

Conclusion

Creo que *La boca* avala la necesidad cada vez más urgente de la promulgación de la ley de apoyo a la industria cinematográfica. Esta ley viene esperando mucho tiempo su promulgación. Tenemos la esperanza de que este dispositivo legal servirá para apoyar el cine nacional teniendo en cuenta los grandes esfuerzos que se realizan para concretar estos proyectos.¹

When Lombardi returned from the gala screening of *La boca del lobo* at Havana Film Festival in 1988, he was anxious that Peruvian national cinema would soon lose the support of a flawed but invaluable protectionist legislation. He hoped, however, that the success of his film and the debate it generated would highlight the need for the government to allow this cultural activity to develop, as a sign of the nation's own political and economic maturity if nothing else. This study has aimed to demonstrate the extent to which individual feature films play a role in provoking controversy and concern amongst politicians, film industry and audiences alike. In so doing, it has also attempted to draw attention to the ways in which political conflict and social crisis affect the logistical, legislative and aesthetic development of an intermittent national film industry.

Despite their different formal qualities and ideological approaches, all of the films considered here are united in their concern with the effect of political violence on the various communities of Peru. They examine the tension between these groups, antagonism rooted in the nation's history of cultural dualism that was exploited to a certain extent by the insurgency. Furthermore, they reveal some of the events, characters and policies that emerged from the conflict between state and *Sendero* and that contributed to the reshaping of personal and collective identities. Most of them court controversy by focusing on those minority sectors of Peruvian society – migrants,

¹ Lombardi cited by Mariella Balbi, 'Entrevista con Francisco Lombardi', *La República*, 27 November 1988, p. 8.

campesinos and neglected provincial citizens – that had been excluded from dominant national discourse and identity and use cinema to voice the concerns of the disadvantaged and impoverished of Peru.

Alienation and difference

All of the films emphasize the need to rethink the perception of the Peruvian nation as homogeneous entity dominated by a white elite, and to consider it instead as shaped by fragmentation, alienation and difference. They also link these characteristics to questions of violence and conflict on different levels. For example, the stories of Jeremías in *Ni con dios ni con el diablo* (Pereira del Mar 1990), Gregorio and Juliana in *Anda, corre, vuela...* (Tamayo 1995), and the community of Villa El Salvador in *Coraje* (Durant 1998), in particular, draw attention to the processes, consequences, dangers and possibilities of migration and cross-cultural interaction. While the first ends tragically as its protagonist fails to recognise the need to assimilate effectively into the customs of urban society, it nevertheless demonstrates how others had found ways to negotiate survival through assimilation of western practices. The second offers a utopian vision of resistance and solidarity at grassroots level, highlighting the need to prioritise collective projects over the pursuit of individual dreams at times of social crisis. And although the heroine of Durant's later biopic, María Elena Moyano, suffers a brutal death, her story is offered as emblematic of the potential for social change without recourse to violence. Nevertheless, in each of these films the state and *criollo* elite are represented as remote, separate, ineffective and, in some instances, capable of inhumane and criminal violence in their apparent pursuit of the maintenance of national security.

The separation of and tensions between different social groups are emphasised even more strongly in, for example, *La boca del lobo*, *Alias la gringa* (Durant 1991) and *La*

vida es una sola (Eyde 1993). *La boca* not only pits soldiers against *Sendero* militants, but also addresses the cultural and linguistic differences between Peruvians from Lima and those from the highlands, demonstrating the way that friction and abuse all too easily arise as a result of ignorance, intolerance and a failure to communicate effectively. Moreover, it differentiates between the various members of the military group in terms of age, ethnicity, and education and reveals the centrality of macho masculinity to the dominant national image. The importance of machismo to Peruvian identity, and its relationship with violence, is further investigated in *Alias la gringa* and *Bajo la piel*. The former presents the community of inmates on a prison island as a microcosm for the nation, with fanatical *Sendero* insurgents, authoritarian representatives of the state, and a range of faces chosen to convey the ethnic and racial multiplicity of groups that comprise the Peruvian underclass. Nevertheless, the relationship between the paler-skinned intellectual Professor Montes and the intuitively intelligent protagonist becomes the main focus of attention, as both succeed in blurring the boundaries and mediating between the different social groups. Finally, *La vida* which, despite focusing all of its sympathy on the trauma of a highland community caught between the crossfire of political conflict, nevertheless draws attention to tensions within such communities resulting from differences in age, education, contact with other communities, and gender. It shows how *Sendero* was able to benefit from such frictions and promote their belief in violence as the only path to social revolution. By crafting two female characters, one a naive highland girl experiencing love for the first time, the other a tough warrior who has chosen to sacrifice her life for the sake of the *Sendero* cause, as complex symbols of the crisis, Eyde also raises controversial questions about the relationship between gender and violence, and asks the spectator to rethink the assumed connection between masculinity and brutality in this context. All three films offer ambivalent endings that demonstrate personal self-realisation and rejection of violence on the part of their respective protagonists, but that fall short of

suggesting that a more general, systematic renunciation of violence is likely while the nation remains divided.

A different kind of social context altogether is presented in Lombardi's *Bajo la piel*, an incisive, existential meditation on the persistence of violence and machismo as central tenets of Peruvian life and identity. The disaffected inhabitants of the fictional provincial town of Palle form the marginalized element of this film. At first, the town appears to be a quiet backwater but it quickly becomes apparent that it is in fact full of characters who are seething with resentment and frustration, emblematic of whom is protagonist police captain Percy Corso. Despite his status of authority and the implied link with the state, he is deeply unhappy at his lack of political agency and by the prevalence of corruption and debauchery as embodied by the town's mayor and his promiscuous son. Depicted as the passive pacifist in the first half, he turns into a brutal killer in the second. By contrast with *La gringa* and *La vida*, in which the main female characters (Julia and Florinda respectively) are presented as positive forces for peaceful change, Marina in *Bajo la piel* is portrayed as providing the main motivation for Corso to respond to his problems with violence. Moreover, the film's explicit attempt to link the killing methods of the ancient Moche civilization with the brutality of *Sendero* and with the savage decapitations committed by the serial killer suggests a reluctant acceptance of the social status quo and a denial of the possibility of change by non-violent means.

The two most recent films discussed in this study, Aguilar's *Paloma de papel* (2003) and *Días de Santiago* (2004) by Méndez are perhaps not as cynical in their social portrayals as *Bajo la piel*, and certainly emphasize the futility of violence, but nevertheless hesitate to suggest alternative models in the way that those earlier films tried to do. *Paloma's* focus on the trauma suffered by a fictional Andean community

caught in the crossfire of state versus *Sendero* conflict ends with a sense of the persistence of the social and political divisions that Mariátegui, writing in the 1920s, insisted would remain at the root of antagonisms throughout Peru for many years.² Meanwhile, the alienation experienced by Santiago in Méndez's debut feature is reminiscent of the frustrations suffered by Corso in Lombardi's mid-1990s film, although the former's psychological collapse is more complete and the violence is turned upon himself. In fact, his inability to adapt himself to the conventions of life in Lima at the turn of the century is perhaps more akin to Jeremías's tragic failure to negotiate survival in the urban jungle depicted in Pereira del Mar's *Ni con dios* released fourteen years earlier.

The diverse locations used within the films draw further attention to the complex richness of Peruvian culture and reveal efforts to negotiate social divisions that are in some ways a consequence of the relationship of different communities with place and space. Moreover, these are all films that variously address the construction and transgression of social and cultural boundaries within Peru, often using the narrative device of the journey (physical and psychological) as a metaphor for social change. In so doing, they begin the process of breaking down the constructed binaries of urban and rural, traditional and modern, white and non-white, and of exploring the potential of liminal space.³ *Ni con dios*, for example, uses images of shamanic practice to suggest, as Arguedas once did, that the creativity, innovation and transformative powers of the Andean cosmos might be of use to the modern, technologized world Jeremías

² Mariátegui, p. 201.

³ Homi Bhabha develops the concept of the liminal to discuss the interstitial or in-between space in which cultural exchange can occur. See *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 27.

encounters in Lima.⁴ He fails to take advantage of the warnings offered, but later films such as *Anda, corre, vuela ...* offer more productive examples of the fruitful coalescence of the traditional with the modern. Several of the protagonists remain enclosed within certain environments, or are forced to move from one oppressive space to another, until they finally break free in a bid to exert real agency over their lives. Vitín in *La boca* flees from his regiment having realised the futility of their mission; Florinda in *La vida* similarly runs away from the immediate dangers of conflict. Both disappear into the highlands and their future remains uncertain. By contrast, the conclusion to *La gringa*'s story is less ambivalent as he is shown to have succeeded in escaping physical imprisonment and psychological entrapment, as well as the inhibiting demands and neglect of the Peruvian authorities. Meanwhile, Gregorio and Juliana in *Anda, corre, vuela ...* do not succeed in leaving Lima and pursuing their personal ambitions, but find collective ways of escaping oppression and violence, and discover more positive social roles for themselves in the process.

Moyano, the heroine of *Coraje*, travels back and forth from Peru to Spain and from Villa El Salvador to central Lima, and in so doing her devotion to the community she is committed to help develop is reinforced. As with those protagonists already discussed, her journeys serve in part as devices for exploring the relationships between different social groups and the possibility of envisioning a new national image for Peru that embraces such heterogeneity. Nevertheless, the resignation to entrapment implied in the ending to Corso's narrative in *Bajo la piel*, the continued separation of Juan's community from Lima in *Paloma de papel*, and the inescapable alienation experienced by Santiago as he traverses the different spaces of the capital all suggest that Peruvian identity remains fragmented. Moreover, such examples of isolation reveal a pessimistic

⁴ See the discussion of Arguedas' work in Rowe and Schelling, pp. 59-61.

trend towards depicting Peru as a nation that continues to be defined largely by deficiency, that is to say, by a lack of mutual understanding and tolerance between different social groups.

The role of cinema in times of crisis

The mixture of implicit and explicit approaches to the representation of the *Sendero* insurgency tells us something about the relationship between politics and culture at a time of threat to national security. It also prompts discussion of the nature and effects of developments in legislation relating specifically to cinema and more generally to acts of terrorism. The period under discussion (1988-2004) began with the controversial release of Lomabrdi's seminal *La boca del lobo*, which portrayed the arrival of a defence force in a suspicious Andean community, raised pertinent questions about cultural difference and misunderstanding between the different social groups of Peru, and showed how conflict could arise out of ignorance. Because *Sendero* remains an invisible but palpable threat, symbolised to a certain extent by the hostile landscape, and because the focus of the drama shifts to the tense relationship between the lieutenant and the novice, the film's topicality was easily downplayed. The removal of any explicit reference to the slaughter of citizens at Soccos, despite a scene that appears to restage that exact event, led to its interpretation instead as a metaphoric meditation on masculinity and violence as intertwined features of Peruvian identity. Nevertheless, the many newspaper articles that explored the message of the film at the time, and the recurrent screenings and academic discussions of it attest to its immediate and enduring role as an important agent of debate at a time of crisis.

Not until the release over a decade later of *Paloma de papel* and *Días de Santiago* did national cinema receive such a warm reception. As has been noted, not all those films

made during the intervening years were concerned with the *Sendero* conflict, nor with violence in other forms, and yet both remained ongoing points of interest for several of Peru's most prominent and outspoken film-makers. Pereira del Mar, whose controversial speech at the first *Conacine* awards revealed his mistrust in the Fujimori regime, was the first after Lombardi to offer a film that contributed to the debate about political violence and personal suffering as consequence of social difference and economic injustice. A number of reasons, aesthetic and political, have been suggested to explain the film's poor reception at the domestic box office, but it nevertheless survives as evidence of a continuing cinematic preoccupation with immediate social themes. Three years later, in early 1993, Marianne Eyde gave numerous forthright interviews in defence of her film the release of which was stifled by political paranoia in the wake of Fujimori's aggressive *autogolpe* and the triumphant capture of Abimael Guzmán. Veteran leftist film-maker Alberto Durant, a staunch proponent of human rights, produced two films during the decade that dealt with the conflict, *Alias la gringa* (1991) and *Coraje* (1998), the latter of which in particular suffered from a long gestation period caused by funding concerns resulting at least in part from the new market requirements of revised cinema legislation. Lombardi's own struggles to find funding, despite his indisputable reputation, led him to work more closely with Spanish producers whose ideas about appealing to international audiences impacted on the treatment of topical and national themes, as seen in *Bajo la piel* (1996). In addition to such issues, increasing restrictions to freedom of expression imposed by Fujimori's regime through the tightening of anti-terrorist legislation, created the need for more suggestive approaches to issues of social concern. The return to an explicit cinematic treatment of *Sendero* in Aguilar's *Paloma de Papel* (2003), and to themes of political violence, identity and contemporary social crisis in Méndez's *Días de Santiago* (2004) suggest not only that such topics continue to be important, but also that the freedom to explore them critically has been restored. The largely positive response to both films by

domestic audiences, and the debates that they provoked in the national media, is surely testament to that. Collectively, these films affirm the role of national cinema as mediator of memory, marker of social histories, and instrument of debate.

The relationship between these films and the Peruvian state is a complex one. While most of them received some support from the government via its legislative structures for cinema, it should be remembered that cinematic expression of a political crisis that threatened to destabilise the nation flew in the face of prevailing discourse that preferred to limit critical debate. Even *La boca del lobo*, although cautiously applauded by President García at the time of its release and an enormous hit domestically and internationally, was condemned by the Peruvian authorities more generally. They were concerned that the film criticised the brutality of counter-insurgency tactics, and revealed a lack of regard for impoverished social groups, at a time when the construction of a sense of national unity, homogenous identity and uncritical support for the state's mission to overcome the enemy was crucial. Throughout the 1990s, during the increasingly repressive regime of Alberto Fujimori, it became more and more difficult to challenge state strategy even though the conflict had officially ended. Fujimori's desire to maintain tight control led to the dismantling of democratic structures and practices, and ever tighter restrictions on freedom of expression. In fact, the state of emergency in several key rural areas was not removed until 2000 when the Fujimori government had crumbled amidst revelations of corruption.

On the relationship between national cinema and national identity, Emma Wilson makes the observation that 'cinema may provide us with identity images, yet it can also remind us that identities are unstable, change through time, location and encounters, have many

facets and are inherently unknowable'.⁵ Susan Hayward goes further in arguing that national cinemas 'should function as a *mise-en-scène* of scattered and dissembling identities'.⁶ The films discussed in this study, over a third of those produced in Peru during the period under discussion, seem to go some way towards fulfilling this brief. The potential for fiction cinema to draw attention, dramatically and compellingly, to those deep-rooted ethnic and class-based divisions that were part of the source of social tension in Peru would perhaps help explain why direct cinematic representations of the conflict in rural areas became fewer in number throughout the 1990s. Uncomfortable questions were inevitably raised about the historical domination and colonization of Peruvian 'national' identity by Lima (the centre), and its problematic relationship with Andean communities (marginalized, on the periphery), with its origins in the Spanish conquest of Peru in the sixteenth century, and perpetuated by a Lima-based ruling elite (whether military or civilian) since the country gained independence in 1821.

Such considerations might also have sparked a concern on the part of individual filmmakers not to be seen to set up challenges to the political status quo, nor to be labelled as a threat to national security. A situation of self-imposed censorship is likely to have sprung from a desire not to risk losing financial, political and popular support for future national film projects. This fear of restrictions to freedom of expression seems to gain new credence in the light of the details that have emerged of the manipulation of the mass media by Fujimori's own head of intelligence, Vladimir Montesinos, through substantial payments to those they needed to control.⁷

⁵ Wilson, p. 20.

⁶ Hayward, p. 101.

⁷ For further details of this phenomenon see Sally Bowen and Jane Holligan, *The Imperfect Spy: The Many Lives of Vladimiro Montesinos* (Lima: Peisa, 2003).

One of the generally agreed aims of any national cinema is to express and explore some aspect or aspects of national identity, an identity built in large part ‘on shared memories of some past or pasts’.⁸ All the films in this study achieve this to varying degrees through their exploration of the motives and consequences of Peru’s recent political violence. However, Hayward also states that while memory as treated by much national cinema ‘stands for collective memory, a shared culture, shared memories of a collective past [...] memory **also** means amnesia’.⁹ Citing Anthony Smith’s work on nationalism, she further notes that ‘the importance of national amnesia and getting one’s own history *wrong* [is essential] for the maintenance of national solidarity’.¹⁰ Smith’s assertion on amnesia and culture is particularly helpful when trying to understand the differing reception to the films under discussion in this project. By 1988, the year of the release of *La boca del lobo*, the political violence had spread to Lima and affected the daily lives of all its inhabitants, regardless of class or ethnic background. A film that debated such violence may not have been warmly welcomed by all, but the topic it portrayed was at the heart of public opinion, and freedom of expression was in any case largely supported by García’s relatively liberal *Aprista* government. By 1993, however, there had been a change of regime, of political structures and of national constitution following Fujimori’s *autogolpe*, and with that a move to an increasingly centralised and repressive mindset that brought the benefit of capturing a terrorist leader, but the disadvantage of restraints on civil liberties. Indeed, the Fujimori-led campaign of post-conflict regeneration aimed above all to wipe from the nation’s minds all memory of the increasingly ‘dirty’ aspects of the political violence in Peru, in particular the military’s counter-insurgency tactics which betrayed a frequent disregard for basic human rights

⁸ Hayward, p. 90.

⁹ Hayward, p. 90.

¹⁰ Smith cited by Hayward, p. 90.

and democratic freedoms. Nevertheless, neglected economically by the state, national cinema seems to have enjoyed greater freedom to keep the memory of the conflict alive than most other mass media forms which were restricted from doing so by Fujimori's repressive, fraudulent and corrupt regime. 'National amnesia' regarding the chaotic and brutal role of the military in much of the violence since 1980 was strongly encouraged, for the sake of national solidarity and social stability. In such a political context, which also involved a change to the country's economic systems and an abolition of the very law established to promote national cinema, it is hardly surprising therefore that films such as Eyde's *La vida es una sola*, that explicitly exposed the 'masquerade of unity'¹¹ of Peruvian society, and drew attention to structures of power and knowledge that appeared to position the indigenous communities as inferior victims, would undergo such a rough ride from audiences and authorities. This episode in turn provoked anxiety amongst fellow film-makers who continued to rely on both for their professional survival. Nevertheless, the desire to explore an issue of major national concern on cinema screens did not diminish, and, as has been shown above, national film-makers returned to it in different ways over the next decade.

Above all, the films addressed in this study share an overriding concern to look back at a recent and very painful period of the nation's history, and to shape narratives that provoke uncomfortable questions about, for example, the relationship between state and society; the apparently integral role played by violence and a certain macho masculinity in the national image; the subordination of certain cultural groups; and the divided nature of Peruvian society. These are questions which remain pertinent to the contemporary Peruvian situation and which cannot themselves be consigned to history. Indeed, the blurring of fact and fiction in many of the films, so often the target of

¹¹ Hayward, p. 101.

criticism from critics and audiences, seems to reinforce the notion that we ought to move beyond consideration of these films as relatively straightforward works of social realism, and instead view their protagonists as more broadly symbolic of a general and ongoing desire for change in the face of social, political and cultural crisis. Thus, actual massacres, such as the one at Soccos implicitly depicted in *La boca del lobo*, become narrative reference points for films that have more to say about the nature of violence and its key role in Peru's patriarchal structure. Moreover, central characters, whether fictional like Vitín Luna, Florinda, Jeremías, Gregorio, Juliana, Corso, Juan, and Santiago, or based on real people such as La Gringa and María Elena Moyano, become icons for resistance to violence and a desire for social change. Santiago in particular, in the most recent film addressed by this study, draws attention to the breakdown of traditional patriarchal order, a certain crisis of masculinity, and a perception of the military as ineffective in protecting its citizens, maintaining social order and ensuring equality of opportunity for all. That the endings of most of the films are ambiguous in tone suggests that the journey towards change is far from over, but the rejection of violence as a viable and effective instrument for reshaping national identity is satisfying nonetheless. Peru's national cinema seems thus to have played an important role in recuperating, revisiting and rewriting events from the nation's past. Indeed, while struggling to contend with its own identity crisis, national cinema seems to have had a significant impact on the shaping of a new sense of national identity/ies, in which difference is at least acknowledged if not yet embraced, and violence as a strategy for change is at least debated if not effaced entirely.

Despite the gradual shift towards a more diverse, heterogeneous and inclusive national image, it must be acknowledged that most national cinema production remains in the hands of the white Lima-based elite; most of the nation's commercial cinemas are based

in affluent areas of Lima; and most spectators hail from the more economically secure sectors of urban society. Nevertheless, audiences at the important network of cine-clubs and cultural centres that exist in most of the country's larger towns and where prices are usually lower, are often more mixed. Moreover, some directors, most recently Aguilar with *Paloma*, have made important efforts to take their films around the country, thus increasing access to them, stimulating debate about the issues depicted, and encouraging interest in film as a cultural activity for all. Meanwhile, an interesting new 'movement' of indigenous film-making has begun to develop in the Andes, following in the footsteps of the *Cine de Escuela de Cusco* that was so influential in the 1950s and 1960s. These directors have themselves embarked upon tackling pertinent social issues in ways that blend magical with social realism, drawing on local approaches to storytelling.¹² The task of critically debating the specific trauma of the *Sendero* conflict on cinema screens has been a heavy burden for those few film-makers who have somehow defied the odds to do so. Some may qualify such activity, in a nation with more pressing economic concerns, as a pointless indulgence that achieves little of great consequence. Meanwhile, others (such as veteran film-maker Robles Godoy) celebrate the very existence of a diverse, critically engaged and politically committed national cinema, however fragile its legislative and economic structures, as a symbol of democracy and enlightened modernity.

Cuando se estrena una película peruana para mí es un día de fiesta, no por la película en sí sino porque vivo en un país donde hay cine, donde hay libertad de expresión cinematográfica.¹³

¹² Film-makers included in this informal 'movement' are Flaviano Quispe Chaiña, whose debut feature *El huerfanito* (2004) was seen by over 100,000 people nationwide, and Palito Ortega Matute, best known in rural Peru for his horror film *La maldición de las jarjachas* (2003). One review article described Ortega as 'el realizador de las películas más taquilleras en la sierra central, donde la violencia terrorista golpeó más fuerte. Sus historias son una catarsis para un pueblo herido.' See David Hidalgo Vega, 'En las butacas del terror', *El Comercio*, 8 August 2004, p. 32.

¹³ Ricardo Bedoya and Isaac León Frías, 'Entrevista con Armando Robles Godoy', *La Gran Ilusión*, 6 (1996), 94-106 (p.104).

Nevertheless, in spite of the counter-hegemonic intentions of the films discussed here, and the impact they have had in terms of provoking public debate, overall it would appear that together they contribute to further reinforcing the notion that violence and Peruvian national identity are inescapably and inevitably connected. Although the message from *Alias la gringa* and *Anda, corre, vuela ...* appears to be that peaceful change and harmonious relationships based on tolerance and understanding should be possible, in fact their characters only achieve this by operating outside the conventions of authority. Meanwhile, the more successful and acclaimed productions *La boca del lobo* and *Días de Santiago*, whose young protagonists are failed by those around them, leave the overriding impression of a society scarred by conflict, of a divided and fragmented population, and of a nation still struggling with its own complex processes of identity formation.