

The objective of the project is to verify a hypothesis according to which European entities funding production and/or distribution of art cinema from the selected Latin American countries impact its final form in such a way that this cinema would confirm common beliefs about the represented cultures and adapt to the currently fashionable art cinema aesthetics. The relationship between European sponsors and filmmakers from Latin America is extremely complex and problematic: local filmmakers obtain funds for the film (often unavailable in their home countries) and gain international audience, but at the same time the sponsors seek “authenticity” and cultural “essence”: characteristics considered to be appealing to international art cinema audiences. This may result in harmful orientalisering and neo-colonial practices manifested through requirements for the films made, and pressure put on the filmmakers. In the context of Latin America, it is frequently argued that transnational co-productions focus on presenting culture in merely symbolic way, just to emphasise ‘otherness’ desired by overseas producers and spectators.

The research will be based on carefully selected case studies. The project realisation will include development of a methodology, innovatively connecting post-colonial and transnational film studies with production studies. Production studies are based on investigating the backstage functioning of media industry and realities of the production process. They focus on work environment studies of this industry, its internal relationships, practices and values. They shift the point of gravity from the so far dominating research on the film text to themes extending and completing this perspective. I will conduct in-depth analyses of selected cases by applying two research methods essential for production studies: contacts with filmmakers and other persons involved in the production process (including representatives of European institutions allocating funds), and analysis of texts and production documents. Contacts with filmmakers will have the form of questionnaire interviews and extensive and in-depth free interviews and they will be recorded and written down. Analysis of documents will focus on materials related to the process of development, production, distribution, promotion and reception of the film. Among the methods derived from film studies the most important are: textual and contextual analysis, comparative analysis, analysis of film paratexts, critical analysis of the literature on the subject, examination of film reception process. In this phase methodology of post-colonial studies will be used, focused on seeking dependency relationships between the examined subjects, manifestations of sense of superiority, and demonstrations of resistance and agency by the dependant entity. Several methodological guidelines directly related to the investigation of cinematography of the peripheries shall be kept in mind, among them the approach which rejects divisions of the world into the ‘centre’ and ‘peripheries’, ‘us and them’, ‘the West and the rest’. Rejection of such dichotomies enables to open into local traditions and avoid dangers of Eurocentric thinking.

Examined problem is immensely important for the film studies, transnational and post-colonial studies as well as for cultural anthropology. In fact, it challenges the core basis of building the academic canon of art cinema and methodology of analysing films from the so called ‘Third world’, draws attention to the so far ignored conditions and unmasks the still functioning dependency, sometimes of the neo-colonial nature. Researchers agree that a series of detail case studies must be conducted, covering the period from inception to reception of the film, enabling to explore the problem and at the same time avoiding unpermitted generalisation of conclusions and their harmful extrapolation to other regions (as the issue of dependence on European funds applies also among others to productions from Asia and Africa). Nevertheless, such comprehensive research has not been conducted so far. The Latin American cinema researchers have not developed a methodology and basic assumptions, often limiting themselves to reaching out for interviews with filmmakers or single conversations. Therefore, I am of the opinion that methods functioning within the production studies field, whose basic assumption is examination of a film, not as an autonomous work or text of culture, but as a product generated in a certain reality. Representatives of production studies state that a film is not a work of a single maker, but a result of complicated social and economic relationships. Production studies draw on social studies and humanities, but first of all, they focus on reality in which people involved in media production function. Their representatives emphasise that humanities must take into consideration complicated work relationships and the whole film industry.