

### **Viva Cuba: Social Commentary through the Eyes of Children**

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*Viva Cuba*. (Cuba, 2005). Directors: Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti and Iraida Malberti Cabrera. 1:20”

On the surface level, *Viva Cuba* follows the story of Malu and Jorgito, two children who decide to travel across the country of Cuba to find Malu’s father. Their journey is notably characterized by friendship, freedom to travel, adventure, and conflict between the two as they run into perilous situations, such as running out of money, and leaving belongings behind. Their decision to go is born out of the desire to stay in Cuba together; after the death of Malu’s grandmother, Malu’s mother has decided to leave the country, putting Jorgito’s and Malu’s relationship in jeopardy unless Malu can convince her father not to sign the papers that would allow her mother to take her out of Cuba. *Viva Cuba*’s portrayal of two children and their journey toward an idea of freedom is suggestive and reflective of the political and social climate of Cuba, beautifully captured as allegory in the children and through creative and clever shots that follow the children’s story.

*Viva Cuba* is an example of third cinema, which is characterized by its display of social inequality and critiques against oppressive governmental practices (Hayward 414). This is evident in the underlying tension between Malu, her upper-class family, and Jorgito and his lower-class, violent and unstable family. From the beginning, the film addresses the attitudes of the people and their government using Malu and Jorgito as an example of two clashing styles of rule. The film starts with scenes of both children playing democratically as if they were in war with the Spaniards, and eventually ceasing

when Malu declares the game over, and that she is now the Queen of Spain (*Viva Cuba*, 3:20). Jorgito shouts to Malu, “We didn’t fight the Spaniards for two hours for you to tell us now you’re the Queen of Spain and we’re your slaves. No, Malu...why do you always have to be the one giving the orders?” Malu retorts with, “First of all, because I’m taller than you.” Malu’s response, though childlike, is telling of the dictatorship of Fidel Castro, repressive and taken by force from Bautista in 1959 (Andres, Chicago Tribune). The historical context of the Cuban regime lays the foundation for the rest of the film.

Because the movie is born from third cinema, the children act as an example of clashing morals and as allegory for the social climate in Cuba, which is one of despair (Hayward, 2018, 414). After the passing of Malu’s grandmother, her mother remarks, “there’s nothing left for me here,” and seeks to ask Malu’s father for approval to take her out of the country (*Viva Cuba*, 14:13). Upon hearing this, Malu and Jorgito decide to make a plan to get to him first to prevent him from signing the papers so that she may tell him what she desires. This is a very important aspect of the film that allows the viewer to understand the children as allegory for the people of Cuba who have faith that there’s still a chance for a better life and a better outcome than what they currently have in Cuba, which is still searching for itself amongst the rubble of revolution, economic distress from the US embargo, and resulting political decay.

Although the narrative and script focus on the children and their exciting journey of the children in the film, much of the underlying social commentary lies in the editing and the scenes through which the narrative is told. Quite a few notable shots set up the allegorical message through symbol, deep focus, eyeline matching, and a few other examples of shots.

First, a scene with depth of field and deep focus reveals some of the historical context if it was missed from the beginning (Hayward 98). In this shot, Jorgito is running toward Malu as she storms away from him in anger. All characters are in focus

in the foreground, and the city they are running through is also in focus, prominently displaying a large graffiti of Che Guevara on an apartment building. This is also an emblematic shot, as the lower class Jorgito looks up toward the sky, while Malu continues to storm off. This scene not only highlights the history, but also introduces commentary on the cultural impact of Che Guevara on the people of Cuba (*Viva Cuba*, 16:09).

Secondly, a series of montage cuts edited together shows the dichotomy of class between the two children as they prepare to leave (*Viva Cuba*, 22:30). The cuts highlight the differences between each child within the items they pack, with Jorgito and his metal cup, and Malu and her lipstick. Montage cuts aim to create a feeling or distortion of time, and these montage cuts of the children packing their things give the air of excitement and hope as the children pack their respective clothes, necessities, and frills (Hayward 111). Malu also brings along the photo of her grandmother, which outwardly symbolizes meaning and grief, but inwardly symbolizes the stabilizing feeling of home so that on her journey, she can return back to the sense of purpose that develops from the safe place of home.

Lastly, arguably the most important scenes of the film are toward the ending. In one scene, the cuts are edited continuously when Malu and her father run toward each other and embrace after she has arrived after her long journey to reach him. The continuity editing mirrors the journey and different phases in which she and Jorgito took to finally find her father (Hayward 94). In the next scene, she asks her father if he signed the papers, and follows it with, "Would you let me go without asking me if I wanted it or not?" He doesn't respond, but simply says, "Forgive me, my love." Malu then looks slightly off camera, multiple times, creating an anxiety about what's coming until the eyeline matching shot shows that she's looking at her mother, the police, and Jorgito's family running toward she and her father. This anxiety is emblematic of the

impending doom lingering in the political climate of Cuba, with nothing for them after the hope has gone; with her father signing her papers, her fate is sealed.

The final scenes are wordless, with music in a minor key playing as background music. When the children embrace and run off to the seaside cliff to escape the fighting and war that has broken out amongst the families, the scene is an emblematic shot summing up the entire film: two children as the people of Cuba ultimately becoming consumed by the water symbolizing the fate of their lives.

*Viva Cuba* ultimately is a movie about the political and social state of Cuba, represented by youth. Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti's use of young children is a smart, approachable, and symbolic way of showing the future of the country. Because youth typically are referred to as the future and the generations of change, it is hard to imagine a future of freedom if the people of Cuba are not heard, reflected in Malu's final question to her father. For Jorgito and Malu, there cannot be a future if they do not have each other, nor can there be a future for Cuba if the people are abused by authority and living amongst fighting and war. Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti's depiction of children as the innocent bystanders to reflect the people of Cuba is a poignant way of driving home the main message: there cannot be a future for Cuba if Cuba is not willing to listen to its people.

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*Viva Cuba*. Dir. Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti. Perf. Malu Broche, Jorge Milo, and Luisa Maria Jimenez Rodriguez.