

## Chapter Eleven

### ***Paloma de papel* (Fabrizio Aguilar 2003): Shaping memories of national trauma**

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

After a five-year hiatus during which national film-makers struggled to find funding, and turned to popular genres such as comedy, historical epic and melodrama, the topical theme of social and political conflict returned to national screens in two of the most successful Peruvian feature films of recent years.<sup>1</sup> The first of these, *Paloma de papel*, by the *limeño* Fabrizio Aguilar, takes a child's point of view towards the trauma suffered by an Andean village caught in the crossfire of *Sendero* violence. It became the third most popular film at the domestic box office in 2003, and was selected for screening at international events worldwide. A year later, *Días de Santiago*, the debut film from another young Lima-based director, Josué Méndez, appeared on cinema screens in Lima. This film, which depicts the difficult return of a young 'veteran' of armed conflict in the Peruvian jungle to civilian life in Lima, garnered awards at many international festivals, and enjoyed similar resounding success on domestic screens during the final months of 2004 and early 2005. This and the following chapter of this study explore these two most recent portrayals of political violence and national identity in feature film making in Peru. They seek to identify continuities with and breaks from their cinematic predecessors in terms of their approaches to representation of conflict

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<sup>1</sup> From the release of *Coraje* in 1998 to the appearance of *Paloma de papel* in 2003, *Conacine* was weakened by a lack of resources needed to fulfil its obligations. The few films that were made during this period had to rely more heavily on external sources of funding and support, and most chose – or were encouraged – to develop less overtly provocative themes. Meanwhile, overseas investors became less and less interested in supporting risky film projects that had no domestic backing. Hardly any of them performed well enough at the box office (domestic and/or international) to recoup their costs, and only a handful enjoyed critical acclaim and festival screenings and awards. The main exception to this was Lombardi's *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (2000), adapted from the Vargas Llosa novel of the same title, with the aid of Spanish co-production funds.

and community. As before, the analyses emphasize the evolving role that national cinema seeks to play in reflecting and shaping the nation and national identity in times of uncertainty and social fragmentation. Given their temporal distance from actual events, the importance of memory, collective as well as individual, in both films is discussed. Finally, the cultural significance of acts and rituals of remembrance in dealing with traumatic episodes is explored.

## **Section 2: Context**

By the time the films by Aguilar and Méndez were released in 2003 and 2004 respectively, some critical distance was established that allowed for a more comfortable reception for them, from authorities and at the box office, than had been the case with, for example, Lombardi's *La boca del lobo* (1988) and *La vida es una sola* (1993). The political violence with *Sendero* had officially ended over a decade before with the capture of Abimael Guzmán and the subsequent fragmentation of the insurgent cause. Yet during the intervening years, especially during the second term of the Fujimori regime (1995-2000), open debate about the effects and consequences of such a difficult and painful era in Peru's history was limited, and rumours of intimidation of those who persisted in trying to start such a debate were rife.<sup>2</sup> Apart from *Coraje* (Durant 1998), the few national films that were produced during the second half of the decade avoided the topics of political violence and national identity altogether. Attempts were made instead to engage in portrayals of other situations and issues of relevance to contemporary Peruvian society, such as delinquency, consumerism, the mass media,

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<sup>2</sup> During his second term, Fujimori's economic policy started to falter and his popularity declined. The President's response was, as commentators such as Hunefeldt confirm, 'to tighten his control of the country, acting in tandem with the military to consolidate power. ... [He] also moved to silence his political opposition and exerted an increased control on mass media', making use of the *Grupo Colina*, a death squad attached to the Intelligence Services, in the most urgent and severe cases of repression. See Hunefeldt, p. 262.

and the role of women.<sup>3</sup> Several of these films also eschewed the more social realist approach to representation used by those covered in this study, and deployed historical myth, provocative satire or excessive melodrama instead.

Most of them, however, chose to convey a sense of the undercurrent of violence and uncertainty that continued to pervade the nation and to provoke questions about the relationship between violence and Peruvian identity more fundamentally. Indeed, one film tackled this notion by taking a historical approach to the development of national identity in Peru. *El bien esquivo* (2001), the long-awaited period drama from Augusto Tamayo, is set shortly after the Spanish conquest amid the violence and political turbulence of the late seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> It focuses on the traumatic encounter of two cultures – European and indigenous Peruvian – specifically, on the process of religious syncretism, as well as on the personal ambition and self-determination of two social outcasts who confront intolerance and prejudice on the basis of their gender, race and ethnicity. Thus, it is another national film that explores and indeed emphasizes the theme of nationhood, reflecting on the development of colonial Peruvian culture, and on

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<sup>3</sup> The most notable of these films were: Marianne Eyde's *La carnada* (1998), which tells a story based on the life of women in a traditional fishing community; Lombardi's *Tinta roja* (2000), about a rookie journalist's initiation into the world of crime-reporting in Lima; Felipe Degregori's *Ciudad de M* (2000), about life in Lima for disaffected young people; Aldo Salvini's *Bala perdida* (2001), which recounts the adventures of a group of middle-class youths from Lima who travel to the ancient city of Cuzco and discover a violent underworld; and Velarde's *El destino no tiene favoritos* (2003), a parody of class and popular culture. All but the last title have violent conflict at their core, but none makes direct or indirect reference to the *Sendero* struggle. Instead they depict different aspects of Peru's fragmented society and, in most cases, give an impression of a nation coming to terms with change with some difficulty.

<sup>4</sup> The late seventeenth century was another period of turbulence and crisis for Peru when the economy of the colonial regime ran into decline, and natural disasters in the form of earthquakes and drought caused devastation throughout the country. *El bien esquivo* was a personal project for Tamayo (unlike *Anda, corre, vuela ...*) and took him so long to complete that he was obliged to repay some of the grant he had been awarded by *Conacine* in 1997.

the violent struggles that have been at the heart of personal and collective quests for identity. However, rather than portraying events and characters that are overtly connected to Peru's immediate crises, Tamayo's romantic and brutal epic film takes a sweeping view of Peru's past and raises questions about the tensions created by 'aventuras transculturales' between those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds that remain pertinent today.<sup>5</sup>

Such issues of cultural encounter are indeed relevant to an understanding of the motives for conflict in both *Paloma de papel* and *Días de Santiago*. However, in contrast to *El bien esquivo*, these two more recent films offer an intimate view of contemporary events, and they focus, as Bedoya points out, on the 'pequeña mirada' of their two protagonists towards everyday life and immediate concerns.<sup>6</sup> *Paloma de papel* was the first national film since 1998 to focus on the specific political conflict between *Sendero* and the military, and the first since 1993 to address the effect of that conflict on highland communities. It had won third prize in the feature project awards held by *Conacine* in 2000, and eventually raised the remaining 60% of the \$380,000 budget from the Hispanic film programme Ibermedia, the Cuban film institute ICAIC and the North American agency, USAID.<sup>7</sup> It became Peru's entry for the Academy Awards in 2004 and, as such, achieved a clear mark of approval from the administration under

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<sup>5</sup> Vich, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> Bedoya, 'Un aprendizaje perverso: *Paloma de papel*', *El Dominical*, 5 October 2003, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> USAID is an independent federal government agency that receives overall foreign policy guidance from the Secretary of State. It gave a grant to support the filming of *Paloma* as part of its programme of conflict management and transition initiatives in 2000. See 'OTI Highlights: Truth Commission', *USAID/OTI Peru Field Report*, June 2002, <[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/cross-cutting\\_programs/transition\\_initiatives/country/peru/rpt0602.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/transition_initiatives/country/peru/rpt0602.html)> [accessed 8 November 2005] (section 3 of 5).

Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), the first Peruvian President of indigenous identity.<sup>8</sup> As well as directing, Aguilar wrote the script, sourced the funds, identified locations and carried out casting trials with thousands of children; he thus continued the tradition set by several of his predecessors by taking sole responsibility for his film project and maintaining faith in it for half a decade. As De Cárdenas points out, Aguilar's journey towards becoming a film-maker is 'una historia como tantas otras en esa mezcla de sueño, realidad y frustración que enfrentan quienes intentan hacer cine en un país pobre como el nuestro'.<sup>9</sup> His fascination with events that were distant from him not only temporally, but also geographically and culturally, is intriguing, and raises questions that will be addressed here regarding national identity, the ethics of representing the experiences of a marginalized community, and the creation of new bonds and affiliations between different social and ethnic groups.

Although the idea and script for *Paloma* were inspired by national TV reports watched by Aguilar, as a child, about the violent conflict raging in more remote areas of Peru, the film is not based on actual real events as with most of those discussed so far. Instead, it is a fictional account of what he imagines life might have been like for children growing up in the midst of violence. Born in Lima in 1973, Aguilar would have been the same age as his protagonist Juan (12) when *Sendero* violence was reaching its peak in the Andean regions in the mid-1980s. The film thus appears to seek a

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<sup>8</sup> Toledo grew up in a village on Peru's northern coast and gained a scholarship to study at San Francisco University at the age of sixteen. He stayed and eventually gained a PhD in Economics of Education at Stanford University School of Education, after which he returned to Peru to become Professor of Economics at the Universidad del Pacífico. On an international level, the Peruvian economy performed relatively well under his Presidency, with a 4% growth rate from 2003-06. However, at least 50% of the population continued to live in poverty, and 15% in extreme poverty.

<sup>9</sup> Federico de Cárdenas, '*Paloma de papel*', *Domingo, la revista*, 5 October 2003, pp.30-31 (p. 30).

connection between the director and his main character's experiences through his own memories of a childhood coloured by images of violence. During an interview given at the time of the film's screening at the Havana Festival of Latin American Cinema 2004, Aguilar admitted that 'si yo voy a contar historias que estén relacionadas con mi país y sus problemas, al final es un tema peruano, porque estoy hablando de mi país'.<sup>10</sup> He seems to resist the notion of social fragmentation, and does not discuss – even when invited – the potential hazards of conveying the complex and traumatic experiences of the highland population of Peru via a national fiction film centred on one boy's adventures that might, given its funding awards and its Oscar nomination, be taken as synonymous for the entire conflict. In the same interview, he claims not consciously to have made a film that would become iconic for the suffering of millions of indigenous Peruvians, nor to be overly concerned himself with political debates about violence and national identity. Nevertheless, the film was received as an effective invocation for human rights, in particular for those Peruvians caught up in the conflict whose story had yet to be told.

This broader understanding of the film arises in part as a result of the timing of its release, and its inevitable connection to events that affected the very fabric of Peruvian society and the way the nation imagined itself. By 2003, Fujimori's regime had been denounced publicly as corrupt and oppressive, and an interim government attempted to stabilise the political situation until the elections in 2001 when Alejandro Toledo was appointed President.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR)*

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<sup>10</sup> 'No es tan fragil la paloma', *Diario del Festival*, La Havana Cuba, 10 December 2004, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Skidmore and Smith summarise the momentous collapse of Fujimori's regime as follows: 'In mid-September 2000 a tape was released to the public showing Vladimiro Montesinos, Fujimori's top advisor and intelligence official, bribing an opposition congressman to join the Fujimori coalition. The public outcry was deafening.

had been in operation for over two years, and thousands of citizens from all over Peru had been offered the opportunity to give statements about what they had seen and suffered at the hands of both *Sendero* and the armed forces.<sup>12</sup> The *CVR*'s final report was published during the same month as the release of Aguilar's film, and both were interpreted as expressions of remembrance and acknowledgement of a traumatic national experience. At the same time, they both also drew uncomfortable attention to the deep cultural divides that persist in Peruvian society. As Pilar Coll points out, the *CVR*'s research highlighted 'la gravedad de las desigualdades raciales y culturales que aún prevalecen en nuestro país';<sup>13</sup> meanwhile, *Paloma de papel* draws cinematic attention to some of the complexities of a conflict that killed many of the nation's most marginalised and impoverished people. In particular, as Eyde's *La vida es una sola* had attempted to do in 1993, it raises questions about the boundary between victim and villain and demonstrates the hazy nature of such a conceptual division at times of extreme social crisis.

In terms of its approach to thematization, this is a film that works on several levels with a number of different approaches to the representation of conflict. While the topical aspect of *Paloma* is clearly concerned with the effects of political violence on an

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Montesinos and Fujimori were hopelessly exposed'. See Skidmore and Smith, p. 219. This was the first of many revelations that led to Fujimori's eventual resignation by the end of that year.

<sup>12</sup> The final report of the 12-member *CVR*, published in September 2003, gave details of investigations into acts of political violence that took place in Peru between 1980 and 2000. It concluded that nearly 70,000 people were killed, half by *Sendero* insurgents and half by security forces and government-backed peasant militias. Most were poor and suffered social exclusion; more than 40% were from the region of Ayacucho; 79% lived in the most remote areas of the Andean highlands; and 75% spoke Quechua or another indigenous language.

<sup>13</sup> Pilar Coll, *Informe final CVR: ejes temáticos de las conclusiones* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 2003), p. 14.

indigenous community in Peru in the 1980s, and on its children in particular, the film's main perennial concern is with the sudden coming-of-age and abrupt loss of innocence of a child caught unawares amidst the conflict of adults. His chief concern is with the survival of himself and of those he loves, but he is briefly seduced by the philosophy and the iconography of *Sendero*. As such, Juan (Antonio Callirgos) is partly a cinematic relative of Florinda in Eyde's earlier film, who is also torn between her love for her family and her seduction by the *Sendero* cause. In part, he is also connected to Vitín Luna in Lombardi's *La boca del lobo* (1988) in the way he engages in then rejects violence as a meaningful, lasting solution. Juan's moral journey to iconic status will be traced here via a close address to his response to events around him and his eventual shift from a boy who responds passively to situations as they arise, to young man who takes a proactive, defiant stance in the face of violence.

### **Section 3: Synopsis**

The plot of *Paloma de papel* is told almost entirely from the point of view of its young protagonist whose peacefully idyllic world is shattered by the sudden arrival of *Sendero* forces, and by the abrupt realisation that life can be cruel and unfair. While battles are staged between *Sendero* and the community (armed by the military), another, more intimate conflict is set up between the boy and the *Sendero* leaders who try to indoctrinate him. He eventually resists these efforts but not before he has been forced to abandon his childhood innocence and become embroiled in acts of violence against the state. For many domestic critics, this concern with a kind of 'aprendizaje perverso' was the film's real achievement.<sup>14</sup> As De Cárdenas points out, 'la lucha entre el niño que se niega a abandonar la realidad propia de su edad y el zombie adiestrado en matar en que

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<sup>14</sup> Bedoya, 'Un aprendizaje perverso', p. 4.

tratan de convertirlo es el conflicto mejor tratado en *Paloma de papel*.<sup>15</sup> As such, this boy is also broadly representative of the many youngsters who were taken against their will by *Sendero* groups and forced or seduced into committing their lives to the revolutionary cause. However, although Juan crosses the line and becomes a reluctant killer, unlike most of those boys he purportedly represents, he survives and apparently atones for his guilt through the traumatic loss of his mother and his subsequent imprisonment as traitor of the nation.

#### **Section 4: Analysis**

*Paloma* was the first nationally-funded feature film since Marianne Eyde's controversial picture of 1993 to turn its attention to life in the emergency zone of the Peruvian Andes in the mid-1980s. Set for the most part in a stereotypical village of the *sierra*, *Paloma de papel* follows Juan as he struggles to understand and deal with the violence that shatters his community and his own life in particular. The first part of the film introduces, through flashback, Juan's hermetically sealed world which is, on the whole, a peaceful one. He spends much of his time playing with his two best friends, Pancho (Angel Mojas) and Rosita (Anais Padilla), and helping out with agricultural tasks. Indeed, the first memory that the older Juan has of his childhood is its depiction as a timeless idyll, 'un poblado que está al abrigo del tiempo y la Historia, una suerte de Arcadia andina', filled with memories of a period of great contentment.<sup>16</sup> He enjoys a strong, loving relationship with his mother, Domitila (Liliana Trujillo), who does her best to protect him from danger. His father is an absent figure and it is not until much later that we learn he is dead, probably as one of the earliest victims of *Sendero*. The

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<sup>15</sup> De Cárdenas, '*Paloma de papel*', 2003, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Bedoya, 'Un aprendizaje perverso', p. 4.

only person who disrupts this idyllic image for Juan is his drunkard stepfather, Fermín (Aristóteles Picho), who is later exposed as an unscrupulous *Sendero* collaborator.

The younger children are vaguely aware of the threat of *Sendero* but treat it lightly, without any notion of the brutal nature of the insurgent group. One evening, however, as they act out their *terruco* version of cops and robbers, they are stopped in their tracks by the horrifying sight of the body of Pancho's father, the mayor, hanging from the village hall and surrounded by pro-*Sendero* slogans. It is at this point that the villagers organise a *ronda campesina* (Civil Defence Patrol) to protect themselves, with basic weapons supplied by the military and warning bells erected around the village.<sup>17</sup> This is the first time that representatives of the state are portrayed. Their omission during the majority of the film serves to emphasize a failure on the part of the state to protect Peruvians located away from urban areas. Moreover, it highlights a failure to recognise such indigenous communities as national citizens that should be included in the remit of official state protection. The chief concern of the military is rather to ensure national security through the elimination of all threat of violence, and, as in *La boca*, little regard is shown towards the different cultural practices and beliefs they encounter in the highlands. Indeed, such communities are treated with suspicion and disdain based on ignorance and fear, and Juan's community suffers abuse at the hands of the military almost as much as it does at the hands of *Sendero*.

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<sup>17</sup> As previously stated in the discussion of *La vida es una sola*, these Civil Defence Patrols, sanctioned by the central government in Lima, began to be established properly throughout the emergency zones from 1983. In many instances, the villagers had no choice but to arm themselves: reluctance to form a patrol was interpreted by the military as implicit support for *Sendero*. 'Neutrality was permitted neither by the military nor by *Sendero*'. Fumerton, Mario and Simone Remijense, 'Civil defence forces: Peru's Comités de Autodefensa Civil and Guatemala's Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil in Comparative Perspective', in *Armed Actors: Organised Violence and State Failure in Latin America*, ed. by Kees Kooning and Dirk Kruijt (London: Zed Books, 2004), pp. 52-72 (p. 54).

The children witness Fermín talking to *Sendero* rebels and discover guerrilla propaganda leaflets hidden in his room. Before they are able to denounce him to the community leader as a traitor, Juan is quickly delivered to the guerrillas and forced into a traumatic process of so-called re-education. He is renamed Cirilo by them, forced to learn how to set off bombs and use guns, and is taught the basics of *Sendero* ideology. Juan, reluctant to submit to the authority of the Party, is nevertheless forced to take goods from other poor *campesinos* and to kill a pleading soldier. Despite listening with some interest to the *Sendero* ideology of radical social change and seeming to gain some pleasure from the sense of purpose generated by the group, he remains intent on escape and return to his mother. He might have physically been forced to kill, but he is shown to have developed a sense of humanity and morality that remain intact in the face of personal danger. When he finally breaks free, he is caught in the crossfire of a ferocious battle between *Sendero* and the armed forces. His beloved mother is killed and he is taken away by the military as a presumed traitor to the nation. The film closes in the present as Juan returns to the village, having been released as part of an amnesty ordered by the interim government.<sup>18</sup> As he enters, he sees the visual signs of conflict that form the focus of memorial almost two decades later. Juan's story ends as he is embraced silently by Pancho and Rosita and thus welcomed back into the highland community that appears to remain unchanged and remote from the rest of the nation. Although the narrative closure is more complete than that in *La boca* and *La vida*, its closest predecessors, a sense of isolation is suggested by Juan's long journey back to his roots. The enduring remoteness of the village to which he returns is underscored by the

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<sup>18</sup> Note also that the state of emergency in the region of Ayacucho ended officially only in 2000. The same year, interim President Valentín Paniagua announced new elections for 2001 and sanctioned the establishment of the *CVR* that gathered thousands of testimonials from Peruvians nationwide.

tight framing of the final image of the three friends, which raises further questions about the arbitrary nature of national boundaries and the difficulty of identification with a nation that fails to recognize the diversity of its membership.

The cinematic portrayal that Aguilar offers of violent conflict emphasizes the suffering of indigenous Peruvians, excluded from political agency and protection, and at the same time highlights the dilemma for a child such as Juan, who becomes, simultaneously, victim and murderer. The audience is positioned from the beginning to share the older Juan's memory of his traumatic childhood experiences and is thus encouraged to feel a sense of injustice on his behalf and of that of his community, despite the fact that he also becomes a killer. Disadvantaged by their remoteness, physically and metaphysically, from hegemonic identity and discourse, the community seems especially vulnerable to attack from all sides. After a long, slow shot that pans across a wall of crumpled photographs and then draws back to reveal a community taking part in a memorial service, the film cuts to show a close-up of the hands of a young boy folding a white paper bird. The paper is clean, white, and squared, like that used in school workbooks. The camera then moves back to reveal a young boy, a row of beds and a female guard, suggesting the location is some form of detention centre, before returning to the close-up of the hands and the paper. A graphic match cut takes us to the next close-up which is almost identical to the first, but shows that the hands belong to an older boy, and the paper used to create the bird is from a greying newspaper. The camera then moves back again to reveal the same bed and the same detention centre. The cinematically contrived impression of a jump forward in time is confirmed by the subsequent shots and voice-over of a TV journalist reporting that thirteen long-term political prisoners are being released as part of a government amnesty. The expression on the older boy's face suggests sadness and anxiety. He slowly leaves the safety of his

prison environment with the sound of chanting supporters ringing in his ears, bids goodbye to a fellow inmate, and steps outside to a very different world from the one he was forced to leave over almost two decades before.

Unlike the others who leave with him, he has no welcome party of family members, and his isolation is emphasised by the long overhead shot that shows him walking away from the crowds towards the bus station. We later learn that his parents both died as a result of the conflict, and it is possible that – without access to media – his friends are either unaware of his release, or unable or unwilling to travel to the city to meet him. This is the first real portrayal of Peru as a fragmented nation, torn apart by a conflict that in turn took advantage of deep social divisions and ethnically-rooted resentments. As he travels back to the only place he knows, uncertain of how he will be received, Juan begins to remember the events that led to his imprisonment. This bus ride is not just a journey back to his roots, but also to his past, a voyage in space and in time, away from the modernity and emotional coldness of the city space and back to what he remembers as a supportive, protective community. The direction of the journey from Lima (centre) to Andes (periphery) is also significant, as is the metaphor created of the capital city as prison from which he is now allowed to escape back to the comparative freedom of the Andes. The flashback thus begins, briefly in jarring fragments and then to a more discursive and linear form, that uses changes in colour and music to create a more sentimental tone befitting the world of a child.<sup>19</sup> Entering Juan's memory world in this way, the audience is firmly encouraged to identify and empathize with the plight of

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<sup>19</sup> Such sentimentality may result from the director's identity as *limeño* and hence a certain romanticism of life in the Andes that chooses to ignore the harsh realities of everyday life in the highlands. He also omits any recognition of the restrictive, oppressive nature of strong traditional values that bind those communities, and that privilege collective will over individual freedom.

an apparently innocent boy who became an apparently unwitting enemy of the state's struggle for political and social stability.

In terms of film form, there are some signs of the neorealist tendency that Aguilar has revealed as a key stylistic and philosophical influence.<sup>20</sup> As well as the familiar devices of location shooting and the casting of a non-professional actor plucked from the highlands as protagonist, *Paloma* places the representation of a broad social reality at the core of its ethical concerns by retracing the boy's journey to adulthood as he gradually discovers the good and bad of the world around him.<sup>21</sup> However, while the first part of the film concentrates on the routine aspects of his life, as remembered by his older self, it does so by recalling this period in the style of a children's fairytale. Indeed, the memory of one specific tale about childhood, villains and doves which is recounted within the diegesis by the old village magician and sage and later woven into the symbolic fabric of the film itself, draws attention to this stylistic approach, as do other recurring images of toys and games. As De Cárdenas suggests, the mythic value of the film's narrative can be appreciated more fully by focusing on the memory as if a nightmare, as Juan remembers being dragged away from his idyllic reality 'para ser sumergido en una pesadilla donde se multiplican los seres monstruosos y la violencia'.<sup>22</sup> The boy is at first quite clear about who he perceives to be the heroes and villains of the village community. For him, the monstrous element to human life is represented by his alcoholic, treacherous stepfather, Fermín, whose portrayal is

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<sup>20</sup> Aguilar spoke about this during a conversation with the author in Lima, August 2004, and also in interviews at the time of his film's release.

<sup>21</sup> Simona Monticelli, 'Italian Post-war Cinema and Neorealism', in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. by Pamela Church Gibson and John Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 455-460 (p. 458).

<sup>22</sup> De Cárdenas, '*Paloma de papel*', *Tren de Sombras*, 1 (2004), 42.

juxtaposed with that of the gentle character recalled only as *Viejo* (Eduardo Cesti), presented here as the wise and kindly village blacksmith-cum-sage and magician, with whom Juan finds comfort and security.

For Juan, Fermín is the only recognisable villain in a community that appears, from the boy's point of view, to operate as a unified and supportive group in all areas of need. Two scenes emphasize this latter point, while drawing attention to Fermín's 'outsider' status, as well as to Juan's initial childhood battleground. In the first scene, Juan joins the village men as they prepare the ground for the construction of a community building. He and Pancho become covered in mud and inadvertently hit Fermín with clay as he passes. Pancho's father calms the enraged man and sends Juan to clean himself up. An idyllic memory of his beloved mother washing him down in the clear river water is evocatively framed by soft-focus lighting and sentimental music, whereas Fermín is remembered only as a violent man. On this occasion, he punishes the boy with a beating and sends him to sleep with the animals. As De Cárdenas further suggests, as far as Juan's idealized memory of traditional community life is concerned, the monsters only multiply when the *Sendero* rebels arrive.<sup>23</sup> Although it is implied that Juan and his friends are vaguely aware of the guerrilla presence in the area, the youngsters' sudden awakening to the brutal reality of violence is imprinted on their minds when they discover the body of Pancho's murdered father.<sup>24</sup> Although this neat binary of good and bad is disrupted later by the *Sendero* leaders who encourage Juan to reassess the mayor as a wrongful supporter of a corrupt state system, and thus as representative of a nation-

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<sup>23</sup> '*Paloma de papel*', 42.

<sup>24</sup> Note that the camera fixes on the traumatised faces of the children at the sight of their gruesome discovery, rather than on the dead man, emphasising the significance of this moment as marking a sudden break with childhood innocence.

state that *Sendero* wishes to destroy, the boy continues to struggle to believe that his friend's father deserved his fate.

A further challenge to the crude juxtaposition of good versus bad is provoked by the depiction of key members of the *Sendero* group as complex individuals whose motives, as Juan appears to recall, included a dangerous blend of altruism and faith in an absolute cause. This is particularly so in the case of cell leader Wilmer (Sergio Galliani) who, while brutal, is remembered by Juan as capable of compassion and humanity. The older man fulfils to some degree the paternal role that is missing from Juan's life by instructing and guiding him in his new environment, offering him a purpose in life that transcends individual concerns and freedoms. The viewer is invited, through the older Juan's memory of Wilmer's explanations of the *Sendero* doctrine, to try to understand what leads this insurgent to act as he does. In so doing, the viewer is encouraged to appreciate why he, like so many other educated but disillusioned, socially impoverished and politically excluded young *mestizo* Peruvians at the time, might have been willing to deliver himself completely to the revolutionary cause.<sup>25</sup> The pivotal scene when Wilmer, framed evocatively by the mountains, attempts to explain the essential tenets of *Sendero* ideology to Juan addresses the most fundamental aspects of Marxist/Maoist thought on which the *Sendero* manifesto was based. The older boy remembers that he talked, for example, about the need to build a radically different social structure for Peru that would eliminate all injustice and poverty, and about the importance of violence not only as a means of destroying the old order but also 'por su importancia para establecer

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<sup>25</sup> Gonzalo Portocarrero, 'Nuevos modelos de identidad en la sociedad peruana', in *Modelos de identidad y sentidos de pertenencia en Perú y Bolivia*, ed. by Portocarrero and Jorge Komadina (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2001), pp. 11-88 (p. 22).

la sociedad del futuro'.<sup>26</sup> This is a crucial turning point for the young Juan: violence is presented to him paradoxically as a creative as well as a destructive force and the film is at this point ambivalent in its position in this regard. Wilmer, assuming a mask of kindness and benevolence, makes his argument gently but unequivocally using language and examples that make the theory plausible and comprehensible to a child. As De Cárdenas further points out, 'las sucesivas explicaciones que intentan reducir la jerga senderista y hacerla comprensible a los oídos de esos niños son como esas viejas lecciones memorísticas aprendidas de paporrera'.<sup>27</sup> Juan has difficulty understanding the abstract concepts of elitism, corruption, reactionary government and semi-feudal systems, but grasps the simple fact that people are hungry, that the existing conditions are unfair for many, and is seduced by the chance to participate in making life better for people like him and his community. Within this short scene, Wilmer explains that, according to *Sendero* ideology, there would be no need for a capitalist system of monetary exchange leading to wealth for some and reliance on charity for others, if everyone had the right of access to all basic needs. Juan's confusion at the economic logic of this is matched by pleasure at the simplistic idea of having things without paying for them. He is also excited by the training games, the construction of a new familial structure, the admiration he gains from learning to use weapons, and the lighting of the torches across the mountainside in the shape of an enormous hammer-and-sickle symbol. The traumatic reality of the violence that was an inextricable part of the *Sendero* campaign, and that took advantage of the dissatisfaction of the poor, had yet to be revealed.

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<sup>26</sup> Nelson Manrique, *Razones de sangre: aproximaciones a la violencia política* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> De Cárdenas, '*Paloma de papel*', 2003, p. 31.

This sequence of scenes is set amidst the impressive yet hostile Andean terrain stripped bare of any man-made adornment. Through this succinct portrayal of the young boy's memory of his indoctrination, the film reveals some of the basic tactics used to persuade susceptible young people living in impoverished areas to abandon their homes and engage in what was a class-based, ethnically-inflected conflict. As Degregori explains, 'Sendero ofrece no sólo una explicación intelectual sino una organización que acoge a esos jóvenes y les otorga identidad'.<sup>28</sup> The insurgent group gave these youngsters a sense of purpose and hope, as well as a new sense of belonging, firstly to the *Sendero* group and secondly, to an imagined new national identity in which they would have a place. It is precisely this sort of attempt at clarification, if not justification, of *Sendero* ideology that led Aguilar's predecessor Marianne Eyde to experience such harsh public criticism for her depiction of the infiltration of *Sendero* rebels into an Andean community one decade earlier with *La vida es una sola*. Aguilar admits that he was unsure about how best to present the *Sendero* cause, and experienced similar, if less sustained, criticism for giving exposure, however limited, to the key tenets of the *Sendero* cause. There are several potential reasons why he suffered less at the hands of critics, public and the authorities than Eyde. The passage of time and change of presidential regime certainly helped, but so too did his identity as a male film-maker who had been born in Peru. This contrasted with Eyde's perceived status as cultural outsider, regardless of the extent to which she affiliated herself politically with those communities in the Andes that became her main subject.

Nevertheless, in an interview that he gave at the time of the film's screening at the annual Festival at Mar del Plata, Aguilar admitted being aware that:

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<sup>28</sup> Carlos Iván Degregori, *El surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso* (Lima: IEP, 1990), p. 193.

Es difícil satisfacer a todo el mundo. Yo tenía la intención de no satanizar a nadie, a pesar de que al final uno toma partido. No quería estereotipar tampoco, ya que para los peruanos, Sendero Luminoso era el malo ... [y] ... para mí esto ya era un problema: intentar humanizar a los asesinos, a la gente que mató, que creó el terror, que ponía bombas.<sup>29</sup>

He further acknowledged that it was difficult not to represent *Sendero* only as a brutal organisation that, because of its radical ideology of social destruction, forced its militants to renounce all emotional ties with families, lovers, and people they had cared about and who cared for them. The most common public perception of *senderistas* has been, after all, as “robots de carne”, como personas radicalmente deshumanizadas por el dogmatismo y la entrega de su libertad’.<sup>30</sup> As Vich further explains, militancy became, for *Sendero*, ‘el único hecho importante en la descripción de la identidad de los sujetos’,<sup>31</sup> and Wilmer, whose own background remains a mystery, tries to explain to Juan that he must renounce all affective bonds and commit himself entirely to the revolutionary cause. Yet the film refuses to accept that *Sendero* leaders were devoid of all humanity and compassion, and includes amongst Juan’s memories more complex relationships between some of the *Sendero* characters. Using facial close-ups, for example, it draws attention to the distress of Carmen (Tatiana Astengo) as she witnesses the shooting of her younger militant sister Yeny (Melania Urbina), cross-cutting between her face and Juan’s as he watches his own mother die in the crossfire, and thus linking momentarily the two family tragedies. A flicker of compassion is also seen on Wilmer’s face when, as an apparent act of mercy, he kills one of his most dedicated

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<sup>29</sup> Fernando Madedo and Anna Fanelli, ‘Por un cine humanista’, *Otrocampo Festivales*, 2004, <<http://www.otrocampo.com/festivales/mardel04/fabrizioaguilar.html>> [accessed 10 September 2004].

<sup>30</sup> Manrique, *Razones de sangre*, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Vich, pp. 27-8.

recruits who was seriously wounded after stepping onto a mine and begged to be shot dead so as not to become a burden to the Party. While some critics accepted this approach as being entirely in line with the director's self-confessed 'visión totalitaria, humana, moral',<sup>32</sup> others were upset by what they perceived as an excessively generous portrayal of individuals behind the guerrilla cause. In particular, some were disturbed by the presentation of brutal death as 'sacrificio heroico y victoria final sobre la tristeza', as an inevitable part of the campaign to change the social structure.<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, *Sendero* is punished: Wilmer and Yeny are both killed in the final battle against the villagers, as is the collaborator Don Fermín. However, the grief-stricken Carmen disappears back into the mountains, her commitment to the cause seemingly reinforced by personal loss at the hands of the state.

Meanwhile, Juan recalls that his only motivation was to ensure the survival of his community. Having crossed the line of morality by killing a soldier, he seems to accept that his own life is over. However, his redemption swiftly follows: rather than cave in to the vision and violence of the guerrilla group, he chooses to escape in a bid to warn his village of the impending *Sendero* attack that is motivated by suspicion of collaboration with the military unit located nearby. In so doing, he risks death at the hands of *Sendero* and the armed forces, for he has become a traitor to both. The older boy remembers the distress he felt at having become complicit in the violence and the realisation that he too has become a killer. He appears to accept his guilt and makes no attempt to escape imprisonment for his crime. Despite his wrong-doing, he is presented as the true hero of the film in that he is shown to have rejected impunity as well as violence, and to be willing to atone for his sins at a time when others remained silent.

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<sup>32</sup> Madedo and Fanelli, 'Por un cine humanista'.

<sup>33</sup> Manrique, *Razones de sangre*, p. 29.

By contrast, depiction of the state is perhaps best understood by its relative absence from the screen, even more so than in Eyde's controversial film. The military, representing the state and hence the dominant national image, is shown entering in the village only twice; once to hand out arms to the community as part of the government strategy of defence, and once more at the end to take Juan away. The remoteness of the regiment, and hence the state, is reinforced in two further scenes. On one occasion, the village leader risks his life by travelling to the regiment with intelligence on *Sendero's* activities, as instructed by the ferocious military leader. He is brutally murdered by *Sendero* shortly afterwards. On another occasion, the regiment is shown training in the hills, seeming to keep a wide berth from the village. Juan's memories of such neglectful behaviour echoes earlier representations of the state as ineffective in protecting all its citizens, leaving communities such as that shown here to defend itself from insurgent attack.

The most overt criticism of state counter-insurgency policy is conveyed in the early sequence during which Juan is caught up in the television reporting on the release of political prisoners. Again inspired by real events, this cinematic representation serves to emphasize that the political conflict dealt perhaps the most severe blow to young men from the most impoverished indigenous communities of Peru. Boys such as Juan, seduced by *Sendero* and excluded from the dominant national image, were imprisoned and convicted according to military court procedures, often without clear evidence of their crime or access to right of appeal. During one brief exchange, a microphone is thrust before a weary ex-prisoner who is asked to describe how he feels. The young man is speechless and it is left to his father to express his anger at

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having lost so many years with his son, thus reinforcing the frustration and resentment felt by a whole sector of Peruvian society at the time. Reference to the procedure of early release at the very start of the film raises uncomfortable questions about their detention, and the injustices of the conflict.

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

While Aguilar insisted that he strove for objectivity, several critics protested that his film ‘prima el desconocimiento y la total exterioridad frente al universo representado en su filme ... como esos escritores *indigenistas* que escribían a partir de un viaje de temporada a la serranía’.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the sentimental evocation of an Andean idyll, suggested through heightened use of colour and dramatic musical score, seems to be the result of an admiring, deferential gaze that neglected to acknowledge the harshness of life in the Andes and failed to allow the marginalized to speak for themselves. In his review, Bedoya asserts critically that this was exactly the approach of ‘ese indigenismo plástico, de raigambre sentimental, deslumbrado por el cielo azul, los gestos de los campesinos y el verde del campo’.<sup>35</sup> The film offends Rojas further for failing to use the Quechua language which would have been spoken by Juan’s community, and – more importantly for him – for failing to acknowledge that such communities or their environment were rarely the idylls portrayed in this film. On the contrary, they were deeply impoverished, and rife with internal disagreement and conflicts of interest that were exploited by *Sendero* leaders when recruiting *campesinos* to join their cause. Furthermore, the ambiguous status and sometimes dubious conduct of the Civil Defence Patrol is not depicted; instead it is recalled by Juan as a heroic group of untrained amateurs who somehow defeat a fierce enemy without the backing of the military. Most

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<sup>34</sup> Pablo Rojas, ‘Urpillay: *Paloma de papel*’, *Butaca Sanmarquina*, 18 (2003), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Bedoya, ‘Un aprendizaje perverso’, p. 4.

critics seemed to prefer the film's focus on the emotional relationships between its characters rather than its efforts at intellectual abstraction. For them, the emphasis on the affective as opposed to the political enabled it to convey rather more effectively 'una visión de lo que fue el trauma senderista en los Andes'.<sup>36</sup>

Above all, such concerns suggest that cinematic treatment of the *Sendero* conflict and the behaviour of the military remained sensitive, and susceptible to criticism from those who were perhaps still wary of reopening barely-healed wounds that threatened to disrupt a society still seething with unrest, and dismantle efforts to recreate a sense of national unity.<sup>37</sup> While one film cannot bear the responsibility of representing all the issues, the timing of the release of *Paloma de papel* bestowed upon it a more iconic status than its producers intended. The film forced viewers, and readers of reviews, to recall and debate an important period of national history that had such a dramatic effect on the way the Peruvian nation imagined itself. Its very existence acts as an uncomfortable reminder of the nation's recent past. Screenings in remote parts of the country, as well as amongst poorer communities in Lima inhabited by Andean migrants, gave those people who were caught up in the conflict an opportunity to see a small part of their experience dramatised on screen, even if someone else (Aguilar, a white urban Peruvian) was telling their story for them. While some proponents of identity politics undoubtedly prefer to see the disempowered speaking for and representing themselves,

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<sup>36</sup> De Cárdenas, '*Paloma de papel*', 2003, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Fujimori's attempts, in 2000, to win election for an unprecedented third term led to protest on the streets of Lima, resulting in the deaths of six people. Some protestors were led by the man who later became President, Alejandro Toledo, while others were part of an uprising organised by the relatively new *Movimiento Etnocacerista*, a left-leaning nationalist group whose leaders included retired military officer Ollanta Humala. Humala, who had fought against *Sendero* and in the brief conflict against Ecuador in 1995, came second to Alan García in the 2006 presidential elections.

the attempts made by Aguilar to represent the interests of his marginalized compatriots and to affiliate himself with their cause have been applauded by others.<sup>38</sup>

Through its many international screenings, this film familiarised a new generation with some of the socio-political realities of a part of the world which is rarely depicted within the global mass media. Of course, there are risks, some of which have been discussed, in terms of simplifying the complexities of certain situations for the sake of entertainment. On the one hand, a fictional portrayal such as the one offered by Aguilar runs the risk of ‘exoticiz[ing] other cultures’ and romanticizing the struggle of indigenous Peruvians caught in a political conflict that, in the end, had little to do with improving their lives.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, fiction cinema has the potential to lure, or suture, the viewer into a certain ideological point of view through careful use of dramatic and affective devices. Hence, there is always the potential, however limited, for ‘a structuring of filmic identification across social, political and cultural situations’, which can be dangerous (if the identification is uncritical) or enlightening.<sup>40</sup>

While drawing attention to topical concerns of great importance to Peruvian society and national identity, Aguilar created a film about the value of memory and the act of remembering. The flashback via which the older Juan recalls the key turning point in his life is framed by poignant signs of the memorial service held on the anniversary of the massacre in Juan’s village. Burning candles, crumpled photographs of the deceased

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<sup>38</sup> In August 2004, Aguilar was presented with a special commendation from the Peruvian section of Amnesty International for bringing violations against human rights in Peru to the attention of cinema audiences worldwide, and for reopening the debate about war crimes internally.

<sup>39</sup> Shohat and Stam, p. 347.

<sup>40</sup> Shohat and Stam, p. 351.

pinned to walls, mournful music and white flowers would be understood by audiences throughout the world. Juan's return in the middle of this service links past to present, while the flashback device confers upon the film its testimonial value. His story becomes thus symbolic of the witness statements collected by the *CVR* at the time the film was in production, given by victims, perpetrators and all those in between.

Whatever the director's intentions, the tone of the ending is ambivalent. On the one hand, Juan's guilt at having been a reluctant participant in *Sendero* crimes appears to have been redeemed. His crimes have been brutally punished not only by imprisonment but also by the death of his mother. His commitment to peace is reinforced by the handling of the paper dove, and a sense of his innate innocence is underscored by the focus on his childhood and on constant comparison with the apparent inhumanity of *Sendero* and the armed forces. His reintegration into the community signalled by his friends' welcoming embrace marks the closure of one chapter and the beginning of another. As the images fade to black, there appears a citation from Erich Fromm, reminding us of the director's intention to tell a story of love and life, of his desire to emphasize humanity over ideology.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, this ending is also troubling for nothing appears to have changed and the possibility of a Peruvian national identity that celebrates diversity remains uncertain. The village church stands in ruins and the grief of its inhabitants is as acute as ever. Pancho and Rosita are standing in almost exactly the same spot from which Juan was taken away by the armed forces years before, and their hermetic embrace closes them

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<sup>41</sup> The final citation from the work of Fromm, the German-born social philosopher and psychoanalyst who was a key proponent of the idea that most human behaviour is a learned response to social conditions, reads as follows: '...el pensamiento crítico dará

off from the rest of the world. The poverty and racist neglect that isolated such communities, made them vulnerable to violent attack, and remote from political agency on a national scale seem also to have remained. In effect, despite its apparently hopeful point of closure, its recurrent motifs of peace, innocence and reconciliation, and the rejection of violence as solution by its charismatic protagonist, *Paloma de papel* offers an image of the nation that is as fragmented, divided and hierarchical as it was at the height of the political conflict. The next, and final chapter explores further national cinema's concern with the disintegration of Peruvian society and identity as a result of violence via an analysis of a film that takes an intimate look at contemporary life in Lima.