life and from those that surround her, foreign to her own corporality, which is what we are unabashedly shown over and over. Eventually, she loses the baby, in a harrowing scene in which we are trapped with her in the bathroom, the unflinching camera refusing to look away from her face. Once more, we witness a cinema of sensations that refuses to explain in the usual terms.

Short films such as *Omblijo de agua / Water Navel* (2018, Nicaragua), by Laura Baumeister are less formally daring but train their gaze on rebellious women whose complexities are rarely easily explained or hard to fit within predominant political narratives. Others like Paz Fábrega's sophomore feature, *Viaje* (2015) are decidedly non-political, though its emphasis on tactility and erotic pleasure carry the electrical charge of the recuperation of female eroticism. On the other hand, a far more recent phenomenon has been the incursion of women filmmakers in essayistic filmmaking: Mercedes Moncada (Nicaragua), Ana Elena Tejera (Panama), Natalia Solórzano (Costa Rica), Roya Eshraghi (Costa Rica), Violeta Mora (Honduras), and Angélica Sánchez (Costa Rica) have found in this mode of address a fertile tool for exploring their individual concerns, from history and memory to sexual experience.

3. Programme notes: 'Shedding Skins'

Shedding Skins: Central American Women Filmmakers' Minor Cinema After 2010 presents recent fiction films by women from one of the most overlooked regions in Latin American cinema. Inheritors of a tradition of feminist documentary and fiction shorts from the 1980s and 1990s, these directors are articulating newer forms of expression that focus on themes that were previously unexplored in their home countries, from sexual experience and desire to abuse and unwanted pregnancy, from the micropolitics of the home to the inevitable weight of history. Following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature, that which a minority develops within a major language, the programme explores how a new generation of women filmmakers is upsetting mainstream narratives and colonial ideas of what film from the region is, and how they are opening up the space for new forms of expression. The programme emphasizes their focus on intimate narratives of individual transformation, the regional quality of many of their endeavours, and the fact that its prominence is recent and, therefore, worthy of attempting to grasp it as it unfolds. The scarcity of exhibition venues for local cinemas means that most of them have had limited runs on commercial screens in their own home countries, regardless of the international accolades they may or may not have received. Screening them next to each other can raise new questions regarding their political, aesthetic, and filmmaking contexts and decisions, thereby activating discussions that do not regularly take place even in Central America itself. The touring programme will be accompanied by a booklet with writing from the women directors whose works contribute to a rich landscape of women's filmmaking that is developing within the region, as well as Q&A sessions.

Agua fría de mar / Cold Water of the Sea (2010, 83 min, Costa Rica, France, Spain, Netherlands and Mexico, Temporal Films)

Paz Fábrega broke new ground with this sensuous film that mysteriously connects the lives of a young girl and a woman. While travelling with her boyfriend on a beachside town, Mariana stumbles upon Karina, a young child whose intimations of abuse disturb her. As the story unfolds, we experience their uneasiness and their bafflement, immersed in the tactile and aural pleasures of the beach. A rich, thoughtful film, it heralded a new era for Central American women filmmakers, and a decade after winning the Golden Tiger at Rotterdam, the film's influence on local filmmakers appears ever more evident.

La casa más grande del mundo / The Greatest House in the World (2015, 76 min, Guatemala / Mexico, Prisma Cine)

Ana V. Bojórquez and Lucía Carreras traverse the fog in the Guatemalan highlands through the eyes of a child. Her mommy pregnant and her grandmother unable to leave the house, Rocio must care for a flock of sheep, alone for the first time in her short life. When she gets distracted and one of the animals, then the herd, gets lost, the child must face the consequences and face nature by herself. Tender and quiet, the film gives an unusually tender look at the Mayan community in the mountains, attentive to the rhythms of daily life and the textures of a rich culture where children and women face strong pressure.

Medea (2017, 70 min, Costa Rica / Argentina / Chile, Cyan Prods.)

In a country where abortion is severely restricted, Alexandra Latishev presents a stark narrative about an unwanted pregnancy. María José, a nonchalant rugby player, is pregnant: we know it, but she behaves as if she isn't. The unrelenting tightness of the compositions and

a raw performance at its core construct a tense, unsettling film in which bodily experiences tell the story. One of the most celebrated debut features in recent Costa Rican cinema.

Ceniza negra / Land of Ashes (2019, 82 min, Costa Rica / Chile / France / Argentina, Sputnik Films)

Sofía Quirós travels to the Caribbean shores of Costa Rica through the eyes of Selva, a girl whose fierce independence places her in opposition to a stifling environment. Ghostly apparitions, magical incantations and natural wonders dance through a film rich in atmospheres and unsettling in the muffled violence that pierces these fragile lives at the margins of the green country. Understated and intriguing, this coming of age story is told through sensations and sounds.

Frontera / Boundary (2017, 2 min, Honduras, Violeta Mora)

Violeta Mora investigates sensations, noise, and colour through a series of self-reflective, abstract short films. Despite the importance of moving image art in the region since the 1990s, little academic or critical writing has analysed its widening legacies, among which feminist perspectives have played an essential role. Mora's shorts exemplify an unexplored field that has allowed women to innovate and carve a space in the cultural landscape.

Ombigo de agua / Water Navel (2018, 23 min, Mexico / Nicaragua, Tanacatana Films)

Laura Baumeister de Montis is quickly becoming one of the region's most promising filmmakers. With this story of an upper middle-class young woman secretly addicted to crack cocaine, she gives an unforgiving look at hypocrisies and family norms. Through her cinema, crafted between Mexico, Germany and Nicaragua, Baumesiter demonstrates the fluid nature of production in the region, and the distinctive voices that emerge in this transnational space.

Kat Waj (Te Quiero) (2016, 18 min, Guatemala, Colectivo Lemow)

Teresa Jiménez directed this short fiction with an indigenous women's collective, inspired by the stories told in their villages. A denunciation of male dominance in traditional Mayan societies ruptured by economic pressure, the film looks through the eyes of a young girl who decides to run away. A daunting future lies ahead. A warm but critical look at the domestic space, *Kat Waj* offers an example of the connections between arthouse-oriented cinema and indigenous film and video-making, and of the many forms that women's cinema is taking.

Conclusion

This project has put forward a programme of films that explores the notion of Central American women's cinema through the lens of minor cinema. This curatorial proposal is not meant to be a definitive account of what contemporary female filmmakers are exploring in their specific practices in such a diverse region, but rather a proposal to reevaluate the limited ways in which they have been discussed so far in academia and in film criticism. By presenting recent women directors' work focused on intimate narratives that eschew traditional plot and the focus on collective politics, it calls for a reevaluation of the feminist history of women's cinema in the region.

'If feminist film is an open letter because it's addressed to a possible future, it's also open because, in order to bring that future into being, it has to go beyond the merely invitational,' writes Sophie Mayer at the close of her reflection on contemporary feminist cinema.¹⁰⁹ The search for 'representational justice' is active, committed and combative; against the heteropatriarchal narratives of film art that would have women directors relegated to a corner of flukes and curiosities (as they still sadly remain in film schools everywhere). It requires further study. For instance, it must be pointed out, few of the protagonists in these films stray far from the filmmakers' backgrounds: they are mostly middle to upper class, educated, and money and class rarely figure explicitly in the plot. The issue of class, together with a comparative textual analysis of the films, may be the most pressing issues for the research to come. Additionally, the issue of transnational funding for many of these films, from Cinergia as an instrument for legitimation before international organisations and festivals to direct financing like the Ford Foundation, the Hubert Bals fund or the World Cinema Fund,¹¹⁰ may yield valuable insight.

¹⁰⁹ Mayer, *Political Animals* (2016), p. 202

¹¹⁰ Cortés, 'Filmmaking in Central America' (2018), p. 152

Limiting the programme to fiction has left out significant documentaries that may well fit into the framework of minor cinema; some follow the legacy of feminist film from the 1980s and the 1990s, but others, such as the works of Ana Endara and Ana Elena Tejera in Panama, search for new terrain in moving image art. An important question nevertheless remains open. Despite the clear 'Central American' nature of funding, circulation, and history, could this accelerated growth in women's filmmaking be, for the time being, a Costa Rican phenomenon that will develop differently in other nations? Though taking a regional perspective makes sense academically and commercially, it can also render invisible the specificities that it strives to look for as much as the label 'Latin American cinema' has historically excluded Central America.

However, as we have noted, many of the filmmakers inhabit a transnational space that comes only naturally in a context where there is little state support for filmmaking, few opportunities for technical education in the industry, and a stable infrastructure of cultural institutions that persistently give room to art in a regional perspective. What Virginia Pérez-Ratton called for in the field of contemporary art was to dismantle the idea of backwardness, despite the evident precarity that overwhelms many cultural practitioners in the region. When looking at what is actually being made, this precarity has not been infertile; quite the opposite, the necessities and absences in the field of film have pushed many women filmmakers to explore novel forms of financing, creation and narration.

This overview reveals an emphasis on sensations and intensities, the indirectly political, and the collective enunciation from individual perspectives. Temporal proximity to these manifestations of women's cinema and the scarcity of their production does not allow for overarching statements that explain or characterise what could be, at best, a set of stylistic coincidences. Nevertheless, once again Deleuze and Guattari prove useful when they remind us that 'a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn't

conceptualize until afterward.’¹¹¹ It is also a useful perspective insofar as it does not merely describe an ‘oppositional’ mode of filmmaking, but rather a form that can emerge within a dominant form or language. It is clearly a moment for capturing what is occurring; when Sequeira proposed the idea of a regional women’s minor cinema, more than half the films in *Table 1* had not even entered pre-production. And women filmmakers certainly notice that something is happening. In an interview after the premiere of *Lucía en el limbo* (2019), Valentina Maurel, who has lived most of her life in Belgium, said that when returning to Costa Rica she noticed that several of her peers were reappropriating spaces such as the home, the kitchen, and the body in order to dissect the power dynamics that traverse them,¹¹² attuned to the vast feminist literature that explores said territories and to Sequeira’s claim that Central American women are narrating stories of the ordinary.

Whether this will continue to grow will depend on how it confronts the obstacles faced in the sustainability of the industry, and the often overlooked aspects of curation and distribution.¹¹³ In 2005, historian María Lourdes Cortés concluded her influential book *La pantalla rota* by reminding its readers that it was not state initiative that had made cinema possible, but rather a collection of individual efforts. However, she hoped that in the new century local cinemas could overcome the stereotypes of poverty and war that have long dominated any discussion (if it happens at all) of Central American cultural and artistic production.¹¹⁴

By looking at women’s cinema through the lens of minor cinema, we shed light on the fact that not only that plenty of filmmakers are finally overcoming these hurdles, but that at a group of directors are constructing a language of their own within the limitations that the

¹¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2008 [1986]), p. 28

¹¹² Alonso Aguilar, ‘En Costa Rica, las mujeres sacuden la gran pantalla,’ *La Nación* (27 April, 2019), online at: <https://www.nacion.com/ancora/en-costa-rica-las-mujeres-sacuden-la-gran/N3ATHC5D6RH2BB4C2LY6WCYM5Q/story/> (accessed 17 August, 2019)

¹¹³ Harvey-Kattou and Alfaro Córdoba, ‘Central American cinema in the twenty-first century’ (2018), p. 140

¹¹⁴ Cortés, *La pantalla rota* (2005), p. 547

mainstream ideology of dominant cinema affords them. Going beyond this recuperation is essential, and facing the burgeoning production is a challenge for academia, for journalists and critics, and for curators and programmers. Echoing Mayer, the history of twenty-first cinema must be written through feminist film—here and elsewhere.

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