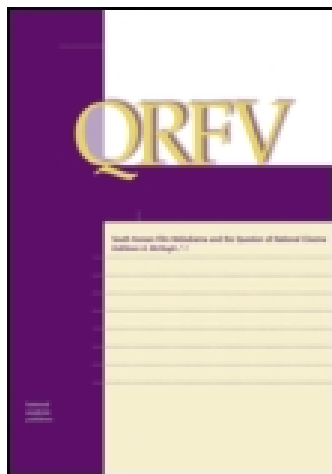


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National Cinema after Globalization: Fernando E. Solanas' *Sur* and the Exiled Nation

Kathleen Newman

In Latin American countries, *cine nacional* has long competed with films imported from Europe, the United States and other Latin American nations for the attention of the citizenry. For this reason, it has been possible to consider cinema history for the region as a cumulative history of national cinemas. Even the region-wide New Latin American Cinema, despite its common political commitments and aesthetic practices, could be viewed as no exception to national categorization: in the 1960s and 1970s cinema production and distribution was still largely determined by the specific configurations of national film industries in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico, on the one hand, and by the relative lack of sustained industrial infrastructures in Andean and Central American countries, on the other. Yet, while politically-committed filmmaking in this period did mark commercial cinema as a contested cultural practice, it is clear that, by the end of the 1980s, the binary opposition between political and commercial cinema within the nation-state had been altered irrevocably. The current diversity of film and video practices in the region is a response to adverse political and economic conditions and, necessarily, a distinct politics of cinema. Such "diversity out of adversity" is evidence of the profound impact of capitalism's ongoing globalization on the nation itself and, consequently, national cinema.

In the case of the nation in Latin America, after a first five hundred years in which the political-economic competition between nation-states was a mechanism of integration of geographical regions into a world-economic system, capitalism has entered a second phase in which transnational practices overcome the pretenses of national sovereignty.¹ Though nation-states still mobilize and deploy the means of violence within and without their borders, and though the State still functions as the guarantor of class relations, the scale of systemic integration is such that almost any struggle is always already local, national, regional, and global. Thus struggles for self-determination and social justice, which numerous Latin American filmmakers have taken to heart, are measured against a different scale of events.

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In the case of national cinema, over the last thirty years there has been a dislocation of filmmaker and nation. Specifically, exile, in the case of nations under dictatorship, and (seemingly national) economic crises in the case of nations with elected governments, caused many Latin American intellectuals to lead transnational lives. Hindsight shows this to be part of a massive reorganization of the intellectual sector, including filmmakers, within and across nation-states in Latin America, as part of a reorganization of the world-economy. Concomitantly, film production and exhibition in the region, always an expensive, collaborative project, by necessity had to improve on the international financial and distribution arrangements of previous periods. Thus, a nation, whether a filmmaker's own or not, came to be no longer necessarily the base from which films are made and distributed, and a national audience no longer necessarily the primary *destinatario*. In fact, many of the recent feature films considered to be Latin American films, by reason of the nationality of the filmmakers, are co-productions with European companies or institutions and first address an international audience. These co-productions have been sought by Latin American filmmakers in response to a sharp decrease in national film financing due to debt crisis and by European producers with an eye to an expansion of markets.

To explore the question of the current status of cinema and nation, I would like to discuss a co-production which is in many ways a treatise on the nation and national cinemas: Fernando E. Solanas' feature film, *Sur* (1987), an Argentine-French co-production, which is most often discussed by critics as part of the cinema of redemocratization in Argentina, that is, as part of the renovation of a national cinema. Indeed, John King has observed that "The trajectory of Solanas from 1968 to 1988, from *La hora de los hornos* to *Sur*, charts in microcosm the development of politically-committed film-making in Argentina."² I will argue that while *Sur* itself does attempt to chart a new course for both peronism and third cinema, it reveals in this attempt the extent to which globalization has already erased the nation as a viable political ensemble.

In discussing Solanas' work and its relation to Argentina as a nation, it is important to recall a point about the impact on Argentine society of the most recent period of military rule (1976–1983), during which some nine thousand citizens were "disappeared" by the juntas and paramilitary forces. As Donald C. Hodges has observed in the preface to his recent book on Argentina's dirty war: "... Argentina has experienced domestically the hostilities that citizens of other states experience mainly in the area of foreign relations."³ The military coup of 1976 was a redeployment of a pre-existing authoritarianism in Argentine society, but it was different from all of the previous coups since 1930, even the coup of 1966 which Guillermo O'Donnell has argued marked the "implantation" of a bureaucratic-authoritarian state,⁴ in that this coup "deterritorialized" the nation: the abstract guarantee of protection of life for citizens within their own national boundaries was revoked and citizenship was redefined. In fact, the coup and the dirty war signalled a redefinition of the State. As an abstract institutional ensemble constituting all citizens as subjects of a nation, the State is the essential binding of citizen to citizen in solidarity which is expressed through governance itself, that which we recognize in daily life in its more concrete manifestations as government institutions and political regimes. Yet, as the theoretical work of Nicos Poulantzas and

Michel Foucault⁵ of the same period of Argentine military rule has shown, this abstract, essentially democratic relation among citizens is, under the modern capitalist State, concretized in violence. Argentina's military coup actualized the potential for violence at the heart of all States within the capitalist world-economy, very simply because nations serve to sustain, within this ever expanding economic system, social divisions of labor that are not equitable. The historical development of Argentina's political-economy in linkage with a world-economy produced, at this conjuncture, such antagonistic political projects for the nation, from socialism to peronism to fascism—and much in between—that “violence at the heart of the State” was mobilized. The return to civilian rule in Argentina in the early eighties did not diminish the systemic capacity for State terror, but rather deferred its deployment. The nation as a political ensemble, then, is at once the lived experience of citizenship, country, and government, and, as well, a dynamic, systemic set of relations that, potentially, can eradicate all three. I will argue that Solanas' cinematic work in the 1980s, beyond his own political theories and the national political project he advocates, registers a change in the very set of relations that is a nation.

NATIONALIST ALLEGORY AND THE RETURN FROM EXILE: 1985

Much of what *Sur* is in terms of style and politics was announced in Solanas' *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* (1985), his previous Argentine-French co-production. A film of great emotional impact, perhaps the best known film of Latin American exile, *Tangos* explored the anguish of a group of Argentine exiles in Paris involved in the invention of a *tanguedia*, a theatrical piece about their specific exile, based on tangos, which is at once tragedy and comedy. The film itself is explicitly a *tanguedia*, a new dramatic genre announced in the film and then parodied by the film to serve Solanas' political goals. Filmically, Solanas pays homage to European political films and the U.S. dance-musical, and creates for himself as *auteur* signature patterns of framing and camera movement to express, respectively, memory as praxis and the circularity of violence. He also introduces into this film language a diegetics of theatrical space derived from Latin American political theatre, which will enable a peronist, nationalist allegory within the film which is not expressed at other levels of the text.

Though much of the film takes place inside a cavernous rehearsal hall, with the curved balustrades and support columns of the mezzanine defining, through the usage of the tiers and shadows in the shot composition, the socio-political order the diegetic *tanguedia* seeks to examine, the chapters of the films are successively structured to have the narrative culminate in a quite different space, that of the small tableau from a political *acto*. The opening section of the final chapter, “Volver,” which takes its title from the classic song expressing the desire to return to one's homeland, is staged beneath the high central vault of a trade center and is presented as a dream sequence of Gerardo, the exiled intellectual who now works as a guard. In the sequence, Gerardo converses with General San Martín, a leader of the war for independence from Spain, and Carlos Gardel, the renowned tango singer, both of whom died in lands distant from Argentina. The immensity of the

space, lighted for night, is used in the first part of this sequence to locate the three characters in a utopian space both beyond everyday politics and the nation-state, to measure their small contribution to the greater cause of the nation. In the second part of the sequence, at the end of cross-cut medium shots constructing an easy intimacy between the three men as they converse about *la patria*, the camera dollies back from the three characters to suggest a tableau. San Martín and Gardel are seated in the semi-darkness to the left and right, respectively, of Gerardo, who, in white bedclothes on white sheets, centrally framed and lighted, is made the focus of the words of the tango "Volver." The characters have been listening to the tango on a record player, but the increase in volume during the dollyback breaks with the diegesis. The scene becomes recognizably a set common to political theatre of the generation of the 1960s. The combination of all these elements serve to have the lyrics of the tango directly apply to the character of the intellectual, and therefore become an explicit evaluation of the political activism of Solanas' generation. The tableau insistently prefigures not merely the return of the exiles to Argentina, but the renovation of peronism, as we will see below.

Readers familiar with the film will recall that the character of Gerardo has played a relatively minor role until this point. The film is principally concerned with a female dancer, the lead in the *tanguedia*, who suffers great depression because of exile and memories of her husband, a professional who was "disappeared" by security forces during the dirty war, and her lover, another exile, who is the composer for the *tanguedia*. The chapters of the film are also structured by musical street performances of "the children of exile," who after a number of years find themselves emotionally between countries, and, in some ways, more French than Argentine (see Figure 1). The memories of the various exiles of their friends, family, and homeland, the daily confrontations between the tragic and the absurd (mannequins in the dance hall representing the disappeared and the tortured; stylized exploding or deflating bodies literalizing the emotions of the troupe), and the dances of the diegetic *tanguedia*, energetically delineating the expressive patterns of the tango itself, all in all, do *not* require, at the level of plot, an ending which focuses on the traditional intellectual (such as journalists or *universitarios*) for whom print is the principal medium of expression, rather than the artists in the film. Yet, no other character could serve the political purpose of Solanas' tableau. In this tableau, the political genealogy is peronist, extending from the military founding father, San Martín, to the singer Gardel (here recuperated not merely as an icon of mass culture but a figure of political populism) to the left intellectual who had seen his country lost to authoritarianism.⁶ Here, as is common in peronist art, a military *prócer* is read as the prefigurement of Perón, Gardel as an expression of the desires of the laboring classes whose union activities have sustained peronism some forty years (to the date of the film's release) through both civilian and military regimes (some peronist, some not), and, the intellectual-who-writes as a synecdoche of the militant political theorist. The militant intellectual was a crucial figure in the leftist political parties of the 1970s, one often involved in party leadership. Yet most parties, including left peronist parties, did not foresee the coming State terror, or the ways in which their own actions would expose their membership and the populace at large to the violence of the dirty war. The political theory under which the *militantes* of Solanas' generation operated was not ade-



Figure 1. *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel* (1985) Fernando Solanas, dir. Courtesy of the Cinemateca de Cuba.

quote: it underestimated the reaction of the rightist military and civilian leadership and did not understand the nature of the State, particularly when and how violence is mobilized against the citizenry (though, it should be stressed, this latter lack of attention to State theory was a common problem among the left in many countries in the 1960s and 1970s).

When the ghost of San Martín enters this scene, emerging from the swirling night fog to the sounds of distant cannon fire, the spatial relations serve to emphasize the enormity of the historical undertaking that is the founding of a nation. In the second half of the scene during the conversation with Gerardo and Gardel, the reduction of the space to a patriarchal trio allows for the conflation of the entirety of Argentine political history under the banner of peronism with its particularly odd combination of populism, militarism, and vanguardism. In English-language cinema studies, it is not widely recognized that the Third

Cinema described by Solanas and Octavio Getino in the 1960s would become by the 1970s an explicitly peronist cinema, albeit one very critical of the rightist elements within historical peronism. Solanas' political theory of the period, which advocated elements of marxist theories of class struggle at the same time as it espoused a contradictory vision of labor struggles enabled by peronist government leadership, was anti-imperialist and nationalist, the latter of which included an epic vision of peronist creation of the nation based on social justice. The evaluation of the exiled militants' political theory in this scene is ultimately a reaffirmation of this epic nationalism rather than its critique. After noting the fear involved in confronting one's past life, the lyrics of "Volver" employed in this scene to cover the tableau end with the following lines: "y aunque el olvido que todo destruye haya matado mi vieja ilusión, guardo escondida una esperanza humilde que es la fortuna de mi corazón/Volver [. . .]." To say in this context "although my old illusions have been destroyed by their passage into time [here suggested to be oblivion or erasure]" is not to critique the basis of those illusions. The humble hope in this context is only humble in the sense that it is meant to associate the three figures of the tableau with popular sectors (*gente humilde*) and to suggest that the return of those political militants who had to go into exile will signal the renewal of the nation itself. While Argentine redemocratization did propose a renewal of national political institutions, the process included many more sectors of the citizenry than Solanas included in *Tangos*.

A cinema of redemocratization did emerge in the five years that followed Argentina's return to civilian rule. With significant support from the Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía, these films of the redemocratization period examined the causes and consequences of the dictatorship and the dirty war. Though a noticeable trend in feature films, this cinema did not overshadow, in terms of national cinema production, the many comedies and action films released at the same time and, as in the past, films imported from the United States and Europe tended to dominate the market. However, the cinema of redemocratization did earn for Argentina a different status in the international market and at international festivals, which had a concomitant impact on its reception by national audiences. The award of the Oscar for Best Film to *La historia oficial* (Puenzo, 1985) increased the international interest in Argentine film, as the release in the same year of *Tangos* and *El hombre mirando al sudeste* (Subiela) renewed international attention to the torture and murder committed under the dictatorship. The promotional materials for the retrospective of Argentine cinema at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1990, though misleading, are not atypical of writings on Argentine film after redemocratization:

. . . Argentina lays claim to one of the oldest and most influential film industries in the world, one that has been subject to the vicissitudes and upheavals of that country's political and social history. In the 1950s and 60s, the *nuevo cine* and *cine liberación* were in the vanguard of third-world cinema movements. Under the military dictatorship that lasted from 1976 to 1983, artistic expression and scores of filmmakers went underground or into exile. With the return of democracy in 1983, the floodgates opened and what followed was a veritable renaissance of film production. . . . Including more than thirty films, CINE ARGENTINO, celebrates one of the most vital and engaging national cinemas in the world.⁷

This summation suggests that the years of dictatorship, in terms of both film and social history, were a period of decreased cultural activity, a lull between two periods of intense activity. In fact, the dictatorship was a moment of rupture, a sundering of social contracts, a period of State terror and bureaucratic-authoritarianism in which some fifty years of social organization came to an end. Likewise, the films of redemocratization were not in any way the resumption of the aesthetics and politics of *nuevo cine* or the peronist cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s but rather a response exactly to the violent sundering. It was impossible in the 1980s to return to a politics that had not foreseen the retaliatory vengeance of the dirty war against not only political militants but against the populace as a whole. Furthermore, it suggests that Argentine film might regain a former aesthetic and/or political preeminence internationally because the conditions which undermined such preeminence have been overcome. Though there was resistance to the dictatorship within the nation, the return to democracy was made possible by the self-destruction of the military leadership by means of disastrous long and short-term economic policies and the instigation of the Malvinas-Falklands War. Briefly, the return to civilian rule, under Radical Party leadership, did not undo the imbalance of power between the military and civil leadership and did not forestall the impact of the foreign debt incurred by the military rulers on the quality of life. Ultimately, though members of the junta were tried for their crimes, civilian government did not redress fully the murder of Argentine citizens by other Argentine citizens in the dirty war, that is, did not take all the steps necessary to prevent a recurrence of State terrorism. What sense of a revitalized national cultural production existed in the first years of civilian rule had evaporated by 1989 when Juan Carlos Menem assumed the presidency six months earlier than scheduled in a moment of severe political-economic crisis. The obviously deepening divisions within the electorally victorious Peronist party between Menem's centrist and rightist supporters, on the one hand, and *la renovación peronista*, a wing seeking to recapture the dynamism of the left-peronist commitment to social change of the 1970s, on the other, augured the two years of ever increasing severity of economic problems leading to the dollarization of the Argentine economy in April 1991. If anything, Argentine national cinema from 1983 to the end of the decade did not register the emergence of a new cinema movement nationally or internationally, as suggested above, but rather the ever increasing difficulty of film production and a shattering of previous political alliances within peronism.

In this context, *Sur* was Solanas' explicit intervention in Argentine national politics. Solanas' return to Argentina from exile in France coincided with the first phase of peronist redefinition after the return to civilian rule. Whereas *Tangos* chronicled the various fates of Argentine exiles in Europe and their sense of the ways in which they had both lost and preserved the true Argentine nation, *Sur* invented a nation that met the expectations of those exiles, a nation to which their return would be crucial. The story of the return home of a political prisoner released from prison in the south of Argentina on the eve of return to civilian rule, *Sur* conflates the return from exile with redemocratization itself, thus omitting what was widely discussed at the time, the history of the two distinct yet inseparable Argentinas, one belonging to those who stayed during dictatorship

and one to those who had to leave. Historically, in both Argentinas, individuals and groups continued the struggle for human rights and social justice. Solanas, however, chooses a version of redemocratization that overlooks the political resistance inside Argentina in the period of the dictatorship to see redemocratization as the revitalization of peronism.

It could be argued that this version is not disingenuous. Argentine sociologist María del Carmen Feijoó considers the film, released in 1987, to mark a shift in peronist cultural politics. For Feijoó, *Sur* correctly concentrates on the specific experiences and private life of political activists as opposed to a more exemplary, but more deadly, sacrificial heroism of the films of the second period of peronism (1973–1976). From the perspective of cultural history, Francine Masiello argues, on the other hand, that *Sur* expressed a peronist nostalgia, seeking a story of political origin in labor struggles prior to Perón's first presidency (1945–1955) that would exonerate left-peronism of the political mistakes that fed the violence of the dirty war and the rise of fascism in Argentina.⁸

Solanas' cultural imprimatur is of the magnitude that, though he is not a direct representative of the Peronist Party, he is a considerable political force in national politics. In his fourth incarnation as a filmmaker at the time of *Sur*—the first three incarnations involving (1) clandestine filmmaking under the first phase of bureaucratic-authoritarianism (*La hora de los hornos*, 1968), (2) a bleakly celebratory nationalism during peronist government (*Los hijos de fierro*, 1975), and (3) filmmaking concretizing the time spent in France (*La mirada de otros*, 1980, and *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel*, 1985)—Solanas had the political stature during redemocratization to redefine political debates. Solanas supported Menem in the latter's election campaign but as Menem's presidency evolved, Solanas denounced corruption in Menem's administration (which, in one case, Solanas felt had undermined the project to purchase the Galería del Pacífico for a cultural center) as did a number of other leading figures.⁹ On May 22, 1991, gunmen shot Solanas as he left the sound studio where he had been working on the film *El viaje*. Though Solanas recovered from the leg wounds he received, the attack was considered as a signal of the willingness of the paramilitary to resume, at any time, the violence that had forced Solanas and so many others into exile previously. Significantly, in an interview subsequent to the attack, Solanas said that the protagonist of all his films was Argentina itself¹⁰ and it is this question of the nation as protagonist to which I will turn.

REDEMOCRATIZATION AS FRATERNAL ROMANCE: 1987

Recent work on the relation between fiction and the nation stresses that the construction of a national culture is part and parcel of the always ongoing configuration of nationality and State formation.¹¹ In these simultaneous processes, citizens are constituted by their relation to the State, the abstract ensemble in which all members are defined as equal, but socially positioned by the concrete manifestations of nation and government which, usually, ensure the continued functioning of unequal political and economic relations, particularly in the case of capitalist States.¹² Citizens are inscribed within the nation in an ensemble, "the

people,” whose collective action is neither predictable or easily described. Homi Bhabha has termed this a rhetorical strategy:

The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested cultural territory where the people must be thought in a double-time; the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principal of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process.¹³

In a country such as Argentina, the contested “cultural territory” for some sixty years has been the public sphere itself, given the alternation of civilian and military rule since the first coup of 1930. This means that what must be constantly redeemed is democratic government and legitimate representation, and that the political struggles of “the people” for egalitarian relations among citizens is principally a contest over the definition of the nation itself.

This struggle is allegorized in the film *Sur* as Project Sur, a worker’s project (which Solanas invents for the film) conceived in the generation before peronism: it is a southern hemisphere project seeking the legitimate representation of “the people” in opposition to the northern hemisphere version of government, i.e., the Argentine military and upper class aligned with U.S. imperialism. In a humorous interrogation scene in a “national” library¹⁴—part the *escrutinio* of Don Quijote’s library, part Borges’s “Biblioteca de Babel”—an elderly militant responds to his military questioners that, if they do not understand Project Sur, it is because they are aligned with the North. Like the tableau of *Tangos*, the interrogation of the elderly *dirigentes* allows Solanas to reposition the politics of this film in order to once again conflate all of Argentine political history with the renovation of peronism. On the surface, the film seems to concern issues of redemocratization. The plot treats the return of a working-class political prisoner, Floreal, released on the eve of democratic rule, to his wife, Rosi. He is accompanied on his night’s journey by El Negro, the ghost of a friend who was a *dirigente*. Floreal must come to terms not only with the tragedies of the dirty war, but with the memories of his wife’s affair with his best friend, Roberto, while he was in jail. Yet, in a typically epic gesture by Solanas, this love triangle becomes the new base on which the Project Sur will stand . . . as soon as it can be reduced to a binary, patriarchal relation. *Sur*, for all Solanas’ broad gestures, subtly addresses an issue that *Tangos* did not: the relation between the gender system and the State.

The promotional materials for *Sur* presented the film as an offering from Solanas to the Argentine people, a gift of the returning exile. The record cover, for example, states that this is “a film to carry in one’s heart,” and the video presents a message from Solanas indicating the political significance of the love story he has constructed:

I want to tell you that *Sur* is a love story. It is the love of a couple and the story of love for a country.

It is the story of a return.

Sur reminds us of those Argentines who I have called in the film the ones of "the table of dreams."

They, beyond their political convictions, gave us, as our heritage, their work and their commitment.

Sur speaks to us of reunions and friendship. It is the triumph of life over death, love over resentment, freedom over oppression, desire over fear.

I also want to tell you that *Sur* is an homage to all of those, who like my character The Stutterer, knew how to say "no." They were the ones who maintained dignity. They said "no" to injustice, to oppression, to the surrender of the country.

Dear friends, here is *Sur*. It was made from the heart and now it belongs to you.¹⁵

The affirmation of life and love after all of the deaths and separation occasioned by the dirty war could be considered a first step toward the renewal of a democratic culture, but Solanas intertwines his stated principal love story, between a couple who were young adults in the days of political militancy prior to the military coup, with two other narratives: the sacrificial death of the generation of the grandparents of his principal couple and of the more politically active members of this couple's generation. The "table of dreams," around which sit the militants of the generation of Rasatti, Emilio, and Project *Sur*, is said by Solanas to bequeath to the current generations an inheritance combining their work, that is, their struggles, and the example of their political commitment.¹⁶ In film, however, Emilio also bequeaths the example of his death, which the male protagonist Floreal, sitting alone at "the table of dreams," appreciates, saying that Emilio really knew how to die. The meanings created by the scene of the death of Emilio and his wife, which is presented as poignant though representing paramilitary violence, are further complicated by the implicit comparison with the other death Floreal has witnessed, that of El Negro.

Near the beginning of the film, with El Negro as his Virgil in this night of memories of the hell of the dirty war, Floreal watches El Negro reenact his own death: the security forces in the standard Ford Falcon pull this political leader from his home and shoot him down in the street. As Floreal watches horrified at the loss of his friend, El Negro jumps back up and comments on his own foolishness. The scene comes very close to comparing our memories of the dirty war to the comedy of a film run backwards. When Emilio and his wife hear the thugs arrive outside their home at night, Emilio makes a barricade across the central hallway of their home with a large side chest and prepares to shoot the intruders with a pistol when they break through the front door. Ignoring Emilio's entreaties to hide, his wife fetches two glasses of wine with which to toast their life together. They die bravely together under a volley of shotgun blasts, the carnage of which the audience does not have to witness because the bodies are behind the chest. The pet bird flies up into the air at the shots and curses the assassins.

The purpose of this heroic, Hollywood death is exactly to create a "triumph of life over death" and to find "dignity of those who resisted" in the lottery of massacre and terror that was the dirty war, yet Solanas is very close to insulting those who died in the dirty war: his insistence that there is such a thing as a dignified death or an honorable death suggests that, at some deeper level, he believes a dignity must be invented for and assigned to these deaths. Solanas has constructed this film in such a way that Emilio's death is suggested to have been a

sacrifice worthy of his life of activism and, therefore, El Negro's death is judged in the film as not as worthy. Here Solanas is very close to blaming the victims of the dirty war for their victimization, and, specifically, blaming the left political actors of his own generation who fell victim to State terror. This is quite different from a critique of the political theories operant in the period. As a consequence of the film's comparison of the two characters, those who were not part of Argentine society during the dictatorship, such as Floreal in prison, or those who were able to reach exile, are exonerated from the responsibility for the political failures of the period.

The two love stories which here receive approval also are made the model of the greater heroic gesture, in terms of narrative as a communicative act, of the love of storyteller for audience, filmmaker for nation. For example, the space in which Emilio and his wife die, the long corridor, prefigures the space of the reunion of Floreal and Rosi at the very end of the film, another long interior corridor. In this final sequence, as Rosi looks at Floreal through the panes of a window, the camera reveals Floreal's reflection covering her face so that the two images merge. Solanas, in the book of interviews on the film published in 1989 (and advertised as a "biography" of *Sur*), stated that he wishes to continue in *Sur* the formal experimentation he had begun in *Tangos*:

In *Sur* I wanted to continue reframing images, treating the image through the other elements that break down the frame. My purpose in *Sur* was that of "glimpsing" memory, and almost all of the shots are filmed through doors, windows, or various modifications of the classic rectangular frame. Windows and doors were almost always the language chosen to represent the past. Still shots seen through something. For the present, in contrast, the scenes with Floreal were moving shots, great long shots filmed in a lengthy single take, almost always tracking shots. In the scenes of Rosi waiting in the house, I wanted the multiplication of her image in mirrors or reflections in the window panes, in a stationary shot.¹⁷

Whereas camera movement was foregrounded in *Tangos*, framing and shot composition are made to bear "the burden of history" in *Sur*. The reunion of Rosi and Floreal, the gender politics of which will be explored shortly, is the intersection of past and present where, ironically, it is the prisoner who has been living in memories of the past who represents the present and the woman who has been active in the present who represents the past. Rather than the multiplication of images which had suggested the complexity of Rosi's dilemmas as a person living under dictatorship or in a love triangle, the two faces that blur together in the pane of glass reduce the possibilities of interpretation of this scene, in a sense, limiting the present because it limits the future. Solanas' plan to spy on memory, to glimpse the past, while an effective technique to suggest the elusive nature of memory, becomes in the film's final sequence a rejection of the past, an erasure of the events that led to the reunion. What one glimpses is a triumphant return in the present, in contradiction to all the past adversity and all past mistakes.

This reunion is part of the fourth and final section of the film, "Morir cansa": Dying is wearisome. Significantly, Solanas described this section in the above mentioned book of interviews in terms of what the protagonist, Floreal, came to understand about the differences between the politics of Floreal's dead guide and "the people":

Dying is wearisome. . . It is the protagonist's confrontation with social reality, unemployment, and the decay of an economically perverse society. It is the protagonist's understanding of the real meaning of his parents' struggle. It is El Negro's self-criticism of the triumphalism and sectarianism of the [political] leadership and his understanding of the silent leadership of the people. "One learns in defeat. . . dying is wearisome. . . how many things have died in these years and I with them". . . "I, who gave my life as a leader, because of my triumphalism, ended up not understanding the silence of the people". . . "The people were not conquered: they survived by defending what little they had."

In all, it is the final confrontation of Floreal with the true country which will make him understand the importance of concentrating his anger and his energy in order to change reality, to defend and realize his dreams.¹⁸

The quotations at the end of the first paragraph are fragments of the dialogue of El Negro. He confesses that he never understood "the people" who were not vanquished but rather survived defending the little they had. The triumphalist position of the peronist leadership caused these leaders not to recognize the direction "the people" were taking, and not to "hear" what they should have heard. While the peronist leadership did make numerous mistakes, to have this one leader, murdered in the streets, stand for all that happened in the days of political militancy prior to the dirty war, the deaths of militants from various non-peronist left and centrist parties and of citizens who had no political involvement, is a dismissal of the human dignity Solanas stated he wished to affirm. Ultimately, Floreal's understanding of the struggles of his parents is Solanas' dismissal of the members of his own generation who could not return, because they, unlike Solanas, never left the political present of the dictatorship, rather they died because of it or lived through it. In the latter case, these people changed in ways Solanas does not choose to recognize; were he to do so, it would undermine his political agenda for the nation.

The resolution of the love triangle between Rosi, Floreal and Roberto has bearing both on the question of the responsibility for the conduct of politics in the present and past and on the question of legitimate representation in the future. Rosi and Roberto end their affair in the film and Roberto (a French immigrant who is lame in one leg, or *renco*, in the best Arltian literary tradition) chooses to return to France. El Negro tells Floreal just before Floreal's reunion with Rosi that Rosi had never left him: she had chosen him again. Yet before this reunion is presented, there is an enactment of Roberto, seated at his own café table in the utopian space of Floreal's night journey through the streets past the "table of dreams," facing the camera, speaking to Floreal. Roberto tells Floreal that though Floreal was a prisoner, he was always able to maintain his freedom in ways Roberto could not. Though this would appear to be another rejection of the activism of Solanas' generation, the narrative resolution of this triangle is not the subsequent visualized reunion of the married couple. If Rosi never left Floreal but awaited his return, the connection between them was never broken. The principal return is Floreal's to Roberto, the fraternal embrace not represented on screen because it need not be. The utopian night space through which Floreal has travelled is masculinist: his relationship with his wife and his brief affair with a woman while in hiding prior to his arrest are secondary to Roberto's motorcycle rescue of Floreal early in the film, a trope often repeated in the film outside the frames of the past, dissolving freely in the narrative to the roar

of the cycle's engine on the soundtrack. Whereas Rosi has embodied Argentina, to the extent to which the narrative has been an allegory of return, and Roberto, France, when in the final sequence Rosi's face is covered by Floreal's, there is a transference of nationality from female to male. Roberto and Floreal return to their respective homelands and all is renewed. It is implied that Floreal will be the next *dirigente* to hear the "people" and, thus, patriarchal Argentina is recovered. The freedom from constraint which Roberto appreciates in Floreal is reaffirmed as a masculinist freedom of political action, a freedom only possible outside of history.

I am not arguing that Solanas' inability to admit into *Sur* and *Tangos* aspects of Argentine political history that would contest a peronist teleology demonstrates that there is no possible reconciliation between political actors in contemporary Argentina. Neither is *Sur*'s masculinist political imaginary merely an example of Solanas' individual rejection of the public sphere, as currently constituted, in favor of a better patriarchal past. Instead, these two films—*Sur* in particular—are part of the rhetorical strategy of a nation of which Bhabha wrote. They are, if you will, part of the discursive formation of citizenship constitutive of the nation. They indicate that the Argentina in which Solanas now works is no longer a nation in the same sense that it had been for most of this century. In fact, Solanas' political intervention, his "story of love for a nation," which on the surface seems inclusive of all Argentines and the breadth of Argentine political history, is only cohesive as a narrative in the diegetic utopian space of his characters outside the story of a return to the nation. The film registers in its formal elements the dissolution of the nation, the ongoing exclusions of sectors of the citizenry, and the further sundering of the abstract ties that bind citizens as members of the same nation. Solanas' allegory of return from exile, which as a political project is an attempt to heal the wounds to the nation when "the violence at the heart of the State" was mobilized in the 1970s, is in fact evidence of the fictionality of the nation as a political unit. The pane of glass that divides Rosi and Floreal at the end of the film, but permits at once the fusion of their faces and the superimposition of Floreal's image over Rosi's, eradicates *both* the utopian space of Floreal's journey home and the realist space of the nation's political future. Space is reduced to reflection and reflection to the impossibility of intimacy and reunion. Rosi's final non-synchronous laughter on the soundtrack is a laughter which evokes both past and future but registers instead the impossibility of the political present: the gendered transference of the embodiment of the nation promises, at the level of allegory, a future for the nation. Yet, given that the language and politics of the film are those of exclusion and distancing, *Sur* exemplifies national cinema after globalization. The nation, necessary to the previous period of capitalism, exists in the nostalgia of nationalist political projects: *Sur* may express Solanas' desire that nation should triumph over the restructuring of all political relations at this conjuncture, but it suggests that the one exile that will not return to Latin America in the 1990s is the nation itself.

NOTES

1. What I have presented as an initial phase of capitalism, Roland Roberston considers to be constituted by five phases. See his "Mapping the Global Condition" in *Global Culture: Nationalism*,

- Globalization and Modernity*, edited by Mike Featherstone, London, SAGE Publications, 1990, pp. 15–30. See also Christopher Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation: Structures of the World-Economy*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989.
2. *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America*, London and New York, Verso, 1990, p. 95.
 3. *Argentina's "Dirty War": An Intellectual Biography*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1991, p. ix.
 4. See among O'Donnell's other works, 1966–1973, *El estado burocrático-autoritario: Triunfos, derrotas y crisis*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Belgrano, 1982.
 5. For their principal arguments, see respectively, *State, Power, Socialism*, London, Verso, 1980, Trans. Patrick Camiller, and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, Trans. Robert Hurley.
 6. For a history of peronism and the Argentine State, see William C. Smith. *Authoritarianism and the Crisis of the Argentine Political Economy*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989.
 7. The retrospective, CINE ARGENTINO, was curated by Julie Levinson and Juan Mandelbaum. The poster and program notes were by Pat Aufderheide and Andrés Di Tella.
 8. Papers read at the Latin American Studies Association National Meeting, Washington, D.C. April 1991.
 9. For a brief overview of the charges against Menem, see Alma Guillermoprieto, "Letter from Buenos Aires," *The New Yorker*, July 15, 1991, pp. 64–78.
 10. *La nación*, May 26, 1991.
 11. See, for example, Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.
 12. See, for an elaboration of the nature of the capitalist State, Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990 or David Held, *Political Theory and the Modern State*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1989.
 13. Homi Bhabha, "DisseminNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation" in *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 297.
 14. In Gabriel García Márquez's *Clandestino en Chile*, exiled Chilean filmmaker Miguel Littín tells the anecdote of the great impression it made upon him when, upon returning in secret to his country, he discovered that his mother had preserved his study, his desk, his books. Like the concern of the character Gerardo in *Tangos* for his library left in Argentina, the rescue of Littín's study is emblematic of the loss of political and intellectual history that was one of the results of State terror in these Southern Cone nations. It is not gratuitous that Solanas should place the principal confrontation in *Sur* between the forces of oppression and the exemplary militants in a library. The sheaves of papers that circle through the air in this scene, matching the flyers which drift on the wind in the scenes of the street demonstrations of redemocratization in the film, are emblematic of the circulation of knowledge essential to the functioning of a democracy as well as to the bureaucracy of print that permits the functioning of the modern State, that is, the disciplining of its citizenry, the control and register of each individual.
 15. Original Spanish: "Quiero decirles que *Sur* nos cuenta una historia de amor. Es el amor de una pareja y también una historia de amor por un país./Es la historia de un regreso./*Sur* nos recuerda aquellos argentinos que en la película he llamado los de "la mesa de los sueños". De ellos aprendí./Ellos, más allá de sus convicciones políticas, nos dejaron como herencia una obra y un compromiso./*Sur* nos habla del reencuentro y de las amistad. Es el triunfo de la vida sobre la muerte, del amor sobre el rencor, de la libertad sobre la opresión, del deseo sobre el temor./También quiero decirles que *Sur* es un homenaje a todos los que, como mi personaje tartamudo, supieron decir no. Fueron los que mantuvieron la dignidad. Ellos dijeron no a la injusticia, a la opresión, a la entrega del país./Queridos amigos, aquí está *Sur*. Fue hecha con el corazón y ahora les pertenece."
 16. See Fernando "Pino" Solanas, *La mirada: Reflexiones sobre cine y cultura*, Interview by Horacio González, Buenos Aires, Puntosur Editores, 1989, for Solanas's discussion of Argentine politics in this generation.
 17. *La mirada*, pp. 130–131. Original Spanish: "En *Sur* quise continuar con el reencuadre de imágenes, tratando la imagen a través de otros elementos que descomponen el cuadro. Mi planteo en *Sur* era el de "espiar" el recuerdo y casi todos los raccontos están filmados a través de puertas, ventanas, o diversas modificaciones del cuadro rectangular clásico. Casi siempre las ventanas y las puertas eran el lenguaje elegido para el pasado. Planos fijos vistos através de algo. En el tiempo presente, en cambio, las escenas de Floreal fueron planos en movimiento, grandes planos generales rodados en

una larga y única toma, casi siempre travellings. En las escenas de Rosi esperando en la casa, buscamos la multiplicación de su imagen a través de espejos o reflejos en los vidrios de las ventanas, filmadas en planos fijos."

18. *La mirada*, pp. 175–176. Original Spanish: "*Morir cansa* . . . es el choque del protagonista con la realidad social, el desempleo y la descomposición de una sociedad económicamente perversa. Es la comprensión del protagonista del real significado de la lucha de sus padres [. . .]. Es la autocrítica del Negro al triunfalismo y al sectarismo de la dirigencia y comprensión de la silenciosa conducta popular. "Se aprende en la derrota. . . morir cansa. . . , cuantas cosas han muerto en estos años y yo con ellas". . . "Yo que di mi vida como dirigente y, con todo mi triunfalismo, terminé sin comprender el silencio de la gente". . . "La gente no estaba vencida: aguantaba defendiendo lo poco que tenía. . ." En síntesis, es el choque final de Floreal con el país real que lo llevará a comprender que lo importante es concentrar su rabia y su energía para cambiar la realidad, para defender y realizar sus sueños."