

Yalálag: Changing Town. Script by CAROL JOPLING, film by JOHN P. JOPLING, narrated by Maria Machicado. 16mm, color, optical sound, 15 minutes. Purchase \$140.00, rental \$15.00. Available from John P. Jopling, 150 Salisbury, Brookline, MA 02146.

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Yalálag, a Zapotec town "ten hours ride by bus, car, or truck" from Oaxaca, is portrayed in this film as a place dominated by contrasts between the Old and the New. The viewer sees "traditional" ~~abode~~ houses in one frame, "modern" brick and plaster structures in the next. We are told that the old ways (symbolized by a list of traits: use of Zapotec language, regular market, traditional costume) coexist with new importations (another list: use of Spanish, radios and phonographs, a schoolteacher in modern Western dress). People of Yalálag, the narrator reports, are proud of their town and its traditions—the film provides glimpses of agriculture, crafts, etc.—but the town "needs to change if its future is to be secure." It is, it seems, the same old story: agricultural techniques handed down for three centuries are unproductive; land is eroding; wage labor is in short supply; young people are rejecting the old ways (they marry whom they please), even leaving the town altogether; and so on. Perhaps there are still students somewhere who have not heard this refrain before. But is far from certain that a film like this one, with a script that seems to have been written by Robert Redfield turned travel-agent, will enlighten even those sheltered individuals. The film suggests, for example, an especially limp synthesis of the dialectic between old and new, in the common merrymaking at the Fiesta of Todos Santos: "new and old forms of entertainment . . ." are said to exist side by side during the festivities, which are thus "a time for the citizens of Yalálag to put aside controversy, dress in their best and stress their love for the town."

There is something truly innovative and noteworthy about this film, however: it is made from still slides. Although there is sparing use of some cinematic devices—panning over and zooming in on particular slides—the film is essentially a series of slides in sequence, with limited use of recorded field sounds, and an accompanying narration. Although the marriage of slide and film is not terribly successful in *Yalálag*, the slide/film concept is suggestive, and ethnographers with filmic ambitions will want to consider the possibilities. This particular film tries to do too much—there is no need to present an exhaustive ethnographic sketch in eighteen minutes. The slides change too quickly for the viewer to absorb what visual impact they contain; the narration is incessant and distracting; and only very sparing use is made of rather poor quality field recordings of music on the soundtrack. These defects can, of course, be overcome. The fact that *Yalálag* succeeds at all testifies

local standards at best, (pause) they are lower-class Mexicans.") The choice of narrator thus sacrifices intelligibility for color. Moreover, there is little visual continuity in the film. Black and white slides clearly of some different vintage are interspersed infrequently with the color pictures. We never see the same characters or scenes more than once (and briefly at that), which made all the more jarring my suspicion that I was seeing the same three traditionally dressed old women now dancing, now marketing, now dancing again.

Nonetheless *Yalálag* demonstrates the potential of the slide/film format, and ethnographers interested in film but who suffer either from slim budgets or from doubts about the intrusion of cinema equipment into the field should certainly have a look at it.

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to the potential of the slide format. But ethnographers should beware of simply putting together their favorite slide show and passing the result off as ethnographic film. Still photographs acquired purposefully may well stand alone visually well enough to eliminate the necessity for constant narrative chatter. Natural sounds of all sorts can complement the visual images if their collection is more than an afterthought. And the slide film concept can accommodate attention to individuals and to focused ethnographic investigations if the photographs are gathered systematically for that purpose.

I may remark in passing on some idiosyncrasies of this particular film. First, the narrator, inexplicably, speaks with such a heavy Mexican accent that she is occasionally incomprehensible. (It is hard to tell whether she is claiming that "wage labor is scarce" or that it is "a curse.") She pauses between phrases in ways that often destroy the sense of her words. ("Though rich by