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# Beatriz Palacios

## Ukamau's Cornerstone (1974–2003)

by  
Isabel Seguí

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*Beatriz Palacios's instrumental role in the Ukamau group has been largely ignored by film historiography and criticism. The authorial persona of her comrade and husband, Jorge Sanjinés, has eclipsed Palacios's work and ideas. Her erasure is due to the perspectives chosen to analyze Ukamau (male-centered auteurist and formalist approaches) and to the almost exclusive use of the voice of Sanjinés (interviews, essays, and films interpreted in an authorial key) to construct the group's history. Ignoring the contribution and importance of Palacios's work and not accounting for her share in the authorship of the films made during the years they lived and worked together impedes a correct understanding of the complexity of the production context and the amplitude of the contribution of Ukamau to Latin American cinema. While her work as a producer is increasingly recognized, delving into her roles as a disseminator of political cinema in alternative circuits, evaluator of the impact of the movies on the popular classes, and documentary director completes the portrait of her all-encompassing life and career.*

*En gran medida, el papel instrumental de Beatriz Palacios en el grupo Ukamau ha sido ignorado por la historiografía y la crítica cinematográficas. La persona autoral de su camarada y esposo, Jorge Sanjinés, ha eclipsado la obra e ideas de Palacios. Dicha eliminación se debe a las perspectivas elegidas para analizar Ukamau (enfoques y formalistas) y al uso casi exclusivo de la voz de Sanjinés (entrevistas, ensayos y películas interpretadas en clave autoral) para construir la historia del grupo. Ignorar la contribución e importancia del trabajo de Palacios, así como su participación en la autoría de las películas realizadas durante los años que vivieron y trabajaron juntos, impide una correcta contribución de Ukamau al cine latinoamericano. Mientras que su trabajo como productora es cada vez más reconocido, ahondar en su labor como divulgadora de cine político en circuitos alternativos, evaluadora del impacto de las películas en las clases populares y directora de documentales, completa debidamente retrato de su vida y carrera.*

**Keywords:** *Beatriz Palacios, Bolivian cinema, Latin American women filmmakers, New Latin American cinema, Ukamau*

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Beatriz Palacios is an intriguing figure. Described by Alfonso Gumucio Dagron in 1975 as “halfway between Mata Hari and Tania the *guerrillera*” (Gumucio, 2016: 137), she has hovered under the radar of historiography, and her recognition is long overdue. Archival evidence and oral testimonies indicate that she managed every aspect of the daily operation of the Ukamau group from her incorporation in 1974 until her death in 2003. Her influence was not only managerial but also ideological and creative.

According to Jorge Sanjinés, she was the liaison with Bolivian social and political movements and had a say in the creative decisions from screenwriting to editing (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). Why, then, has her instrumental role in the structure of the Ukamau group been so largely ignored by film historiography and criticism? Why has the authorial persona of Jorge Sanjinés ended up eclipsing her work and ideas? Her being virtually erased from scholarly writing is not due to the will of Sanjinés or to any lack of available information. In every single oral account of her collaborators, assistants, friends, and colleagues, the interviewee emphasizes the constant control she exerted over every stage of production and distribution of the films.

From the descriptions of her personality we can even intuit that she was overcontrolling and probably a workaholic. She had power in Ukamau. An important part of the decision making fell upon her shoulders or was the product of consensus between her and Sanjinés.<sup>1</sup> Since she is not overlooked in the oral narratives, it can be said that the responsibility for Beatriz Palacios’s absence from the academic literature is due to the perspectives chosen to analyze the Ukamau group. These auteurist, formalist, or exclusively textual approaches have resulted in vertical and male-centered analyses that overshadow the contribution of women and below-the-line members of the crew.

Thomas Schatz, in *The Genius of the System* (2009: 524), states: “Auteurism itself would not be worth bothering with if it hadn’t been so influential, effectively stalling film history and criticism in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism.” The focus of most scholarship on Ukamau on its innovative cinematic language and the empowering representation of working-class and indigenous groups, although important, has kept us from more complex discussions about the politics of production, exhibition, and reception. To grow out of adolescence it is necessary to acknowledge the big picture. Even a cursory analysis shows that it takes much more than an artist or even an exquisite filmmaker to make movies in countries without a film industry, without large budgets, and under circumstances of political persecution. In these cases what is needed is organizational skills, the ability to generate resources, and political drive. All the aforementioned qualities and more were unwaveringly provided by Palacios from the moment she became involved with the Ukamau group in 1974.

Therefore, ignoring the contribution and importance of Palacios’s work and not accounting for her share in the authorship of the films they made during the years she and Sanjinés lived and worked together impedes a correct understanding of the amplitude of the contribution of Ukamau to Latin American cinema. This article aims to redress this situation. Elsewhere, I have written about Palacios’s role as a producer and manager (Seguí, 2018). Here I am going to address her role as a disseminator, evaluator, and director and document

some unfinished cinematic projects that she set aside in prioritizing her husband's initiatives.

The Ukamau group has a complex history that spans over 50 years. In the first phase, before the arrival of Palacios, three of its most iconic feature films were made: *Ukamau* (And So It Is, 1966), *Yawar Mallku* (Blood of the Condor, 1969) and *El coraje del pueblo* (The Courage of the People, 1971). In 1972 the group shot a feature in Peru called *Jatun auk'a* (The Principal Enemy, 1974), and in 1973 Sanjinés postproduced it in Cuba, where he met Beatriz Palacios. In 1974 the second phase of Ukamau began under the rule of the Sanjinés-Palacios duo, which lasted until her death in 2003. They completed *¡Lloksi kaymanta!* (Get Out of Here!, 1977), *Las banderas del amanecer* (Banners of the Dawn, 1983), *La nación clandestina* (The Clandestine Nation, 1989), *Para recibir el canto de los pájaros* (To Hear the Birds Sing, 1995) and *Los hijos del último jardín* (Children of the Last Garden, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Ukamau stands out in the history of Bolivian and Latin American cinema for a kind of practice that the group called "cinema with the people" (Sanjinés, 1979), an emancipatory cinematic project in alliance with the Andean masses. Under Ukamau's strategy, films, as cultural products, were not intended for consumption by the middle classes in theatrical venues. Movies and movie-making processes were weaponized, targeting subaltern audiences who were, at the same time, the protagonists of the films. The aim was to foster political liberation, and Beatriz Palacios was chiefly responsible for all the tasks involved in these processes (dissemination, education, impact evaluation). Thus, her self-imposed duties and her organic involvement with social and political movements created coherence between the theory and the practice of the Ukamau project.

One of the reasons for the lack of scholarly attention to the practical side of this filmic endeavor is the narrowness of the range of primary sources used to construct Ukamau's narrative. The typical source focuses on the voice of Jorge Sanjinés: interviews, essays, and films interpreted in a formalist/authorial key.<sup>3</sup> Even Sanjinés's constant efforts to employ the plural in his statements seems to be read as a sign of false modesty (a royal "we") and not taken seriously by scholars who, by doing so, continue to attribute to him de facto sole authorship of the films.<sup>4</sup>

For me this approach to the research on Ukamau changed when I was given access to some abandoned files kept in cupboards on the premises of the Ukamau Foundation in La Paz. After becoming familiar with the contents of the dusty folders, untouched for a decade, I realized that I was confronted with the remnants of the life's work of the late Beatriz Palacios, compiler of the archive and manager of the group. Palacios was alive in those files. Her mind, heart, and soul were stored there, her loves and priorities (what to save, what to highlight, in what order) and dislikes (what to discard, what to censure). I never got to know Beatriz Palacios, but through her files I had special access to the work methods indissolubly linked with her life.

I have completed the rest of Palacios's story through conversations with people who did get to know her—some of them real friends, some mere acquaintances, and some probably enemies. I have also read her publications and used the compilation of interviews with her collaborators contained in the

documentary *Beatriz junto al pueblo* (Beatriz with the People, Sergio Estrada and Alba Balderrama, 2011). However, I have to admit that my main source of access to Palacios has been Sanjinés himself, who, with enormous generosity, has shared his private life for the sake of a proper posthumous recognition of his irreplaceable wife and comrade. A feminist revision of the history of the group entails relativizing Sanjinés's prominence in the narrative. However, I am convinced that he prefers a complex and truthful chronicle to his own glorification. His entire life has been a fight to decolonize cinema, and depatriarchalizing the history of cinema is—or should be—part of that process (on the need for depatriarchalization in the context of Bolivian decolonial endeavors, see Galindo, 2013).

Moreover, a big part of the responsibility for Beatriz Palacios's apparently low profile was not imposed from the outside. Until the day of her death, she cultivated an aura of mystery around herself that some attribute to the virtue of prudence so necessary in such a turbulent political time, others to a taste for adventure, and the less benevolent to a necessity to cover up "certain things" (in Bolivia, widespread rumors claim that she was a member of the Cuban secret service or at the very least prepared to serve the Cuban regime if requested to do so).

The enigma of Beatriz Palacios begins with her name. There is a suspicion among her acquaintances that Palacios was not her real surname (see Gumucio, 2016: 137). Often, Azurduy is cited as her first surname (*Los Tiempos*, 2007). Her actual age is also problematic; the year of birth that commonly appears in her biographies is 1952. The sources that offer this date range from the catalogue of Bolivian women filmmakers compiled by the New Bolivian Film and Video movement (Palacios, 1992: 7) to Wikipedia. In the posthumous publication of her writings *Los días rabiosos* (The Furious Days, 2005) the date is 1958. However, Jorge Sanjinés assures us that when they met in Cuba in 1973 she was 28 years old. This information, which is probably the most plausible, indicates that she was born ca. 1945. A further problem with knowing her actual date of birth is that the identity document she used upon her return from exile may have been forged, since Sanjinés states that they obtained it under dubious circumstances (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015).

What is certain is that Palacios's political commitment had begun long before she met Sanjinés and her encounter with him represented the opportunity to link her life with her struggle. She saw herself as a guerrilla without a gun, a Cold Warrior (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). According to Sanjinés, she found in filmmaking the weapon she needed to fight imperialism without bloodshed. The Ukamau film group was her cultural and educational *foco*.<sup>5</sup> She fought for the liberation of the Andean people, even after the Cold War was over, and it could be said that she dedicated her life to the project. She died in 2003, having spent the last years of her life severely ill but enduring her physical limitations stoically while continuing her numerous activities.

In July 2004, a year after her death, Sanjinés wrote a poem titled "Beatriz." The manuscript (handwritten) can be found in Ukamau's archive. In it he describes how much he misses her as his main connection to the outside world. Significantly, he portrays himself as at home while Palacios is on the streets. He

chooses a reclusive existence, waiting for her return to inquire about the events of the world. In this text he shows a profound admiration for his dynamic *compañera*. He describes her superior ability to interpret reality and his total faith in her judgment, perception, and critical capacity (Sanjinés, 2004). The admiration and love described in this poem show the importance of Palacios in his life—working, personal, and political. From his words it is easy to interpret that Sanjinés was very comfortable in his ivory tower, knowing that she had all their business under control and that she was going to generously share her knowledge, sensibility, and efforts with him because they shared a mission, Ukamau. The unpublished text evidences that to credit her only as a producer falls far short of describing her true role. This article aims to reveal Palacios as a crucial contributor to one of the most coherent and comprehensive radical cinema practices of Latin American Third Cinema.

### THE FILM DOES NOT END WITH THE WORD “END”

Probably the most innovative facet of Beatriz Palacios’s work was her systematic evaluation of the impact Ukamau’s films had on subaltern audiences. The scope and duration of this endeavor are unique in the New Latin American Cinema movement. Palacios envisioned political filmmaking as a living process that had to be nurtured in all its phases: investigation, preproduction, production, postproduction, dissemination, and evaluation. The results obtained from the impact evaluation of a film were the seed for the next. Her overall objective was perfecting the political effectiveness of Ukamau’s cinematic products and practices (Palacios, n.d.a).

Palacios reflected publicly on her methodology on various occasions. For instance, in the article eloquently titled “La película no termina con la palabra ‘FIN’” (The Film Does Not End with the Word “END”),<sup>6</sup> she states that dissemination “is a patient work, not spectacular—contradictory to the spectacular nature of the film itself—that flourishes through bringing cinematic images to popular and marginalized sectors of our society, week after week, month after month, and year after year” (Palacios, 1988a: 16). She claims that statistics reveal surprising insights about the magnitude of this unpublicized work. She cites the example of *The Courage of the People* (1971), which, in addition to being the Ukamau movie most watched in theaters, has been seen by twice as many viewers in alternative circuits thanks to its direct dissemination by the group itself and the distribution of free 16-mm copies to grassroots organizations with the infrastructure necessary to screen them (Palacios, 1988a: 16).

Palacios claims that Latin American films reach more viewers through alternative channels than North American productions do through mainstream channels. For her this has to be taken into account in the assessment of the dissemination of political cinema at a continental level. She also announces that the Ukamau group is preparing a well-documented publication about its work on alternative distribution that aims to shed light on the impact of Latin American political cinema on its target audiences and demonstrate that dissemination is the fuel for the entire cinematic process “with the people” (Palacios, 1988a: 16, 1988b). She was a professional and devoted

compiler of testimonios, using this practice of mediation of the voice of the subaltern, so fashionable in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, to bear witness to repression and challenge official history in her newspaper articles and documentaries.<sup>7</sup> However, she also used this technique in a more innovative way—to assess the impact of the films. In order to do so, she and her subordinates undertook a systematic compilation of evidence that she was hoping to publish one day (Palacios, 1988a; 1988b). Unfortunately, the promised publication was never produced, and the material she claimed to possess that proved the impact of the films on audiences has mostly been lost. However, there is enough remaining documentation to verify her proceedings.

The first appearance in print of her transcriptions of Q & A sessions in nontheatrical venues is part of *Teoría y práctica de un cine junto al pueblo* (Theory and Practice of a Cinema with the People [Sanjinés, 1979a]), which Sanjinés used to prove the actual effectiveness of the theory developed in the essays assembled in it. To the same end, Palacios (1981; 1988b) published some interviews with viewers in *Cine Cubano*. Her files also feature some unpublished writings that record her evaluation activity. For instance, the folder that contains material related to *The Courage of the People* includes “Un testimonio popular” (A People’s Testimony), the transcription of a conversation with a member of the audience called Mrs. Betzabé in June 1979. She is described as “Woman of 42, widow of Chuquimia and mother of five children, none of whom go to school; they all work as street vendors” (Palacios, 1979). At this point the film was being shown in La Paz for the first time, eight years after its release and triumph at the Pesaro International Film Festival. *The Courage of the People* is a denunciation of the St. John’s Eve massacre (conducted by the army in the mining settlement of Siglo XX in 1967) reenacted by its survivors. The film had been banned during Hugo Banzer’s dictatorship, and people were eager to see it. However, although Bolivia was nominally a democracy at the time, the political influence of the military was still strong, and therefore the mayor of La Paz had threatened to forbid its screening (Grupo Ukamau, 1979).

Betzabé’s testimony was gathered a few days before the mayor’s order was to go into effect. According to her account, she and her *comadre* (close friend), the meat seller Higinia, had been told by a fellow vendor that the film was a must-see because for the first time it showed Bolivian people fighting for their rights on the big screen. Following this recommendation, five market women took turns in the queue outside the Cinemateca “with a lot of trouble, many people pushing” (Palacios, 1979). Betzabé said that she never went to the movies because they did not interest her but in this case they had bought tickets for both the matinee and the evening program. When Palacios asked what this type of cinema meant to her, she responded, “Well, cinema like this, for me, is the cinema of truth, the cinema of the people, a cinema lesson where the lesson is learned without knowing how to read the alphabet. . . . This lesson teaches us to speak loudly, to unite, and allows us to stand up.”

In Palacios’s files there are more testimonies that, like this one, were intended to be used as proof of the effectiveness of Ukamau’s films with

subaltern audiences. Most of the interviewees are women. Palacios was also very interested in children. That she and her collaborators, principally Consuelo Lozano, raised awareness in schools is apparent from the presence in the archive of dozens of school essays on films. A critical document unfortunately lost is the notebook that Palacios's direct subordinate, the person responsible for dissemination in the countryside, Manuel Quispe, kept with the records of the Q & A sessions he conducted after screenings in remote indigenous communities. For Palacios, all these sources of verification of the impact of their films were the ultimate result of her exhausting work and constituted her reward. But these were not the only reactions from the audience; there were also spontaneous responses in the form of letters or even contributions in kind, such as potatoes, to finance future Ukamau films (Palacios, n.d.a). Those gifts were evidence of the existence of a consolidated non-middle-class public. If Ukamau managed to acquire this loyal audience, it was through an engaged and organic process that she coordinated.

Palacios also undertook the work of routinely interviewing the members of their crews. These thorough questionnaires enable research into Ukamau's production practices because she frequently asked about off-screen issues such as filming and exhibition experiences. She aimed to give voice to key participants besides herself and Sanjinés to document the entirety of the cinematic life cycle. Some of these interviews, for instance, those with Cergio Prudencio, the creator of the soundtracks of various Ukamau films (Palacios, 2010a; 2010b) are published. Some further, unpublished interviews, such as the one with the Ecuadorian crew members Alejandro Santillán and Cristobal Corral (Palacios, n.d.b), can also be found in Ukamau's archive. Her effort to document the complexity and political significance of Ukamau's cinematic methodology highlights the importance of her contribution and evidences that political cinema as an emancipatory process should not be judged only on its aesthetic results.

### *LAS BANDERAS DEL AMANECER*

Palacios was able to complete at least one project in which she was responsible both for the entire creative cycle (investigation, scriptwriting, direction, and editing) and the bulk of the production, distribution, and alternative dissemination (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). *Las banderas del amanecer* (Banners of the Dawn, 1983)<sup>8</sup> was for her a beloved undertaking, an effort that was arduous and risky—she even suffered imprisonment to avoid its confiscation and destruction by the Peruvian authorities in 1981—but rewarding.<sup>9</sup> The reels that she was trying to save when she was detained at the Lima airport were not the final cut. Palacios and Sanjinés had started filming in La Paz after Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch's coup in November 1979. They had been prompted to undertake this long project by the urgent need to chronicle the events that unfolded in Bolivia after the coup, a step backward in the recently inaugurated democratic opening that had allowed them to return from exile a year before.

The film premiered at the Havana International Film Festival in December 1983, where it received the Great Coral Award for best documentary. In Bolivia

its release took place in Mina Bolívar on March 16, 1984. It had been updated in January 1984, including new footage that made it slightly different from the one that had premiered in Havana (Palacios and Sanjinés, 1984). The following week it was released in La Paz. The date chosen was Thursday, March 22, 1984, in honor of the Jesuit priest and human rights fighter Luis Espinal on the fourth anniversary of his assassination by paramilitaries during the dictatorship of Luis García Meza.

In the press dossier on *Banners of the Dawn* in Ukamau's archive, Palacios kept all the published reactions to the movie: reviews of the premiere, film reviews, interviews, and publicity. The film was attacked by Westernized film critics for rawness, lack of lyricism, overuse of speeches made by mumbling ordinary people, and a general tone closer to the television newscast than to art. However, although critics noticed a U-turn in terms of style, there was no reference in the reviews to the possible influence of Palacios in this shift. Given that Beatriz Palacios was the codirector of the film, this lack of recognition in the press of the time is striking, as is her lack of self-promotion.<sup>10</sup>

The same can be said about the public acts and homages that accompanied the two premieres. The miners, whose organizations were dominated by men, paid tribute to Sanjinés by symbolically investing him with a mining helmet (*guardatojo*), while there is no evidence of any intention of also awarding Palacios this honor. Back in the city, thanks to Palacios's initiative, almost every class and grassroots organization that mattered in Bolivia supported the release of the film in La Paz. Among others, the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers Central—COB), the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia—CSUTCB), the Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (Permanent Assembly for Human Rights—APDH), and the Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas "Bartolina Sisa" (Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Peasant Women). However, her substantial logistical effort was in direct contrast to her total absence from the public spotlight during the event. As in a self-evident staging of the gendered division of roles between Palacios and Sanjinés, the speeches were delivered by him (and the musician and union leader Nilo Soruco) while she was taking care of everything from backstage.

### PALACIOS'S FILMMAKING STYLE: MILITANT-DIRECT CINEMA

*Banners of the Dawn* reconstructs chronologically the historical episodes between the Natusch coup on November 1, 1979, and the return of the legitimate president Hernán Siles Suazo on October 10, 1982. Emphasis is placed on the massive popular resistance that restored power to the people, taking it from the hands of the army. The movie covers the three general elections occurring in 1978, 1979, and 1980 and the two coups d'état led by Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch and General Luís García Meza and documents the slaughter of All Saints' Day and the assassination by the military of the socialist leader Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz and the Jesuit priest Luis Espinal. Moreover, it bears witness to an enormous variety of peasant and working-class mobilization and, finally, shows the country's shaky return to democracy.

The production of *Banners of the Dawn* was carried out with a minimum crew composed of Beatriz Palacios, Jorge Sanjinés, Eduardo López Zavala, and a few more people who occasionally supported them. For more than two years, their activity consisted of recording the daily chronicle of political and social mobilizations in the country in an urgent style. Many of the testimonials that ground the argument are audiovisual, but before the filming, research was needed, and Palacios, an experienced interviewer, took the lead. Remarkably, because of the shortage of personnel, she held the role of the sound person in the filming, which suited her entirely because she was a journalist with a predilection for the testimonial format and an exceptional ability to listen to people and gain their trust.

As mentioned earlier, *Banners* is considered by the critics to be one of Sanjinés's less successful films. It is often described as irregular and confusing, a minor oeuvre, not at the level of other creative milestones by the director that are more formally balanced and beautiful. Sanjinés is widely admired by male-dominated Western or Westernized film criticism as an auteur who has managed to balance the openly political content of his films with cinematic beauty. However, in this case, in the words of Alfonso Gumucio (2003: 380), "In *Banners of the Dawn* these [aesthetic] concerns seem absent; the directors seem to have taken the option of exercising a stark look at the political reality of the country, without filters or aesthetic make-up. The result is, similarly, harsh and violent." He goes on to say that foreign audiences would perceive the film as a cryptic mass of testimonies that gives too much information with little clarification. The point is that Palacios and Sanjinés were not interested in foreign audiences or Westernized film criticism. They were reacting to the political situation and trying to be of service to the Bolivian people.

One of the reasons the film may be considered confusing is its lack of an external narration such as the voice-over that usually accompanies Ukamau's films. In *The Courage of the People* and *Get Out of Here!* the voice-over was done by Jorge Sanjinés himself, a classic example of authorial control. In the case of *The Principal Enemy* (1974), the narrator was the indigenous peasant leader Saturnino Huillca, a storyteller used to create a Brechtian distancing effect. *Banners* was the first time since *Blood of the Condor* (1969) that an Ukamau film had no voice-over. The decision to abandon the voice-over was made by consensus by the directors, according to Sanjinés: "There is no narrative that guides the facts. We took care of not imposing our voice, and everything said and spoken in the film comes from the opinions of the people, their leaders, the real protagonists of their true story" (Palacios and Sanjinés, 1984).

However, this was the first time that Palacios had directed and therefore had had the final responsibility in the decision making. The sound was Palacios's duty not only during the shooting but also as the researcher and salvager of the other sources that were finally used to construct the narrative. I would therefore venture to say that it was on her initiative that the overindoctrinating voice-over was dismissed, principally because there were enough usable political arguments in the voices of the common people of Bolivia.

Moreover, and paradoxically, this abandonment of the voice-over did not mean that the directors renounced editorialization. On the contrary, the main thesis of the film was constructed from a collage of voices that came not only

from the direct sound captured during the unfolding street events but also from sources produced expressly for the film (such as interviews) or acquired through semiscripted provocations by the filmmakers (creative reenactments). In addition, external sources such as radio programs were used freely. The final minutes of the film are a case in point. At the end of the movie, the Bolivian people, after many tribulations, remove the military from power, allowing the return of Hernan Siles Suazo, the president elected in 1980. Nevertheless, Siles, who won with a manifesto that promised an end to the economic package imposed by the International Monetary Fund, has not fulfilled these promises, and the filmmakers send him a warning.

The sequence begins with images of street riots, but the central element is not the image but the careful selection and editing of an audio narrative, constituted as a collage of voices but with a definite editorial line. It begins with the intervention of a unionist who warns that if the Siles government does not implement his manifesto the unions will not collaborate and there will be clashes instead. Then a group of militants discusses the source of the problem, concluding that the problem is not the people who rule (whether the democratic president Siles or the dictator García Meza) but the system and therefore as long as the country remains capitalist there will be no solution to the social unrest. They argue that it is necessary to try something that has so far never been tried in Bolivia: a socialist system.

After this claim, the audio cuts to a demonstration in which people shout, "Weapons for the people, damn it!" Then the audio returns to the prior discussion to insist that what is important is a change of the whole system. A new cut brings us the speech of a leader who says, "Therefore, we must think that our fundamental goal is the seizure of power, but not in a democracy as we know it today. We seek a people's democracy, participatory, where decisions are made by national majorities and not by private enterprises or the military." Then the tune that has been the leitmotif of the entire film comes back while we watch a group of poor children marching, representing the future. The film ends in a worker-peasant meeting in Ayo-Ayo, the birthplace of the Aymara leader Tupac Katari. A crowd of peasants runs up a hill (an image of hope and overcoming) shouting, "Long live Bolivia! Down with U.S. imperialism! Long live Tupac Katari! Long live Bartolina Sisa! Long live the COB! Long live the CSUTCB!" The word "end" appears on the screen, but then this word is used to form part of another sentence: "There's no *end* for the people on their feet." To summarize, the entire audiovisual montage is ideological. The message—although it is constructed not by using a Griersonian "voice of God" but from a collage of popular voices—is not open to interpretation. All these voices support the directors' thesis: the restoration of a liberal regime is not a satisfactory end. The Bolivian people will continue to fight against any military, economic, social, or racial oppression until the final victory.

Sanjinés says in an interview with Lupe Cajías that *Banners* is a film of "direct cinema" (Sanjinés, 1984). Because it not only documents but also interprets "reality," I would rather place it halfway between direct and political intervention cinema. It has the spirit of direct cinema in its inclusion of lived experience, its negotiation with chance, and its approach to the temporality of the concrete action, but it does not pretend to present a panorama open to

multiple interpretations. The message of the film is precise. There is a Manicheistic view of conflict, with clearly separated good and evil sides. The good side is densely populated and offers a close and multifaceted view of the Bolivian people, but the view of the conjuncture is polarized and partisan. The directors do not even try to seem equidistant. There is no room in the film for the viewpoint of the class enemies.

Another feature of direct cinema that is present in *Banners* is intimacy, the ability to penetrate private spaces and daily life with unprecedented closeness (Ortega, 2008: 18). However, in terms of Robert Drew's commandments for direct cinema—be there, be unobtrusive, do not distort the situation (Hall, 1991: 24)—*Banners* meets only the first. Palacios and Sanjinés intervene in the events without reflecting through their filmic discourse on the mediation they exert. *Banners* is not a primarily ethnographic or aesthetic product; it is cultural-political. It is the staging of the manifestations of Bolivian popular political culture from the somewhat interior angle of two organic intellectuals in alliance with the social groups represented.

### MEDIATING FILMIC TESTIMONIES

Palacios and Sanjinés also incorporated into the film participatory techniques such as the creative improvisation by nonprofessional popular actors that they had learned from their extensive experience in the creation of collaborative docu-fiction films over the previous decades. This methodology is very similar to the cooperative mode of production of written testimonios and provides an alternative to traditional individual creativity. To illustrate this last trend, I am going to use the scene of the roadblock in *Banners*, a reenactment performed by the actual road blockers at the request of Palacios and Sanjinés. Located in the middle of the film, the scene does not stand out; it seems to be just one of the many popular actions portrayed in a documentary mode. However, a closer analysis of the scene makes it clear that it is almost entirely reconstructed.

From statements by Jorge Sanjinés we know that he, Palacios, and López Zavala went to an actual roadblock taking place in the middle of the Altiplano (interview, La Paz, July 29, 2015). Blocking the main roads is common practice in Bolivian political struggles. The intention of the filmmakers was, as usual, to document the peasants' direct action. To that end, they took some establishing shots and other images, but then they unexpectedly met an acquaintance of theirs among the road blockers—the peasant leader Lucía Mejía, executive secretary of the Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Peasant Women. Mejía brought the principal leaders together at the roadblock, introduced them to the members of the Ukamau group, and explained the kind of cinematic work they had been doing with the people for decades. It was not difficult to persuade the bored peasants—a roadblock normally lasts for several days—to collaborate on the film.

The fictional element is introduced with the supposed arrival of a car at the roadblock; we see a Volkswagen (the production car) stopping. In the next shot, a big gringo-looking man gets out of the vehicle and walks toward the

roadblock to talk to the protesters (we see only his back; he is the cameraman Eduardo López-Zavala, so it can be assumed that Sanjinés was filming). The following shots are in point-of-view; the camera (the gringo) is being aggressively addressed by the crowd of road blockers. The peasants scream and face the camera, taking the opportunity to show off their physical strength and their persuasive rhetorical skills, always in Aymara. The entire scene lasts three minutes and is a masterful example of totally improvised “cinema with the people.” The creativity of the peasants, who deliver the most convincing performance possible, is an example of a kind of testimonial inventiveness that breaks the boundaries between documentary and fiction.

*Banners of the Dawn* is a testimonial and processual film, easily usable as a consciousness-raising tool. It took four years to complete. The tiny crew traveled the entire country and had to go into exile in the middle of the filming, and Palacios even paid with jail time. In general, in Ukamau films, the production processes and practices are as impressive as the resultant products, and this case is no exception. The narrative is confusing only for those who are ignorant of Bolivian history during those years. For the protagonists, the Bolivian people, the storytelling is crystal clear and absolutely crucial. María Aimaretti (2017: 64) has called the film a *wiphala* (the many-colored Aymara banner), the embodiment of multiple voices, bodies, and points of view, that does not duplicate the confusion of the traumatic events but represents an effort to systematize them in terms of a different, Andean logic. The influence of Palacios’s mediation is present everywhere in this movie, despite her insistence on disappearing not only behind the subaltern protagonists but also behind Sanjinés, who, as usual, took most of the credit in the public spheres (audience, press, criticism, and academia). The irony, in this case, is that Palacios’s highly effective direction seems to have tarnished Sanjinés’s reputation among the Westernized film critics of their country, who did not understand the inherent coherence present not only in the process but also in the film as a text.

One last example of Palacios’s testimonial style is hidden within a film directed by Sanjinés. In 2003, during the so-called Black February—a mass mobilization against the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, which prefigured what was to be his definitive expulsion from the country during the gas war in October of the same year—Palacios, whose life was destined to end in July, picked up a tiny crew and a couple of nonprofessional actors from the ongoing shoot of the film *Children of the Last Garden* and mixed them with the crowd of demonstrators who were clamoring against the government and its devastating neoliberal policies in the dangerous streets of La Paz.

Palacios made the actors mingle with the people of a real march and pretend to lead it. In this shot, just behind the main actor we see the soon-to-be first indigenous president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, who, unaware that besides participating in the march he is taking part in the filming of a movie, shouts the same slogans as the actors and the mass of demonstrators: “Rifle! Shrapnel! The people are not going to shut up!” In the middle of the road, antiriot police wait for their moment to attack, while the crowd calls them murderers in anticipation of what might happen.

For a brief moment, Beatriz Palacios appears in the frame wearing a straw hat and sunglasses. She is ill and looks older than she is, but her attitude is determined. When she realizes that the camera is filming her, she abandons the shot immediately. However, the final cut, edited by Sanjinés after her death, bears witness to her active presence as the director of the most exciting scenes of what is, otherwise, a failed experiment—the first digital film by Ukamau. Palacios took the initiative to shoot these scenes by intuition. She quickly mobilized the crew to get ready to film, knowing that something meaningful was happening in town. If Jorge Sanjinés had been in La Paz that day, in his own words, he “would have tried to prevent her from going onto the streets” (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). However, thanks to his absence, we can enjoy this last example of Palacios’s cinematic style, which was also an approach to life and work that encompassed not only the filmic form but the entire life cycle of the film.

### UNFINISHED PROJECTS, INTERRUPTED LIFE, AND LEGACY

The list of Palacios’s unfinished films is longer than might be expected. In 1979 she abandoned a project to create a film about the five women of the mines who defeated the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer in favor of making *Banners of the Dawn*. Furthermore, I have found three unfinished projects by Beatriz Palacios in the archive of the Ukamau Foundation: *Cuatro mujeres para la guerra* (Four Women for War), a story about the women freedom fighters of the Independence Wars Bartolina Sisa, Juana Azurduy, Simona Manzaneda, and Vicenta Juaristi (Palacios, n.d.c), *Amayapampa o La pampa de las ánimas* (Amayapampa or The Plain of Souls), a docu-drama about the so-called Christmas Massacre conducted by the state in 1996 (Palacios, n.d.d), and the most remarkable one because of its stage of development, *La tierra sin mal* (The Land without Evil). Nevertheless, there may be some more, hidden away in a dusty box or perhaps lost forever.

During the last years of her life Palacios had been working on *La tierra sin mal*, a very personal feature film focused on street children (*La Prensa*, 2003). The project had received funding from the National Council for Cinema. According to Sanjinés the preproduction was finished and everything was ready to begin filming when she suffered a severe return of her arthritis and the shooting had to be postponed indefinitely (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). In the archive of the Ukamau Foundation I found a few documentary remains of this project: a detailed weekly shooting plan and some loose and disorderly sheets of the script. Both documents are interesting. In the first, we can see just how ambitious Palacios’s project was. The planned duration of the shoot was eight weeks, and the scheduled locations were the city of La Paz, Huarina (a town on Lake Titicaca), Patacamaya (a small town on the road from La Paz to Cochabamba), Cochabamba, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the Chiquitano Plain, and, finally, Urubichá (a small town founded as a Jesuit mission in northern Santa Cruz)—in all a journey of 1,200 kilometers at altitudes ranging from 194 to 4,000 meters (Palacios, n.d.e).

This film was intended to tell the story of a group of street kids traveling in search of Yvy Maraey, the land without evil, a mythical Guarani place where children live happily ever after. It is a road movie, an allegorical and

physical journey through Bolivia from the Andean highlands to the tropical lowlands. It is also a trip through Bolivian human geography that reveals the complexity of the country. The shooting plan details the characters that appear in each of the 94 scenes of the film. Through this list we can see the broad social portrait that Beatriz Palacios intended to make. A significant character in the film was her little dog, Perico, which, according to Sanjinés, she had been training for years for this role (interview, La Paz, August 12, 2015). Through the adventures of the children and the dog on their journey, Palacios creates a crude but full portrait of Bolivian society. She also shows how the children protect each other and get ahead thanks to the strength of the group (Palacios, n.d.f).

Palacios's unfinished projects show how, suffering from rheumatoid arthritis for decades, she postponed her own initiatives and put her strength at the service of projects creatively led by Sanjinés. When the opportunity arrived to carry out her most personal project, her damaged body prevented her from completing it. However, to suggest that Palacios was another interrupted author, a victim of patriarchy, would only overshadow her actual contribution to Latin American political cinema. Her life work was successful because her aim was not to be an auteur but to lead processes that encompassed cinematic theory and practice while contributing to the transformative impact of the films.

In this light, meeting the challenges she raised will require a new approach. I have proposed a divergent model of film appreciation and historicization that provides a more consistent framework for interpreting the reach of the emancipatory processes conducted by Third Cinema collectives in Latin America. Transcending male-centered, formalist, and auteurist perspectives allows shedding light on women and below-the-line members of the crew and, remarkably, contributes to the ultimate goal of Third Cinema: decolonizing filmmaking.

## NOTES

1. A range of testimonies about Palacios—from film collaborators such as Eduardo López Zavala, César Pérez, and Raquel Romero to union leaders such as Filemón Escobar and Domitila Chungara—appears in the documentary *Beatriz junto al pueblo* (Beatriz with the People, Sergio Estrada and Alba Balderrama, 2011).

2. The first Ukamau group was made up of Oscar Soria and Jorge Sanjinés, with the subsequent incorporation of Consuelo Saavedra, Ricardo Rada, and Antonio Eguino and the collaboration of other members such as Mario Arrieta, Danielle Caillet, and Gladys de Rada. Eguino and Soria retained the legal name of the original enterprise "Ukamau Ltd." and used it to undertake different filmic projects (*Pueblo chico*, 1974; *Chuquiago*, 1977; and *Amargo mar*, 1984). The Ukamau Foundation was created by Sanjinés and Palacios in the 1990s. A third stage of the Ukamau group began when, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Monica Bustillos became Sanjinés's producer and right hand in finishing Ukamau's last films: *Insurgentes* (2012) and *Juana Azurduy, guerrillera de la patria grande* (2016).

3. See his interviews for *Cinéaste* (4 [3]: 12–13 and 5 [2]: 18–20), *Cine Cubano* (71 [2]: 52–59; 98: 80–83), and *Hablemos de Cine* (52: 36–40) and the much more recent ones for television (Manuel Pérez, Cuba, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXMuRAjXmyE>, and Ana Cacopardo, Argentina, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTJHhHRRYz8>). The essays include principally those in Sanjinés (1979a) but also others such as Sanjinés (1989).

4. Equating Jorge Sanjinés with Ukamau, as if they were synonyms, is a tendency of virtually all the scholarly studies on Ukamau to date. Therefore, although the Ukamau group is

commonly used as an example of collaborative political cinematic praxis, there has not been any consistent effort to delve into its mechanisms of creation and management of shared authorship. I have analyzed the overshadowed contribution of the female members of several Ukamau crews (Seguí, 2018).

5. Foquism is a theory of guerrilla warfare according to which a revolution may be initiated by a small group or *foco* (spotlight) even though the overall conditions do not appear to be the most appropriate. This idea was initially proposed by Ernesto Che Guevara (2006 [1961]) and developed theoretically by Régis Debray (1967).

6. All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

7. In 1983, Palacios started a column in the weekly *Aquí* called "Para no olvidar" (So as Not to Forget), a selection of testimonies on the repression conducted in Bolivia during the dictatorship era (1971–1982). A volume of these articles was compiled after her death (Palacios, 2005).

8. The English translation of the title is that of the British Workers Film Association, which organized a premiere in Manchester on March 29, 1986. Jorge Sanjinés presented at this event.

9. Palacios and Sanjinés returned to Bolivia from exile in 1978. In 1979, filming started on *Banners of the Dawn*. In 1980, following García Meza's coup, they went back into exile, and in late 1981 they completed a first version of the film. Then they flew to Peru with the intention of entering Bolivia by land, but the police were waiting for them at the airport in Lima. Sanjinés managed to escape, but Palacios was arrested attempting to avoid the confiscation of the film. She was imprisoned for two weeks, a time that might have been much longer had it not been for the intervention of her dear friend the filmmaker Nora de Izcue, who moved heaven and earth to get her out of prison. When Palacios was released, she and Sanjinés returned to Bolivia with the film, but they resumed the filming once again because they realized that the people were still mobilizing and the dictatorship would fall to pieces sooner rather than later (interviews with Sanjinés, La Paz, August 12, 2015, and Nora de Izcue, Lima, June 20, 2015).

10. A case in point is Palacios's response to the negative review of *Banners* by the film critic Tomás Molina Céspedes (1984). Although her defense of the film is solid and apparently she is arguing in favor of her project, she does not overtly contradict the attribution of the film to Sanjinés. This occurs only in a secondary line of argument in which she says that if Sanjinés is accused by Molina of illicit enrichment, then the rest of the team must also be charged. In no way does she claim recognition for the film itself.

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