

## Images of Peru: A National Cinema in Crisis

Sarah Barrow

Published in *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity*, edited by Lisa Shaw, Stephanie Dennison. McFarland. 2005.

A brief look at the major trends in the history of the national cinema of Peru suggests that the relationship between the development of the moving image and the onset of modernity in that country has always been awkward. Many have argued that the advent of cinema coincided in most parts of the world with the decades when modernity was already 'at full throttle . . . a watershed moment in which a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space'.<sup>1</sup> However, the reality for the majority of Latin American countries was quite different. As Ana M. López points out, it simply is not possible to link the rise of cinema in that part of the world to 'previous large-scale transformations of daily experience resulting from urbanization, industrialization, rationality and the technological transformation of modern life'.<sup>2</sup> Such developments were only just starting to emerge, so that as cinema was launched across the world, modernity in Latin America 'was above all a fantasy and a profound desire.'<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the arrival of cinema in Peru was, it appears, warmly welcomed by the elite of Lima, who greeted it as the very incarnation of the modernity to which they aspired. President of the Republic, Nicolas de Piérola was influenced in the reconstruction of his capital city by images of Paris brought by the world's first filmmakers, that iconic city of modern sophistication with its grand spacious boulevards and fashionable inhabitants. Peruvian film production was late in getting

started compared to the rest of the world, and during Piérola's regime (1895-1899) the newsreel and documentary forms were encouraged as modes of expression ideally suited to flaunting the efforts made by the Aristocratic Republic to modernize and expand its capital using funds raised from the export of its sugar, cotton, rubber, wool and silver. Furthermore, many of the early moving images made in Peru coincided with the first aviation flights in the country, with images of Lima taken from the air filling its inhabitants with pride at such an overt display of progress.<sup>4</sup>

During the second decade of the twentieth century, many more films were made to illustrate national ceremonies, funerals, and civic or religious occasions. Lima was the focus of these cinematic documents, with little attention being paid to the country's multi-ethnic heritage. Unlike in many other countries where movie-going was most popular with the working classes, the first Peruvian cinemas were installed in the more affluent parts of the capital, where dramas and comedies from France could be enjoyed by the social elite.

Between 1919 and 1930, the eleven year period known as the *Nueva Patria* (literally, the New Fatherland), the country was ruled by the omnipotent President Augusto B. Leguía. Leguía and his government wanted to see Lima further transformed into a beautiful spacious city, the utmost expression of modernity, completing the project begun by Piérola. They thus ignored the realities of hardship and fragmentation throughout the rest of the country, and the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism that would mark Peruvian culture during the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Documentaries were made, sponsored by the State, to record the grand carnivalesque celebrations held in Lima to commemorate the centenaries of Peruvian Independence in 1921 and the end of the battles of Junin and Ayacucho in 1924, and according to national film critic and historian Ricardo Bedoya:

Alongside films that praised and congratulated the President were those that talked about the growing status and wealth of the country, of the prosperity which would last for many years, the product of collaboration with investment and technology from overseas, particularly the US. Cinema found itself tied to the official ideology and history of the State, promoting the message of a greater and more modern Peru.<sup>6</sup>

This chimes with a suggestion made by social theorist Jorge Larrain that the ‘power of an entertaining spectacle transmitted through images is very useful to create and maintain traditions that boost national feelings’.<sup>7</sup> But despite this encouraging flurry of activity for documentary-makers, the fact remains that as the rest of the world adjusted to the introduction of sound to the moving image medium, Peruvian filmmakers were only just grappling with their first silent features, highlighting the real lack of technological resources, investment and experienced filmmakers in a country still struggling with the pressures of US-led industrialization. Leguía’s approach to modernization was simply to block any radical change that would benefit the working classes, and to open the country to further investment by US companies.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, however, Peru’s first fiction films were in fact quietly critical of the impact of Western-led progress, and promoted instead the traditional, rural life experienced by the majority of the population, thus presenting a challenge to the very idea of a coherent national State that was at the heart of modernity. One example was *Camino de la venganza* (Path to Revenge, Luis Ugarte, 1922), a medium-length drama that recounts the story of an innocent servant girl from a mining town who is kidnapped and brought to Lima by a military captain, to be corrupted by the many distractions in

the city. Conflict is established between a morally idyllic rural life where work in the fields alternates with collective gatherings for eating and dancing, and the dangers of Lima, a city replete with threat and temptation. This focus on the tension between urban and rural life was to become a recurrent theme of Peruvian cinema thereafter.

The early 1930s saw film activity virtually grind to a halt as the Peruvian economy, so dependent on the export of its raw materials to the wealthy Northern countries, was devastated by the effects of the Wall Street Crash. Attempts were made to sustain production by a handful of key individuals but these projects were doomed to fail in such unstable circumstances. Later, that decade saw the establishment of a film production company that holds an important place in the history of Peruvian cinema: Amauta Films, named after the journal founded by leading Peruvian Marxist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui, who had died in 1930, having also set up the first Socialist Party in Peru. As the government of the time became ever more repressive and intent on aggressive modernization of the country, Amauta Films made feature-length movies that offered a romantic view of traditional life in the *barrios* of Lima. These were popular in some areas, but competition from the US, Italy and Mexico in particular - countries whose film industries were actively supported by their governments - eventually contributed to the downfall of the company by the end of the 1930s.

Peruvian films made over the next few decades tended to reproduce the conventions of European or US movies and were lacking in any distinctive local color or national sentiment; indigenous communities were almost completely absent from the screen. Films were amateurish and unsophisticated, production was sporadic, and investment went into the distribution and exhibition of foreign films. Many

filmmakers left Peru, their films were lost and no infrastructure was left for their successors, who had to start from scratch.

It is difficult to disagree therefore with Bedoya's view that '[T]he history of cinema in Peru has always been one of crisis. The instability of crisis has been the normal condition at all stages of its intermittent existence'.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, no legacy has been left by Peru's early filmmakers, and the infrastructure and political support for a national film industry are as absent today as they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, there is one important period that appears to be at odds with this general assessment of events. In the early 1970s, the populist military regime led by General Velasco took a long-term interest in the possibilities of cinema production to support its own modernization projects. Whereas in the past such support had been singularly self-serving and short-lived, legislation passed in 1972 provided sufficient flexibility and longevity for a range of filmmakers with varying ideological approaches to benefit from the scheme and to develop a degree of continuity verging on the creation of a national film industry.

And yet just twenty years later this protective legislation had floundered and been abolished, and by the end of 1994, President Fujimori had introduced a more market-oriented cinema law. Since then Peru's film industry has continued its steep decline. Despite much fanfare and excitement at the announcement of fresh legislation and economic support, delays in administration resulted in four 'empty' years for domestic film production.<sup>10</sup> In the end, the majority of the resources promised by the State for this law to be upheld were allocated elsewhere, with the result that between 1997 and 2001 just ten Peruvian feature films had been produced.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the nation's own film funding scheme had no money to award, and Fujimori's government

collapsed suddenly amidst dramatic discoveries of widespread institutional and individual corruption.

The remainder of this chapter aims to investigate these two most recent attempts by the Peruvian State to address its national cinema crisis, and the circumstances leading to the failure of those interventions. It further considers the ways in which Peru's filmmakers have variously reacted and responded to the changes imposed upon them, in a society steeped in many different social and economic crises. I suggest that these latest developments in fact echo the frustrating and frustrated 'stop-start' tendencies of the history of cinema in Peru outlined above, and are inextricably linked to the approaches of successive regimes to the modernization of the country.<sup>12</sup>

### The cinema law of 1972

In 1972 a protectionist cinema law was introduced by the military government of General Juan Velasco, after five years of consultation with Peru's filmmaking community. Velasco promoted himself nationally as a defender of the poor, redistributing land, and re-nationalizing private oil and mining companies. The motivation for the positive support given to the development of national cinema could therefore be interpreted as complementary to an overarching socialist reform program. Velasco was keen to fill national cinema screens with Peruvian images to replace the foreign ones that had dominated screens since the advent of cinema in Peru. The motivation for reclaiming Peruvian cinema screens for national directors and images of their country was in line with moves by the State to reclaim the oil fields of Talara from the International Petroleum Company and telecommunication systems from the All America Cables and Radio and ITT.<sup>13</sup> Christian F. Wiener has further argued that the establishment of this type of cinema law was part of a very ambitious project to

intervene in the arena of mass communications, to stimulate national media production, and to convert it into an educational tool, a means of consolidating national culture and promoting the benefits of modernity.<sup>14</sup>

This 1972 'Legislation for the Promotion of the Film Industry' included the following five key features:

1. Exhibitors were obliged to show a short Peruvian film before every imported feature presentation, and eight per cent of the total box office for that event would be paid to the makers of the short. The result was that some 1200 shorts were made during a twenty year period, providing a stable training ground for filmmakers, the potential for technological and personnel infrastructure to be established, and the development of financial resources to be invested into feature filmmaking.
2. Up to five Peruvian-made features would be selected each year for screening in the top cinemas of Lima. Investors, more certain of financial reward, would as a result commit to developing strategic marketing and promotions campaigns. The outcome in 1985, for example, was that a small national film called *Gregorio* (Gregory, made by the Chaski Group) enjoyed the same box-office success in Peru as several US blockbusters released that decade. Although the number of feature films produced each year during this period did not rise significantly, there was a constant flow of work for cinema crew and cast.<sup>15</sup>
3. A 'holdover' strategy was established whereby Peruvian features would remain on release until the weekly box-office figures dipped below a specified level. This allowed for word of mouth to build, and restricted exhibitors from replacing a

reasonably successful Peruvian film with a guaranteed money-spinning Hollywood blockbuster.

4. Subsidies would be available to filmmakers and investors in the form of welcome tax exemptions.
5. In addition, ticket prices were kept artificially low, controlled in much the same way as were prices for sugar and bread, to keep cinema-going accessible to as wide a range of the population as possible, thus safeguarding its status as media for the 'masses'. This factor contributed further to the success of films such as *Gregorio*, which was made with an audience from the more deprived parts of the country and the capital in mind.<sup>16</sup>

Protectionist legislation such as this was common to many so-called 'infant' film industries in Latin America; its general aim, according to observers such as Jorge Schnitman, was to encourage an industry threatened by foreign competition, enabling it to achieve economies of scale before moving to more independent models of operation.<sup>17</sup> The specific and overt aim of this legislation was to further the government's modernization program, which followed Ernest Gellner's argument that modernization entails, among other things, acquisition and mastery of technology.<sup>18</sup> Indeed Bedoya is clear that the practice of film production in Peru was used as an affirmation of modernity, and the Cinema Law was put in place primarily to ensure that national filmmakers would promote the State's ideology of revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the advantages outlined above, some issues of concern to Peruvian filmmakers remained neglected by the legislation. The market for films was still limited to the domestic one as difficulties in finding distribution channels abroad were not fully addressed. There were insufficient funding sources, and it was increasingly

hard for new, inexperienced filmmakers to gain access to credit. There was, furthermore, no guarantee that the decision to approve a film for obligatory screening would not be influenced by an increasingly intolerant political regime that was wary of any form of criticism.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, national film production in Peru was undoubtedly stimulated during the 1970s and 1980s. The making of short films became a lucrative activity with exhibition guaranteed and investments quickly returned, especially with an exchange rate kept artificially favorable so as to assist the purchase of equipment and stock from the US. New filmmakers thus gained more opportunities for artistic and technical experimentation and training. In particular, this era saw the rise of Peru's only internationally renowned director of recent times, Francisco Lombardi.

Meanwhile, one sector grew increasingly alienated. The owners of cinema theaters considered the law to be an unwanted imposition of films that they would not have screened given the choice. An authoritarian government was breathing life into cinema production at the expense of box-office income, leading to an unhelpful fragmentation of the national cinema project. Exhibitors even complained of having to bear increased electricity costs caused by longer screening sessions. Moreover, there was soon an unrealistic glut of shorts to be screened and it must have come as little surprise that the demise of the 1972 Cinema Law was welcomed, and to some extent encouraged by national cinema exhibitors.

The public also reacted negatively to the poor technical quality of many of the films of this period, especially the shorts. With the pressure mounting to produce as many films as possible, the criteria of success being quantity over quality, many production companies neglected to make improvements to sound and color, to their ultimate cost. This was partly due to a lack of proper equipment, but also caused by

the proliferation of companies established primarily to benefit financially in the short term from the opportunities that the Cinema Law promised. Indeed, few of them reinvested profit in the development of a national cinema infrastructure. Furthermore, technical blunders were largely overlooked as increasingly films were rejected from the guaranteed screening and tax credit system purely for offering a critical vision of the military regime and social order, regardless of whether they were well-made.

### The decline of the Cinema Law and its abolition in 1992

By the end of the 1980s, the Cinema Law had all but run its course, and its original deficiencies were clear. In addition, the reality of an acute economic crisis within the country and the break-up of the model of development promoted by Velasco's government were reflected in the growing difficulties posed by making films in Peru. The lack of secure funds put the brake on developments and frustrated expectations. Investment in film production became, once again, a high-risk activity as cinemas began to contravene the Law by refusing to show national product. The internal market weakened, and the export of films became almost impossible. Little money was left from the preceding period, and the Banco Industrial, the main bank involved in supporting film activity, now actively excluded from credit arrangements all new filmmakers, along with any more experienced directors who had no guaranteed back-up resources. Hyperinflation meant that any funds acquired were in any case spent within a few days of starting shooting, and projects were either abandoned or took several years to reach the screens.

Many out-of-town cinemas, where the appeal of locally made movies had been greatest, went out of business during the 1980s and early 1990s for several reasons. Terrorism led to the imposition of curfews, regular power cuts broke into almost

every screening, and ticket prices eventually had to rise out of the reach of most people due to the devastating effects of hyperinflation, despite government efforts to keep them low.

So it was within this context that new President Alberto Fujimori announced in 1992 that he intended to make important changes to the framework for national cinema.<sup>21</sup> With some anxiety, the Filmmakers Association of Peru reluctantly began to work with the government on re-presenting a policy that they had started to develop during the late 1980s, one which would support the development of national cinema, but within the new economic framework, and involving representatives from distribution and exhibition sectors. The 1972 Cinema Law was officially abolished in December 1992, and the Association worked with Congress for two years on a new plan.

US distributors saw an opportunity meanwhile to develop a more middle-class audience which would now identify more readily with the affluent lifestyles offered by Hollywood product than with the more somber Peruvian reality portrayed by the majority of the country's own filmmakers. These distributors became involved in the debate, and via their Ambassador put pressure on a government showing signs of interest in foreign investment from the US.

In the event, a new Cinema Law was passed in October 1994, by which time plans for US-financed and -programmed multiplex cinemas in affluent areas of Lima were in place, audience demographics had inevitably shifted almost entirely to the middle-classes, and national filmmaking had all but ground to a halt.

## The 1994 Cinema Law and its impact

The key difference with regard to the new law was its objective that cinema should no longer be regarded principally as an industrial activity and overt signifier of the country's progress towards modernization, but as an important cultural activity for producers and viewers. In the text accompanying the law, President Fujimori signaled for the first time since elected what he considered ought to be the cultural policy of the State at a time of liberal democracy, declaring that: 'one of the responsibilities of the State [was] to develop, disseminate and preserve national culture, for the purpose of affirming the country's cultural identity, without seeking financial recompense'.<sup>22</sup>

Filmmaker and lawyer José Perla Anaya, in his final speech to fellow national filmmakers after four years as president of the body set up to administer and apply the new law, gives the following summary of its development and nature:

In October 1994, the new Peruvian Cinema Law 26370 was established, and was finally approved in May 1995. CONACINE was set up on 5 January 1996. Three representatives were designated from the Ministry of Education, Indecopi (the national body for the protection of intellectual property) and INC (the National Institute of Culture), and seven members elected by cinema associations [...] Thus Law 26370 came into effect, with a model of incentives for production based on competitions and prizes. There was no longer to be any tax exemption nor obligatory exhibition for Peruvian films. The law's other ambitious responsibilities included the dissemination of national cinema, cinema education, the organization of film archives, and the establishment and maintenance of a cinema register.<sup>23</sup>

This competition-based funding model was based very loosely on similar experiments in Europe and elsewhere in Latin America. A new national film organization, CONACINE (*Consejo Nacional de Cinematografía* – National Film Council), was set up within the Ministry of Education to assess, administer and award the \$1.5 million per year promised by Fujimori. In theory there were to be six prizes per year for features and forty-eight for shorts. In practice, however, no more than half a dozen feature films and around thirty shorts have been awarded funding since 1994, partly because of the government's failure consistently to make available the promised resources. This was due in part to the fact that the Ministry of Education's limited resources have been more urgently required for basic education costs, and also because the necessary matched-funding has been almost impossible to locate, especially for short films. Moreover, when compared to the annual sum of \$40 million promised to Argentine filmmakers in 1995, the \$1.5 million that Fujimori set aside a year earlier seems woefully inadequate.<sup>24</sup>

The President's announcements in 1994 aroused suspicion amongst filmmakers, who specifically attacked the abandonment of the obligatory screening aspect of the previous legislation. They also feared that the competitions would become a form of indirect censorship by the State, and there was general concern about how long the financial commitment would last. Although they admitted that there had been a need to revise the old law, and indeed a great deal of effort had been put into doing just that, the filmmakers themselves were reticent about placing their faith in a regime still lacking an overarching cultural policy, and with more pressing economic priorities. The following extract from a speech given by Nilo Pereira del Mar, filmmaker and President of the Filmmakers Association of Peru, at the first prize-giving ceremony

for shorts and feature film projects in December 1996, gives some indication of the anger that was still felt by many:

As everyone knows, these last four years have been devastating for national cinema. The production of national films, which had been fairly constant since 1972, was abruptly interrupted by the abolition of the main financial incentives for the production of shorts and features. It is important to point out that when this regrettable break occurred, national cinema had reached a maturity of content and professional quality which opened up an international space thanks to prizes and screenings all over the world. Twenty years of unbelievable effort by more than 200 filmmakers over two generations were about to be sent into oblivion. Nevertheless, we persevered with our dreams. And for four years we battled tirelessly to achieve a new legal framework that would allow us to really get on with our work.<sup>25</sup>

Despite Perla Anaya's positive and determined attitude to make this Law work, it seemed doomed from the start. At the very first prize-giving ceremony, criticism was raised on the part of filmmakers as to why only seven out of the twelve available prizes had been awarded, especially as some of those who were not recipients had already been given prizes at national and international festivals for those very films now undergoing assessment domestically. Pereira del Mar questions the criteria on which the CONACINE awards were allocated a little later in the same speech:

We sincerely hope that judgement of each film project was not based on its ideological approach, when the decision should have been based on artistic

criteria. We only say this because several of the Jury members have made a point of supporting freedom of expression and battling against film censorship, and it surprises us that they have rejected precisely those works whose vision is not the most sympathetic towards our reality.<sup>26</sup>

His criticisms continue:

In the case of the competition for features, we are delighted that the three prizes have been awarded, as indicated by the Law. However, we would have liked one of those to have been a proposal from a new director, so as to fit in with the Law's objectives and ethics of promotion.<sup>27</sup>

Thus it appears that at least one important group of filmmakers had concerns about the interpretation and application of the new Law. Pereira admits that they were aware that it was no longer appropriate simply to replicate the phenomenon of Law 19327, when practically every work benefited. They also believed that they needed to be shown evidence of coherence and understanding of a cinematic reality which had been paralyzed for four long and difficult years. Their most immediate concern was that the decision not to award more than forty per cent of the prizes would make the production of shorts even more challenging in the coming year.

The year 1997 was, however, more promising, with two further competitions for shorts (still only half that promised by the Law), in which all twenty-four available prizes were awarded, and one further competition for features, in which three more projects received support. However, by 1998 funds had become extremely scarce and,

by Perla Anaya's own admission, amounts owed to prize-winning companies for feature productions were mounting up.<sup>28</sup>

One film project that suffered tremendous setbacks partly as a result of uncertainty caused by the 'new' Cinema Law was *El bien esquivo* (The Elusive Good). Augusto Tamayo's project was awarded the top prize of \$188,000 (648,000 *nuevos soles*) in 1997, but was not released until July 2001, four years later, having received just \$14,500 (50,000 *nuevos soles*).<sup>29</sup> The delay in itself is not wholly exceptional, but the unfortunate dispute in which the film's writer and director was for a long time engaged with CONACINE and the Ministry of Education betrayed some of the inherent weaknesses of the legislative system. The film took longer to make than was allowed by the contract agreed with CONACINE, primarily due to problems with the identification of matched-funding. As a result, the \$14,500 received may have to be returned. And yet the film was welcomed on its release as an important cultural product, according to positive reviews at the time, and achieved moderate success at the box office.

Outspoken veteran filmmaker Armando Robles Godoy is rather more emphatic in his criticism of the system. In an article in *La República*, 22 November 1998, on the State-supported film *Coraje* (Courage), completed by Alberto Durant that year, he offered a cry of protest at the State's indifference towards Peru's national cinema:

This [*Coraje*] is one of very few national films that have been made in recent years. There is almost no cinema in Peru because the government won't get on with fulfilling the very same laws that it set up. At this rate, the century and the millenium will close with the complete abolition of Peruvian

cinema, a death throes that began in 1992, with the action of the Ministry of Finance and its sterile dogma of market-oriented policy.<sup>30</sup>

In the same article, producer Andres Malatesta continues in a similar vein:

A country without its own cinema is like a country without a face. We've demonstrated that we're ready to compete, but for a long time we've had to confront so many financial headaches. CONACINE doesn't have any money, it seems like cultural activity isn't taken seriously, it's terrible. We want clear quotas and obligatory exhibition, as we had with the 1972 Cinema Law that was abolished in 1992. It's incredible that in our own country we have to beg to get our films screened in our own cinemas.<sup>31</sup>

More recently, producer Stefan Kasper, one of the founding members of the socialist film-making Chaski Group, responded to an email interview on the importance of national cinema in the following way:

Yes, national cinema is very important, and the State should definitely support it. Why? There is a range of ways in which cinema can contribute to the development of a country. It acts as the mirror and reflection of reality. People see themselves in their own films and need this image of themselves to help them construct their own identity. Cinema is also the image that one country projects to other countries, its way of communicating. Cinema is art and industry, and each country should develop it according to its own criteria, priorities and interests.<sup>32</sup>

## The films of the 1990s

What kinds of films were eventually produced once the new Cinema Law was in place? To what extent is it possible to identify a distinctive style and set of thematic concerns common to Peruvian films of the 1990s? Peruvian cinema has never been greatly influenced by the major trends which made their mark elsewhere in Latin America; indeed the overtly left-wing political agenda of the 1960s' and 1970s' pioneers of the 'new' and revolutionary cinemas of the continent have had little impact on the Peruvian scene. Commentators argue that this is not because Peruvian filmmakers themselves have no political inclination, but rather because they have been drawn into a more quietly critical or allegorical discourse due to the need to have films approved by a government body in order to qualify either for obligatory screening or for a competitive award.<sup>33</sup> The few exceptions to this trend, such as Marianne Eyde's *La vida es una sola* (You Only Live Once, 1993) which dared to show less sympathy for the military than for the rural communities caught up in violence with the Shining Path rebels, suffered from a delayed release, difficulties with funding, and negative reception from certain areas of the press.

Furthermore, the lack of economic support has meant that filmmakers have had to rely almost exclusively on box-office returns, and a desire to please rather than challenge the audience has become fundamental to ensuring continuity. Hence, a rather unremarkable approach to filmmaking has emerged, with either a focus on realist re-constructions of actual events already in the public sphere, or a ransacking of myths from the past, mixing anthropology with fetishistic mysticism and an increasingly touristic gaze. Indeed many Peruvian film critics have lamented the lack of innovation and dynamism shown by many of the nation's filmmakers.<sup>34</sup>

The most consistent director, and the only one to have gained sustained international recognition, is Francisco Lombardi, whose works have been appreciated for their classic dramatic structure and realist themes concerning personal and political violence. He benefited from the opportunities offered by the 1972 Cinema Law and gained early success at festivals with controversial feature films exploring the military and the terrorist movements, such as *La ciudad y los perros* (The City and the Dogs, 1985) and *La boca del lobo* (In the Mouth of the Wolf/The Lion's Den, 1988). During the 1990s, Lombardi made six features, none of which relied on government-sponsored prizes or subsidies, but which succeeded in attracting investment from overseas.<sup>35</sup>

### Co-productions and foreign relations

With very limited national investment, and the narrowing of the internal market, the only way forward in terms of funding in recent years has tended to be via international co-production arrangements. Even during the 1980s, out of thirty-seven national films, seventeen were part-financed by overseas capital, mainly from Europe.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Lombardi's projects built on the success of the previous decade and attracted a good level of co-production support from Europe and other parts of Latin America, leading perhaps inevitably to a certain internationalization of subject matter, but enabling him to remain independent of the vagaries of the State system. Yet even he has seen the funds dry up as investors' attentions have been diverted to filmmakers who are backed by some sort of national infrastructure. More recently, Lombardi saw his own production infrastructure collapse when his main Peruvian producer was last year found to be implicated in the Fujimori corruption scandals.<sup>37</sup>

In his last speech as president of CONACINE, Perla Anaya summarized all the most recent steps that had been taken by this organization in collaboration with filmmakers' associations in an attempt to stimulate film production once more. Several of these measures acknowledge the need to participate in the global market and to develop partnerships with other countries. For example, a proposal was put to *PromPeru*, a government body set up to promote the country as a destination of choice for tourism and business, to set up a travelling exhibition of national cinema and to finance trips by the makers of feature films in search of resources. Some interest was expressed at first, but the progress made has been limited. In 1997, the Filmmakers Association of Peru, with the support of CONACINE, drew up a plan to create a national film fund, with resources to be drawn from the exchange of external debt for investment in film production. This proposal, named FINPROCI, has not yet been formally approved by the government despite repeated campaigns to highlight the need for such a project. Other projects include a Peruvian Film Commission, promoting the use of Peru as a film location for overseas companies, and the Ibermedia program, a multilateral fund for film production that promotes the development of film projects by Latin American companies through awarding grants. However, despite government promises since 1997 to pay the annual quotas required for Peru to become a member of such a program, no resources have yet been forthcoming.<sup>38</sup>

The government of the late 1990s appears to have favored more direct and increasingly accessible means of communication technology such as television and the Internet, and the potential for national cinema to contribute to this renewed modernization project via mass communication seems remote. Moreover, although observers such as Ian Jarvie may argue that movies might still be considered as at

least a way-station to acquiring and mastering the more politically useful communication technologies of television and computers, the Fujimori government demonstrated no interest in protecting its film industry even for that reason.<sup>39</sup>

## Concluding remarks

Despite two rounds of legislation aimed ostensibly at stimulating national cinema, the Peruvian film industry at the turn of the twenty-first century was again in crisis. The first intervention in 1972, with its overt links to a State modernization project, enjoyed a measure of success but required evaluation, revision and development both to stay in line with changing political and economic contexts, and to benefit distribution and exhibition activities as well as film production. Instead it was abolished and replaced with a funding competition which was received with some skepticism, and which in the event completely failed, mainly due to a lack of genuine interest and economic support from the Fujimori regime. In addition, potential international co-producers turned their back on Peru's filmmakers, government corruption dragged the whole country into further turmoil, and the new Toledo-led regime installed in 2001 has yet to turn its attentions seriously to developing a coherent cultural policy as it grapples with the more pressing social dilemmas of acute poverty and unrest. As a consequence, a new generation of potential film talent is being driven to seek opportunities abroad, or within the more lucrative markets of television and multi-media.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, the filmmaking community in Peru remains somewhat divided: while some (such as Robles Godoy and Kasper, cited above) have campaigned for a system based on the one developed during the protectionist years of quota, subsidy and guaranteed screening, others (such as Lombardi, Salvini, Velarde) seem to have

embraced, however reluctantly, the need to find ways of working within a global market dominated by the US.<sup>41</sup> What they appear to share, with each other and with a century of Peruvian film ‘pioneers’, is the somewhat utopian vision of a stable and independent infrastructure for Peruvian national cinema, as expressed by one of the main spokespeople for the decade, Perla Anaya:

I continue to believe that these legal and economic problems can be overcome if we really work at it. All I ask is that those who really love our national cinema never tire of working in it and for it, however deficient or limited our actions might seem to be.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, Peru’s filmmakers moved from having a clear, if somewhat functional role within the inward-looking nationalist modernization agenda of General Velasco, to the promise of a broader cultural one under President Fujimori. The latter’s neo-liberal approach, leaving national filmmakers to compete against international industries under economic conditions that favor product from outside the country, appears in some ways to have more in common with those of earlier regimes led by Piérola and Leguía, who were seduced by the films, lifestyles and investment opportunities of Europe and the US. In the end, the promise of an overarching cultural policy remained unfulfilled, and just a few years after Fujimori’s dramatic disappearance from the political scene it still appears to be too early to weigh up the possibility of renewed support from a regime whose leader has promised to prioritize the basic needs of the rural and poor majority.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, Peru’s filmmakers continue the search for finance and a role in an increasingly crisis-ridden country that

in many respects is still finding the transition to modernity a painful one, imposed upon it from the outside like the Hollywood blockbusters that dominate its screens.

---

1 Stephen Kern, quoted in Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 19.

2 Quoted in Vivian Schelling, *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London & New York: Verso, 2000), p. 149.

3 *Ibid.*

4 I am indebted to Ricardo Bedoya's *Cien años de cine en el Perú: una historia crítica* (Lima: Universidad de Lima, 1995) for providing much of the historical detail upon which parts of this introductory section are based.

5 See Peter Elmore, *Los muros invisibles: Lima y la modernidad en la novela del siglo XX* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1993), pp. 11-51.

6 Bedoya, *Cien años de cine en el Perú*, p. 43 (our translation).

7 Jorge Larrain, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 40.

8 See Carlos Iván Degregori et al., *The Peru Reader: History Culture and Politics* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 215-8.

9 Bedoya, *Cien años de cine en el Perú*, p. 305 (our translation).

10 Between 1993 and 1997, just four films were made and released in Peru: *Sin compasión* (No Mercy, 1994) and *Bajo la piel* (Under the Skin, 1996) by Francisco Lombardi, whose film projects at that time attracted useful co-production finance, mainly from Spain; *Anda, corre, vuela* (Walk, Run, Fly, Augusto Tamayo 1995) and *Asia, el culo del mundo* (Asia, the Pits of the Earth, Juan Carlos Torrico 1996). No Peruvian films were released in 1997.

11 1998: *Coraje* (Courage, Alberto Durant), *La carnada* (The Bait, Marianne Eyde) and *No se lo digas a nadie* (Don't Tell Anyone, Lombardi); 1999: *La yunta brava* (The Brave Union, Federico García) and *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (*Captain Pantoja and the Special Services*, Lombardi); 2000: *Ciudad de M* (City of M, Felipe Degregori) and *A la media noche y media* (At Half past Midnight, Marite Ugaz and Mariana Rondón); 2001: *Tinta roja* (Red Ink, Lombardi), *El bien esquivo* (The Elusive Good, Tamayo) and *Bala perdida* (Stray Bullet, Aldo Salvini). Just five of those received partial support from the State. The 1994 Cinema Law stated that up to six feature film projects a year should be awarded funding, starting in 1996, thus up to thirty-six projects should have been supported by the end of 2001.

12 I am grateful to Anglia Polytechnic University (APU, Cambridge) for the award of a bursary that enabled me to carry out a research trip to Peru in 2001 and acquire the material for this and other essays on Peruvian national cinema. I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to Norma Rivera and her staff at the *Filmoteca de Lima*, who very patiently helped me to find the material I needed. And, finally, thanks to those filmmakers and critics who generously gave their time to be interviewed for this project.

13 José Perla Anaya, *Censura y promoción en el cine* (Lima: Deyco Instituto Peruano de Derecho de las Comunicaciones, 1991) p. 115.

14 Christian F. Wiener, 'Tan duro de vivir, tan duro de morir: el cine en el Perú de los 1990' in Rob Rix and Roberto Rodríguez-Saona, *Changing Reels: Latin American Cinema Against the Odds* (Leeds: Trinity & All Saints College, 1997), p. 22.

---

15 Financial support for production, marketing, distribution and exhibition was not the sole contributor to the success of *Gregorio*, although it undoubtedly helped that the film was shown throughout the country, in the most remote areas, by a mobile cinema unit. Critical comment at the time praised the film's effective neo-realist style and sensitive portrayal of social deprivation amongst street children in Lima. See the entry for this film in Ricardo Bedoya, *Un cine reencontrado: diccionario ilustrado de las películas peruanas* (Lima: Universidad de Lima, 1997), pp. 255-7.

16 These are just the main aspects of the 1972 cinema legislation. Exhaustive detail can be found in Perla Anaya, *Censura y promoción en el cine*.

17 See Jorge Schnitman, *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development* (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984).

18 See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

19 Bedoya, *Cien años de cine en el Perú*, p. 188.

20 Wiener, 'Tan duro de vivir, tan duro de morir', pp. 22-3.

21 Christian Wiener's essay examines in detail the political decisions that made the abolition of the cinema law inevitable. In summary, in December 1992, Fujimori and his ultra-neo-liberal chancellor, Carlos Boloña decided to terminate the laws regarding tax exemption and privileges, which in effect made the old cinema law obsolete.

22 Wiener, 'Tan duro de vivir, tan duro de morir', p. 24 (our translation).

23 José Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años: memoria 1996-1998* (Lima: CONACINE, 1998), p. 74 (our translation).

24 In fact, the economic resources committed by the government were by far the greatest concern. As Perla Anaya summarizes in his 1998 report, CONACINE worked for seven months in 1996 with no funding; in 1997, they requested approximately \$1.16 million (4 million *nuevos soles*) and received \$290,000 (1 million *nuevos soles*); in 1998, they requested \$1.305 million (4.5 million) and received \$290,000 (1 million); in 1999, they requested the same amount and received nothing. Over eighty per cent of the funding received was spent on competition awards, leaving little for the remaining responsibilities.

25 Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años*, p. 19 (our translation).

26 *Ibid.*, p. 20 (our translation).

27 *Ibid.* (our translation).

28 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

**30 (our translation).**

**31 (our translation).**

32 Interview with author by email on 9 August 2001 (our translation).

33 Wiener, 'Tan duro de vivir, tan duro de morir', p. 26.

34 For example, see Jorge Zavaleta Balarezo, 'El Cine en el Perú: ¿la luz al final del túnel?' in Karl Kohut et al., *Literatura peruana hoy: crisis y creación* (Frankfurt: University of Eichstatt, 1998).

35 For a full analysis of Lombardi's films see Ricardo Bedoya, *Entre fauces y colmillos: las películas de Francisco Lombardi* (Huesca: Festival de Cine de Huesca, 1997).

36 Zavaleta Balarezo, 'El Cine en el Perú', p. 263.

37 Lombardi agreed to be interviewed by the author during a research trip she carried out to Peru in the summer of 2001. He spoke of having to suspend the operation of his production company, Inca Films because of its links with the corrupt former

---

Intelligence Minister Vladimir Montesinos via his colleague and head of the State television Channel 4, Crousillat. The Fujimori and Montesinos corruption scandals were closely linked to all the State television channels, in that the main broadcasters were allegedly bribed to support the President's regime.

38 Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años*, pp. 94-6.

39 Ian Jarvie 'National Cinema: A Theoretical Assessment' in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie, *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 75-87.

40 Some are inevitably tempted to follow in the footsteps of Luis Llosa, who made several short films in Peru in the 1970s and then went to work with Roger Corman in the US. His most (in)famous works to date include *Anaconda* (1997) and *The Specialist* (1994). He also has a television production company in Lima that specializes in the production of soap operas and employs much of the young filmmaking talent in the capital, including up-and-coming feature director Aldo Salvini, whose digitally filmed thriller set in Cusco, *La bala perdida*, starring two young and nationally well-known television actors, was released in late 2001.

41 Another new filmmaker, Alvaro Velarde, began to enjoy some success in the late 1990s. Having trained in New York, he went on to make three award-winning short films, *98 Thompson* (1994), *C. Lloyd, un cuento de crimen y castigo* (*A Tale of Crime and Punishment*, 1996) and *Roces* (*Social Graces*, 1999), and was due to release his first feature, *El destino no tiene favoritos* (*Destiny has no Favourites*), in 2002. He received some funding from CONACINE, but has had to look outside Peru for matched-funding, post-production facilities, and screening possibilities. By early 2003, this project had received support from Rotterdam Film Festival's renowned Humbert Bals fund, and been selected for a number of festival screenings, but had not raised the finance to transfer from video to film and had no release date scheduled in Peru.

42 Perla Anaya, *Los tres primeros años*, p. 76 (our translation).

43 In the section on Peru in Peter Cowie's *Variety International Film Guide 2003* (London: Button, 2002), pp. 266-7, national critic and film professor Isaac León Frías explains that the '2002 Peruvian Film Congress stressed the need for a new legal framework to support production within the liberal economic model followed not only by the Peruvian government but by most Latin American regimes, and filmmakers have begun to put pressure on the new government of President Alejandro Toledo to do more for their industry.' On these pages, León Frías mentions five other features that have been completed and are awaiting release, several of them made on the cheaper digital video format. He points out that while production continues, the films are often not released until two or three years after completion.