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Theorizing Folk Cinema

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Abstract

This honors project theorizes the concept of folk cinema. The project grapples with the complex history of the study of folklore and cinema's historic inaccessibility as a medium in order to position folk cinema as a revolutionary project capable of reimagining both cinema and folklore. Avoiding concrete definitions or the urge to label any specific films as folk cinema, the project explores folk cinema theoretically through the experimental Spanish short film *Aguaespejo Granadino,* the films of the Bolivian Third Cinema filmmaking collective the Ukamau Group, and finally my own creative intervention via the creation of a short diary film.

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This project is dedicated to the dream of folk cinema,

and everyone, past, present and future,

whose cinematic practices bring us closer to it.

Table of Contents

Access to Film

As part of this project, I created a short diary film entitled *How We May Have Seen It*. This film accompanies the third chapter of my project and can be accessed at the following link: https://youtu.be/e1uY-hs3hf0

List of Figures

This publicly accessible version of the project only includes the figures which the copyright holders gave permission to reproduce.

Introduction

In 1963, avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas said “The day is close when the 8 mm. home-movie-footage will be collected and appreciated as beautiful folk art, like songs and the lyric poetry that was created by the people” (89). As Mekas predicts the rise of a cinema of the people, he paradoxically intertwines the new, technological nature of 8mm film with all the nostalgia and tradition that the folk arts possess. Mekas’ discussion of 8mm film as folk art anticipates the rise of a folk cinema, a type of film with the expressive and subversive power of other folk arts. In Mekas’ imagined future, folk cinema could serve as a place for community expression far from the clinical universal language of dominant Hollywood filmmaking. However, sixty years later, Mekas' prophecy of an imminent folk cinema seems to have fallen flat. Cinema has remained an inaccessible medium dominated by the wealthy and elite. The decades past have not brought cinema much closer to popular conceptions of the folk arts, as cinema remains the epitome of mass media and popular culture which seem diametrically opposed to typical notions of the folk. Cinema is new, modern, and universal, while the folk is the opposite — old, traditional, and localized. While the rise of digital video in recent years has made Mekas’ dream of folk cinema feel more tangible than it once was, folk cinema as a fully realized project remains elusive, even the proliferation of digital video on video sharing platforms like YouTube has not ignited an interest in understanding these new cultural productions as folk cinema. Instead, the rise of digital video has only further differentiated the divide between “video” and “cinema,” where instead of framing these works through the lens of

folk art, digital videos are just a less-professionalized aspect of the current pop culture media landscape.

Still, I find there to be a tantalizing quality to the idea of folk cinema that persists even within these contradictions and difficulties. A folk cinema brings with it a chance to challenge not just what folk art can be, but also what cinema itself can be. Folk cinema imagines a cinema where experiences and narratives historically ostracized from the cinematic medium could finally be expressed via the power of the moving picture. Folk cinema could be a way for the projection of films to become a site of community participation, and filmmaking as a whole a place of collective work and constant community-led recreation. Theorizing folk cinema therefore can be a gateway to a whole new mode of expression that seeks to reclaim a medium that for too long has been made for the people but not by them. The folk cinema I theorize is not one that is simply folkloric or imbued with folk qualities, but rather a cinema that is itself folklore. I imagine a folk cinema that is fully incorporated into a community's folklore, harnessing cinema's communicative artistic power in a hybridic manner that embraces the dynamic nature of tradition and culture. Importantly, I see folk cinema as a theoretical project that is forever on-going and constantly evolving, and consequently my use of the term as I explore film history will be rhetorical in nature, using the conflicts embedded in the term to unravel questions of cinema's past as well as its future.

In this extended essay, I take these initial ideas about folk cinema and develop them into a theorization of folk cinema that imagines the possibilities and potentials of such a practice. My theorization will not seek definitions or search for any concrete examples, rather it will embrace

the dynamic and on-going nature of the project, theorizing a folk cinema that acknowledges the contentious, nationalistic history of folklore in order to reshape and challenge ideas of both cinema and folklore. I will turn to three distinct case studies to develop my theorization: Spanish filmmaker José Val del Omar film *Aguaespejo Granadino,* the films of the Bolivian filmmaking collective the Uakamu Group, and finally my own participation in diary filmmaking practices. Paying particular attention to how folk cinema intersects with essentializing nationalistic narratives present in the concept of folklore, folk cinema will become a theoretical rhetorical device to analyze film history as well as propel my own filmmaking practices, resulting in a theorization that envisions cinema as a radical tool for community expression.

I will situate my theorization of folk cinema within a larger understanding of folklore and the folk. This understanding will draw on the origins of folklore and the folk as well as its more contemporary theorizations, synthesizing both academic and commonly held notions of the term. Through this investigation, I will unravel folklore's connection to essentialist narratives and cultural nationalism, while also interrogating its potential as an alternative and accessible medium of liberatory expression. This discussion will explore folklore's connection with tradition and change, providing the groundwork to situate folk cinema within larger conversations about folklore. I will put various perspectives on the meaning of folklore and the folk into dialogue, incorporating them into an understanding that is relevant for the project of folk cinema. I will use folklore as an umbrella term referring to all of the folk practice, traditions, knowledge, and artifacts of a community. My utilization of this terminology aligns with the term's use in many of the Folk Studies texts I will draw on. Though in some uses of the term

folklore can refer to just verbal expressions of folk culture, the concept often takes on a broader meaning. While this more comprehensive understanding can arise from the belief that even if all folklore isn't verbal, it is all orally transmitted (Brunvand 5), other folklorists depart all together from this notion of oral transmission and create an even more expansive perspective on folklore (Ben-Amos 9). However, more importantly, my use of the term folklore over folk arts emphasizes through the suffix -lore the communicatory and interpersonal aspects of folk cultural productions that are particularly relevant to my project of folklore.

Origins of Folklore

Folklore as a term originated in nineteenth-century England. British writer W.J. Thoms coined the word in a letter in the literary magazine *Athenæum* in 1846 in order to distinguish the study of "popular antiquities," also referred to as "popular literature," from its parent field of antiquarian studies. This desire for folklore and its study in mid-nineteenth century England came out of a profound dissatisfaction with the state of industrialized England, and a longing to return to a mostly imagined ideal of English agrarian life (Bennett 212). The early development of folklore as a concept contradicts the common perception that unease with industrialization and nostalgia for the pre-industrial is a recent development, or at minimum one that occurred significantly after the Industrial Revolutions. Rather, the origin of folklore demonstrates that this unease and nostalgia originated contemporaneously with the Industrial Revolution. Considering that the mid-nineteenth-century is a time that in retrospect seems quite folksy, the origin of the study of folklore muddles the distinction between when traditional ways of life end and the modernity associated with industrialization and mass culture begins. Arguably, many conceptions

of folklore necessitate the haziness of this split as folklore can be conceived of as the traditional situated within the modern; it relies on the contrast of industrialized modern culture in order to distinguish itself as something worthy of independent study. In this sense, many conceptions of folklore situate it not as nostalgia for traditions that modernity has destroyed, but rather nostalgia for the traditions that have persisted despite it.

This imagined ideal of agrarian life that motivated the development of folklore caused folklorist Roger Abrahams to argue that folklore developed under the purview of romantic nationalism, as well as the influence of the burgeoning capitalist economic system (Abrahams 3). Romantic nationalism and the changing class dynamics would transform perceptions of agrarian people and create the "folk." Antiquarians saw these newly created "folk" as possessing popular knowledge and practices that in their mind allowed them to represent the local and national character of a place (Abrahams 4). This utilization of folklore furthered an essentialist understanding of culture that reduced varied cultural practices and productions into appropriated symbols for burgeoning nation states. Though folklore can represent the diversity that a place possesses, its origin stories demonstrate that it also has the potential to be a homogenizing factor. This dynamic speaks to a larger conflict in folklore that persists regardless of the more progressive direction folklore studies has taken in recent years: folklore may foreground the cultural production and practices of downtrodden people in a way that allows the furthering of a liberatory political agenda, but at the same time, the concept of folklore still possesses nationalist roots and the potential to be used in a culturally essentialist way to further reactionary political projects.

The problematics of folklore and its study extends to the idea of the folk, the people who create folklore. In the 19th century, folklorists conceived of the folk as a group of people existing in between savage and civilized. This theorization limited the folk to peasants in the Western world and forbade countries deemed uncivilized from containing "true" folk (Dundes 4). Often, even when groups traditionally viewed as existing outside of the folk were brought into a folkloric context, they were only given access to folk forms deemed cross-cultural and were therefore excluded from being truly part of the folk (Dundes 5). Through this exclusionary conception of the folk, the term takes on an essentialist view of culture imbued with racist and colonial values where certain groups are perceived to inherently have the traits necessary to be folk while other groups are permanently ostracized from it.

Remnants of these understandings of the folk persisted in Folk Studies into the twentieth century, and still remain in popular notions of the folk. In popular senses of the term, people often view the folk as close to them and therefore not "savage," yet at the same time, other the folk due to their perceived distance from contemporary society and life. The folk are reflections of people's constructed ideas of their culture's near past, so therefore for a group to be folk, they have to remain culturally and geographically near to the observer. Consequently, the folk fail to take on a global connotation in the popular use of the term as the folk remain only the "nearby other." This dichotomy between savage and civilized that the folk are placed within corresponds to trivializing the way they are discussed in the study of their cultural productions. The folk are not given the privilege of authorship bestowed on the more "civilized" creators of fine art or culture. In fact, Folk Studies historically at times veered so far from the folk themselves that it

often became reduced to a quasi-scientific collectionary and classificatory practice that mirrored similar work in the nascent field of biology (Weber 38).

The origins of folklore and the folk provide important context to my theorization of folk cinema. The history of Folk Studies reveals the thoriness of folklore and folk as theoretical terms and brings to light issues relevant to a theorization of folk cinema that avoids the essentializing narratives often present in these concepts. Folklore and the folk are not necessarily left-wing or liberatory concepts, instead they feed into right-wing discourses that appropriate folklore instead of celebrating it. Therefore, my theorization of folk cinema will be intimately aware of this side of folklore's potential. I will situate my theorization of folk cinema in an awareness of folk cinema's connections to folklore's difficult past, in order to combat the tensions present in folklore. This process will allow me to develop a notion of folk cinema that has the potential to challenge the more essentializing constructions of folklore in order to reassert communities' role as the center of these practices.

Reimagining Folklore

In the later half of the twentieth century, older conceptions of folklore and the folk persisted in Folk Studies, while at the same time, other folklorists pushed towards more progressive understandings. During this period, some folklorists entered subversive territory in order to develop new theorizations of folklore and the folk, while other folklorists chose to stick with more traditional conceptions of the area of study that emphasized the classic notions of folklore as traditional and orally transmitted. For example, in 1968, folklorist Jan Brunvad provided a more traditional formulation of folklore, first describing what he views as the three

main modes of folklore: verbal folklore, partially verbal folklore, and non-verbal folklore (3). Then, while acknowledging the difficulty of precise definitions he lists five main qualities of folklore: "(1) it is oral; (2) it is traditional; (3) it exists in different versions; (4) it is usually anonymous; (5) it tends to be formalized" (Brunvard 4). While Brunvad's writing on folklore acknowledges the difficulties in definitions and the multiplicities in understandings, his conception of folklore is still rooted in more conventional approaches to the field. On the other hand, folklorist Alan Dundes provides an example of the more progressive direction other folklorists took, with his 1980 proposed definition of the folk as "any group of people whatsoever who share one common characteristic" (6). This understanding of the folk radically departs from the common idea that the folk are somehow opposed to elites and conceives of the folk as a grouping that is inclusive to all social strata. Moreover, the expansiveness of Dundes definition of the folk combats the essentializing, cultural nationalistic tendencies present in more conversation theorizations of the folk.

Similarly to Dundes' subversive reimagining of the folk, in 1972, folklorist Dan Ben-Amos' conception of folklore offered a comparably radical departure from the field's conventions. He rejects folklore's characteristics as traditional and orally transmitted, and describes folklore as a communicative process instead of a collection of things (Ben-Amos 9), stating his definition as "folklore is artistic communication in small groups" (Ben-Amos 13). Ben-Amos acknowledges that folklore can escape the confines of these small groups and reach divergent audiences, but he reiterates folklore's origins in small groups by stating that though it may reach disconnected global audiences, "folklore is true to its nature when it takes place

within the group itself" (13). Ben-Amos additionally proposes in this discussion of folklore his key idea of community recreation. Community recreation captures folklore's collective and collaborative nature while recognizing that singular community members often create a piece of folklore to begin with. Community recreation therefore outlines the processes by which pieces of folklore are reworked and adapted by the community after their initial creation in a collaborative process of recreation (Ben-Amos 7).

The recent trend towards more progressive and open understandings of the folk and folklore bring valuable insight to the project of folk cinema. Tradition is a troublesome concept. At what point will time have aged something like cinema enough for it to be considered traditional? In the grand scheme of human history, every medium of expression was at one time new and contemporary, so the line between the traditional and modern appears a convenient but temporally frivolous divide that overemphasizes the positionality of the observer and deemphasises the dynamic nature of human culture. Additionally, the oral character of folklore proves to be just as difficult of a concept. As modes of communication develop and change, folk art forms become less exclusively aligned with oral transmission, as folkloric practices can be communicated in other ways, such as through social media.

Ben-Amos provides key insight into these difficulties of prescribing oral transmission to folklore. He states that folklorists hold on so dearly to the idea of oral transmission because it allows them to more easily distinguish the object of their study from related fields. He states that oral transmission does not help to define folklore and instead serves as just "a qualifying statement about the form of circulation" (Ben-Amos 9). Removing the traditional and oral

character from definitions of folklore opens up the topic to explorations that are able to deal with the constant element of change present in societies and communities, even in supposedly less traditional or folkloric mediums. Furthermore, looking at folklore as “artistic communication within small groups” (Ben-Amos 13) unleashes folklore’s potential to capture the expressive and creative ways that we communicate amongst each other. For cinema, something that seems very alien in character to many older folk art forms, I view this type of framing as an essential part of unraveling the potential possibilities of folk cinema. By drawing on a more inclusive understanding of folklore, cinema can be put in dialogue with the whole of a community's folkloric practices and utilized to facilitate new avenues of community creative expression. I want this dialogue to produce a conversation where cinema can be not just a medium to transmit pre-existing folklore, but rather a folk practice in and of itself.

However, conventional approaches to folklore and the folk still contain relevant perspectives in regards to how I want to approach folk cinema as a theoretical concept. Like Dundes’ definition of the folk, Ben-Amos’ approach to small groups is inclusive to elites that are almost always ostracized from most commonly held notions of the folk and folklore. Because newer formulations of folklore and the folk choose to not distinguish the concepts’ differentiation from the culture of the elites, I do not want to abandon altogether more traditional understandings of folklore and the folk, as they can provide insight that these more recent understandings lack. For example, folklorist Richard Dorson defines the field of Folk Studies as “concerned with the study of traditional culture, or the unofficial culture, or the folk culture, as opposed to the elite culture, ... to learn about the mass of mankind overlooked by the

conventional disciplines" (Dorson 117). I want to highlight Dorson's attempt to distinguish folk culture from elite culture. Folk has a literal meaning of "people" (Williams 92), and retaining this element of the folk and folklore is important for my conversation about folk cinema. The difference between the "people" and the "folk" as groupings are arbitrary and they are often be used interchangeably. The main difference between these terms is that folk is a more charged word that carries with it the baggage of the folk as the Western, nearby pre-industrial other. I see cinema's historic and contemporary domination by elites as mandating theorizations of folk cinema that acknowledge the role of the folk, meaning the people, as the creators and the recreators of folk art forms. Without this acknowledgement, my theorization of folk cinema can never imagine cinema becoming an inclusive medium that truly allows for creative expression and communication within and by communities.

Moreover, a fundamental distinction I want to develop is the difference between the folk and the popular. This divide connects to the notion of the folk as distinct from the elites. While popular also denotes a relation to the people, this signification comes with a very different connotation than folk's association with the people. Typical ideas of the popular align it with modernity, universal appeal, and an ecosystem of mass media that is arbitrated by an elite capitalist class. On the other hand, folk recalls the traditional and the nostalgic, evoking ways of life and practices that center local communities. Cinema, in its role as mass media, appears as the torchbearer of popular culture, often a direct contrast to common conceptions of the folk and folklore. However, this divide possesses a fluidity that is important to explore. Theorists Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel in their book, *The Popular Arts,* comment on the dichotomy between

folk and the popular and describe how folk art forms slowly transformed themselves into popular arts, using the music hall as an example of a transitional form between folk and popular art forms (Hall and Whannel 56). Due to cinema's association with the popular, I believe folk cinema motivates the idea that if folk culture could transition to popular culture, the opposite can be true as well. I view folk cinema as a project that seeks to reclaim the cinematic medium from the elites and push a form of cinema that is not just made for the people, but by them as well. Furthermore, my conception of cinema calls for rethinking our role as spectators. Under the project of folk cinema, a movie theater becomes not just a disjointed collection of strangers, but it becomes a shared community space, where groups can rethink and transform a film they watch, through a form of community recreation that asserts the film belonging and importance in the community's folklore and discourses.

My theorization of folk cinema will not rely on a singular perspective on folklore and the folk, and instead will draw on these varied theoretical perspectives on folklore that I have described in order to address folk cinema in a manner that accounts for the complexities of folklore as a concept. My discussion of folk cinema is not attempting to affirm any singular perspective, rather I will use varied academic perspectives as well as colloquially held notions of folklore and the folk to orient my theorization of folk cinema. I will create a theorization of folk cinema that positions it as subversive to the notions of folklore as explicitly orally transmitted and traditional, while also affirming the ability of folklore to contain the stories and narratives of the unofficial culture. I conceive of folk cinema as drawing very explicitly on the progressive idea of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (Ben-Amos 13), yet I also will use folk

cinema as a way to arbitrate and dissect the more traditional conceptions of folklore including the problematic origins of the concept. My theorization will ultimately lead to perspectives on folk cinema that can provoke new ideas not just about folklore but about cinema itself as well.

The Specificity of Cinema as a Medium

Cinema as a highly technological medium distinguishes itself from many existing folk art forms that rely significantly less on technology. Cinema possesses a high level of inaccessibility as a medium, due to the expense and difficulty of acquiring both the technology as well as the related technical knowledge necessary for filmmaking. The advent of formats like VHS and digital video have not significantly lowered the barrier of entry into cinema. Rather, they have just constructed a divide between video and cinema, where cinema is a delicate and sophisticated artform while video stands apart as a lower and less refined medium. Other artforms like the visual arts or music do not have terminology that so explicitly separates professional productions from all the rest, making the divide present between cinema and video a unique part of the cinematic medium. Because of this, I view using the word “cinema” in the term “folk cinema” as vital for developing the moving picture as a folk art form. I want to assert community filmmaking as a practice that can destroy the divide between video and cinema. Folk cinema allows the reimagining of cinema’s limits, and therefore plays a key role in the process of closing the gap between video and cinema and reasserting the cinematic value of previously dismissed video-making traditions.

Additionally, cinema distinguishes itself from other folk mediums due to its technological character; it is an art form that is technologically reproduced. This idea was first proposed by

theorist Walter Benjamin in his 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." Benjamin states in this essay that early works of art were produced to serve ritualistic purposes and that these ritualistic functions persisted even as the rituals in question became more secular. These ritualistic purposes of art are heavily intertwined with what Benjamin refers to as art work's aura (Benjamin 330). An artwork's aura is rooted in its uniqueness and authenticity (Benjamin 329). However, the advent of technological reproduction destroys the unique and authentic quality of artwork produced via these means. Consequently, these artworks lose their aura and therefore free themselves from their traditional ritualistic role (Benjamin 331). Benjamin's evaluation of cinema is therefore one that conceives of cinema as distinctly separate from art's typical ritualistic role. Cinema demonstrates the new social function of art after the advent of technological reproduction, where art no longer plays an interpersonal, ritualistic role that has the potential to bring communities closer together, and instead exists as a universal medium detached from ritualistic practices.

I want to intervene in this interpretation and consider the possibility that cinema can regain a ritualistic quality. While I agree that most cinema possesses the qualities that Benjamin attributes to it, I view folk cinema as a potential disruption to this paradigm. Folk cinema could allow cinema to regain a ritualistic character, if the film is viewed not as a physical, technologically reproduced object, but rather a site of performance, where each projection creates a unique moment of engagement that cannot be reproduced through mechanical means. This dynamic reaserts the movie theater as a community space, and holds the projection of film as part of ritual action intertwined with a community's folklore. While it is impossible to give to

cinema the exact same ritualistic role that non-technological reproduced art possessed, reframing the cinematic medium to emphasize the moment of projection instead of the physical (or digital) object of the film reel allows the imagaining of a new, and distinct ritualistic role cinema could obtain through practices that align it with a community's folkloric practices, that put an emphasis on the performative nature of film exhibition. This change in framing could make the moment of exhibition a site of community recreation, where spectators can reshape the meaning and significance of a given film.

Existing Literature on Folk Cinema

Folk cinema is not an idea that is well developed within either Folk Studies or Film Studies literature. With Film Studies, the term "folk cinema" has appeared a few times in scholarly writing, but it is almost always an off-hand reference, suggesting the possibility of folk cinema and encouraging further investigation, but failing to develop or theorize the topic (Boutet and Gélina 1984, Kent 1988, Perkins 1992). While Film Studies does frequently address amateur filmmaking, I want to distinguish folk cinema from such an area. While amateur filmmaking is defined by who creates it, folklore, and therefore folk cinema, encompasses much more than just that. Moreover, I want to acknowledge that especially historically, cinema had a very high technological barrier of entry. Many of the filmmakers that I will utilize to develop my theorization of folk cinema have some level of professional experience in the field, which is expected due to the technical skill often needed for filmmaking projects. However, instead of viewing these creators' professional experiences as alienating them from their communities, I want to reposition them as craftspeople. In terms of folklore, craftspeople of a community may

be highly skilled or trained in a specific community practice or tradition, but that knowledge does not separate them from other community members, rather it allows them to better act as facilitators and contributors to their communities' folklore.

To further expand my conception of folk cinema, I wish to contrast folk cinema from what I will refer to as two related but distinct categories of cinema: ethnographic cinema and folkloric cinema. Unlike folk cinema, both folkloric cinema and ethnographic cinema have been discussed much more extensively in the literature (Heider 1976, Sherman 1998, Sherman and Koven 2007, Towfique-E-Elahi 2013). While ethnographic filmmaking is a more developed and concrete term referring to the practice of using film as a tool for ethnographic fieldwork, folkloric cinema is a term I have conceived to refer to the many films that represent folklore but are not necessarily folk works in and of themselves. These films are often narrative and commercial, but their representations of folklore formulate their audience at a national instead of international scale. While both ethnographic filmmaking that documents folklore and folkloric cinema can represent folk practices, the aim of folk cinema is not just the representation of existing folklore. I instead view folk cinema as folk practice in and of itself, one that belongs to its community. Folk cinema does not need to participate in any sort of documentation, as the film itself is a folkloric document. Especially considering that many ethnographic films are made by outsiders and for outsiders, folk cinema would appear in stark contrast given its more integrated status within a community.

Folkloric films are distinguished from folk cinema in similar ways; like ethnographic cinema, folkloric cinema is not necessarily a part of a community's folklore. Due to folkloric

film's status as commercial projects seeking wide audiences, folkloric representation in these films can lean towards appropriation and essentializing narratives furthered by outsiders instead of community-led storytelling and expression. With these types of representations, I argue that folkloric films can easily forward cultural nationalistic ideas as they work to artificially construct the imagined communities that are nations. Now, folk cinema does not by any means forbid representations of folk practices, but I argue that representation alone does not qualify a film as folklore. Rather, a folk cinema would need to fulfill Ben-Amos idea of folklore as "artistic communication within small groups"(11), and go beyond just documentation of existing practices to instead be a site of artistic expression and community recreation.

An exception to the general lack of interest within Film Studies in regards to folk cinema is the recent work of film theorist Jamie Chambers. Chambers has contributed various articles discussing folk cinema and he proposes this definition of folk cinema in his 2023 article "Towards a Folk Cinema": "a positive definition of a Folk Cinema premised upon four, interlinked attributes: revisionist representation, ethnographic verisimilitude, collective perspective and the translation of traditional cultural forms"(2). Chambers does not explicitly say in his definition that folk cinema is the manifestation of cinema as a folk art. He instead connects folk cinema to topics such as ethnography and the cinematic representation of traditional culture. Chambers' exploration of folk cinema focuses on Scottish filmmaking traditions that he is involved in, but also constructs a "speculative global canon of Folk Cinema" through an overview of films from across the globe (Chambers 3). Furthermore, he investigates the tensions present in folk as a concept, especially when applied to cinema, by unraveling the tension

between the global and the local present in folk cinema. He additionally describes the "irresolvable tensions" a folk cinema would face as "the axis between leftist, anti-imperial politics and ethnography … can be loosely mapped in parallel with a fraught axis of self and other; of emic perspective (that which is located within a community) and etic perspective (that which is located outside a community, looking in)" (Chambers 4). Chambers identifies here a principal tension within folk cinema – the difference between filmmaking projects arising from within a community and filmmaking projects initiated by outsiders. He concludes that despite the problematics of a folk cinema that he has identified "ultimately, the fundamental notion of a Folk Cinema – that subaltern experience be represented in filmic discourses – is compelling, no matter how problematic" (Chambers 18). Chambers' work to both propose folk cinema and describe the tensions present in the term, such as the conflict between filmmaking projects started by community members or lead by outsiders, is a crucial contribution of Chamber's project, which like mine, seeks to be "useful to leftist discourses" (7).

However, while Chambers' contributions to the discourse around folk cinema are significant, especially as so far he is the only scholar to thoroughly explore folk cinema, is a sentiment that motivates my own discussion of folk cinema, my approach differs from Chambers as I am not interested in a folk cinema that as Chambers states possess "folk concepts," (3) but rather I theorize a cinema that is in and of itself folklore. Moreso, unlike Chambers, I am not interested in defining folk cinema as my project of folk cinema is an on-going one where it would be premature to explicitly define it. I will also more explicitly draw on existing scholarly work from Folk Studies on folklore and the folk than Chambers, an addition which I think is a

necessary step forward for folk cinema as a concept. Chambers calls for a "corresponding critical engagement from film scholars" when he notes that already Scottish filmmakers like himself and others are working with folk concepts in their filmmaking, and I aim for my theorization of folk cinema to provide the next step towards this critical scholarly engagement with the topic, as I believe that even if folk cinema may have yet to truly come to fruition, glimpses of folk cinema are everywhere, and that combined with the revolutionary potential of the project necessitates urgent engagement by scholars.

Towards a Theorization of Folk Cinema

My theorization of folk cinema will serve as an intervention that seeks to motivate deeper discussion of the potential of cinema as a medium of folk expression. While amateur filmmaking, ethnographic cinema, and folkloric cinema are established lines of investigation within Film Studies, folk cinema itself is very underdeveloped. Moreover, though Chambers has begun a discussion in this area, folk cinema is still significantly under-explored as a concept and requires much more investigation. I want my participation in this dialogue to distinguish itself by taking an approach that is less interested in folk concepts in cinema and constructing definitions. Instead, I situate my approach within the existing dialogues of folklore in order to use folk cinema as a rhetorical device in film historical readings in order to produce a theorization of folk cinema that takes into account the messiness of folklore's history and origin story. While it is tempting to use my theorization to untangle folk cinema into a neat definition or to find concrete existing examples, I view these two avenues as unhelpful as I see folk cinema as a project that has yet to fully come to being. Defining something that has yet to exist feels overly prescriptive

and closes off avenues of discourse that I want to leave open and let flourish. Moreover, though many existing films approach folk cinema, given the relative newness of cinema as a medium and the underdeveloped nature of folk cinema, arguing for any explicit film to be folk cinema distracts from the actual aim of my theorization, which is to imagine the possibilities and potentials of folk cinema.

Though I want to avoid proposing any strict understanding of folk cinema, I still want to position discussions of folk cinema within some general notions of the topic. These should not be seen as strict parameters or definite characteristics but rather malleable ideas that can provoke deeper exploration into the possibilities of a folk cinema. For example, a folk cinema would not exist as an isolated artistic practice, but rather as a fully incorporated part of a community's larger traditions of folklore. It would not just be a medium to represent other folklore practices, but rather itself be folklore. In a similar vein, even if a folk cinema would not be traditional or alternative in the usual sense associated with folklore, folk cinema centers forms of community-centered expression that are oppositional to the typical cinematic conventions of the film industry. Folk films would also likely be created by active participants in a community's folklore instead of outside observers and utilize collective filmmaking techniques and film exhibition as ways to harness the power of community recreation. Folk cinema would be hybrid and dynamic, a continually developing project that takes into account the varied and changing nature of culture and tradition. Finally, folk cinema could challenge the arbitration of cinema by elites, allowing everyday people to appropriate the medium of cinema as a new avenue of "creative expression within small groups" (Ben-Amos 9) and a place of community expression.

In the following pages, I will draw on these general ideas about folk cinema to theorize a conception of it that challenges the boundaries of both folklore and cinema. I will utilize a diverse collection of case studies, beginning with an exploration of the Spanish abstract film *Aguaespejo Granadino*, before moving into analysis of the films of Third Cinema filmmaking collective the Ukamau Practice, and then ending with my own participation in diary filmmaking practices. I will develop my theorizations of folk cinema through communities of various sizes — the nation in the case of the films of Grupo Ukamau, the region in regards to *Aguaespejo Granadino,* and finally the individual family unit when it comes to my own work within diary filmmaking. This approach will let me explore the tensions present in folk cinema no matter the size of the "small group" in question. *Aguaespejo Granadino* will allow me to develop folk cinma's connections to the essentializing side of folklore and further develop my analysis of folk cinema's ritualistic role through studying how the film connects with notions of regional identity in southern Spain. The films of the Ukamau Group will let me reframe these tensions present in folk cinema to comprise the entirety of a nation, as I interrogate my theorization of folk cinema through exploring the difficulties faced by the mostly mestizo filmmaking group as they attempted to make politically motivated films in collaboration with Bolivian indigenous peoples. Finally, my last case study will allow me to analyze a filmmaking practice that challenges the traditional notion of daily life as uncinematic and investigates home movies and videos. The bulk of this chapter will be my own participation within diary filmmaking practices informed by work by diary filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas and Jonathan Caouette. Due to the participatory nature of folklore, I see my own participation as a key step in my theorization of folk cinema.

Importantly, my selection of these three case studies and the films I explore within them as well as the one I create, does not mean I consider these films to be proper folk cinema. In fact, I think it would be impossible to lay such a claim and I instead intend to use these works to inform future notions of folk cinema, even if they themselves are distinct from it. My project is based around film history, but utilizing folk cinema rhetorically instead of applying it as a label. The culmination of my theorization will not be any decisive understanding of folk cinema, rather I intend to further open up this discussion by positing the powerful and transformative potentialities of folk film, both for folklore and cinema, as well as for the communities that could utilize it.

Chapter One:

Aguaespejo Granadino: Abstract Cinema as Community-Centered Artistic Expression

José Val del Omar was a ground-breaking experimental filmmaker from Spain whose filmmaking has been unfortunately relegated to the national cinema of Spain, instead of gaining recognition at the international level. *Aguaespejo Granadino* is one of his most striking films, made between 1953 and 1955. The 23-minute film is an abstract exploration of Val del Omar's hometown of Granada, Spain. It was shot on 35mm black and white film, with a segment tinted green. I discovered this film for the first time when I was studying in Granada, Spain. I was immediately struck by Val del Omar's unique and provocative style. Months later when I began my investigation of folk cinema, I returned to the film as its exploration of Granada possessed a quality to it that seemed to approach folklore. The film's intertwinement of water, stone, and life with images of the city's Arab past and evocative portrayals of Granada's gitano community speaks to specific localized experience of Granada as a city. Moreso, I was curious to explore the potential of abstraction for folk cinema, considering abstraction is associated with experimental filmmaking practices that are often perceived as inaccessible and cloistered from the people.

My study of *Aguaespejo Granadino* will analyze the film's relationship to the idea of folk cinema by combining analysis of the film with an investigation of the film's influence. I am particularly interested in how the film abandons the much more conventional documentary as

well as narrative forms, and in doing so, communicates messaging in ways beyond traditional narrative plot and documentary-style representation. Additionally, I will draw upon understandings of Spanish orientalist narratives and the aesthetic theories of Federico García Lorca and Walter Benjamin to further nuance and develop my discussion of how *Aguaespejo Granadino* can motivate understandings of folk cinema. I want to acknowledge before I go deeper into my exploration of the film, that because I am not from Granada nor am I part of the gitano community, my readings of this film and their connections to the local communities will be limited by my lack of personal experience.

José Val del Omar

José Val del Omar (1904-1982), the director of *Aguaespejo Granadino,* was a Spanish filmmaker from Granada, in Andalusia, a region of the south of Spain. He spent the majority of his adult life in Madrid and worked as a filmmaker and inventor of film technologies through various periods of Spanish history: the monarchy, the Second Spanish Republic, the dictatorship, and near the very end of his life, the transition to democracy. As a young man in 1925, he directed what appears to be his only feature film, *En un Rincón de Andalucía.* This film apparently featured non-professional actors, and combined narrative and documentary techniques. Similar to *Aguaespejo Granadino,* the film focused on the gitano community. However, this film is lost as Val del Omar destroyed it due to his dissatisfaction with the film (Gubern 13). Later, during the Second Spanish Republic, a period of democracy that lasted from 1932 till the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Val del Omar participated in the pedagogical missions of the Second Spanish Republic. Pedagogical missions were an effort by the Second

Spanish Republic to bring “modern” art and culture to isolated parts of rural Spain. These missions also served as an opportunity for urbanites working on these missions to learn more about the day-to-day life of the Spanish countryside (Gubren 21). Val del Omar would participate in the film division of these missions, serving as a camera operator, film projectionist, and photographer (Gubren 23). During this period he would make more than 40 documentary films, though almost all of these films are now lost (Gubren 25). One of the few surviving films of this period of Val del Omar’s life, *Vibración de Granada* (1935)’s thematic focus on Granada foreshadows the subject matter of Val del Omar’s later work on Granada, *Aguaespejo Granadino*, though stylistically the montage of *Vibración de Granada* is much more conventional than *Aguaespjo Granadino*’s more experimental montage techniques.

During and after the Spanish Civil War, Val del Omar, unlike many other Spanish intellectuals and artists, stayed in Spain and worked as filmmaker and an inventor. Val del Omar would experience the full extent of Fascist control of Spain, from when the forces of Francisco Franco triumphed in 1939 till Franco’s death in 1975. Val del Omar produced much of his most prominent work during this period, under the careful watch of Francoist censorship. This work includes Val del Omar’s most well-known project, the *Tríptico Elemental de España,* which during Val del Omar’s own lifetime gained little prominence, but after his death would become much more well known. The *Tríptico Elemental de España* is a series of three short abstract films that each highlight a different natural element in a different region of Spain. The first film in the series, *Aguaespejo Granadino* (1953-1954) explores water in Granada, while *Fuego En Castilla* (1958-1960) and *Acarino Galaico* (1961-1982, 1995) explore fire in Castilla, and earth

in Galicia respectively. *Acarino Galaico* would be finished posthumously by filmmaker Javier Codesal in 1995, as Val del Omar was unable to finish the film in his lifetime.

Besides working as a filmmaker, Val del Omar was a prolific inventor of film technologies and techniques. Some of the more well-known inventions used in his filmmaking are *sonido diafonico*, an early version of surround sound, *desbordamiento apanorámico de la imagen,* a technique where the film projection would escape the screen to be projected on the walls of the theater, and finally *vision tactile,* a system of pulsating lights used to enhance the viewing experience. All of these techniques would be utilized in his triptych, with *Aguaespeijo Granadino* implementing his *sonido diafonico* (Losada 105). Interestingly, all of these inventions are techniques that directly affect the experience of the spectator, demonstrating Val del Omar's interest in film exhibition and how it is experienced. Due to Val del Omar's work as an inventor he is often referred to as a "cinemista," meaning filmmaker-alchemist (Gubren 15). Despite Val del Omar prolific accomplishments during this period, his work would be shadowed by the dictatorship and his complicated relationship with the regime. For example, though he helped to develop loudspeaker technologies for the Francoist regime, his later writings show that he regretted this collaboration (Losada 104).

My analysis of *Aguaespejo Granadino* differs from typical analyses of Val del Omar's work that focus more exclusively on the mystical or experimental qualities of the filmmaker's work (De Lucas and Pintor Iranzo 2017, Ansa Goicoechea 2016). This intervention takes into account *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s intense and underappreciated meditation on land and place. Moreover, my analysis will emphasize the folkloric qualities of the film in order to utilize

Aguaespejo Granadino in my theorization of folk cinema. I will not explicitly argue that *Aguaespejo Granadino* is folk cinema, instead I will leverage the film to explore some of folk cinema's prospects. Particularly, my exploration of *Aguaespejo Granadino* will reveal folk cinema's potential to create places of dialogue and community expression, its ability to navigate essentializing narratives like orientalism, and folk cinema's possible ritualistic role as a part of larger folklore traditions. My choice of *Aguaespejo Granadino* over other films in the triptych, which could also be useful for exploring folk cinema, comes from Val del Omar's own background. Unlike the subjects of the other films in the triptych, Castilla and Galicia, Val del Omar was born in Granada and knew the city very well. He would return to the city throughout his filmmaking, making his cinematic explorations of Granada particularly interesting as Val del Omar possessed a profound connection to Granada as a city, a community, and a site of folklore.

Water, Life, Stone

Aguaespejo Granadino communicates the interplay between water, life, and stone in the city of Granada. From the very initial parts of the film, *Aguaespejo Granadino* expresses the connections between life and water. The film starts with an establishing shot of the Alhambra, a famous Arab palace complex located in Granada. Then, the film shows koi fish in water, before a shot of a lillypad. Water's entanglement with life in Granada is the immediate impact of the film's first moments. Beyond this interplay between water and life, *Aguaespejo Granadino* returns consistently to the contrast between water and life with stone. An image found throughout the film are fountains that are at times in the shape of human statues. The still stone of the fountains contrasts with the dynamic flow of water that the statues are constructed to

guide. This flow of water returns frequently in the film, and its cascading current evokes the movement of a reel of film. Like the film reel that preserves the story of *Aguaespejo Granadino*, the flowing of water captures and records the sensation of the city in its movement and circulation through the fountains, aqueducts, and rivers of Granada. This conversation between water, life, and stone, is situated not in a universal context, but rather specific to the city. Through the film, Val del Omar frames his montage of the city with landscapes and shots of the iconic Alhambra, similar to Val del Omar's previous film *Vibración de Granada*. The interplay he develops between water-life-stone is one that is location dependent, rooted in a sense of history that the film displays at both the human scale in regards to the imagery of the Alhambra, and at a geological scale in relation to many shots depicting the curvature of the mountains surrounding the city.

While experimental films are often viewed as disconnected from average people and popular styles of filmmaking, the abstract form of *Aguaespejo Granadino* in fact allows the film to escape the constraints of narrative form to match the rhythm of existing local folklore. *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s secondary title is *La Gran Siguiriya.* The word *Siguiriya* is the name of a flamenco *palo* (category of flamenco song). While the rhythm and movement of music and dance feels distinct from narrative styles of filmmaking, by turning towards abstraction, *Aguaespejo Granadino* can better evoke the cadence of flamenco music and dance, thereby situating the film in conversation with these forms of folk art that are so prevalent in Granada. Moreover, narrative filmmaking traditions arriving from Hollywood feel like imports, associated with global filmmaking instead of local traditions. I argue that the film takes on a similar cultural

role as the folkloric function of flamenco, serving as an expressive and artistic form of communication amongst a community.

In fact, Val del Omar himself describes the aim of *Aguaespejo Granadino* as "contagiar conciencia del baile de nuestra vida: la Gran Seguiriya de las ciegas criaturas que se apoyan en el suelo" (qtd. in Llano 114).[1] " Las ciegas criaturas que se apoyan en el suelo" refers to a repeated refrain found throughout the film. Though to a degree these blind creatures refer to all of us (Llano 14), in the most specific sense these creatures are the intended spectators of the film, the people of Granada. The dialogue over water, stone, and life form new discourses about the city that speak specifically to their experiences. Part of the power of *Aguaespejo Granadino* is that the intended spectators are exactly "las ciegas criaturas que se apoyan en el suelo" that are portrayed in the film. Unlike the majority of cinemas that the spectators of *Aguaespejo Granadino* would have seen, *Aguaespejo Granadino* is a film about the spectator and made for the spectator. The film gives the viewers the unique opportunity to watch themselves on the screen. Moreover, stating that these creatures, and in turn the spectators, are blind, instills the film with a paradoxical energy. While at one level this points to the film serving to open up the eyes of the spectators, at the same time, the blindness of the spectators points to a more radical reading: the spectators of *Aguaespejo Granadino* are blind, yet through perhaps their proximity to the films' contents, they can "see" the film nonetheless.

To say that the *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s audience is the people of Granada is not to say that *Aguaespejo Granadino* cannot be enjoyed by people who lack the local context for the film,

[1] Translation: "Infect the consciousness of the dance of our lives: the great *seguiriya* of the creatures that lie on the ground." All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

rather it means that Aguaespejo Granadino, similar to folklore, speaks most directly to the local situation it comes from. In fact, many of the images' communicative powers rely on the spectator's ability to recognize them. For example, there is a scene early in the film where a man walks out of a cave (figure 1). For those familiar with Granada, the man is immediately recognizable as gitano and the cave he exits is recognizable as one of the caves in the historically gitano neighborhood of Sacromonte. Additionally, the spectator would also recognize that the naturalism of the cave marks it as different from most of the cave homes that the spectator familiar with Granada would recognize. Therefore the scene of the man exiting the cave takes on a new layer of meaning, where the man exiting the cave comes to serve as a marker of the film's willingness to depart from reality in its exploration of Granada. This departure serves to assert that the Granada of Aguaespejo Granadino is not documented or represented, rather it is a construction. The constructed city, freed from the bounds of reality, serves as a site of community dialogue, exploring the dynamics of the city in a place where the spectators can engage with the film outside the confines of reality. Moreover, this dynamic in Aguaespejo Granadino reiterates the sense that a folk cinema is distinct from a documentary practice of filmmaking. Folkloric artistic communication may contain portrayals of life and the world around it, but its search for community dialogue through artistic expression estranges it from reality and therefore traditional documentary filmmaking.

Directly after the shot where the man exits the cave, there is a brief scene depicting a woman clapping next to a toddler who is dancing in a style typical of Flamenco. The voice-over

states “bailan sin saber porque.”[2] This scene and the film's other references to flamenco practices in the film serve not to document or represent Flamenco, but rather to position *Aguaespejo Granadino* as operating in the same way that Flamenco does. What unites these two distinct mediums, flamenco and films like *Aguaespejo Granadino,* is their choice of creativity as their avenue of expression to their community. However, this scene, specifically the narration, also might be essentializing as it associates flamenco dancing as a natural part of gitano identity. Readings such as these complicate understandings of *Aguaespejo Granadino* as the film walks a fine line between essentializing and non- essentializing portrayals of the gitano people that are at the heart of the film. These portrayals relate to Val del Omar’s long term interest in displaying Spain as a place of intersections. In fact, in Val del Omar’s 1935 manifesto about cinema, “Manifiesto de la Asociación Creyentes del Cinema,” Val del Omar states “Porque creo en los valores, energías y virtudes de todo desarrollo de abajo arriba y de dentro a fuera, en una tierra que es triple vértice de continentes y de coincidencias fronterizas entre Oriente y Occidente” (Val del Omar 73).[3] This sentiment is abundantly clear in *Aguaespejo Granadino* as Granada exists in the film as an intersection between the east and the west. However, this subject matter causes *Aguaespejo Granadino* to operate outside but also within the essentializing narratives of Spanish orientalism. This dynamic appears also in folklore at large, as the cultural nationalist narratives of folklore mixed with folklore’s liberatory potential cause folk cultural productions to exist within but also outside of cultural nationalism.

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[2] Translation: “Dance without knowing why.”
[3] Translation: “Because I believe in the values, the energies, and the virtues of all the development from top to bottom and inside out in a land that is the triple vertex of continents and the coincidences of the borders between the West and the East.”

Orientalist Narratives

At the first level of analysis, *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s portrayals of gitanos as associated with nature appear to essentialize them and play into common stereotypes. Moreso, their representation alongside so many images of the Alhambra in the film materializes an understanding of gitanos as the "oriental" other that came to replace the Arab populations after the Spanish monarchy expelled them in 1492 (García Guerrero 74). Spanish orientalism proves a distinct case from other European nations – Edward Said himself acknowledged the limits of his theories in regards to Spain, as Said's theory of orientalism relies on a clear division between the West and the Orient where the West dominates (Martin-Márquez 8). In the case of Spain, this theory struggles as Spain plays the role both as the oriental other as well as the orientalizer due to its status as borderlands (Martin-Márquez 9). Despite the difficulties of directly applying the theories of Said's orientalism to Spain, orientalist discourses provide a particularly poignant, even if complicated, perspective on Spanish society and films like *Aguaespejo Granadino* that seek to portray Spain as a borderland. Moreover, understanding Spanish orientalism reveals that *Aguaespejo Granadino* in fact counters the narratives that at first glance the film seems to embrace.

These orientalizing and essentialist narratives that *Aguaespejo Granadino* must navigate in its portrayals are part of an extended source of conflict in Spain. In the late 19th century and early years of the 20th century, the Western world associated Spain with Andalusia. European tourists as well as the Spanish themselves perpetrated this view through orientalized portrayals of

bullfighting, flamenco, and the gitano people (Vengas 68). This gitano and Andalusian character of Spain oscillated between being despised and embraced by the Spanish. As the orientalized aspect of Andalusians' representations caused Andalusians to be viewed as closer to the stereotyped European understandings of Persians, Egyptians or Indians than other Euroepans, anti-Andalusian nationalists sought to align Spain further with Europe by purging its Andalusian character (Vengas 35). In reaction to this sentiment, Andalusians campaigned against the degradation in various ways. For example, Andalusian poet Juan Ramón Jimenz fought against ideas like alhambrismo. Alhambrismo is the heavy association of Andalusia with its Arab past. Jimenz tried to instead assert a universalized version of Andalusia freed from exoticized representations present in alhambrismo (Vengas 75). On the other hand, Andalusian poet Federeico García Lorca went in the opposite direction and constructed representations of Andalusia that embraced what anti-Andalusian nationalists had decried as lower and less European forms of culture. While the imagined quality of García Lorca's representations could point to a form of self-exoctizing, these representations should be understood as direct reactions to the degradement of Andalusian culture, and not attempts at historically accurate representations, as García Lorca was still concerned with avoiding a "false Andalusian vision" (Vengas 84-85).

After the Spanish Civil War, Franco's regime stepped in to arbitrate the orientalized view of Spain. The Andalusian history of political resistance during the civil war was obscured after the war in a period that embraced Andalusian folklore as part of the national image of Spain (Vengas 96). During this era in the 1940s, Spain was embroiled in economic problems, and films

called Españoladas or Andaluzada flourished as a way to distract people from the austerity of Franco's regime. These narrative feature films featured peppy and orientalized appropriations of Andalusian folklore (Vengas 98), and serve as an example of folkloric cinema: cinema that represents folklore but is not itself folklore. The representations of gitano people in this era were conflicted, and academic José Luis Vengas describes the dynamic perpetrated during this period as "exoticized gypsies eternally wander a symbolic no-man's land between 'like us' and 'not like us.' At once despised outlaws and national emblems, they play out the country's ambiguous status as simultaneously orientalized and orientalizing" (100). As Spain's economy improved in the 1950s orientalist representations of Andalusia persisted, but transformed from tools of nationalist nation building to become drivers of tourism that sought to distinguish Spain from the rest of Europe. In the latter period of Franco's regime in the mid 1960s, censorship decreased and portrayals of Andalusian culture finally turned away from appropriation. Andalusians began to reclaim their folklore to form identities that associated regional ethnic identity with leftist ideas of class consciousness (Vengas 98).

Tracing the history of Spanish orientalism reveals a narrative that has many commonalities with the origins of folklore. Appropriation of Andalusian folklore during the 1940s serves to further the same cultural nationalist vision that early folklorists pursued, as folklore developed under the purview of romantic nationalism and the influence of the burgeoning capitalist economic system (Abrahams 3). Romantic nationalism and the changing class dynamics would transform perceptions of agrarian people and create the "folk." Antiquarians saw these newly created "folk" as possessing popular knowledge and practices that

in their mind allowed them to represent the local and national character of a place (Abrahams 4). This utilization of folklore furthered an essentialist understanding of culture that reduced varied and diverse cultural practices and productions into symbols for burgeoning nation states, such as Franco's fascist Spain. The positioning of folklore in representations such as Españoladas displays the problematic aspects of folklore as not necessarily vanguardist artistic expression of the people, but also possessing an origin and potential that is littered with nationalism and appropriation. In the case of folk cinema, it is particularly relevant to assert folk cinema in opposition to such appropriated and essentialist representations like what is found in Españoladas, in order to create an understanding of folk cinema that furthers a progressive conception of folklore where communities can have ownership over their own culture.

Deeper readings demonstrate that the film *Aguaespejo Granadino* counters the narratives of Spanish orientalism under Franco's regime, and demonstrates the potential for a cinema that diverges from the practices of folkloric cinema in order to make a cinema that approaches integration into a community's folklore. While at times *Aguaespejo Granadino* still skates close to essentializing portrayals, the film's portrayal of Granada diverges radically from the orientalist discourses of the time. The film produces a deep contrast in the depth of its portrayals to the superficial representations of Andalusian culture found in the Españoladas. *Aguaespejo Granadino* also foreshadows the left-wing Andalusian reappraisal of Andalusian culture, utilizing abstract cinematic language to express ideas that were not yet outwardly acceptable. Moreover, *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s reflects the work of earlier creatives like García Lorca, who embraced the Andalusian culture that Spanish nationalists vilified. However, just as García

Lorca's work arguably struggled with self-exocitizng despite attempts to the contrary, *Aguaespejo Granadino* finds itself in a similar situation. Especially in the context of Franco's regime where Andalusian cultural heritage was consistently essentialized and appropriated to serve a nationalist mission, problems quickly arise of how to re-appropriate and rehabilitate that cultural heritage without participating in the same process of essentialism that appropriated the cultural heritage in the first place. As much of this culture forms part of Andalusian identity, untangling what portrayals essentialize Andalusia and especially the marginalized gitano identity, proves difficult. This is especially difficult as spectators often bring their own orientalist gaze to the film. To return to the scene of the toddler dancing, flamenco is a part of gitano folklore and cultural identity, so while this scene can be read as essentializing, it also asserts ownership over an aspect of gitano culture that is often appropriated. The same parts of culture and folklore that are often essentialized remain key parts of identity, meaning that even if a complete reappropriation or rehabilitation of this folklore may not be a project that can ever be totally completed, in it lies importance and relevance. Therefore when creative cultural productions like *Aguaespejo Granadino* come from within a community and parallel folk practices, they can resist the outside essentializing gaze in order to create portrayals that celebrate instead of essentialize cultural practices.

Aguaespejo Granadino's editing challenges and resists orientalist portrayals and therefore demonstrates the role of artistic practices in reasserting community ownership over appropriated folklore. Academic Isaac García Guerrero provides a reading of how the film combats orientalist narratives in his essay "Materialidad histórica como subversión en Aguaespejo granadino de José

Val del Omar." He argues that though *Aguaespejo Granadino* possesses aspects that at surface level evoke orientalism, Val del Omar uses montage and "la plástica de las imágenes" to deconstruct these narratives, particularly the spectators own stereotyped understandings of Granada (García Guerrero 43). Guerro provides various examples of Val del Omar's attempts to subvert the stereotyped understandings of gitano people. For example, in the film there are various black and white shots of gitana women. Two back to back shots have the camera rotate around the heads of two women. Later on, another shot shows an oscillating close-up of a gitana woman's face. The effect of these intense closeups is to provoke the spectator to question their views of gitanos and challenge the orientalizing and essentializing portrayals of gitano people that other them. Furthermore, in the night section of the film which is tinted to a mystical green color, shots of gitanos are covered in water, eliciting the idea of escape to another dimension through the water, where perhaps essentialized understandings of gitanos don't reign (García Guerrero 85). The introspection that the film provokes is not necessarily targeted towards outsiders. Considering Spain's internal conflict over orientalist narratives as well as the biases towards gitanos common in Spain, *Aguaespejo Granadino* chooses to dissect orientalist narratives exactly to stimulate introspection amongst people from Granada. Therefore, the film attempts to provoke a type of community dialogue, operating with keen awareness of the discourses at play amongst the people of Granada.

García Guerrero continues his argument about the subversive content of *Aguaespejo Granadino* to assert that the more mystical aspects of *Aguaespejo Granadino* contain a radical element. The hermitage of San Miguel del Alto appears various times in the film, at one point

covered in clouds. This hermitage is above the traditionally gitano neighborhood of Sacromonte, and the cloudy and therefore obscured depiction of the hermitage puts its role as a hierarchical religious protector of the gitano people of the neighborhood in question. Furthermore, in this same sequence, a shot shows the crucifixion of a man on an unconventional cross. The cross is a Carlist cross, demonstrating the strong association of Francoism with Catholicism (García Guerrero 90). The crucifixion refers to the violent political oppression in Granada directly after the civil war by Catholic Francoist forces (García Guerrero 89). The unorthodox cross puts the viewer at unease, especially because of the viewpoint from behind. Moreover, directly after this shot of crucifixion, which takes place at the foot of Sacromonte in a place called Jesus del Valle, a shot shows a gitana woman nursing her infant. This shot's warmth and love contrast with the brutal unease of the crucifixion (García Guerrero 90). The effect of all these images is to question the absolute authority of religion, particularly in Sacromonte, and assert the existence of a spirituality beyond the confines of the catholic church, one that instead directly belongs to the people of Andalusia, in this case especially the marginalized gitano people of Sacromonte (García Guerrero 91). This assertion emphasizes the power of the unofficial culture of the people, their folklore in all of its manifestations, as opposed to the culture of outside institutions as exemplified by the Catholic church. The liberatory nature of this reading is a bold contrast to the Catholic hegemony of Franco's regime, and demonstrates the ability for *Aguaespejo Granadino* to breakthrough through the nationalist narratives that perpetuate an essentializing and orientalizing gaze onto Andalusia and the gitano people.

Aguaespejo Granadino's portrayals of gitano people are marked by an intensity that separates these portrayals from more essentializing representations. The images, often functioning like portraits, are consistently striking. They work to contextualize the dialogue of water-stone-life as one that is rooted in the people of Granada and one the seeks a mystical integration of all forms of life, even stone with water. One of the more powerful shots of gitano people in the film, is a shot of three figures that comes near the start of the film (figure 2). In this shot, a young man stands in profile in the right half of the frame looking leftward, while a young woman, looking past the spectator, stands in the left of the frame, holding an infant whose gaze is towards the ground. In contrast to the images including moving water, the people in this shot have a feeling of permanence from their stillness and belonging. They look beyond the spectator, thereby demoting the spectator's gaze and acknowledging its inaccuracy and lack of knowledge. This level of intensity the figures possess distinguishes the portrayal as much more than just essentialization, rather the gitano people in film are displayed with a sense of humanity and complexity that conquers the spectators' likely essentialized understanding of gitano people.

To a degree, *Aguaespejo Granadino* may never be able to reach a full re-appropriation of the cultural heritage it represents even if it can come very close to it. Arguably, considering the film's position in a society dominated by essentializing orientalism, that is not a realistic goal. Val del Omar, unlike many other Spanish creatives, stayed and produced his most well known works like A*guaespejo Granadino* under the careful watch of fascists censorship and control. Val del Omar's level of collaboration with the regime is one shared by many people living under Franco's rule, but that does not discount the fact that his films, even if they are radical, were

allowed to exist because their content was deemed as sufficiently non-threatening to the ideological control of the dictatorship. Even if the *Aguaespejo Granadino* avoids the orientalism present in Españoladas and posits a transgressive image of Andalusian identify, like García Lorca's poetry about Andalusia and gitanos, analyzing these works carefully will still reveal traces of orientalism. However, these traces demonstrate the strength of the narratives that the works fought to counter, and do not discredit *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s much more substantive subversive elements.

Dunede and Cinema as Ritual

I want to now further my analysis of *Aguaespejo Granadino* opposition to exclusively institutionalized religion and spirituality by analyzing its mystical and trance-like qualities through the lens of duende. This exploration will allow me to understand how folk cinema can further philosophical and aesthetic concepts specific to local communities that otherwise would be marginalized from the screen. Duende is a folk-aesthetic concept that poet Fredrico García Lorca developed in his 1933 essay "Juego y Teoría del Duende." The word duende in Spanish refers to a type of humanoid creature reminiscent of the English-language concept of leprechauns, gnomes, or goblins. García Lorca uses this term as an aesthetic concept applying to art that he has observed within Andalusia. García Lorca explains the sensation of duende by quoting a man describing it as "poder misterioso que todos sienten y ningún filósofo explica" (García Lorca 150).[4] García Lorca further elaborates that duende is "un poder y no un obrar, es un

[4] Translation: "mysterious power that everyone feels and no philosopher explains"

luchar y no un pensar"[5] and that it is "el espíritu de la Tierra" (García Lorca 151).[6] In the traditional understanding of duende, the term applies to the dark and mysterious power elicited by certain performers, notably in Flamenco performance but also in other performance-based artistic traditions. While duende in the aesthetic sense does not directly refer to the folklore creatures the term also describes, the experience of duende does evoke a sense of magic and power arising from something beyond the human, as if a duende had possessed the performer to allow them to elicit the sensation of duende that the audience experiences through watching their performance.

Applying this idea of duende to film appears difficult as film is not typically viewed as a performance-based artform. However, the unique qualities of films like *Aguaespejo Granadino* point to the possibility of duende in film. While viewing *Aguaespejo Granadino* does not involve performance in the traditional sense, during exhibition of the film, the movie camera and the power of editing elicit a performative quality from the images they transform. The film is able to evoke a powerful mystery and darkness that could be called nothing else besides duende, especially when the film is exhibited in a small group setting of spectators familiar with the concept. This quality of duende is not often found in film, and the duende of *Aguaespejo Granadino* serves to illustrate the capacity of folk cinema to create new cinematic experiences through drawing on other folk practices and traditions. The project of folk cinema imagines a cinema that prioritizes local aesthetic practices that otherwise would not be present in such a globalized medium like cinema. Moreover, viewing *Aguaespejo Granadino* through the

[5] Translation: "a power and not a work, it's a fight and not a thought"
[6] Translation: "the spirit of the Earth"

folk-aesthetic concept of duende allows the boundary between cinema and the performative arts to become a malleable site of exploration instead of a stringent divide.

Duende as an aesthetic concept contrasts with the more well-known philosophical concept of the sublime. To a degree, duende has many similarities with the notions of the sublime. Like the sublime, duende as a descriptor describes aesthetic experiences that fall outside of beauty. Immanuel Kant, one of the most influential theorists of the sublime, describes the sublime as "that…which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses" in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (134). He distinguishes the sublime into a mathematical sublime "that is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small" (Kant 2000, 134) and a dynamic sublime found in nature that "elevate[s] the strength of our soul above its usual level … which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature" (Kant 2000, 145). While the dark, mysterious power of duende may seem similar to the "absolute great" of the mathematical sublime or "all-powerfulness" dynamic sublime, what sharply divides duende from the sublime is that even though it is "el espíritu de la Tierra," duende derives itself from the merging of human performance with the non-human element of the duende, while Kant's sublime arises from Enlightenment thinking where the human and nonhuman nature are strictly separate. In this regard, duende is an important theoretical challenge to the sublime. It describes experiences that while offering tinges of sublimity, differentiate themselves from notions of the sublime due to their human element.

Moreover, duende offers an example of the power of local experiences and folklore to foster unique and culturally-specific intellectual explorations. While García Lorca's derivation of duende seeks no universal aims and instead focuses its theorization explicitly on the Andalusian character of duende, Kant's theorization of the sublime looks for universal standards of aesthetics that in retrospect feel reductive and simplistic. Kant and his book *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* writes about Spain's aesthetic character, but his appraisal was just a quick dismissal of Spain's scientific and artistic accomplishments in order to assert Spain as a primarily sublime nation (Kant 1991, 98). The universality of the sublime is appealing, but used incorrectly, it can take on a reductive character, and moreso, lack the specificity of insight that more local theories can have. In the case of Andalusian folklore, it feels particularly well-suited to turn to ideas like duende that are uniquely tailored to the task and moreover allow important aesthetic ideas to flourish that have been unfairly disregarded in the name of universality.

The element of duende in Val del Omar's cinematography has been identified previously by scholar Rafeal Llano in their book *Imagen Duende: García Lorca Y Val del Omar.* Throughout his writing, Val del Omar references the idea of duende (Llano 80). More so, in regards to *Aguaespejo Granadino* Val del Omar describes his aim in his 1935 manifesto as "hacer un cinema que mire hacia dios al encuadrar y perseguir la mágica" (Val del Omar).[7] Val del Omar's intentions with his filmmaking were arguably informed by the sense of duende present in the folkloric traditions of Granada. Returning to the alternative title of the film, *La Gran Seguiriya*, seguiriya is part of cante jondo, a genre of flamenco whose depth of feeling is

[7] Translation: "create a cinema that looks towards framing god and pursues magic."

highly associated with the idea of duende. Llano provides an insightful reading of the subject matter of *Aguaespejo Granadino* and its duende by asserting that *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s subject is not water itself rather "su apariencia, duende o fantasma audio y visualmente condicionados por las técnicas valdeomarianas de grabación" (114).[8] The film functions as a cultural object, akin to folklore, where the water acts as a performer and "se aviva y empiza a cantar" (Llano 115).[9] During the transition to night, the shots of water are one of many instances where *Aguaespejo Granadino* constructs water as possessing duende. Water shoots into the air, but then it fades in and out of focus, revealing a large fountain in the background. Finally the water appears again clearly in focus, but this time in a choppy slow motion (figure 3). Throughout this sequence, the sound of water is distorted with often high-pitched interference and a barely audible voiceover (figure 3). The distorted audio and the slow motion contorts the water to create an intensity that emphasizes water's motion and frenetic energy by capturing it in momentary stillness. Water may not be a human performer, but the performance of editing, audio, and cinematography and the fluidity of water that mirrors the film reel transforms the film as a whole into a performer that has duende in a similar way to how human performers possess duende. Importantly, this element of performance comes through during the exhibition of the film, when spectators are able to sense the duende as it is created in the theater.

Beyond water, the portrayal of humanity in *Aguaespejo Granadino* also manages to elicit a unique and intense sense of duende. An example of a scene in the film that has particular

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[8] Translation: "its appearance, duende or phantom audio and the visual conditions for valdeomarian filming."
[9] Translation: " intensifies and begins to sing"

success expressing duende through portrayals of people is a scene at the very end that features a young girl. Over the sound of wind and a voiceover saying "amor, que ciegas, estando tú tan abierto,"[10] a wide eyed and open-mouthed shot of a girl appears (figure 4). Then, a brief and slightly distorted shot shows a man looking down with his eyes closed. On the words "estando tú," he opens his eyes. Then, we see another shot of the girl, a shot of a man, before a time-lapse shot of a forest where the clouds quickly move through the sky. The voice-over finishes and the clouds disappear from the sky. There is one more shot of the wide-eyed girl, before the last shot of the film, which is a repeat of the time-lapse of the forest. There is an inexplicable sense of mystery in this sequence – a dark and foreboding power driven not just from the wide eyed and open-mouthed shot of the young girl, but also derived from the intense confrontation with what is implied to be her land. Moreover, the distorted shot of the man who has downcast eyes evokes a presence and intensity that feels ghostly. The intensity of this sequence exhibits a dark and inexplicable spirit of the land that haunts *Aguaespejo Granadino.* The duende present in this sequence puts the film in conversation with the large body of performative folklore in Granada that similarly play with duende.

Furthermore, the element of duende in the film positions *Aguaespejo Granadino* as fulfilling a ritualistic role. This aspect of the film is very radical in its departure from the typical role of cinema. Benjamin states that since cinema is technologically reproduced, it lacks aura and does not have a traditional ritualistic role. Benjamin's evaluation of cinema is therefore one that is separated, in fact, he states liberated, from the typical artistic role as ritualistic material. I want

[10] Translation: "love, how blind, you being so open"

to intervene in this interpretation and posit a counter-reading proposing that cinema might regain its ritualistic role. By removing ritual, cinema becomes a more universal art form, but in turn it loses the power that ritualistic art can have in communities. Rituals, which often contain elements of folklore, draw communities together. And, the specificity of rituals have a communicative power that universalized practices do not. Cinema may have freed itself from ritual, but as part of cinema's path towards a truly liberatory potential, cinema may need to take on a ritualistic role.

It seems difficult to give cinema a ritualistic role, as the technological production inherent to the medium appears to have purged cinema from any hints of a religious and traditional cultural role. But, films like *Aguaespejo Granadino* demonstrate that cinema can elicit a specificity of place and people that aligns it with other forms of folklore that play the ritualistic artistic role that Benjamin identifies. However, what truly separates *Aguaespejo Granadino* from most technologically reproduced art and asserts its ritualistic role is its evocation of duende. This duende functions to construct an aura around the film when it is shown in a small-group setting. Even if *Aguaespejo Granadino* as a physical and now digital object can be reproduced endlessly, watching the film brings forth a trance like state. For the brief period of the film's projection, a duende appears to possess the room, and this "duende" may have been technologically born, but it cannot be technologically reproduced. It, like non-technologically reproduced object's aura, is specific and unique. Even if *Aguaespejo Granadino* can be shown a million times, the duende of a specific projection marks that viewing as a unique and non-technological reproducible object in and of itself. This lack of technological reproducibility reasserts the film's aura and allows it to

take up a ritualistic role. Therefore, imbuing cinema with ritualistic roles requires making the moment of projection much more central to the medium.

Legacies of Aguaespejo Granadino and Val del Omar

Though Val del Omar was not very well known in his lifetime, in the years and decades after his death, a small but vibrant body of artistic work has built upon the filmography of Val del Omar. Examples of works that take inspiration from Val del Omar's filmmaking and approach folk cinema in a similar way originate primarily in Val del Omar's hometown of Granada, however some of the creations reworking Val del Omar's work came from Spanish artists further afield. Much of the work to trace Val del Omar's legacy has been done by Carmen Rubia Morena in their Master's thesis *El Legado de José Val del Omar: Influencia en el Siglo XXI.* They trace the legacy of Val del Omar from the initial archival work of his daughter and son-in-law to early academic works on Val del Omar and finally to creative projects inspired or related to Val del Omar. Of these creative projects, Morena identifies examples of music, cinema, and new media inspired by Val del Omar. The cinematic works are diverse; some are documentaries, others are more experimental and some projects primarily involve the reworking and re-editing of Val del Omar's own film. Often, even the more musical projects are of interest cinematically as they often incorporate aspects of Val del Omar's filmmaking in their visuals.

This legacy of Val del Omar directly evokes his own aims with his filmmaking; each of the films in the triptych end with the phrase *sin fin,* signifying the unfinished nature of his films as well as the continuous nature of his cinematic projects.Val del Omar's commitment to *sin fin* demonstrates his interest in allowing his films to exist in a never ending project of recreation and

reimagining. This commitment can be found fairly directly in the triptych, as the last film in the series, *Acariño Galaico*, was in fact finished posthumously. The idea of *sin fin* can be also found in the 2004 film *Tira tu Reloj al Agua (Variaciones sobre una cinegrafía intuida de José Val del Omar)* directed by Barcelona-born filmmaker Eugeni Bonet. The film edits Super8 footage shot in Granada by Val del Omar to create a new but Valdelomarian exploration of Granada (figure 5). *Tira tu reloj al agua* has a distinctly folkloric quality because it chooses to "repreform" the cinema of Val del Omar. Folklore, in many cases, is distinguished from other art forms by capacity for repreformance (Ben-Amos 5). Dances are danced by generations of different dancers, stories are retold by innumerable storytellers, songs sung and strummed by countless musicians of a given community. Therefore, even though many folk creations are not necessarily community created and may have one main craftsperson attributed to their creation, they are communally recreated (Ben-Amos 7).

Consequently, cinema appears distinct from these folkloric practices of reperformance and recreation, as even if scenes in films may reference scenes or shots from other movies, mainstream cinema is rarely reperformed or community recreated in the way that folklore is. However, the legacy of Val del Omar presents a counterpoint where cinema starts to approach this quality of folklore. While Val del Omar served as the main craftsman for his projects, the reperformance and recreation of his films in cases like *Acariño Galaico* and *Tira tu reloj al agua* demonstrate a folkloric aspect of his works even if the production of his films may have been small-scale enough that they were less collective. This element of reperformance and recreation found in Val del Omar's work develops the possibility for folk cinema to allow community

contributions and re-workings in a way that is quite unique compared to mainstream cinematic production. Folk cinema therefore becomes a project that is nestled within existing folkloric practices and techniques, integrating itself with traditions of collective creative practices centered on community-recreation.

Figure 1-1. A still from "Lagartija Nick x Val del Omar." Lagartija Nick performing in front of a clip from *Aguaespejo Granadino*.

Another example of the reperformance and recreation of Val del Omar's work, particularly *Aguaespejo Granadino,* lies within Granada's music scene with the rock band Lagartija Nick. In 1998, Lagartija Nick produced an album entitled *Val del Omar.* Lagartija Nick previously worked with Granadian Flamenco singer Enrique Morente to create the album *Omega,* which combined Flamenco with rock. Their album *Val del Omar* draws significantly less upon Flamenco music, but still demonstrates the group's commitment to traditions of artistic expression in Granada. Beyond the songs themselves which reference Val del Omar's work with titles such as "Sin Fin" and "Vision-Tactile," when Lagartija Nick preformed this album, they would project a montage of clips from Val del Omar's filmography, including excerpts from *Aguaespejo Granadino* (figure 6). Lagartija Nick's performances of *Val del Omar* are not just references, rather the montage and synched musical performance substantially draw upon yet

transform Val del Omar's cinematography to allow Lagartija Nick's performance to function as a reperformance of films such as *Aguaespejo Granadino.* Lagartija Nick's reperformance enforces *Aguaespejo Granadino's* place in a larger communal artistic discourse of Granada, where dialogues over the city and its community can take place through art. *Aguaespejo Granadino* was not a film that captured or spoke to just one specific time in Granada's history, rather the film lends itself to folkloric-style repreformances such as Lagartija Nick's that reestablish and develop the film's meaning and cultural significance for subsequent generations. This development of new signification via reperformance is a quality that could allow folk cinematic works to take on a dynamic nature as they are constantly developed via the participatory act of reperformance. In the case of Lagartija Nick and *Aguaespejo Granadino,* creating montages of the film to the soundtrack of contemporary musical performance allows *Aguaespejo Granadino* to escape the temporal constraints of its original production and allows the film's commentary on the city of Granada to apply to contemporary times. Furthermore, the fact that Lagartija Nick's performance is not something that would normally be considered cinema further demonstrates that theorizing folk cinema reveals the possibilities of a cinema that challenges the boundaries of the medium.

Beyond just reperformance, *Aguaespejo Granadino* has served as a source of inspiration for filmmaking in Granada. Much of this work comes in the forms of music videos. These include films that explicitly reference *Aguaespejo Granadino* as well as films that may not demonstrate direct influence from *Aguaespejo Granadino* but function in similar ways, using cinema as a form of expression amongst their community. The fact that many of the films that are similar to *Aguaespejo Granadino* are music videos suggest that music videos, as forms of

cinematic expression that are both uniquely accessible to make and to watch, might possess a distinct potential for folk cinema. Moreover, in terms of the abstraction so characteristic of *Aguaespejo Granadino* and Val del Omar, music videos are one of the few cinematic forms where abstraction is commonly used and accepted by audiences. Music videos also push the limits of cinema; the word video frames music videos as distinct and lesser productions in comparison to cinema.

Figure 1-2. A still from "La Plazuela - Parao frente a la muerte." La Plazuela performing in flamenco cave.

Turning to a specific example, the music video *Parao enfrente de la muerte* is one example of the influence of *Aguaespejo Granadino*. This 2020 six-minute music video by flamenco-fusion group La Plazuela was made for the song *Parao enfrente de la muerte* from their self-produced EP *Yunque, Clavos y Arcayatas*. The video, which was made by Colectivo Myopia, contains three minutes of montage that draws fairly directly on *Aguaespejo Granadino.* The second half of the music video contains the performance of the song in a flamenco cave interspersed with a woman dancing at the beach, a continuation from the montage of the video's first half. *Parao enfrente de la muerte* expands the discourse started by *Aguaespejo Granadino.* While Lagartija Nick's reperformance of the film contextualizes *Aguaespejo Granadino* into a

new time period, *Parao enfrente de la muerte* takes it one step further and expands upon *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s dialogues on water, life, and stone.

Key to *Parao enfrente de la muerte* expansion of *Aguaespejo Granadino* discourses on water stone and life is the use of montage to intertwine the stillness of stone and the motion of water with both present and past life in Granada. This commentary expands on *Aguaespejo Granadino* investigation of these themes as *Parao enfrente de la muerte's* montage contrasts past and present Granada, interspersing archival footage with contemporary footage using split screens. In one shot, a tri-split screen shows a shot of contemporary tourists between two archival shots of children doing flamenco style dance. *Parao enfrente de la muerte* represents Granada as a changed city, but one where the past is ever-present. In the music video, this contrast between past and present is threaded together by the continued relevance of the interplay with water and stone. Throughout the video, imagery of water and stone is reminiscent of the portrayals in *Aguaespejo Granadino.* In many ways, *Parao enfrente de la muerte*'s frequent use of archival footage with contemporary footage avoids the essentializing narratives that *Aguaespejo Granadino* at times flirts with. The effect of the varied imagery of people in Granada results in a depiction of life that emphasizes Granada's cultural heritage while also acknowledging the city's diversity. In one particularly interesting split-screen shot, a fountain dominates the center of the screen with surrounding shots of crowds. This depiction centers the city's connection with the flow of water and the stillness of stone, while also asserting the varied human element of the city.

Furthermore, La Plazuela utilizes the imagery in *Parao enfrente de la muerte* to affirm their role in a larger tradition of folk art in Granada. As a flamenco-fusion group, La Plazeula

struggles to find its place within a folk tradition, as flamenco has historically been resistant to change. Already, by performing in a flamenco cave (figure 7), they establish their own music as possessing the same folkloric character as flamenco. Moreso, by engaging with *Aguaespejo Granadino*'s discourses, La Plazuela further illuminates their connection to Granada's artistic traditions and their own legitimacy. And, this use of *Aguaespejo Granadino* has the effect of further cementing *Aguaespejo Granadino* role as a site of community recreation and expression. In the music video, the cinematic language used manages to both assert Plazuela's role within a folk tradition while also challenging the constraints and boundaries of that folk tradition. One example of this is simply the contextualization of *Aguaespejo Granadino* as something equally traditional to that of a flamenco cave in the video. Additionally, the modern style of dance found in the video provides another contrast as its intensity and movement asserts itself as compatible with the expressive cultural nature of flamenco, despite its modern character, In the second to last shot of the video, the dancer is submerged in water, demonstrating how contemporary artistic practices in Granada become submerged within the same water that represents Granada's tradition and heritage, but in way that embraces hybridity instead of essentialism, through signaling water as a source of fluidity and dynamism for the city. *Parao enfrente de la muerte* serves as an example of folk cinema's potential to mediate cultural discourses in ways that are rooted in community traditions and practices.

Though many films take explicit influence from *Aguaespejo Granadino*, other works connect to *Aguaespejo Granadino* not via direct influence, but rather as fellow participants in a continuum of cinematic community expression in Granada. Take for example the music video by

Granadian musician artist Dellafuente, *Sanuk Sabai Saduak*. This 2022 music video made by Studio Bandiz does not feature Dellafuente at all, which is typical for many of his music videos. Instead, the music video, depicts the day to day life of people in Granada. Even though Dellafuente has become a mainstream and well-known Spanish rapper, he refers to his own music as "música folklórica atemporal,"[11] clearly delineating his interest in existing within a larger tradition of folk art, and his videos appear to participate in a similar aim. Dellafuente, like La Plazuela, seeks to redefine notions of folklore. As a major musical artist, Dellafuente seems more attuned to the popular than any notion of the folk. Yet, he decides to resist this distinction and challenges the typical boundaries of the folk and popular by asserting his music's status as folklore. This resistance continues in his music videos, which demonstrate the possibility for folk cinemas not just to serve as tools for contemporaneous and modern community expression, but also avenues to push the boundaries and constraints of folklore.

Though *Sanuk Sabai Saduak* is a music video for an urban track, the video diverges from genre conventions and features a young family living in a cave in the Sacromonte in Granada. The video does not have an overarching narrative, rather it includes various moments of their life together in a cave. Although very stylistically distinct from *Aguaespejo Granadino, Sanuk Sabai Saduak* shares a common concern for the day to day life of the more marginalized people of Granada, bringing an intensity and beauty to those portrayals. The family, composed of a young couple and an infant (figure 8), are similar to the gitano family portrayed in a shot of *Aguaespejo Granadino.* This similarity is likely just coincidental, however it shows that *Aguaespejo*

[11] Translation: "atemporal folk music"

Granadino and *Sanuk Sabai Saduak* share some of the same overarching concerns. They both seek to express cinematic images of Granada as a city that speak specifically to the life of people who live there. Furthermore, the scene at the end of *Sanuk Sabai Saduak* portrays pouring water over the head of the baby. This reference alludes most obviously to baptism, but the interaction between life and water additionally invokes the discourses of *Aguaespejo Granadino* on this topic. Granada is a city situated at the foothills of towering mountains where rivers filled with snowmelt weave through intricate systems of Arab aqueducts. Human life and everyday experience are shadowed by the fluid motion of water, and even brief representations of this exchange such as in *Sanuk Sabai Saduak* demonstrate the relevancy of *Aguaespejo Granadino* and the potential for folk cinema to explore highly localized experiences such as these. Moreover, situating these folk expressions within a contemporary and often dismissed musical genre like trap, reasserts folklore's role as the artistic expression of living and often marginalized communities.

In his manifesto, Val del Omar describes his intentions: "Porque el documento del proceso biológico emotivamente segmentado por el poeta, constituye la coacción menos dañosa, la influencia más apetecible, cuando se trata de sembrar una sana conciencia en el pueblo" (Val del Omar 73).[12] Val del Omar's aims with cinema have always been based on engagement and communication with the people. Analyzing *Aguaespejo Granadino* and influence makes that intention very clear and also demonstrates filmmaking success in speaking and communicating to

[12] Translation: "Because the result of the poet movingly segmenting the process of life forms the least harmful pressure and most appealing influence when trying to seed a healthy conscience within the people."

specific communities, such as the people of his hometown of Granada. While I do not wish to explicitly name A*guaespejo Granadino* as folklore, it approaches folklore in a way that is very revealing for imagining the potentials of folk cinema. It shows how cinema can become a local tool for communication and demonstrates the possibility of cinema working in conversation with larger traditions of folklore, and even to serve as an arbitrator in debates over topics such as essentialism and orientalism. Moreso, *Aguaespejo Granadino* through its use of duende demonstrates the potential for folk cinema to return cinema to its ritualistic role, and thereby foster a cinema that forms a part of a community's folkloric rituals and traditions. *Aguaespejo Granadino* helps only to scratch the surface of folk cinema's potentials, but it still helps theorize an understanding of folk cinema where it can play an unique and innovative role pushing forward not just understandings of folklore, but at times cinema as well.

Chapter Two:

The Ukamau Group: A Cinema Closer to the People?

Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa writes at the end of his 1969 manifesto entitled "For an Imperfect Cinema," "El futuro será, sin duda, del folklore. Pero, entonces, ya no habrá necesidad de llamarlo así porque nada ni nadie podrá volver a paralizar el espíritu creador del pueblo. El arte no va a desaparecer en la nada. Va a desaparecer en el todo" (García Espinosa 13).[13][14] García Espinosa was a director and screenwriter who played an integral role in post-revolution Cuban cinema and the larger movement of Third Cinema. His manifesto provides a compelling and radical argument for an imperfect cinema. Though García Espinosa only mentions folklore near the very end of this, I believe this discussion is especially poignant for my project of theorizing folk cinema. While ideas of folklore can become buried under layers of history, debate, and rivaling definitions, I find conceptions of folklore like this one the most inspiring. García Espinosa posits folklore as the ubiquitous but marginalized unofficial culture: the art and stories of the people. His intertwining of folklore with his understanding of imperfect cinema establishes the role of film and folklore within the revolutionary context; the overthrow of

[13] Translation: "The future will be, without a doubt, of folklore. But then, there will no longer be any need to call it that because nothing and nobody will be able to return and paralyze the creative spirit of the people."

[14] I use the Spanish translation to preserve Espinosa's utilization of the word folklore. The English translation by Julianne Burton-Carvajal chooses to translate this English loanword to folk arts instead of keeping the original term Espinosa uses.

capitalism disrupts the regime of the "official" culture and lets the unofficial culture, folklore, flourish. Folklore is revolutionary in all of its forms, from storytelling to even cinema.

The following part of my argument will utilize the movement of Third Cinema as an inspiration for my larger theorization of folk cinema. Specifically, I will use the filmmaking of the Bolivian production company the Ukamau Group as a case study in a cinema that chooses to diverge from mainstream cinematic practices in order to develop a tradition of filmmaking that futhers revolutionary projects. While the Ukamau Group is by no means the only group within Third Cinema that can inform my theorization of folk cinema, I have chosen to focus on their filmmaking as I believe their success, and more importantly, their struggles, form a particularly informative and nuanced case study on the process of developing a cinema outside of mainstream institutions. While the Ukamau Group aimed to create a "cine junto al pueblo,"[15] the conflicts between the largely mestizo filmmakers of the Ukamau Group and the indigenous people that they worked with demonstrate the complexities of creating a cinema that is truly collaborative. In what follows, I will bring into conversation the Ukamau Group with my theorization of folk cinema. I will illustrate how the collective and localized filmmaking practices of the Ukamau Group's revolutionary cinema can inform my understanding folk cinema, while at the same time my readings will take advantage of the tensions inherent to concepts of folklore and the folk to produce readings of the films and writings of the Ukamau Group that acknowledge the complexity of the Ukamau Group's relationship with their indigenous collaborators. I ultimately show that the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group demonstrates the need for folk cinema to be an

[15] Translation: "A cinema with the people"

on-going project. I will develop this analysis of the Ukamau Group by contrasting the Ukamau Group's film *Yawar Mallku* (1969) with the subsequent film *El Coraje del Pueblo* (1971), as well as drawing on the writing of the Ukamau Group.

I want to emphasize that my argument does not claim the films of the Ukamau Group as folk cinema. My analysis instead strives to learn from the filmmaking traditions of Third Cinema and utilize the framing of folk cinema to develop new readings of these films. Not only is identifying films as folk cinema outside of the scope of my project, but the baggage folk and folklore carry makes it problematic to claim films like those of the Ukamau Group as "folk." Folk and folklore are areas that indigenous people have historically been denied access to through exclusionary understandings of who the folk can be. Additionally, folk as an adjective is often used to debase cultural productions and practices, as "lesser" than so-called "higher" arts. Therefore, my analysis of the films of the Ukamau Group will be careful to avoid naming any of these films as folk cinema. My theoretical approach to folk cinema is future-facing, imagining its potentials without defining the past. In this manner, my analysis of the Ukamau Group will diverge from typical film history techniques, as I am not interested in classifying or labeling them, and rather want to see how they can inform the future project of folk cinema.

I also want to acknowledge my perspective as a non-indigenous person working from the imperial core. Just as the Ukamau Group had to deal with their own positionality as mostly urban mestizo filmmakers working within rural indigenous communities, I also come at this topic with life experiences and backgrounds that distance me from it. As a white person from the neocolonial power of the United States of America whose ancestors came to North America as

part of a project of colonization and indigenous genocide advanced by Western Euorpean powers, my lived experiences are detached from both that of the Bolivian mestizos as well as the indigenious peoples of the Andes. This positionality will by nature limit the level at which I can engage with the topics, and I therefore view the readings of the Ukamau Group that I will propose as constrained by my lack of personal experiences with the topics I address.

Third Cinema and the Ukamau Group

Third Cinema was a filmmaking movement that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. While Third Cinema appeared throughout the global south, the movement was especially prominent in Latin America. Filmmakers working in countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, and Cuba advanced a form of cinema that had explicitly socialist political aims. In the words of Argentinian Third Cinema filmmaker Fernando Birri, their aim was "to create a new person, a new society, a new history and therefore a new art and a new cinema. Urgently" (211).[16] Third Cinema directly counters First Cinema, Hollywood filmmaking, as well as Second Cinema, European auteur filmmaking and art cinema. Filmmaking practices within Third Cinema are diverse and belong to a variety of sub-movements. For example, the Argentine Grupo Cine Liberación worked within the documentary form and produced political documentaries such as the famous *La Hora de Los Hornos* (1968), while Brazilian Cinema Novo filmmaker Glauber Rocha's films like *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964) and *Terra em Transe* (1967) were narrative features. On the other hand, Cuban filmmaker Sara Gomez, working directly after the Cuban revolution, combined both documentary and narrative techniques in her feature film *De*

[16] I quote the English translations of works if that is the version of the work that I came across.

Cierta Manera (1977). These varied films that together comprise Latin American Third Cinema came to be during a period where the process of industrialization and increasing cognizance of national identity in Latin America resulted in a euphoric feeling of imminent socialist revolution (Armes 88). The end of this period of filmmaking came as political coups in the 70s lead to political oppression and exile of the Third Cinema filmmakers. In exile, filmmakers whose focus was so explicitly on their own national context, struggled to continue their filmmaking practices, and in turn, Third Cinema as a movement began to decline (Armes 93).

Third Cinema filmmakers theorized their movement via a variety of manifestos and essays they wrote about their filmmaking practices. One of the most notable of these manifestos, besides García Espinosa's aforementioned "For an imperfect cinema," was "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World" by Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino of Grupo Cine Liberación. Describing Third Cinema, they write that it "recognises in that [anti-imperialist] struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point—in a word, the decolonisation of culture" (Solanas and Getino 233). This understanding of Third Cinema firmly situated the movement within a revolutionary political struggle concerned with neo-colonialism and anti-imperialism. And while Third Cinema filmmakers like Solanas and Getino would be explicitly clear about the politics of their filmmaking, Third Cinema filmmakers would avoid being prescriptive about questions of aesthetics. Instead, they outlined what

aesthetic practices were unhelpful to the project of Third Cinema, and left other routes open (Willemen 7).

Further on in their manifesto, Solanas and Getinos describe the role of the spectator in the Third Cinema, stating: "This person was no longer a spectator; on the contrary, from the moment he decided to attend the showing, from the moment he lined himself up on this side by taking risks and contributing his living experience to the meeting, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than those who appeared in the films" (Solanas and Getino 246). This conceptualization of the spectator outlines the moment of projection as a site of performance and a moment with transformative potential. Third Cinema in this manner creates places of community-centric discourse and expression, literal worlds away from First Cinema where spectators are dwarfed by huge screens and are demoted into passive observers of cinema that becomes austere and clinical in its aim for a universal viewing experience.

Like Solanas and Getino, García Espinosa also explored the spectator in his manifesto "For an Imperfect Cinema," in a way that is arguably even more explicit and radical. Writing from an already post-revolutionary context in Cuba, García Espinosa presents the possibility that future advancements in film technology will lead to not just to more people becoming filmmakers, but rather "la posibilidad de rescatar, sin complejos, ni sentimientos de culpa de ninguna clase, el verdadero sentido de la actividad artística" (2).[17] García Espinosa discusses the idea of cinema as an impartial, or uncommitted artistic practice — a cinema that is not labor, and returns to Marx, quoting "en el futuro ya no habrá pintores sino, cuando mucho, hombres, que,

[17] My translation "the possibility to rescue, without complexity nor feelings of blame towards any class, the true sense of artistic practice."

entre otras cosas, practiquen la pintura" (Marx qtd. in García Espinosa 4).[18] This impartially-practiced imperfect cinema that García Espinosa calls for can only come about through the destruction of elites (4). From there García Espinosa identifies the next step forward for this type of cinema as looking to see if the current conditions allow cinema to not just be the work of career filmmakers, but rather for "no en espectadores más activos, en coautores, sino en verdaderos autores." (García Espinosa 5).[19] García Espinosa's radical writing on spectators provokes a notion of cinema, where like folklore, the line between spectators and performers is not just blurred, but completely obliterated, as the artistic traditions at hand are practiced by the community at large, instead of elite practitioners separate from the people.

Grupo Ukamau was a filmmaking collective in Bolivia that was part of the larger Third Cinema movement along with García Espinosa, Solanas and Getino. While the Ukamau Group's filmmaking often took on a more narrative style than the work of the Grupo Cine Liberación and comes from a very different context, the Ukamau Group political and revolutionary commitments aligns with Solanas and Getino's proposals in "Towards a Third Cinema" as well as the ideas put forth by Espinonsa in "For an Imperfect Cinema," especially in regards to the Ukamau Group's aim to create a "un cine junto al pueblo." In the essay ""The Problems in Form and Content of Revolutionary Cinema" by Ukamau Group member Jorge Sanjínes, Sanjínes highlights cinema's revolutionary potential and describes the importance of collective, not individualist filmmaking practices that are integrated with communities (Sanjínes 288). Sanjínes describes that the

[18] My translation: "In the future there will no longer be painters, rather, men, who amongst other things, practice painting."
[19] My translation: "not just in more active spectators, but rather in co-authors, in true authors."

Ukamau Group took some time to develop filmmaking techniques that formed “un cine junto al pueblo.” Earlier films of the group such as the Ukamau’s group first film, *Ukamau* (1966), a 75-minute black and white film, as well as *Yawar Mallku* display cinematic techniques that were more European in style and were made with less direct collaboration from local indigenous groups (Sanjínes 288). Based on feedback from indigenous people, the Ukamau Group changed their filmmaking practices to be more collective and community-centric, as well as to move further away from the aesthetics of European cinema and towards artistic styles that were more situated within the traditions of the communities the Ukamau Group worked with. These changes in their filmmaking practices came to fruition in their subsequent film *El Coraje del Pueblo* (Sanjínes 289).

While much of the literature on the Ukamau Group emphasizes the role of Sanjínes and I will return to his writings later, I want to take the time now before I go forward with my analysis to be cognizant that the common conflation of Sanjínes with the Ukamau Group as a whole imposes notions of authorhood onto Sanjínes that goes against the collective cinematic practices that Sanjínes and the rest of the Ukamau Group sought to cultivate. Taking influence from feminist film scholar Isabel Seguí’s article “Beatriz Palacios: Ukamau’s Cornerstone (1974–2003)” that outlines the usually ignored but significant role of producer Beatriz Palacio in the Ukamau Group’s work, my approach to the Ukamau Group will avoid overstating Sanjínes role and instead highlight the collective effort of all the collaborators who worked on these projects. Considering that the Ukamau Group’s work was especially concerned with the production and distribution of their films, work done by producers like Beatriz Palacio, who

worked as a vital liaison with community groups as well as providing creative input on projects (Seguí 78), are as important if not more important to spotlight than the work of whoever ended up credited as the director. Moreover, I want to highlight the agency that actors and their performances have in creating meaning within films. This is especially relevant in the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group, as the Ukamau Group was mostly mestizo while the actors in their films were majority indigenous. Turning away from auteur theory gives spaces for readings that account for the agency indigenous actors express in their performances. For the project of folk cinema, this is especially relevant as drawing conclusions on collective filmmaking practices requires expanding notions of authorship to account for the ways in which communities both during production and later distribution and exhibition collectively produce meaning in films.

Revolutionary Politics, Indigenous Aesthetics

The films of the Ukamau Group form not just a cinema that embraced the medium's power as revolutionary tool, but also one that moved away from the aesthetics of First and Second cinema, in order to embrace a cinematic aesthetic specific to the Bolivian indigenous context. The films of the Ukamau Group are not universalizable – they speak to specific experiences and situations both on the level of messaging as well as on the level of aesthetics. Their filmmaking practices incorporate community members and localized aesthetic practices into their films through collaboration with communities that mirrors the folkloric idea of community re-creation. This process results in a type of film that communicates within the "small group" that forms the Bolivian nation. However, the Ukamau Group did not achieve a

cinema that integrated revolutionary politics with indigenous aesthetics right away. Instead, it took time for them to develop a type of filmmaking that was not just radical politically but also distinct in an aesthetic sense. While *Yawar Mallku* was an ambitious and impactful film on the political level, its aesthetics are much more connected to European Art Cinema. In the Ukamau Group's subsequent film, *El Coraje del Pueblo,* the filmmaking collective decided to radically depart from the conventions of Western filmmaking in order to make a film whose aesthetics reflected the needs and wishes of communities the group collaborated with. In the following analysis of these two films, I will trace the shift in the Ukamau Group's filmmaking practices that occurred between the release of *Yawar Mallku* and the production of *El Coraje del Pueblo.* I am particularly interested in exploring how the political messaging and impacts of these films develop cinema as a tool for radical change, and in doing so illustrate folk cinema's potential to move away from the nationalist origins of folklore and instead highlight the unofficial culture as a medium for revolutionary change. Moreover, I want to understand how the Ukamau Group changed their filmmaking practices to be more in tune with local communities, and therefore inform how folk cinema could foster cinematic forms that are not just radical in messaging, but are also integrated aesthetically with the artistic styles and tastes of specific communities. I value the Ukamau Group's process of critical self-reflection and adaptability, and believe that a folk cinema would need to similarly participate in processes of self-criticism and change.

Yawar Mallku is a 67-minute black and white 1969 film that deals with the forced sterilizations that indigenous women in Bolivia faced at the hands of the USA's Peace Corp. Known in Spanish as *Sangre del Condor* or *Blood of the Condor* in English, the film which

prominently features Quecha, tells the story of an urban indigenous man, Sixto, in the city of La Paz, trying to find blood for his brother, Ignacio, who is hospitalized and needs surgery after he was shot by the police in the rural community he lives in. Igancio became injured after investigating the cause of his wife Paulina's infertility. He discovered that many other women in the village suffered from this same ailment after visiting a maternity clinic run by the "Progress Corp," a stand-in for the Peace Corp. Igancio and other villagers would together end up trying to expel the Progress Corp from their village, and Igancio's leadership in this action would cause the police to target him. After the leadup to and the shooting of Ignacio, Paulina and Igancio would head to La Paz to seek Sixtio's help (figure 9), and the rest of the story about the Progress Corp and forced sterilization is interspersed via flashbacks into Sixto's quest to find blood for his slowly dying brother. Based on real events, almost half a million Bolivians watched the film, becoming the most viewed Bolivian film at the time (Campbell and Cortés 388). *Yawar Mallku* resulted in a real, material change in Bolivia, as the Bolivian government would proceed to expel the Peace Corp from the country because of the impact of this film.

The Peace Corp has never admitted to performing forced sterilization in Bolivia. There is evidence in academic writings that there was an IUD program targeting indigenous women in Bolivia (Gidel 776), but there is little publicly accessible information about Peace Corp-led sterilizations in Bolivia. However, considering the long history of Eugenics programs domestically in the United States, including towards indigenous women, the possibility of some type of forced sterilizations occurring in Bolivia at the hands of the Peace Corp seems very likely. Moreover, the long lasting nature of IUDs and the high probability that linguistic barriers and

lack of proper information about the devices could have prevented women from truly giving informed consent for the procedure, suggests that this program was not just an opportunity for women to access birth control, but rather a eugenics project of population control that subjected women to infertility without their informed consent. In this regard, *Yawar Mallku* acts not just as the political bullet that expelled the Peace Corp, but also one of the only accessible accounts of the Peace Corps' project of eugenics against indigenous Bolivians. The film demonstrates the profound power that politically motivated cinema can have. Moreover, *Yawar Mallku*'s use of local, non-professional indigenous actors and the prominence of community cultural practices such as flute playing and reading coca leaves (figure 10) highlights cultural practices of the unofficial culture of the people. While these portrayals are just representations of folklore not necessarily folkloric themselves, some of the impact of *Yawar Malk* comes from how the film communicates its message by highlighting the majority yet marginalized indigenous culture of Bolivia.

However, the Ukamau Group was dissatisfied with *Yawar Mallku.* Indigenous people who watched the film were unhappy with the narrative structure, which included many flashbacks. The Ukamau Group additionally had difficulties making the film in the first place. While a community leader had invited them to come and film the movie in the Kaata indigenous community he lived in, other community members were suspicious until the Ukamau Group had a coca leaf reading performed that revealed they were not a threat to the community (Geidel 763). Sanjínes expressed that in retrospect, they should not have made *Yawar Mallku* at all, and instead chosen to make a movie about the conflicted encounter between the Ukamau Group and

the Kaata community they had come to film (Geidel 764). Sanjínes additionally expressed regrets over how the movie was filmed. While the actors were non-professionals from the community, actors memorized from a script, instead of acting based on their own lived experience (Sanjínes 289). So, while the political messaging of *Yawar Mallku* was radical and impactful, in the end, the film failed to successfully integrate itself within the local community as its filmic language and production practices were not rooted in the needs and wants of the local community, and moreover, it was not a sufficiently collaborative project.

Going into their next film, *El Coraje del Pueblo,* the Ukamau Group sought to correct many of the problems present in *Yawar Mallku. El Coraje del Pueblo* is a 94-minute color film from 1971 that reenacts the San Juan Massacre. The San Juan Massacre was a brutal massacre of miners and their families by the Bolivian military that took place in 1967 at the Catavi Mine in Bolivia on the Eve of St John's Day. Unlike Y*awar Mallku,* it was made in more direct collaboration with the local community. The film, while narrative in its structuring, is interspersed with segments of documentary, and actors in the film were reenacting their actual experiences of the massacre. The film begins with a deeply disturbing sequence of a crowd of people marching towards military gunmen. The military gunmen fire, and what seems like hundreds of people die or are injured. The rest of the film is the lead-up to this brutal event. This sequence is the product of the collaborative methods used in making the film. While the Bolivian soldiers are shown in medium-range shots, the indigenous people marching towards them are mostly shown as a collective (figure 11). The Ukamau Group highlights the collective culture of the indigenous people through long shots, as opposed to the Western individualist culture that is

prominent in cinema and enhanced via frequent close-ups (Gidel 119). The medium shots emphasize the alignment of the soldiers, the military, and the Bolivian government as a whole, with individualistic Western values. While the indigenous miners and their families are taking an action together as one and are therefore shown altogether, medium shots that isolate the soldiers individually or in small groups demonstrates the individualistic and Western nature of the Bolivian military, and therefore its opposition to the values of the Indigenous people that make up the majority of Bolivia's population. Subsequently, from the very start of *El Coraje del Pueblo,* the unique filmic language establishes that it is not about individual heroes, but rather a film about the strength of a whole community against an outside aggressor. While guns may be wielded by a few men, the true unstoppable power present in the film is that of the people, and that is something that can only be harnessed via collective action.

The shift in filmmaking practices demonstrates the possibility of a cinema that is not just politically powerful, but also aesthetically aligned with the local community. While *El Coraje del Pueblo* was suppressed by the government, and therefore did not get the immediate wide-spread release and impactful response that *Yawar Mallku* got, the film still communicates an equally powerful political message, and this time the production of the film involved greater community dialogue that resulted in a film whose aesthetics are more in tune with the local community. Just as *Yawar Mallku* derives some of its political power from its portrayal of the unofficial culture and its utilization of non-professional local actors, *El Coraje del Pueblo* does the same, but magnitudes more of it, resulting in a film that combines revolutionary politics with a form of filmmaking that instead of simply replicating the Western filmmaking aesthetics, turns to local

communities in order to develop a type of filmmaking that reflects the pre-existing values and practices of a community. This form of filmmaking turns cinema into a tool for creative expression within small groups, or perhaps, a type of folklore.

The phrasing "indigenous aesthetics" refers to reorienting creative practices to reflect the indigenous values, beliefs, practices and traditions of an area instead of relying on imported Western aesthetic traditions that a community may find ill-suited for their creative own practices. Therefore, while the political power of *Yawar Mallku* may have let it serve as collective memory at the level of the nation, *El Coraje del Pueblo*'s embrace of aesthetics specific to the indigenous people of Bolivia and informed by the miners and families of the Catavi mine, becomes a tool of collective remembrance for a far more specific group, the miners and families of the Catavi mine, and the other indigenous people in Bolivia who share similar experiences. Moreover, despite the localized nature of the film, the reproducibility of film as a medium allows the story of *El Coraje del Pueblo* to travel and reach other Bolivians with similar experiences. The specificity of both narratives and aesthetics in *El Coraje del Pueblo* is not a weakness of the film, rather it allows the film to better serve a specific community and impact those with shared experiences with more power and intensity. The more Westernized aesthetics of *Yawar Mallku* may make it a more accessible film, but in turn, the film loses some of its ability to serve as a tool for in-group communication, as seen in the reaction by indigenous people to the film's narrative structure. *El Coraje del Pueblo* still uses flashbacks, but this time the flashbacks are used as framing instead of intermingled in the narrative structure. The film therefore seeks to remedy the weaknesses of

Yawar Mallku by fostering greater community collaboration and making the film oppositional to the West not just at the level of messaging, but also at the level of aesthetics.

I want to stress that while I believe *El Coraje del Pueblo* possesses a level of "indigenous aesthetics" in its filmmaking through the shift in narrative structure from that of *Yawar Mallku* and its utilization of long shots to emphasize collectivity, the increased emphasis on collective filmmaking can be viewed as reductive reading of the indigenous culture influenced by literary depictions of indigenous people in Bolivia and a socialist inspired romanticism towards collective societies (Schiwy 119). While it is true that Western culture has an individualist element that is in direct contrast to many other cultures across the globe, there is a tendency, especially when studying folklore, to push collective styles of identity onto people seen as more distant from modernity, and therefore less deserving of authorship or individuality. As someone who is an outsider to the indigenous people who worked at the Catavi mines, I am not able to judge if *El Coraje del Pueblo* overstates (or even understates) the level at which the community wanted to express the collective culture the community possessed, but I want to bring up this issue as it illuminates a tension in folklore, and therefore any future folk cinema.

Individualist culture is pushed by Western powers, but that does not negate the fact that these same Western powers have been the arbitrators of who and who cannot be an individual. In matters of folklore, this means that folklorists unfairly diminished the contribution of individual artists to pieces of folklore. While some communities may value collective style of representation, it is also important to allow space for these communities to assert authorship and individual identity at whatever level they wish. Moreover, there is not one type of indigenous

aesthetics. Bolivian indigenous communities have diverse and rich aesthetic and folkloric traditions. Exclusively emphasizing collective identity essentializes indigenous identity and diminishes the aesthetic possibilities of an indigenous-orineted filmmaking that pulls from their own artistic traditions instead of imported Western filmmaking techniques. My theorization of folk cinema therefore wants to develop a cinema that is an expressive medium for specific communities that can reflect the varied artistic practices of a community. Folk cinema should aim for aesthetics practices that reflect the diversity of cultures and communities. These practices should be developed collaboratively, with the emphasis on the filmmaking process not necessarily the content of the resulting film. The Ukamau Group's work on *El Coraje del Pueblo* is therefore significant for folk cinema not because of the collective styles of representation, but because of the collaborative filmmaking process that brought those styles of representation into being. Furthermore, this type of collaborative filmmaking can create radical new notions of authorship by challenging auteur theory while also leaving space for community members to assert authorship when they want to.

Critiquing the Ukamau Group: Indigenismo vs. Indianismo

As I have already suggested, despite the Ukamau Group's desire for collective filmmaking practices that embraced local cultures and values, even films like *El Coraje del Pueblo* films are not perfect. The principal tension that underlines much of the Ukamau Group's filmmaking is the distinction between the mestizo ideology of Indigenismo and that of the indigenous ideology Indianismo. Latin American cinema researcher David M.J. Wood elaborates on this conflict in his article "Indigenismo and the Avant-garde: Jorge Sanjinés' Early Films and

the National Project Indigenismo." Here, Wood describes the tensions between the Marxist-Indigenismo present especially in the early films of the Ukamau Group (66). In these early films, the Ukamau Group attempts to position indigenous people as part of the Bolivian national project. Wood describes the ideology of Indigenismo as a "rhetorical tool employed by the elite intellectual and political classes, often to create a homogenizing, mestizo national imaginary" (66). As Indigenismo pushes Western rationality and modernization, it seeks to neutralize the perceived threat of the indigenous people and transform them into idealized imagery of Bolivian indigeneity (Wood 66). Opposing Indigenismo, is the indigenous ideology and movement of Indianismo, theorized by indigenous Bolivian writer Fausto Reinaga. Reinaga viewed the indigenous people of Bolivia as entirely distinct from that of the imagined colonial project of the Bolivian nation (Wood 65). Using the film *Yawar Mallku* as a case study, I want to interrogate the tensions between Indigenismo and Indianismo. This investigation will allow me to better theorize how folk cinema could be revolutionary, while also running the risk of furthering the nationalist narratives present in folklore.

This conflict between Indianismo and Indigenismo within the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group reveals central tensions of folk cinema. "Folk" and "folklore" are concepts often rooted in the nearby rural other. The Ukamau Group embrace a similar tendency, as in their writings, they continually refers to indigenous people as "campesinos",[20] and in doing so, erase the cultural and racial distances between the majority mestizo the Ukamau Group and the indigenous people they collaborate with. Utilizing the word campesino instead of the word indio was a push by Bolivia's

[20] English: peasants/people living in rural eras

Movimento Nacionalisto Revolucionario (MNR),[21] who came to power in 1952, to stop the spread of radical indigenous movements and convert Bolivia into a homogenous, urbanized, and mestizo country (Geidel 771). While the Ukamau Group opposed the MNR's project of homogenization and sought indigenous liberation (Wood 65), they nonetheless use the phrasing of campesinos in their writing. It additionally reflects a Marxist worldview, where class-oriented thinking dominates and issues such as indigeneity are minimized. Therefore, the wording of campesinos in the case of the Ukamau Group's writing reduces their indigenous collaborators to just rural counterparts of the Ukamau Group — distinct but still roughly analogous in the Bolivaness they supposedly share with the urban mestizos of the Ukamau Group.

While compared to the more nationalist tendency of Solanas and Getino of Grupo Cine Liberación in Argentina, the Ukamau Group did attempt to create a more grassroots approach to cinema and sought specifically indigenous liberation (Wood 64), they still operated under the assumption that Bolivia as a nation exists, instead of accepting it as the imagined construct it may actually be. Understanding the origins of folklore as a way to forward cultural nationalism and make such imagined communities, then it appears that consciously or not, as the Ukamau Group collected these indigenous narratives, they participated in constructing the imagined community that is the nation of Bolivia. As they made some of the earliest films in indigenous languages like Aymara and Quechua, their films and the Bolivianess they asserted served to assimilate indigenous culture into the larger imagined imagery of the Bolivian nation. Like early folklorists, their films collected artifacts of marginalized peoples in order to further national

[21] English: Revolutionary Nationalist Movement

identity. The filmmaking of the Ukamau Group illustrates that just as folk cinema can possess all the liberatory and radical power of folklore, it can also possess all of its nationalistic dangers.

Opposing the ideology of Indigenismo present in the Ukamau Group's filmmaking is the philosophy of Indianismo that Reinaga advanced. Born to an indigenous family in rural Bolivia, Reinaga would read and write only at the age of 16, but would then go on to get a degree in law and would write prolifically on issues of indigeneity for the rest of his life (Ticona Alejo 113). Once a Marxist, after a transformational visit to Machu Picchu, Reinaga decided to reject Marxism and Western thought as a whole (Alejo 143). Estében Ticona Alejo in their Latin American Cultural Studies doctoral thesis, *El Indianismo de Fausto Reinaga: Orígenes, Desarrollo, y Experiencia en Qullasuyu-Bolivia,* describes Reinaga's philosophy of Indanimso as "es el movimiento ideológico, político, social, económico, moral y ético del indio de América, que recoge el pensamiento profundo de los pueblos ancestrales que vivieron y aún viven. …el indianismo es la perspectiva de que el ser humano es parte indesligable del cosmos o la naturaleza y con conciencia de libertad" (Ticona Alejo 202).[22] However, Reinaga would eventually drift away from his theorization of Indanismo and propose his idea of "pensamiento amaútico." Reinaga describes it as the following:

> El pensamiento amaútico es la concepción cósmica del Universo y de la vida. Para el pensamiento amaútico el hombre piensa, la hormiga piensa, el árbol también. De alguna parte ha debido salir el pensamiento. Ni el hombre ni la hormiga ni el árbol piensan sin el Sol; no viven sin el Sol; de alguna manera el Sol es quien engendra, quien hace la vida de los seres terrestres. Porque sin el Sol no hay, no hay pensamiento. En consecuencia, el

[22] My Translation: "… it is the ideological, political, social, economic, moral, and ethical movement of the American Indian that takes the profound beliefs of the ancestral peoples that lived and still live. …indianismo is a perspective with a liberatory conscience that human beings are an indistinguishable part of the cosmos and nature."

> hombre piensa gracias al fluido del Padre Sol. El pensamiento, de una u otra manera es energía hecha luz, luz solar.[23] (Reinaga 19 qtd. in Ticona Alejo 212)

"Pensamiento amaútico" represents a clear rejection of Western thought. It therefore demonstrates that Reinaga's philosophical goals were set not just on furthering a radical theory of indigenous liberation, but also to completely abandon Western thought in order to create an entire alternative cosmology and philosophical outlook on the world. Like folklore's origins, Reinaga is reacting to the forces of industrialization, but unlike folklore's reaction that centers humanity, then Reinaga's philosophy takes into account the intertwined forces of colonialism and industrialization in order to call for a radically decentering humanity. This perspective demonstrates the importance of looking beyond the Western philosophical canon, as just how folklore's early focus on only Western peasants was limiting and damaging, so is the continued overrepresentation of Western thought.

Though the ideas that Reinaga proposes are often radical and insightful, he is a very controversial thinker. Not only is his writing very harsh and he can be accused of racism due to his biting critiques of non-indigenous cultures (Stephenson 590) but he also fails to account for the unique struggles of indigenous women in Bolivia (Stephenson 593). Moreover, Reinaga is just one indigenous Bolivian philosopher who is privileged in literature because his work was

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[23] My translation: "amautic thought is the cosmological theorization of the Universe and of life. For amuatic thought, the man thinks, the wasp thinks, the tree thinks. From somewhere this thought must've come from. Not the man nor the wasp nor the tree thinks without the Sun; they don't live without the sun; in a way the sun is who produces life, who gives life to earthly beings. Because without the sun, there's nothing, no thought. Consequently, the man thinks thanks to the fluid of Father Sun. Thought, in one manner or another, is energy made life, solar light." Note: "amaútico" appears to be a word that Reinaga coined and therefore lacks a direct translation. "aumatic" is how I have decided to translate it here.

published in Spanish-language books and is easily accessible to scholars. Reinaga's philosophical contributions can obviously not represent the whole of Bolivian indigenous philosophy in all of its diversity. However, the reason I want to bring Reinaga into conversation with the Ukamau Group, is that he demonstrates that the indigenous aesthetics and liberatory messaging that the Ukamau Group sought do not need to be fostered and developed by outsiders, rather it has and does come from within. While their first film *Ukamau* (1966) tells the story of an indigenous women raped and killed by a powerful mestizo with a degree of personal distance, this was not some abstract experience for someone like Reinaga, rather it was something he directly experienced two times over with the rape and murder of his two elder sisters by local political bosses (Ticona Alejo 125). And, watching *Ukamau,* while there is clearly an Indigenismo undertone and a Westernized style of filmmaking, the striking performance by the lead indigenous actor, Vicente Verneros Salinas, who plays the husband of the murdered and raped women, manages to overcome the confines of the film's austere Western language and mestizo direction, in order to give a performance that communicates a uniquely powerful feeling of anger, sorrow and the need for indigenous liberation and justice.

In regards to the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group, what the writings of Reinaga provoke is the potential for a form of filmmaking that goes even beyond the Ukamau Group shift towards collective aesthetics. What would a film look like if it went deeper into the philosophy of "pensamiento amaútico" instead of just exploring ideas of collectivity? What about films drawing upon the many other indigenous philosophies that simply aren't as privileged in the literature as Reinaga's work is? How could films such these create an aesthetic style that relies on

the varied and diverse aesthetic traditions of specific indigenous communities instead of utilizing imported Western aesthetic practices? How could this type of filmmaking come to reflect dynamic indigenous artistic and philosophical practices, creating a cinema that truly belongs to a given community, both in regards to its past, present, and future traditions? How could filmic language express ideas less common in Western philosophy, such "pensamiento amaútico"'s cosmological decentering of humanity? These are not questions that I can answer, but they serve to show that while the Ukamau Group learned from *Yawar Mallku,* their work in *El Coraje del Pueblo* was just a start at creating an indigenous Bolivian cinema. The potential of a cinema that is in tune with the folk, may have begun, but it is yet to be fully realized. Therefore, returning to my theorization of folk cinema, this leads me to believe that any folk cinema would have to be an on-going project, constantly acknowledging the ever-expanding possibilities of forms of filmmaking that are better integrated within community values and practices. Folklore is hybrid, dynamic, and diverse, and a folk cinema would have to reflect that.

These conflicts between the Ukamau Group's Indigenismo and Reinaga's theories of Indianismo and *pensamiento amaútico* therefore demonstrates the difficulties in creating "un cine junto al pueblo." In the article "Proyecto Emancipador y Agenda Política en el Cine de Jorge Sanjinés: Colonialismo, Indigenismo y Subjetividades en Disputa,"[24] sociologist and filmmaker Marcos Arnez Cuéllar outlines the conflicts that the Ukamau Group had with indigenous communities and in doing so lays out evidence that questions if the Ukamau Group actually succeeded in creating "un cine junto al pueblo." Amongst other anecdotes provided about the

[24] Translation: "Emancipatory Projects and Political Agenda in the Cinema of Jorge Sanjinés: Colonialism, Indigenismo, and Subjectivities in Dispute."

impact of the Ukamau Group's filmmaking practices, Arnez Cuéllar describes the effect of filming *Yawar Mallku* in the Kaata community. After the filming of *Yawar Mallku,* anthropologist Joseph Bastien describes difficulties working with the local community due to the distrust that had built towards outsiders. Community leaders accused the filmmakers of involving them in a political film that would bring the community misfortune (Arnez Cuéllar 106). The government targeted community members for supposedly being communists due to their association with the politically charged film (Arnez Cuéllar 107). While the consequences the Kaata community faced involved to a large degree actions taken by oppressive government regimes and not the filmmakers themselves, this story about the effects of filming *Yawar Mallku* questions the ways in which filmmakers must be conscious of the long-term effects of their filmmaking projects on local communities, regardless of any overall positive political impact of their filmmaking. Because I view folk cinema as a continually on-going project, understanding long-term effects on communities is a particularly important idea.

The creation of *Yawar Mallku* likely stopped the Peace Corp's eugenics agenda of forced sterilization. However, the concerns brought up by Arnez Cuéllar and Sanjínes himself in his own writing about the film, suggest that the successful political agenda of the film does not necessarily justify the film's creation and it doesn't suggest that the film was an example of "cine junto al pueblo" either. One of the most provoking scenes of the film is a scene near the very end, where Ignacio leads his community members to the maternity clinic run by the Progress Corp (figure 12). Here, the three Progress Corp members are having a pleasant evening dancing to Western music, a stark contrast to the anguish that the community is currently experiencing.

Taking the Progress Corp members out of their home, the community threatens to castrate the male Progress Corp members, all while the foreigners claim that the community members just don't truly understand the work they were doing. This sequence is particularly powerful, demonstrating the strength of a community against outside aggressors. Yet, this same power is marked by a call for disturbing acts of violence. While the film's earlier messaging focuses on the systemic injustices faced by indigenous people navigating a new colonial capitalistic system, this scene shifts to direct and explicit justifications for violence. Given the later feelings expressed by the Kaata indigenous community about the consequences of the film, it is unclear whether or not the Kaata community was happy with these scenes in the long term. While to an outside audience this scene may feel like one of the film's most powerful, its impact on the community itself, the people who should have the most agency and the most authority over a film, is ultimately what should've decided whether or not the scene was part of the film.T herefore, while *Yawar Mallku* demonstrates the radical power of cinema, it also demonstrates the danger of politically motivated films that are not consistently aligned with the needs and desires of a given community.

A Cinema Closer to The People

Given these deepset conflicts in the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group, is it possible for their cinema to be a cinema with the people? This phrasing on its own is difficult, as the term "the people" offers the opportunity for the same type of essentializing that happens with the term "the folk." However, with this in mind, I see the phrasing of the people as I use it here to imply a cinema made away from elites who often dominate filmmaking. Perhaps, given the struggles of

films like *Yawar Mallku* it seems that a cinema like this is an impossible quest, something that is forever on-going and never totally completed. While I view this as a necessary character of a future folk cinema, at the same time, *Yawar Mallku* still had great success as an impactful political film, and the failures of *Yawar Mallku* would spark a stark self-reflection and a change in the filmmaking practices of the Ukamau Group when it came to their next feature, *El Coraje del Pueblo.* Sanjínes describes the shift between *Yawar Mallku* and *El Coraje del Pueblo in* his essay "The Problem of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema." Sanjínes outlines several key ideas of a revolutionary cinema. He calls for a cinema that is not just beautiful, but rather revolutionary, and causes viewers to reflect and think critically (Sanjínes 287). Sanjínes subsequently calls for community participation in cinema, and the abandonment of individualism (288). He then calls for a filmic language that reflects the community, not just the filmmakers' wishes (Sanjínes 289). Finally, Sanjínes emphasizes the importance of distribution, describing the difficulties of it due to political oppression (292), and also the importance of not relying on the usual method of film distribution and instead taking films to the countryside with a projector and generator so even communities without electricity can view the films (293). In this essay, Sanjínes describes the production of *El Coraje del Pueblo,* stating that after *Yawar Mallku,* the Ukamau Group had learned the downsides of strictly using a script while filmmaking. Instead, in this production, they let the actors interpret the events as they wished. Moreover, Sanjínes notes that because of the control the actors were given over the production, they understand the full political implications of their work, something that was missing in *Yawar Mallku*. Sanjínes

describes the experience of filming, “We, the members of the crew, became instruments of the people’s struggle, as they expressed themselves through us!” (Sanjínes 289).

However, all this is not to say that *El Coraje del Pueblo* was a perfect film that corrected the problems of *Yawar Mallku.* For one, Sanjínes describes the crew as instruments, but why do the people need instruments at all? However, while this is true and *El Coraje del Pueblo* may not have been then a cinema with the people, it was still a cinema closer to the people due to its commitment to collective filmmaking practices and aesthetics suited for the specific community of the Catavi mine. Moments such as the scene when the women of the mining community go on hunger strike (figure 13) give the indigenous women of the Kaata community the chance to express themselves through the artistic form of cinema. These actors, drawing on their own experience in the events that had only recently taken place, express the intensity at which they had to fight for their basic needs against the oppressive control of the mining company. Therefore, even within its flaws, the community participation, innovative aesthetics, and messaging of *El Coraje del Pueblo* make it an example of how cinema can reorient itself as a medium of creative expression for specific communities and their needs. This reflects the aim of folk cinema, to serve as a medium of community creative expression and become integrated into a community’s aesthetic traditions and larger folklore.

While *El Coraje del Pueblo* makes progress towards a cinema of the people, the article “Decolonizing the Frame: Indigenous Video in the Andes” by media theorist Freya Schiwy demonstrates that there was still a lot of work to be done in order to reach an indigenous Bolivian cinema. Schiwy posits that developments in the 1990s within indigenous video practices in video

go much further than the work of Grupo Ukama in "indigenizing" film, as indigenous people in these more recent videos practices are not just actors as they were in the early work of the Ukamau Group, but also comprise the crew as well (Schiwy 120). Films that Schiwy mentions, such as the horror short film, *Qati Qati: Susurros de Muerte* (1999), demonstrate forms of filmmaking where indigenous people are both cast and crew. In *Qati Qati,* like some other indigenous video projects, there is no director, only a "responsable."[25] The responsable, while not taking on the typical role of the director, is most often the main scriptwriter and the person in charge of the final cut (Schiwy 120). *Qati Qati* employs horror not to just create a Bolivian-flavored horror film, but instead to create a film that interrogates questions of cultural knowledge and belief. The film follows a couple, Valentina and Fulo, and their encounter with a floating head spirit called "qati qati." While Valentina is aware of the "qati qati" because of stories told to her by grandmother, Fulo doubts its existence as he doesn't take ancestral knowledge as seriously as his wife (figure 14). This film's central conflict, therefore, is not just a conflict between humanity and the supernatural, but rather a conflict over opposing belief systems and the role of traditional values in a rapidly modernizing world. *Qati Qati* demonstrates that while *El Coraje del Pueblo* may have not fully achieved its dream of "un cine junto al pueblo," its aspirations lived on, and later indigenous filmmakers and community, like the creators of *Qati Qati,* have continued the quest to create a cinema with the people. Additionally, *Qati Qati*'s more conventional filmic language and choice of the horror genre demonstrates that completely abandoning Western aesthetics in filmmaking is not always the way towards a folk

[25] Translation: The responsible person / person in charge

cinema. Folk cinema calls for aesthetic techniques that reflect community artistic traditions, but also acknowledge that there is no pure folkart, and rather all cultural practices reflect hybridity and cultural exchange.

However, despite the optimism that some more recent indigenous filmmaking projects can elicit, in many regards, "un cine junto al pueblo" remains distant. Latin American Studies scholar Nuria Vilanova in "Descolonización y Cine: la Propuesta Indígena de Jorge Sanjinés Hoy," argues that despite the recent political victories like the election of indigenous Evo Morales as president, Bolivian filmmaking remains unable to achieve the type of filmmaking that the Ukamau Group dreamed of. This is due to that style of filmmaking's opposition to the conventional cinema that the mainstream public expects, as well as this cinema's lack of concessions to Western viewers (Vilanova 90). The type of filmmaking that the Ukamau Group inspired was fundamentally oppositional to cinema and the state of popular mass culture at the time of its production, and still is today. The somewhat unique success of the Ukamau Group should be celebrated, but also demonstrates that the project of folk cinema is one that requires much work to get to. Moreover, the opposition to capitalist distribution continuously follows filmmaking projects in Bolivia. Schiwy notes that many filmmaking projects are seen as belonging to the people themselves (Schiwy 121). In a world where individual ownership is prioritized even for collective mediums like filmmaking, making cinema in conditions that allow for its collective creation as well as its collective ownership is difficult.

Perhaps the ultimate problem of the Ukamau Group and the reason that despite the filmmakers' numerous successes they never seemed to truly reach their aim of "un cine junto al

pueblo", is that maybe a cinema with the people is not in fact the correct cinema to reach for. Rather, the goal should be to create a cinema that is not just with the people, but of them. Instead of imagining cinema as an outside force that can align itself with the people, cinema arises from within. Conceptualizing cinema as a type of folklore helps imagine this cinema of the people. Therefore, the Ukamau Group demonstrate key ideas for my project of folk cinema. While their films reflect the revolutionary power of cinema and the potential for filmmaking to reflect the values and traditions of local communities, the filmmaking of Ukamau Group illustrates how hard it is to achieve "un cine junto al pueblo," or better said, a cinema of the people.

Furthermore, while this discussion of the films of the Ukamau reveals the incredible potential that a folk cinema could have, it also outlines the potential negative effects of such a cinema. Consequently, to derive a folk cinema that avoids the nationalist tendencies found in both folklore and Ukamau Group's underlying ideology of Indigenismo, requires struggling with the conflicted potentialities of folklore and historical examples such as the films of the Ukamau Group. Within films like *Yawar Mallku* and *El Coraje del Pueblo* is a radical desire of a type of filmmaking that is liberatory both politically and aesthetically, and while achieving such a cinema is a difficult aim, folk cinema can form a way to imagine a similar project, through the on-going development of collectively practiced cinema that functions as artistic communication within small groups.

Chapter Three:

Home Movies and Videos in the Diary Film: Creative Explorations

While I have previously focused on analyzing existing films in order to further my theorization of folk cinema, due to the participatory nature of folklore, I want to now turn to my own creative practices as an avenue for expanding my theorization. Moreover, I want to look at a filmmaking practice that has been remarkably absent in my analysis so far: home movies and videos. Specifically, I am interested in exploring and participating in the cinematic tradition of the diary film, which utilizes footage of home movies and videos.[26] While I want to question why unedited home movies and videos are not considered cinema, I am focusing on films containing edited home movies and videos, because the process of editing allows home movies and videos to better communicate with people outside of the family-unit who originally created the films. I am interested in how diary filmmaking has the potential to create new small groups of people with similar experiences, who otherwise would remain unconnected if not for the reproducibility of the cinematic medium. My own diary film will express my own life experiences in a way that interrogates the tension between home movies and videos with the larger national narratives they can embody. In my film and this chapter, I will explore home movies and videos practices, as well as a draw on two diary films that incorporate home movies and videos, *Reminiscences of a*

[26] I will use "home movies" to refer to family footage shot on film and "home video" to refer to family footage recorded using analogue or digital video technologies.

Journey to Lithuania (1975, dir. Jonas Mekas) and the more recent film *Tarnation* (2003, dir. Jonathan Caouette). As I develop my understanding of folk cinema, I posit that diary filmmaking forms an intimate and accessible interpersonal outlet for creative expression, and moreover, one that can begin to disrupt the homogenizing national narratives of the idealized family that unedited home movies and videos often possess. Consequently, this analysis's exploration of diary filmmaking demonstrates the potential of folk cinema as a disruptive force that can interrupt the essentializing national narratives that are often present in folklore.

Figure 3-1. A still from *Home Movies*. Family movie of Christmas morning.

Home Movies and Videos

The 1975 documentary short *Home Movie* is interesting because unlike most literature in folk studies as well as studies of home movies, it is a text that presents home movies as folklore. This documentary produced by the Smithsonian Institute and directed by Ernst Star and Steve Zeitlin documents home movies as a folk art portraying a family's "golden age," which the film compares to Adam & Eve's garden of Eden (figure 15). The documentary is subversive to the extent that it turns its gaze not to the imagined agrarian other that for so long was the object of folk studies, but instead looks more inward, even incorporating home movies from one of the

co-directors' own childhood. The home movies displayed in the film are of an ostensibly urban, white, and wealthy America, codifying through the inaccessibility of the movie camera a vision of America where inequality is apparent but never explicitly commented on. One interviewee remarks that it took her 30 years to even watch the home movies of her childhood — the Great Depression erased her family's wealth and led them to sell both their projector and their camera. However, the documentary chooses to not dissect the full implications of this statement, as the decades past are just an opportunity for time to "folksifize" the celluloid, instead of markers of the ephemerality of wealth and social class. This passage of time is necessary, as in the traditional conceptions of folklore, cultural productions need to be sufficiently aged in order to become folk.

Interestingly, even though the 70s now appear as part of the prime of the home movie, the documentary never explores current home movie practices, instead choosing to conceptualize American "folk" home movies as an archival practice detached from active traditions of creation. Even in the 70s, home movies were firmly a vehicle of nostalgia, encoding a perfected view of the family that was forever fleeting and never contemporaneous with the present. Because of these dynamics, *Home Movies* is a text that reveals that when home movies are analyzed as folklore, they seem unable to escape the historical baggage of folklore. This suggests that a folk cinema cannot rely on the novelness of the filmic medium to liberate itself from the constraints of folklore's origins, more work is necessary.

In a similar but more sophisticated manner to the argument proposed in *Home Movie,* Patricia Zimmerman in her 1992 book *Reel Families A Social History of Amature Film* argues

that American home movies, starting in the 1950s, forward the ideology of "familism," where family relations and the family unit are valued over other social organizing units (132). Home movies pushed a "myth of togetherness" that portrayed idealized versions of the family unit, and in doing so, had consequences such as furthering anti-feminist notions of women as solely homemakers (Zimmerman 133). I argue that this ideological bent reflects the early studies of folklore, where folklore arose from a form of Cultural Nationalism and folklore artifacts were utilized to construct imagined notions of the nation state. While the microscopic subject of individual families at first glance distances home movies from concepts as large as the nation state, these home movies produce the ideologies of a nation. Moreover, the mythos of American home movies does not just espouse idyllic memories of family relations, but also pushes a longing for the period of economic prosperity that underlines this era of American home movies. Within these home movies is the economic and social ideology of the American Dream, where imagery of an affluent white middle class with time and money for home movies forwards both a nostalgic longing and a pressing desire for the quickly receding but ever present American Dream. In this manner, *Home Movies* is correct that home movies portray a "golden age," however this golden age is not the simple site of pleasant familial reminiscences. Rather the golden age portrayed in American home videos is an entanglement of the social and economic ideologies of the nation with deeply intimate imagery of people's lives.

Viewing folklore as the unofficial culture or as folklorist Ben-Amos says "artistic communication in small groups," (13) the rise in popularity of film technologies for personal use make it possible to view home movies as integral part of contemporary folklore, where this more

technological form of small group expression plays a similar communicative role as older folk mediums like music, dance, and oral storytelling. Home movies reflect the unofficial culture, as they build an aesthetic style that is inspired by but still distinct from mainstream cinematic practices. Moreover, the small size of a family unit allows home movies when analyzed as folklore to emphasize the smallness and localness of folklore, which can become obfuscated as nation-states appropriate folklore into wider generalized imagery of a nation. Colloquial understandings of folklore often eschew conceptions of folklore based upon the small-group and instead assert notions of folklore where nation-states are the umbrella, even if calling something American folklore asserts a questionable level of broadness. *Home Movies* itself was made for the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. The film chooses not to question the "Americanness" of the home movies it presents as folklore, instead asserting the nation as the natural unifying factor regardless of its actual suitability.

While folklore is a less common approach to home movies then the more mainstream media-studies perspectives furthered by scholars like Zimmerman, *Home Movies* is able to make a robust argument for home movies as folklore by drawing on their unique social function within families. On the other hand, diary films that are composed of home movie or home video-like materials feel much further away from notions of folklore. The act of editing the raw home movies and videos into a film to be displayed publicly disrupts the unedited and private nature of home movies and videos that underscores their folkloric character. I want to be clear that the idea that home movies or videos can be folklore does not mean that I am identifying them as folk cinema, because while home movies and videos are interesting folkloric artifacts, they are not

necessarily exhibited and watched by spectators like cinema. However, I do not want to dismiss home movies and videos as fundamentally uncinematic. Rather, through my exploration of diary films and how they use home movies and movies as well as my own creative work, I want to blur the divide between home movies and videos and cinema, and suggest that home movies and videos may very well should be seen as cinematic, and could be part of a future folk cinema along with diary films.

Diary Films

Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania and *Tarnation* are two films that are made up of the director's own home movies and videos. *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* follows director Jonas Mekas journey back home to Lithuania after years of absence, telling the story through short vignettes of 16mm footage shot in an handheld, home movie style united by Mekas' narration. *Tarnation,* made several decades later, traces the director's relationship with his mentally ill mother, utilizing varied home movie and video features shot throughout his life. While *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* is referred to as a diary film, *Tarnation* is less associated with that phrasing, however, I will call it a diary film due to its autobiographical nature and use of footage arising from daily life. I will develop my understanding of folk cinema by viewing these two films as texts that can serve as foundations for my own diary film.

Mekas, the director of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania,* was a Lithuanian immigrant who came to live in New York City after spending time in a displaced persons camp in the aftermath of World War II. Films like *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* are hallmark of Mekas' unique filmmaking style which take the form of montage of footage from his day to

day life. While his status as a member of New York City's Avant-Garde may at first appear to distance his filmmaking from other American home movies, I argue that Mekas films such as *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* in their contents clearly resembles the aesthetic traditions of home movies, and furthermore, his filmmaking provides an early example of cinematic practices that transform home movies-like artifacts into longer form cinematic projects. Indeed, Jeffrey K. Ruoff in the article "Home Movies of the Avant-Garde: Jonas Mekas and the New York Art World" states that while films like Mekas' *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches* cannot be reduced to be just home movies, the depictions of the social relations of New York's Avant Garde community have a specificity that lets them serve as "home movies of the avant garde" (16). The relation of Mekas' films to the New York Avant Garde allows the films to speak most directly to that community. However, while the films possess a proximity to the New York Avant Garde and speak to those experiences, they are not home movies in the literal sense, as the editing and re-presentation of the footage into cohesive longer piece distances films differentiates them from more typical home movie traditions, even if the artifacts and clips that make up the film are fairly indistinguishable from typical home movies if shown in isolation. Moreso, it is the editing of the home movies that allows them to communicate to the larger small group that is the New York Avant Garde, as otherwise the un-edited home movies would be most accessible only to people directly involved with them. The labeling of Mekas' films as "diary films" denotes their portrayals of day-to-day life while delineating that their cinematic form challenges easy categorization within the tradition of home movie making. The labeling also describes the

difficulty of easily categorizing Mekas' films under umbrellas such as experimental or documentary.

Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania portrays Mekas' return to Lithuania to visit family after an absence of several decades (figure 16). The footage selected in the film resembles typical American home movies: portrayals of family moments. The trauma of World War II shadows the film's often idyllic portraits of the family, but this trauma eludes direct representation and stays off-screen. Even when Mekas visits the site of the displaced person camp where he spent several years of his life, he finds no trace of it and remarks in the voiceover that no one living nearby even remembers it. This moment emphasizes that home movies do not just choose to represent the idyllic side of life, instead moments of familial trauma and sadness are difficult to represent in home movies. Moreover, Mekas uses the aesthetic qualities of home movies to assert his non-normative experience onto the conformist fabric of American home movies. While home movies express a level of artistic expression in their raw form, the power of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* is how editing, voiceover, and sound add another artistic dimension to what would otherwise be just several reels of home movies and in doing so, enhances the communicative power of the work. And, while *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* captures many of the "golden age" and familial aesthetics common in home movies, Mekas' experience as an immigrant who spent many years away from home due to war displays a far more complicated portrayal of the family than many home movies. Film scholar Efrén Cuevas states that even though the immigrant experience is now often represented in films by second generation or third generation immigrants, Mekas' work is a unique perspective on the

immigrant via his status as a first generation immigrant cinematically exploring those experiences (198). The narrative strung together through the long-form format of the film allows Mekas to construct a representation of his family and experiences that is far more cinematic and more easily exhibited than any unedited home movie reel could express. Therefore, this technique allows the film to communicate to a wider small group than just his immediate friends and family involved in or knowledgeable of the events of the film.

Figure 3-2. Still from *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania.* Mekas' mother who he has not seen for decades cooking.

While *Tarnation,* like *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania,* is a compilation of family footage, *Tarnation* was made after the advent of home video in the 1980s. While the difficulty of shooting film instills a level of selectivity into what it portrayed, video offers more freedom and flexibility, which *Transition* demonstrates. James M. Moran in their 2002 book *There's no Place like Home Video* argues that home video furthers the same idealized imagery of the family that scholars such as Zimmerman identified within home movie practices. Moran describes home videos as "constructed by intellectuals and journalists as the abject 'other' against which favored media practices are measured" (xvi) and argues that home video continues the legacy of home movies as "utopian representation of domestic space" (xvi). Marsha and Devin Orgeron question

this reading in their article “Familial Pursuits, Editorial Acts: Documentaries after the Age of Home Video” where they avoid a purely technological determinist argument, but still argue that films such as *Tarnation* show home videos’ potential to create less idealized portraits of families than what is found in home movies. In this manner, home videos serve as more complete portraits of families (48). I find both of these readings very compelling and together productive. While home videos offer a greater chance for less selective representation, I believe that *Tarnation* distinguishes itself from typical home video practices that may still align with the nationalized narrative of familialism, because as a film, *Tarnation* possesses the narrative power to dissect and interrogate less perfected representations of the family that would be otherwise swept under the rug even if they were recorded.

Figure 3-3. Still from *Tarnation*. Caouette’s mother Renee.

Tarnation’s style, similar to *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania,* pulls on more experimental techniques to form a montage of home videos (as well as some home movies too) that together display the director’s relationship with his mentally ill mother (figure 17). In comparison to the idyllic familial qualities of many home movies, *Tarnation* is a visceral disruption to the nationalized narrative of a perfect family and economic prosperity that home movies of the past perpetuate. Unlike *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* which uses first

person monologue, *Tarnation* utilizes third-person text inserts to weave together the narrative. This choice reflects the depersonalization that Caouette suffers from during the film, and perhaps gives him sufficient distance to deal with the disturbing narrative the home videos reveal. The film reveals a portrait of his family where mental illness arises not inexplicably, but rather through a systemically abusive psychiatric system. While *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* also deals with dark themes, the darker moments of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* have happened off screen, and *Tarnation* distinguishes itself by bringing on screen what home movies can't or won't show. The content that *Tarnation* chooses to show can in this way feel exhibitionist, seeking to bring private lives to dispersed audiences.

Yet, just as Mekas' filmmaking can be viewed as most directly speaking to the New York Avant Garde and the experience of a first generation immigrant, there is also a level of specificity to *Tarnation* that defies its more exhibitionist elements. Within the iMovie editing and special effects that have an aesthetic far removed from the clean style of the official culture, lies a very introspective narrative about children of mentally ill parents that is highly specific and personal to certain people. Moreover, the film serves not just as something for outsiders, but also is a vehicle for Caouette to communicate within his family, serving to untangle the web of experiences that shaped his familial relationships. In this way, *Tarnation* demonstrates that diary films can create more complicated discourses and investigations of family history than just home movies and videos on their own. *Tarnation,* like folk cinema, is a form of artistic communication in small groups, using the cinematic form to communicate specific messaging to an in-group. And more so, because *Tarnation's* communication about familial representation creates a new

small group, as the diary film can reach more disparate groups of people than unedited home movies and video, it specifically demonstrates the power in diary filmmaking to unite people with shared experiences, and foreshadows a folkloric potential within cinema.

Tarnation in this way even with its more exhibitionary tendencies still forms a type of creative communication within small groups, just as *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* communicates messages specific to the New York Avant Garde and the first-generation immigrant experience. Each of these films demonstrates the communicative power of utilizing home movie and video footage in film; weaving together narratives through often experimental editing can bring footage that would otherwise be private to people who find within them shared experiences. While small groups may be conceived as people who all know each other personally, relationships and commonalities can also be built via the experiences people share. The technological reproducibility of film and video challenges typical notions of what a small group can be as these mediums possess the ability to connect people who are geographically and physically far apart.

Moreover, the films display the power and significance of applying cinematic techniques to home movies and videos. Like folklore that is littered with a past in service to homogenizing forces of cultural nationalism, home movies and videos can easily become just reflections of the narratives of the American dream and familialism. I argue that the process of editing home movies and videos allows filmmakers like Mekas and Caouette to disrupt these narratives, and to instead center stories that show more varied experiences: the immigrant experience and the New York Avant Garde in the case of Mekas, and familial mental illness in the case of Caouette. The

process of editing differentiates these films from typical home movies and videos, but it makes the films more accessible to larger small groups and lets individuals communicate messages that would not come through in the raw home movie and video footage. Diary films do not radically change home movies and videos, rather they reframe them to intensify their communicative capacities. I draw on this dynamic in the creation of my diary film, where I utilize both recently shot footage as well as older home movies and videos to communicate some of my life experiences to those around me, while at the same time interrogating the national ideologies present in the home movies and videos I utilize.

Artist Statement

The following section of this chapter will be an artist statement discussing the short diary film that I made, entitled *How We May Have Seen It*. This film aimed to capture my relationships with the places I lived and the people I have shared these places with. As I find myself at a time of transition, I decided to make a film that could serve as a tool for reflection. My intended audience for this film consists of my friends and family, many of whom are featured in the film or helped with it in one way or another. While making *How We May Have Seen It* has been a process full of reflection, my intent with this film is not just an inward-facing project, but rather to create a film that communicates something about my experiences to those around me that I couldn't express through another medium. *How We May Have Seen It* is about five minutes long, and structured into six vignettes. While much of the footage in the film is archival, in the months prior to editing the film, I shot additional footage to include in my film.

The contents of the film's six vignettes are as follows. The first vignette contains old home video footage shot by my sister and I on our family's computer Photo Booth app webcam. The second vignette includes footage that explores motion and cityscapes shot specifically for this project. The third vignette utilizes Super8 footage that I shot within the last two years, as well as Super8 footage I shot after beginning this project in my neighborhood. The fourth vignette explores nature and landscapes of my hometown, shot while I was there for holidays. The fifth vignette contains footage shot since the start of this project of time with friends. The final vignette returns to the theme of home videos, but uses home videos I shot within the last two years edited more experimentally than the presentation of home videos in the first vignette. In vignettes one, three, and six, I chose to use archival home movies and home videos in order to commentate on home movie and video practices. I used the format of the diary film to disrupt the narrative of familialism, similar to what Mekas' and Caouette's films do. I then decided to shoot over the period of several months additional footage in order to contextualize the older home movie and videos with newer footage that portrays more of the present.

I took influence from Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* as well as Caouette's *Tarnation* while making *How We May Have Seen It*. Inspired by *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania,* I decided to structure my film into numbered vignettes. Turning to what techniques I found impactful in Caouette's *Tarnation,* as I sifted through home videos, I decided, like Caouette, to leave some home videos largely uncut while presenting others in a more experimental and abstract editing style. While Caouette employs experimental editing in certain

parts of his films, he keeps clips such as a video of his younger self performing a character unedited. Because some of these home videos I was working with were very performative in nature (figure 18), I decided to take the same approach as Caouette and minimally edit them to preserve the authorship and original intent of the videos.

Figure 3-4. Still from *How We May Have Seen It*. My sister singing the national anthem.

For the narration of *How We May Have Seen It*, I decided to do something distinct from Mekas' spoken narration and Caouette's title cards. I created narration through a constructed conversation composed of snippets of recorded conversations between friends as well as recordings of my friends and family members' reactions to unfinished versions of the film. This allowed me to create a narrative that weaves together the disparate vignettes into a cohesive form. Moreover, creating a soundscape interspersed with narration was an idea inspired by my first case study on *Aguaespejo Granadino,* a film that mixes ambient noise, music, and narration in its soundtrack. I also found *Aguaespejo Granadino* a particularly strong inspiration for segments that include landscapes or cityscapes, as the film demonstrates how elements such as sound and editing can be used to effectively communicate the feeling of a place.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of the narration recalls my second case study on the collaborative filmmaking practices of the Bolivian filmmaking collective Ukamau Group, even though my film's content and aims are very different from the more explicitly political cinema of the Ukamau Group. While I worked with my family to collect home videos and many parts of the film were recorded with friends, I wanted to find more ways to include other people's voices in the film and not just my own, and I realized that narration comprised of various conversations was an ideal way to do that. Additionally, I took influence from the Third Cinema movement as a whole and especially García Espinosa's writings, as the film I made was very removed from perfection. It is an imperfect film as well as a still unfinished one, as while I write this I am still working on finishing *How We May Have Seen It*.

How We May Have Seen It uses the format of vignettes to express distinct experiences to those close to me: my family and friends. These distinct perspectives are tied together by the constructed conversation that serves as the film's soundtrack. I express some specific themes throughout the six vignettes, which are emphasized by this unique style of narration. I first wanted to explore the passage of time, specifically as I found myself at a time of transition between different periods of my life. This theme is most relevant in vignettes that use older home video footage and super8. I additionally explore the contrast between exterior spaces (i.e. cities, nature) and interior spaces (i.e. the home) in the film, which I found to be an important site of reflection as I once again find myself contemplating how to say goodbye to a certain place. I interrogate this dichotomy throughout my film, but specifically through the contrast between the vignettes featuring cityscapes and nature and the vignettes featuring more domestic settings and

home video. Finally, my last thematic interest in the film was to understand and disrupt the essentializing narrative of familialism. I do this in vignettes that specifically utilize family videos, as well as when I use Super8 videos, a medium associated with family movie-making practices. I interrogate this theme by displaying more nuclear versions of a family in earlier vignettes, and then disrupting these portrayals in later vignettes by representing family video, and therefore the family itself, as a more fluid concept that can often also be composed of friends and other relationships. In my film, time weaves its way through interior spaces and explores relationships with both family and friends. Then, especially as the internal clock of the film progresses towards the present, the film shifts to exploring exterior life: demonstrating how our experiences of the outside world are rooted in the relationships formed in more personal, interior spaces.

Throughout this project, my great difficulty was feeling that my own life was not cinematic enough to be part of a film. Even though as I have theorized folk cinema I have tried to deconstruct the notion that only certain forms of narratives and types of expression are worthy of the big screen, while making this film I found myself replicating the same limited thinking on cinema that I have tried to work against. This demonstrates to me the stakes of my project of folk cinema. Even with the rise of digital video, certain video creations remain alienated from cinema, despite the profound potential for community artistic expression that they possess. This dynamic is unfortunate, as home movies and videos are sources of rich interpersonal expression, especially when reorganized as diary films. Films like Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* and Caouette's *Tarnation* demonstrate this potential through their own unique creative uses of home movies and videos in their filmmaking. I see my film as pursuing a similar aim, and

therefore working to lay the groundwork for a time where cinema is no longer viewed as an elusive art form inaccessible to everyday people, but rather an open and accessible medium that can become an integral part of a community's folklore, even if that community is as small as a family or circle of friends.

Conclusion

Folk cinema theorizes a project that questions both the boundaries of folklore and cinema. It seeks to obliterate the boundaries that divide these two terms, and calls for a cinema that is truly of the people, of all of humanity. As I explore folk cinema I embrace the complexities and difficulties that the term folklore presents. Folklore is fundamentally problematic, deeply tied to the origins of the nation state, cultural nationalism, and the dawn of the industrial revolution, and therefore the exploitative system of capitalism. And, as we attempt to untangle folklore from all of its baggage, what ends up happening is a loss of all specificity, a transformation of folklore into simply a word describing culture. And maybe that merging of folklore and culture is desirable. Because if folklore is the unofficial culture, then for all cultures to become unofficial culture is a demand intrinsically wrapped up in the revolutionary project of liberation from the systems of capitalism and colonialism. My theorization of folk cinema is just one small manifestation of this larger liberatory project, one that now has spanned centuries and winded across continents. However, the theorization of folk cinema that I propose is just a start, and I hope that folk cinema can be pursued many times over, and most importantly become an idea that is not just theoretical, but integrated into filmmaking practices.

My theorization of folk cinema explores the topic through case studies that analyze the topic at three levels of small groups: the nation, the region, and finally the family. These case studies span three continents and propose three unique and divergent sites for folklore: the city of Granada in the case of my case study on *Aguaespejo Granadino*, the nation of Bolivia for my study of the films of the Ukamau Group, and finally the American family as I investigate home

movies and videos in diary filmmaking. These three explorations reveal that the ideology of the nation follows folklore wherever it goes, no matter how large or small the community is. The current political and economic systems of the world rely on these imagined communities of cultural nationalism, and folklore through its ability to produce essentialized versions of national culture is an integral part of these systems. However, all this is not to say that folklore is doomed to never escape its legacy of cultural nationalism, because folklore at the same time is the culture of the people, the culture of all of us. And the agency of the people, the "folk," constantly slips through in folklore. While folklore can help form nations, it has a level of culture specificity through its origin in small groups that has the potential to destroy the very concept of the nation. Therefore, within folklore is the possibility of liberation, yet also the potential for the exact opposite: a nationalism that seeks the total domination of the people.

With my first case study, an investigation of experimental filmmaker José Val del Omar's film *Aguaespejo Granadino,* I explore folk cinema at the level of the region. I trace Val del Omar's own personal history, and discover how *Aguaespejo Granadino* possesses a uniquely localized portrayal of the city that he was raised in. Using the perspective of Spanish orientalism under Franco, I analyze how a folk cinema could combat essentializing narratives. I then turn to the idea of duende, and study how *Aguaespejo Granadino* incorporates aesthetic traditions and philosophies specific to Andalusia and Granada, in order to create a film that functions like the dance, or the *Gran Seguiriya* as the secondary title labels it as. I connect this analysis to Benjamin's discussion of ritual in cinema, and propose that the duende of A*guaespejo Granadino* present when it is exhibited allows the film to take on a ritualistic role, and therefore suggests

that folk cinema could allow films to gain a ritualistic role, despite their technologically reproduced nature. Finally, I look at the legacy of *Aguaespejo Granadino*, tracing its influence from experimental film to concerts to music videos. All this investigation reveals that *Aguaespejo Granadino* is a film that communicates at a profoundly local level, intricately intertwining its aesthetics with an awareness of the artistic practices of Granada and Anadalusia at large. For my theorization of folk cinema, this reveals the potential for cinema to use more abstract and experimental cinematic forms in order to create narratives that are specific to local communities, and therefore folk cinema could deconstruct essentializing narratives about culture that folklore often perpetrates.

My second case study explores the films of the Ukamau Group, analyzing folk cinema at the level of a nation through a discussion that explores the difficulties that the mostly mestizo Ukamau Group faced making political cinema collaboratively with Bolivian indigenous people. I first situate my discussion of the Ukamau Group within the movement of Third Cinema, as Third Cinema is a cinema with radical political aims, similar to the potential politics I see within a possible folk cinema. With my discussion properly situated, I then investigate how the lack of community collaboration in *Yawar Mallku* caused the Ukamau group to reevaluate their filmmaking practices, and create *El Coraje del Pueblo,* a film that is not just politically radical, but also reflects indigenous aesthetics. I proceed to interrogate these same films through the conflict between the mestizo ideology of indigenismo and the ideology of indianismo. I question whether or not even with its more indigenous aesthetics *El Coraje del Pueblo* was a “cine junto al pueblo,” and propose that a better aim might be not a cinema with the people, but a cinema of

the people. Lastly, I turn to the legacy of the Ukamau Group, exploring later indigenous filmmaking projects and demonstrating how despite their flaws, the Ukamau Group still brought cinema closer to the people and other filmmakers continue this work in their own distinct ways. These exploration in this case study allow me to explore the difficulties a folk cinema would face creating a cinema that is truly of the people. Moreover, I theorize that the complexities of the nation in regards to folk cinema, demonstrates that while a nation can function as a small group, the complexities and divisions such a small group faces cause particular difficulties when envisioning folk cinema. Based on these difficulties revealed through the filmmaking of the Ukamau Group, I conclude that a folk cinema would be a project that is continually ongoing, and necessitating a hybridic view of culture.

My final case study investigates the practice of incorporating home movies and videos in diary filmmaking through my own creative participation. In this final case study, I move to the smallest possible small group, the family, in this case in the American context. I begin by utilizing the documentary *Home Movies* as a text that reveals the potential for home movies to be folklore. I then expand that discussion to include an investigation of how American home movies and videos can produce the essentializing national ideology of familism. This analysis leads me to study how the films *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* and *Tarnation* that exemplify the diary filmmaking tradition, can serve as texts that demonstrate the way in which diary filmmaking can disrupt the national ideology of familism present in home movies and videos and communicate to small groups that wouldn't exist in the case of unedited home movies and videos. I use this background as framing for my own diary film, a short film comprising six

vignettes that depicts my feelings and experiences at a time of transition in my life. Intending this film's audience to be my friends and family, I utilize the medium of film to communicate experiences about the passage of time, my connections to certain places, and relationships with people that couldn't be communicated to my family and friends in another medium. Throughout my short film, I utilize my own home movies and videos in order to additionally investigate and disrupt how home movies and videos can produce essentializing versions of the American family. My own creative work through making this film is an especially vital part of my theorization of folk cinema as a whole. This is not just due to the participatory character of folklore, but also because my theorization of folk cinema seeks to inform real-world filmmaking practices. I conclude from my experiences making the film that home movies and videos demonstrate the strength of national ideologies; they infect units as small as the family. I also realize how deeply entrenched ideas about what can and cannot be cinema is in our cultural psyche, as I struggle to view my own life as cinematic enough to be part of the film. Despite this issue, my creative work in this area ultimately celebrates home movies and videos as an example of a common practice that approaches folk cinema, a vital avenue for future theorization and filmmaking practice.

I find it appropriate to end by returning to García Espinosa, who eloquently captures a key element of my project of folk cinema in his quotation, "El futuro será, sin duda, del folklore. Pero, entonces, ya no habrá necesidad de llamarlo así porque nada ni nadie podrá volver a paralizar el espíritu creador del pueblo. El arte no va a desaparecer en la nada. Va a desaparecer

en el todo" (García Espinosa 13).[27] Paradoxically, a fully formed folk cinema necessitates the end of folklore, the end of the cinema, even the end of art. Folk cinema is a project that can only reach its full liberatory potential through the destruction of the boundaries between art and life, folklore and culture. Only when these borders disappear can folklore in all its manifestation thrive. Because for folklore to be free, it must become everything. The divide between the official and unofficial culture must be obliterated and phrases like the folk must become meaningless as they simply encompass humanity. Cinema must become not a cloistered practice of filmmakers, but rather so integrated into daily practices and culture as a whole that it ceases to exist as a distinct category. Only through the total liberation of human culture and life can folklore, and in turn folk cinema, finally be free from all the limitations put on it both internally through nationalistic and essentializing narratives, and externally through pressure by the elite official culture. To pursue the liberation of folklore then means to desire its destruction, because only through its demise can folklore finally be free. Once folklore and cinema are no longer tangible ideas, but rather fully integrated parts of culture, can there finally be a folk cinema.

Folk cinema therefore is a revolutionary project that calls for the entire re-imagining of culture, a cinema that as García Espinosa would say, wants to disappear into everything. Folk cinema is a cinema of liberation, a cinema of a reimagined society, a cinema that seeks its own end. It is a project that will never be finished as long as it exists, because once folk cinema is

[27] Translation: "The future will be, without a doubt, of folklore. But then, there will no longer be any need to call it that because nothing and nobody will be able to return and paralyze the creative spirit of the people."

realized, there will no longer be cinema, there will no longer be folklore. There will only be the beautiful liberated culture of all of humanity.

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