“¿Que pinto yo aquí?” The Construction of National Identity in Contemporary Spanish Rural Cinema

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with the construction of national identity as defined by post-Franco Spanish rural cinema. It takes into account issues of cultural and political stagnancy in twentieth century Spain, as well as the larger historical and psychological trajectory of the same. This work examines notions of Spanish identity through the films of Fernando Gomez, Mario Camus, Jose Luis Cuerda and others, and considers the cultural and sociological conditions internal and external to the works themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Spanish rural cinema is actively engaged in the discursive construction of Spanish national identity. The many turbulent aspects of twentieth century Spain, marked by war, internal political persecution and totalitarianism have all played a role in determining Spain’s psychological trajectory. Contemporary Spanish rural cinema presents a definition of national identity that takes all of this into account, and which is marred by the conflicts of social and historical progress. This thesis will begin by providing a brief historical look at the Spanish film industry throughout the twentieth century and the social and political conditions that shaped it. It will engage “Spanishness” in a cultural and political context that presents the strong historical tradition that undermines such an ideological notion. Following this, I will examine the place of a number of rural films in history, arguing that they act as a historical reflection on Franco’s regime from the point of Spain’s democratic period. Their portrayal of rural life under Franco’s rule will be contrasted with similarly-themed films released before and during the Francoist age, Floran Rey’s *La aldea maldita* (1930) and Luis Garcia Berlanga’s *Bienvenido, Señor Marshall!* (1955). The thesis will conclude with an examination of the current condition of rural cinema in Spain through the analysis of more contemporary works from filmmakers Jose Luis Cuerda and Julio Medem. This construction of national identity through contemporary rural cinema functions as a healing retrospective of the trauma incurred during Spain’s years of dictatorship.

A relatively small amount of scholarly work has been published on Spanish rural cinema as a genre. Most notably is a small section within *Contemporary Spanish Cinema*
by Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas, which emphasizes the atemporality of the genre. Most of the work on rural cinema treats individual films and the context in which they are placed. Elena Carrera’s contribution to the anthology The Cinema of Spain and Portugal views Los santos inocentes as an allegorical statement of Spain’s current political attitude. Jose Maria Caparros Lera’s El cine español de la democracia contains a commentary on the historical nature of El viaje a ninguna parte, as does a section of Contemporary Spanish Film From Fiction on Fernando Fernan Gomez and the issue of memory within the film. The films of Jose Luis Cuerda receive no more than passing comments when placed in the context of war or as discussed in contemporary reviews. Available interviews with the filmmakers as well as other commentary available on these films, however, give a fresh take on their works and the environment they occupy. To this purpose, compilations such as Conversaciones con Fernando Fernan Gomez will greatly benefit the thesis’s examination of El viaje..., particularly in terms of his treatment of America’s influence in the film’s content and production.

In dealing with issues of nationality, two important works place the progression of Spanish history with respect to contemporary cinema. Cain on Screen: Contemporary Spanish Cinema by Thomas G. Deveny deals with the various phases of 20th century Spain, with a special regard to the Franco years. One particular section on past memories within the book brings up both El viaje a ninguna parte and Los santos inocentes as casualties of the totalitarian regime through Franco’s influence in matters of leisure and social order respectively. In order to further stress the root conditions of nationality in contemporary rural cinema, “Spanishness” in the Spanish Novel and Cinema of the 20th-21st Century (edited by Cristina Sanchez-Conejero) and Sebastian Balfour’s The
Reinvention of Spain: Nation and Identity since Democracy prove invaluable in terms of locating a diverse and ongoing discourse over national identity through various films and filmmakers with a special emphasis on the Spanish historical trajectory as the basis for identity.

The Spanish film industry shortly before Franco’s death and throughout the transicion was fostered through financial assistance following years of state control and censorship. A number of books illustrate the shifting patterns in censorship and the role that the state-owned Radio Television Espanola (RTVE) plays. Most notably John Hopewell’s Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema After Franco which contains an expanded section on Mario Camus but proves far more beneficial in terms of better understanding the role of NO-DO, the AP and PSOE political parties and their roles in crafting motion picture laws and the dire financial condition of the national cinema by the end of the 1970s. All this will prove integral in order to contextualize the growing role of the state through subjugation and later through state subsidies.

Given that a majority of the films take place during Franco’s rule, a body of work covering the Francoist philosophy and social expectations at the turn of the century is required. For this purpose, Norman B. Cooper’s Catholicism and the Franco Regime, Max Gallo’s Spain Under Franco, and Antonio Cazorla Sanchez’ Fear and progress: ordinary lives in Franco’s Spain, 1939-1975 will provide valuable context on Falangist social expectations and the mentality that plagued not only the protagonists covered within the films, but also the nostalgic environment that envelops them.


1.

“SPANISHNESS” IN A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Throughout the twentieth century, Spain’s historical trajectory has been marred by trauma, sedation and redemption. The lack of a stable government during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) opened the doors to national instability and bloody strife. The regime of Francisco Franco following the end of the Spanish Civil War instituted a thirty-six year forced cultural reunification of Spain. Franco and his Falangist Party aimed to not only transform the country into a new fascist order but also to shift its ideological perspective using, at times, the cinematic medium. His death in 1975 and the coming of democracy have led to philosophical and artistic stock taking that continues to this day. Contemporary Spanish rural cinema addresses this issue of historical reminiscence through films in which issues of “Spanishness” come into play.

Spanish rural cinema participates in this national project, playing a cultural and psychological role in defining a national identity, molded by the nation’s modern historical experience. This chapter examines Spanish national identity through various contexts, particularly through historical and cultural interpretations in the various stages of twentieth century Spain, while also taking into account the longer philosophical trajectory of Spanish identity. The condition of Spanish cinema throughout the Franco regime and the democratic epoch will also be examined in this context. This will be followed by incorporating the scholarly discourse on national cinema as well as the
current economic conditions of Spanish film as a basis for establishing such a national
entity. Lastly, this chapter places rural cinema into this ongoing discussion.

Grasping the mindset of those turbulent years in Spanish history (1939-1975) and
notions of “Spanishness” predating Franco is necessary in order to understand the modus
operandi of the Falangue Party’s philosophical and cultural tenets. The Falangueist regime
was based on traditional principles, emphasizing a national connection to an undisputed
ruler and past glories. Franco’s regency as “Caudillo y Jefe de Estado de Espana por la
Gracia de Dios” (“Leader and Head of State of Spain by the Grace of God”) followed an
intense civil conflict that dated back to the 1870s, when strife between the various Carlist
factions for control of Spain was commonplace. Though Franco ruled as regent for the
Borbon Royal Family, various actions (such as the monarchic right of walking beneath a
canopy and living in royal housing) transformed his image and that of his country to a
globally-accepted European presence from that of a mere post-war dictatorship. His 1948
declaration of Spain as a monarchy symbolized his personal position and his country’s
royalist essence in an effort to present itself as a more open nation in the world stage.¹
This was aimed at emphasizing the state’s superficial political stability and openness on
the world stage, in light of the stain of post-World War II European totalitarianism.

The Carlist Wars of the nineteenth century between liberal republican forces and
the royal establishment represented more than just a conflict for control of Spain. It was
also a fight to determine which ideology would take hold in the country. The main clash
of twentieth century Spain, following the Spanish Civil War, was a continuation of
previous ideological conflict. It was composed of two rival ideologies: the ruling fascist

Falangue Party and the old republican guard, made up of various leftist factions, following the Falangist victory of 1939.\textsuperscript{2} The resonance of such an intense and long-standing conflict ensured not only that Spain’s post-Civil War traumatic wounds remained open, but also a discernible influence within a cinema built on national self-reflection.

**Spain’s Philosophical Trajectory**

A series of political and cultural events predating Franco present a foundation of a national identity built upon Spain’s historical and cultural trajectory. Religious affiliation plays a large part in determining such a point of identification. Spanish Catholicism throughout the sixteenth century and beyond represented an affront to the rise of Protestantism in Europe, and the political figure of the monarchy strengthened that union of identification between politics and religion. The crown stood as a cultural guide for the Spanish nation to follow, one with which Spaniards and the Catholic Church could find parallel on the grounds that such a system stood “por la gracia de Dios” (“by the grace of God.”)\textsuperscript{3} This emphasis on the monarchist Catholic ideology remained following the revolutionary events of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century and shifted to fit new philosophical movements throughout Europe.

During the Napoleonic Wars, while a Bonaparte sat on the Spanish throne, gatherings of civic leaders occurred with the objective of establishing a national stand in the face of foreign oppression. Sovereignty based on egalitarian principles was declared

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid. at 23.
during a congress of the National Assembly, which took place in Cadiz in 1810. Two years later, the tenets for Spanish governance were set as that of a Catholic parliamentarian nation with a newly approved constitution. Forgoing the previous absolutist rule of Spanish monarchs, this proclamation embraced liberal notions of Spanish nationalism based upon a commonly-shared cultural and historical experience, citing the populist governing entities such as the parliamentarian system of the medieval age as an example of national unity. Moreover, the development of these notions of nationalism incorporated a self-reflective historical outlook. The continental struggle against Napoleon and his allies was called the “Guerra de la Independencia” (“War of Independence”) representing Spain’s stance against Bonaparte rule. Such an inward look into Spain’s psyche and cultural condition spurred the establishment of new philosophical camps following the defeat of Napoleon and the reconstruction of Europe.

Progressive nationalists advocated the decentralization of the state in favor of autonomous self-determination, while the conservative camp argued for the opposite, citing cultural and historical struggles against what they perceived to be heretic entities. The traditionalists stood with the monarchy’s non-reformist mentality and established a definition for a “Golden Age” that highlighted Hapsburg absolutism and Catholic allegiance during the Protestant Wars of the 16th century. These camps actively participated in the parliamentarian governance of Spain following the Carlist Wars of the late nineteenth century, during which time stronger notions of the ideological perspectives were put forward. Liberal nationalists during this time put forth the notion of

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4 Ibid. at 19.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid. at 21.
a “sacralized” nation which placed them in alliance with their conservative counterparts. The latter group, led by Antonio Canovas, emphasized the romantic notion of a “national character” molded by history and tradition. Moreover, Canovas stood with the conservative movement’s inherent connection with religious thought, proclaiming during an 1882 conference that divine right remained and justified the privilege of public leaders and wealthy industrialists.⁷

Of greater importance from the conservative tenets, however, was the construction of Castille as a determining point for national identity from which Spain could trace its roots. Running parallel with the conservative emphasis of a centralized political state and noting the opposition to regionalists of Catalan and Basque descent, Castille became established as an imaginary embodiment of “Spanishness.” Canovas emphasized not only the seat of power and congregation within the Castillian plain, but also as the cultural and historical foundation of the country.⁸ Such notions of identity were embraced by a number of philosophical groups during the late 19th century, most notably the “Generation of 1898.” Employing psychological examinations of the national mentality, the “regeneracionistas” pointed to Castille as the foundation of Spanish identity and referenced castellano and such cultural aspects like bullfighting as intrinsic with the region.⁹

Such movements, however, subsided following the abdication of King Alfonso XIII and the failure of the Spanish Republic (1931-1939). What remained was the conflict between such definitions of national identity and the clash of ideologies that

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⁷ Ibid. at 22.
⁸ Ibid. at 23.
⁹ Ibid. at 30.
overwhelmed them. Political affiliations were unified with the end of the Civil War and the Fascist victory under the Falangist power structure. Replacing the republican government with a dictatorship acting as regency shifted notions of national identity grounded on religious and monarchist traditions. The reshaping of Spain into this new political order nonetheless retained the traditional tenets of Spanish nationalism, and stood to re-establish what they felt was lost during the republican years, the philosophy of which was abhorrent to the new ruler. A clear example of this comes through the alliances that the Francoist regime established after coming to power.

The cultural oppression of the regime attracted allies and brought to life a system of classification for Spain’s citizenry. The Catholic Church worked closely with the regime and supported its establishment and maintenance through its silent consent and later by echoing the regime’s rhetoric towards the population. The Spanish Civil War caused the deaths of thousands of dissident clergy members. Historian Antonio Cazorlo Sanchez notes that “the Church’s silence meant moral endorsement for the military courts … priests were often seen seated there, either as spectators or because they went to testify.”

Church leadership also embraced the Francoist regime and its philosophy. The bishop of Lerida, for example, advised his flock in 1955 that it “should be grateful to Franco and his government and [that they] must ask God to illuminate them and give them comfort so they can continue with their work of enthroning social justice.”

The population at large also remained a target of the regime’s attentions.

Following the end of the war, uneasiness regarding the defeated enemies as well as the

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11 Ibid. at 136.
civillian population caught in the midst of the struggle settled in Spain. To address this national instability, and to clarify the regime’s position on social relations, the Falangists named the regime’s two main enemies which, as Sanchez points out, were “the perverse, defeated republican leaders and the good, ordinary Spaniards who had been led by foreign ideologies and perverse politicians.”

The latter classification points towards Franco’s paranoid obsession with what he described as the “Judeo-Marxist and Masonic syndicate.” The state went as far as employing language to reinforce its perspective of the citizenry. Sanchez further points out that:

> “Good” was the code word for workers, a term that was avoided and replaced with “producers”. The name change only reflected the barely hidden anxieties of the dictatorship. For the regime, the working class was the real problem, because workers were potential revolutionaries.

Given this, the Spanish population was kept at bay under the regime, which feared a backlash from the many dismayed parties on the losing end of the Civil War and the opposing ideology. Such control, a necessary instrument in the eyes of the regime to solidify psychological power over the citizens, was extended to cinematic production through a number of measures in the ensuing years.

**Spanish Cinema under Franco**

The condition of Spanish cinema was altered by the coming to power of Franco and the regime’s subsequent efforts to reshape a divided country through their ideological viewpoint. Under Franco, notions of national identity would be jeopardized and fought for. Even in the midst of the Civil War, the Nationalist regime under Franco made its first

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12 Ibid. at 43.

13 Ibid.
entry into the Spanish film industry. The establishment of the first censorship board oversaw both a blockade of foreign imports and national script supervision.\textsuperscript{14} By the mid-1940s, the state-sanctioned “películas del interés nacional” stamp instituted definitions of national identity in contrast to suppressed foreign imports.\textsuperscript{15} Films such as \textit{Raza}, an autobiographical look at Franco’s rise, echoed the regime’s sentiments of honor, courage and patriotism.\textsuperscript{16} The film, based on Franco’s anonymous book of the same name and commissioned by the generalissimo himself, aimed at embodying the glorification that the Francoist regime sought to underline for the country’s population and national image.

While such brainwashing and self-congratulatory works passed the standards for approval of a paranoid regime, another Western European nation sought to confront such notions through critical and honest works of art following the Second World War. Post-war Italy challenged this idea of cinematic national glorification through the release of a number of important films, including the socially-conscious works of Italian Neorealists. Filmmakers such as Rossellini and di Sica came to terms with the harsh reality that a post-war nation presented them.\textsuperscript{17} These works, however, were not available Spanish audiences until 1951, when the National Film School hosted an Italian cinema week in conjunction with the Italian consulate.\textsuperscript{18} This event opened the way for rising Spanish

\textsuperscript{14} Following the Nationalist victory at war’s end, further efforts, such as the first state-owned NO-DO news broadcasts and mandatory dubbing of foreign films by Spanish studios, sought to solidify the regime’s hold on the industry.
\textsuperscript{15} The regime further strengthened its efforts towards a state-controlled medium through financial involvement in the following decade. National subsidizing of the industry began in 1952, with films promoting the “national interest” receiving the lion’s share of state funding. Films such as Luis Garcia Berlanga’s \textit{Bienvenido Senor Marshall!} did not receive such a designation, and thus became relegated to depending on foreign interest. The film played in competition during the 1953 Cannes Film Festival.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. at 10.
filmmakers to examine the Italian output in contrast with that of Spain’s controlled medium. As it became known in Spain, the Neorealist movement, with its emphasis on an honest cinematic discourse on its war-scarred society, and the establishment of *Objetivo*, a new film criticism publication, became integral in bringing about a new artistic and more honest perspective in Spanish cinema.

This shift can be seen in the First National Film Congress, held in Salamanca in 1955 with partial financial backing from the Ministry of Education.\(^{19}\) The National Film Congress, a four day event, served as both a response to the Italian Neorealists and a self-reflective reaction to national cinematic impotence. Film artists and industry leaders from both extremes of the Spanish political sphere participated in this gathering. Prominent filmmaker Juan Antonio Bardem, clearly inspired by the work of his colleagues across the Mediterranean and disgusted with the national product and its lack of a realistic reflection on the country’s dire economic situation, passionately defended a swift change of tone for his country’s identity. “Spanish cinema,” he said during the conference, “lives in a state of isolation… isolated… from our own reality.”\(^{20}\) The Franco regime, however, remained watchful and at times actively involved in the conference through banning the attendance of some international guests and ensuring that no such calls for action in Spanish cinema came to fruition.\(^{21}\) The congress’ attempts at shifting the national cinematic conversation resulted in more Neorealist imports for exhibition, as well as influencing many of its participants.\(^{22}\) Neorealist priorities remained a part of Bardem’s

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\(^{20}\) Ibid. at 28.


\(^{22}\) Ibid. at 24.
post-Salamanca work, such as *Calle mayor* (1956) which would be warmly received at Venice.\(^{23}\) Such works aimed at a more honest appraisal of Spanish society.

In the early 1960s, the regime’s efforts at *apertura* (re-opening) sought to reinvent Spain away from its image as the only post-war dictatorship in the West. Following on the state’s 1950s “Spain is different” campaign, the film industry under the state’s control followed like-minded progressive steps. The appointment of Jose Maria Garcia Escudero, previously fired from the board of censorship and a participant during the Salamanca talks, brought about much needed reform to an antiquated industry. He instituted a new category to counter that of “national interest” entitled “*interes especial,*” which not only dealt with more serious social issues but also inadvertently attracted the attention of the state. Initially, a special subset of art cinema theaters were constructed and specified for this new category where foreign films could also be screened. The New Spanish Cinema movement, however, faded under pressure from the government, which eventually decided to close these theaters in an effort to stem the tide of the new directors working on films based on content deemed questionable by the state’s ideological tenets. Moreover, the lack of a commercial appeal of these works ensured the movement’s demise.\(^{24}\)

1967 witnessed the first major congregation of film talent since the Salamanca talks through the radical efforts set forth by the Sitges conference, actively calling for the state to end censorship. A similarly minded conference, this one held by the producer-director association ASDREC in 1970, kept the pressure on the state and its cinematic control to allow for the rise of a truly independent national cinema. The *dictablanda* (soft

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\(^{23}\) Ibid. at 28.
\(^{24}\) Higginbotham, Virginia. *Spanish Film Under Franco*, 68.
dictatorship) of the early 1970s allowed for greater freedom of expression, particularly through the *tercera via films* which relied so heavily on low comedy and American wit, such as Manuel Summers’ *No somos de piedra* which parodied traditional values on birth control.\(^{25}\)

The 1975 demise of Franco and the *movimiento nacional* that made up his party’s ideological perspective since the end of the Civil War brought much needed assistance to a film industry which had been under restraint since the thirties. This period of post-Franco democratic governance, known as *la transición*, spread over to the industry through a series of appointments and events that eased the medium into modernity. In 1976, the process of selection for approval of scripts was annulled.\(^{26}\) Pio Cabanillas, under the government formed by Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez that same year, became the new Minister of Information and Tourism, replacing Alfonso Martin Garnero.\(^{27}\) This shift of power to Spain’s first democratically elected government allowed for the import of such previously censored works as Luis Bunuel’s *Viridiana*, which was first screened in 1977.\(^{28}\) The following year, notification for film shoots replaced the previous system of permits that was instituted by the Franco government.\(^{29}\) Although some works with explicit sexual and sensitive content still came under a level of censorship (such as Pasolini’s *Salo or the 120 Days of Sodom*), a system of classification for ratings was put

\(^{25}\) Ibid. at 67-69.


\(^{27}\) Ibid. at 70.

\(^{28}\) Higginbotham, Virginia. *Spanish Film under Franco*. 121

\(^{29}\) Monterde, Jose Enrique. *Veinte anos del cine español: Un cine bajo la paradoja*. 71.
into place in 1981. Spain’s political change of the guard further benefited the condition of Spanish cinema and aided it in transition to modern standards.

The coming to power of the Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (PSOE) and Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez that same year put into motion a set of initiatives benefiting the frail national industry. Filmmaker Pilar Miro, who had previously worked with Radio-television Espanola, became General Director of Cinematography for the Suarez government in 1982. Miro, alongside Fernando Mendez Leite, initiated a series of reforms, colloquially referred to as the Miro Law, to assist the industry. These protectionist initiatives encouraged higher state subsidies for national productions, an artistic cooperation between Spanish filmmakers and RTVE, and an emphasis on international promotion. Such efforts would not only provide much needed financial assistance to the national scene, but also set the stage for a more active position for Spanish cinema on the world stage.

This promotion of the film industry on the part of the government helped shed light on an intricate period in Spanish history, where the uneasy transicion from totalitarianism to democracy allowed for a higher level of liberated cinematic expression through the demise of state censorship. One example of this comes through the cultural movement la movida madrileña of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which encompassed not only rebellious new Rock ‘n Roll acts such as Alaska y los Pegamoides but also Pedro Almodovar, whose films tackled issues of sexual exploration and taboo topics and took place in Madrid during such a transformational epoch. These urban dramas and

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30 Ibid. at 73.
comedies encapsulate a feeling of pent-up aggression towards the inhuman philosophy that had plagued Spain for over thirty years.

Spanish film during the democratic age has prompted questions as to the significance of the new political order. Scholar Peter Besas wrote in 1985 that “after fifty years, Spaniards seem finally to have shaken off the onus of their politicized past and are now questing for new subjects,” and also pondered “whether political and artistic freedom … result[s] in ‘greater’ or at least more ‘interesting’ forms of art.”

Besas brings up filmmaker Vicente Aranda who, during that time, stated:

…this is an uninteresting country and its films, too, are uninteresting, uninteresting for the rest of the world. … We’ve lived in a time of general assent, and that is the dullest thing that can happen to a country[’s artistic undertaking] … Ours is not a historical period that solicits passion; rather, we have become our own censors and all we want to do is forget.

Aranda’s notion of that era’s cinematic output echoes the so-called “pacto del Olvido” (pact of forgetting) which, during the transition, emphasized the forgoing of political difference and strife during recent Spanish history in favor of working towards nurturing the new-born democracy. Aranda’s condemning prognosis of the Spanish cinema in the mid-1980s reveals a deep frustration with the democratic age’s medium and its insistence on maintaining a single mindset focused on exploring the repercussions of a free Spain while, at the same time, forgetting or repressing the thirty five years of totalitarianism.

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32 Ibid. at 261.
Rural cinema rejects the notion of _olvido_ in favor of actively confronting the historical trauma incurred during the Franco years. In doing so, the genre seeks to not only establish a national healing process through the pain of remembering the dictatorship but also to present a definition of national identity based on Spain’s historical continuity. These works supersede issues of national identity rooted in Spanish history in favor of a more humanistic, universal approach to the human condition. Rural cinema’s position throughout the 1990s expanded to incorporate more than self-reflection and conflict. Rural cinema’s definition of national identity has grown to include a common ground with its urban counterpart through social commentary on modernity and modernization. The rapid coalescing of the urban and the rural, eased by the rapid pace of interconnectivity in communication, has shifted the genre’s tone and definition of national identity. Moreover, modernity comes to influence the genre’s take on “Spanishness” in a more collaborative manner, taking into account the new overriding social order, where critiques of Spain, the government or other national aspects would now be safeguarded through democratic free speech.

“There is more to nationalism and national identity than public moralities and virtuous patriots,” scholar Anthony Smith states, “in the eyes of its devotees, the nation possesses a unique power, pathos, and epic grandeur, qualities which film … can vividly convey.”34 Spanish rural cinema recalibrates such a notion of national identity so as to underline the importance of the national psyche. Urban cinema, with the modern and fast-paced settings that it employs, incorporates an immediacy that transcends history and examines modernity through more universal themes. This interpretation of national identity...

identity through a temporally-restrained perspective of the immediate post-Franco years creates a limited exploration of national identity.

**Scholarly Discourse on National Cinema**

Issues of national identity become further obfuscated by the historical trajectory followed by Spain throughout the twentieth century, both during the Franco regime and the transition to democracy that followed it. An understanding of this trajectory is crucial in order to understand definitions of “Spanishness” when dealing with conditions such as those represented by the rural genre which, unlike Almodovar or Trueba’s urban films, opens the way for a discussion of national identity. David K. Herzberger writes about the permanent standing of history and the chivalrous and deeply religious conditions upheld under the Francoist definitions of national identity. Catholicism, he argues, “points to the foundational ethno-cultural elements rather than to strong civic identification.”

Moreover, Besas points to the manipulation of Spanish history as a Francoist instrument with which to further define a national identity, such as its past involvement with the removal of the Jews and Moors during the fifteenth century and its lessening involvement with Spanish imperialist encounters. What seems to be left over, according to this Falangist notion of “Spanishness,” resembles a permanent stillness based upon a proud Castilian traditionalism, a self-reliance that borders on delusion and wishful thinking.

Underlining the importance of looking through the past to define this notion of “Spanishness,” one can discern Spanish national identity after the settling of the current

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36 Ibid. at 14.
democratic system. “With the transition to democracy in post-Francoist Spain,” Herzberger continues, “…past time would now be opened to modes of inquiry and possibilities for inclusion in the national discourse that had been largely denied during the Franco years.”37 Rural cinema, with its emphasis on traditionalism and the terrain’s psychological stillness, defines a smorgasbord of insecurity, stubbornness and vague hopes, a national identity based upon the scars carried by the nation. The uneasy transition between totalitarianism and democracy is further reflected by more contemporary filmmakers such as Julio Medem. Such a cultural and political transformation opens the way for a new examination of national identity based on historical tenets and popular attitudes, with rural circumstances acting as the ideal stage for such an analysis. “Spanishness” in this respect comes through the genre’s treatment of its people, as well as its emphasis on isolation and self-reflection.

Issues of time and environment are integral to grasping rural cinema and its connection with the historical trajectory of and psychological identification with the state. National identity in cinema, argues Andrew Higson, is “the product of a tension between ‘home and away’, between the identification of the homely and the assumption that it is quite distinct from what happens elsewhere.”38 Considering rural cinema’s isolated nature, this proves especially true for a genre based on its conflict with the urban environment but also on a national psyche more permanently engrossed in the past. Susan Hayward presents a similar argument towards a national cinema that “is ineluctably reduced to a series of enunciations that reverberate around two fundamental concepts:

37 Ibid. at 15.
identity and difference.”39 The similarities lie on this concept of the binary relationship presented by the familiar and the outside world which are at the heart of rural cinema.

Given the historical progression of Spanish cinema and, in particular, the developments of the last thirty years, the epicenter for Spain’s political action (the urban centers of Madrid and Barcelona) have attracted the attention of film scholars dealing with issues of Spanish national identity. When it comes to urban cinema in Spain, Pedro Almodovar’s works come into the picture as reflections of Spain as a democracy on the rise. “There is no doubt,” writes Jean-Claude Seguin, “that the works of Pedro Almodovar are the ones that undoubtedly analyzes the question of the Spanish ‘nation’ with more finesse.” He continues:

Spain is a montage, a puzzle, peripheries, decentralization. Nobody like Pedro Almodovar has achieved more in the development of an extremely complex Hispanic model in which the nation, completely forgotten, can provide a layout where identity can be unraveled. [my translation]40

Seguin’s take on Almodovar’s contributions to national identity in Spanish cinema, though wholly aware of the psychological condition of post-Franco Spain, fails to acknowledge the limited historical perspective of Spanish identity presented in these films.

Though Almodovar’s films succeed in presenting a contemporary account of the country’s position at the end of the decade, they fail to reflect the deeper conflicts within the national psyche in favor of an immediate reaction based upon the cities’ suppressed anger and subsequent relief over the demise of Franco’s regime. Urban cinema’s exploration of the national condition offers a limited perspective of national identity

through a compressed view of history under modern circumstances. Though essential in understanding national identity during the late twentieth century, it nonetheless represents a fraction of that cinema through the instant social historical reaction that it provides following the death of Franco and the demise of fascism as cultural perspective. An analysis of rural cinema offers a more expanded sociological grasp of Spanish history, one that accounts for earlier notions of “Spanishness” that remain operative outside of the frenesi of urban centers. Moreover, Spain’s various conflicts in history and religious and cultural societal mores are more characteristic to a Spanish tradition grounded in the past.

National Cinema through Current Economic Conditions of Spanish Film Industry

In the years following the demise of Franco and the coming of democracy, the industry benefited greatly from government efforts towards nurturing a national cinema. Peter Besas tackles the financial condition of Spanish cinema in the face of growing international pressure for more stable imports and a desire to solidify an otherwise fragile national industry. State subsidies for the many projects that Spanish filmmakers engage in yearly take into account these imports. For example, the case of the 2:1 ratio of imported films to a national or European Union production helps to insure a reinvigoration of national cinema through an artistic exchange between the homegrown product and the contributions of EU members. Moreover, a licensing system put into place in the 1940s, requiring distributors to obtain licenses for Spanish-dubbed films, further assists national development.

Even with such involvement, a solid notion of a national cinema in Spain still remains murky given the involvement of international production companies and investments. The European Union’s Media Programme, though seldom involved with national cinema, is still sought after as a mode of production. Eurimages, involving the cooperation of three countries within the European Union, make a stronger presence in the financing of national films.\textsuperscript{42} Nonetheless, the major presence in the making of Spanish film resides is the television industry and Ministry of Culture, with further assistance from the various autonomous regions in which the films are shot. This encouragement on the part of both the national and autonomous community governments, as well as the presence of RTVE, continues to play an active role in ensuring notions of a financially-defined national cinema.

Of note are the integral financial roles played by the Ministry of Culture, which annually receives applications for scripts and production plans to be funded through the state. Radio Television Espanola, the state-owned television media conglomerate, is also involved in funding a number of projects in exchange for obtaining screening rights through its television channels.\textsuperscript{43} “Spanish television … makes us rethink its borders with cinema, Marsha Kinder writes. She further argues that:

\begin{quote}
The respective fates of these media are inextricably fused. It is not merely a matter of television displacing cinema as the dominant vehicle for defining national and regional identity, for many Spaniards are hoping that these new configurations of television will help revitalize Spain’s national cinema.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[42]{Ibid. at 253.}
\footnotetext[43]{Ibid. at 250-251.}
\footnotetext[44]{Kinder, Marsha. \textit{Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain}. 393.}
\end{footnotes}
Given the steps taken by Spain’s government and its involvement with the country’s various mediums of communication, Spanish cinema can be said to embody a semi-official national output.

Before such progress took place, Franco’s involvement with the medium as an ideological filter for his citizens represented an embodiment of “Spanishness” with Francoism that disavowed non-Falangist principles. Propaganda and glorification films such as Raza stood to gain in the eyes of the state from forcefully unifying the country through the coalescing of Franco and the citizenry. Spanish national cinema would, in effect, be an extension of Franco himself. The various categories and forms of censorship imposed on the medium meant that it came to be defined through the state. Today, notions of Spanish identity are encouraged in a free and democratic society and with the support of the government. The implications of modern Spain present a national cinema defined on a more balanced level through state nurturing of Spanish filmmakers and the opportunity of free speech in cinematic content. National identity’s position in this cultural and social trajectory has remained both harmonious and corrosive with Spain’s historical record, as it has molded notions of identity through the struggles of a traumatized Spain and a Spain in transition.
“COMO FRANCO NUNCA SALIA …”: DEFINING SPANISH NATIONAL IDENTITY IN *EL VIAJE A NINGUNA PARTE* AND *LOS SANTOS INOCENTES*

Villa del Rio, a small and isolated village in Spain’s Castillian plain, comes alive for one extraordinary day that will transform its way of life in a brief instant. The financially-dire Spain of the 1950s has determined the town’s fate for what seemed an eternity, confirmed by the lack of a working fountain and a tower clock that refuses to move forward. The town’s stagnant social life appears both content and resigned, its citizens live their lives in a sedated manner. The end of the Second World War and the subsequent Marshall Plan, however, give Villa del Rio an opportunity to change its fiscal fate. Eager to impress visiting American leaders, the town gambles away not only a series of loans but also its previous identity by having their village and its citizens pass off as Andalusians, hiding the duller side of their nature for the sake of financial prosperity. This scene from Luis Garcia Berlanga’s 1956 film *Bienvenido, Mister Marshall* dramatizes the conflict between national identity and the nation’s position on the world stage.

Contemporary Spanish rural cinema used Francisco Franco’s regime to its allegorical advantage. This usage underscores the main aspects of national identity through that era’s various secular and Christian characteristics as well as the nation’s tumultuous historical background. The physical terrain acts as a breeding ground for conflict between the scarred Spanish mindset of the nineteenth century and the impending modernity of the twentieth century when a larger sense of globalization affected what remained of the archaic societal orders. Spain, a humbled former world power, had fallen
into disarray during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. The victors, under the totalitarian rule of Generalissimo Franco, determined the fate of Spain’s political, cultural and psychological condition for over thirty years after the end of the war. The traditional mentality that permeates contemporary Spanish rural cinema encapsulates Franco’s regime psychologically and geographically. Given this, Fernando Fernan Gomez’ *El viaje a ninguna parte* and Mario Camus’ *Los santos inocentes* presents a sense of “Spanishness” that transcends the *frenesi* of urban films in favor of a closer examination of the isolation and stillness found in the rural terrain. Contemporary rural cinema defines national identity through Spain’s conflicts with both its societal hierarchy and the presence of international and progressive forces. This chapter will treat these films as allegories for Francoist Spain, and its definition of national identity through its contrast and conflict with these aspects.

**National Identity through Conflict with its Societal Order**

Franco’s regime, with its totalitarian emphasis on tradition and nationalistic values, underscored the traumatic circumstances of post-Civil War Spain. The hierarchical struggle between the regime’s strength and its weakened subjects further strengthens a breakdown of the country’s stability and morale. When trauma is normalized and thus easily carried from one day to another without a thought for its psychological repercussions, societal conditions such as those found within Mario Camus’ *Los santos inocentes* seem both unreal and unsurprising. This 1984 work takes into consideration Falangist values of Catholic servitude and loyalty, as well as the role that nostalgic ideals of rural idyllic agricultural work play within such an ideology.
Taking place during the Franco regime, the film employs the rural terrain to represent the cultural and historical tenets of the Falangist regime and its ideology. The protagonists appear willing to accept this new order, even while maintaining a certain quiet rebellious identity. Under nearly oppressive circumstances, Paco and Regula, alongside their family, work the lands owned by a marquise while attempting to ensure their existence under increasingly tense circumstances. Although the marquise has only tangential contact with her workers, her family and the other overseers who work for her are closer to these modern-day serfs. Paco and Regula’s daughter Charito, nicknamed la niña chica (the little girl), suffers from a severe psychological handicap, and her painful anguish haunt the family, already traumatized by its subjection and financial condition. Only the innocent Azarias, Regula’s brother who also suffers from a mental handicap, deals with la niña chica with mercy. Azarias (Paco Rabal), an innocent soul who has recently been fired from his previous duties at another estate, comes into the picture as an unintentional insurrectionist.

From the film’s beginning, Azarias’ inner warmth is visible through the care and regard he holds for his hunting dove, calling it his milana bonita. As the film progresses, the dove increasingly functions as an extension of Azarias. The film begins with Azarias merrily running in the forest, barely seen through the foliage. This escapist image presents a character whose humanity overrides any questions of totalitarian ownership. Though initially hesitant of the idea, Paco agrees for Azarias to join this unfortunate group of serfs. He is mostly relegated to simple tasks and does not come into close interaction with the owners and overseers except in particular circumstances. Back in the estate’s mansion, the owners and overseers’ sexual trysts become fodder for the workers,
who quietly become commentators of the ruling class as, for example, when “el
Senorito Ivan,” the marquise’s son, needs assistance during his hunting expeditions.
These encounters assure an inevitable clash of idealized representations of nationalist
ideology during the Falangist age.

This ongoing interaction between the obrero and the rulers is a microcosm of a silent national conversation between the Francoist regime and its subjects. The isolationist rural setting provides an opening for a discourse on these differing definitions of national identity. Catholicism and the work ethic it promotes through the regime acts as a chain between the two groups. The “holy innocents” offer their allegiance to both God and the Marchioness representing Franco’s ideal Spain. In turn, the Marchioness attempts to balance both her role as a noble and as a kind-hearted Christian leader. The Senorito stands apart as a purely Falangist intermediary, embodying the absolutism and the nationalist fervor of Francoist rule. John Hopewell accurately describes this character as “an acid portrayal of the Spanish authoritarian mind.”

His national identity, however, surpasses more than just what he represents in the age of Franco. The Marchioness’ son carries with him nobility that transcends centuries, channeling the divine right of past rulers to subject his fellow man even while wrestling with impending modernity in such an archaic terrain. His harsh treatment of Paco, and later Azarias after his brother-in-law’s accident during a hunting expedition, reflects this totalitarian personality that he carries out in a matter-of-fact way. This perspective of Catholic power works hand in hand with that of the Francoist philosophy, as the motto “por la Gracia de Dios” justifies

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(in his eyes) a natural right to rule. The rural circumstances allow for these differing interpretations of national identity, each of them easily accessible for examination.

Further interaction between the laborers and the ruling class is assured when the Marchioness returns to her lands and, in commemoration of her grandson’s First Communion, offers gold coins to the workers who gladly line up and exchange a few words. Any illusions of coexistence dissipate and the dividing lines become clear once the ruling class takes up its Fascistic standard of servitude and allegiance to the central core of traditional values. The workers stand at ease during the arrival of the marquise, and closely listen to her words from the balcony, joyfully replying with “Long live the marquise!” This idolatry is a reverberation of Fascist ideals of cultural and psychological subjugation, and her arrival echoes that of a political rally for the Falangue.

Spain’s unclear cultural condition of the 1950s confronts the rulers of the estate which, though isolated, find it increasingly difficult to avoid contentious political issues. When a visiting ambassador dines with the estate’s hosts, the latter bring forth Paco and Regula to show how Spaniards under the current era can read and write their names, and challenges the ambassador to spread the word about Spain’s newly-founded order and stability. Echoing the Francoist regime’s invitation to the world, el señorito Ivan, the main overseer of the estate, employs the services of two holy innocents in order to dare the world to refute not only the philosophical premises of the regime, but also the current condition which, after civil strife, might be presumed to remain under a traumatic psychological trance. With this brand of national redemption in mind (and considering the “por la Gracia de Dios” approach to land-holding and life in general) the masters of the house wield their scepter over a twentieth century feudal system with a clear
justification from the patria. No concern is apparent when it comes to Paco and Regula’s struggle with producing a clear spelling of their own names (lacking, as they do, a true self identity). Concern is only given to the bare minimum of their skill.

This insistence on national pride under less-than-glorious circumstances echoes the condition of Spain in the 1950s. The constant encounters between the two groups in the film act as assurances that this nation on the rise has merited inclusion in the international community, at least according to the ruling class. “Tell your foreign friends”46 stands as more than just one man’s nationalist sentiments, but rather as the embodiment of the regime’s public relations efforts on the world stage. The Ministry of Tourism’s “Spain is different” campaign now encounters a capable spokesperson in the form of the Senorito, whose disdain for the lower class nonetheless stays out of the way of his nationalist agenda.

The eventual killing of Senorito Ivan by Azarias towards the end of the film represents a boiling desire on the part of Spain to shed off both the benign attraction and harsh treatment from the regime. Marsha Kinder, writing about the Spanish oedipal narrative, states that “the son has a choice between replacing the murderous seductive father or bonding with the powerful mother against the patriarchy… If the son chooses to bond with the mother … he ultimately rebels against her as well.47” This proves particularly true when it comes to this killing of Ivan, a clear representative of Francoist rule while at the same time representing a repudiation of the heir of the kind-hearted marchioness to whom the obreros remain so faithful.

46 Camus, Mario. Los santos inocentes.
47 Kinder, Marsha. “The Spanish Oedipal Narrative from Raza to Bilbao.” Quarterly Review of Film and Video 13, no. 4: 75
1930’s *La aldea maldita*, written and directed by Florian Rey, echoes many of *Los santos inocentes*’ unspoken but well defined notions of Spanish identity during a time of unstable transition. The absence of Franco and the uneasiness of the current political system, one that would witness the abdication of King Alfonso XIII and the Second Republic, open the way for a different insight into the national mentality. Moreover, the film examines a mentality that transcends Franco’s traditionalist values and underlines the essence of Spanish honor as its cornerstone. A small village on the Castilian plain suffers through a third consecutive year of agricultural plight which, the film informs us, immediately suggests a “damned village.” The main protagonist Carlos, lives with his blind father and his wife Jacinta and puts on airs of a local *hidalgo* (honorable country gentleman) opening the way for the film’s notions of identity under demoralizing rural conditions.

Jacinta, with advice from her neighbor, decides to leave the village for good in favor of a prosperous urban life. Her father-in-law warns her that leaving the village will bring shame to their Castilian honor as well as to her infant son, whose name he wishes to remain undefiled by her exit. The old man further points out that he fears no hunger, and would prefer death than to taint his personal honor. As the villagers begin their exodus from the cursed village, Jacinta discovers that her father-in-law has forbidden from bringing the baby along. Jacinta leaves her son and husband behind in hopes of finding a better life and later returning to the village with prosperity for her family. Life in the city, however, never strays far from the rural mentality which follows Jacinta and the rest of her family.
Three years pass and Juan, who works as an overseer in an estate, finds Jacinta working in a local bar. After berating her in public, Juan angrily demands that she move into their home with the condition that she never reveal her true identity to her son. Over time, his father, too, comes to believe that her honor has remained intact. Following his father’s death, Juan throws Jacinta out of the house, causing a great consternation in her bordering on mental instability. She tries in vain to befriend the town’s children to make up for the traumatic separation from her own son, but is dismissed as a witch and a town outcast. Later on, Juan finds out through an acquaintance that Jacinta had returned to the cursed village. He returns to his old family home and finds his estranged wife sitting by an empty cradle, singing songs and putting the imaginary child to sleep. Juan experiences a change of heart and tells his son to give his mother a kiss, opening the way for possible reconciliation.

Social distinctions among the lowly inhabitants and later émigrés of the cursed village reinforce those portrayed within the upper rungs of the characters in *Los santos inocentes*. Set within the instability of the late 1920s and on the cusp of the Second Republic, the characters within *La aldea maldita* obviously forego the Francoist limitations on expression while at the same time maintaining an honorary system that links them to it. Keeping with the traditionalist nature of the film, Agustín Sanchez Vidal makes reference to the various religious symbols found within:

There is the stoning of the adulterous woman at the hands of the young children, the temptation of the desert at the hands of the coquettish Magdalena, and the ‘son, here is your mother’ of the end. But perhaps the best devised is the visual sequence, which we might define as the
‘crucifixion of the Spanish peasant,’ when we see one of the locals grasping on to one cart with his arms spread open.\textsuperscript{48}

This emphasis on religion goes hand-in-hand with the \textit{honor castellano} that the film’s characters mean to underscore, as these two characteristics complement each other in the rural context.

The Abuelo character, echoing a position of nobility as the marchioness in \textit{Los santos inocentes}, alludes to an honor system that not only clashes with the urban trend to modernity but also links them to the past. His son Juan, like Senorito Ivan in \textit{Los santos inocentes}, maintains a misogynistic position while all evoking a historical position of heraldry, a traditional lineage of power and privilege, and the social position of the \textit{hidalgo}, a local gentleman with a deeply held attitude towards honor and social leadership.

\textit{La aldea maldita}’s mode of historical self-reflection attempts to regain a level of lost dignity that the fall of the empire produced in the Spanish nation. This almost-obsessive identification of the protagonists with “\textit{honor castellano}” stands on equal ground with the kind of pride that Ivan demonstrates when speaking about Spain’s condition in the 1950s. Such pride works to redeem the imperfect conditions in the state of the nation (loss of the empire versus a stagnant culture) in both cases, thus presenting a definition of national identity that expands on this conflict with the Spanish societal order. The humbled and traditionalist perspective that the country found itself in muddles clear boundaries for Spanish national identity in the twentieth century, as it transitions

from imperialism to democracy. The uncertainty that develops from this conflict works to suppress downcast sentiments about the state of the nation.

In the two films, following Franco’s ideological footsteps is akin to maintaining an allegiance to a dead metaphysical concept. As a result of this, a certain level of stagnancy characterizes the two films’ approaches towards nationalism and the identification it produces.

Being castellano, and later Spanish, remains the most notable common characteristic shared by the two films. The holy innocents’ faithful subservience, later reinforced when Paco’s son joins the military, faithfully equates to that of Juan and his father’s loyalty to their honor. Allegiance to a Castilian principle, and later to the state (Franco, the Marchioness and her son) defines a national identity grounded in historical and cultural tenets, as well as political and psychological sources of power.

**National Identity through Conflict with Modernity and the West**

*El viaje a ninguna parte*, written and directed by Fernando Fernan Gomez from his novel, tells the story of a traveling group of theater performers during the 1940s and 50s. Traveling from small town to small town, the group aims for success but only finds the dual curse of a vagabond experience and the reputation of its profession. As ‘comicos’ the Iniesta-Galvan theater group headed by Fernando Fernan Gomez’s character, the elderly Don Manolo, constantly find themselves not only on the road but in a struggle for acceptance in rural Spain. Carlos Galvan, Manolo’s son, balances awkward and debilitating relationships with his estranged wife and a son who he first meets at the age of seventeen and who doesn’t seem too interested in partaking in the family business.
The coming of motion picture attractions to Spanish villages (the “jodio peliculero” or “fucking movie fad” as Manolo bitterly describes them) gets in the way of success for the troupe, who slowly witnesses the downfall of traveling theater. Carlos Galvan struggles with maintaining the troupe and assuring its survival in the face of multiple challenges from a rival troupe and second thoughts about life on the road.

The Iniestas’ constant conflict with cinema as an alternative form of leisure for Spaniards stands in for the larger conflict between antiquity and modernity. To a larger extent, the struggle represents one between the Spanish way of life and the cultural presence of the West. For the Iniestas, motion picture imports stand in the way of preserving a national culture based upon traditional forms of leisure such as the traveling theater groups. The “jodio peliculero” redefines the Iniestas’ way of life and transforms a nation’s leisurely priorities through its embrace. The harmonious coalescing of modern (i.e. urban) and rural atmospheres in this respect spells disaster for both the Iniesta group and rural traditionalism. More importantly, El viaje a ninguna parte exacerbates this conflict by isolating and pointing out definitions of national identity that are both akin and corrosive to the traditionalist rural mentality. The regime’s desire to incorporate Spain into the world community echoes rural Spain’s rejection of the theater in favor of film. Meanwhile, the Iniesta-Galvan troupe’s insistence on sustaining the relevance of a dying tradition embodies a forgotten past in tune with the rural mindset. This cultural and political clash of national identification is at the core of El viaje...’s examination of 1950s Spain, as well as its dual take on “Spanishness” under such transitional historical circumstances.
The Nationalist-Republican conflict from the Civil War gets channeled through a notable conflict throughout the film.⁴⁹ In one particular segment brother is pitted against brother in this epoch of uncertainty. The Galvan family, following a meeting with their loathed entertainment rival, finds itself in a clash with the locals of a village at which they had just arrived. Led by the mayor, the townspeople express not only their disdain for the theater troupe but also, they argue, to the town’s prosperity. The impending arrival of a film shoot to the village opens up an opportunity for the locals to obtain some small jobs, and the theater actors, they fear, will be an obstacle to their well-being. Carlos, on behalf of the family and unaware of the disastrous consequences to come, speaks in defense of the troupe and what they stand for in 1950s rural Spain. Using lofty and inspiring language, Carlos stands for the art of the theater as a ray of happiness during such turbulent times. Making a well-meant case for his craft, he evokes the fraternal bonds between the villagers and the vagabonds and the value of their brand of entertainment:

You work grounds drenched with blood, sweat and tears. … Where is the manna for the comics? The work of the films are for actors. You want to deny us our bread, we who come from the road? … We bring laughter…. we live off of your change. Do not attack us because we are your brothers in employment and unemployment, in plenty and in hunger. (My translation)⁵⁰

The film then cuts to Carlos’ psychoanalyst who asks him, “And you said all this, in a Spanish village in the 1950s?” Given the questionable veracity of Carlos’ oral memoirs – the film later reveals his merging of wishful thinking and painful memories– it

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⁴⁹ As seen in Chapter 1, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was the culmination of a century-long ideological war between the progressive republican camp and the conservative nationalists.

⁵⁰ Gomez, Fernando Fernan. El viaje a ninguna parte.
nonetheless remains a crucial part of the film’s treatment of the rural terrain. Appealing to a Spanish sense of unity, regardless of political affiliation, Carlos employs the intimacy of a small bar in a virtually unknown village to promulgate a message in language some would find to sound “rojo.” This clash of identities encapsulates the larger clash between antiquity and modernity, between the traditionalism of the theater versus the current state of affairs. Carlos’ republican tone, one not likely to be taken by his father, bridges these two camps even if an accord cannot be reached.

“Como Franco nunca salia…,” Carlos’ first point of historical reference during his opening monologue, speaks about more than just a totalitarian mandate on how late-hour leisure should be enjoyed. Franco’s forced psychological embodiment of his populace both blurs and clearly points to a national identity that matches both the concurrent political regime and an eternal essence. Franco’s own Madrilinean isolation from the Galvan troupe becomes even more affective to the traveling thespians walking to no place in particular and, eventually, to decay. Franco appears once more in the film when Carlos “recalls” that, prior to a traumatic break-up, the Caudillo had apparently hosted President Kennedy for a goodwill tour of Spain:

We broke up around the time that Kennedy died. Before that… he visited Spain to tell Franco two things: to stop dressing like a legionnaire, and to cease censorship of the theater. He visited Llanada because he was a great fan of our architecture and Cervantes. We were in celebration for three days.\(^{51}\) (my translation)

This “visit” by President Kennedy serves as a clear reminder of *Welcome Mr. Marshall* and the American delegates passing through Villa del Rio. Through it, Kennedy’s appearance stands in as a statement of national hopes, playing upon notions of Spanish

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
symbolism as signs of identity in the hopes of bringing better fortunes to the Galvan troop.

The film’s score, composed by Pedro Iturralde, further contributes to the story’s definition of nationality and the conflict that it bears with modernity (Hollywood and the West). Following the introductory monologue by Carlos, the title credits appear over the smooth styling of Iturralde’s American jazz. The score stands in as both a counterpoint and as a strangely appropriate companion composition to this subject matter of a local theater troupe in rural Spain. “I arrived at the conclusion that [the music] had to be American, Jazz,” Fernando Fernan Gomez states, “… it would have been more significant than if I had to incorporate Andalusian music. It seems so evoking, melancholic when it shouldn’t be.” (my translation) Moreover, Gomez points out the necessary steps taken in order to best represent rural Spain on the screen through costuming, and once again invokes America as a point from which to best determine a necessary break for the sake of national identity. “Spanish cinema is at fault for trying to imitate American cinema,” Gomez continues, “in American cinema, only the poor wear used clothing. The rest, every single person, you can tell that it comes from a tailor or a dress designer, even in the Western” (my translation).

Given this concern over the looming presence of the West, Bienvenido Senor Marshall!, the 1956 feature directed by Luis Garcia Berlanga, presents a rural definition of “Spanishness” through an anxiety not unlike that from the Galvan family. The influence of the West remains just as crucial to the development of both films’ characters, to the point where their simultaneous fate rests upon how that same influence is wielded.

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52 Conversaciones con Fernando Fernan Gomez. 206-7
53 Ibid. at 206.
At the film’s beginning, a voiceover painstakingly describes the small village of Villa del Rio and its diverse citizens, from its humble, bumbling mayor to the town’s hidalgo (honorable gentleman). This introductory narration also includes a description of the city hall whose clock tower remains frozen in time due to lack of money, an true indication not only of Spain’s financial condition at the time but also of the seemingly endless days and nights that such rural stillness brings about. Also, during the beginning of the film a visiting flamenco star enters the picture alongside her manager as she is warmly welcomed by the mayor who also happens to own the only entertainment spot in the village, a small bar.

When a provincial leader arrives at the town, carrying the news of an impending visit by American representatives to Villa del Rio, the townspeople frenetically make preparations for their honored guests in the hopes of speedy financial investment for the town. The mayor takes it upon himself to make sure that this visit will prove successful. Villa del Rio’s school teacher prepares for the visit by gathering the citizens in the small one-classroom schoolhouse to lecture the populace about the United States, teaching them about various geographical and social facts about the country. During this meeting, the town priest mentions the opportunity presented to them as Catholics. Citing the number of Protestants, agnostics and atheists within the United States, he advises the population in favor of a conversion effort for the visiting Americans.

Villa del Rio’s mayor and local leaders, however, eventually decide to impress Americans by passing off as an Andalusian village in the Castilian plain. Playing off the

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54 It should be noted that Jose Luis Cuerda’s *Asi en el cielo como en la tierra* (1995) also employs this notion of a rural village’s poor financial condition, albeit to a different extent as will be explained in Chapter Three.
town’s exoticism, they argue, would arouse the attention of the visiting Americans. With this objective in mind, the town invests borrowed money on building fake Andalusian portals and fronts for the town’s dull, humble buildings. The townspeople don Andalusian attires and attempt to learn the region’s accent and slang in collaboration with the visiting flamenco singer. More immediately for the town, the fountain and city hall clock are finally brought to working conditions. The film’s climactic arrival of the Americans sputters, as the traveling motorcade passes through the town while seemingly ignoring the cheers and waving crowds, rendering this performance meaningless.

The film brings to life the uncertain financial and social position of Spain on the world stage during the 1950s. The passing cars and the lack of attention paid to the idolizing hosts is a glimpse of national frustration towards the West. Most importantly, however, Bienvenido... tackles that same discontent in the context of an uneasy conflict between Spain and the rest of the world (modernity) also present in El viaje a ninguna parte. The victim of this clash turns out to be the film’s definition of national identity that characterizes the town, one which is compromised in the face of globalization and to which the town is content to return. The timelessness of Villa del Rio and banal social circumstances that accompany it underscore a historical stagnancy strengthened by the terrain. The town’s national identity, through conflict with the West, remains intact and in tune with their mindset at the film’s end. Both the village and the country remain sedated and wait quietly for progress.

The film’s interpretation of both national identities, argues Wendy Rolph, “foreground[s] the constructedness and superficiality of those representations … and
invit[es] criticism of the project as a collective [read national] cultural activity.”55 The Andalusian exoticism brought to life by the villagers, however, goes further than just a falsification of national identity and a call to action. It stands out as a national loss of hope and a financial subjugation to the West that defines Spain’s position through the 1950s. This same position naturally affects the struggle towards defining or attempting to define the tenets of Spanish national identity. Both the Franco years and the age of globalization in the film hamper that process and ultimately results in a definition of national identity that comes into conflict with both extraneous entities and embodies that emptiness. Spain’s uncertain financial situation on the world stage results in not only the desperate measure taken by the villagers, but also in a process of self-reflection that the terrain and the genre grant with ease.

_El viaje a ninguna parte_’s emphasis on epochal loss echoes that of _Welcome Mister Marshall_!’s identity conflict. The effort to readapt to modern circumstances, being that of the new dominant structure determining the fate of both films’ characters, results in an inability to take part in this new order. Don Arturo’s multiple takes before a rolling motion picture camera and his eventual walking off the set stands in for the passing cars after Villa del Rio’s attempt to hide its banal circumstances and pass itself off as an Andalusian town. Moving forward through acceptance and welcoming a compromise with this new order that comes into conflict with the characters does not translate into a smooth transition. Doing so signifies breaking away from a central aspect of national identity as defined by the two rural films: a stubborn refusal to move with the times and an inability to change at the behest of an outside influence. This plays in sync with a

ruralist traditional mindset that, much like the tower clock in *Welcome, Mister Marshall*, refuses to move forward. National identity in response to this conflict with modernity and the West remains one marked by an unflinching stagnancy.

This connection between Spain’s unstable past and a scarring contemporary epoch acts as more than a historical conversation between films of different decades. The works of Berlanga, Gomez, Camus and Rey fully employ the rural terrain to represent a state of mind that remains still regardless of the political ramifications of Franco’s regime. These films present a definition of Spanish identity that not only incorporates a constant sense of conflict but which also encourages historical self-reflection of the national condition. Uncertainty in Spanish national identity prevails as a result of the struggle with both the politics of the Franco years and the current position of Spain in the global age. Given Spain’s turbulent historical trajectory, the conflict between the past and modernity stands out as a unique basis over which national identity is discussed. The rural terrain invites an active discussion of national identity during such contradictory times as the rule of a backwards Francoist estate during a globalized and modern era. These films present a notion of “Spanishness” through this perspective of loss and uncertainty, one that historically is not temporally exclusive to the age of Franco.

These works define a national identity linked even while forgoing the epoch of the dictator. In other words, the tenets of Francoist philosophy cross over past centuries of Spanish traditionalism, emphasizing the role of the totalitarian state and the values of a stagnant Catholic mentality. The films succeed in solidifying this mindset through the use of Franco as an embodiment of these past centuries, one in which national identity inevitably comes into conflict with the role of the state and, throughout the twentieth
century, with modernity and progress. Villa del Rio’s attempt at re-branding itself for the purpose of attracting positive attention towards itself presents far more than a village’s attempt for financial prosperity. Though Spain’s financial condition throughout the 1950s was dire, the film represents a national statement on itself. Spain’s status as a Western European nation sheds off notions of folkloric gimmickry in the hope of standing out as its own cultural presence. The active oppression, and resigned acceptance of a nation in conflict with both historical and outside forces, comes alive in the rural terrain which, like a battlefield, is ready-made for struggle and an appropriate location for national reflection.
DEMOCRACIA RURAL: JOSE LUIS CUERDA, JULIO MEDEM AND NATIONAL
IDENTITY IN THE DEMOCRATIC PAGE

Contemporary Spanish rural cinema is at once self-reflective and a mode of social commentary. Following the end of Franco’s regime in 1975, Spain began the gradual process towards democracy facilitated by King Juan Carlos’ efforts during the period of the transicion. The Spanish Constitution of 1977 brought forth not only the right for assembly and guarantee of popular elections, but also abolished state censorship. This transition was not smoothly carried out, as seen by the “Tejerazo,” the attempted coup d’état of 1981. Spain eventually rose from the yoke of totalitarianism and developed into a modern democracy through the transitional years that have allowed for the dismantling of the old Francoist elements that once held the country hostage.

The cinema of the democratic age from 1976 through the present has been a beneficiary and a testament to the new political conditions. Rural cinema, in particular, witnessed a transformation in its role as the portrayer of Spanish traditionalism and isolationism. The coming of democracy to Spain has shifted the genre’s tone towards one of evaluation of what it means to be Spanish in post-Franco Spain. The rise of film auteurs such as Jose Luis Cuerda and Julio Medem has opened the way for a discussion of the national condition, one whose point of view provides a more contemporary interpretation on Spain’s historical trajectory and which takes into account the development of a free and more expressive society. The abolishment of censorship from Spain’s 1977 constitution has opened the way for open criticism of societal institutions, and has allowed Spanish rural cinema to fully embrace open commentary in its
narratives. More importantly, however, is the impact that a democratic Spain has had in redefining the rural terrain through the interconnectivity of its traditionalism with a modern perspective. Julio Medem’s *Tierra* (1996) and Jose Luis Cuerda’s *Así en el cielo como en la tierra* (1995) define national identity in a democratic Spain following the end of Franco’s regime; this new emphasis on liberated cultural expression demonstrates a new and uncharted terrain for the genre that emphasizes the coalescing of rural values with a modern perspective.

**Tierra: Spanish Identity through Trauma and Historical Coalescing**

The scars worn by Spain following Francoist rule conflict with a new era of sexual exploration in Julio Medem’s *Tierra*, suggesting a national identity that embraces the future and remembers the past. This film represents not only a return to provincial isolation but also a recalibration of national values as encouraged by the rural psychology and societal conditions. The film, like Medem’s earlier *Vacas* from 1992, continues the latter’s tone of tension in an autonomous (Basque) environment and sexual interconnectedness. The objective of both is the representation of a now-contemporary rural atmosphere coming to terms with the troubles of the past. The Basque aspects of the film are minimalized, however, in favor of a more national perspective that the film emphasizes through cultural and political commentary. Furthermore, the main protagonist Angel Bengoetxeo, an exterminator recently released from a psychological institution, represents a depository of national discontent and uneasy transition into the world, much like Ana Torrent’s character in *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice 1973). The film seeks to emphasize this change and portray a larger social and cultural sentiment that sets Spanish
national identity in a new era and with this idea of progress in mind as an embodiment of the current national psyche.

*Tierra* begins with a roadside encounter between Angel (played by Carmelo Gomez) and a shepherd who has been struck by lightning. Informed by a nearby gypsy family of the situation, Angel approaches the man all the while passing dead sheep which have also been struck. Lying on the ground, the dying shepherd questions the truthfulness of his own existence and compares the life he barely clings onto with dreaming. Angel, perturbed, nonetheless finds him a strong psychological connection with him. The shepherd and exterminator’s connection with the earth is emphasized in the scene, and that same earth which the latter works over eventually becomes an extension of a numb personality and of his dry, organic relationships with those around him. This initial encounter, magical in its context and close to Angel’s psychological struggles, succeeds at bringing forth from Angel a sign of life. Throughout the film, Angel returns to such questions of life and death with every inner conversation that the setting and its characters prompt from him.

The small town to which he arrives has few signs of life outside of the bedrooms of its scattered denizens, the bar being the most obvious place for local congregation. The main source of life comes from the many vineyards which surround the small main part of town. These vineyards, now under siege from a virus harming the intended taste of the wine they produce, come under the care of Angel who, hired by the city, gathers a small army from the local gypsy community for this purpose. The bar itself resembles a shack in the middle of a field, constructed by tree trunks and barely lit as if to emphasize its quaint condition. Angel’s arrival in the town also arouses the attention of Angela (Emma
Suarez), the daughter of a widower vintner, who hires Angel to fumigate her property which, like many of those in the village, has been infected with woodlice, creating an earthly taste for the wine they produce. Angela’s troubled marriage with Patricio (Karra Elejalde) smoothes the way for an inviting personal relationship with Angel which, in turn, starts a new series of conflicts.

The wife’s silent affections are shared with Angel, who by now has entered into another sexual relation. Mari, a local nymphomaniac and mistress for Patricio, repeatedly appears before Angelo as both a temptress and as an alternative to his domestic situation. This interaction between Mari and Angel underscores the already active tension between the latter and Patricio, who quickly gains a high level of disdain for this stranger in their town. Throughout all these encounters and ongoing confrontations, we return to the main conflict within the film, that of Angel versus himself. He sees himself, much like the dying shepherd at the film’s beginning, half dead and half alive, in a dream state in which he struggles with the realities around him. This same state can be seen in his work as he approves the earth-tasting wine found from the soon-to-be fumigated vineyards. This duality in Angel’s life stretches to the conflict between his psychological affection for Angela and his passion for Mari, a source of constant strife.

Though Basque in terms of production and setting, the film adopts a more national perspective through its characters as well as through a rural terrain that represents a nationwide mentality. Angel’s troubled past as a former patient in a psychological clinic, echoing Spain’s tortured madness through the Francoist years, comes through in this new episode of his life which, although redemptive in nature, still bears the wounds of the past. The seemingly irrational other side of Angel’s personality,
the voice that hounds him at every misstep and feigned emotion, speaks to him as more than a reminder of his unstable past. It represents an inability (and perhaps unwillingness) to accept the present. “One may wonder,” scholar Paul Coates writes when speaking of Angel’s duality, “whether the doubles are generated by his weariness of a solitude underlined by the way Medem shoots so many dialogues, with only one interlocutor in frame.”56 Angel, though isolated from those around him, however, does not represent an insular entity. On the contrary, this inner conversation results from his previous conflicts as an overactive dreamer in a time of disarray as well as from conflicts that arise with both the remnants of the past (Francoist and chauvinist family values) and the present (the revolutionary sexual encounters in the rural village.)

The strict social structure that he encounters (Angela and her loveless marriage and family life) comes into conflict with Angel and this new vision for his life. Coming off the horrors of his past, the rural terrain in this new and liberated order becomes ripe for a clash with Angela’s husband, himself resembling the authority of Los santos inocentes’ Senorito Ivan. This rivalry, one sure to enhance Angel’s past trauma, nonetheless accompanies therapeutic sexual encounters that further emphasize an attitude befitting to national identity in the democratic age, one which employs rural isolation to confront the present. Angel’s phone conversation with Angela, one during which he physically transports himself to her side through his thoughts, evokes the prisoner mentality enforced by this Francoist marriage. All the while, his affairs with the two female protagonists in the film go hand-in-hand with a new found sense of sexual liberation that, at this stage in Spain’s history, works with the rural terrain as an

instrument of identification. Mari’s shack, isolated from the village but not too far from the grounds that Angel works over, lacks color and life, but nonetheless remains the epicenter of the town’s psychological and sexual attention. Resembling more of a strong contemporary statement on sexuality than a harem, the shack stands in as a reminder of the new epoch’s insistence on new possibilities.

*Tierra* represents the unstable and uneasy transition of Spain’s government from Falangist totalitarianism to democracy and their respective political perspectives. Angel’s past runs parallel with his transformation and that of his country under such conditions. The trauma of madness and repressed hopes and dreams follows him throughout all of his experiences. His inability to recalibrate and meld within this new and liberated social framework brings forth the same symptoms of his past as a patient in the psychiatric ward. It takes Angel’s multiple conflicts with both death and sexuality (and, through the latter, the old familiar order) force a therapeutic process for the character that requires one last trauma-ridden life stage through which he is given the setting and the circumstances for true personal redemption. The rural terrain in these modern circumstances prompts this conflict of past and present through which the film imagines a new nation.

Such a process employs channeling metaphysical self-examination that Angel returns to both privately and publicly within the film. The film makes wide use of this perspective through its many ethereal and out-of-body experiences that Angel provokes from his interactions with the many events throughout his experience in the town. Writing about the narrative’s metaphysical qualities, scholar Paul Julian Smith states that
“it is most unlikely that [the title of the film] is to be taken in any foundational sense.” Angel’s view of the cosmos, though certainly a part of his condition, never strays from the character’s relationship with the earth below him, those individuals that he deals with, and the unstable and provoking environment that surrounds them all. Through such traumatic circumstances, the film employs the rural terrain to define a national identity based on such an ideological shift, a hopeful but bumpy process to gradually shed off Spain’s past in favor of the present and its varied opportunities. Rather than encapsulate the cultural effects of the young democracy in response to the Franco years, Medem synthesizes the characteristics of both periods of time in order to underline basic facets of what it means to be Spanish through his use of the rural terrain and its isolated and provoking nature.

Angel’s inner observations of himself and the world around him channel an inability to accept a reality that contains many of the same aspects of his past. The conflict of forbidden love and his psychological war with Angela’s abusive husband stir emotions within his psyche that only strengthen the dream-like condition of Angel’s life. The totalitarian conditions in the familiar setting of Angela’s life and the liberation that Mari’s sexual daring presents embodies a Spain which both embraces and rejects the pacto del olvido. The rural terrain, working en tandem with Angel’s perspective, continues to encourage the conflict between past and present in the film, and takes full advantage of its isolation as a source of self-reflection. Angel’s eventual acceptance of his psychological condition encompasses Spain’s slow-paced reconciliation with its past wounds, opening the way for a national and, particularly in Angel’s case, psychological

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transformation. *Tierra* presents a definition of national identity grounded on the uneasy transition between totalitarianism and democracy, and one which represents both the trauma and new found hopes of a nation striving to find itself in the face of modernity.

**Therapy: Jose Luis Cuerda and Spanish Identity through Surreal and Comedic Commentary**

Jose Luis Cuerda contributes to rural cinema’s definition of “Spanishness” through an examination of socio-cultural institutions and their potential for magical and surreal undertones that help to present a national identity based on light-hearted satire appropriate for the age. *Asi en el cielo como en la tierra (On Earth as it is in Heaven)*, written by Cuerda in 1995, shifts the focus from governmental bureaucracy and societal idiosyncrasies to religious institutions, more precisely the Catholic Church. Considering the role the Church had played in Francoist Spain, it becomes necessary to re-evaluate this work in the light of a progressive and liberated culture now free to reexamine the established spiritual order. Twenty years following the demise of the Falangist-Catholic philosophy that forced its way into the national culture for decades, *Asi en el cielo*... represents a democratic attempt at not just creating a satire of Catholicism but also as an examination of nationality. The film offers an interpretation of Christian Heaven in a manner that downplays popular notions of it as a glorious, atmospheric locale. In Cuerda’s film, Heaven is set in a rural Spanish village. This transplant of national identity to both a “celestial” and familiar setting allows for political and cultural commentary in a contemporary age where both the past and the present, in a free society, can coalesce and engage in a discussion of the current national condition.
The film begins with a recently-arrived soul, a benign rural soul from Albacete, who meets St. Peter (Paco Rabal) at Heaven’s gate, represented by the feudal town gates. St. Peter, the gate keeper, first appears at sunrise in his Spanish Civil Guard suit and exiting his headquarters, which feature a sign painted in the Spanish colors of red and yellow with the saying “Todo por la patria” (“All for the fatherland”) echoing the nationalist perspective. The two protagonists discuss the new circumstances for the bemused newest citizen of Heaven, who while inching closer towards the gate stops when the Spanish national anthem plays out of thin air. For the remainder of the film, St. Peter explains the mechanics of this interpretation of Heaven to its latest member, one upon which every nation contains a different model of the afterlife with Spain choosing a rural set-up. The film employs flashbacks as Peter gives a tour of “el Cielo” while explaining the strange circumstances under which he had arrived: a mangled attempt at the Apocalypse.

Fernando Fernan Gomez plays the role of God, the mayor, as a crotchety insomniac who is relatively lonely and filled with self doubt. Although able to run his domain, the troublesome deity encapsulates the stillness of his town and notably lacks in charisma. Jesus (Jesus Bonilla), his son and the town’s second-in-command, fails to fall under the popular notions of his entity as a figure for inspiration. Instead, his approach mannerisms show an extension of a held-back and troubled figure, a mentality compounded by his lack of facial hair and a haircut appropriate for a business setting. He who once aroused the spirits of those around Him had now been relegated to the social position of just another citizen, and this lack of accessibility and attention receives the same treatment from his father, who ultimately sees him as a lost opportunity.
Given this, St. Peter tells the curious new soul, Jesus has taken to seeing a psychoanalyst who struggles in aiding a deity fallen from grace. God himself sees little opportunity for healing his own ails, and takes to speaking to the figure of the Holy Spirit, represented by a dove who resides with him in the town hall. An opening for redemption, however, appears when Jesus convinces his father to plan out the Apocalypse in all its literary splendor and horror. God, who up to then considered the idea of sending another son to correct the mistakes of the last one, hesitantly consents to this operation. Heaven’s denizens and governing bureaucracy, however, fail to produce this spectacle properly, given the lack of a budget and philosophical questions about the literal aspects of the Book of Revelations. Cuerda’s principle position in respect to the current rural situation in Spain’s democratic epoch becomes painfully clear in terms of more than just the title of his work; the lack of economical impetus in a region marred by societal backwardness allows for the deferment of financial success, on Heaven as it is on Earth.

Cuerda employs the rural circumstances of a modern Spain in cultural disarray, as well as a reflective commentary on Spanish Catholicism. The town’s less-than-solid financial standing in order to carry out the Apocalypse “como Dios manda” and the bureaucratic problems involved in the production are but a glimpse of El Cielo’s many issues. God the mayor remains a melancholic and at times uncharacteristically-flexible mayor. Playing the role of a retired land-owner, God nonetheless spends most of his time cooking in the kitchen, conversing with the dove or in administrational meetings. As a titular vice-mayor, an aloof Jesus presides over Sunday Mass and rejoins the citizenry as just another member of the community, with no sign of color within him. Taking on the
shape of an obrero (a laborer) he carries no majesty and wields no influence over the townspeople, and is accordingly treated with mediocrity.

St. Peter, surprisingly, appears as the most held-together individual of the celestial court, and with a deep sense of warmth uncharacteristic of someone in a Guardia Civil uniform. His role as tour-guide for both the recently deceased peasant from Albacete and the audience itself carries a sense of calm resignation, and his constant presence over the film strengthens the influential local role that such a reassuring law enforcement rank carries. Other such figures within the film, such as that of St. John the Evangelist (who, as the local artist, witnesses the dismantling of his oeuvre as the Apocalypse production falters) and the Virgin Mary (playing the archetypal Dona figure and leader of the women’s community) complete a hierarchy that seems to have an overall confused but well-intentioned handling of their tight-knit community.

One of the most telling aspects about the film, however, comes in one of the climactic final scenes, in which the town’s hierarchy attempts to carry out the Final Judgment. Following the lackluster and financially-disastrous attempt at carrying out the Apocalypse, the celestial choir arrives at the town plaza with no more than fifty Spanish citizens caught up in the process. A smorgasbord of the national population, one which attempts to represent a slice of different social categories, appears before the mayor and the other authority figures of the town. One obrero complains about the sudden and meaningless process that had just been undertaken. An insurance agent mentions that the Apocalypse had just intruded upon a long-delayed date with her lover. An intellectual strongly maintains his opposition to being held in Heaven against his will given his strongly-held atheism, something which he mentions to God to his great confusion. A
matador wonders whether or not he died because of an incoming bull or because of the Apocalypse because of his concern over his legacy. And a successful businessman sternly proclaims the injustice of this process, something which he calls “indigno de la divinidad.” 58 This stands apart as not only a conflict between Heaven and Earth, but also between the stillness and solitude of the rural terrain and the bustling attitudes of the urban atmosphere. In a wider context, this climactic final scene encapsulates the co-mingling of Spanish society, one in which every aspect of contemporary society can be individually examined within the confines of one environment and a singular theme.

_Asi en el cielo como en la tierra_ is not Cuerda’s only involvement in the rural genre. Far from it, the film represents the culmination of a ground long ago treaded by him during his collaborations with Radio Television Espanola and through the beginnings of his mainstream success. His use of the rural terrain, though an effective backdrop for the _Asi en el cielo_...’s commentary on religious antiquity, is outdone by the interconnectivity of human institutions and far-fetched popular references in his earlier works. Moreover, the poetic commentary found in the workings of the religious imagery of Heaven’s bureaucracy lands a far less satirical tone than its surreal counterpart in Cuerda’s two earlier films, 1985’s _Total_ and 1988’s _Amanece que no es poco_ (Awaken before it’s too late). These two earlier works echo _Asi en el cielo_’s cynical and comedic approach to Spanish society, creating a national identity owing not only to ruralism, but also to a surrealist tendency in twentieth century Spain that embraces zany and absurd content in order to underscore Spain’s psychological condition following Franco’s regime. Cuerda’s earlier efforts reshape the genre’s downcast approach to incorporate a

58 Cuerda, Jose Luis. _Asi en el cielo como en la tierra_.

level of cinematic therapy that recalls the political senselessness of the country’s past. Through this form of national recovery via a genre that, throughout its history, emphasized conflict as the basis for Spanish national identity, Cuerda redefines the genre as an instrument through which he is able to establish a new form of national identity based on both rural traditionalist values and those of the current democratic age.

*Total*, made as a television production for Television Espanola, takes a tour-guide approach towards its audience in the style of *Asi en el cielo*, as we are led to discover the many different idiosyncrasies of London, reduced to a Spanish-looking and sounding village located after the collapse of civilization in the twenty-sixth century. The host of this cinematic trip, a gentle and easily-amused shepherd, appears on the outskirts of the town, exclaims “Londres…” and then, turning to his flock says, “…ovejas…,” clearly demarcating the matter-of-fact tone that he intends to carry with such a complex situation. Fear spreads that the Apocalypse is approaching given that London is held under the spell of various strange happenings, such as that of a lady who appears and disappears at will or the insistence of a loving shepherdess’ cows that wish to acquire knowledge to enter the town’s school. Such surreal happenings represent more than the obvious comedic break with reality. Rather, Cuerda’s rural perspective in this new epoch creates a process through which the frenesi of the urban centers can now be implanted in a rural terrain, thereby solidifying a social coalescing between the two Spanish cultural centers. More than a rural and international recalibration of London, Cuerda aims to present a reinterpretation of the national mentality through a setting wholly familiar to the same. More than this, Cuerda shifts this narrative towards a locale different than Spain in

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59 Cuerda, Jose Luis. *Total.*
the narrative in a minimal effort to expand the cultural reach of the film as well as to reinforce “Spanishness” under such extraneous circumstances.

_Amanece que no es poco_, Jose Luis Cuerda’s first national success released in 1989, represents an alternative to _Total’s_ perspective of national reflection by equating London with Spanish ruralism. Also written by Cuerda, the film’s treatment of the rural terrain and its laborers and denizens does not differ wildly from the examples set by _Total_ or _Así en el cielo_..., but given the highly-structured narrative in place (a series of short and often-unrelated vignettes) the images presented contain a new tonality. Though centered on the story of a college professor visiting his home town on sabbatical from the United States, the story deviates into a plethora of small plots and instances that isolate side characters in an effort to underline the surreal comedic content of the film. One clear example of this comes midway through the film when, at the end of the field day, an agricultural worker sits down before a pumpkin and, while rolling a cigarette, proclaims his gratitude and loyalty to the pumpkin. “Pumpkin, a new day is ending and, like every afternoon I want to say goodbye.” He continues:

> You, when you could be in the table of the rich and powerful, have chosen the terrace of a poor old man to give an example to the world. I can not forget that... in the hard moments, when my sister had a son with a black man or when they castrated my ferret, only you listened to my complaints and illuminated my path. Pumpkin, I carry you in my heart.  

Set to a melancholic melody, this monologue represents not only the idiosyncrasy so characteristic of Cuerda’s writing, but also an active effort on behalf of the filmmaker to produce a representation of national identity through satirical commentary on Spain’s obreros. Bringing up racist attitudes and insignificant concerns from this content laborer

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60 Cuerda, Jose Luis. _Amanece que no es poco_. 
overshadows the significance of the monologue, which underlines a larger insight into this satirical view of the Spanish obrero and his worldview. The film also makes a mockery of civic and religious figures as well as of the position and the relevance that they carry in a democratic rural terrain. One of the town crier’s announcements proclaims: “De orden del senor cura, se hace saber que Dios es uno y trino!” (“By order of the priest, it is to be made known that God is one and trinity!” [my translation]) Such commentary on the hierarchical position of such social figures sheds light on not only the current view towards them, but also on a populist perspective akin to a time during which such ridicule could be made. This take on the rural condition treads uncharted ground for a genre based on identity and psychological strife, but is wholly characteristic of an epoch set on embarking on a modern way of living. More importantly, it defines national identity through the embellishment of a new and forward-looking tone which lets go the downcast rural perspective in favor of the “disparatado” (zany).

When discussing his own personal interpretation of the rural condition, Cuerda (in an interview with El Pais) notes: “I had examined the work of Berlanga, of Fernan-Gomez, and I applied my own perspective of viewing the rural world which has changed so much… More than absurd, I stretch the limits of logic!” His works, though certainly in the comedic vein from auteurs such as Berlanga and Gomez, represent a defiance towards a genre with a record of dour national prognostication, and which choose to channel that which is wholly “disparatado” in Spanish popular culture. Cuerda’s films expand on earlier rural works’ definitions of “Spanishness” as based on conflict by having this concept coalesce with a contemporary form of satire emphasizing a

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61 Ibid.
democratic right for self-ridicule and a coalescing of the past and the present that the terrain fully employs and encourages. The canvas that the rural atmosphere provides invites a national conversation as to the current state of Spanish society. Channeling zany comic content, Cuerda encourages a forum that seeks not only to laugh at rural characteristics and quirks, but which also stands to gain from the healing process that this incurs.

Cuerda and Medem’s works remain statements of psychological conditions in the age of democracy, presenting a national identity that upholds not only the new hopes of the democratic era, but also the therapy with which it intends to climb out of the trauma incurred through the Franco years. The trauma of oppressed human expression, whether through sexual desire or social commentary, finds an outlet provided by the agora of the Spanish rural terrain, which brings about a confrontation between the world outside and this new Spain, as well as between the past and the present.

This new approach to rural cinema acts as not only historical therapy but also as a kind of discourse, one which attempts to find true answers to the question of Spanish culture and of a new definition to be discerned in the face of international cinematic pressure from the West. The meeting between urban progress and rural stillness remains integral for a genre built upon self-reflection. The rural-urban conflict’s cultural and historical clash of ideologies stands out as one balanced on the question of national identity. This encompasses that between Francoist values, as reflected in the embrace of traditionalism, and the rejection of rural traditionalism in favor or progress. This question of national identity takes on new significance in this latter stage, one wholly predicated on the democratic age’s appraisal of a traumatized and awakened sensibility. The rural
terrain in this new stage of the genre opens the doors for an integration of the past and the present as well as that of old and new Spain, and signals an opening for national unification through a shared identity that embodies that country’s spirit.
CONCLUSION

A scene from Jose Luis Cuerda’s Total, his apocalyptic and surrealist exploration of Spanish national identity in the rural terrain, presents an elementary school teacher pondering his own existence. As his students recite basic grammar rules in unison, the visibly distraught teacher ponders “Que pinto yo aqui?” (“What am I doing here?”). Shortly thereafter, the school principal, as well as the teacher’s wife, arrives in the classroom to publicly berate her husband before the class for a myriad of reasons. This contemporary portrayal of “Spanishness” embodies rural cinema’s approach to national identity, one grounded upon hesitation and the passage of time, the trauma of the past and the democratic healing of the present time.

It is this mentality that works through rural cinema as an encapsulation of time and history, and which Spanish cinema takes as the core of a Spanish national identity. Considering all aspects of twentieth century Spain, the overriding factor is the longer historical trajectory found within the country-side’s psychological make-up. The rural legacy predates Franco and lingers in the public conscience as a reminder of the historical burden of the nation. This philosophical inheritance inevitably affects not only this discussion, but also rural cinema as an investigation of the national spirit.

The ebb and flow of Spain’s turbulent historical trajectory inevitably presents a lack of cultural clarity, a sense of psychological loss and recovery that befits a nation with such a transformative time as the twentieth century. Culturally, Spain has and continues to be at the whim of conflict (whether violent or ideological) and stands in the midst of transformation even while trying to figure out its identity and position at home and abroad. Rural cinema takes full advantage of this lack of clarity and presents us with
a definition of national identity based not only the conflicts of both the past and the present, but also on the nation’s psychological undertones as shaped by culture and history. The traditionalist perspective coupled with the pressures of historical progress succeeds in presenting a notion of “Spanishness” in rural cinema, unearthing a sense of instability, conflict and uneasiness. The instability of political and cultural harmony throughout twentieth century Spain opened the way for a national conflict with its own history. The uneasiness that remains lies at the heart of this exploration of Spanish national identity, one which permeates this complicated notion. The Spanish experience through the Franco years and the turbulent transition to democracy demonstrates this as a common running theme. Rural cinema acts as a barometer of the national mentality through the years, and is effective in terms of its approach to this uneasy condition.

The Francoist years of Spanish history acted as an embodiment of previous ideological tenets that reinforced Spain’s traditional ideological foundations. The role of both Church and state as a unit with which to identify as a nation was implemented by the regime, a notion found in previous historical precedents of Spanish history. To complement this mode of identification, the backward-looking and archaic totalitarianism of the Falangist regime worked against the march of time as a source of further conflict between past and present. This stubborn effort on the part of the regime to emphasize past glories in an effort to centralize its definition of national identity resulted in conflict with modernity and Spain’s ancient hierarchy and cultural stagnancy during the twentieth century. Rural cinema approaches such notions of “Spanishness” through an examination of the cultural and psychological trauma incurred during a regime that sought to establish and maintain a rigid national mentality. Grasping centuries of traditionalist thought, this
cinema looks back at the historical conflicts which shaped the scars borne by post-Civil War Spain and presents a national identity ridden by loyalty, fear and tradition. Fernando Fernan Gomez’s *El viaje a ninguna parte* and Mario Camus’s *Los santos inocentes* encompass this trauma, and an inherent acceptance to lean towards the past as a guiding social principle.

Likewise, Spanish rural cinema of the late twentieth century employed not only the current democratic system but also the legacy of the past, which loomed over the present as a never-ending reminder of what the nation was built upon. The conflict between past and present in rural cinema of the democratic era is inevitable in the face of an open and liberated society. Parody, free speech and sexual liberation stands apart from the traumatic Francoist years that contemporary rural cinema covers. This definition of Spanish national identity represents an effort to reunify a psychologically-fractured country in the midst of national political and cultural therapy. Julio Medem’s *Tierra* and the works of Jose Luis Cuerda represent not only a reaction to this new epoch of Spanish history, but also a national historical statement that balances the legacy of Spanish traditionalism and the age of democratic modernity.

With the lifting of limitations in the Spanish film industry, rural cinema creates a forum for Spaniards to examine their place in time and allows for a retrospect of what it means to be Spanish, that is, to bear the wounds of a conflicted past while balancing the nation’s current modern perspective. Spanish rural cinema represents a national conversation that incorporates issues of history, cultural instability, and the national psyche. The historical trajectory of a politically-unstable century (and Spain’s reversion to a philosophically conservative mentality) opened the way for an uncertain cultural
position that permeated through popular thought. This psyche, one based upon a sense of cultural and historical loss, is revealing of a legacy that seeps through a “Spanishness” which rural cinema underlines. The terrain that rural cinema provides acts as a locale where trauma is confronted and a definition of national identity is forged out of the scars of twentieth century Spain.
WORKS CITED


