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Book Review: María Fernanda Miño Puga, *Ecuadorian Cinema for the 21st Century* (London: palgrave macmillan, 2023), pp. 222, ISBN 9783031409882 (hb), £109.99; ISBN 9783031409912 (sb), £109.99; ISBN 9783031409899 (eb), £89.99

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This review examines María Fernanda Miño Puga's groundbreaking monograph *Ecuadorian Cinema for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), which offers the first comprehensive scholarly analysis of Ecuador's emerging film industry during the early 21st century. Miño Puga, a distinguished film critic and scholar, addresses a significant gap in Latin American Film Studies by examining Ecuadorian cinema within the political and cultural context of Rafael Correa's "Socialism for the 21st Century" movement (2006–2016).

The book's central thesis argues that Ecuadorian cinema during this period reflects the same contradictions and ambiguities as the political ideology it emerged from, maintaining neoliberal tendencies despite anti-hegemonic rhetoric. Through a praxis-based methodology incorporating theoretical frameworks from Pierre Bourdieu, Stephen Heath, and critical transnationalism, Miño Puga identifies three distinct subfields within Ecuadorian cinema: commercial exhibition, state-supported indie productions, and vernacular filmmaking.

While comprehensive in scope, the review notes limitations including the exclusion of community cinema and short films, and suggests that future research should examine post-Correa developments, particularly the transformation of the National Film Council into the Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Innovation in 2020. Nevertheless, this pioneering work successfully repositions Ecuadorian cinema within the global cinematic landscape and establishes a foundational framework for future scholarship in this previously understudied field.



María Fernanda Miño Puga (Guayaquil, 1980) is a distinguished scholar and film critic whose work has significantly contributed to the understanding of Latin American cinema, particularly the often-overlooked cinema of Ecuador. With a background in Film Studies and a deep commitment to exploring the cultural and political dimensions of cinema, Miño Puga offers invaluable insights into Ecuador's emerging cinematic landscape. As a passionate advocate for the visibility of Ecuadorian cinema, the Ecuadorian scholar has dedicated her career to challenging the perception that his country lacks a robust film industry.

Her book, *Ecuadorian Cinema for the 21st Century*, is a timely and meticulously researched contribution to the burgeoning field of Latin American Film Studies and stands as a seminal work that redefines the study of national cinema within the context of Latin American film. Published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2023, this monograph offers a comprehensive analysis of Ecuadorian cinema in the context of the country's political and cultural shifts during the early 21st century, particularly under the influence of the so-called "Socialism for the 21st Century" political movement led by former President Rafael Correa. Miño Puga's work is a significant addition to the limited scholarship on Ecuadorian cinema, a field that has often been overshadowed by the more prominent film industries of Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. The book not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also provides a nuanced understanding of how cinema operates within a specific national and political framework. Even though there are no local precedents in this field of knowledge, Miño Puga goes beyond important studies such as *Latin American Cinema. A comparative history* (2016), by Paul A. Schroeder, and *El Carrete Mágico, Una Historia del Cine Latinoamericano* (1994), by John King; Schroeder book's does not mention Ecuadorian Cinema at all and King's classic study only includes a couple of paragraphs about this small nation cinema.

The book is structured into seven chapters, each addressing a different aspect of Ecuadorian cinema during the period from 2006 to 2016. Miño provides a compelling analysis of full-length films such as Sebastian Cordero's *Ratas, ratones, rateros* (1999), a pivotal work that marked a turning point for Ecuadorian cinema on the global stage. She examines how documentaries like Maria Fernanda Restrepo's *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011) engage with historical trauma and collective memory, creating a space for reflection and reconciliation. It is a documentary that grapples with the personal and political trauma of a family tragedy (the Restrepo Brothers assassination by the local police during the *Retorno a la democracia* period) highlighting the ways in which personal narratives can take on national significance.

The author employs a praxis-based methodology, drawing on a wide range of theoretical frameworks, including Pierre Bourdieu's Field of Cultural Production,

Stephen Heath's *Film and Ideology*, and Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim's critical transnationalism. This theoretical grounding allows Miño Puga to navigate the complexities of defining a national cinema within a transnational context, a task that is particularly challenging for a country like Ecuador, which has historically been considered a "third-tier" film-producing nation.

One of the book's central arguments is that Ecuadorian cinema during this period reflects the same ambiguities, ruptures, and reversals as the political ideology of Socialism for the 21st century. Miño Puga contends that despite the anti-hegemonic rhetoric of the Correa administration, the local film industry maintained, and at times encouraged, neoliberal tendencies. This argument is particularly compelling in the context of the 2006 National Film Promotion Law (*Ley de Cine*), which aimed to support local film production but ultimately reinforced existing market structures dominated by international conglomerates and the local exhibition sector.

Miño Puga identifies three distinct subfields within Ecuadorian cinema: the commercial exhibition sector, the state-supported indie subfield, and the vernacular subfield. This tripartite division allows her to explore the tensions between state-funded cinema, which aspires to international recognition and commercial success, and more marginal forms of filmmaking that operate outside the mainstream. The author's analysis of these subfields is nuanced and well-supported, particularly in her discussion of the 'preferred path' or 'habitus' of state-supported films, which often rely on international co-productions and film festival validation before seeking commercial distribution (9).

Miño Puga's engagement with existing scholarship is thorough and critical. She draws on a wide range of theorists, from Pierre Bourdieu and Heath to more recent works on Latin American cinema by scholars such as Claudia Sandberg and Cynthia Vich. Her use of Bourdieu's concept of the "field of cultural production" is particularly effective in explaining the dynamics of power and influence within the Ecuadorian film industry. The author's ability to apply these theoretical frameworks to the specificities of Ecuadorian cinema is a testament to her scholarly rigor.

While the book is comprehensive in its scope, there are areas where further research could be beneficial. For instance, the focus on films that achieved theatrical release necessarily excludes other forms of filmmaking, such as community cinema or underground films, which may offer different perspectives on the relationship between cinema and politics in Ecuador. Miño Puga acknowledges this limitation in her introduction, but it remains an area that could be explored in future studies. She also dismisses a very prolific field in Ecuador: the short subject, a format that is necessary in any crisis. We miss, for example, important works like the twenty five-minutes film *La*

Verdad sobre el caso del señor Valdemar (2009) by Carlos Andres Vera, based on the Edgar Allan Poe short story, made with private investment.

Additionally, while the book provides a detailed analysis of the 2006–2016 period, it would be interesting to see how the trends identified by Miño Puga have evolved in the years since the end of the Correa administration (a final criticism would be that Miño Puga seems to proclaim that all the cinematic productions in that period were possible because of the political revolution led by the former president). The transformation of the National Film Council (CNCine) into the Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Innovation (IFCI) in 2020, for example, suggests a further shift towards neoliberal practices, which could be explored in a follow-up study.

Thanks to Miño Puga's work, the category of small cinema can no longer be applied to Ecuadorian films. Her meticulous study demonstrates how state support once nurtured a vibrant film industry, a reality that has since faded. Repositioning Ecuadorian cinema within the global cinematic landscape, this pioneering book will undoubtedly inspire further research on Ecuadorian cinema and its place within the broader landscape of Latin American film. As the author writes in one of the final chapters, 'these articulations testify to a vibrant film activity that continues to negotiate its own cinematic identity' (193).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

