THIS IS A DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CITE WITHOUT PERMISSION

Jon Beasley-Murray University of British Columbia jon.beasley-murray@ubc.ca

"Subalternity, Betrayal, and Flight: Three Recent Films from Peru"

The current renaissance in Peruvian cinema is unexpected to say the least. It was just a couple of years ago that Sarah Barrow observed that this was "a national cinema in crisis," pointing to a drastic decline in what was already a pretty minimal level of state funding for film-making, as well as to a dearth of production. As she notes, "between 1993 and 1997, just four films were made and released in Peru" (56), two of which were directed by the country's one cineaste of international repute, Francisco Lombardi, and that only thanks to the aid of transnational co-production and foreign capital. Not a single Peruvian film was released in 1997. And the turn of the century hardly heralded much improvement: "between 1997 and 2001 just 10 Peruvian feature films [were] produced" (43). At the best of times Peru's cinematic fortunes had been precarious; now it seemed that the country's truncated filmic tradition was finally coming to an unheroic end. Even the transplanted B-Movie director, Luis Llosa, appeared to be in the doldrums: he had not made a movie since 1997's underwhelming disaster flick Anaconda, and had turned instead to TV, producing series with titles such as Cazando a un millonario ("Hunting a Millionaire") and the soap operas Latin Lover and La mujer de Lorenzo ("Lorenzo's Woman"). In Peru, it was almost impossible to track down Peruvian movies; video chains were full of Hollywood blockbusters and martial arts or action films. In 2004 Lima's grubby Filmoteca, housed in a corner of the venerable national Art Museum, in a theater with poor sound and worse sightlines, closed its doors after sixteen years of operation.

Today, however, more films than ever are being produced in Peru. 2006, for instance, saw a dozen or more features made. The Filmoteca's collection transferred to the smart, modern building of the Catholic University's Cultural Center. Blockbuster Video closed down, but its disappearance has been more than compensated by a flourishing black market trade: in the "Polvos Azules" market in central Lima, for instance, dozens of small stalls offer Peruvian and international art house cinema (as well, of course, as Hollywood hits and US television series) for less than \$2 per DVD.

Indeed, more generally the cinematic resurgence of the past few years has been propelled by new technology and its informal networks. Blogs buzz with discussion about national cinema. Trailers and even entire films are uploaded to YouTube. And most importantly, the arrival of high-quality digital videography and editing facilities at relatively affordable prices has spread the means of cinematic production further than ever before. The San Marcos University's Cultural Center recently (November 2007) organized a "First National Festival of Independent Cinema" that showcased features from across the country: regions represented ranged from Puno in the South to Cajamarca in the North. And while the quality of these films is variable (to say the least), they have generated significant excitement, especially in the provinces where they were made, and are inspiring others to try their hands at film-making in turn.

Precisely because of the regional focus of this new cinema, however, the concept of "Peruvian" cinema has to be revised. Of the twelve movies on show at the San Marcos festival, only two were made in Lima. And so Lima, in this context, becomes simply another Peruvian province: the capital can no longer stand in for the country as a whole. "Peruvian" cinema is now a combination of this new, regional cinema plus the continued, if scarcer, work of directors such as Lombardi who fund larger projects via international co-production. In this sense, Barrow's prediction has come true: Peruvian cinema has disappeared; it has been replaced by subnational and transnational cinemas that challenge the very notion of a "national" cinema. National cinema has been usurped by a non-national or even anti-national cinema that undoes claims to national hegemony. And this non-national, non-Peruvian cinema is subaltern *par excellence*. It is subaltern because is comprises a betrayal or flight from the idea of a nation that has never come into its own. And in this essay I show through readings of three recent "Peruvian" films how these concepts or practices, of subalternity, betrayal, and flight, are presented and enacted in this new cinema.

The three films under discussion are all quite different. *Chicha tu madre* ("Chicha Your Mother," 2006) is a co-production between Peru and Argentina and is a comedy set in suburban Lima. *Días de Santiago* ("Santiago's Days," 2004) is also set in Lima, and is a low-budget film, partly in grainy black and white, about the travails of an exserviceman. Finally, *Madeinusa* (2006) is the most critically acclaimed of recent films from Peru; a co-production with Spain, its sumptuous cinematography portrays a syncretistic festival in the Andes. At the same time, these films could be more diverse: I

do not discuss, for instance, any of the regional film-making mentioned earlier. These three films are among the most polished examples of recent Peruvian cinema, and *Días de Santiago* and *Madeinusa* have enjoyed considerable success on the art house and festival circuits in North America and Europe. This is not the most marginal cinema imaginable. Yet marginality in itself has little to recommend it. Indeed, beyond their artisanal qualities, it is notable that regional films such as Flaviano Quispe's *El huerfanito* ("The Little Orphan," Puno, 2004) or Nilo Inga's *Sangre y tradición* ("Blood and Tradition," Junín, 2005) tend to be socially conservative. The same is also true, incidentally, of avowedly socially-committed movies such as the Grupo Chaski's *Juliana* (1988) or *Anda*, *corre*, *vuela* ("Go, Run, Fly," 1995). It would take another essay to analyze the reasons why this is so, but perhaps at times the greatest risks are taken in making the film in the first place, rather than in the film itself. The three films I am discussing pose no less of a challenge to conceptions of Peruvian identity than does the regional or marginal cinema whose very existence is already a significant enough retort to the idea of a national film industry.

subalternity, betrayal, flight

Each of these films offers differing configurations of subalternity, betrayal, and flight. Subalternity comes in all shapes and sizes: it is characterized by diversity, heterogeneity, and singularity. The subaltern is what falls outside of or exceeds the identities that define or are defined by the norm. And the lower-middle class characters depicted in *Chicha tu madre* are as much subaltern as are the considerably poorer inhabitants of the shantytowns featured in *Días de Santiago* or the Andean peasants of *Madeinusa*. Subalternity is also a shifting, temporary characterization: individual characters can inhabit subaltern positions at one moment, while at the next, or viewed from a shift of perspective, they suddenly take on normative configurations. Subalternity is a relational concept, or perhaps better a concept of (non-)relation. The protagonist of *Días de Santiago*, for example, has spent the years preceding the start of the film's diegesis enforcing a whole set of boundaries in his role as agent of the Peruvian armed forces. Literally, he has been upholding the demarcation of the national border between Peru and Ecuador; more abstractly, fighting Sendero in the highlands was a matter of distinguishing between law-abiding citizen and insurgent

terrorist. But on his demobilization and return to civilian life in Lima he becomes subalternized: he no longer fits within the grid of expectations and capacities that inflect everyday life in the capital. He struggles to establish "normal" relations with his environment, even the subordinate relations of student, employee, or son. And in similar fashion, Madeinusa likewise presents us with the shifting contours of subalternity. At times the mayor of its remote highland village most definitely occupies and defines a position of power and privilege: as mayor but also as father. At other times, however, and viewed from the position occupied by the middle-class Limeñan who wanders into the villagers' domain, it is the mayor who becomes subalternized, primitivized, when subjected to the scrutiny of the liberal gaze. But even this apparently authoritative positioning is itself precarious, as is demonstrated by the film's dramatic denouement in which the outsider suddenly grasps that he too can become subalternized, can be erased from the moral grid that operates within the community itself. Cinema is a particularly good medium for investigating the constant modulations of perspective and positioning in which subalternity is continually established and dissolved: cinematic shot selection is always about (re)framing, while montage presents us with an ever-changing set of points of view. Indeed, however much the cinematic apparatus tries to hold and reinforce a particular point of view (the male gaze, say, or any other putatively hegemonic perspective), the fact of the matter is that the object consistently flees from sight, demonstrates its opacity, or becomes lost in the myriad refractions and reflections that constitute a moving picture.

The thematics of betrayal are also both ever-present and multi-faceted. *Chicha tu madre* revolves around a series of betrayals, some comic, some less so: the protagonist is consistently unfaithful to his wife, for instance, as well as (more seriously in terms of the film's encoded *machista* values) to his football team. More generally, and like a number of other recent Latin American films (the Argentine movies *Nueve reinas* ["Nine Queens," 2000] or *El abrazo partido* ["Lost Embrace," 2004], for instance), the movie depicts contemporary urban society as enveloped in an increasingly chaotic and informal ambience in which survival is a matter of doing deals, many of which are inevitably dodgy in one way or another. Every deal done opens the possibility of some petty treason, from tax avoidance to fencing stolen goods to confidence trickery of the most sophisticated varieties. Everything is negotiable, in another instantiation of the flexibility and precariousness of official norms: not even the taxis have meters in Lima.

And every time that the norm is renegotiated offers the possibility of another betrayal, not least of the principle of normativity itself. This, indeed, is the eponymous Santiago's main stumbling block in *Días de Santiago*. Santiago's problem is that he has internalized a set of rigid prescriptions from his military days, and more importantly that he has internalized the habit of rigidity itself. Though he is accustomed to surprise, ambush, and unpredictability, he sees such deviations not as an attempt to negotiate and so re-establish a code of sociability and communication, but a betrayal of the very principle of normativity. Santiago attempts to master social interaction along military lines, by formulating plans and procedures for every possibility, whether that be crossing the road or asking a girl for a dance. But something always escapes his plans, stranding him with his unworkable assumptions. And so he perceives urban living as a constant cavalcade of treasons that ultimate asphyxiate him and lead him to social (perhaps even literal) suicide. Again, there is something intensely cinematic in this perception of the urban experience: the moving camera guides our vision but also confounds it, cutting or shifting focus at its own tempo rather than our own. In Días de Santiago, as in much other contemporary cinema from Latin America and elsewhere (the cinematography and also the central character have much in common for instance with the Jason Bourne trilogy), the camera sometimes moves so rapidly that our eyes retain only the merest sensation of movement and activity with no clear purpose. The gaze is constantly undermined. In addition, in this picture grainy black and white periodically, and apparently randomly, alternates with color: we can never be certain how, let alone what, we will be seeing next. The camera eye betrays us, less empowering prosthesis than debilitating handicap.

Finally, flight too is both endlessly variable, indeed by definition never the same, and also a perennial cinematic concern. *Chicha tu madre* and *Madeinusa* both end somewhat abruptly, in mid flight to destinations or fates uncertain. In the case of *Chicha tu madre*, the ending is particularly brusque: the last scene shows the lead character on a bus headed towards Argentina, but leaves unresolved for instance the basic question as to whether the trip on which he is embarked, transporting sick and infirm Peruvians to an Argentine clinic, is a good deal or simply another scam. Well, we already know that it is at least half scam: the recruitment and payment process involves a series of covert kickbacks, for instance. But the film's protagonist, roped in on the voyage by a man he has come to believe could be his friend, seems to have been infused with the semi-

messianic promises of cheap and efficient healthcare offered by the Eva Perón hospital in the Southern Cone. So much so, indeed, that he has arranged for his girlfriend's aged grandmother to join the expedition, too. The bus is crammed full with hope, then, with the notion that flight can be positive rather than negative, an Exodus that leads to a promised land of health and security. But everything in the movie hitherto has primed the viewer to suspect deception at every turn, to believe that get-rich and get-healthy schemes alike simply prey on the gullible hopes of people who in fact have no good reason to believe. But the flight, interrupted or rather not followed by the film's abrupt termination (although we are led to believe that it is part one of a trilogy), leaves us in suspense. It is a flight from representation, beyond our sight, as much as it is a flight also within the diegesis itself. Something similar occurs in Madeinusa, whose last scene shows us the protagonist, a young woman from the highlands, in a truck headed towards Lima. Her escape from the constrictive confines of family and hermetic community has been long anticipated: early on in the film we have seen her precious collection of objects (magazines, trinkets) that come from "outside," and now she herself is venturing to that outside, in pursuit also of her mother who made the same journey some years before. The trip to Lima has been cast as her salvation. But the viewer is aware that anything might happen to her in the capital, not all of it good by some long stretch. The typical Andean migrant finds him or herself in one of many sprawling slums and shantytowns that surround and shadow Lima's colonial and middle-class heart. Work is not easily available, and corruption and exploitation are rife. (The Grupo Chaski's Gregorio [1985] documents just such an uncertain transition from highland to city.) As the film closes, we have to imagine how the characters' lives are to continue; they break free of the camera as the cinematic representation comes to an end, a deficit that some films (such as Ciudad de M ["City of M," 2000]) try to rectify with brief texts updating us on "where they are now." But it is in the nature of the object to flee its filmic capture, to break the frame, which is perhaps why the cinema has been preoccupied with such escapes from its very origin. In different ways, from the Lumière brothers' L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat (1896) to, say, the contemporary parafilmic merchandising pioneered by George Lucas's Star Wars (1977), cinema's possibilities and drawbacks, its hopes and anxieties, have often revolved around the fact that something always flees the screen.

In the end, I argue, what most manifestly flees the screen in these three recent Peruvian films is a sense of what Peru or Peruvian cinema might be. Each of these movies confounds the very attempt to define or capture peruanidad or "Peruvianness." As such, they might be better described as "not Peruvian" or "Peruvian under erasure." They show that any attempt to represent Peru is also necessarily the country's erasure, a demonstration of the fissures and pressures that ensure the ongoing inviability of Peru and of Peruvianness. These films are manifestations of the historic failure of the Peruvian nation to come into its own. This cinema is itself, then, subaltern: not merely in that it lies in the shadow of either Hollywood or the better-known Latin American cinemas of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, but more significantly also in its (non-)relation to the nation whose name it somewhat reluctantly bears. This is a cinema of betrayal, which repeatedly traduces the notion that a national cinema can or should serve as window through which either the citizenry or the world sets its eyes on a national identity in formation. It is also a cinema of escape: not simply the escapism or distraction that has classically been the social function of cinematic entertainment, but a more vigorous and lively affirmation of what it might mean to be "not Peruvian" at the turn of the twenty-first century. These characteristics, especially the treason that this cinema offers to the project of liberal hegemony that tirelessly seeks to represent the nation, have combined to generate significant controversy within Peru. The debates around this new, non-national cinema have been most intense in the case of Madeinusa, a film praised outside the country but almost universally disdained by the intellectual elite within it. I argue, however, that there is no is no point lamenting the failure of Peruvianness, cinematic or otherwise. Such laments have defined the elite variant of (not) Peruvianness ever since the nineteenth century at least, but melancholy declarations of exasperation with Peru's multiple failures are no more than an inverted form of the snobbery, racism, and will to power of those who claim to condemn these same traits in others. Peru's newly exuberant subaltern cinema offers a way out, a line of flight, from such morose reflections on national identity on the part of a would-be hegemonic power whose project is now exhausted. In short and at best, Chicha tu madre, Días de Santiago, and Madeinusa define a cinema of posthegemony.

Chicha tu madre

"Chicha" is a word that in Peru has come to mean something like "kitsch" or "tacky." It derives from the name of a maize drink (which can be fermented or non-alcoholic) of pre-Columbian origin that is particularly associated with the Andes. Among the Incas, chicha was used for ritual purposes and drunk during religious festivities. But with the massive migration from the countryside to the cities during the twentieth century, the term "chicha" became attached to a gamut of cultural phenomena from the highlands, especially as manifested among the new inhabitants of the suburbs and slums that grew up around Lima and other major urban centers. Chicha music, for instance, is a particularly hybrid genre that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in the Peruvian Amazon and the Northwest coast, at the interface of Andean melodies, Colombian cumbia, and even North American psychedelia with its surf guitars and moog synthesizers. It soon spread like wildfire among Peru's many internal migrants and became the sound of Peru's popular classes, and so also Lima's taxis and busses, ghetto blasters and markets. Messy and informal, chicha music was looked down upon by middle class defenders of elite culture and Andean purity alike. And so by extension, "chicha culture" came to refer to the appropriation of foreign cultural influences as part of the sprawling but also sensual and affectionate hybrid or bricolage that constitutes everyday urban Peru. Chicha is colorful and loud, gaudy and uninhibited. It is found in and propagated by lurid television talk shows and Peru's thriving and sensationalistic tabloid press. Chicha is a popular culture that confounds the conception of a Peruvian "people" propounded either by indigenists who seek to trace national identity back to pre-Columbian and rural roots, or by hispanists who seek to conserve Iberian culture from backward provincialism and pernicious mass culture alike. It is almost paradigmatically "not Peruvian": a Peruvian way of not being Peruvian. So when Gianfranco Quattrini, the director of Chicha tu madre, says that the film's title means "We are all chicha" (Ranzani), the point is that this expansive effervescence touches and transforms even someone like him: of Swiss parentage, born in Peru, raised in Chicago, and living in Buenos Aires.

The phrase "chicha tu madre" also conjures up the phrase "concha tu madre": literally, "your mother's pussy"; more loosely, "motherfucker." This is one of the harshest insults imaginable, and it can be heard in Peru, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina,

but perhaps rather less in Peru (where people tend not to swear so much) than for instance in Argentina (where they most certainly do). The title of the film Chicha tu madre is therefore itself as much an example as a description of chichería: it is a typically Peruvian take on some other, more influential, cultural expression; and in the process the appropriation also softens some of the expression's harsher edges, substituting sentimentality for aggression. We see this dynamic at work time and again within the film. The protagonist, a taxi-driver and would-be tarot-card reader by the name of Julio César (or JC), is endlessly fascinated by the bits and pieces of extraneous discourse that he founds around him. His world is particularly populated by Argentine immigrants and visitors, one of whom, a nurse and health-care entrepreneur called Fabián, at one point drops the term "capocha" into his pitch trying to sell the virtues of the Eva Perón clinic. Later, giving him a ride in his taxi, Julio César pumps his new friend for information: "What does 'chabota' mean?" "What?" responds Fabián, confused. "'Chabota'? 'Capocha'... Capocha means head." But once Julio César has picked up a new word, he will use it. Much later, when Fabián finds him lying on the sidewalk, having been beaten up by members of his own football team, he tells the Argentine "My capocha hurts." At which Fabián laughs and rubs his buddy's head: JC's chicha sensibility does not desert him even at the worst of times. But as a result of this voracious interest in all things exotic and foreign, Julio César also becomes deperuvianized. Fabián tells him he would fit right in down in Argentina: "You're smart, you could make a living in Buenos Aires." Elsewhere, during one of his frequent visits to a local brothel, a prostitute remarks "You look like a Mexican." And over the course of the movie, which opens as he learns his daughter is pregnant and so that he is about to become a grandfather, rather than consolidating his position as pater familias, JC becomes increasingly rootless. He is cast out of the marital bed to the living room sofa, and then leaves home altogether. He loses favor with the football club of which his own father had once been a mainstay. And finally he drives Fabián's bus towards an uncertain future in Argentina. Chicha is not only the fabric of urban Peru; more generally, it is the culture of deracination. It is "not" Peru.

The film shows few traces of "official" Peru. There are no shots of the city center, or of national monuments, symbols, or landmarks. The closest we get are a few panoramic wideshots of the city: once at night across the beach, with a distant glimpse of the illuminated cross high on the Morro Solar hill to the south of Chorrillos.

Ironically, that cross has now disappeared, pulled down in September 2007 because it had become unstable, a victim of corrosion. Then another shot, also of the coast but now looking north, shows Lima in all its grey, foggy nondescriptness. The horizon is indistinct and the whole composition is suffused with the palest of sunlight, the sun itself obscured by the haze. By contrast, the vast majority of the movie takes place in the suburbs, and it full of the gaudy saturated colors of neon lights, half-torn street posters and fliers, cheap Chinese restaurants, nightclubs and whorehouses. Even Julio César's car has a red carpet to decorate the dashboard, as well as a white rabbit hand puppet for luck and to bid farewell to his prostitute mistress in one stand-out scene that combines irredeemable kitsch with touching sentimentality. Meanwhile, state institutions are either absent or flawed. At the movie's outset, JC visits a lawyer to sort out a long-running dispute to secure the inheritance of his house. He is told he needs to come up with 5,000 soles, and it is this situation that drives much of the plot's twists and turns. The lawyer suggests he sell his taxi, which he duly does, only to steal it back from the buyer to then have the car remodeled and disguised. This escapade in turn leads to JC's two other brushes with authority: first as he solemnly registers the sale of the (now missing) automobile to its new (non-)owner; and second as a semi-retired policeman introduces himself at the garage where the car is being fixed up, and arranges to have it illicitly registered as a different vehicle in his future son-in-law's name. All for a little bit of cash, of course. In the informal culture portrayed by Chicha tu madre, the currency is cash or superstition (Julio César is always looking for opportunities to read the tarot), but never ideology. This is a cinema of subalternity in that any hint of a hegemonic project is utterly lacking. All we see are an endless succession of margins, and people trying to get by at those margins. Indeed, in this movie of double crosses perhaps the only thing that is not subject to treason is the nation, because it no longer even has a palpable enough presence to be betrayed.

Julio César is a smalltime hustler, as is everyone in this informal economy in which contracts are shunned and survival implies always having an eye out for the main chance, but what redeems him (and makes him different from the characters in the rather similar movie that came out in Peru a couple of years previously, Alberto Durant's *Doble juego*) is his sentimentalism and so, ultimately, his irrationality. *Chicha tu madre* is a movie drenched in affect. If JC cheats his friend, stealing back the car that he himself has sold him, it is so he can present it to his pregnant daughter and her

boyfriend. Just as he picks up snippets of knowledge from others, he wants to pass on his homespun wisdom in turn. A woman stops him in the street and thanks him for his tarot-reading. He responds with a phrase that his tarot maestro has just delivered to him, in the hopes that it might be meaningful likewise to her: "Patience is the virtue of the chosen." She gives him a quizzical look, but then not everybody has JC's faith in destiny, and so in the possibility of a fortunate outcome. Likewise it is affect rather than a search for gain that persuades our muddled hero to invite his prostitute girlfriend's grandmother on the miracle trip to Argentina. He ignores his friend Fabián's advice that the woman's illness is incurable: "Neither of us have the final say," he responds. Ultimately, for all the various scrapes literal and metaphorical that affect the denizens of this precarious world (and Julio César spends the film's final half hour with his face marked by the wounds inflicted in the beatings he's suffered), this is a movie of affirmation. And what it affirms is destiny itself, incarnated in the tarot. The film's entire plot is obliquely revealed at the very outset by means of the cards: a pregnancy, new friends will lend a hand, a deceit with money, a journey... Julio César seeks freedom by living in accordance with the iron laws of subaltern necessity that are ingrained within the state of things themselves. There is never any appeal to a transcendent authority: not only is the state absent, but so is the church; God barely gets a mention. The only sign of religiosity is a small sticker affixed to JC's taxi windscreen: it is an icon of Sarita Colonia, the classic Peruvian urban saint. Sarita was a young woman from the provinces who migrated to Lima in the 1930s, working as a domestic servant and petty trader in the capital; on her death at the age of 26 in 1940 she was buried in a common grave on the outskirts of the city, near the port of Callao. Her suffering (she was said to have been victim of a rape) and her equanimity meant that she was soon the object of devotion among certain subaltern sectors, such as prostitutes, gays, and petty criminals, but the cult of Sarita Colonia really took off in the 1960s and 1970s with the massive influx of migrants from the countryside. Unrecognized by the Catholic Church, Sarita is the patron saint of the Peruvian multitude. But when Julio César climbs into the bus headed out of the country, her image is on the windscreen there, too, and it is the Argentina Fabián who touches it before taking his place on this voyage of miraculous escape. He, too, has taken on board a touch of chichería.

Días de Santiago

Días de Santiago depicts a somewhat lower rung of urban Lima society, though there is plenty of overlap. Like the protagonist of *Chicha tu madre*, the eponymous Santiago is also a taxi driver. But where the sleepy-eyed Julio César is generally at peace with the world, happy to follow the immanent dictates of the tarot, Santiago is a study in tension and coiled energy, ready to overflow or explode at any moment. He is an ex-marine, who has spent the past six years fighting in border skirmishes with Ecuador and in the civil war against Sendero Luminoso. Now he finds himself, at 23, officially retired but with a miserable state pension and little in the way of qualifications that could help him re-integrate into civilian life. It is not that he is without skills: as he tells an administrator at a local college, he "know[s] how to do things [...] electrical stuff, carpentry, a bit of everything, really." "So perhaps you could take that into account," he suggests to her. But the response he receives, here as everywhere else he looks, is a robust disqualification: "No, young man, here it's different." However, much somewhere over "there," in the jungle frontier to the north or the highland countryside to the south, Santiago may have had a place and a position as "third sea officer" on the front lines of national security, "here" in Lima he has to start from scratch. Here he is just one more member of the anonymous mass who constitute the capital city's underclass. And at every turn he is reminded of his subalternity: most humiliatingly, when he and his wife, Mari, go together to a store looking to buy a fridge. Upon being told that his Navy ID is out of date, his credentials worthless, and his income insufficient to make the monthly payments, Santiago becomes infuriated by the salesman's patronizing tone and inflexibility. Standing up and shouting at him ("Is that a reason to make fun of me? [...] I fought for my country, Mister! What have you done for your country?"), he grabs Mari and marches her outside. Once on the street, Mari starts to upbraid him for his sensitivity and hot-headedness. "In your sick mind. . " she exclaims, only to be cut off as Santiago lashes out at her, punching her in the face. Progressively, far from finding a place for himself, the ex-combatant is becoming more and more alienated from the few ties that hold him within the fabric of normal, everyday life. By the time the film comes to an end, and for all his good intentions and indeed protective and gentlemanly instincts, he is left utterly alone. We last see him toying with a revolver, almost caressing his body with the gun barrel. He feels

betrayed, while all around believe that it is he who has turned on or lashed out at them. As the film closes with this apocalyptic depiction of absolute destitution, we do not know if he will decide to use the gun on himself or not. But in some ways it does not matter: he has already committed a sort of social suicide. We can imagine no lower place for him to be than this bare life of desperation.

Santiago is a name that has simultaneously military and religious overtones: "Santiago Matamoros" is the traditional figure of James, patron saint of Spain, who is alleged to have miraculously appeared to aid the embattled Christian army in a battle against the Emir of Cordoba's troops in 844AD. The image of Saint James the Moorslayer, then, accompanies the idea of Spain's divine justification for an imperial project. In the Americas, he becomes Santiago Mataindios, the Indian-slayer, who wields his sword against a new form of pagan idolatry and subaltern resistance. In sharp contrast to Sarita Colonia, one could hardly imagine a more hegemonic saint, although his ways were hardly those of ideological inculcation or the building of consent. Rather, he is an instance of the violence that persists on every colonial frontier, the absolute extermination of subaltern difference. And the Peruvian army assumed a similarly crusading attitude in their pacification of the Sendero rebellion: their adversary was demonized as a combination of barbarous savagery, exotic ideology, and simple terror. The terrorists or "terrucos" were denied all rights, and the suspicion of involvement was cast over almost the entire rural population. Santiago's days were therefore once spent incarnating the forces of order against the subaltern other; his crisis upon his return to Lima is that all of a sudden he finds himself on the other side of the subaltern divide. Or rather, he comes face to face with the falsity of the black and white division between good and evil, hegemon and subaltern. For if his mind is "sick," as Mari suggests, or if he has become "fucked up" as his brother alleges, this is the sickness of state, the fucked up-ness of divine order. Santiago discovers to his cost that there's no room in Lima's chaotic metropolis for a crusader, for a would-be savior. He is particularly protective towards women: near the beginning of the movie, for instance, he tells a young woman at a bus-stop that her zipper is undone, seeking to shield her from the lascivious gaze of the boys hanging out nearby; later he becomes outraged at the behavior of a guy who is snorting coke in the bathroom of an all-day discotheque, and he tries to rescue the boy's girlfriend from his pernicious influence; still later, it is his sister-in-law whom he sets out to save from the abuses of his brother. Finally, the

ultimate disintegration of his world sets in as he stages a hostage-taking in the name of yet another deeply inappropriate rescue mission. But the city is no place for such missions. Again, the difference between "there" and "here": "You wanna do something, but you can't. You control yourself. 'Cause you're no longer there. Now you're here. . . You were used to saving, rescuing, coast, mountain, jungle, air, sea, land, day and night. Not here." And in Lima, almost every time he tries to intervene, the results are disastrous and self-defeating. The rigid norms he tries to uphold are fictions, abstractions that have led to genocide in the countryside and now to suicide in the city.

The original military meaning of the term "subaltern" applies: Santiago is a subaltern who suddenly finds himself without a commanding officer. He is a soldier for a fatherland that no longer exists, a crusader in the name of a transcendent moralism that is abstract and hollow. His implosion and subalternization is a consequence of the disappearance of the state itself. The comparison with Jason Bourne suggests itself again: Santiago is a fighting machine torn loose from his moorings. And like Bourne, in the absence of orders from above, Santiago is forced to subsist on his wits, on a semiintuitive reading of his immediate surroundings. If Chicha tu madre is a film about affect, Días de Santiago turns out to be a film about habit. In every frame (and Santiago's body is almost constantly the object of our gaze), his military bearing is apparent. Santiago's stride, his shoulders, and his alert eyes constantly remind us that he treats the city as yet another theater of operations. For it is not that he lacks skills, in that he has obviously been trained to serve in the special forces or some other elite battalion. To let off steam he continues to train on the beach and to practice maneuvers on the hills overlooking the city. And when he is on the street, Santiago is constantly planning his next move, evaluating potential dangers, calculating, rationalizing. Again, his sickness or madness is a consequence of hyper-rationality rather than illogic. He literalizes the metaphor of the city as an urban jungle. The film's cinematography often heightens this effect: a telephoto lens picks him out in long shot as he walks through crowds in the Jirón Unión downtown, his nerves taut in readiness for any threat or trap. In voiceover we hear his interior monologue weighing up the situation: "You should think before taking action. Walk down the street and analyze your position, develop your strategy. You can be attacked any moment. . . . You gotta keep looking around, ready for anything, anticipate everything, ready to neutralize your enemy with your hands, with your eyes." Santiago is a machine man habituated to constant conflict, who sees every situation as a confrontation either potentially or in fact. He is a war machine who has been subjected to a totalizing regime of order and moral rectitude. However much he realizes that such a simple act as asking a woman to dance cannot in fact be reduced to a series of protocols, he knows almost no other way of acting. His is a line of flight, but a suicidal and solitary one, self-destructive and sure to bring down all that he knows he should really hold dear.

Set loose from a now absent state, Santiago's suicidal flight closes in on itself. His tragedy is that he can find no escape. His old war buddies come up with a scheme to rob a bank, but his moralism prevents him from going along with the plan, and in any case their efforts are in vain as they are quickly captured by the one state apparatus that still at least half-functions, the national police. So self-immolation and recapture are, it seems, the only destinies that this film can imagine for the lines of flight that it portrays. Again, the multiple contrasts with *Chicha tu madre* are palpable: rather than reveling in the chaotic excess of Lima's informal sector, Días de Santiago can see only corruption and decadence in sharp black and white terms; rather than affirmation, this is a movie of radical destitution. But the DVD version of the film contains an alternative ending. Not that this alternative holds out that much hope for Santiago himself. Far from it. As in the theatrical release, we see him discover the dirty secret at the center of his own family: his father's incestuous abuse of Santiago's young sister. But instead of then cutting to Santiago back in his own room, scratching his head with his loaded gun, in this conclusion our hero immediately shoots himself in front of his parents. The screen blacks out for a moment, and then for the first time, with Santiago dead, the movie can shift to another character. For the next we see is the sister, Inés, first threatening her father with the gun and then, in an extended sequence, running out of the house and down the street. She runs through the dirt roads of the shantytown in which they live, and on to the asphalt of the nearest main highway. Apparently unsure of which direction to take, she finally flags down a city bus, gets on, and sits on her own at the back. She closes her eyes as she is carried off to a future that we, and perhaps she, can only begin to imagine. This is a messier ending, but it opens a radical possibility that has remained forever closed to Santiago himself.

Madeinusa

Madeinusa also ends with a young woman fleeing incest. Moreover, this is a film with its fair share of *chichería*: the truck in which she is travelling has an image of Sarita Colonia on the gearstick. And the heroine's name, which gives the film its title, is a classic appropriation of a snippet of foreign discourse. At one point Madeinusa tells the young man from Lima who finds himself stuck in her remote village that he has her name on his shirt. "Made in USA," he replies. "That's not a name." "It's my name," she replies. "I like it." "It's not a name," he insists. "You should be Rosa or María, not Madeinusa." So once again she reminds him: "It's my name." Madeinusa does not fully fit within a Limeñan conception of how the Andes should be. Alongside her precious collection of colored trinkets and postcards, lipstick and ear-rings, she keeps a tattered copy of a dated women's magazine called Maribel. The cover illustration shows a blond white woman in a red jacket clasping a young child to her arms within what would seem to be a typical living-room scene of the 1950s. Early on in the film, the protagonist takes a thick pen and carefully inscribes her own name over the magazine title: no longer Maribel but Madeinusa. And so this young woman from the highlands writes herself in to the film (for there is no other title screen) and into her own sentimental vision of what life must be like elsewhere. Any visitor meeting her is going to be disappointed if they expect only rural isolation and self-sufficiency. Not that there are likely to be many visitors: the village in which the action is set goes by the name of "Manayaycuna," which means "the town no-one can enter" in Quechua. And yet, against the odds, a stranger has arrived: Salvador, like Santiago of Días de Santiago another would-be savior, abandoned here by the truck driver "el Mudo" just in time to witness the community's distinctive Easter celebration. Within a matter of hours, "tiempo santo" or "holy time" is due to begin.

The premise behind "holy time" (which is not, incidentally, actually a ritual to be found anywhere in Peru) is that from 3pm on Good Friday, the hour of Christ's crucifixion, to 6am on Easter Sunday, the moment of his resurrection, God is dead and so cannot see what takes place on earth. During holy time, therefore, there can be no sin. The law is suspended, and everything is suddenly permitted. The holiest of times is therefore also the most profane: it is a carnivalesque period of festivity, drunkenness, and sexual licentiousness. Of course, such a state of exception during which all limits

are undone has to have its own limits carefully demarcated and heavily ritualized. First a young virgin is chosen to head the celebrations; this year it is Madeinusa's longawaited turn to fulfill this function and wear the appropriate extraordinarily elaborate and brightly-colored dress. She is then carried in procession to the church, where with much solemnity the life-size figure of the crucified Christ is taken down from the cross and his eyes blindfolded. All the meanwhile in the village square sits a complex human clock, in which an old man on a stool surrounded by bright petals turns over a set of numbered cards to signify the passing of the minutes and hours. When holy time arrives, the cards are marked in red, and a chorus of young girls sings out "It's Holy Time. Now it is Holy Time." The festivities can begin as the people exit the church and the mayor, who is also Madeinusa's father, picks up a clay pot full of food and dashes it to the ground. Wild abandon breaks out: tables are overturned, bottles of chicha beer uncorked, and kids dressed as distinctly non-Christian mythological and fantastic creatures pelt the general assembly from the rooftops. Later on, the men of the village will gather together to sever their ties (literally as well as metaphorically) from their usual year-round responsibilities, and await the arrival of the womenfolk who will each choose a new partner to sleep with that night.

The mayor, Don Cayo, has been awaiting this year's holy time with particular relish. It is his chance to sleep with his daughter, and so deflower the community's chosen virgin. Madeinusa recognizes and seems to accept her fate, putting up with the aggression he shows her (for instance in burning her box of special things), but she has to tell him to wait until the right moment comes around. In the meantime, however, she has caught sight of and fallen for young Salvador, the foreigner (whom she and everyone else calls "gringo") in their midst. And before her father can get to her, she practically throws herself on the stranger, who duly has sex with her behind a wall, she in her full virginal immaculate-heart get-up complete with ornamental tears, while yet another procession goes by. But when Madeinusa then asks him to take her with him back to Lima, he refuses. "Lima would destroy you," he tells her. Later, however, he changes his mind when he witnesses her father take advantage of her. Somewhat reluctantly, he assumes his apparent role as savior. From initial shock and disdain at the community's practices, he seems to have forged some kind of connection with his young admirer. So he leads her off early Sunday morning to where the two of them can wait for el Mudo to return and pick them up. But Madeinusa turns back, realizing that

she has left behind her ear-rings, the only item of precious chichería left to her after Don Cayo dumped the rest of her belongings. What is more, they are particularly valuable because they belonged to her mother who herself escaped during some earlier holy time, in circumstances that are never fully clarified. So Madeinusa returns, carefully extracting the colorful pieces of costume jewelry from a pocket in her father's suit. He, after all, like most of the rest of the town is now comatose from overindulgence. But she realizes that he has broken the ear-rings, too. And by way of revenge, in the dying minutes of holy time she cooks him up a soup laced with rat poison, forcing spoonfuls of the deadly concoction into his mouth despite his alcoholic haze. At this point, Salvador appears again, and is horrified at what he sees. "You're mad!" he exclaims. But his nightmare weekend is about to get worse. Madeinusa's sister, Chale, arrives and sums up the situation. Turning to face Salvador, she declares "You killed my dad." Then, shouting: "Come! The gringo killed my dad!" The Limeñan is open-mouthed, his look turning to one of pure horror when, after a brief pause, Madeinusa joins in: "Come! The gringo killed my dad!" She then runs through the village, waking the neighbors with the same cry. "Come! The gringo killed my dad!" And the next we know, Madeinusa is in el Mudo's truck, en route to Lima, and her putative savior is nowhere to be seen.

Madeinusa is one of the most critically-acclaimed films ever produced in Peru. It has won awards from film festivals across Latin America, Europe, and the USA. But at home it ignited a firestorm of controversy, and was accused of everything from "banal Orientalist exoticization" to being "a cinematic insult." One protest that circulated widely on the internet claimed that a country's cinema was its "face," and as such that Madeinusa portrayed to the world a nation populated by "ignorant, uncouth, and savage Indians [who are] so captivated by the outside world that they have named a simple small-town girl 'Madeinusa'" (Roca, "Madeinusa"). But such criticism merely echoes the befuddlement already encoded within the film itself by Salvador's own suggestion that Rosa or María would be better names for a Peruvian girl. In other words, this is the familiar lament over popular chichería, over the way in which Peruvian popular culture itself, more than the film that reflects it, betrays traditional conceptions of Peruvianness. The complaint is deeply misguided on every level. Journalist Fernando Vivas is quoted as saying, "Madeinusa is not a movie to be shown on a plane en route to Peru" (Lama, "2006"). But, in fact, what better to show to

incoming international visitors than the very image they seek: colorful rituals that leaven exotic if savage practices in the highlands? The film's success on the festival circuit can hardly have hindered the efforts of government agency PromPerú, whose own publicity trades largely on traditional costumes and pre-Columbian ceremonies, to attract the tourist dollar. The controversy about national image is misplaced: the debate around *Madeinusa* has more to do with the country's historic internal tensions than with some Machiavellian distinction between poor, misunderstood Peru and an Orientalist West.

The problem that the movie poses can be best understood in terms of the historic failure of the Peruvian nation that has been so repeatedly demonstrated at every turn from the nineteenth-century War of the Pacific to the Sendero insurgency of the 1980s and 1990s. Sociologist Gonzalo Portocarrero suggests as much when he argues that Madeinusa portrays "Peru's impossibility": "the film depicts a country that is unviable thanks to barbarism and lack of authority amid popular culture." Naturally enough he swiftly adds: "I would like to believe that the film is wrong" ("Madeinusa"). But what movie both displays and enacts a betrayal of precisely such well-intentioned efforts on the part of the coastal elite first to understand and then to hegemonize the subaltern interior. That elite is shocked at the movie's refusal to endorse a politics of solidarity, horrified at the way in which Madeinusa betrays Salvador's gesture to rescue her from rural isolation and domestic abuse. But their reaction misses the power precisely of the film's critique of the savior complex and power relations that underlie even (or especially) the most liberal of efforts to construct the Peruvian nation. For Madeinusa turns around the systematic destitution of authority: religious, lay, and liberal, each of which is represented in turn by the three male figures who die as the plot unfolds. Christ, the mayor, and the "gringo" all have to be killed if Madeinusa has any hope of liberation. And each is necessarily undone by treason, rather than by frontal assault or counter-hegemonic persuasion. The film's conservative critics, who worry about the image that the movie presents to the exterior, are shocked above all by the first of these betrayals: they see the "moral transgressions" that the film portrays, particularly the incest between father and daughter, as a scandal. But within the logic of the film, there are no such transgressions: during holy time God is dead and the law is suspended. Moreover, the incest at the heart of *Días de Santiago* generated no such protest. It is as though the outraged defenders of Peru's image could not bear this destitution of the

religious authority that has, since the Spanish conquest, been the main pillar of colonial and postcolonial subjugation in the highlands. Meanwhile, the murder of the father and mayor has led to less comment. It is surely strange that the fearless supporters of Andean society and its representation should be least concerned over the fate of the only indigenous person who dies. No doubt they are carried away with the notion that to save the highlands, the "bad" indigenous will inevitably have to be purged. But this is to fall into the same racism that they supposedly condemn. And then above all for the liberal left, the real crime of *Madeinusa* is the breach it opens (the "abyss" according to Portocarrero) between the young man from Lima and the young woman from Manayaycuna. For so much of the film, after all, the plot holds out the promise of a prototypical "foundational fiction" in which romance would quasi-naturally secure the idea of nation. It is when subaltern betrayal refuses this affective mechanism of wouldbe hegemony, choosing flight instead, that the critics sound the alarm. But why should Madeinusa exchange colonial authority or postcolonial abuse for an unfeasible tie with some liberal hegemon? She needs no savior in order to make her way to Lima and who knows where thereafter.

conclusion

Peru's rather desultory and undistinguished tradition of national cinema is at an end, if it even ever really got started. We might ask which was the last Peruvian film to be made. Perhaps Lombardi's *Ojos que no ven* ("What the Eye Doesn't See," 2003), a rambling attempt to portray the impact of the country's "vladi-video" scandal, in which it was discovered that President Alberto Fujimori's security chief Vladimiro Montesinos had secretly filmed hundreds of meetings in which he bribed and suborned congresspeople, media moguls, supreme court justices, and many more. But like every other expression of Peruvian national identity, this too is an expression of embittered nostalgia for what has been lost, or for what never came about in the first place. It is a cinematic echo of Mario Vargas Llosa's famous line: "At what precise moment had Peru fucked itself up?" (3). On the other hand, perhaps the vladi-videos themselves constitute Peru's only national cinema worthy of the name: the attempt to make the country visible, to take an x-ray of all its inner workings and hidden mechanisms. We can hardly lament the demise of this neoliberal project of surveillance, just as we should

feel little sorrow for the passing of the elite dream of a hegemony that would finally integrate (and so dissolve, eliminate) the subaltern classes under its supposedly enlightened leadership. Rather, the multiple betrayals and subversions explored by films such as *Chicha tu madre*, *Días de Santiago*, and *Madeinusa* generate a creative and effervescent line of flight that consistently evades and erases such tired and fruitless power-mongering. They show why cinema is becoming relevant again in Peru, as it charts a "not Peruvian" defiance of official rhetoric and symbolism, of state pedagogy and reterritorialization. They affirm a subaltern and posthegemonic cinema that is both rebellious and exuberant, even as it is often also gaudy and kitsch. Shaking off the telos of consolidating state-centered representation, these films chart new directions and open up new cinematic possibilities, however much their ultimate destination is as unknowable as are the fates of Julio César, Inés, and Madeinusa themselves.

works cited

- Barrow, Sarah. "Images of Peru: A National Cinema in Crisis." *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and Nationhood.* Ed. Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. 39-58.
- Lama, Luis. "2006, RIP." Caretas 1957 (28 Dec. 2006). 30 Nov. 2007 < http://www.caretas.com.pe/Main.asp?T=3082&id=12&idE=704&idSTo=87&id A=23911>.
- Portocarrero, Gonzalo. "Madeinusa ¿La imposibilidad del Perú?" La página de Gonzalo Portocarrero (Oct. 2006). 30 Nov. 2007 http://gonzaloportocarrero.blogsome.com/2006/10/05/p134/.
- Ranzani, Oscar. "La síntesis de la cultura chica es el rebusque." Interview with Gianfranco Quattrini. *Página 12* (15 Nov. 2006). 28 Nov. 2007 http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-4485-2006-11-15.html.
- Roca, Pilar. "Madeinusa o el insulto hecho cine." Indymedia Peru. 25 Sep. 2006. 30 Nov. 2007 http://peru.indymedia.org/news/2006/09/35352.php.
- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *Conversation in the Cathedral*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Harper and Row, 1975.