An East German Chile in Bulgaria: Notions of Longing and Displacement

Abstract

The long-lasting relationship of the East German production company DEFA with Eastern European cinemas is documented by the great number of co-productions with Bulgaria, among other countries. In a canon of DEFA films shot on location in Bulgaria, the ‘DEFA Chile films’ appear as interesting example of cultural hybridity and transnational filmmaking, which have yet to receive scholarly attention. The features *Der Übergang/The Passage* (1978), *Die Spur des Vermißten/Trace of the Disappeared* (1980) and *Blonder Tango/Blond Tango* (1985), presenting East German views about human rights violations that occurred in Chile during the Pinochet regime, were made with Bulgarian, German and Chilean casts and crews. This paper examines the Eastern European physiognomies in these films and their meanings as conflation between East and South in the Cold War dynamics of the late 1970s to mid-1980s. While the films propagate notions of Third World solidarity and fascist denunciation in narrative terms, Eastern European natural and urban landscapes produce feelings of displacement and yearning for an intact place remote from East German reality.

Keywords

East German cinema, co-productions, exile cinema, Cold War, socialist film, Third Film, Bulgaria

Introduction

This article deals with a complex case of transnational filmmaking in the Cold War dynamics between East and South of the late 1970s and mid-1980s. The feature films, *Der Übergang/El Paso/The Passage* (Orlando Lübbert, GDR-Bulgaria, 1978), *Die Spur des Vermißten/Trace of the Disappeared* (Joachim Kunert, GDR-Bulgaria, 1980), and *Blonder Tango/Blond Tango* (Lothar Warneke, GDR-Bulgaria, 1985) produced by the East German production company DEFA, retrace episodes of exile, persecution and disappearances that took place in Pinochet's Chile. The DEFA Chile films were photographed at the shores of and small towns close to the Black Sea and in the Balkan mountain ranges, with Bulgarian actors; collaborations between film personnel from East Germany, Chile and Bulgaria who shared a socialist ethos and a concern about their former socialist ally. My paper addresses the complexities and problems of mapping Chilean stories and memories onto Eastern European physiognomies. I argue that this imagined Chile offers a visual terminology of Third World solidarity and picture experiences of displacement in the shifting socio-political context of socialist filmmaking.

Where the recent transnational turn in film studies opened new and exciting avenues into the study of East German cinema, most enquiries tried to fit East German film into the longer history of German national film, or observed aesthetic trends and connections to Western European cinema and Hollywood (Berghahn 2005; Wedel et al. 2013; Allan and Heiduschke 2016). There is a scarcity of research that investigates DEFA filmmaking as part of the Eastern European film industry. Scholars such as Katie Trumpener and Aniko Imre have highlighted that eastward conjectures are important for an understanding of East German film (Trumpener 2002; Iordonova 2005; Imre 2012). Dina Iordonova claims that studies of the East-East connections would reinsert 'an important dimension of cultural history: many of the GDR developments had closely followed the logic of events in the Soviet sphere and not the internal East-West German logic' (Iordonova 2005). After all, film was the preferred genre to reinforce

the value system of socialist society. The domineering cultural influence of the Soviet Union and set artistic guidelines were vehemently discussed by cultural functionaries and artists across the socialist world, and the similarity of socialist everyday life as it unfolded in private and public spheres, became processed in books and films across the socialist world. Most Eastern European cinemas fed into the vision of developing a vibrant socialist-cultural sphere.¹ Film personnel, trained in film schools in Berlin, Moscow or Prague, formed members of the cultural elite that, using their connections to former fellows, friends and colleagues, engaged in establishing international production and distribution networks and supported joint ventures that would give Eastern European film a distinguishable identity.

DEFA entertained long-lasting and close relationships with partners in Eastern European countries, among them Bulgaria. Aside from Konrad Wolf's acclaimed *Sterne/Stars* (Bulgaria-GDR, 1959), a collaborative effort with director and author, Angel Wagenstein, DEFA partnered up with Bulgaria in at least ten documentaries and feature films.² Co-productions offered a feasible solution to realize expensive and/or ambitious endeavours, by sharing knowledge and filmmaking expertise, costs, technologies and equipment (Skopal 2018, 137). Produced as joint ventures, Eastern Europe created films that enriched the domestic market and called attention to the creativity and of Eastern European cinema beyond Cold War boundaries (Ivanova 2019, 20-21). Mariana Ivanova notes: 'Eastern European studios developed strategies to emulate Western successes and to distinguish themselves from them both aesthetically and structurally' (Ivanova 2019, 21). Because each country had different control and supervision mechanisms in place to monitor film projects, involving international partners was an effective strategy to circumnavigate censorship measures and other restrictions from the political overhead at state level (Siefert 2012, 39-42). As is the case with the films at hand, East-East co-productions came into being by the need to feature urban or rural landscapes, bodies and faces that emulated the 'south'.

The DEFA Chile productions indicate the proximity of the socialist film industry to actors and agents situated in the Global South and contact zones of Third Film philosophy with that of socialist film. Eastern Europe sought to establish political, economic and cultural connections to newly independent states such as Mozambique, Angola, Cuba, Nicaragua or Chile that had chosen a socialist pathway. This included efforts to develop their indigenous film industry. Filmmakers from allied countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East received training in Eastern European film schools (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2017, 16-17).³ Film festivals in Tashkent, Karlovy Vary or Leipzig were key venues for the exhibition of work by artists coming from countries that lacked functioning distribution and exhibition structures (Hanlon 2016, 141). The notion of Third Film, a ‘radical/subversive cinema that developed in Third World countries with the intent to radicalize directly and call to action members of the audience’ (Macdonald 1994, 28) echoed with aims and motivations of socialist cinema. Both had an antifascist impetus and meant to enlighten audiences about their central place in revolutionary social processes past, present and future. The installation of military regimes across Latin America and repressive measures of these governments prompted the exodus of progressive cultural movements in the region and drove leftist activists, artists and intellectuals into exile. With the arrival of Chileans in East Germany, connections between socialist film and Third film became at once more urgent and more personal. The DEFA’s Chile films are the result of these developments.

By virtue of its diplomatic alliances with the Third World, the East German government had sought to convince their own population of the pacifist and humanist character of socialism and its morally superiority over the capitalist economic and political system (Döring 1999, 9). The DEFA Chile canon was the attempt to bring such rhetoric to the world of film. DEFA’s engagement with Chile started right after the coup d’état in 1973 and lasted well into the 1980s. Some productions, such as Heynowski and Scheumann’s (in)famous Chile cycle, disclosed the

Pinochet regime as exemplary case of fascist-imperialist forces in rather aggressive formats. At the same time, the abundance of productions and range of genres, including newsreels, animation films, shorts, documentaries and feature films — are evidence of a special bond that the socialist allies had shared. Vivid exchanges between the two countries took place during time of Allende's government that apart from trade agreements and close diplomatic relations, included visits of student and worker groups and artist collectives (Krämer 2004). Chilean specialists and academics received training in East German technical institutes and universities. Allende's government also endorsed East Germany's application to become a sovereign member of the United Nations. While the military coup in 1973 abruptly ended Chile's socialist path and diplomatic relations to East Germany, this event started another chapter in East-German-Chilean relations. East Germany granted visas to approximately one thousand and five hundred Chileans and provided them with accommodations and jobs or the opportunity to join vocational training programs and university-level degrees. Among the emigrants were writers, visual artists, musician and journalists. Their work continued to be promoted in their new 'home', and found a interested audience among the East German population.⁴

DEFA hired Chilean directors, scriptwriters, actors and musicians for their many film projects. This was a way of supporting Latin American progressive cinema in European exile and provided much-needed income to artists. The Chilean film personnel brought cultural authenticity to the East German productions. But DEFA had to ensure that the films fitted with official political rhetoric and aesthetic conventions of East German national film and present insightful texts for East German audiences. In order to guarantee desired impact and effect, DEFA dramaturgs amended original scripts handed in by Chilean artists, to connect to East German meta-narrative, historical events, symbols, metaphors and figures. Was the design of the cinematic spaces part of this practice to straighten out linguistic and cultural differences or

even divergent political views, and successful in creating an East German imagery of Third World solidarity?

The different parties involved in the filmmaking process – DEFA as official producer, dramaturgs, East German, Chilean and Bulgarian film personnel – each arrived at the film projects with their own agendas and each left a mark on the films’ visual aesthetics. DEFA authorities and Chilean artists seemed to agree on the idea of displacing the Chilean stories onto Eastern European terrain, specifically the choice of setting them in Bulgaria. The émigré artists themselves found the Bulgarian topography, culture and mentality to reflect their native Chile. Hans-Joachim Kunert, director of *Trace of the Disappeared*, noted: ‘Chilean colleagues who resided in socialist countries told me time and time again that Bulgaria was the country that had them remember their home, the landscape as much as the people’ (Kunert 1980). Dramaturg Erika Richter, who developed the screenplay for *Blond Tango*, noted in an interim report that Saavedra Santis found it more suitable to film in Bulgaria than in Cuba because the Bulgarian mentality would have more in common with the Chilean than with the Cuban one (Richter 1984). The perceived likenesses between Chile and Bulgaria was, among other reasons, informed by longstanding, colonial fantasies about Latin America that were also associated with Eastern Europe, both ‘imaginary location somewhere between civilization and barbarism’ (Imre 2016, 6). For example, DEFA production director, Gert Golde, imagined *The Passage*’s narrative to be ‘set in a big and beautiful landscape’. ⁵ Its director, Orlando Lübbert, reminiscing about the film thirty years later, indicated that the practice of setting the film in Bulgaria was motivated by an East German idea about what Chilean culture and geography are like (Sandberg 2015a).

The remainder of this article will read the imaginary Chile of *The Passage*, *Trace of the Disappeared* and *Blond Tango*. As I will show with reference to production conditions and on the basis of textual analyses, the picture of the country in each film was created in a different

set of institutional interests, artistic visions, notions of nostalgia and exoticism. The selected films reflect the changing social and political climate in East Germany from the late 1970s into the 1980s: *The Passage* and *Trace of the Disappeared* were made when solidarity campaigns for Chile were in full swing and the popular support in East Germany was strong. *Blond Tango* was conceived in the mid-1980s, when wide-spread social discontent led to public discussions of a reformed socialism, foreshadowing the demise of the East German state. We will see that the filmic spaces act as aesthetic intervention in ever-fluctuating sensibilities and desires that undergirded, advanced or undermined official socialist discourses of solidarity and exile.

The Passage

The Passage became the first DEFA film feature about Chile. In 1976, Orlando Lübbert, a promising Chilean cineaste who lived in West Berlin, submitted a screenplay to DEFA that was entitled *El paso* ('The Crossing'). Lübbert received support for his idea from various cultural and political agents. Director Wolfgang Kohlhaase assisted Lübbert with the writing of the script and put in a word for the young filmmaker at DEFA. The local Unidad Popular (UP) committee also endorsed this endeavour. Clodomiro Almeyda, former minister of foreign affairs in Chile and acting as general secretary of the UP in East Germany, directed a letter to DEFA's head of production, Alfred Wilkening, in which he applauded the proposal, describing it to be of 'exceptional significance for the resistance struggle and solidarity with Chile.' Almeyda closed his letter by reminding DEFA and the East German government of their promise to support progressive Chilean cinema in these difficult times. A few months later, DEFA officials gave thumbs up for the filming of *The Passage*. They decided that this film should be developed in collaboration with another socialist country because this venture would

strengthen the socialist front. As DEFA production director, Gert Golde, said: ‘If not this topic, which other could socialist countries agree on?’⁶

Filming took place in outside locations in Bulgaria and in Kinocentar Sofia, the production facility of the Bulgarian state-owned feature film studios. Kinocentar sent a producer, costume designers and light technicians, while the German crew consisted of a photographer and two camera assistants. Chilean artists who had been settling all over Western Europe at the time were asked to take part in the production and subsequently flown into Sofia; Aside from Lübbert who came from West Berlin, there were actors Hugo Medina and Adelaide Arias (Rosa) from London and protagonist Oscar Castro and composer Ivan Pequeño from Paris. Lübbert requested that Gaston Angelovici, and Alfredo Nazar, both of whom he had worked with in the documentary *Los puños frente al cañón* (1975), were hired as consultants to the film.⁷ They travelled to Bulgaria from France and Sweden, respectively. The tremendous efforts and financial means provided to support this film – salaries and travel expenses for the Chilean artists had to be paid in hard currency — indicate that East Germany was seriously committed to assist Chilean friends and colleagues. With the participation of so many important figures of the former Chilean artistic scene, this production shared narrative and formal features with many Chilean films that were produced in exile elsewhere.

The Passage is set in Chile of December 1973 and follows a simple storyline: The political fugitives, Carlos (Hugo Medina), Juan (Oscar Castro) and Lorenzo (Aníbal Reyna), attempt to cross the Andes on foot to reach Argentina. Without having any sense of orientation, the men climb over rocks, walk in sandy riverbeds and sleep next to roaring river streams. They are found by Argentine officers but returned to Chilean authorities soon after. In the end, Juan becomes shot while trying to escape and Carlos and Lorenzo kill the officers who had taken them prisoners (see figure 1).

DEFA found it important to give this account of an escape a clear political direction. Tamara Trampe, dramaturg of *The Passage*, noted: ‘The film should not only be a historical document of Chilean film art in exile, but should be used as much as possible as a weapon’ (Trampe 1978, 12). The figures of Carlos, Juan and Lorenzo were closely modelled against the archetype of the socialist-realist male hero. Though they appear increasingly run-down and frail, the men never show signs of defeat. With bonds of trust and solidarity that have established between them on a dangerous journey, the male leads of *The Passage* appear almost as selfless as the concentration camp inmates and underground communist party members in *Nackt unter Wölfen/Naked Among Wolves* (Frank Beyer, GDR, 1963), who by rescuing a Jewish child, put the well-being of their peers before their own without fail.

<Figure 1>

The film’s mise-en-scène, however, challenges the antifascist ideal of unwavering political convictions and unquestioned self-sacrifice. Lübbert’s Andes are a hostile and uninhabitable terrain without routes nor pathways, exposing the protagonists to the natural forces; becoming an image of their inner turmoil (Melby 2010, 1-2). The mountainous setting serves as a powerful metaphor for the transformation of a vivid political venture into experience of death and displacement. As Ana Lusnich notes, many Chilean and Argentinian films that commented on the fascist regimes in these countries, employed tropes that signified authoritarianism and imprisonment (Lusnich 2014, 190). Spaces and cinematography in *The Passage* underline sensations of entrapment. Birds-eye views, wide-angle and extreme angle shots privilege spectators to observe the men as figures on a chess board, enclosed by an endless mass of dry earth. In a never-ending, delirious journey of three refugees in what appears as no-man’s land, doubts, nightmares and desires torture them while a stubborn will to survive drives them forward. Before the men’s eyes appears a ramshackle peasant’s house. The young and heavily pregnant Rosa (Adelaide Arias) who waits for her husband to return with provisions

for the baby, offers the fugitives temporary shelter. The scarce interior (table, chair, cross, bed) indicates that the couple lead a simple life. It is a location outside of the conflicts and disenchantments of modernity where traditional social arrangements are still intact; there is a god to follow, a husband to be obedient to, a child to be raised. Rosa's world seems far away from the current political turmoil. She mentions in a conversation over dinner that, 'in this house we do not talk politics,' and she cannot believe that Juan was tortured for no reason: 'But he must have done something?' To Carlos, Juan and Lorenzo, this place satisfies their basic needs, gives them a much-needed break before continuing on their trip. Towards the end, Carlos and Lorenzo pass the house again, now as hand-cuffed prisoners on horseback. Juan, who had run away also returns to Rosa's place to spend another night there. Rosa's penetrating eyes follow him from behind the window when on the next day he leaves to find his comrades, as if she knew that he would die soon. The house in the mountains has become a faint memory of their former lives and signifies an endpoint of their journey, and as the title *The Passage* indicates, is the transition towards something else.

Trace of the Disappeared

Trace of the Disappeared was adapted from a radio play that was written by Chilean author Antonio Skármeta. Kunert and Skármeta co-wrote the screen play for this television film that the DEFA Studio für Spielfilme made for the channel Deutscher Fernsehfunk. In its entirety filmed in Bulgaria and overseen by a crew that consisted of Bulgarian and East German film personnel, the set-up of this production was similar to that of *The Passage*.⁸ But while in *The Passage* Chilean artists acted in lead roles, *Trace of the Disappeared* worked with a cast of Bulgarian and East German actors. Some of the Bulgarians had been part of Bulgarian

solidarity productions. For example, Naitscho Petrov, who was one of the resistance group member in *Trace of the Disappeared* acted the role of Salvador Allende in the French-Bulgarian co-production *Llueve sobre Santiago/It rains over Santiago* (Helvio Soto, 1975). Involved in other TV and feature film productions with DEFA, among them the acclaimed *Sterne*, Naitschow was a familiar face to East German spectators.

The members of the film team participated in this venture because they felt empathy for the situation of the Chileans whose lives were shattered by the political turn in their country. Director Kunert stated that working with the Bulgarian colleagues in this film was delightful, as their work was motivated by a shared interest in the subject. As he said: 'The theme of the film touched everyone' (Kunert 1980). An East German film critic evaluated this German-Bulgarian co-production as exemplary case of socialist internationalism (Künzel 1980). As a venture in which Chilean artists were not involved or interfered in, *Trace of the Disappeared* is a socialist-realist interpretation of Skármeta's play and it includes features of what Daniela Berghahn calls 'revolutionary romanticism,' (Berghahn 2005, 35), having picked up fantasies of the 1968 European student movement about Latin America (Siebenmann 2003, 64).

With the story of a father's search for his missing son, *Trace of the Disappeared* was one of the first films about a disappeared person - a subject that has become a mainstay in the cinematic memory of the Chilean dictatorship. There are references to actual existing human rights institutions that worked underground, such as the Committee ProPaz and The Vicariate of Solidarity. Carlos lives with his father Cosme, a taxi driver (Günter Naumann), and his uncle in Temuco, a town that is located six hundred kilometres south of Santiago. At night, a friend of his appears on his doorstep asking for shelter. On his way to the university the next day, Carlos is pulled into a black car and is not seen again, as a result of having collaborated with an opponent of the regime. Cosme investigates the whereabouts of his son. There seems to be no trace of him. Neither local authorities, nor soldiers or police officers are helpful. On a trip

to the next town in order to get advice from a lawyer, he meets Ernesto (Wenzelslav Kissjov) and they befriend each other. As he finds out, Ernesto, disguised as a travelling salesman, participates in underground activities against the regime and he gets to know his friends. They become tipped off about bodies which have been buried in a nearby cave. Cosme finds the body of his son Carlos among the dead. This scenario at the end of the film refers to a well-known case in Chile, Lonquén, which was proof that the Pinochet government had murdered and disposed of political opponents (Rojas Mira 2001; Amorós 2003).⁹ Lonquén has come to be associated as a name that stands for the many unsolved cases of disappearances and the pain that this uncertainty caused their families.

A road movie that is populated with Bulgarian actors to represent travelling salesmen, peasants and fishermen, *Trace of the Disappeared* spatially imitates Chile, including the Andes mountain range, the rugged Pacific coast, rural and urban areas. The film follows a binary logic in portraying the agents of Chile's fascist government and the hard-working population to occupy separate worlds. Humble living quarters, guesthouses, small hotel rooms and peasant houses are furnished only with essential items, contrasting with the grandeur of buildings that house institutions and beneficiaries of the repressive system. The interior of a police station is decorated with wood panels and offices situated around a generous hall, where the captain shouts at his subordinates from the landing on the second floor. A tall heavy glass door leads to an elegantly curved staircase and from there to the office of the lawyer, who acts on Cosme's behalf to request the whereabouts of his son from the local authorities and requests ever more money for his services.

As mentioned before, *Trace of the Disappeared* is marked by romantic beliefs about Latin America. Carlos's figure dressed in a poncho looks like what it is: a well-known East German actor in an ill-fitted costume. In other cases, the socialist-educational trajectory that drives the narrative – a society that actively resists their fascist enemy – competes with

European notions of the Global South. The photography yield images with a great depth of field that find Chile in rolling hills and bucolic landscapes. Ernesto's visit to his parents who live by the seaside, convey an idea of the Latin American country that is connected 'to a way of life and to cultural traditions associated both to the land and the past' (Fowler and Helfield 2006, 6). He runs along the shore to get to his parents' house, with the camera following the character along a row of fisher boats and tiny houses that line the coast. The soundtrack features Victor Jara's guitar accords and *El Pimiento*, a song that deals with the hardships of the *campesino* (farmer), round off a romanticised panorama of rural Chile and a fisherman's life drawn in poetic terms (see figure 2). If a contemporaneous socialist spectatorship should have picked up on Cosme's development from narrow-minded business owner to politically involved citizen, the film's imagery is likely to have undermined this message by seducing rather than educating viewers.

<figure 2>

<figure 3>

The film should not be dismissed too quickly, however. It manages to evoke a repressive atmosphere in an emotionally authentic manner that make occasional Eurocentric blunders and cultural stereotypes a lesser evil. The chiaroscuro lighting in night scenes, for example the head lights of an arriving car illuminating Carlos's face through the blinds or shadows of moving figures thrown against house walls, create suspense and evoke a sense of uncertainty and fear. The performances of the Bulgarian cast add credibility and intimacy to the effects of torture (see figure 3). In the sequence of Ernesto's meeting with his parents, his emaciated mother (Nadija Michowa) pressing her head into her son's chest and his father's dead eyes (Nikolai Klissurov) convincingly mark their broken spirit. The end of the film emphasises Cosme's dealing with pain and desperation. After he found the body of his son, he

gets rid of his car and hitchhikes along the open road. This ending implies that torture and murder would traumatise the Chilean population for a long time to come.

Trace of the Disappeared moved East German and Chilean audiences alike. The East German press praised the film as having the quality to ‘bridge the distance ... to Chile with sensibility and personal compassion’ (Barra 1980; see also Kraft 1980; Zinn 1980). Contemporary Chilean film critics find its emotional and political testimony extraordinary (Cavallo and Martinez n.d.).¹⁰

Blond Tango

In 1983, the Leipziger Dokumentar- und Kurzfilmwoche featured a series of films in remembrance of the tenth anniversary of the Chilean coup d’état. This event brought renewed attention to the country and a population that were still ruled by the same military regime. For East Germans, the term Chile was associated with images, music, posters and school activities, memory of socialist utopia that seemed a lifetime away from East German reality of the 1980s. DEFA commissioned three more features, films that on the one hand, should reawaken interest in this subject, and on the other, would come to reflect on an altogether different chapter in East German-Chilean relations. Aside from *Blond Tango*, this was *Verzeihung, Sehen Sie Fußball/Pardon, Do You Like Football* (Gunther Scholz, GDR, 1983) and *Isabel auf der Treppe/Isabel on the Stairs* (Hannelore Unterberg, GDR 1984). Unlike previous films that featured Chilean protagonists committed to rebuilding a socialist community, these pictures dealt with Chileans as isolated foreigners in East Germany. In *Blond Tango*, the belief in a better future is the past dream of an older generation. From today’s perspective it seems unbelievable that in a DEFA film someone shouting ‘Dieses Scheißland!’ (this shitty country)

would pass the censors. The film examines older conceptions of exile, raises questions about the achievements of antifascism and denounces East Germany's solidarity with Chile as an illusion. By extension, the film's images of Chile are self-reflective of rhetoric and practices that portray the country in exoticized terms.

Views and visions of Chilean artists critically informed this film. *Blond Tango* was based on a novel by author Omar Saavedra Santis who also wrote its screen play. Actor and theatre director Alejandro Quintana Contreras was cast in the main role. Santis' and Contreras' collaboration on this film had a marked impact on a narrative and aesthetic structure that juxtaposes East German and Chilean perceptions of love, war and exile, which accrue to 'an expression of solidarity and the consolidation of plural subjects and speaking positions' (Trnka 2011, 311). Santis and Contreras were friends and colleagues, had both emigrated from Chile in the early 1970s and lived in East Germany ever since. Contreras's engagements at the Volksbühne Rostock and Berlin's Theater der Freundschaft brought the world of theatre into this film. Santis seemed to have written his novel about a Chilean émigré employed in an East German theatre with his friend in mind. Contreras certainly shared feelings of bitterness and disappointment and a good sense of humour with his character.

Blond Tango connects to a French-Argentine production, *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel/Tango. The Exile of Gardel* (Fernando Solanas, 1985) that was in the making at around the same time albeit on the opposite side of the Iron Curtain. *Tango. The Exile of Gardel* deals with artists from Buenos Aires who try to find a producer for their dance show in Paris. Made with Latin American émigré artists, the films portray European spaces – the French capital in *Tangos* and the village close to the Baltic Sea in *Blond Tango* - in a visual terminology that symbolises loss and coldness (Sandberg 2016, 46). Lack of light, blue-tinted images and fog and snow on empty streets indicate feelings of loneliness of the émigrés on the one hand, and indifference of the European contemporaries on the other, giving the term Cold War Europe

yet another meaning (see figure 5). Hamid Naficy notes that the main motive in exile film is the construction and depiction of mobile, hybrid and performative identities as means of surviving daily life in a foreign country (Naficy 2001, 6). *Blond Tango*'s protagonist, Rogelio is haunted by memories of imprisonment and nightmares of torture. As a mental escape route, he dreams up a different version of his life that becomes ever more colourful. In letters to his mother (Steffi Spyra) and uncle (Hernán Garate), he tells her about his alleged fiancé, their marriage and a baby son.

Chile appears in flashback whenever Rogelio receives a letter from home. His dreamt-up Chile was shot in Balchik, a town near the Black Sea, chosen by Saavedra, because it reminded him of his hometown, Valparaíso (Sandberg 2015b). Overexposed pictures of cobblestoned streets and brightly painted houses have an affectionate quality that establish a noticeable contrast to the ones shot in East German surroundings. A place that is far from the mockery of his colleague Luisa who demands that he should get used to the here and now, the Bulgarian Chile is free of the complications that he deals with in his East German reality. The Chilean scenes convey the idea of a sunny place where people are emotionally attached to each other and where he is loved and cared for. In a lively and animated get-together with the entire village, his mother auctions Rogelio's alleged wedding photo to contribute to a solidarity fund for victims of the regime (see figure 6). These scenes jar with Rogelio's life in East Germany where his only meaningful relationship is that with an older man who in his youth had spent time in Mexico as a prisoner of war and still speaks a bit of Spanish and lives secluded in an old house in the Northern German countryside.

<figure 4>

<figure 5>

Film scholar Barton Byg states that the film's 'narrative and characters self-consciously deal with clichés about southern, non-German culture'. (Byg 2003, 68) This becomes obvious

towards the end. In a surprising narrative turn, Rogelio learns that the stories of the whereabouts of his family were fabricated. Because his mother passed away, his uncle Alfonso had composed the letters. This twist highlights the artificial and exotic quality of the Chilean images. The country that Rogelio had left, does not exist anymore, perhaps never existed. This critique of exilic nostalgia served as a didactic means to bring the protagonist back to current reality in East Germany, contemplate its ugliness and flaws and use his energies for the political reforms that were hotly discussed at the time. When 'Don' Stephan (Gerhard Meyer) reminds Rogelio: 'We also need the foreign eyes, otherwise we feel that we are the navel of the world', this turns an absent-minded émigré into an engaged citizen whose voice, knowledge and energy could help to enrich the East German social and cultural landscape.

Conclusion

This paper looked at East German-Bulgarian co-production practices and relations of Eastern Europe to Latin America, to have structured images and imaginations of Chile in *The Passage*, *Trace of the Disappeared* and *Blond Tango*. The making of the DEFA films were motivated by East German political campaigns, among them forging solidarity with the victims of the Chilean regime and defending the righteousness of the socialist system against its enemies. For political as well as financial reasons the films could not be shot in fascist Chile, therefore Bulgarian locations stood in for Latin American topography, culture and people. Despite its limitations, adopting this practice allowed DEFA to give East German official rhetoric and antagonisms of fascism a face. Literally 'Europeanising' Latin America for Eastern audiences was a way to promote a shared sense of identity between inhabitants of socialist countries and entertain the idea of proletarian internationalism. But the productions were also defined by

motivations and desires of their East German, Chilean and Bulgarian participants. The texture of the films reflected lived experiences of emigration and deterritorialization. Conveying individual and collective anxieties about revolutionary ideas and utopia, the imagined Chilean spaces complicated abstract and exotic notions of Third World solidarity.

The Passage came into being as result of DEFA's commitment to support Chilean progressive cinema in exile. The cultural authorities granted the young Chilean filmmaker Lübbert considerable autonomy over this venture. Cast and crew comprised of renowned members of the Chilean artistic community that had been key figures of the cultural scene under Allende's government. The film is structured as aesthetic dialogue between socialist realism and Chilean progressive filmmaking: while the portrayal of the male leads evokes the moral integrity and staunch political belief of the antifascist hero, the mise-en-scène maps their troubles and anxieties. The Andes appear as rugged labyrinth that spatially marks dystopia, a trope that was used often in contemporaneous Chilean and Argentina militant films. A film that has no Chilean participants, *Trace of the Disappeared* is the prototype of a German-Bulgarian solidarity production in which displacement functioned as premise, theme and organising principle. While the film is not free of Eurocentric tendencies, the performances of the Bulgarian cast manage to give it great emotional impact. *Blond Tango*, realized in East Germany's most vibrant political phase, is the last film in this series linked to Chile as longstanding political, social and cultural project. The contemporaneous social sensibilities were observed from the viewpoint of a Chilean émigré. His feelings of nostalgia are manifested in narrative and formal ways. Where *The Passage* used the metaphor of the mountains to depict the desperation of three men trying to flee from Chile, the picturesque images of a coastal town in *Blond Tango* were means for its protagonist to escape East German reality. The films' binary visual structure hints at the protagonist's disturbed sense of identity and finds notions of antifascism and solidarity to be a thing from the past. In questioning the practice of selling

Eastern European settings as authentic reproduction of Chile, *Blond Tango* teased out an understanding of the misunderstandings, stereotypes and fantasies that East-German Chilean relations were based upon.

The DEFA Chile films emerged from concerns and interests that connected the European socialist community. Nowadays, these materials also have a place in Chilean cinematic memory. A joint film historical chapter that spans Germany, Bulgaria and Chile this is but one chapter in East-South relations, which merit further scholarly attention.

Notes

¹ For a detailed study of patterns and practices of socialist cultural exchange see Kunakhovich 2016.

² Co-productions that precede the DEFA Chile films, include *Die antike Münze/ Starinnata moneta/The Antique Coin* (Vladimir Yantshev, GDR-Bulgaria, 1965), *Amboss oder Hammer sein/ Nakovalnya ili chuk/ Nakowalhija ili czuk/Being Anvil or Hammer* (Hristo Hristov, GDR-Soviet Union-Bulgaria, 1972) and *Предупреждение/ Preduprazhdenieto/Die Mahnung/The Warning* (Juan Antonio Bardem, Bulgaria-Soviet Union-GDR, 1982).

³ For the international profile of the Konrad-Wolf University in Potsdam see Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2017.

⁴ For an overview of Chilean artists in East Germany see Koch 2016, 198-230.

⁵ This quote is taken from a letter that Gert Golde, DEFA production director wrote to Hans Dieter Mäde, DEFA general director in support of the project, dated October 1, 1977.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gaston Angelovici and Lübbert directed *Los puños frente al cañón/ Die Fäuste vor der Kanone/The Fists in Front of the Canon* (1975), a documentary that traces the history of the Chilean worker's movement since the 1930s, for which Alfredo Nazar assisted Lübbert with the script. While they had finished a raw cut of the film in Chile before emigrating to Europe, the film was released in West Germany in 1975.

⁸ Production management of *Trace of the Disappeared* was shared between Dieter Dormeier and Stefan Svetkov. Sigried Meyer and Radost Radzeva served as assistants to the director.

⁹ In 1978, *La Vicaria de Solidaridad* had published photos of bodies that were found in caverns in the countryside not far from the Chilean capital Santiago. The bodies belonged to farmers who had been imprisoned five years earlier.

¹⁰ For an extended discussion on the Chilean contemporary reception of this film see Claudia Sandberg 2017.

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