

Chapter Three

Political Violence and Peruvian National Identity

Section 1: Introduction

I am inclined to think that conflict [between Incaism and colonialism], that antagonism, is and will be for many years the decisive factor, sociologically and politically, in Peruvian life.¹

This second contextualising chapter provides an overview of the formation of the Peruvian nation-state and the development of national identity, noting the inextricable role played by violence in their development. It concentrates mainly on the emergence of the guerrilla movement known as *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) from the 1960s, and its campaign of terror from 1980 until 1992. It also considers the nature, aims and outcomes of the counter-insurgency strategies deployed by the three governing regimes during that time: Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1980-85); Alan García Pérez (1985-1990); and Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). It also takes into account the latter period of Fujimori's regime when anti-terrorist legislation remained in place and democratic rights continued to be restricted. While focusing attention on Peru's violent history, it is perhaps pertinent to bear in mind the concern expressed by Nestor García Canclini that 'Latin America continues to be interesting only as a continent of a violent nature, of an archaism irreducible to modern nationality, an earth fertilised by an art conceived as tribal or national dreaming and not as thinking about the global and the complex'.² Nevertheless, the effect of the latest long episode of conflict on this nation's sense of self, as well as its deep-rooted social divisions and difficulties, calls for a closer look at some of the social, political and cultural circumstances that sparked such events.

¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. by Marjory Uriguidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 201.

² Nestor García Canclini, 'Remaking Passports: Visual Thought in the Debate on Multiculturalism' in *Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff. (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 372-381 (p. 374).

Moreover, the fact that the majority of the few films that were made between 1988 and 2004 are themselves concerned with aspects of the *Sendero* versus state political struggle would appear to suggest that the topic remains one of fundamental concern to Peruvian society, both in reflecting and in shaping images of the nation.

Section 2: A National History of Aggression

For Alberto Flores Galindo, writing at the end of the turbulent and crisis-ridden 1980s and just before his own premature death, there were two main ways of approaching and understanding the development of national identity in a nation as geographically, culturally, economically and ethnically diverse as Peru with raw scars of its colonial past imprinted upon the hierarchical institutions dominated by a social elite. In the first instance, he reminds the reader of the view held by some that the Republican state system set out to impose a sense of coherent, unified and homogeneous nationhood on its disempowered citizens, rising up ‘sobre una tradición en la que se encontraban los tres siglos del Virreinato y, más atrás, los imperios andinos’, despite the flaws apparent in its political apparatus.³ However, he declares a preference for an alternative view of national identity formation that privileges the more active force of the Peruvian people, including the disadvantaged and the marginalized. In this regard he argues that ‘podríamos decir que la nación – si identificamos esta palabra con los habitantes del país – se ha constituido en lucha contra el Estado’.⁴ He emphasises the persistent relationship of conflict that has existed between civil society and political institutions in his country and casts a large part of the blame for Peru’s history of violence on the ‘monopolio oligárquico del poder’ as well as on a flawed tradition of authoritarian

³ Alberto Flores Galindo, *Los rostros de la plebe* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2001), p. 193.

⁴ Flores Galindo, p. 194.

democracy that denies political participation to all but the elite.⁵ It is therefore important to investigate the ways in which the films chosen for discussion explore the nature of various acts of resistance to oppression, whether on the part of *Sendero* militants in the name of social revolution, Andean *campesinos* on behalf of their traditional way of life, or individual soldiers, prisoners, street children, or community leaders in defence of basic human rights and freedom of expression. Accordingly, some thoughts are offered on the history and development of violence in Peru and in particular on the *Sendero* conflict.

In his study of the underlying reasons for the insurgency campaign, Nelson Manrique records a debate held at a youth centre in Lima in the late 1980s, during which one of the participants – a priest – stated that:

El Perú es una sociedad que nace de la violencia. Hay la tentación de derrumbar todo. Usar la violencia para eliminar la violencia.⁶

He thus points to a vicious circle of aggression that would need to be broken if peace, stability and equality were to be achieved. Jorge Aliaga, in his study on terrorism in Peru, is more emphatic. For him, ‘terror in Peru is a continuum through which the relations of the oppressors and the oppressed have been expressed throughout the entire history of the country since the arrival of Europeans in America’.⁷ Indeed, he argues that the execution of Inca Atahualpa by Pizarro’s forces in 1532 symbolized the foundation of the Peruvian state itself and that tensions between Western and

⁵ Flores Galindo, p. 194.

⁶ Nelson Manrique, ‘The War for the Central Sierra’, in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*, ed. by Steve J. Stern (London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 193-223 (p. 284).

⁷ Jorge Aliaga, *Terrorism in Peru* (Edinburgh: Jananti, 1995), pp. 11-12.

indigenous cultures that became the main feature of Peru's post-conquest history originated from this first unresolved dispute.⁸

Of course, the use of extreme violence to claim authority goes back further than the European conquest of Latin America, since the pre-Columbian civilisations that ruled parts of Peru did so by eliminating the previous occupiers by force. Nevertheless, Peru's history since the Spanish conquest, and in particular since the battles for Independence from 1821-4, has been significantly marked by frontier wars with neighbouring states and internal struggles based largely on economic and ethnic differences.⁹ It seems therefore that conflict such as the one with *Sendero* was almost inevitable, as the archaeologist-cum-serial killer suggests in Lombardi's *Bajo la piel* (1996), forming part of a seemingly unbreakable chain of violent attempts to change the social structure in Peru and remove those in power. As Flores Galindo argues, 'de esta manera, las imposiciones violentas y el empleo del terror por parte de Sendero Luminoso tienen un sustento en esta sociedad y su historia'.¹⁰ Meanwhile, more conservative thinkers were angry that the conflict with *Sendero* risked being interpreted simplistically as a relatively straightforward Marxist revolution on behalf of the poor, 'como la lucha

⁸ Aliaga notes that 'Atahualpa was initially promised his freedom, in return for one room full of gold and two of silver which the Inca provided' (p. 11). However, Pizarro feared rebellion and seven months later Atahualpa was publicly garrotted.

⁹ For example: in 1780-82 a massive rebellion led by Túpac Amaru II claimed 100,000 lives; in 1814 a rebellion against the crown erupted in Cuzco; the War of the Pacific (1879-83) during which Peru and Bolivia fought in alliance against Chile and lost two provinces to the latter; in 1885 there was a rebellion of indigenous people in the northern highlands of Ancash; the early 1900s were marked by strikes and violent protests; a popular uprising in Trujillo in 1932 was severely repressed by the armed forces who executed up to 6,000 local residents who were suspected of giving armed support to a banned socialist party. See Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, 'Peru: Soldiers, Oligarchs and Indians' in *Modern Latin America*, 6th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 181-220 (p. 203).

¹⁰ Flores Galindo, p. 188.

contra España hasta la independencia; contra el imperialismo británico en el siglo XIX; y contra el imperialismo yanqui en el presente'.¹¹ Nevertheless, numerous rigorous studies have revealed that there were specific reasons for the emergence and surprising longevity of this particular group and indeed Steve J. Stern stresses that '*Sendero*'s capacity to dominate the 1980s ... fell far short of inevitability, and its unique features would prove important over the course of the war'.¹² The origins, formation, and ideological standpoint of the key revolutionary movement that created the social, political and cultural crises to which the films analysed here variously respond are reviewed in the section that follows.

Section 3: The Emergence of *Sendero Luminoso*

In May 1980, as Peru returned to democracy after twelve years of military rule, a fundamentalist pro-Maoist splinter group of the Peruvian Communist Party, more familiarly known as *Sendero Luminoso*, broke into a polling station in the Andean town of Chuschi, Ayacucho, and destroyed the ballot boxes there. This act of aggression signalled the onset of twelve years of armed struggle which evolved into a "dirty war" between the military and the insurgents that persisted through three democratically elected presidencies, until the capture of the group's leader, Abimael Guzmán, in 1992. As Manrique states, 'así comenzó una guerra cuyo objetivo era derrocar al Estado peruano, como el primer paso de una revolución que liquidaría el sistema capitalista

¹¹ Chirinos cited by Víctor Peralta Ruiz, *Sendero Luminoso y la prensa, 1980-1994* (Lima: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos, Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 2000), pp. 238-9.

¹² Steve J. Stern, 'Introduction to Part I', in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

para instaurar el comunismo a escala mundial'.¹³ However, the genesis of the guerrilla movement can be traced back to a period when years of economic disparity, racial prejudice and deepening distress had already taken their toll, culminating in peasant riots in the 1950s and 1960s. Ill-conceived land reforms on the part of General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-75), introduced during the 1970s, caused further pain for rural communities by eliminating the land-owning elite who had at least acted as intermediaries between state and society. Hence, as Mauceri suggests, 'a radicalized base sympathetic to Maoist discourse and practice already existed by the time *Sendero* launched its armed activity' as a result of rapid and uneven social, political and economic change in the preceding two decades.¹⁴ Charismatic university professor Abimael Guzmán exploited the sense of intense disillusionment these state policies provoked and the political vacuum they left in their wake. He also took advantage of the effects of the 1960s expansion of university education throughout the provinces, which had raised expectations amongst the poor for a better future whilst also engendering a heightened awareness of the persistent ethnic and cultural divisions that characterized the nation. He reminded them thus of the dominant conception of Peruvian social structure as 'a multitude of binary relations of dependence and domination ... [in which] ... Indianness ... is defined as the low end of a dependency chain on nearly all dimensions of unequal relations'.¹⁵

Guzmán promoted himself as the liberator of indigenous Peruvians from the darkness of exploitation and oppression, and drew on elements of Maoist and Marxist ideology that

¹³ Nelson Manrique, *El tiempo del miedo: la violencia política en el Perú 1980-1996* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁴ Philip Mauceri, *State under Siege: Development and Policy-Making in Peru* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 119-20.

¹⁵ Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto, 1997), pp. 73-4.

he then adapted to the *Sendero* cause. Simon Strong highlights what many senderologists have perceived as the ‘structural similarities of Maoism and Andean culture’ which were enhanced to increase the appeal of the *Sendero* mission to the indigenous of Peru, who were the group’s first target for recruitment.¹⁶ In the first instance, Strong suggests that the reconstruction of the Shining Path Party after the split of its members from the national Communist Party, and its declared role as liberator, mirrored ‘the myth of the anticipated return of the Inkari, ... said to be putting his body together again below the ground in preparation for settling accounts with Pizarro’.¹⁷ Furthermore, as with the Andean belief in *pachacuti*, the *Sendero* revolution was presented by Guzmán and his followers as an ending of one era and the beginning of another, and a complete upheaval of the old order.¹⁸ Structural links were strengthened by *Sendero*’s strategically allegorical use of colour: red, the main colour of the movement’s flag, holds significant connotations within Andean culture, where it is associated with the sun, day and fire, the latter of which is considered to be a purifying force. For *Sendero*, this colour was also specifically symbolic of armed struggle and contrasted directly with black as representative of the corrupt and reactionary forces of power.¹⁹ Finally, carefully selected symbols were used in propaganda leaflets aimed

¹⁶ Simon Strong, *Shining Path* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 78.

¹⁷ Strong, p. 80.

¹⁸ Strong states that ‘according to Indian chroniclers of the seventeenth century, each of the five ages [of the Andean world] lasted a thousand years and comprised two halves, which were heralded by a *pachacuti*. The *pachacuti* was both the end of one world and the start of the next, a cosmic upheaval’. See Strong, p. 79.

¹⁹ The colour black in Andean culture represents rain/night/moon. Note that Andean belief stresses the interdependence of the two sets of elements for a harmonious state, whereas ‘in Maoism the two principal opposites resolve their difference and disappear in the violent birth of a new order’. See Strong, p. 82. *Sendero* ultimately distinguished itself from Andean culture through its determined emphasis on conflict and destruction, even of the natural world.

primarily at the illiterate and semi-literate population. The image of the sun was particularly important since it was already the classic Inca symbol of truth, strength and authority. By appropriating the symbol for his own purposes, Guzmán seemed to suggest that his authority was 'legitimate in the same way that of the Inca was', and used these associations to enhance his status amongst the indigenous populations of the *sierra*.²⁰

In his study of violence and contemporary society in Peru, Víctor Vich endorses Strong's view that part of the appeal of *Sendero* was its promise of a possible 'reaparición de un mesianismo andino muy consciente del carácter injusto de la historia peruana y las posibilidades milenarias de su inversión'.²¹ He further concurs that the structural violence and brutal economic inequality that had become endemic within Peruvian society would have fanned the flames of opposition to the governing regime in Lima. Vich goes on to outline the four basic features of *Sendero* that distinguish it from other resistance groups and which made it such a threat to the survival of the state and its institutions. Firstly, he refers to *Sendero*'s aim to recruit young militants who would commit themselves entirely to the formation of a new social structure, and echoes Strong again in emphasising the group's vision of a completely new era for Peru. Secondly, he describes its strict patriarchal structure, its denial of individuality or differentiation, and its insistence that only by belonging to the party would the masses acquire the desired capacity for agency. Thirdly, he stresses the cult of death that was central to *Sendero*'s achievements, arguing that according to the group's bloody logic,

²⁰ Strong, p. 83. Note also that Guzmán was referred to by some Quechua-speaking communities as *Puka Inti* (Red Sun). Red Sun was also the name given to Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution.

²¹ Víctor Vich, *El caníbal es el otro: violencia y cultura en el Perú contemporáneo* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2002), p. 19.

‘la muerte es el sacrificio indispensable para conseguir un fin que ... es entendido como algo fuera del sujeto’.²² Finally, Vich discusses the pedagogical discourse that was deployed as the strategy to ensure belief in Guzmán as a strong and powerful leader, and as a way of engendering a sense of the movement as ‘el único espacio de “verdad” y “conocimiento”’.²³ As Stern puts it, the group’s ‘horrifying will to violence ... [and] ... amazing capacity to build utopian dogmatism and contemptuousness into an effective political war machine’ combined to create a uniquely effective force.²⁴ The ways in which individual films interrogate the cultural, ideological and philosophical tenets of *Sendero*’s mission via direct and indirect portrayals of group members and events are hence reviewed and analysed in this study.

Several of the most significant events of the conflict have been used as the inspiration for the films featured in this study. These include specific acts of civilian slaughter in the Andes at the height of the battle for the *sierra*; assassinations of community leaders on the outskirts of Lima as the insurgency campaign moved its focus to the capital; prison riots and escapes; and military reprisals. Others draw upon some of the devastating social consequences of the intense violence, from urban migration and life for orphaned street children to family and community breakdown. All look back on an episode in of recent national history that has had a crucial and lasting effect on how the nation envisions and frames itself to the outside world. The key aspects of this struggle between *Sendero* and state are reviewed so as to demonstrate how the conflict developed and the extent to which different sectors of Peruvian society were variously affected.

²² Vich, p. 30-1.

²³ Vich, p. 32.

²⁴ Stern, p. 2.

Once armed activity had begun, the group's expansion throughout the country was swift, especially in the region of Ayacucho, which was the focus of the first phase of the guerrilla campaign. By 1982, *Sendero* stepped up its mission to 'liberate' rural parts of Peru. As Ponciano del Pino points out, 'the idea was to expel the state from the guerrilla zones, and to mount its first People's Committees as a new governing structure'.²⁵ First, however, *Sendero* initiated a campaign to eliminate all trace of the state, the bourgeoisie and the semi-feudal system from these rural communities, starting with the elimination of their traditional structures of authority, which they felt imitated and reinforced hierarchical models of the state. This strategy of aggression was potentially at odds with the prevailing political mood since, as Degregori et al point out, 'the period of democratic transition (1978-80) and the restoration of municipal elections in November 1980 [had] helped revive political life' throughout the country and the victories of several left-wing candidates had renewed hope for social change.²⁶ Nevertheless, *Sendero* set out to project an image of itself as the only group that could effect the extreme change required to eradicate the inequalities its leaders perceived as being entrenched in Peruvian political and social structures. So unshakeable was their belief that, as Vich suggests, anyone who openly disagreed with the insurgent mission put themselves at risk of execution for implicit collusion with the state.²⁷

²⁵ Ponciano del Pino H., 'Family, Culture and "Revolution": Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso' in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*, ed. by Steve J. Stern (London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 158-192 (p. 162).

²⁶ Carlos Iván Degregori, José Coronel and Ponciano del Pino H., 'Government, Citizenship and Democracy: A Regional Perspective', in *Fujimori's Peru: The Political Economy*, ed. by John Crabtree and Jim Thomas (London: ILAS, 1998), pp. 243-264 (p. 250).

²⁷ Vich, p. 78.

Belaúnde's government neglected initially to take the movement seriously, considering any activity to be the work of a few rogue delinquents. As Stern points out, 'the declaration of armed insurgency in 1980 seemed absurdly out of step with the turn of the polity and the leftist opposition toward competitive electoral politics' and few were willing to imagine that an apparently archaic Maoist sect would 'prove so able to wage war, organise a social base, and read the flow of history'.²⁸ However, in late 1982, when the number of fatalities across the central *sierra* began to rise dramatically, the armed forces were ordered to take a leading role in the counter-insurgency struggle.²⁹ As Peralta Ruiz reminds us, 'fue en ese momento cuando el conflicto se reconvirtió en el escenario propio de una "guerra sucia"', by which he specifically meant that indiscriminate acts of violence were to be perpetrated against the population as a whole and particularly against those living in remote rural areas where *senderistas* were thought to be based.³⁰ Peralta further explains that 'la "guerra sucia" era un concepto referido al uso ilegal de la fuerza física por parte de la policía y los militares, por lo que aparecía íntimamente asociado con un terrorismo del Estado'.³¹ It was a symptom of the lack of understanding of rural, Andean communities by the state and the population based in Lima. The discourse of "dirty war" also related to the actions of *Sendero*, but it is the controversial strategies and actions of the state that have become most closely associated with the term.

²⁸ Stern, p. 3.

²⁹ In the worst-affected province of Ayacucho, for example, the number of victims of conflict rose from around 100 in 1982 to 1500 in 1983 and over 2500 in 1984. See Manrique, 'The War for the Central Sierra', p. 194.

³⁰ Peralta Ruiz, p. 60.

³¹ Peralta Ruiz, p. 61.

The years 1983-4 marked the peak of the first counter-insurgency campaign that saw the indigenous peasantry caught between two violent forces. As Manrique points out, ‘more than half the fatalities suffered [between 1980 and 1991] in Ayacucho happened in just two years, 1983 and 1984 ... [when] the administration of Fernando Belaúnde put the Peruvian armed forces in charge of suppressing the *senderista* uprising’.³² Moreover, there were several catastrophic events in 1983 that highlighted the difficulty in distinguishing between victim and killer, a further key unifying thread of the films chosen for discussion. A group of journalists was murdered in Uchuraccay in mysterious circumstances while investigating the background of the conflict for their various publications; over forty *campesinos* were massacred in the highland village of Soccos by the armed forces on dubious charges of collaboration with *Sendero*; and the Andean community of Lucamarca was brutally attacked by neighbouring peasants supported and encouraged by *Sendero*. The concept of victimhood amongst rural Peruvians became highly problematic during this time since many villagers did become involved in the insurgency in some way, whether willingly or by force, as sympathisers, contributors, or as recruits. As Vich explains:

A diferencia de otros países latinoamericanos donde la represión militar sabía quiénes eran los enemigos a combatir, en el caso de los Andes peruanos, y dada la consciente invisibilidad de SL desarrollada como táctica de guerra, nos encontramos ante una especie de “zona de nadie” donde el grueso de la población campesina fue posicionada como sospechosa por los dos bandos enfrentados.³³

By early 1984, however, Belaúnde’s regime recognised the need for a more developmental approach to the struggle that would aim to address the underlying social and economic reasons for the violence. Furthermore, as Crabtree points out, after a year

³² Manrique, ‘The War for the Central Sierra’, p. 193.

³³ Vich, p. 47.

of controversial and highly publicised attacks that left many civilians dead, ‘increasing concern about human rights violations in the Emergency Zone ... coupled with growing scepticism about the results being achieved, led to pressure to adopt other methods’.³⁴ Part of the new strategy included the appointment of General Huamán, whose task it was to communicate with peasant communities and to win back their political support via food donations and community development projects.³⁵ However, when Huamán began to take control of local projects and to determine the allocation of resources unilaterally, the strategy faltered since it seemed to resemble the centralised authoritarian structure that *Sendero* insisted should be destroyed if conditions for the *campesinos* and other excluded groups were really to improve. He was dismissed in August 1984 amidst reports of escalating violations of human rights, and rumours of ‘institutional rivalries between the three branches of the armed forces, and between the three independent divisions of the police force’.³⁶ Meanwhile, *Sendero*’s own capacity and support base were consistently underestimated by the state such that the military was rarely adequately prepared for its mission.

Between Huamán’s dismissal and the next presidential elections, there was a period of great uncertainty regarding the next state strategy. In 1985, hopes were lifted by the victory of the leader of the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA), the party founded in 1924 that offered a left-wing critique of Peruvian society including a

³⁴ John Crabtree, *Peru under García: An Opportunity Lost* (London/Oxford: Macmillan, St Anthony’s College, 1992), p. 104.

³⁵ Crabtree explains that General Huamán’s ‘own *serrano* social background and ability to speak Quechua [was supposed to facilitate] a more communicative style’ and to help establish valuable links with the previously excluded peasant communities. See Crabtree, *Peru under García*, p. 105.

³⁶ Crabtree, p. 106.

commitment to the ‘redemption of “Indo-America”’ that promised to take the heat out of *Sendero*’s own opposition to colonialist practices.³⁷ The moderately reformist and charismatic Alan García Pérez promised ‘dynamic leadership, social reform, and a new economic nationalism’.³⁸ He won with a resounding majority and enjoyed the support, at last, of the armed forces after decades of highly antagonistic relations between *APRA* and the military following the aforementioned massacre in Trujillo in 1932. His inaugural speech led people to believe that his approach to *Sendero* would be one that included a renewed respect for human rights and a commitment to break the vicious circle of relentless violence. As Muñoz reports, García famously declared that, in his view, “‘to struggle against barbarism it is not necessary to fall into barbarism””, anticipating an alternative to bloody suppression.³⁹ He established a Peace Commission, advocated dialogue with *Sendero* leaders, and got rid of the military chiefs who had been responsible for massacres of civilians in Ayacucho.⁴⁰ However, just four months later the same Peace Commission was in chaos due to a failure to allocate sufficient resources to address the problem adequately. Moreover, by the late 1980s, the country’s economic recession had spiralled out of control, and *Sendero* shifted its focus from the *sierra* to the more densely populated coast, with the capital as its ultimate goal. The group began to infiltrate unions and urban community groups, and targeted government

³⁷ Skidmore and Smith explain that *APRA*’s original mission included ‘resistance to Yankee imperialism; political unity of Latin America (Indo America); nationalization of land and industry; internationalization of the Panama Canal; and ... solidarity with the oppressed around the world’. See Skidmore and Smith, ‘Peru: Soldiers, Oligarchs and Indians’, p. 201-3.

³⁸ Skidmore and Smith, p. 214.

³⁹ García cited by Hortensia Muñoz, ‘Human Rights and Social Referents: The Construction of New Sensibilities’, in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*, ed. by Steve J. Stern (London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 447-469 (p. 451).

⁴⁰ Crabtree, *Peru under García*, p. 109.

officials in a wave of assassinations that took the administration by surprise. Their declared intention was to ‘unmask the pretence of democratic institutions’ and to undermine thereby the memory of García’s early popularity.⁴¹ Meanwhile, it was clear that García’s ‘*desarrollista* strategy ... had not produced results’, and that most in the military were more keen on pursuing an approach that combined political negotiation with military action.⁴² Perhaps most significant of all in signalling the desperation of the counter-insurgency campaign was the emergence of death squads in 1988. Ironically, the first known assassination came just days after García’s annual Independence Day speech during which he appealed for ‘unity against terrorism, and for a national crusade against *Sendero Luminoso*’, concealing the fact that he had just approved an illegal strategy that would threaten to divide an already fragmented nation further.⁴³

By the time that the little-known independent candidate Alberto Fujimori was elected President in 1990, the general perception was that *Sendero* was steadily advancing toward its goal of bringing down the state, while in its effort to win the war ‘the military had become one of the world’s worst human rights abusers’.⁴⁴ Neopopulist leader Fujimori was famously successful in bringing *Sendero* under control by implementing a number of complementary measures.⁴⁵ He improved military salaries and centralised

⁴¹ Crabtree, p. 113.

⁴² Crabtree, p. 201.

⁴³ Cited by Crabtree, p. 205. That first assassination was of the lawyer acting for *Sendero* leader Osman Morote.

⁴⁴ Peter Flindell Klarén, *Peru: Society and Nationhood in the Andes* (New York: OUP, 2000), p. 407.

⁴⁵ John Crabtree, ‘Neo-populism and the Fujimori Phenomenon’, in *Fujimori’s Peru: The Political Economy*, ed. by John Crabtree and Jim Thomas (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998), pp. 7-23. Crabtree uses the term ‘neopopulism’ to refer to Fujimori’s governing style and policies, describing them as ‘a traditional type of response to new conditions’, based on strong leadership, rejection of existing structures

decision-making so as to reduce internal conflict and to boost morale.⁴⁶ He ensured increased resources were given to intelligence agencies and emphasized their role in the counter-insurgency campaign, resulting in the capture of many of the most high-ranking *senderista* leaders and their computer records. Perhaps most importantly for the longer term, he reinforced support for the civil defence patrols (*rondas campesinas*) that are depicted to varying degrees in some of the films under discussion. These patrols worked alongside the military to resist and reduce *Sendero* attacks, while also fulfilling an intermediary political role between state and rural communities. As Mauceri observes, ‘this mobilising capacity [...] ultimately proved the most successful element in the Fujimori effort to defeat *Sendero*’.⁴⁷ Manrique confirms that these patrols were of vital importance to the counter-insurgency effort, since as well as supporting the military they also exposed the main problem for *Sendero* in terms of its relations with the *campesinos*. By enabling the peasants to reject the insurgency with such determination, the patrols revealed a ‘disjuncture between a profoundly vertical and authoritarian political project, on the one hand, and a peasantry with a long tradition of independent, solid, and free communities, on the other’.⁴⁸

The momentous capture of Abimael Guzmán in September 1992 was the highlight of Fujimori’s strategy, especially since it fragmented the insurgent group and removed its key decision-maker, while also helping to dispel the memory of a wave of bloody

and politicians, and the establishment of an unmediated relationship between a political leader and the ‘populus’. See Crabtree, p. 22.

⁴⁶ In April 1992, having harnessed the support of the military, Fujimori reorganized the judiciary and ‘struck down his own government in what became known as an *auto-golpe*’, sparking an abrupt return to authoritarian rule. See Skidmore and Smith, p. 217.

⁴⁷ Mauceri, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Manrique, ‘The War for the Central Sierra’, p. 218.

attacks on the capital between April and July of that year.⁴⁹ *Sendero* was further weakened by Guzmán's surprise signing of a peace proposal in 1994 in which he appealed to his comrades to end the violence. The President's strategy and ultimate triumph were accompanied by a new approach to press reporting of *Sendero* activities, and public opinion was steadily shaped by the media in such a way as to ensure support for Fujimori, however unorthodox the methods used by his newly centralised armed forces to suppress the rebels. Attempts to offer a different, more critical picture were rare, in large part due to the introduction of new anti-terrorist legislation that made it more dangerous for journalists to debate openly the conflict with *Sendero*. As David Wood points out, 'in November 1991 [... as part of] a package of 126 presidential decrees prepared under [Fujimori's] extraordinary legislative powers [...] any Peruvian citizen publishing articles critical of the counter-insurgency campaign in the foreign press would be charged with treason'.⁵⁰ Just five months later, Fujimori closed down Congress without warning and announced a radical reorganization of the judiciary. As Skidmore and Smith point out, 'he struck down his own government in what became known as an *auto-golpe*, or "auto-coup," made possible only because of solid military

⁴⁹ Such events in 1992 included the killing of forty *Sendero* prisoners in dubious circumstances; the subsequent terrorist attack on Miraflores; and the bombing of a TV station in July, leaving 250 civilians dead. The Miraflores event was, according to Manrique, a profound misjudgement on the part of *Sendero*, for whom the affluent district of Lima symbolized white exploitation of the masses. In the event, there was an outpouring of solidarity with the victims, and people throughout Peru felt affected regardless of their cultural difference. *Sendero* appeared more cruel than ever as images of suffering were shown on the mass media. The mayor's appeal for peace and reconciliation also damaged the insurgent campaign since it broke the vicious circle of hate and highlighted the futility of violence. Paradoxically, Miraflores became a focal point for the nation's grief and anger, and after the attack it gradually changed into 'un símbolo de integración social'. See Manrique, 'The War for the Central Sierra', p. 196.

⁵⁰ David Wood, 'The Peruvian press under recent authoritarian regimes, with special reference to the *autogolpe* of President Fujimori', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 19 (2000), 17-32 (p. 17).

backing'.⁵¹ Peru thus became the first Latin American country to slip back into authoritarian rule, and democratic rights were gradually eroded over the remainder of the decade.

Section 4: Reporting and Remembering Violence

In terms of specific examples of press reporting, the leading conservative daily *El Comercio* insisted that Fujimori, the police and the intelligence services deserved the highest praise for the capture of the *Sendero* leader, regardless of rumours of dubious military practice elsewhere. Nevertheless, details of violations committed by the armed forces were occasionally reported by the same newspaper. For example, just one year after Guzmán's imprisonment, a discovery was made of a mass grave containing the remains of a professor and eight students from the *Universidad de La Cantuta* in Lima. These victims were already suspected of having been kidnapped in 1991 by a military commando group, and confirmation of this in the press reopened a thorny public debate about 'la institucionalización de la "guerra sucia" en Perú'.⁵² Even those who were most supportive of Fujimori's tactics were aware of the need not to lapse into triumphalist discourse given the fact that some of the revolutionary group remained at large, attacks might continue, and acts of anti-subversion might have to be repeated, ideally with a degree of national consensus. Nevertheless, the dominant discourse was one of support for Fujimori's approach, no doubt aided by the substantial bribes that were eventually exposed by political opponents just as the President was fighting for an unprecedented third term in office. In this context, then, and bearing in mind the existence of anti-terrorist legislation already established by the Belaúnde regime in 1981 which specifically warned against the projection of sympathies towards groups such as

⁵¹ Skidmore and Smith, p. 217.

⁵² Peralta Ruiz, p. 229.

Sendero that threatened the stability of the nation-state, most of the films under discussion in this study offer a bold challenge to the formidable restrictions to freedom of expression that prevailed during the 1980s and 1990s.⁵³ Only Aguilar's *Paloma de papel* (2003) and Méndez's *Días de Santiago* (2004) were made after the emergency measures were lifted in 2000 by Valentín Paniagua's interim government, and even then the same classification and approval processes applied.

During his brief spell in charge, Paniagua oversaw the establishment of the *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR)*, which was given a remit to investigate the two decades of political violence and in particular all instances of human rights abuses. Questions and concerns about the excesses committed by both *Sendero* and the armed forces are raised by each of the films in one way or another, and form another key thread to the analyses. Muñoz notes that before the conflict, the Peruvian people had not 'perceived fully their own condition as citizens in a political community with corresponding civil rights'.⁵⁴ However, as the 1980 elections returned the country to a democracy of sorts, the awareness of human rights discourses gradually took hold and organizations based locally and overseas kept a close eye on the actions of Peru's governing regimes as well as on the devastation caused by *Sendero* itself. The *CVR*

⁵³ The prohibition of films for screening in Peru has not officially been authorized since legislation was passed in 1981 to coincide with a return to democracy, but life has been made difficult for directors whose work has been considered politically provocative, as explored in the analyses of Lombardi's *La boca del lobo* (1988) and Eyde's *La vida es una sola* (1993). Perla Anaya offers a detailed study of cinema legislation in Peru since the first films were screened there, and points out that indirect censorship has been used against films considered to contain 'contenido ofensivo, según la Junta de Clasificación de Películas'. See Perla Anaya, *Censura y promoción en el cine*, p. 97. For example, as was the case with Eyde's film, the whole approval process can be dragged out for so long as to dissuade distributors and exhibitors from dealing with it, especially if the media debate accompanying these actions works against the film.

⁵⁴ Muñoz, p. 447.

presented its final report in 2003 in which it identified by name some 32,000 people who died as a result of the *Sendero* conflict. Sociologist and historian Nelson Manrique, who was a member of the committee and whose studies on violence and Peruvian identity have been important to this project, reported that an estimated 69,000 people in total died or disappeared, double all previous estimates. Of these, the study attributes 54% of the deaths to *Sendero Luminoso*, 30% to the security forces, 14% to government-backed peasant militias, and 2% to a much smaller guerrilla group known as *MRTA*.⁵⁵ The Commission gathered nearly 17,000 testimonies from survivors in 530 villages in remote areas and held public hearings in seven regions. Their report confirmed, amongst other things, that those living in remote highland communities were the main victims of the violence, and that *Sendero* ‘mostró profunda irresponsabilidad y desprecio hacia la vida de sus militantes al inducirlos a matar y a morir de la manera más sanguinaria’ while its leaders lived in comfort and away from harm in the capital.⁵⁶ It also concluded that the mass media could have acted with greater sensitivity and maturity, accusing some of sensationalism and a lack of responsibility long after the conflict had officially ended, ‘agravándose esta situación a finales de la década del 90 con la corrupción que alcanzó en gran forma a algunos medios’.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *MRTA* stands for the *Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru* which began operations in 1984. According to Skidmore and Smith, it was influenced by Castro’s socialist example in Cuba and ‘used kidnapping and ransom – rather than violence – to attract attention and to accumulate resources’. See Skidmore and Smith, p. 214. Its most high profile attack was in 1996 on the Japanese embassy in Lima when hundreds of hostages were taken. The siege lasted for 127 days and ended only when Fujimori ordered the storming of the premises by a team of commandos, resulting in the death of all the guerrillas.

⁵⁶ Pilar Coll, *Informe final CVR: ejes temáticos de las conclusiones* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 2003), p. 21.

⁵⁷ Coll, p. 52.

Armed now with evidence of such horrifying acts of death and destruction committed largely amidst and upon the most impoverished of Peru, and despite all the explanations offered for the appeal of the *Sendero* movement, it remains hard to understand how so many young people could have been drawn into the killing of those from the same or similar social backgrounds. The key perhaps lies in the creation of the myth of *Sendero* as self-sacrificing opposition to a brutal state, preserver of the Inca tradition, and in the promise of a new nation with a social structure that would guarantee equality for all sectors of society and place the needs of the poor at its centre. For many young people growing up during the crisis-ridden 1980s, *Sendero* offered a way to channel the aggression borne out of a deep sense of frustration, thwarted ambition, and resentment at lack of opportunities. As Manrique explains, *Sendero* ideology appealed to the marginalized youth of Peru in a number of ways. It offered, for example, a logical and scientific discourse of radical social change. It claimed to be morally superior, ethical, dutiful and opposed to the ‘monstruosa corrupción del orden existente’.⁵⁸ It encouraged young recruits to unleash and mobilise a growing thirst for revenge, and to glorify violence rather than feel ashamed of it. Perhaps most dramatically, it appealed to their desire for a sense of social purpose and collective belonging – long denied to them by the state – even if the path offered by *Sendero* would lead to the ultimate self-sacrifice. In the final analysis, their death would contribute to the revolutionary cause; they could end their impoverished lives ‘con gestos útiles y perdurables’.⁵⁹

In so doing, however, *Sendero* repeated many of the authoritarian practices of oppression and exclusion that had already become a part of Peru’s history of colonialism, *caudillismo* and feudalism, and that continue to be reproduced by the

⁵⁸ Manrique, ‘The War for the Central Sierra’, p. 187.

⁵⁹ Manrique, ‘The War for the Central Sierra’, p. 189.

governing powers and their institutions. Moreover, rather than represent and liberate a marginalized sector and despite professing to recognise Andean culture as part of its own identity, in reality it turned out that the indigenous people were regarded with derision by *Sendero* leaders, useful mainly as ‘carne de cañón’ for the achievement of Guzmán’s mission.⁶⁰ Through pitting rural communities against the state, the *Sendero* campaign drew attention to social polarities and ‘the ethnoracial othering of native Andeans as “Indians”’ that had begun with the colonial conquest, when all the time its ultimate goal was one of overthrowing those in power and reversing the old order.⁶¹ Rather than seeking out political agency for the masses themselves, it offered itself as the only group that would represent their interests effectively while encouraging them to give their lives to the revolutionary cause. They deceived their supporters by explicitly and selectively appropriating José Carlos Mariátegui’s 1920s socialist vision of the Peruvian nation and his desire to redress the imbalances of Peruvian society by ‘drawing on and adapting the collectivism of the Incan empire’.⁶² At the same time, they ignored the views of Peru’s other main *indigenista*, José María Arguedas, on the inevitability of social transformation and the impossibility of cultural purity in a ‘largely transculturated society’ increasingly distinguished by *mestizaje*.⁶³ As Vich points out, Peruvians ended the twentieth century ‘con una organización terrorista que reprimió todo el amplio espectro de las identidades sociales y terminó por reducirlo, brutalmente,

⁶⁰ Vich, p. 49.

⁶¹ Stern, p. 2.

⁶² Skidmore and Smith, p. 201.

⁶³ Amaryll Chanady, ‘Identity, Politics and *Mestizaje*’, in *Contemporary Latin American Cultural Studies*, ed. by Stephen Hart and Richard Young (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 192-202 (p. 197).

a su más mínima expresión'.⁶⁴ The possibility of embracing the plurality of identities that comprise the Peruvian nation was hence severely threatened by another brutal homogenising force. The extent to which the nine films analysed in this study provide a form of resistance to that threat, and help to shape, challenge and reflect developments in identity formation is hence a key priority of this work, as is an exploration of their role in helping to forge a new sense of community and belonging for Peru's younger generations. What is perhaps already clear is that their role as national films in reminding spectators of a traumatic episode of violence and of the many different communities within Peru's fragmented society, while refusing to 'conceal structures of power and knowledge', continues to be vital.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Vich, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Hayward, p. 101.