

## Chapter Five

### ***Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* (Nilo Pereira del Mar 1990): The hybridization of national identity**

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

*Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* was the first Peruvian feature film after Lombardi's landmark *La boca del lobo* (1988) to deal explicitly with issues raised by the political conflict between *Sendero* revolutionaries and the Peruvian state. It was also the first in Peruvian film history to offer direct representation of the rebel group on the cinema screen. In contrast to Lombardi's portrayal, which alludes to the constant presence of the attackers but leaves them as an invisible threat sheltered by the Andean mountains, and perhaps therefore partly a response to that production, Pereira del Mar's debut fiction film gives a face to the insurgents. It depicts them barking orders and preaching ideology at their new recruits, and carrying out attacks on urban and rural targets. The central concern, however, is with the portrayal of one individual who was caught up in the political conflict and this discussion investigates the representation of the protagonist's relationship with the different groups and environments with which he comes into contact. The analysis examines the extent to which *Ni con Dios* draws attention to the conflicting elements of Peruvian national identity and offers a vision of a fragmented nation in crisis, revealing some of the seemingly unassailable rifts between the diverse social and ethnic communities in Peru. It also considers the impact of political conflict in forcing social changes with complex consequences during this important transitional phase in Peru's recent history. In particular, the film's depiction of the specifically topical social phenomenon of human migration from rural periphery to urban centre is explored in relation to intra-cultural conflicts based on ethnic, racial and class divisions that arose during a traumatic episode of political violence.

## Section 2: Context

As already noted in the discussion of Peruvian national identity in Chapter Three, several writers have remarked upon the increasingly hybrid and heterogeneous nature of Peruvian culture since the end of the Spanish colonial era, with studies focusing mainly on the tension between indigenous and European communities. While problems relating to ethnic and class differences as well as social exclusion clearly remain a key feature of Peruvian society, the movement of communities and individuals into and within the nation have led to a complex system of social exchange in which new and different cultural groups have emerged. For example, the plantations that developed during the nineteenth century encouraged indigenous people to move away from the highlands and brought them into more sustained contact with white Peruvians, leading to the strengthening of a distinct *mestizo* culture in coastal areas.<sup>1</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, such industries were largely replaced by state administration as the main employer of coastal *mestizos*. This in turn led to the creation of an urban middle-class with increased political agency, and a separation between this new social group and the still largely impoverished manual and peasant workers. A wave of economic migration in the 1950s further isolated the Andean and Amazon communities, and saw the development around Lima of enormous shanty towns whose inhabitants organised themselves politically in their struggle for resources. Meanwhile, a burgeoning informal

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<sup>1</sup> *Mestizaje*, as discussed by Amaryll Chanady, is primarily a racial marker of hybridity. See Chanady, Amaryll, 'Identity, Politics and *Mestizaje*', in *Contemporary Latin American Cultural Studies*, ed. by Stephen Hart and Richard Young (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 192-202 (p. 192). It is positioned as subordinate to the creole (*criollo*) elite defined as 'the Spaniard native to America'. See Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin American* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 116. As Chanady points out, 'official discourses of *mestizaje* [...] stress assimilation, Europeanization and whitening' (p. 192), and thus emphasize the hierarchy of ethnicity with white perceived as being the most socially acceptable. Philip Swanson also stresses that early *mestizos* were largely 'the product of the continual rape of indigenous women by common Spanish soldiers and parvenus [and that] given these origins, *mestizos* were often looked down upon as subhuman'. See Swanson, *Companion to Latin American Studies* (London: Arnold, 2003), p.28.

sector of employment encompassing domestic service and fringe commerce provided further opportunities for interaction between different social groups.

Lima quickly became the main focus for cultural exchange, a lively meeting point for Peruvians of all ethnic and social backgrounds. *Ni con Dios* foregrounds this feature of the city while showing also how boundaries separating the different social groups remained difficult to transgress. For example, the film shows elite Peruvian households clinging onto their 'European culture as a means to reaffirm what they perceive as their superior 'white' racial origins'.<sup>2</sup> *Mestizo* men are depicted labouring on construction sites while *mestizo* women work as housekeepers, serving the dominant *criollo* and gringo cultures. Anxious to distance themselves from their indigenous roots and to be associated with a more modern, urban and apparently sophisticated way of life, there appears little possibility of them being treated as equals by their employers. Meanwhile, the protagonist, a newly arrived immigrant from the highlands, is shown struggling to fit into a culture that seems alien and that treats him with added suspicion given the imagined identification of the indigenous culture with *Sendero* in the minds of Lima's inhabitants.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Peruvian identity relating to the story presented in this film is that of *choloificación*, the process of becoming *cholo*. *Cholo* is the term (usually derogatory) used to refer to those who have migrated from the country to the city and who set out to 'whiten' themselves so as to fit in with the dominant culture and wish to eliminate the stigma of difference and inferiority bestowed upon them by others. It refers to the process of cultural transformation from identification as someone of an

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Poole and Gerard Rénique, *Peru: Time of Fear* (London: Latin America Bureau), p. 102.

apparently inferior and barbaric indigenous background, to association with a supposedly more civilised *criollo* social and cultural identity through the gradual acquisition of the habits and customs shared by the urban majority usually stemming from the white elite. The term *cholo* does not always define a specific group of people, but is often a relational term, used by one individual or group to deprecate others perceived as inferior or not-quite-*mestizo*. As Wade points out, in Lima, ‘terms such as indian and *cholo* were used by some migrants to describe other migrants’; and all migrants would be labelled *cholo* by those outside their circle.<sup>3</sup> Categorisation, with associated meanings, remains an important part of everyday urban life, however fluid the status of the individuals concerned. The main difficulty and indeed danger comes, as seen here with the protagonist’s tragedy, when the immigrant remains strongly identified by others, and hence marginalized, in terms of his indigenous heritage. Unable to rely upon the protection of the community that he has left behind, he is also rejected by others in a similar position who have already embarked upon their own journey of cultural transformation.

### **Section 3: Synopsis**

The narrative structure of *Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* is divided into two parts, with the first concentrating on the incursion of a *Sendero* cell into a highland Andean village. The traumatic consequences of this event for one of the young villagers, Jeremías (Marino León de la Torre) are foreseen in a ‘reading’ of the coca leaves by the village shaman. Soon after, the insurgent group executes the community leader on trumped-up charges of corruption and a young villager, Jeremías, known to have followed at least a basic education, is nominated as *Sendero*’s reluctant local representative, along with his

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto, 1997), p. 64.

friend Ofelia (Ivonne Fraissinnett) as tax collector. When the armed forces arrive, Jeremías is forced to flee since he is now officially an enemy of the state. He leaves for Lima with the aim of finding his *padrino*, a white North American who once visited the village and promised to look after him. On his long journey to the capital, he is forced to earn money by labouring in the highland mines and for the first time is confronted by examples of modernity and technology – from mechanised transport to capitalist labour divisions and the printing press – that have not yet reached his own remote community.

The second part of the film is signalled by the arrival of Jeremías in Lima, and the deceptively upbeat tone of his first encounter with life in the capital. He tracks down his ‘patrón’ who reluctantly offers him work and shelter on a new building site. Before long, a series of misadventures causes Jeremías to lose both his job and the support of his white protector. Further confusion at the house of a police chief where he next finds employment leads to him being suspected of involvement in a terrorist attack, despite being at a neighbouring house with his girlfriend Victoria (Patricia Cabrera) at the time. As he leaves that house, he is shot by security forces and his dead body is photographed with a gun placed in his hand. This carefully constructed image is used on the front page of newspapers next day with headlines celebrating victory over the ‘enemy’. The very last image is a freeze-frame on the face of Ofelia as she passes the news stand and the image of Jeremías, failing to notice the image of her deceased friend. Having earlier refused to leave the highlands with Jeremías, she is now dressed in western-style clothes and walking the streets of Lima. Nothing is shown of her journey into or around the city, but such an ending implies that the problems of urban migration are not restricted to the story of one young man.

#### Section 4: Analysis

*Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* was Pereira del Mar's first (and, to date, only) feature-length film, after a consistent career as a short film-maker. His early work benefited from the economic incentives of the 1972 Cinema Law that are reviewed and discussed in Chapter One. After making this film, he took a leading political role representing national film-makers as President of the *Asociación de Cineastas del Perú*. He campaigned for revisions to the Cinema Law that were designed to develop further the infrastructure for a national cinema by building on the strengths and dealing with the flaws of the previous legislation. The failure of that venture and its redirection by the Fujimori regime, outlined in Chapter Two, led to disappointment and anger from the director, sentiments that resonate with the anti-establishment tone of this feature film. Indeed, the comments he made during a speech delivered in November 1996 on the occasion of the first awards ceremony under the 1994 Cinema Law railed against the perceived restrictions to freedom of expression for Peru's film-makers. For example, he expressed regret that so few short films, including several international award winners, were granted funding awards by the state, and hoped such decisions were not based on judgement of content rather than on artistic merit alone.

Sobre todo decimos eso porque varios de los integrantes del jurado se han destacado precisamente por la defensa de la libertad de expresión y su lucha contra la censura cinematográfica, pero igualmente no deja de extrañarnos que hayan sido dejadas de lado precisamente aquellas obras cuya visión no es la más complaciente frente a nuestra realidad.<sup>4</sup>

He suspected the government of taking a more active and somewhat sinister role in the development of, or restrictions to, national cinema, and suggested that films illustrating

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<sup>4</sup> Nilo Pereira del Mar cited by José Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años: memoria, 1996-1998* (Lima: Conacine, 1998), p. 20.

signs of political dissent and social critique continued to be institutionally ignored. This short extract from his speech sheds some light on the film-maker's views on the freedoms he believed should underpin a democratic regime, and on the role of national cinema to challenge the political status quo. The following analysis of his film indicates the extent to which Pereira del Mar's known political sympathies inform his portrayal of this particular episode of national transformation.

With *Ni con Dios*, Pereira del Mar highlights an issue of direct concern to much of the Peruvian population – that of ‘la forzada migración hacia Lima emprendida por un joven campesino desplazado de su tierra como consecuencia de la Guerra desatada en los Andes por Sendero Luminoso’.<sup>5</sup> As David Wood explains in his study of the complexities of Peruvian society, although migration from rural communities to urban centres had been under way for most of the second half of the twentieth century, the 1980s witnessed a much higher level of migration as well as a different kind of social movement that affected the entire nation. Whereas migration in the 1950s-1970s had coincided with economic expansion in the coastal cities with corresponding deprivation in provincial areas of the *sierra* and *selva*, most of those arriving in Lima and other coastal centres in the 1980s were forced to do so for political reasons. Wood summarizes that ‘tenían más de refugiados de una violencia política extrema que de migrantes: su paso a la ciudad no era un proceso meditado ni muchas veces gradual, sino una huida desesperada’.<sup>6</sup> It is precisely this category of refugee-migrant that is represented in *Ni con Dios* by protagonist Jeremías, who portrays a type of Peruvian familiar to urban audiences in the 1990s, from the national press if not from everyday

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<sup>5</sup> Ricardo Bedoya, *Cien años de cine en el Perú: una historia crítica* (Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo de Desarrollo Editorial, 1995), p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, *De sabor nacional*, p. 28.

life. It is the journey taken by this young man from the highlands, and the behaviour towards him of those already living in the capital and thus familiar with urban culture, that provide the main narrative focus and centre of conflict within the film. The film thus conveys a point of view towards the problem of urban migration that is largely critical of the response of the government and blames its lack of foresight and planning rather than the *Sendero* conflict for much of the social tension in the capital.

*Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* is set during the early 1980s at the point when the ferocity of the *Sendero* campaign of violence began to present a serious threat to both the Belaúnde regime and to national stability more generally. As noted in Chapter Two, while the insurgency group's first decisive action took place in May 1980, it was not until December 1982 that Belaúnde declared the region an emergency zone and ordered the military to enter the highland region of Ayacucho. This decision resulted in a dramatic increase in the death toll not only of insurgents and the armed forces, but also of civilians. Many of the latter fled rural areas to escape from military and *Sendero* reprisals, partly to shield young members of families from suspicion by military or recruitment by revolutionaries, as well as to escape the extreme poverty intensified by the civil conflict.<sup>7</sup> An example of one such *Sendero* incursion and military response, depicted in the first part of *Ni con Dios*, forms the motivation for the protagonist's flight from his village. In fact, the period represented by the film's diegesis can be pinpointed more precisely to early 1983. The narrative makes specific reference to TV and newspaper reports of the massacre of eight journalists in Uchuraccay by highlanders whose motives were the subject of much press speculation and public debate. At the time, Peralta notes, such media reporting included heated assertions about the supposed

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<sup>7</sup> Aliaga, *Terrorism in Peru*, pp. 36-7.

‘reacción instintiva y primitiva’ and ‘el instinto de violencia colectiva de los comuneros indígenas’, inflaming racist resentment towards those of indigenous origin.<sup>8</sup> *Ni con Dios* offers a provocative challenge to the dominant myth, propagated for the sake of white hegemony, of indigenous peoples as uncivilised and instinctively violent by portraying them instead as innocent victims caught in the crossfire of an increasingly ‘dirty’ war orchestrated in large part by the state.

The year 1983 also heralded the beginning of violent attacks in the capital city itself with electricity blackouts and car bomb explosions, both of which are incorporated into the film’s plot. Such events ensured that the inhabitants of Lima began to take the *Sendero* conflict more seriously and to appreciate the threat it posed to national stability. Moreover, it was during this year that economic austerity measures were introduced, resulting in a GDP drop of 12%, with mass unemployment and the beginning of spiralling inflation that would last a further ten years. Economic deprivation is presented as a serious concern for some, though by no means all of the characters in this film. Extreme inequities in wealth distribution are highlighted by contrasting images that emphasise the poverty of the highlanders and the exploitation of the mining community with those that draw attention to the decadence of the wealthy Lima elite.

*Ni con Dios* was made at the end of the 1980s, a turbulent decade of economic and political crisis, and the film provides a reflection and critique of events that continued to traumatise the nation. Although it appears to look back to a set of particular events, it deals in fact with issues that pertain closely to the time of its making and release. By 1990, the violence affected the entire nation, and *Sendero* had shifted its tactics to

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<sup>8</sup> Peralta Ruiz, *Sendero Luminoso y la prensa*, p. 64.

concentrate more on urban destruction than rural domination. The year 1988 in particular, when this film was in development, marked a turning point for *Sendero* with a shift from a rural to an urban-based revolution with the proclaimed aim of, as Aliaga puts it, speeding up ‘destruction of the state and the creation of a new democracy based on the peasants and urban workers’.<sup>9</sup> Attacks became bolder and more visible, with masked protestors attending political meetings to shout down speakers and to incite violence. Bombing attacks in Lima became a major feature of Shining Path’s psychological war aimed at demoralising the population.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the military continued to respond with such force that human rights groups such as Amnesty International observed that Peru had the highest number of forced ‘disappearances’ of any nation from 1987-9.<sup>11</sup> Despite the consideration given to human rights and developmental issues during the first two years of the García regime, by 1987 the government’s main strategy had returned to repression. By 1990, political violence was endemic and the country was in total chaos.<sup>12</sup> Dominant media outlets, including *El Comercio*, *Radioprogramas*, and *24 Horas*, encouraged readers, listeners and viewers to support the military in its battle to eradicate the insurgents who seemed bent on destroying the infrastructure of the Peruvian nation.<sup>13</sup> The more brutal actions of the government’s ‘dirty war’ strategy were not officially revealed to the Peruvian public until many years later in the report from the *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* (2003). Even then, many continued to believe that such a harsh response had been a

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<sup>9</sup> Aliaga, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Flindell Klarén, *Peru: Society and Nationhood in the Andes*, p. 397.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International 1987-9 in Aliaga, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Crabtree, *Peru under García*, pp. 108-118.

<sup>13</sup> Peralta Ruiz, p. 31.

necessary step in the face of an overwhelming threat to law, order and national stability. The portrayal of conflict in *Ni con Dios* offered to the Peruvian public in 1990 would thus have set itself at odds with the hegemonic discourse advanced to tackle a political conflict that seemed to have spiralled out of control. Moreover, it illustrates the more antagonistic role played by national cinema at times of crisis in drawing attention to issues of difference and opposing injustice.

Pereira del Mar makes it clear to his audience where his own political sympathies lie: he positions the spectator to experience the film from the point of view of his young protagonist. As Wiener has observed, 'desde el título, privilegia el papel de los inocentes inmersos a su pesar en el conflicto, en este caso un campesino obligado a huir a la capital, víctima del abuso de uno y otro lado'.<sup>14</sup> Jeremías and his community are depicted as innocent victims of forces beyond their control. Although the boy becomes the local *Sendero* representative after the execution of the village elder, it is clearly a role he has no desire to fulfil, and which leads to his subsequent tragic position as a target for both *Sendero* and the military forces, and as a traitor to both causes.

On his nomination as community leader by *Sendero*, Jeremías becomes broadly representative of the thousands of young people from the highlands who were caught in the crossfire between revolutionary fervour and military counter-insurgency. Youngsters aged fourteen or fifteen were the primary targets for recruitment to the *Sendero* cause, since they were considered less likely to be tainted by life experience and more susceptible to the Mao-Marxist ideology and idealism of the revolutionary group. Moreover, the perceived lack of any alternative, despite educational opportunities, and an increasing awareness of exclusion from the dominant Peruvian

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<sup>14</sup> Christian Wiener, 'Miedos de guerra', *Butaca Sanmarquina*, 12 (2002), 18-20 (p. 19).

identity imposed from Lima made them particularly vulnerable to the choice offered by *Sendero*. Nevertheless, Jeremías never actually makes the transition to *Sendero* sympathizer, let alone armed recruit, since his sights are set on finding wealth in Lima and entering the capitalist system that *Sendero* so despises. Unlike his cousin who becomes passionately inspired by the insurgent campaign, Jeremías feels no self-sacrificial commitment to the *Sendero* cause. His ambitions lie not in helping to create a radically new social structure, but in leaving the harsh subsistence life of the village behind. His childhood encounter with a kindly rich gringo has convinced him that other solutions are possible.

Jeremías is in fact an outsider in every social context and his ambivalent position marginalizes him further. In his village, he is more interested in reading and fantasising about Lima than in tending his sheep, and is unable to appreciate fully the potential strength and complexity of his community's way of life. Later, he fails to fulfil his *Sendero* responsibilities and rejects the solution for change offered by the revolutionary group. He lacks the strength and skills to work effectively in the mines and is bewildered by the communication technology, organised labour and oppression he finds there. Once in Lima, he is treated with some impatience by the *padrino* whose priorities have clearly shifted from the social idealism of his own youth to more capitalist commercial interests, and who appears irritated by Jeremías's lack of respect for social difference. On the building site, older colleagues mock his accent and skin colour, as well as his lack of strength and skill, even though several of them clearly share a similar ethnic background. Having lived longer in Lima, however, they have learnt to assimilate and adapt to the dominant culture, and prefer to distance themselves from the newcomer from the highlands whose very presence serves to remind them of an identity with

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which they no longer wish to be associated. Several may indeed be second or third generation migrants to the city, in which case their identity is likely to be even more closely aligned with the culture of urban *criollismo* than with their indigenous roots.

The final section of the film completes the social marginalization of the protagonist. When he enters the household of the police chief to begin work in domestic service, Jeremías is utterly bewildered by the alien nature of elite Peruvian culture. The costume of white tuxedo and gloves he is forced to wear restrict his movement and emphasise the darkness of his skin, thus highlighting his position as inferior, dangerous “other” and providing, as Snead argues, ‘blatant linkage of the idea of the black with that of the monster’.<sup>15</sup> His confusion with the gadgets and household implements he is expected to use further illustrate his estrangement from modern life. Moreover, his lack of awareness of social boundaries triggers suspicion in the mind of the police chief who is concerned to find that Jeremías has answered the private telephone in his office and has thus had access to papers relating to the counter-insurgency campaign. When the boy’s name is discovered subsequently on a list of traitors, hysteria breaks out as the police chief and his wife believe they have mistakenly allowed the enemy to enter their home. Jeremías’s tragic fate as scapegoat is sealed when the car bomb explodes moments later.

The bewilderment felt by Jeremías at every situation he encounters emphasises his daily struggle to negotiate survival in this new urban environment, and the extent to which he feels alienated from modern life. The ‘othering’ of Jeremías by all of the characters he encounters marks him out as inferior, even from the other indigenous men and women working as house servants in Lima. Like the building labourers, they also look down on

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<sup>15</sup> James Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

him for lacking the skills and know-how that stand for modernity and civilisation and for having failed to come to terms with the dominant white culture. They distance themselves from him for fear of being reminded of their own former position as subjects of economic deprivation, social injustice, exploitation and abuse, and of being marked out as *Sendero* suspects. As Radcliffe has noted, 'the indian migrant from the highlands of Peru who becomes a domestic maid in Lima is on her way to becoming a *mestizo* woman, but her background is not forgotten'.<sup>16</sup> Any wilful distortion of ethnic affiliation, in the name of integration, assimilation or a new cultural identity, is not made easier by constant reminders of origin and inferiority in the form of new migrants such as Jeremías. The shift away from a culture associated by the dominant elite with savagery, towards a *mestizo* identity that marks progression up the social hierarchy and a blurring of ethnic difference, might be socially, economically and politically desirable, but is likely also to be slow, traumatic and fraught with difficulty.<sup>17</sup> *Ni con Dios* mourns the erasure of social boundaries and the loss of distinct indigenous cultures. It points out regretfully that a hybrid *mestizo* identity conceals the differences of origins and thus holds the potential to create the illusion of a new sense of social unity. Hence, it is perceived as less threatening than one that has come to be associated with terrorism, poverty and social exclusion.

The two social groups that pose the greatest physical threat to Jeremías, the security forces and the *Sendero* cell, are represented largely as monolithic entities that reinforce the sympathy that Pereira del Mar wishes to generate for his protagonist. The military, for example, is shown only as a homogeneous violent force, entering the highland village and assassinating or 'disappearing' all those suspected of sympathising with the

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<sup>16</sup> Radcliffe in Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Chanady, pp. 196-99.

enemy. In contrast to Lombardi's *La boca del lobo*, nothing is shown of the different ways in which the soldiers might have interacted with the community, and their abusive behaviour is more overtly portrayed as part of a general military strategy rather than as the errant actions of a few renegade individuals. Likewise, little differentiation is depicted within the *Sendero* cell, and the rebels are also represented as ruthless perpetrators of violence who make no effort to forge a relationship with the villagers. Neither group shows any regard for the cultural practices of the indigenous people and both are determined to impose their own solution for social change without considering the impact upon others. Audience sympathy for the plight of those unsuspecting villagers caught in the crossfire is thus activated through representation of both the military and *Sendero* as brutal, inhuman agents of violence.

The Peruvian state is further represented in the film by a political leader and a police chief, briefly shown in heated debate about how best to tackle the violence that has begun to make its presence felt in the capital city. Behind the politician, a portrait of independence fighter Simón Bolívar (*El Libertador*) is caught in the background as an indirect reference to the birth of the independent Peruvian nation-state in 1821 – a much-debated turning point for Peruvian identity, when violent confrontation and unfulfilled promises reinforced rather than eradicated many of the divisions and inequalities in a society that had developed during the colonial era.<sup>18</sup> This visual cue offers further evidence of the director's desire to challenge the state's ambivalent attitude towards Peruvians of Andean ethnic origin. The memory of the freeing of the nation from colonial rule is ironically undermined by the way the film draws attention to the numerous everyday restrictions, exclusions and inequalities that still exist for

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<sup>18</sup> Christine Hunefeldt, *A Brief History of Peru* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2004), pp. 104-5.

many Peruvian citizens, and the strong ethnic and class-based hierarchies that remain in place.

The state's position is attacked finally with a more sustained and critical portrayal of the head of the elite security force responsible for controlling law and order within the capital, and for overseeing the general counter-insurgency strategy. He is thus shown to be leader of an institution that is struggling to contain and overcome the *Sendero* threat and fearful of losing public support. He is also a member of the wealthy coastal elite, and the depiction offered of his household, with clear demarcation between owners and servants, reinforces the stereotype of this social group as clinging 'to European culture as a means to reaffirm what they perceive as their superior 'white' racial origins'.<sup>19</sup> He is quick to suspect Jeremías, a newly arrived dark-skinned boy who is behaving strangely in his house, as a member of *Sendero*. It is at this point that the film-maker clearly wishes Jeremías to be understood as an unfortunate outsider who has no sense of how to protect himself in the apparently hellish, urban jungle of Lima. During his short time in the city, Jeremías has become the victim of beatings, verbal abuse, unfair dismissal, and false accusations of robbery. As far as the police chief is concerned, however, Jeremías is the perpetrator of violent crime. From the point of view of the dominant culture, the boy's obvious social, racial and ethnic difference mark him out as barbaric other who represents a threat to Lima-based constructs of the Peruvian nation.

The *Sendero* cell that infiltrates and 'liberates' the highland village from which Jeremías flees, is depicted as focused, determined and unafraid of violence. The female leader of the group is highlighted in scenes that show her setting out the *Sendero* message calmly

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<sup>19</sup> Poole and Rénique, p. 102.

and clearly. She articulates the group's vision of an alternative society that prioritises a collective way of life that promises indigenous communities a greater role in public debate, and offers them greater visibility in the political life of the nation. Her sense of control serves as a counterpoint to the more hysterical behaviour of the chief of the security forces. Moreover, her leadership of the rebel group draws attention to the important role played by women in the revolutionary conflict, an aspect that is explored in greater depth in Marianne Eyde's *La vida es una sola* (1993).<sup>20</sup> *Ni con Dios* begins with the incursion of *Sendero* members into the village and their disruption of life there. The *Sendero* vision was imposed as the only possible solution to social inequality, and wiping the slate clean was considered the first necessary step regardless of the trauma involved.<sup>21</sup> They root out the community leader, accuse him of collaboration with the capitalist enemy and stage a mock trial during which villagers are forced to vote for his execution. Such a scene draws attention to the *Sendero* strategy of destroying existing organisational structures and imposing new leaders selected by the party.

The visibility of the *Sendero* rebels decreases during the second part of the film, but their impact on characters and narrative events remains strong. For example, after Jeremías's arrival in Lima, the narrative cuts on several occasions to brief sequences that show the *Sendero* cell in pursuit of their traitor that serve to reinforce the protagonist's position as a helpless victim and object of oppression from all sides. Even though Jeremías has fled from the village, abandoning his position as *Sendero*-appointed community leader, he is unable to break free from his forced affiliation with

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<sup>20</sup> Isabel Coral Cordero, 'Women in War: Impact and Responses' in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*, ed. by Steve J. Stern (London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 345-374 (p. 349).

<sup>21</sup> Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path: A History of Millenarian War in Peru*, trans. by Robin Kirk (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), p. 119.

the terrorist group and it is this that leads to his tragic death. In the final section, an example of *Sendero*'s urban campaign is shown, thus emphasizing a strategy which aimed 'to identify key figures, assist, co-opt, intimidate or kill them'.<sup>22</sup> In this instance, the attack involves blowing up the police chief's house while other 'key figures' from the security forces are gathered there, and when Jeremías's presence puts him in the frame as the key suspect. Portrayal of the rebel group serves on the whole to emphasize the status of the protagonist as a victim, to provide narrative motivation for his flight from the highlands, and to reinforce the debate about the relationship between individual desire and collective responsibility.

Many of the issues pertaining to social and cultural identity and difference discussed above are reinforced by the film's creative use of space and place. In the first instance, the physical journey taken by Jeremías offers spectators the chance to explore visually some of the diverse geographical locations inhabited by Peruvians and to consider the ways in which space and culture interrelate. Moreover, the various modes of transport taken by Jeremías as he makes his way to Lima link each space and draw attention to the way in which different cultures interact and overlap. The movement between rural and urban space, between traditional and modern cultures, is shown mostly in the direction of the capital city as Jeremías makes his way to Lima. Nevertheless, portrayal of the incursions by the army and the *Sendero* cell into the highland space suggest that everyday life in the remote Andes experienced considerable interruption during the conflict, and that the potential for change even in the most isolated cultures can arise as a result of interference from the outside.

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<sup>22</sup> David Scott Palmer, ed., *Shining Path of Peru* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 8.

*Ni con Dios* opens with a classic establishing shot of the empty and barren Andean landscape, with its snow-topped mountains and seemingly unpopulated highlands. The hostility of the terrain is reinforced by a diegetic soundtrack of whistling high winds. A group of indigenous villagers comes into view, slowly taking one of their dead to be buried amongst the rocks. As these villagers pay homage to their mountain deities, reference is thus made to the distinct belief system and language of the Andean people, as again in the scene when the village elder solemnly takes a 'reading' of the coca leaves. The perceived failure of the Peruvian state to look after all its people is suggested by such images of intense deprivation in the Andean community and, later on, by more images of the hardship and exploitation faced by those working in the mines. The spectator is thus encouraged at an early stage to sympathise with the plight of the indigenous and lower social classes of Peru, especially when contrasted with the consumerism, technology and waste of urban spaces, symbols of modernity that have yet to make their mark on remote highland communities such as the one shown here.

The initial section of the film indicates that the highland villagers are totally unprepared for the traumatic consequences of their impending fate at the hands of the rebels. They are offered no protection from the state and the warning from the village elder of dangerous times ahead provides little comfort. Indeed, Jeremías only manages to escape because his work as a shepherd accounts for his absence from the village when the military arrives to purge it of rebels, recruits and suspected sympathisers. On the other hand, the elder's warning and the close relationship of the villagers with the natural world suggest that the ancient traditions that are an essential feature of such communities might offer alternative strategies to deal with the contemporary situation. Rather than trying to dominate and control the savage 'other', the Andean approach to nature is portrayed as one that emphasizes respect and co-operation in the hope of

receiving guidance and protection in return. However, young Jeremías is slow to comprehend the deeper significance of the rituals and, while he does not absolutely reject the beliefs and practices of his elders, he clearly has dreams of a different way of life in Lima. As in most communities, attitudes differ from one generation to another, and such tensions are exploited by the *Sendero* cell depicted in their mission to recruit disillusioned young villagers.

The image of the village elder reading the warning in the coca leaves recurs at key moments during Jeremías's journey to the capital city. These flashbacks act both as a reminder of his origins and of the reason for his urgent need to flee from the village. They suggest that the way of life he left behind remains integral to his identity and that he might draw upon the knowledge, skills and beliefs he acquired there in his struggle to survive in Lima. Part of his failure to adapt to urban culture appears to result from his inability to understand how the traditional and the modern might interact and integrate productively, and might offer him ways to negotiate his way through the minefield of cultural encounters he faces. Instead he leaves one culture behind without appreciating the difficulty of assimilation and integration with another.

As Jeremías enters the city, the screen fills with colour and the upbeat music suggests that his fortunes are about to take a turn for the better. For him, the metropolis is associated with the idea of comfort and wealth as a result of the fantasies triggered by his childhood encounter with his patron. However, images of him dressed in peasant clothing and overwhelmed in the frame by oppressive colonial buildings, emphasise his disenfranchisement from a Western cultural heritage that impregnates life at all levels in Lima. The composition of the *mise-en-scene* that emphasizes the protagonist's alienation from his surroundings signals fundamental differences and inequalities

between rural and urban culture. It also indicates conflicting ideas of Peruvian history and national identity that work along problematic binaries that separate highland/rural and coastal/urban dwellers, however differentiated and unstable each of these geographically-defined groups might actually be. The notion that such communities might ‘imagine’ themselves belonging to one nation, as Anderson suggests members of even the smallest nation will do, is called into question by such images that draw attention to Jeremías’s struggle to find a place for himself in Lima.<sup>23</sup>

Shohat and Stam, in their study of ‘Eurocentrism’ in the media, discuss the way that land and space is represented in films of the classic Western genre in such a way as to reflect and reinforce divisions between indigenous and Anglo-Saxon Americans. For example, they draw attention to the following important distinction:

For most Native American cultures, land is not real estate for sale but is sacred both as historically consecrated and as the “mother” that gives (and needs) nurture. ... For the European, on the other hand, the land was a soulless conglomeration of exploitable resources, and the Indians a wandering horde without a sense of property, law, or government.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, *Ni con Dios* highlights differences between the indigenous and the European approach to land. It evokes nostalgia for the Andean way of life, and mourns what is presented as the gradual eradication of traditional practices and belief systems that promote productive engagement with the *sierra*. For example, the opening burial ceremony and sacrificial offerings emphasise the ‘reverent attitude towards the landscape’ adopted by traditional indigenous communities.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, later scenes

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 116-7.

<sup>25</sup> Shohat and Stam, p. 116.

on the building site in Lima portend a desire for control, transformation and commodification of land on the part of the North American property developer. Meanwhile, the protagonist's lack of engagement with the natural world, despite his work as shepherd and his dreams of a different way of life, suggest a shift in priorities among the younger generation that potentially destabilises perceptions of the hitherto enduring nature of indigenous traditions.

The binary structure that is tentatively suggested by the representation of space and place is further disrupted by the portrayal of Lima as a city replete with cultural and social difference and unevenness. Distinct districts have developed particular identities in terms of the socio-economic and ethnic status of their inhabitants and some of these are depicted from Jeremías's point of view as he travels around the city only to discover that he is unwelcome in many of those spaces. When, for example, he arrives at the gringo's luxurious house in a wealthy part of Lima, his initial excitement is tempered by the sight of impenetrable high gates and fences, and the suspicion of the maid who greets him. This time he is able to transgress the physical and the symbolic barriers and is invited to enter the living quarters of the white man. To her great irritation, the maid is ordered to serve the boy with food and drink. She is insulted at being required to serve someone of a lower social and cultural status to herself, thus illustrating the hierarchical structure that prioritizes both whiteness and western notions of urban progress. The meal with the gringo represents an isolated blurring of social boundaries, however, and Jeremías is quickly made aware of his inferiority not only by the way he is treated by everyone from then on, but by the spaces to which he is restricted. He is forced to work and sleep amongst the rubble of the building site where expensive new houses are being constructed for the elite of Lima who have been fortunate in benefiting

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from international investment and co-operation. When he does eat with others, it is in a dingy poorly-lit bar located in a run-down area of the city where the electricity blackouts caused by *Sendero* have little impact on the lives of those with very limited resources.

For Jeremías, the most alarming episode of cultural conflict takes place when he enters the house of the police chief. He is expected to dress in restrictive formal waiter's attire, and to use a range of basic domestic appliances. That he is unfamiliar with all of them is perhaps exaggerated, but his ignorance and confusion serve to emphasise the film's critique of the inequalities embedded within Peruvian society. Each new space bewilders the protagonist and upsets his sense of self more and more, while his failure to adapt and to assimilate puts him in a position of danger. In the end, he is gunned down while alone in the street where the police chief's house has just been attacked. The still image of his body, cropped for use by the press, further isolates him, and denies him any cultural context or connection with his surroundings. This image also 'double-frames' him, reinforcing and complicating his position as 'othered' object of the gaze.<sup>26</sup> The implication is that he will be viewed as dangerous, savage other by the film's fictional newspaper reader who is fearful of another *Sendero* attack, but with sympathy by the film's omniscient spectator who is aware of the tragedy of Jeremías's fate.

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

When *Ni con Dios* was released on a commercial domestic basis, it was screened at nine cinemas in Lima. Judging by the lack of material to be found on it within the meticulously kept archives of the *Filmoteca de Lima*, and the single review offered by

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<sup>26</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 141.

Bedoya's authoritative and comprehensive study on Peruvian cinema, Pereira del Mar's first attempt at feature film-making went largely ignored by the national press.<sup>27</sup> Even Bedoya paid scant attention to the film's efforts to offer critical comment on some of the social consequences of the nation's worst political conflict since the Wars of Independence. It is worth considering, therefore, some of the compelling socio-economic, political and aesthetic reasons for this apparent indifference towards a national film, during a year when only four others were produced.

As already noted, the year of the film's release marked the end of a traumatic decade for the whole of Peru, and the start of a new one that held little sign of change. The conflict with *Sendero* was the most obvious manifestation of this crisis, and the one highlighted in *Ni con Dios*, but other aspects included spiralling inflation, severe economic austerity measures and high unemployment. The consequences of mass migration from rural to urban areas represented by the tragic story of the film's protagonist were keenly felt in the capital city and were in fact the cause of further conflict as previously disparate groups were forced to confront each other in their daily lives. The year 1990 also coincided with a national election campaign, which the nation hoped would bring a new leader to alleviate the crisis and offer the chance of a better future. It was undoubtedly too soon for the domestic spectator to be invited to remember and reflect critically upon the consequences of a political conflict that was still ongoing, the physical and psychological effects of which were still keenly felt.

A further set of problems lie in the largely monolithic portrayal of both *Sendero* and the state, as well as in the film's clear nostalgia for an indigenous rural identity that not only

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<sup>27</sup> Ricardo Bedoya, *Cien años de cine en el Perú*, pp. 288-9.

reminded urban *criollos* of their disenfranchised origins, but which was also associated in the popular conscience with terrorism. Moreover, despite attempts to acknowledge diversity, it tends towards essentialism, reducing social groups to a limited set of reified stereotypes. The final problem relates to the portrayal of the protagonist himself as an innocent victim of oppressive forces, and to the invitation to the spectator to identify with his plight. Jeremías, after all, is depicted as a tragic victim of circumstances beyond his control rather than as a hero who actively chooses to confront the ‘enemy’ – whether *Sendero* or military – and to sacrifice himself in the face of evil. In addition, he is more interested in pursuing his own goal of self-improvement than in putting his life on the line for the sake of a remote collective cause. Spectator identification with him is further complicated by his status as a disenfranchised, emasculated, poorly educated and unskilled young man who struggles to find a role in Peruvian society. Although he undertakes an arduous physical journey, there is no sign that he has any appreciation of the necessity to embark on a much more profound psychological journey if he is to survive and achieve his goals. He needs not only to venture into and adapt to the unfamiliar city-space, but also to find a place within the liminal ethnic and cultural identity of *mestizaje*.

Despite the indifference shown towards this film by national critics, audiences and institutions, *Ni con Dios ni con el diablo* fulfils one of the key criteria of a national cinema by drawing attention to issues that are pertinent to contemporary Peruvian society and culture, especially those concerned with ‘questions of nationhood’.<sup>28</sup> In particular, it focuses on the phenomenon of mass migration arising from political conflict, while more generally it tackles the subsequent crises in individual and collective forms and processes of identity formation. Aspects of ‘banal nationalism’

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<sup>28</sup> Higson, *Waving the Flag*, p. 5.

abound in the visual and aural aspects of the portrayal, from the distinctive images and sounds of Andean landscape and everyday life, to the more cosmopolitan and culturally blurred spaces and practices of the capital city.<sup>29</sup> The film highlights issues of national cultural identity by concentrating on a Peruvian protagonist from one part of the country (the periphery) and by following his long journey to and within Lima (the centre). It thus deploys ‘contrastive cultural elements’ in order to contest the assumption that any uniform, stable and cohesive national identity might exist in Peru.<sup>30</sup> Jeremías’s bewildered gaze, and the point of view shots that seek to position the spectator so as to share his confusion, draw further attention to intra-cultural differences, tensions and inequalities.

The film draws attention to specific issues of identity raised by political conflict, forced migration and cultural encounter. Divisions along racial, ethnic and class lines are linked and related in the film to questions of power, dominance and exclusion. The unlawful killing by the security forces of the indigenous Jeremías harks back to episodes of violence between indigenous and European Peruvians at several points in national history. With a differently-coloured skin and an accent that exposes his provincial origins, lacking in money, skills and education, Jeremías is marked out and marginalized on multiple levels. He is in an impossible position, and the final sequence of the film reinforces the tragic view that rural to urban migration in times of political

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<sup>29</sup> Hjort draws on Michael Billig’s (1995) notion of banal nationalism to discuss recognisably national material elements such as locations, language, actors and props that ‘provide the basis for a given film’s national quality’ without constituting a theme of nation in themselves. Mette Hjort, ‘Themes of Nation’, in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 103-118 (p. 108). As she further explains, ‘banal nationalism involves the ongoing circulation and utilisation of the symbols of the nation, but in a manner that is so deeply ingrained and habitual as to involve no focal awareness’. Hjort, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> Hjort, p. 113.

conflict is fraught with difficulty and danger both for individuals and for society in general. Collective fear is felt when the loss of clear and stable cultural boundaries is threatened even though those threats may be illusory and ephemeral, and arise largely from a lack of mutual understanding and recognition.

In his study of political violence in Peru published just two years after the film's release, David Scott Palmer pointed out that:

The racial divide amongst white, *mestizo*, and Indian appears to be the decisive factor that keeps the center from responding effectively and keeps the periphery paying a disproportionate human toll in the ongoing struggle.<sup>31</sup>

*Ni con Dios* offers a dystopian vision of Peruvian society that warns of the further entrenchment of social injustice and racial division. The dominant white culture in Lima is portrayed as reluctant to enter into a conflict that initially was hardly felt, let alone seen, in the capital city. Only when rural migrants begin to arrive in significant numbers, and when key state figures were attacked, does the centre begin to respond. Even then, the need to apportion blame and to maintain political and social equilibrium seems a greater priority than addressing the underlying social causes of the conflict. The indigenous culture, represented by the emblematic Jeremías, becomes both the collective victim and the scapegoat due largely to the racial divide suggested by Scott Palmer, even though there are tensions in the protagonist's own affiliation with that culture. The film pessimistically suggests that the blurring of difference and subsequent triumph over prejudice will be difficult to achieve. The possibility, for example, that urban *mestizo* culture might help to reinscribe Peruvian cultural identity in a positive

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<sup>31</sup> Scott Palmer, p. 4.

and more inclusive way is not acknowledged, and the problems of cultural whitening remain the target of the film's central critique.<sup>32</sup> The film finally suggests that its tragic protagonist's failure to understand this process is the real reason for his death, and that the various forms of physical and psychological violence that he has been forced to endure are symptomatic of the deep-rooted social divisions and resentments that remain at the heart of Peruvian national identity.

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<sup>32</sup> As Peter Wade argues, '*mestizaje* as an ideology of national formation is far from benevolent, as it commonly combines with a powerful ideology of whitening ... in which mixture ... is a value-loaded process of the elimination of blackness and indigenusness from the national body politic in favour of whiter types of mestizos'. See Wade, 'Images of Latin American *mestizaje* and the Politics of Comparison', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 23 (2004), 355-366 (p. 357).