The emergence of Golden Age in Mexican Cinema

Growing up in a little town did not allowed me to see all the movies that were been released, one because there was no permanent theater in my town, second, people was very ignorant about cinema and its meaning. I use to watch TV with my uncle on Saturdays. I remember him coming over to my house to see the lucha libre. My father who was often coming to the United Sates used to work on seasons, used to bring us (my family and I) movies to Mexico, but we did not even got to see them because he would sell them out to people he knew in the town. There was times where I got to see, Pedro Fernandez, movies such as *La nina de la mochila azul[[1]](#endnote-1)*. My mom allowed me to go to in house movie theaters or carpas, where once every so often, some people would rent a projector, and they would either paint a wall all white or simply tight a white sheet to the wall to be able to project the movies. I remember, on my childhood the Lucha libre movies were famous, especially those where the two most famous Mexican wrestlers, (Santo, el Enmascarado de Plata and Blue Demon). Then I watch Viruta[[2]](#endnote-2) and Capulina[[3]](#endnote-3) movies. Capulina was considered in Mexico the king of while humor.

Through my life I have watch so many movies, I consider myself a movie lover, but I always watched movies as a normal movie viewer, I was able to say, I liked it or I hated it. It was not till fall 2013, that Dr. Zielina introduce me to movie criticism. I has been great because it open up my mind to a better understanding in the world, from all the perspectives, social, political, economic, etc. I have been able to see, what was there and did not notice at some point. Besides my desire to watch a movie just for fun, I have been founding sense to the films I watch. For this reason I want to do and present an investigation on Mexican cinema from the beginning to the new cinema.

Cinema was introduced to Mexico in 1896 by Bon Bernard and Vayre, first to President Porfirio Diaz, his family and to all important government officials, before presenting it to the public. It was said that the dictator, “appeared pleased”, and that he jumped of joy in the presence of his new toy (Hershfield p. 5). With this apparatus, The Silent Era of Mexican cinema began. In 1896, Bon Bernard and Vayre showed the first scenes filmed in Mexico, including General Diaz and his family. The first Mexican movie with a real narrative was *Don Juan Tenorio* Salvador Toscano Barragan. Cinemas films were gaining so much popularity that carpas[[4]](#endnote-4) began to be open all over. Not long later, the competition and the shortages of titles selections were aggravated by the hostility of Church and other Catholic groups, who were licensed by the films of North America boxing matches, provoking scandals in the places where it was advertised. Exhibitors, in order to reclaim social approval, they tried everything that was in their hands. For instance ask for recommendations from priests before films arrival, they did an also small celebrations, or they would also donated a portions of what was made to the church. During the years 1903 and 1906 another tree movies were made. With the Cinematograph synchronized with a phonograph imported from Cuba, directors were able to give each scene its appropriated music. During the 1910 the attention concentrated on the preparation and of the spectacular commemoration of the Centennial of Mexico’s Independence. Doe to the great filming skills directors Toscano and Rosas had, they founded the base of the Mexican documentary, which showed itself as a pioneer and a model superior to the English one (Hershfield p. 8). During this time of Revolution became the emblematic instrument of an arm movement, which directly affected the cinema. The director of that time took sides in the Revolution, they would film each revolutionary character, leaders such as Madero, Obregon and Huerta. This chronicle documentaries were more successful than the North American adventure films and the grand Italian epics. In 1911, since the cinema industry was growing, the government of Mexico City appointed inspectors to regulate the chaotic performances at the cinemas that were overcrowded, no age restrictions and were unsanitary. The inspectors has the right to stop the film if they perceived it was violating the public’s decency. Therefore, the inspector concentrated on controlling more the films content than the people assisting to see the film. All this time, from 1910 to 1917 directors concentrated more on the Revolutions and its revolutionaries. From the 1917s to the 1920s film maker began to explore the society and began to incorporate themes of Mexico into their films as well as movie stars.

The Era of sound was born in Mexico. Antonio Moreno, actor and director, who was trained in Hollywood and acted in Hollywood’s failure to make films for Spanish speaking market. Moreno remakes the film *Santa* in 1931, been the film that gave birth to Mexican sound cinema[[5]](#endnote-5). La *Santa* was the most popular film, which also brought the theme of prostitution to Mexican cinema, until *Alla en el Rancho Grande* was released in 1936 overpassing *Santa* in popularity. The success of this last mentioned film opened doors for the industry to make thirty-eight feature films in 1937. Unfortunately many of the previous era industry did not, could not transition from silent to sound and did not make any more films. One of the most successful directors, who maintain his popularity and was able to transition with great success was Miguel Contreras Torres. He was also a screenwriter, producer and lead actor. Contreras Torres was the first Mexican director to film abroad including Mexico, Spain and Hollywood. He was also the first director in exposing the struggles of Mexican immigrants to the United States. Another of the greatest Mexican filmmakers during the 1930s was Fernando Fuentes who started to bring more themes to the Mexican cinema such as corruption, horror, extramarital affairs, and his favorite, the Revolution. It was not until the director Guillermo Calles that cinema was overturning to the natives. Most of his films were a representation of *indiginismo*. All of his films had Native representation. The first key to the main success of Mexican cinema was its nationalism, a lo mexicano, and an absolute identification with the rural societies of Latin America. The combination of both elements made the film one of the greatest box-office hits of all time (Hershfield p. 32). Two different Eras in the Mexican cinema, the silent and the sound, both important at their own time, and to a certain point it remain important, overall the sound period because it open up the doors for new experiments in the film, and for director to each time, perfect their work. Thanks to the sound along with the dialogue and novel themes, brought about the advent of the greatest era in the cinema of Mexico known as the Golden Age.

Even though TV had not yet come to Mexico, cinema was the style of the moment, everywhere they would bring it, in the most remote towns and villages, films were very enjoyable. It was the era where more films were made. Its success was as due to different factor at the time. One, it had good directors that had already made their mark during the last two eras, and were still producing great films. Another factor was that many Mexican filmmakers returned to their homeland after working in Hollywood, where they had learn important cinematic skills and improved existing ones. During the WWII Hollywood focus more in the war, using the cinema as a way to foster nationalism. As the Spanish speaking people was not interested in Hollywood’s war films, they would turn over to the Mexican films. Other themes and genres were also integrated such as, the ranchera, which combined a rural setting with popular music and songs, romance comedic archetypes, and a happy ending. We can also see the genre of rumbera or cabaretera, in this melodrama, familiar themes and issues resonated with audiences, it also reflected the society mores and mentalities of the 1940s and 1950s. These films also explored social conflicts of that time (Hershfield p.34). It was the era where greatest starts were made. Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete were always identified with the genre rancheras. There were many other actors and actresses as well as singers that made the ranchera into one of the most popular and enduring genres of Mexican Cinema. We had the film Ahí esta el detalle from director Bustillo Oro, movie that transformed its protagonist, Cantinflas, into the first great idol of the Mexican cinema. We have many other actors that were made during this era and became symbols of the Mexican cinema. The production of films between 1948 and 1952 reaches an average of 102 feature films per year. Some of the most important films of that time were; *Rio Escondido, La mujer del Puerto, Los Olvidados, by Luis Bonuel, La red, Soy Puro Mexicano*. This was an era were Machismo also played an importand role, thiswas because of the time. Most of the cinematographic industries were directed and control by men. And it was patriarchal period. Although Mexican films reproduced some features of the classical Hollywood paradigm, Mexico’s Golden Age cinema was distinctly Mexican, telling Mexican stores and narrativizing Mexican social problems (Hershfield 7).

In conclusion, doing this research help I realized that cinema is not just playing a movie. It is incredible how many all details that need to be taken under consideration prior to filming. There is a lot of things that, us humans, we tent to under see, such the purpose of the film. The elements that surround that particular film. Mexican cinema, exposed criticism to a dirty society, but only to a point, due to the corruption of that time. But it is incredible how many stars, overall, the Golden age brought to our films. While doing the research, I found names of actors and actresses as well of films that took me back to my childhood, when my oldest brother and friends used to imitated the ranchero movies, where the protagonist was Antonio Aguilar. It reminded me of those weakens when my dad use to laid down in the living room couch and played Cantinflas movies. At that time there was no comments in regards to the movies, we used to just watch them, but now I realized the concept of all of his movies. It was not just playing, or representing a *pelado,* he was advocating for the poor lower classes. Cantinflas was fighting a corruptive system that has been always, till this day, seen as something normal because nobody does nothing to fight it, and when you tried to go against it, you are the affected one. This research also made me want to search and watch every single movie from the beginning of Mexican cinema, to the end of it. It also made me wonder if there will ever be a good time in the Mexican film as there was in the past.

1. His was Pedro Fernandez first movie as a kid, next to the famous Mexican comedian, Resortes. The movie was filmed in 1979, but it was not released until January 05, 1980, (http://es.wikipedia.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Marco Antonio Campos was a Mexican comedian, actor, and singer best known as Viruta in the double act Viruta y Capulina with Gaspar Henaine. His best known role is as the straight man in the comic duo Viruta y Capulina along with Gaspar Henaine, ,( http://es.wikipedia.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Gaspar Henaine Pérez, more commonly known by his pseudonym Capulina, was a Mexican comedian, actor, singer, film producer, and screenwriter best known for partnering with Marco Antonio Campos as the double act Viruta and Capulina, (http://es.wikipedia.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. tents [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. De la Mora p. 47.

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