

***Cine Móvil: Lights, Projectors, and Screenings on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast*¹**

*CINE MÓVIL: LUCES, PROYECTORES Y PROYECCIONES
EN LA COSTA CARIBEÑA DE NICARAGUA*

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ABSTRACT: Previous scholars have noted the importance of film and video to the Sandinista Revolution (Ryan 1996, Buschbaum 2003, Calvo 2008, Roncallo 2013, Gonçalves 2015). A subset of this scholarship critically assesses the structural implications of Sandinista media (Velásquez 2016; Rodríguez and Anangón 2019), however, little attention has been paid to the racial dimensions of Sandinista media projects. This essay focuses on the historical, geographic, and racial dimensions of *Cine Móvil*, the mobile cinema project established by the Sandinista government as a consciousness-raising

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tool for the country's rural communities. Through a combination of Sandinista-produced newsreels and narrative films, these screenings promoted decentralized, grassroots, and participatory media practices. I argue that *Cine Móvil* was an expansion of Sandinista multiculturalist strategies that sought to suture the splits between a predominantly mestizo Pacific coast and the historically marginalized Afro-Indigenous Nicaraguan Caribbean coast. The screenings in places like Pearl Lagoon, Rama, and Orinoco were strategic for the Sandinista government, given that the contra war financed by the United States was primarily fought on the long-neglected coast. Trained to open with a revolutionary salute and to engage the audiences in conversation after the screenings, the projectionists who arrived on pack animals, motorboats, and vehicles across the vast terrain that separated the two coasts provided entertainment, didactic media, and a reassurance that they had a place in the larger project of Sandinismo.

KEYWORDS: Race, Cine Móvil, Sandinista Revolution, Latin American Cinema, Central American Caribbean.

RESUMEN: Otros estudiosos han señalado la importancia del cine y el medio audiovisual para la Revolución Sandinista (Ryan 1996, Buschbaum 2003, Calvo 2008, Roncallo 2013, Gonçalves 2015). Entre estos, algunos evalúan críticamente las implicaciones estructurales de los medios sandinistas (Velásquez 2016; Rodríguez y Anangón 2019); sin embargo, se ha prestado poca atención a las dimensiones raciales de los proyectos audiovisuales sandinistas. Este ensayo se centra en las dimensiones históricas, geográficas y raciales de *Cine Móvil*, el proyecto de cine ambulante establecido por el gobierno sandinista como herramienta de concienciación para las comunidades rurales del país. A través de una combinación de noticiarios y películas narrativas producidas por los sandinistas, estas proyecciones promovían prácticas mediáticas descentralizadas, populares y participativas. Sostengo que *Cine Móvil* fue una expansión de las estrategias multiculturalistas sandinistas que buscaban suturar las divisiones entre una costa del Pacífico predominantemente mestiza y la afroindígena costa caribeña nicaragüense, históricamente marginada. Las proyecciones en lugares como Laguna de Perlas, Rama y Orinoco eran estratégicas para el gobierno sandinista, dado que la guerra de la Contra, financiada por Estados Unidos, se libró principalmente en la costa, descuidada durante mucho tiempo. Entrenados para abrir con un saludo revolucionario y para entablar conversación con el público después de las proyecciones, los proyeccionistas que llegaban en animales de carga, lanchas y vehículos a través del vasto terreno que separaba las dos costas proporcionaban entretenimiento, medios didácticos y la seguridad de que

la audiencia tenía un lugar en el proyecto más amplio del sandinismo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: raza, cine móvil, revolución sandinista, cine latinoamericano, caribe centroamericano.

From the October Revolution to the Sandinista Revolution, insurgent regimes have been associated with nationalized cinema². Soviet nationalized cinema contributed to the overall growth of film production, but a lesser-known feature of the plan was the distribution of film throughout the countryside via thousands of mobile film units³. Decades later, Maoist China would put into effect a similar nationalization of the film industry as well as a parallel strategy of extending cinema viewership into the countryside, relying on teams of cultural workers who served as projectionists on routes through villages that lacked electricity⁴. The idea in both cases was to conquer the hearts and minds of the masses, while ensuring the systemic distribution of film to rural multitudes. Working with these two precedents, Latin American revolutionary governments likewise

² For more on the history of Soviet cinema, see *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–1935* (1991), *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (1992), and *Inside the Film Factory* (2005).

³ As Vance Kepley Jr. states: “The linking of cinema with the national rail system, which began as a marriage of necessity during the Civil War, was extended by the mid-1920s into a full-scale campaign to reach and inform previously isolated segments of the population. The Russians traded for foreign projectors which were then outfitted with portable generators and transformed into itinerant cinema facilities. By 1925, 1,600 such units were touring the countryside by train. Within two years the figure had risen to 2,000; film industry officials boasted of approaching their goal of being able to reach literally every Soviet village with some form of cinema entertainment and enlightenment” (35).

⁴ Writing about this latter case, Jie Li writes that “the party’s human-powered media infrastructure networked the immense Chinese countryside without electrification, relying instead on the labor and talent of radio receptionists, film projectionists, propaganda performers, and other cultural workers” (34).

understood film –and mobile cinema in particular– as a valuable ideological commodity.

During the Sandinista decade (1979–1990), revolutionary filmmakers became attuned to the effect of mediations as they garnered support for their movement. As Emilio Rodríguez Vasquez noted in one interview: “The need to document the involvement of the masses during the process of liberation –a mobilization without precedent in Nicaraguan history since Augusto César Sandino’s resistance to the U.S.-sponsored invasion in the late 20s and early 30s– suddenly became a priority” (Burton 28). Sandinista Nicaragua became the second place in Latin America after Cuba to integrate into state-sponsored media a program for rural distribution. After all, Carlos Vicente Ibarra noted in the same interview, “the existence of 150 movie theaters accounting for a substantial tradition of film viewing could not be overlooked by the Sandinista government” (Burton 28). The idea was not to produce films that would only be seen in Managua and in the homes of members of “a growing international solidarity movement; it was for them to be seen in all the corners of the national territory as well. On this note, Ibarra emphasized: “In terms of Distribution, our priority is the establishment of an effective mobile cinema program. The idea behind this project is to bring films to the most remote sections of the country, to people who have had little if any prior exposure to the medium” (Burton 30). The media projects espoused by the Sandinista government highlighted the old regime’s media centralization and opened the path to a reconceptualization of grassroots cinematic production and distribution. In Nicaragua, where entertainment had once served the pleasures of the elite via Hollywood movies in the movie theaters of the capital, 16mm and 35mm film would serve to document the changes ushered by the revolutionary government and a mobile cinema program would be used to bring that audiovisual documentation to the masses in the country.

Landmark volumes, such as *Cinema and the Sandinistas* (2003), *La pantalla rota* (2005), and *A la conquista de un sueño* (2014) have contributed key assessments of the history and structural aspects of

Sandinista-era media⁵. This article dialogues with that scholarship, and adds to the conversation a closer look at *Cine Móvil*, in operation during Sandinista governance. The article brings to the fore new documentation through an interview conducted in April 2025 with a projectionist who worked at many sites in the country, including Puerto Cabezas on the Nicaraguan Caribbean coast. Given the subject matter and the current global political context, I have chosen to protect the projectionist's name. Little is known about the experience of *Cine Móvil* projectionists, and this interview answers several of the questions posed by reviewers in the first draft of this article, to wit: What films were shown? Who presented the films (projectionists or Sandinista political cadre)? The article then moves into contextualization of the memories shared in the interview. Together, these elements demonstrate that *Cine Móvil* was perceived by the Nicaraguan Film Institute (INCINE) as a key media investment that required dedicated resources and specialized labor to bring cinema to audiences on the Caribbean coast, especially during the contra war.

MEMORIES OF CINE MÓVIL

The following interview with "CMP" (Cine Móvil Projectionist) was conducted via Facebook Messenger in April 2025, and it offers details about his experience as a projectionist in the 1980s. The connection to the participant was facilitated by a mutual friend. Though I have shortened my input as an interviewer, CMP's responses are recorded fully. The translation of the original conversation in Spanish is mine, and I assume full responsibility for any errors therein. To my knowledge, this is the first interview with a *Cine Móvil* projectionist to be published in a scholarly journal. The interview delves into the

⁵ For contemporary approaches to Nicaraguan film, especially from a gendered lens, see "Cine nacional comprometido" (2014), "Cine 'a lo zurdo'" (2015) and *Cultura de la memoria y cine documental* (2016).

participant's memories about *Cine Móvil*, covering what it meant to him as an individual and as professional, as well as his impressions of the spectators who attended screenings in both coasts of the country. It responds to questions that have gone unanswered in extant writings about *Cine Móvil*, providing possible avenues for future researchers on the topic.

CMP: I was a member of the projectionist team in the eighties, we were a small group of young people who traveled all over Nicaragua.

JGM: *Cine Móvil covered the entire country, tremendous work. Did you decide which towns to go to? How did you transport the equipment?*

CMP: *Cine Móvil* is born with the purpose of bringing healthy recreation to farthest towns away from the city, to make known the liberation struggle against the dictatorship, because at the beginning TV signals did not reach the mountains of Nicaragua. In the beginning it was only like four projectionists, including one woman. Then there were twelve, and by the 1980s 52 projectionists throughout Nicaragua. We were from Managua, León, Estelí, Bluefields, Matagalpa. Some were placed in the region where they were, and some of us were placed in sites far from Managua.

CMP: Fui integrante del equipo de proyccionistas de los años ochenta, éramos un pequeño grupo de jóvenes que anduvimos por toda Nicaragua.

JGM: *El Cine Móvil tuvo una extensión sobre todo el país, una enorme labor. ¿Decidían ustedes a qué pueblos iban? ¿Cómo transportaban el equipo?*

CMP: El *Cine Móvil* nace con la finalidad de llevar recreación sana a las partes más alejadas de la ciudad, dar a conocer la lucha de liberación en contra de la dictadura, debido a que en el inicio no llegaba la señal de TV a las montañas de Nicaragua. Al comienzo sólo eran como cuatro proyccionistas, entre ellos una mujer. Después fueron doce, ya en el 80 eran 52 proyccionistas en todo Nicaragua. Éramos de Managua, León, Estelí, Bluefields, Matagalpa. Algunos se les ubicó en la región de dónde estaban y a otros nos ubicaron en lugares lejos de Managua.

JGM: *Amazing how quickly this project grew. What led you to participate? What places did you go to as a projectionist?*

CMP: Well, first I was old enough to work and, since I was a member of a community organization, a friend took me to see if I would like to work as a projectionist. I went through training, and I took a liking to seeing how much people enjoyed watching films, such as those with Chaplin or black-and-white Mexican films. Also, one feels good giving people something to break up their routine.

My first official post was in the city of León, but not in the city itself, in the different municipalities, regions, or state production units. I was filled with joy seeing the faces of the peasants, their children, young people, and elders delighting in something that was not very common for them.

Then I was assigned to Jinotega and its communities. I was in Camoapa Boaco, in Juigalpa, San Carlos, Río San Juan, the Bonanza mines, Rosita and Siuna, I was in Puerto Cabezas,

JGM: *Increíble lo rápido que creció este proyecto. ¿Qué te llevó a vos a participar? ¿A qué lugares fuiste como proyccionista?*

CMP: Bueno, lo primero ya tenía edad para trabajar y como era miembro de una organización comunitaria, un amigo me llevo a ver si me gustaría trabajar como proyccionista. Pasé un periodo de preparación y ahí me fue gustando ver cómo la gente disfrutaba al ver una película como por ejemplo de Chaplin, Cantinflas o mexicanas en blanco y negro. También uno se siente bien al llevarle algo para que salieran de la rutina.

Mi primer lugar ya oficialmente fue en la ciudad de León, pero no en la ciudad, sino que a los diferentes municipios, comarcas, pues o unidades de producción estatal. Me llenaba de regocijo ver la cara de los campesinos, sus hijos, jóvenes y viejos disfrutar de algo que no era muy común para ellos.

Después fui asignado a Jinotega y sus comunidades. Estuve en Camoapa Boaco, en Juigalpa, San Carlos, Río San Juan, las minas de Bonanza, Rosita y Siuna, estuve en Puerto Cabezas,

in the Miskito settlements.

In every place there is always a different story that was experienced. Lived experiences with other members and projectionist friends.

After going to all those places, I went on to the projection equipment and accessories maintenance and repair workshop, and lastly, I transferred to the area of review and restoration of 16mm tapes.

JGM: *Do you remember the film titles that you took with you? Were they screened alone or along with noticieros/newsreels?*

CMP: We took entertaining films and another of a more informative character, whether INCINE noticieros/newsreels, documentaries, educational.

In some cases where one was stationed, the receiving community arranged transportation and getting around was smoother. In some cases, as I had to do in the mountains of Jinotega, we had to “echar a tuto,” or carry the equipment on our shoulders, and the campesinos helped us transport the equipment to our screening destination. Once

en los asentamientos miskitos.

En cada lugar siempre hay una historia diferente que se vivió. Experiencias vividas junto a otros miembros y amigos proyeccionistas.

Después de andar en todos esos lugares pasé al taller de mantenimiento y reparación de equipos de proyección y accesorios, por último, pasé al área de revisión y restauración de cintas de 16 mm.

JGM: *¿Recuerdas los títulos de las películas que llevabas? ¿Se presentaban solas o junto con los noticieros?*

CMP: Se llevaban películas de entretenimiento y otra de carácter informativa, o ya sea noticieros INCINE, documentales, educativos.

En algunos casos donde uno era ubicado, el organismo receptor contaba con medios de transporte y se facilitaba la gira para ir a trabajar. En algunos casos como me tocó a mí en las montañas de Jinotega nos tuvimos que echar a tuto, o cargar los equipos al hombro, los campesinos nos ayudaban a trasladarnos hasta el lugar de la proyección. Ya

there, we searched within in the community, village, hamlet, finca, a house where we could install the projector, speakers, Honda 1500 generator, and we began shortly thereafter with the activity.

Before the screening began, the politician of the community would give a speech and, representing INCINE, we would then take the floor and would serve as government messengers bringing them entertainment.

The projectionist equipment was, at the beginning, a Kalart Victor projector for 16mm film, a separate speaker, and in one of the flaps we kept the film reels to be projected, an electrical extension to connect to the generator in areas without power, the generator was situated as far as possible to avoid its noise.

JGM: *How long did the teams stay in the towns?*

CMP: To take advantage of the time because of the distance of the cities, we looked for ways to cover the population cores in the surrounding areas because we could not cover a whole population in one month.

ahí, nosotros buscábamos en la comunidad, pueblo, caserío, finca, una casa donde instalarlos con el proyector, parlantes, planta eléctrica Honda 1500 y al rato ya comenzábamos con la actividad.

Antes de comenzar la proyección el político de la comunidad decía su chaguite y nosotros en representación de INCINE también tomábamos la palabra y servíamos de mensajeros del gobierno para llevarle el entretenimiento.

El equipamiento del proyccionista era al inicio, un proyector Kalart Victor de 16mm, un parlante aparte, y en una de las tapas se guardaban los rollos de películas a proyectar, una extensión eléctrica para conectarse a la planta eléctrica cuando no había luz eléctrica, la planta la poníamos bastante largo de dónde estábamos por evitar lo más posible el ruido.

JGM: *¿Cuánto tiempo se quedaban en las comarcas?*

CMP: Para aprovechar el tiempo por la lejanía de las ciudades, buscábamos como cubrir los núcleos poblacionales de los alrededores

So, we took advantage of as much as possible in that period of time, we coordinated that with the municipal bodies, departments and peasant cooperatives to take advantage of the transportation they could arrange for us.

JGM: *What was the experience in Puerto Cabezas like?*

CMP: I started working when they were planning or carrying out the relocation of the Miskitos from the border with Honduras to the nascent settlements of Tasba Pry, Wasminona, Sasha, Sumubila.

There were no conditions whatsoever, the first day I arrived in Wasminona I had to sleep almost out in the open, and then with time the conditions began to improve, the Miskitos hardly spoke with a "Spanish" as they called those of us from the Pacific. At the first screening I undertook, I was pleased to see how the young people, children, and the elders crowded around me to watch as I installed all the projection equipment.

And, before the screening started, everyone was talking, but

porque no cubríamos en un mes toda la población.

Así que aprovechamos lo más posible en ese periodo de tiempo, eso lo coordinamos con los organismos municipales, departamentales y cooperativas campesinas para aprovechar los medios que se conseguían para transportarnos.

JGM: *¿Cómo fue la experiencia en Puerto Cabezas?*

CMP: Yo empecé a trabajar cuando estaban formándose o realizando el traslado de los miskitos desde la frontera con Honduras hacia los nacientes asentamientos de Tasba Pry, Wasminona, Sasha, Sumubila.

No existían condiciones de ningún tipo, me tocó el primer día que llegué a Wasminona dormir casi a la intemperie, ya después fueron mejorando las condiciones, los miskitos casi no hablaban con un "español" como nos decían a los del Pacífico. Ya para la primera proyección que realicé me fue grato ver cómo los jóvenes, niños y la gente mayor se agrupaban alrededor mío para ver como instalaba todo el equipo de proyección.

when the movie started, they stopped talking. At the funny parts of the movie, there was laughter and admiration all together.

JGM: *Do you remember what movies were screened there? Did your team go to those settlements many times?*

CMP: I brought Noticiero 1: “Nationalization of Mines,” Noticiero 5: “The Beginning of the Literacy Campaign,” “Our Agrarian Reform,” “Victory of a People in Arms”, Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, Cantinflas’ *The Circus*, and Noticiero 11: “The Atlantic Coast.”

We visited several times. After screening the ones with me, I would go to Puerto Cabezas Wilbi to exchange them for those that the projectionist of that place had, I remember it was _____.

To avoid too many trips, we screened either just the noticieros/newsreels or just the movies, on some occasions, the people would ask me to screen the comedy films that I had already projected.

I know and experienced many

Y antes de iniciar la proyección todos hablaban, pero al comenzar la película dejaban de hablar. Cuando salía la parte chistosa de la película, eran risas carcajadas y admiración todo junto.

JGM: *¿Recuerdas cuáles películas se proyectaron allí? ¿Fueron a esos asentamientos varias veces?*

CMP: Yo llevé Noticiero 1: “Nacionalización de las minas”, Noticiero 5: “Inicio de la alfabetización”, “Nuestra reforma agraria”, “Victoria de un pueblo en armas”, *El gran dictador* de Chaplin, *El circo* de Cantinflas, y Noticiero 11: “La Costa Atlántica”.

Se visitaron varias veces. Al pasar las que llevaba, me trasladaba hasta Puerto Cabezas Wilbi y las intercambiaba con el proyccionista de ese lugar, me acuerdo que era _____.

Para evitar los viajes muy seguidos pasábamos o los noticieros o solo las películas, en algunas ocasiones la población me pedía pasarles las cómicas que ya les había proyectado.

Conozco y viví muchos momentos buenos, malos con casi todos los cros de *Cine Móvil*. Siendo

good and bad moments with almost all the *Cine Móvil* crews. Being a projectionist, I helped others when they had problems with the equipment and we solved them, that's why I was placed in the workshop. We had Cuban advisors, and we learned a lot from them.

Also, with the Cubans we began to provide equipment maintenance service to the commercial cinemas belonging to the state cinema chain.

JGM: *So, the 16mm films were for mobile cinemas and the 35mm films for theaters?*

CMP: Yes, that's right. Later, a donation of 35mm KH19 and KH20 mobile projectors arrived from the Soviet Union.

When the Frente lost the elections in '90, everything collapsed. There was no budget for INCINE, and *Cine Móvil* disappeared. We weren't given the severance pay we were entitled to, and we were left jobless. Well, we'll talk about all those experiences over time.

proyeccionista ayudaba a otros cuando tenían problemas con los equipos y los resolvíamos, por eso fue que me ubicaron en el taller. Teníamos asesores cubanos y aprendimos bastante con ellos.

También con los cubanos comenzamos a dar servicio de mantenimiento a las salas de cine comerciales pertenecientes a la cadena de cines del Estado.

JGM: *¿Entonces las de 16mm eran para cine móvil y las de 35mm para los cines?*

CMP: Sí, así es, después llegó una donación de la unión soviética de proyectores móviles de 35mm KH19 y KH20.

Cuando el Frente pierde las elecciones en el 90, todo se vino al suelo, no había presupuesto para INCINE y el *Cine Móvil* desaparece, no se nos dio liquidación a la que teníamos derecho, quedamos sin trabajo.

Bueno, todas esas vivencias las vamos a conversar con más tiempo.

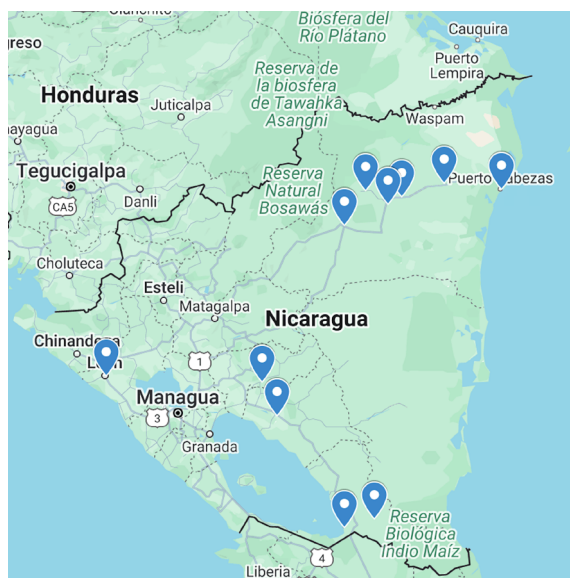


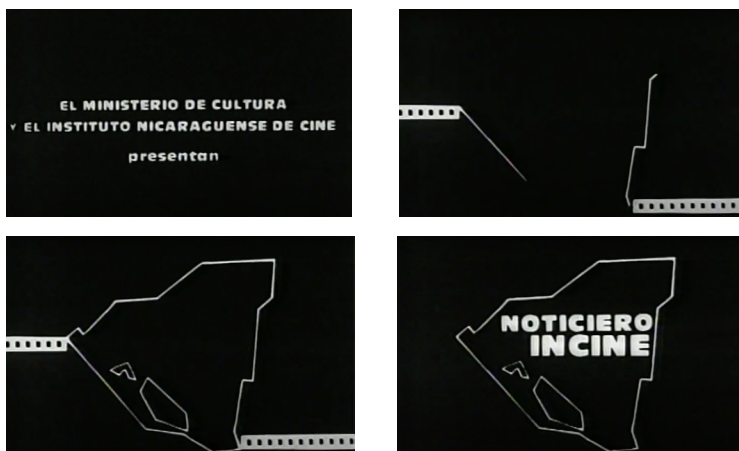
FIGURE 1. Projectionist Sites Mentioned by CMP. Map Data Ó Google Maps 2025.

THE 16MM KALART VICTOR PROJECTOR IN CONTEXT

The “Founding Principles and Goals of the Nicaraguan Film Institute” (1979) declared that INCINE was born in the fire of war against the reactionary and anti-popular force of the Somoza regime, for the purpose of gathering cinematic testimony of the struggle, countering enemy news agencies, and keeping international solidarity alive (INCINE 1979)⁶. Noticieros/newsreels were intended to garner support

⁶ My translation of the fragment. The original text reads: “Sometida al saqueo, a la explotación, al hambre y a la miseria por esa tenebrosa fuerza reaccionaria y antipopular, Nicaragua tuvo también que enfrentar una sistemática y profunda agresión destinada a socavar su identidad nacional. En el fragor de la guerra contra esa fuerza, nació el cine sandinista, por la necesidad de recoger el testimonio cinematográfico de los más significativos momentos de esa lucha para

for the revolution throughout the country, and it was no accident that many began with an animated sequence bringing together film strips to form an outline of Nicaragua (See Figures 2-5). Like film splicing—the physical process of joining strips of film together in film editing—this sequence represented for INCINE the role of film in bridging the geographic and socio-cultural chasms of the country⁷. It was a visual manifestation of the institute's intention to use film to develop a new image of Nicaragua in 16mm and 35mm, one in which the medium would suture the historical gap from the Pacific to the Caribbean coasts.



FIGURES 2–5. Animated Film Strip Opening Sequence in Early INCINE Noticieros/Newsreels. Source: “Inicio de la campaña de alfabetización” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980)

contrarrestar la desinformación promovida por agencias noticiosas enemigas y mantener viva la solidaridad internacional”. The original “Declaración de principios y fines del Instituto Nicaragüense de Cine” was published as a pamphlet, and a digital copy can be found in the online library of La Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano. See INCINE (2025) for the Spanish translation and INCINE (2019) for a full English translation.

⁷ For a focused analysis of the chasms in Nicaragua, see “Race and the Space of Citizenship” (2010) and for an understanding of how parallel chasms manifest throughout Central America, see *Black in Print* (2023).

The fifty newsreels produced by INCINE filmmakers provided coverage of the nation-wide initiatives developed by Sandinista government in the early days of the revolution⁸. Among these are two dedicated to the landmark national literacy campaign: “Inicio de la campaña de alfabetización/Beginning of the Literacy Campaign” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980) and “Clausura de la cruzada nacional de alfabetización/Closing of the Literacy Campaign” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980), as well as a newsreel detailing the extension of telecommunications to the Caribbean coast: “Rompiendo el silencio/Rupturing Silence” (Iván Argüello, 1984). Importantly, when CMP selected the film reels that he would take to Puerto Cabezas, he chose “Nacionalización de las minas/Nationalization of the Mines” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1979), “Inicio de la campaña de alfabetización/Beginning of the Literacy Campaign” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980), and “La Costa Atlántica/The Atlantic Coast” (María José Álvarez, 1980)⁹. The revolution had seen the rise of *casas de cultura* throughout rural areas where workshops on music, theater, handicrafts, dance, and poetry served to rupture the previous division between high and low culture¹⁰. In the same vein, INCINE’s newsreels situated campesinos as protagonists of both film and history, thus creating the basis for a national cinema that was attuned to those who had been historically on the margins of Nicaraguan society. They cemented INCINE’s “founding principles

⁸ For a full list of the fifty noticieros/newsreels produced by INCINE, see the “Filmography” section of *Cinema and the Sandinistas* (2003).

⁹ The first two noticieros/newsreels that CMP selected highlighted two populist programs with a high impact on rural areas and the third related directly to the region of the spectators: “Nacionalización de las minas” (1979) featured an interview with a former Sandinista combatant narrating his experience as part of the campaign to nationalize the mines, “Inicio de la campaña de alfabetización” featured interviews with young people who formed part of the literacy brigades as well as rural community participants speaking to their desire to learn to read and write, and the “La Costa Atlántica” (1980) was a report on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua touching on its music, landscapes, and agricultural production, and political issues.

¹⁰ See “On Culture” (1989) and “Memoria e imagen” (2012).

and goals” of creating a national cinematic tradition that reflected its people’s concrete reality and specific cultural experiences, a cinema grounded in historicity that would contribute to the development of the revolutionary process and its central character: the Nicaraguan people (INCINE 1979)¹¹.

In tandem with its initial production of newsreels, INCINE began to produce medium-length and feature-length films. Many, such as those screened by CMP in Puerto Cabezas, were expository documentaries about revolutionary history: “Victoria de un pueblo en armas/ Victory of a People in Arms” (Jorge Denti, Bertha Navarro, Carlos Vicente Ibarra, 1980) and “Nuestra reforma agraria/ Our Agrarian Reform” (Rafael Vargas Ruiz, 1982). Others brought specific areas of the country into focus, including the Caribbean Coast: “La otra cara del oro/The Other Side of Gold” (Rafael Vargas and Emilio Rodríguez, 1981) and “Bananeras/Banana Plantations” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1982). Though documentaries were an important in INCINE cinematic production, the development of feature-length narrative feature-length films like *El espectro de la guerra* (Ramiro Lacayo, 1987) were also made to serve the revolution¹². Importantly for the purposes of this article, however, is understanding a parallel strategy: In the same way that the iconic literacy campaign boosted reading and spread Sandinista writings, so, too, did the *Cine Móvil* campaign boost visual literacy while serving as a distribution wing

¹¹ The original text reads: “El nuestro será un cine nicaragüense, lanzado a la búsqueda de un lenguaje cinematográfico que ha de surgir de nuestra realidad concreta y de las experiencias particulares de nuestra cultura. Partirá de un esfuerzo de investigación profunda en las raíces de nuestra cultura, porque sólo así podrá reflejar la esencia de nuestro ser histórico y contribuir al desarrollo del proceso revolucionario y de su protagonista: el pueblo nicaragüense.” See note 6, above, for the Spanish and English versions of the document.

¹² *El espectro de la Guerra/The Ghost of War* (Ramiro Lacayo, 1987) was about a young Black man living in Bluefields who gave up his dream of becoming a dancer to join the revolution during the contra war. The film was Nicaragua’s entry for Best Foreign Language film at the 61st Academy Awards.

for INCINE's productions. This was, in fact, confirmed in INCINE's five-year retrospective document:

With respect to screenings, we have an extensive chain of alternative cinematic distribution, through *Cine Móvil*. These are projectionists who travel to the most remote corners of our national territory, places that neither radio nor television, nor written media from the capital, can reach, as well as large urban areas with greater population density, screening national productions as well as foreign productions. Today, we have fifty-two projectionists distributed across the six regions and three special zones in which the country is divided, who completed in 1984, 6,000 screenings for 1,500,000 spectators [50% of the country's population].

The *Cine Móvil* screenings, due to their massiveness, in addition to their value as a form of entertainment and education, have served us as a means of convening and supporting the different campaigns that the Nicaraguan government carries out in the areas of environmental health, vaccinations, agrarian reform, education, etc., playing an important part as well in defense, especially since it is the only form of entertainment in the zones stalked by counterrevolutionary bands.

With *Cine Móvil*, through the introduction of film series, movie weeks, we have not only taken film to regions where it was unknown, but we have created a new film spectator who is much more conscious and more interested in a cinema that emplaces him in reality¹³ (INCINE 1985).

¹³ My translation of the fragment. The original reads: "En exhibición hemos desarrollado una amplia cadena de distribución alternativa cinematográfica, a través del *Cine Móvil*. Éstos son proyccionistas que viajan hasta las más remotas comarcas de nuestro territorio nacional, lugares en donde no llega ni la radio ni la televisión, ni los medios escritos de la capital, así como también en los lugares urbanos con mayor concentración de población y que proyectan de forma gratuita, tanto producciones nacionales como extranjeras. En la actualidad, poseemos cincuenta y dos proyccionistas distribuidos en las seis regiones y tres zonas especiales en que está dividido el país, habiendo realizado en el año de 1984, 6 000 proyecciones con una asistencia de 1 500 000 espectadores (50% de la población del país)".

INCINE viewed *Cine Móvil* as a consciousness-raising tool as well as a political weapon, developing nuclei at multiple sites of the country with the express purpose of screening its revolutionary productions from south to north and on both coasts of the country. With support of the Black and Indigenous populations necessary to winning the contra war, INCINE's casting of a net of revolutionary material from the Pacific to the Caribbean Coast was especially strategic. *Cine Móvil*'s mission was carried out by projectionists who were guided by the concept of cinematic pleasure, even as it was structurally devised by the state as a far-reaching media support wing and apparatus during the contra war. The cross-coastal scale and scope of the project was envisioned as a way of splicing the two coasts of Nicaragua into a single revolutionary story. As the extensive production of newsreels as well as medium-length and feature-length films suggests, filmmaking was an important battleground. The distribution of this work through *Cine Móvil* demonstrates the extent to which precious resources were carefully plotted across the map of the country whilst a system of production, distribution, and the formation of film audiences was meticulously planned. This was a cinematic network that did not put films that were critical of the government, like *Wanki Lupia Nani/Los hijos del río/Children of the River* (Fernando Somarriba, 1987), into circulation¹⁴. After all, INCINE filmmakers had declined to produce a newsreel about Miskito displacement that would be favorable to

¹⁴ The film marked the first time that a filmmaker dared to make a film that was openly critical of Sandinista policies and actions against Miskito people. The documentary brought together interviews and footage that captured Sandinista violence against the Miskito community, a public apology from Sandinista leader Tomás Borge, and footage of the return of the displaced Miskito peoples to the riverbanks of their ancestral lands. As Magdalena Perkowska observes, the footage is from 1985 through 1987, a period that intersects with the Sandinista war against counterrevolutionary forces on the coast (1981-1989) as well as the Miskito demand and reinstatement of autonomy (1984-1987), making this film a participant in these political processes from its place in the cultural sphere (64).

the revolution¹⁵. It was a film circuit that prioritized media critical of pre-revolutionary Somoza governance and cultural pursuits, one that was more intent on decentralizing the routes of media reach even as it drew from centralized semiotic messaging during a critical time in the revolution.

CLOSING CREDITS

When the grand movie theaters of Nicaragua were established in Managua and other cities in the Pacific coastal region during the nineteenth century, they reified standing racial, class, and geographic divisions. Even when earthquakes and fires destroyed classic movie theaters like Cine Margot and González, they were rebuilt over the same locales and continued to afford urban elites and middle classes the luxury of entertainment (“Historia” 2022). Nicaragua had accelerated its investment in Pacific coastal areas with financing from the older coffee and booming banana trades during the Somoza regime (1936-1979), outfitting its privileged region with highways, potable water, telephones, and Hollywood studio movies. Meanwhile, the large expanse of the 60,366 km² of the Zelaya District –inhabited primarily by Miskitu, Garifuna, and Creole peoples– lacked such

¹⁵ Remarking on the context and INCINE’s request for a favorable depiction, Ramiro Lacayo remarks in one interview: “Hubo un momento en la Revolución que agarraron a los misquitos que vivían en la zona del río Coco y los metieron en unos refugios contra su voluntad. Fue el momento cuando quemaron iglesias, e hicieron una serie de barbaridades. A mí me llevaron a los lugares, a lo profundo de esa gente, para que yo hiciera noticieros o documentales de propaganda... Sin embargo, yo me negué diciendo que no me parecía... (There was a time during the Revolution when they grabbed the Miskitos who lived in the River Coco area and forced them into refugee camps against their will. That was at the time that they set fire to churches and committed other acts of barbarism. They took me to those places, to the depths of those people, so that I would make newsreels or propaganda documentaries... However, I declined, saying it didn’t seem right to me...)” (Translation mine; qtd. in Cortés 339-340).

amenities well into the mid-1960s (Fundación Enrique Bolaños 1965). Relying on telegraphs –and even then, only in select towns– well into the late 1960s, telecommunications were virtually non-existent of the Pacific Coast (Fundación Enrique Bolaños 1965). This unequal access of communications technologies was thrown into relief when the Sandinista government came into power in 1979.

Media before and during the Somoza regime had complemented political discourses that marginalized Caribbean coastal populations, casting them as “uncivilized” in the national story (Hooker 247). *Cine Móvil* emerged as a deliberate project of cinematic diffusion in the countryside that was a trailblazer in creating critical cinematic experiences for rural peoples throughout Nicaragua, especially those on the Caribbean coast. The very presence of *Cine Móvil* and its projectionists in the neglected areas of the country reinforced promises about what a revolution could do for populations previously excised from the national imaginary. It was a project that reaches generations of audiences in an expansive way that had not been seen before and, importantly, has not been seen since. Imperfect as it was, especially with respect to Indigenous sovereignty, Sadinismo fell, and with it, *Cine Móvil*. Though mobile cinema was reinstated by a new government in 2007, public screenings remain concentrated in Managua and other Pacific coastal contexts. With selections like Sandinista-era noticieros/newsreels and *La insurrección cultural*/The Cultural Revolution (Jorge Denti, 1981) as well as contemporary films like Cuba’s animated feature film *Meñique* (Ernesto Padrón, 2014) and Venezuela’s live action film *Papita, maní y tostón* (Luis Carlos Huek, 2012), today’s Nicaraguan mobile cinema partakes the tradition of cinematic joy established since the earliest days of filmmaking-as-craft¹⁶. Gone, however, is the perception of mobile

¹⁶ The documentary *Insurrección cultural* (1981) was screened along with “Inicio de la campaña de alfabetización” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980) and “Clausura de la cruzada nacional de alfabetización” (Ramiro Lacayo, 1980) during the August 18–20, 2023 new cine móvil series at three parks, all in Managua, the capital: Parque Marañoses, Parque 10 de Junio, and Parque Luis Alfonso Velásquez

cinema in Nicaragua as the distribution arm of a contemporaneously produced national cinema. Absent as well in its current Nicaraguan manifestation, is long-ago *Cine Móvil's* attention to Caribbean coastal peoples as key audiences and their homes as critical sites for cinematic engagement. Evaporated, lamentably, is the sense of urgency born in revolution for mediations that can breach the historical and infrastructural divides between the two coasts of Nicaragua.

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