

## Chapter Ten

### ***Coraje* (Alberto Durant 1998): Creating an icon**

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

*Coraje* was one of only two national films that were released in 1998.<sup>1</sup> The last Peruvian feature film to appear before this date was Lombardi's *Bajo la piel* in 1996, and the following year, 1997, signalled a barren year for national cinema despite also marking the centenary of cinema in Peru. As noted on earlier pages, the initial optimism felt by some at the introduction of new cinema legislation in 1994 had quickly dissipated. Meanwhile, those who were already sceptical considered themselves vindicated, but were equally disappointed at the delays in administering the proposed new funding competitions. In fact, the development and production of *Coraje* took seven years, during which time the political and cinematic landscape in Peru had changed radically. The achievement of bringing a national film to the screen was widely acknowledged by critics such as García de Pinilla who pointed out at the time of *Coraje*'s release that 'hacer cine hoy en el Perú es obra de titanes, premunidos de paciencia y constancia'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as already suggested in discussions of several of the films made in the early 1990s, such production delays call into question the capacity of national cinema to contribute effectively to timely debates about violence and national identity. Whereas some have argued that temporal dislocation between actual events and the subsequent release of a film that depicts such events is a useful and welcome strategy,<sup>3</sup> in the case of *Coraje* this appears not to have been the case. This analysis explores the representation of a controversial woman whose real-life role as

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<sup>1</sup> The other was Lombardi's *No se lo digas a nadie*, adapted from Jaime Bayly's controversial novel about sexual identity (Barcelona: Seix-Barral, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Rafaela García de Pinilla, 'Coraje', *El Comercio*, 20 December 1998, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Jelin, *State Repression and the Struggle for Memory*, pp. xvii-xviii.

defiant community leader is presented here as iconic figurehead for non-violent social change. It also probes further both the political role of national cinema to activate public debate on events of national concern, and its capacity to provoke opposition to the prevailing hegemonic discourse.

## **Section 2: Context**

Durant's film *Coraje*, arguably more than any of those discussed so far, was profoundly affected not only by changes in the socio-political context that saw the demise of the *Sendero* conflict and an increasingly repressive neoliberal regime, but also by reforms made to national cinema legislation. It therefore seems especially important to take account of the peripheral discussion about national cinema in 1998 before considering the approach taken in *Coraje* to a topic of national interest. The legislative reforms resulted in increased production costs, a requirement to source finance from outside Peru amongst the highly competitive and increasingly demanding co-production market, and the involvement of several scriptwriters and funders with conflicting ideas and priorities.<sup>4</sup> The arguments surrounding the impact of international support for this film will be addressed later, but at this point, it seems pertinent to suggest that the transnational complexity of the production arrangements presumably had some considerable bearing on the approach to representation of an important and controversial figure of recent Peruvian history, María Elena Moyano. As with *Bajo la piel*, the tendency of funders to prioritise images of the Peruvian nation that conform to essentialist stereotypes and myths about Latin American machismo and violence has to

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<sup>4</sup> Funders and supporters additional to *Conacine* included the European Script Fund; Guggenheim Memorial Foundation; *Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana*; *TVE*; Hubert Bals Fund; *Frecuencia Latina*; *ICAIC*; *Centro Cultural de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú*; Morgane Productions, and a number of private individuals.

be borne in mind, especially since the main outlet for such a film would be the global film festival circuit.

Despite the controversial and deliberately provocative nature of the film's main themes, its relationship with the state was ambivalent. On the one hand, its very existence depended at least in part upon the new cinema legislation introduced by the Fujimori regime. The significant delay in production and the subsequent problems experienced during the making of *Coraje* occurred despite the fact that the project received government funding as one of the first feature script proposals to win an award from the newly-established *Conacine*. Placed second, it received a grant that amounted to almost 40% of a total budget of \$1million, one of the largest to date for any Peruvian film.<sup>5</sup> As such, it was regarded as something of a landmark for national cinema, even before it was released. Wiener, for example, confirms that *Coraje* was 'el primer largo realizado bajo el auspicio del nuevo sistema de concurso de proyectos del Conacine, lo que de alguna manera lo convierte en un filme representativo de este nuevo período del cine peruano'.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, it generated a high level of expectation amongst domestic observers who wanted to believe that the new law would signal a change in fortunes for national cinema, but who acknowledged the struggles faced by Peruvian directors.

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, it was the first to be released. The winner of the first prize, *Guaman Poma*, submitted by José Carlos Huayhuaca Del Pino, was not completed, and third place went to the proposal for *Ciudad de M*, an adaptation based on the novel, *Al final de la calle*, by Oscar Malca, submitted by Felipe Degregori and released in 2000. In his address at the prize-giving ceremony, President of the Association of Peruvian Film-makers, Nilo Pereira del Mar congratulated all three directors, but expressed disappointment that a new national film-maker had not been rewarded in this first round: 'nos hubiera gustado que cumpliendo con el afán de promoción de nuevos valores se hubiera incluido una ópera prima entre los proyectos premiados'. Cited by José Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Wiener, 'Una Moyano demasiado lejos: *Coraje*', *La Gran Ilusión*, 10 (1999), 105-107 (p. 105).

Critic Marcelo Robles, for example, on hearing that a new national film was finally in production, noted rather dramatically that:

Las noticias sobre la producción nos permiten pensar, no en un resurgimiento del cine nacional, pero sí en la constante lucha que libran los cineastas para emprender la difícil aventura de hacer cine en el Perú, un país en el que este arte ha sido prácticamente relegado.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, many critics and film-makers were fully aware of the ongoing problems for cinema production in Peru, regardless of the new legislative framework. Veteran film-maker Armando Robles Godoy, for example, proclaimed somewhat dramatically during an interview in which he discussed the state of national cinema at the time *Coraje* was released, that despite the welcome appearance of a new film, Peruvian cinema was in its death throes. He described it as an ‘agonía que comenzó en 1992 en las aras del Ministro de Economía, bajo los dogmas estériles de la teología de mercado’.<sup>8</sup> It was within this difficult economic climate, and after a year during which no national films had been released, that *Coraje* was brought to the screen, during a period that also witnessed the gradual stifling of debate throughout the national media about the events of the ‘dirty war’. If cinema was not the target of direct censorship and fraudulent control in the same way that the national television and press were, it nevertheless suffered from economic pressures that led to the significant absence of

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<sup>7</sup> Marcelo Robles, ‘*Coraje*’, *El Comercio*, 13 February 1998, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ricardo Bedoya and Isaac León Frías, ‘Entrevista con Armando Robles Godoy’, *La Gran Ilusión*, 6 (1996), 94-106 (p.104). It should be recalled that Robles Godoy was directly involved in the establishment of the first Cinema Law in 1972 and was, at first, understanding and supportive of the new legislation introduced during Fujimori’s first term. During an interview he gave two years before the release of *Coraje*, for example, he described it as ‘una ley que se adecúa a este momento’. Cited by Bedoya and León Frías, p. 105. He was pleased at the creation of *Conacine* which he was optimistic would campaign on behalf of national film-makers. By 1998, however, he and many like him were already deeply disillusioned by the decisions made by that institution and by the lack of funds made available to it.

high quality and entertaining films that addressed national concerns from cinema screens.

### Section 3: Synopsis and Analysis

*Coraje* is based, like *Alias la gringa*, on a well-known episode of recent Peruvian history and focuses on one extraordinary individual, María Elena Moyano. Unlike the inspiration behind *Alias la gringa*, however, this individual was familiar to the Peruvian public since her exploits and eventual death were widely reported across the national media. This film depicts the final three months in the life of María Elena Moyano (played by novice actress Olenka Cepeda), the vice-mayor of one of Lima's most historically and politically important *barriadas*, Villa El Salvador, where she was an outspoken critic of both *Sendero* and military violence. Shooting of the film began exactly six years after Moyano's assassination by *Sendero* on 15 February 1992. It offers on one level a reconstruction of, as one reviewer put it, 'la azarosa y polémica vida de una mujer de grandes virtudes'.<sup>9</sup> It shows her in the roles of mother, wife, friend, colleague and community leader and presents her sympathetically as a flawed but admirable fighter for community benefits at a time of heightened social crisis, soaring inflation and escalating guerrilla violence. At the beginning of the 1990s, Peru was on the verge of social and economic collapse, or, in Hunefeldt's words, 'on the edge of an abyss'.<sup>10</sup> This film presents Moyano's story within that context of crisis. Key features of her character and scenes from the last months of her life are selectively portrayed so as to emphasise the film's broader message of rejection of violence as the principal solution to the problems of Peru. Her image and story are depicted as

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<sup>9</sup> León Frías, 'Coraje', *TV+*, 21 November 1998, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Hunefeldt, p. 242.

metaphorically important in terms of rethinking the social and political outlook for a nation much troubled by injustice, poverty and institutional corruption.

Moyano was one of the leaders of Villa El Salvador's Women's Federation, which was popularly regarded as one of the 'key pillars of the district's unique and much-heralded model of self-management' and which is depicted here as instrumental in the campaign to resist *Sendero* violence.<sup>11</sup> The vital importance of this aspect of her work is stressed in the opening scene which focuses on Moyano's return from a prize-giving ceremony in Madrid where she received an award from the King of Spain for her work for women's rights. Indeed, many of the film's most compelling scenes thereafter show her battling to convince her frightened Federation comrades that they should continue to provide the essential services of food and clothing despite the brutal intimidation tactics of armed *Sendero* gangs. She is portrayed thus as the embodiment of the philosophy and ideology of non-violent protest as the only long term solution to many of the problems faced by Peru, and in particular the immediate threat posed by *Sendero* insurgents.

Wiener draws attention to the notion that this film, ostensibly a straightforward reconstruction of one woman's remarkable life, might be interpreted more broadly as a discussion of the national political and economic crises and the various responses to them by both the state and the communities most affected. He categorises the film rather tentatively as a biopic, not because he believes it attempts primarily to recreate aspects of the life of a real person, but, he suggests, 'porque pretende construir a partir de ello, el paradigma de una causa'.<sup>12</sup> In this case, familiar key moments of Moyano's life are

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<sup>11</sup> Jo-Marie Burt, 'Shining Path and the "Decisive Battle" in Lima's *Barriadas*: The Case of Villa El Salvador', in *Shining and Other Paths*, ed. by Stern, p. 279.

<sup>12</sup> Wiener, 'Una Moyano demasiado lejos', p. 106. He compares it, for example, to the Argentinian film *Yo, la peor de todas* by María Luisa Bemberg, which drew on the story

reconstructed partly so as to provide an insight into her heroic character, but also in order to prompt debate about the effect of the political violence on a community that had been severely affected by poverty resulting from the economic shock policies. As Chakravarty suggests in her discussion of Indian film and terrorism, ‘in narrative cinema a sense of collective identity can only be mediated and dramatised through the particular’.<sup>13</sup> As such, it is therefore important to unravel the main points of this screen representation of one woman’s life, and to get a sense of how the director attempts to encourage his audience to make the imaginative leap from the particular to the collective in an effort to ignite broader political debate.

In Wiener’s description of Moyano’s quest, he pinpoints, for example, the crucial aspect of her agenda that made this woman symbolic of those leaders and campaigners who regarded both government and *Sendero* propositions as irrelevant to the needs of their community:

Como otros líderes populares y sindicales víctimas del terror indiscriminado de Sendero Luminoso y las Fuerzas Armadas y Policiales, luchó por consolidar la organización popular ... buscando con ello, además de mejorar las condiciones de vida de los más pobres de ese distrito, afirmar una tercera vía en el conflicto que desangraba al país.<sup>14</sup>

Like several of the iconic protagonists in other films already discussed, Moyano stands out for placing herself firmly in the crossfire between insurgents and state. She assumes an important symbolic role that allows issues to be addressed pertaining to the complex

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of its protagonist to draw broader conclusions about the contemporary situation for women in Argentina.

<sup>13</sup> Sumita S. Chakravarty, ‘Fragmenting the Nation: Images of Terrorism in Indian Popular Cinema’, in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 222-238 (p. 226).

<sup>14</sup> Wiener, ‘Una Moyano demasiado lejos’, p. 106.

and shifting relationships between national identity and violence in Peru. In this film, images of Moyano that depict her at the head of peace marches and taking a defiant stand in public against *Sendero* demands for food and support, demonstrate her refusal to accept their alternative vision for Peru based on a revolution defined primarily by destruction. The mediation of some of these episodes through reconstructed TV reports adds further weight to her perceived status as a key national figure whose political message as protagonist resonates beyond the borders of Villa El Salvador. At the same time, she is angered by the Fujimori government's failure to address urgently the problems of hunger and deprivation in such communities, and frustrated by the state's neglect in protecting its citizens from structural and political violence in the form of poverty and terrorism. Scenes that show her refusing to bow to convention when she goes to demand more food from the Minister reinforce this aspect of her character. *Coraje* thus embraces and embellishes Moyano's identity both as symbol of resistance to *Sendero* violence and as female figurehead of peaceful struggle within Peruvian society more generally.

Moyano became famous nationally for confronting *Sendero* at a time when the group's destructive strategies began to take their toll on the capital itself, and when the state response had mutated into one of intense brutality, with little or no concern for accompanying campaigns of social development. She was one of the few dissenters who dared to speak out against both insurgents and the state, yet at the same time attempting to offer an alternative solution based on human rights, especially those of Peruvian women. As one of the film's reviewers put it, her defiance was particularly notable because it was known that *Sendero* was attempting to infiltrate key districts such as Villa El Salvador by tempting its leaders with the offer of alliance and protection:

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Dedicada a luchar e inculcar los derechos de la mujer así como a aliviar las dificultades alimenticias de los habitantes del distrito mediante los comedores populares, María Elena se enfrenta con Sendero cuando ellos, al advertir el poder de la Federación, intentan hacer una alianza.<sup>15</sup>

Moyano was recognised as an articulate proponent of a non-violent path between state and guerrilla terrorism. She represented a new kind of leader emerging in the *barriadas*: ‘young, feminist, nonwhite, progressive but not tied to any major political party’.<sup>16</sup> In *Coraje*, such liminal features are emphasised and shown to be the cause of both her triumph and her downfall. While perceived by other community figures as brave in her determination to resist pressure, Moyano’s position is shown as one of increasing isolation from the women’s group she leads and in which she takes so much pride. This is in part due to her refusal to collaborate with *Sendero*, who promise not to make them the target of future attacks if she will agree to provide them with the benefits of their achievements. Some of her oldest friends, more fearful of *Sendero* reprisals than of state intervention, find it difficult to comprehend her decision instead to press ahead with negotiation with the government; indeed, they begin to suspect her of less altruistic motives than those she claims to have. *Sendero* propaganda leaflets that accuse Moyano of corruption and cronyism, appealing to the rivalries and divisions that are exposed through fear and poverty, further inflame this criticism, as does a subsequent conversation with a taxi-driver who accuses her of collusion with the state for personal benefit. The film draws attention to her stubborn and strong-willed nature in the face of declining support, even ignoring the mayor’s friendly warning not to speak out about *Sendero* at the funeral of a neighbour’s husband, who was a victim of guerrilla violence. Meanwhile, her best friend, Paulina (María Teresa Zúñiga), breaks off contact

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<sup>15</sup> León Frías, ‘*Coraje*’, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Starn et al, *The Peru Reader*, p. 371.

altogether with the Women's Federation having witnessed the imprisonment of her husband as a *Sendero* activist. Paulina is plunged even deeper into poverty and believes that only *Sendero* will offer salvation. Such portrayals of intra-community fragmentation were indeed realistic as several studies have exposed divisions in neighbourhoods like Villa that contradict more romantic claims about urban self-determination and popular unity.<sup>17</sup> However, in the context of this film they also serve to reinforce Moyano's status as a stubborn and defiant leader who was willing to sacrifice everything she held dear in order to remain true to her principles. In this sense, they take the film beyond realism and elevate Moyano to the status of a symbolic national martyr for the cause of non-violent protest.

It was known that Moyano advocated social revolution and reform based on constructive strategies, and key scenes that depict her negotiations with both *Sendero* cell leaders and state ministers emphasise and embrace this alternative ideological approach to the nation's problems. In life, she campaigned for a policy of grass-roots participation and solidarity in opposition to both a reactionary government, and the tyrannical insurrection of *Sendero*. In an interview in 1991, the 'real' Moyano spoke of her absolute faith in the power of strong community groups to combat terrorism: 'I believe that we women have a lot of strength. If we believe in what we are building, there's no reason to be afraid', and many of these words and sentiments make their way into the film's script.<sup>18</sup> Given that the battle against *Sendero* seemed at that time to be worsening, many of those who did not consider her corrupt accused her instead of naivety, if not sentimentality. In *Coraje*, such naivety is depicted sympathetically as

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<sup>17</sup> *The Peru Reader*, pp. 371-6; Burt, pp. 267-306.

<sup>18</sup> María Elena Moyano, "There Have Been Threats", in Starn et al, *The Peru Reader*, pp. 371-276 (p. 374).

devotion to her community, and as intense belief in the ethical superiority of her intentions. It is emphasised that she found it impossible to tear herself away from the people she loved so much and who helped to define and give her life purpose. Two key scenes highlight her need to return to Villa El Salvador from potential safe havens in Madrid and in Miraflores, despite death threats and clear evidence of an assassination plot. She has adequate resources and support to transgress national borders, yet in her mind, the local community, here signifying the 'nation-in-microcosm',<sup>19</sup> is the only meaningful entity. The connection between place and character is depicted as almost spiritual, and again takes the film beyond the realm of realism.

To deflect further and refute the accusations of naivety, there are moments in the film when Moyano is shown to be completely lucid about the danger to which she is exposing herself. She speaks to the Spanish doctor Jimena (Rosana Pastor) about the sacrifices she is prepared to make rather than give in to *Sendero* intimidation, and about how she feels torn between her responsibilities as mother and wife, as well as her status as community leader. Nevertheless, the film is ambiguous in this respect, drawing attention to Moyano's egoism by tracking the development of her own awareness of her ability to overcome the invincible might of *Sendero*, as well as by her attraction to the media. In life, she appeared regularly in Lima's newspapers and weekly magazines as an example of how to combat terror and, as Burt explains, she 'became something of a celebrity for her outspoken criticism of Shining Path'.<sup>20</sup> In the film, her fame within Villa El Salvador is emphasised and she appears to take pleasure in both the power that

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<sup>19</sup> Chakravarty, p. 228.

<sup>20</sup> Burt, p. 289.

her fame brings and in the fame itself, flirting with politicians and fellow community leaders alike, while neglecting her family's own emotional needs.

The final scene of the film, depicting her death, adds further weight to the criticisms of Moyano as egocentric and lacking in judgement. Her high public profile means that she is easily tracked by *Sendero* spies and becomes a key target of aggression. While defiantly leading a peace march that most of the community ignores, she is handed an invitation to a community barbecue in an area of Villa El Salvador that she does not really know. She is reluctant to accept, but is persuaded to attend as guest of honour. The next scene shows her enjoying a day on the beach with her two sons, after which, in a somewhat clumsy attempt to counteract the negative image of her as a neglectful mother, she goes to the community event and drags the boys along with her. On the way, Paulina tries to warn her of the danger, but to no avail. She walks right into the trap: all around her are *Sendero* sympathisers who regard her as being on the side of the enemy state. Not only is she shot dead at point blank range in front of her sons, but her body is blown up, destroying physical trace of her existence and all she stood for.

In the end, however, the film appears to suggest that Moyano's belief in her role as community leader and her utter faith in the moral integrity of non-violent protest were more important than her own life and the needs of her family. Indeed, her death, as Skidmore and Smith remind us, 'made her a martyr for the cause of political reform, as distinct from revolution, and for the empowerment of women throughout Latin America'.<sup>21</sup> The film emphasises the notion of self-sacrifice by focusing in the last moments on her refusal to give in to the pressures of violence. The tragedy is further emphasized when Paulina, whose choice in committing herself to the *Sendero* cause is

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<sup>21</sup> Skidmore and Smith, p. 216.

presented as unfortunate but not without reason, is shown making efforts to save her friend despite their fundamental differences. Paradoxically, the film's own commitment to peaceful protest and social development as the only long-term strategy for resolving Peru's social and political issues of inequality is made absolutely clear by presenting Moyano's death in such a violent way.

Moyano, the protagonist of *Coraje*, is further signalled as different not only by her gender and political beliefs, but also by her racial and ethnic identity. Referred to affectionately by friends as La Negra, she is racially and ethnically marked out as belonging to the minority Afro-Peruvian group. Her social status therefore as one of the leaders of the diverse community of Villa El Salvador is particularly remarkable. Her non-conformist nature and her different cultural roots are celebrated by the film. Her refusal to integrate, assimilate or to form politically expedient alliances is highlighted throughout, as is her pride in being part of and in part defined by a community that seems to value diversity. Nevertheless, like Jeremías in *Ni con dios*, she dies partly because of the fact that she speaks and stands out, causing resentment, and partly because she is not totally aware of the danger her liminal status brings. Unlike Jeremías, she resists intimidation and makes choices that he did not even know he had. In real life this attitude of defiance went on record in a host of media interviews, while in the film she is shown broadcasting her views over national TV and local radio and discussing them privately with the fictional character of Jimena.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> These include the extensive interview conducted by Mariella Balbi that was published three months before Moyano's death. 'Entrevista con Moyano', *La República*, 22 September 1991, p. 17.

The final text that precedes the end credits implies that Moyano's assassination had the effect of galvanising broad national resistance to the conflict and to violence generally. However, Burt's extensive research on the infiltration of *Sendero* into Villa El Salvador suggests that in reality the impact of her death was more complex. She notes that 'a massive funeral procession was held for Moyano, but numerous observers noted that local participation was minimal, and that Shining Path's intended objective – to inculcate fear and inhibit any further efforts at resistance in Villa El Salvador – had largely succeeded'.<sup>23</sup> After her death, Shining Path continued their campaign of intimidation of community leaders, infiltration of community groups, manipulation of internal rivalries, and further accusations of corruption that were 'undoubtedly exacerbated by the context of economic deprivation, which heightened suspicions of those with access to resources and power at all levels of society'.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Peace and Development Group that Moyano had set up was disbanded, and new alliances were formed between *Sendero* and various groups within Villa El Salvador that held grievances against the left-wing municipal leadership, with some even refusing to denounce Moyano's murder. Fujimori's *autogolpe* two months later did not help matters; instead, it heightened fears about the repressive nature of the state and the security forces. Hence the film's attempt to position Moyano's death as marking "the beginning of the end" of the conflict could be described as a gross oversimplification of a very complex reality. For the sake of reifying her status as martyr, and emphasising the power of community solidarity, *Coraje* neatly avoids considering many other factors that led to the end of the conflict, including the government's own success in capturing *Sendero*'s leader. This mismatch between reality and representation draws attention again to the problems raised by delays in producing and releasing national

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<sup>23</sup> Burt, pp. 291-2.

<sup>24</sup> Burt, pp. 292.

films. It also demonstrates the intention of the director to move away from documentary realism in his approach, and to use Moyano's story as a device with which to promote the wider issues of human rights as well as peaceful solutions to the political, economic and social problems that have become inextricably linked with a stereotypical view of Peru as violent and macho.

The film's protest against violence is further highlighted by its graphic portrayal of *Sendero* characters and attacks. The terrorist presence in *Coraje* is first suggested with an image, shown from Moyano's horrified point of view, of a dead dog hanging from a lamp-post on the road from Lima to Villa El Salvador – the standard calling card of *Sendero* intimidation.<sup>25</sup> The audience is thus positioned from the outset to share the disgust of the protagonist at the guerrilla tactics of terror, and in fact at any form of violence. In one sense, the portrayal of these terrorists is sketchy and lacking in depth. We are shown fleeting images of hooded youths on motorbikes; a bespectacled cell leader who carries out negotiations and gives overall orders; the emotionless young women who spy on Moyano and perpetrate the final act of assassination. The hooded youths at first do little more than paint anti-state slogans for which they become the target of police shooting. María is called into the clinic while Jimena tends to one of the shooting injuries and is asked by the cell leader to contribute money and food to the insurgent cause, which she refuses to do.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Note also that until fairly recently, as explained by Stephen Hart in his analysis of Lombardi's *La ciudad y los perros* (1985), 'it was common practice to toughen up recruits in the Peruvian army by making them stab to death live dogs strung up between two poles', and then to rip the flesh apart and drink the animal's blood. See Hart, "Slick Grit", p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> The protagonist we see on screen, three months before her death, had ceased believing that *Sendero* might be a revolutionary group offering an alternative vision for Peruvian society. See Moyano, p. 374.

However, the sketchiness of this portrayal is in itself a device that serves to emphasize the film's broader political intentions. From this point on, the depiction of *Sendero* violence focuses on attacks on specific community targets thus exposing their intentions of destruction while also revealing factions within the neighbourhood self-help groups themselves. In one particularly dramatic scene, the soup kitchen is attacked and the main cook, a staunch supporter of Moyano, is badly injured and traumatised. As a result, she and other core members of the women's group are fearful of reprisals and reluctant to become more deeply involved. Their fear and desire to protect their families is shown in marked contrast with Moyano's strong sense of duty to the wider community. Later the town hall (symbolic of governmental authority and oppression) is burnt down. The slogans, graffiti, and leaflets continue to spread propaganda, while activists chanting by night on the fringes of the suburb, where city meets Andean foothills, promote the chilling sense of an invisible, ubiquitous threat. Live TV and radio reports of violence are seen and heard at key moments in the film, and an image of a car bomb explosion on the front page of Spanish daily, *El País*, prompts Moyano to return home from Madrid despite the threats to her life.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, the film also shows how vulnerable members of impoverished and neglected communities, such as Villa El Salvador, were liable to fall prey to *Sendero*'s ideological campaign. Paulina, for example, comes to sympathise with the *Sendero*

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<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that, as Peralta Ruiz argues, the assassination of Moyano represented a turning point in the way *El País* reported on the violence of *Sendero*, changing from its previous position that *Sendero* was in some ways a justified response to state repression. Its reports suggested that Moyano's murder represented a 'fractura irreconciliable entre el proyecto senderista y el proyecto popular'. Cited by Peralta Ruiz, p. 187. However, it also continued to insist that Peru would now see a total disintegration of support for the ineffectual state structure, arguing that 'el terrorismo de Sendero Luminoso se encaminaba a desarrollar con éxito un estado de parálisis y miedo colectivo en la sociedad'. Cited by Peralta Ruiz, p. 187.

cause, having first hesitated to accept her husband's belief that they were battling in the name of the poor in Peru. When he is made to disappear by the military and she is left destitute, she makes up her mind to support *Sendero* even if that means betraying Moyano, despite appeals from the latter to resist their propaganda. Moyano's efforts prove pointless, since Paulina, representative of many in despair at the time, feels she has nothing more to lose by siding with a group that she is convinced is fighting for the elimination of the structural violence that results in poverty. As the real Moyano explained in her interview with Balbi, this view of *Sendero* was in stark contrast to the perceived ambitions of all the legal political parties, including the previously popular left-wing opposition:

Many people felt tricked [by the divisions and failure of the political left to protect them], disillusioned, and they haven't found another alternative. Some in poor neighbourhoods look at the Shining Path from afar and see them as something mythical, fighting for justice.<sup>28</sup>

As shown in *Coraje*, faith in the capacity of the state to resolve Peru's acute social problems was entirely absent. Tragically, however, even though the poorest were most receptive to *Sendero*'s arguments, it was the soup kitchens on which they depended for survival that were targets of destruction, as seen in this film. For *Sendero*, such projects represented conformity, exploitation and repression on the part of the state, leaving the communities in a situation of dependency, pity and relentless charity, and preventing them from fighting for their rights and achieving equality.<sup>29</sup> Protagonist Moyano admits

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<sup>28</sup> Moyano, p. 373.

<sup>29</sup> See *Sendero* publications *El Diario* 551 (1989) and 620 (1992), cited in Burt, p. 305. As Burt explains, the aim of *Sendero* was not to take over the leadership of the community groups and assume control of the self-management model, but 'to destroy them ... to extend Sendero's own influence in the district, and to provoke military repression'. See Burt, p. 296.

to Jimena that she did not understand the ideology behind such actions at first, but now that she has, she recognises the danger the group presents not just to the state but to those people they claim to represent.<sup>30</sup>

The film focuses on Moyano's response of defiance in the face of such intimidation, and of her insistence on promoting an alternative non-violent campaign of courageous resistance, as embodied in the title, *Coraje*. It further shows that in her commitment to organising the symbolic rallies and marches, as well as to keeping open the soup kitchen, she not only marks herself out as a *Sendero* enemy, but she also becomes the target of recrimination closer to home. Through highlighting Moyano's increasing isolation as a courageous but lone protestor, the film draws attention to the way in which *Sendero* worked politically to expose and aggravate small but lingering tensions and rivalries within existing community groups. As Burt points out, by 'radicalizing popular grievances and promoting confrontation and polarization, Shining Path was able to advance at the local level by locating the weak points in specific local contexts and exploiting them to their advantage'.<sup>31</sup> As seen in the film, Villa El Salvador, despite its embodiment as a model of self-management and democratic politics, became a terrain of effective Shining Path political organizing as did so many other marginalized communities located on the periphery of Lima. The deepening economic crisis and the neglectful state, as suggested by images which emphasise the community's lack of basic services and supplies, resulted in deep frustration and anger amongst poor communities like Villa El Salvador that provided Shining Path with

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<sup>30</sup> As the real Moyano told Balbi, she was horrified to discover that *Sendero* intended to wipe out the grassroots organisations that had been set up to support the poor, and wanted thus 'to snuff out survival organisations so that levels of malnutrition and death [would] rise'. See Balbi in Starn *et al*, p. 372.

<sup>31</sup> Burt, p. 297.

plenty of raw material to exploit to its advantage. The women of the *comedor* who had given their time and energy to helping the neighbourhood are shown prioritising, understandably, the needs of their family regarding food and basic shelter, and questioning Moyano's calls for solidarity. Her friends and colleagues become increasingly fearful and find the danger that appears to accompany brazen solidarity and resistance to *Sendero* too much to bear.

While Moyano's main anger is reserved for the brutality of the insurgent group, the government and its military force are portrayed as ineffective and neglectful in terms of their duty to protect the citizens of Peru. Criticism of the state is implied rather than directly stated, and some figures of authority, such as the local mayor who is viewed more as local than as a state representative, are treated sympathetically. National leaders, however, are depicted as remote and posturing, caught up in meetings to discuss the bigger picture rather than taking action to solve immediate, human concerns. Their position is undermined as they are shown as more involved with transnational relationships than with addressing local problems, as seen when Moyano barges in on a high level meeting and demands more bags of rice for the *comedores*. The minister, having ignored her on his way into the meeting, signs for more rice immediately and makes a point of congratulating Moyano for her Spanish award in front of his visitors. The critical thrust of the film is clear, emphasizing the perception of state failure to provide peaceful long-term solutions to the nation's overall political, economic and social difficulties. Moreover, while Moyano is willing to make the journey from suburb to centre, the politicians are clearly unlikely to enter any shanty town in person. The minister and his kind remain physically isolated, suggesting that the process of social integration is not two-way. Meanwhile, the few interventions by the police or military are depicted as largely ineffectual, if not absent altogether. On the one hand, their

shooting at graffiti painters and the disappearing of suspected sympathisers without evidence, served mainly to deepen the rift between state and its people, pushing the latter toward retaliation and recrimination. On the other hand, the police chief releases the wife of one *senderista* in the face of pressure led by Moyano. Such an ambivalent portrayal of the authorities points perhaps to an element of self-censorship in the context of the anti-terrorism law (1981) that was still firmly in place and that strongly penalised any suggestion of sympathy for *Sendero* or overt critical representation of the state. Given the precarious relationship between state and national cinema, it was perhaps not worth the risk of falling foul of such legislation, as Marianne Eyde had done in 1993 in *La vida es una sola*..

#### **Section 4: Transgressive Spaces**

As for the community itself, it has already been suggested that Villa El Salvador had remarkable and distinct qualities that are illustrated by the film. For the state, however, its broader symbolic function as a heavily coded site of transgression and resistance is also vitally important in the national context. Efforts are made in *Coraje* to emphasise the strong relationship between the main characters and their environment, and in particular the intense emotional bond that Moyano feels for her home town: as the place where she has grown up, as a diverse community of friends, and as the location for her own identity and sense of purpose. A key dramatic moment that highlights this bond occurs when the protagonist reacts with absolute fury at the sight of *Sendero* slogans and banners all over the community centre that symbolises her most dearly-held political and ethical beliefs. Filmed in ruins at a tilted angle that serves to emphasize her sense of desolation and anger, she is in despair at this evidence of incursion into her physical and philosophical territory. Frequent travelling shots provide the audience with Moyano's point of view of Villa as she travels back and forth from suburb to centre,

thus giving access to her affectionate gaze towards the everyday life and customs of her neighbourhood.

It is suggested that Moyano's identity has been culturally and politically defined in large part by her attachment to a location that developed amidst adversity, and by the possibility it still represented for an alternative way of life that would benefit all its inhabitants. It is offered here as a potential utopia for Peru that might set the standard for a peaceful resolution to all the issues of violence and injustice and that might help to redefine the image of the Peruvian nation, both for its own citizens and for the outside world. Having been established independently just south of Lima outside the formal authority of the government decades before, Villa El Salvador had been recognised by the state for some years but it still had to fight for basic services and adequate food.<sup>32</sup> Contrasts are implied, and the importance of community and human contact reinforced, through images of other places and spaces: Madrid, where Moyano is depicted as more interested in the people on the streets than the impressive colonial buildings; central Lima, where she goes to meet the minister and is frustrated by the impersonal atmosphere of the modern surroundings; and the affluent district of Miraflores, where she is forced into temporary exile and spends lonely hours in a comfortable but bland apartment, escaping only once to the anonymous transnational space of a burger bar. The physical and symbolic distance of the suburb from the minds of politicians and city dwellers is emphasised by the journeys made by Moyano to and from central Lima, and

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<sup>32</sup> By the early 1990s, Villa El Salvador had 260,000 inhabitants and was, according to Burt, 'perhaps the most important symbol of left-wing organization and community development in Peru'. See Burt, p. 268. Designed as an urban showcase of Velasco's reformist military regime (1968-75), it became a centre for left-wing retaliation against the more conservative policies of Morales Bermúdez (1975-80). Because of its structure of 'popular participation and self-management, Villa was touted as a model of local organizing and a viable alternative to a neglectful state'. See Burt, pp. 268-9. It was thus ironically considered impenetrable to an authoritarian group such as Shining Path.

the checkpoints that mark a kind of boundary that she insists on crossing between safety and terror, centre and periphery, prosperity and neglect.<sup>33</sup>

As explored in discussions of earlier films, the diversity of the marginalized of the Peruvian nation is conveyed once more by including the depiction of Villa inhabitants from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and by allowing this crucial shanty town to symbolise the nation generally. The positive aspects of such diversity are highlighted by drawing constant attention to Moyano's enjoyment of belonging to a culturally mixed, differentiated community that has accepted and embraced her despite her own minority position. The joyful participation of a Spanish woman (Jimena) in community-building activities through her work as a doctor, and her acceptance by others, further underscores this point about tolerance. Jimena's cheerful response to the light teasing she receives from her brother for having picked up a local Villa accent provides evidence of the affection she feels towards the seemingly close-knit community.

On the other hand, Moyano acknowledges that the community is sadly united in their shared experience of poverty and hunger that result in large part from the state's harsh economic policies, and she insists therefore that they must take collective responsibility for improving the situation. Nevertheless, the divisions and rifts that are created by such relentless extremes challenge her utopian vision. Some inhabitants of Villa El Salvador are clearly less deprived than others, and resentment builds up towards Moyano because of her overseas trips and comparative comfort. The location depicted by Durant becomes another example of a community caught in the crossfire, between state neglect

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<sup>33</sup> Villa El Salvador was of strategic importance to *Sendero* due to its location bordering the Pan-American highway and close to other *barriadas* in the foothills of the Andes. Capture and control of this 'iron ring' around Lima provided *Sendero* with the possibility of strangling the capital.

and *Sendero* violence, in which differences in response to such difficulties are exposed. Moyano is silenced for trying to defend not only her people but also the progressive model of participation and self-management that is her community's distinguishing feature and which was seen by many as a framework for the renegotiation of the state's relationship with the citizens of Peru.

### **Section 5: Concluding Thoughts**

The fate of Durant's feature film was determined by circumstances similar to those that affected, for example, Tamayo and Kaspar's *Anda, corre, vuela ...* which was released in 1995, in that the socio-political landscape in Peru had changed dramatically during the film's seven-year period of development. This would have mattered less if the film had not been linked so directly to a complex national social-economic crisis, revisiting of which in such a critical way was discouraged by the Fujimori regime. State oppression had replaced *Sendero* barbarism, and open criticism of government authority was treated with suspicion, as seen by the controversial reception of Eyde's *La vida es una sola* a few years previously. As a result, although the protagonist Moyano is vocal about her frustration at government indifference towards the plight of her community, such scenes are far outweighed by criticism of the *Sendero* campaign to destroy the Peruvian nation.

It is notable that the script went through thirty-seven drafts involving at least seven other writers, before being presented to *Conacine* in 1998. It is tempting therefore to speculate that, in the process, some aspects of Durant's original political vision could have been watered down so that it represented only an approximate reconstruction of

the final months in the life of one woman rather than a broader statement about resisting violence and redefining the image of the nation.<sup>34</sup> Indeed Wiener suggests that:

La multiplicidad de voces, el ir y venir de la historia durante largo tiempo, y la continua reescritura del guión, terminaron por recalentarlo, sin quedar claro en qué momento lo que pudo ser un acercamiento dialéctico, periodístico y político a la biografía de la Moyano ... devino en una ilustración lineal y sin mayores sorpresas de sus últimos días.<sup>35</sup>

A further factor, the complex funding arrangement noted earlier, could perhaps also have resulted in the less than satisfactory representation of political conflict in *Coraje*. Due to the new national cinema legislation, much of the finance for feature projects had to come from non-state sources and in the case of this film, at least nine other supporters were involved, most based outside Peru and several of them outside Latin America. Many of these investors had motives beyond the desire to support national cinema that prompted their involvement in this production. *Frecuencia Latina*, for example, a private Peruvian TV channel, declared itself keen to use the film to promote itself outside Peru, banking on the potential of guaranteed festival and TV screenings in Spain and Germany.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Whereas *Conacine* records confirm Durant as the official screenwriter, Wiener's analysis states that 'se sabe que además de los guionistas oficiales del filme (Ana Caridad Sánchez y "Chicho" Durant), y quienes figuran en los créditos en calidad de supervisores de una primera versión (el brasileiro Orlando Senna y el dramaturgo peruano Alonso Alegría), participaron Andrés Cotler, José Watanabe, Gianfranco Annichinni, Sonia Uriarte, entre otros nombres'. See 'Una Moyano demasiado lejos', p. 105, and also Perla Anaya, *Memoria*, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Wiener, p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> Robles, *El Comercio*, p. 16. Note that the webpage for *Frecuencia Latina* states that the company was set up in 1983 as the popular alternative to the traditional channels, with a particular interest in broadcasting high quality programmes from overseas. The channel used a form of product placement tactic to promote itself within the film's diegesis, when Moyano speaks out against *Sendero* to the media. '*Frecuencia Latina*', <<http://www.frecuencialatina.com.pe/empresa>> [accessed 23 February 2006].

While it is true that most of the main actors in *Coraje* are Peruvian, as were almost all of the scriptwriters, it is possible to detect, as Wiener does, a little more European influence in the content of *Coraje*, than, for example, in Lombardi's *La boca del lobo* in 1988. The Peruvian commentator acknowledges that co-production finance is vital for underdeveloped national cinemas such as in Peru, but points out that there are potential disadvantages as well as advantages, especially in a climate of increased competition for such funds, which could affect the screen depiction itself:

En estas condiciones suele suceder que los proyectos se modifiquen por las sugerencias y presiones de quienes participan económicamente, y que casi siempre tienen sus propias ideas, conceptos y prejuicios sobre las realidades tercermundistas y latinoamericanas.<sup>37</sup>

He suggests that this might explain, for example, the long middle sequence set in Madrid and the inclusion of the doctor played by Spanish actress Rosana Pastor, both of which, he contends, do little more than detract from the core themes and events. In a similar vein, the heavy-handed musical soundtrack, composed by the Spaniard Juan Bardem, that starts up whenever Moyano speaks of her love for her community, provides further evidence of possible European sentimentality towards and simplification of a complex Peruvian reality.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wiener, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> *Coraje* was screened in several international festivals before it was released in Peru, including events in Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Biarritz, Berlin, Spain, and at Sundance (US). It won an award for humanitarian content at Viña del Mar (Chile), and best actress and audience awards at Huelva (Spain). In general it was received more warmly outside Peru than within, suggesting that frustrations with its approach to ideological concerns were not so keenly felt by those less closely affected. The passage of time between events depicted and the film's release also made it less directly relevant on the domestic front to national concerns and issues of national identity.

Others reject this antagonistic view of European support, refusing to accept nor to create excuses for technical weaknesses. A few suggest that, despite its faults, this is a necessary film in that it serves as a catharsis for its Peruvian audience. Salvador Del Solar, who plays Umberto, Moyano's political colleague, drinking partner and occasional object of desire, suggests in an interview that 'en un momento en el que el entretenimiento es lo que más se vende en los medios, es muy importante que un pasado que todavía se siente nos asalte así'.<sup>39</sup> Leira argues that national cinema offers one way of sparking reminders of an era of bombings and fear that had for the most part already been erased from a fragile collective memory through repression of critical discussion in the national mass media. Wiener also suggests that the rather tepid domestic response to Durant's film could indeed relate to questions of cultural memory and collective trauma. Perhaps, he says, 'deberemos esperar que el tiempo pase y cicatrice heridas, para que se pueda hablar sin tapujos de uno de los capítulos más dolorosos pero importantes de nuestra historia contemporánea'.<sup>40</sup> Durant himself suggests, in Leira's report, that such acts of remembering are necessary, however painful, in order to reflect properly upon mistakes and thus calm the soul of the nation. Cinema, for him, has a cathartic duty and he intended his film not to stir up past tensions but to exorcise ghosts, and to show the effects such events had on ordinary as well as remarkable people.<sup>41</sup>

On studying the reviews that appeared at the time, it appears that most domestic critics were disappointed by the film's lack of incisive debate about the role of the state in

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<sup>39</sup> Milagros Leira, 'Entrevista con Robles Godoy', *El Comercio*, 22 November 1998, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Wiener, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Note that Durant began as a documentary-maker, and shifted from making political documentaries to feature films with a political backdrop, with human relationships as the central focus.

protecting communities such as Villa El Salvador. Others, meanwhile, suggested that it needed a clearer ideological message that would set itself more obviously against the violent message of *Sendero*. These commentators complained that the image offered of the terrorists is too benign, and that *Sendero* activists are depicted more as delinquents than as a political threat to the stability of an entire nation.<sup>42</sup> While agreeing that the depictions lack some political vigour, it might be argued, however, that the main dilemma of the film hinges not so much on Moyano's political affiliations as on her urgent need to decide whether or not to submit herself to exile from the community to which she is so profoundly attached. Understanding the bond she feels to her birthplace and her people is key to appreciating the drama behind her inevitable return, despite the certain death that is entailed by this act. This element of perennial thematic interest appears to have been overwhelmed by the topicality of the subject matter, by its ambivalent documentary form, and by the subsequent close attention paid by critics and audiences to the realism of the reconstruction of the last events in Moyano's life. It is important therefore to consider the additional symbolic meaning with which the protagonist's quest is endowed, and the transgressive aspects of her nature and journey that suggest new ways of negotiating national identity that are founded on feminism and peaceful resistance as opposed to patriarchy and violent repression.

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<sup>42</sup> For example, see Alberto Serrat, '*Coraje*', *Somos*, 29 November 1998, p. 15.