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Cultural Memory Conflicted in Post-Conflict Peru: Constructing Heroes and Villains *La hora final* and *La casa rosada*

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By Reed N. Peets

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
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ABSTRACT:

Building on this same theoretical platform, this project uses two critically-acclaimed contemporary cinematic representations of the internal armed conflict—*La hora final* and *La casa rosada*—as reflections of the ways in which the Peruvian cultural products of today are leveraged to reorchestrate collective understandings of the past.

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## Introduction

The words of renowned Latin American author Jorge Luis Borges frame this project nicely: “La verdad histórica... no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió” (449). In contemporary Peru, historical truth remains up for interpretation with respect to the internal armed conflict of the 1980s: within the cultural memory of the conflict persists conflict itself. With the recent election of agrarian socialist Pedro Castillo to the presidency, and the broader reemergence of a powerful political left in Peru, questions concerning the contemporary memory of *El sendero luminoso*—or the Shining Path, in English—have broad socio-political implications going forward. Perhaps Castillo’s narrow 2021 election victory over Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the former heavy-handed president who governed through the Shining Path era and claimed eventual victory over the insurgents, represented as much of a triumph for a certain narrative as for a certain candidate. Vladimir Cerrón, the leader and founder of the new government’s ruling party, *Perú libre*, writes plainly of his party’s allegiance to the furthest planks of Latin American leftism in the party ideological manual: “decirse de izquierda cuando no nos reconocemos marxistas, leninistas o mariateguistas, es simplemente obrar en favor de la derecha con decoro de la más alta hipocresía” (Cerrón 4). The Marxism, Leninism, and Mariateguism pledged today by Cerrón, alongside the Maoist influences of *Presidente Gonzalo*, formed the ideological core of the Shining Path as it rose to prominence among the disaffected left in the 1970s. José Carlos Mariátegui, the founder of the first Peruvian Communist Party, is also honored by the Shining Path’s full name—*El Partido Comunista del Perú en el Sendero Luminoso de Mariátegui* (Masterson 155). While these points of ideological confluence on the far left do not necessarily signal the resurgence of Shining Path violence, their existence sets the

stage for a silent war of perception in the cultural arena. Since Peru's leftist government of today shares substantial ideological commonality with the Shining Path of recent history, there exists ample incentive to encourage a more favorable understanding of the militants when memory turns to the macabre years of internal war. Therefore, there could hardly be a more appropriate moment for a careful interrogation of contemporary cultural products that strive to exert influence on the memory of Peruvians at large. Relevant are the words of George Orwell: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past" (44).

Between 1980 and 1992, the revolutionary communist guerrilla group known as the Shining Path ravaged the Peruvian nation in its attempt to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat through force and terror. Philosophy professor Abimael Guzmán struck the first match of the Shining Path's Maoist call to action inside a university in the Peruvian town of Ayacucho in 1969 (Urrego 124). Before Guzmán's capture brought an end to its reign of terror in 1992, Shining Path militants had decimated rural Peru and cast an unavoidable shadow of fear over its major cities. By the numbers, more than 69,000 were killed or disappeared between 1980 and 1992, making the internal armed conflict responsible for the most human loss in Peru's 182-year history as an independent state (Hatun 15). Even though the Shining Path set out with a nominal mission of displacing the ruling class through the unification and empowerment of *los campesinos*, in the end, the movement's decimation was felt most intensely by those same rural peasant communities it originally sought to glorify: impoverished and uneducated rural zones with high concentrations of indigenous peoples bore the grand majority of the tragedy, with 68% of all victims having an education level below secondary schooling and 75% speaking Quechua or another native tongue as their primary language ("Conclusiones"). Many who have studied the

conflict in its wake, like renowned Peruvian sociologist Carlos Iván Degregori, argue that the Shining Path's struggle was neither as authentically indigenous nor proletarian as its propaganda would claim. Instead, its academic roots and strong inroads with the educated and urban middle class are offered as evidence of a movement which ironically came to resemble the top-down bourgeoisie it claimed to detest (Urday 2). Degregori writes of the disconnect that grew between the Shining Path's educated theorists and its rural footsoldiers:

No previeron las consecuencias de su “guerra popular”, que imaginaron como una guerra principalmente campesina contra el Estado. En realidad... al iniciar su guerra el PCP-SL abrió una caja de Pandora que no fue capaz de controlar; su incapacidad para admitir la posibilidad de agencia campesina independiente y su ceguera ante la organización y la cultura andinas, estuvieron entre las causas principales de su derrota. (22)

Irrespective of its failure to fulfill in practice what it claimed in theory, the Shining Path did succeed in sowing undeniable, historic, horrific carnage. In 2001, the administration of President Alejandro Toledo set out to repair the torn social and political fabric of Peru with the launching of its comprehensive *Comisión de la verdad y reconciliación* (CVR). A three-year investigation, the CVR leveraged 16,000 voluntary testimonies in an effort to garner a holistic understanding of the conflict and its causes, while also gaining redress for victims and recommending a course for future reforms. Official estimates produced by the CVR credit the conflict with having made 40,000 orphans, 20,000 widows, and 600,000 internal refugees (Hatun 385-86). Beyond measurable figures of devastation, those who experienced the conflict speak of the incalculable suffering felt over a decade of abject dehumanization acted out in the worst ways imaginable. The CVR's president—Salomón Lerner—spoke to this aspect of the era:

Se trata de crímenes horrendos, imposibles de concebir en una sociedad de personas civilizadas, como son las numerosas torturas y asesinatos selectivos, las masacres indiscriminadas, las violaciones de todo orden a los derechos elementales de las personas, los secuestros y robos constantes a nuestros compatriotas más desposeídos, las humillaciones intolerables y el arrasamiento de comunidades enteras. No son, pues, solamente hechos que se puedan certificar con frialdad notarial. Estamos hablando, en rigor, de sufrimiento humano y ello constituye de manera inevitable, otra vez, una apelación a nuestras calidades morales. (57)

In 2003, Lerner and his team released their *Informe final* on the conflict, making public the fruits of the CVR, marking a change in administration from the Fujimori regime, and stamping the government seal on an official version of events (Milton 6, 10). While the CVR's sobering statistics facilitated agreement over the devastation of the internal armed conflict, it has not succeeded in closing the case on the conflict in decisive fashion. The presence of an official state version of events has only encouraged debate over charges of culpability in the court of the Peruvian collective consciousness. For example, although Shining Path militants were condemned by the CVR as the war's principal antagonists, 37% of all civilian killings were deemed to be the responsibility of the Peruvian Armed Forces and Police (Hatun 10). Moreover, the CVR did not hesitate to rebuke state entities for their failures in qualitative terms, drawing honest conclusions with regards to the character and scope of their contributions to bloodshed. In one specific instance, the CVR dismisses any attempt by the Peruvian military to deflect institutional blame onto anomalous actors, writing that "La CVR afirma que en ciertos lugares y momentos del conflicto la actuación de miembros de las fuerzas armadas no sólo involucró



algunos excesos individuales... sino también prácticas generalizadas y/o sistemáticas de violaciones de los derechos humanos, que constituyen crímenes de lesa humanidad” (“Conclusiones”). The CVR, despite its government backing, was unreserved in condemning the military and police forces. Furthermore, Peruvians in the modern political arena, like Vladimir Cerrón, point to staunch socioeconomic inequality, racism towards indigenous peoples, and the state’s abandonment of rural populations as contributors to the bloodshed on par with the Senderistas themselves. As head of the Peruvian government’s most powerful political party, Cerrón recently made headlines when, on the day of Abimael Guzmán’s death, he chose to publicly highlight “las causales del terrorismo” rather than the evils of terrorism itself (Redacción EC). From an academic perspective, Latin American historian Cynthia E. Milton describes this argument over culpability as being between two competing memory narratives. On the one hand, the “salvation memory” emphasizes the malevolence and power of the Shining Path and contextualizes the shortcomings of the state within a glorification of its eventual triumph over the detestable terrorist group. On the other hand, the “human rights memory” emphasizes the negligence and cruelty of the state and contextualizes the barbarism of the Shining Path as symptomatic of broader legacies of socio-political isolation and inequality (Milton 9-10). As the CVR’s conclusions, Cerrón’s opinion, and Milton’s analysis demonstrate, underlying any interpretation of the conflict are substantive questions: Was the internal armed conflict as simple as an emergence of bad actors disrupting a mostly good society? Or is the first stone more justifiably cast at the Peruvian state for its participation in the hostilities?

These two questions form the foundation of the ongoing conflict within the Peruvian cultural memory of the internal armed conflict. Put simply, this project’s goal is to explore the

present-day argument over culpability in the past through a careful investigation of domestic contemporary cinematic representations of the conflict. In the wake of Fujimori's exit, and with an official government version to anchor the conversation, artistic expression assumed a major role in the field of private-sector memory construction after 2003 (Milton 12). Many used their work to give a voice to the voiceless in the aftermath of a conflict in which thousands of rural Peruvians disappeared "sin que nadie en la sociedad integrada, en la sociedad de los no excluidos, tome nota de ello" (Lerner 147). Others condemned the Peruvian government alongside *los senderistas* for human rights violations committed across the conflict. As the number of voices has grown since the CVR, the line between *los héroes* and *los villanos* in the popular representation of the internal armed conflict has been blurred to a substantial degree (Milton 198). To contend with this blurring of lines within Peruvian cultural memory, this project treats the past as a dynamic cultural creation dependent on the needs and perspectives of the present (Assmann 33). In other words, this project is unconcerned with objective happenings of the past but is instead focused on how the past is actively being reinterpreted in Peru through modern cultural products like domestic cinema that exist outside the formal historical discourse. Since subjective allocation of guilt is the topic at hand, it makes sense to focus on memory within the subjective frame of Peruvian culture. Beyond objective facts and timelines, cultural memory underscores the role played by "reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (Assmann 132). Put differently, cultural memory is the collective conceptualization of the past through cultural products that represent the past. As television and the internet mediate modern society through images, the cinema of post-conflict Peru, as a cultural product

of expansive scope and popularity, represents a valuable window into the particulars of the discordant Peruvian cultural memory. Scholar James Dettleff affirms the memory-making power of cinema in the Peruvian context in his work on justice and reconciliation in the post-conflict era:

El cine, como artefacto cultural masivo y móvil, es uno de los medios de representación más poderosos de la época del CAI. Producciones realizadas en Lima y en Ayacucho se han aproximado al tema y puesto en escena los elementos que agudizan el problema y que deben abordarse para intentar la reconciliación entre los peruanos. Existe una posición testimonial en las películas, que aun siendo de ficción se presentan como documentos de lo acontecido, denuncian lo que pasó durante esos años y generan una versión de los hechos superpuesta a la historia oficial. (102)

Building on this same theoretical platform, this project uses two critically-acclaimed contemporary cinematic representations of the internal armed conflict—*La hora final* and *La casa rosada*—as reflections of the ways in which the Peruvian cultural products of today are leveraged to reorchestrate collective understandings of the past.

The significance of films as cultural products is heavily dependent on the cultural context with which they interact. That is to say, their value as cultural memory makers is only as good as their cultural relevance. Because of this reality, on top of an unpacking of the historical context, a full-fledged analysis of *La hora final* and *La casa rosada* requires a baseline understanding of their cinematographic background to fully appreciate their utility as source material. Peruvian film as a whole has undergone significant shifts since the turn of the century. In terms of size, the growth and advancement of the formerly nascent film industry in Peru was a natural result of the

internal armed conflict's conclusion and the country's subsequent unprecedented macroeconomic prosperity, during which annual growth averaged 6.1% of its GDP between 2003 to 2013. In terms of distribution, the film industry has grown much more national in character, decentralizing production beyond the capital city of Lima and giving more voice to diverse regional communities. In terms of exposure, Peru has seen a substantial uptick in representation across the international film festival scene during the same period, exemplified by the festival nominations and wins achieved by industry pioneers like Claudia Llosa, Melina León, and Alvaro Delgado Aparicio (Vich and Barrow 2). Nonetheless, the lack of robust, federally-supported financial infrastructure has kept Peru's film industry at the mercy of an imbalanced market and heavily reliant on foreign investment (Vich and Barrow 7-9). The content of Peruvian films offers invaluable insight into the country's ongoing national dialogues regardless of the industry's gross output, especially concerning the recollection of the country's internal conflict. Close inspection of the domestic cinematic works released since the CVR reveals a country without a unifying national narrative, still reeling from the social, political, and economic devastation of internal conflict, and split between "different ways of articulating those crises" (Barrow 9).

*La hora final* and *La casa rosada* are only a sampling of Peru's post-conflict cinema. Nonetheless, they represent two of the most notable productions germane to the task of investigating the influence of cinema over cultural memory. A brief discussion of contemporary works of significance is necessary to best frame the landscape of Peruvian post-conflict cinema, as well as further justify the selection of these two films. Discussions of Peruvian cinema must make mention of Claudia Llosa and her marquee work, *La teta asustada* (2009). Llosa's

imaginative and symbolic portrayal of the conflict's generational trauma garnered widespread critical praise, earning sixteen wins and six nominations at various festivals, including a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film of the Year at the Academy Awards. The film's international acclaim and Llosa's rise to fame constituted a watershed moment for Peruvian film. Never before had a Peruvian production captivated the attention of the film industry to such a degree (Barrow 174). The setting and celebrity of *La teta asustada* made the film worth considering as source material, but its relative age makes it incapable of contributing effectively to this project. Moreover, Llosa's film contends indirectly with the internal armed conflict, keeping the traumatic events in the distant background while unpacking the trauma of the era up-close through metaphor. In other words, the aim of *La teta asustada* is to represent memories of the conflict while the aim of this research is to analyze artistic representations of the conflict itself. This distinction is important because it justifies the disqualification of other noteworthy, and otherwise qualified, Peruvian post-conflict films for their second-hand relationships to the conflict, such as *La última tarde* (2016) from director Joel Calero, Salvador del Solar's *Magallanes* (2015), and Evelyne Pegot's *La hora azul* (2014). Although representing events that took place as the conflict unfolded, Alejandro Legaspi's *La última noticia* (2016) was similarly disqualified for its treatment of the conflict itself as more of a setting than a subject. Furthermore, many films of import to the composition of Peru's post-conflict cinema, like *Vidas paralelas* (2008) from director Rocio Llado or much of Palito Ortega Matute's earlier work, simply lack the recency necessary for an informed discussion of the present.

While the production of cultural memory can be a unifying process through which millions are brought together by a national narrative concretized in shared cultural products,

these cinematic representations demonstrate the capacity of cultural products to sow discord within cultural memory and problematize national narratives of history (Burke 28). This project is a content analysis treating two domestic cinematographic works as primary data to better grasp the forces at play within Peruvian cultural memory. Based on an understanding of the historical context, a review of the available secondary literature, and careful viewings of the films themselves, it is this researcher's conclusion that *La hora final* and *La casa rosada* demonstrate the broader ongoing conflict in Peruvian memory over culpability as they deliberately seek to sway the audience's perception in one direction or the other by leveraging opposite ends of a heroes and villains archetypal paradigm. This project's conceptual understanding of heroes and villains is grounded in Joseph Campbell's theory of the heroic monomyth and guided by Christopher Vogler's application of the monomyth to cinematic screenwriting. Campbell builds on the work of psychologist Carl Jung who contended that unconscious human experience could be defined through the identification of a limited number of human behavioral archetypes. In his timeless text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell fleshes out Jung's archetype of the Hero to delineate a universal heroic formula composed of three broad steps: separation, initiation, return. Campbell asserts that all mythological heroes, regardless of their distinct cultural roots, essentially follow the same archetypal journey in which they are called to an adventure, cross the threshold to an unfamiliar world of tests and trials, and return with the power to benefit their peers (30). In his book, *The Writer's Journey*, Vogler uses Campbell's theory to establish an extensive set of guiding principles for cinematic storytelling. Vogler's work illustrates the ways in which the archetypal structure of the Hero's Journey ought to be leveraged in order to build substantive characters and tell powerful stories on the big screen (3).

Vogler's blueprints for building effective heroes and villains are of particular interest to this project as a bridge between the theoretical realm of psychology and the functional domain of film. More specifically, Vogler's work is used as reference for identifying the ways in which the archetypal hero and the archetypal villain are made manifest in *La hora final* and *La casa rosada*. Thinking through the thematic structures of heroism and villainy as represented in the two films, there is evidence of conflict in Peruvian cultural memory over the state's role in the internal armed conflict within each director's conscious construction and assignment of roles within the story.

Heroic Humans in *La hora final*

*La hora final* from director Eduardo Mendoza de Echave constructs a heroes and villains archetypal paradigm, making evident to the audience which characters ought to be viewed as the heroes, and which the villains, with his choices of direction and cinematography. For Mendoza, the internal armed conflict was a clearly-defined battle of good and evil, with the state's elite intelligence unit representing the greatest good and the Shining Path representing the greatest evil. *La hora final* (2017) follows two agents of *el Grupo Especial de Inteligencia del Perú* through their pursuit and capture of the Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán. Mendoza's film fits the mold of a classic crime thriller, with the plot wholly attached to the lives of its two main protagonists, Carlos Zambrano and Gabriela Coronado. While most of the story is driven by the daring investigative maneuvers of the agents, Mendoza also pays substantial attention to the development and humanization of the characters. For every depiction of their clandestine police work, a personal scene shows how life at home has been complicated by the demands of the job or firsthand experience with the terrors of conflict. Through character development, as well as employing deliberate thematic emphases and cinematographic techniques, *La hora final* funnels the audience towards a heroic understanding of Zambrano, Coronado, and *el Grupo Especial de Inteligencia del Perú*. By the end of the film, Mendoza attempts to give the viewers no choice but to regard these representatives of the Peruvian state as righteous defenders of the people.

Eduardo Mendoza de Echave, director of *La hora final*, was an eighteen-year-old living in Lima when Abimael Guzmán was captured in 1992. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Guzmán's arrest, Mendoza would debut his film depicting the events of the capture across twenty-six cities in Peru (Ruíz Tovar). Prior to *La hora final*, Mendoza had directed several films



of relative domestic success, including *Mañana te cuento* (2005), *Bolero de noche* (2011), and *El evangelio de la carne* (2013). Mendoza spoke to the personal nature of the film's subject during promotional interviews in the leadup to its premiere. When asked why he was interested in the subject of Peruvian terrorism, the filmmaker replied bluntly: "Porque lo he vivido, de hecho" (Mejía Yóplac). Mendoza has also commented publicly on the film's importance in relation to the national memory of the Shining Path, highlighting the necessity of understanding and taking responsibility for the past "para evitar cometer errores en el futuro." For him, making the film was an opportunity to drive forward an essential discourse about a traumatic era still lacking the decisive closure that only conversation can provide ("Película"). Lima-based company *La saga producciones* spearheaded production on the film and the leading roles of Carlos Zambrano and Gabriela Coronado were played by Peruvian actors Pietro Sibille and Nidia Bermejo, respectively.

The success of *La hora final* is marked by a positive response from the public and the press, as well as its status of being one of the most widely-distributed Peruvian films. The film's official trailer garnered 300,000 views within the first day of its release on Facebook and more than half a million overall (Mejía Yóplac). Because of this major public response, the number of theaters set for the film's opening night had to be expanded drastically from twenty-five to eighty-eight (Ruiz Tovar). Since its premiere, Mendoza's film has been praised for its balance of entertainment and social significance, with Peruvian critic Sebastián Zavala calling it "uno de los mejores estrenos nacionales en lo que va del año, un thriller intrigante y emocionante que sirve, también, para que uno reflexione sobre el pasado de nuestro país." Writing for *The Guardian* in Peru, journalist Dan Collyns called *La hora final* the "most successful Peruvian movie in 20

years” and the “most prominent work” of those which address the conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. Further underscoring the film’s prominence is its 2018 acquisition by the international streaming giant Netflix. *La hora final* is the only film produced by *La saga producciones* to reach this level of export status, an especially impressive feat given the nature of Peruvian cinema: in 2014, domestic films represented only 5.5% of screenings in Peruvian theaters (Collins). Moreover, Mendoza’s film has received positive feedback from academia for its development of the “insurgent” character to a point of inciting empathy in the audience, far beyond what had been done in previous post-conflict cinema (Benedetto 271). Mendoza’s production, for its entertainment value and accessibility, represents the best of Peruvian post-conflict films whose goals were mainstream commercial success and popular connection. Premiering on 14 September 2017, the film’s recency further justifies its capacity to represent a present-day influencer in the cultural memory arena.

Mendoza creates a context of fear from the outset in *La hora final*, establishing the Shining Path as the shadowy architects of an ambience of terror and, in turn, setting the stage for a heroic conquest. Several elements frame the audience’s perception within a heroes and villains framework even before the camera rolls. For example, the film’s official poster features five GEIN agents in plain clothes against a red background image of the face of Abimael Guzman hanging above them, massive and threatening. The poster’s depiction of the GEIN agents, looking determined and poised in the face of a vivid red menace, sends a clear visual message of their righteous standing. The film’s title is featured below front man, Carlos Zambrano, and just above the title is the phrase: “Frente al terror, ellos nos devolvieron la esperanza.” This declaration further frames the perspective of the viewer before the opening credits: Guzmán and

the Shining Path, who brought terror to Peruvian society, represent a seemingly insurmountable evil. The agents of the GEIN, who returned hope to the people, represent the glorious soldiers of peace who vanquished the horrible foe. Taking all these elements together, the message of the poster is a discernible assigning of roles.



The film itself opens with an intertitle composed of paragraphs of text against a black screen to frame the historical context of the story. Similar to the poster, the information provided funnels the audience towards a straightforward, heroes and villains interpretation of the events. It is necessary to view the full text to fully appreciate its contribution to framing the narrative:

En mayo de 1980 el movimiento de Sendero Luminoso liderado por el profesor de filosofía Abimael Guzmán le declara la guerra al Estado peruano y comienza una etapa de terror nunca antes vista... Doce años después, el país se encuentra al borde del colapso con miles de muertos y millones de dólares en pérdidas. Mientras tanto, un olvidado grupo de policías de investigación emprende la misión más difícil de sus vidas: la captura del líder de la organización terrorista más sanguinaria del mundo.

On the one hand, Mendoza introduces the Shining Path and its leader in these paragraphs of text with an emphasis on the intensity of their evil, matching his portrayal of them in the poster. Mendoza's word choice sends clear signals as to how this presentation of context ought to be interpreted, with phrases like "nunca antes vista," "al borde del colapso," and "más sanguinaria del mundo" maximizing the fear surrounding the Shining Path to mythical proportions. On the other hand, Mendoza presents the GEIN as the unsung heroes who, despite their underdog status, embraced the unthinkable challenge of capturing Guzmán. Even though the state has been implicated in official documents for its major role in the atrocities of the conflict, absent from Mendoza's contextualization is any mention of this reality—such mention would complicate the historical narrative beyond the scope of his film. Mendoza makes it clear to his viewers, with the way he frames the story to come, who are the heroes and who are the villains.

When the action begins, Mendoza continues to construct his aura of terror by peppering his scenes with references to the Shining Path, all the while keeping any contact with the organization at an ominous distance. For example, as Zambrano drives his car through the streets of Lima, the newscaster can be heard over the radio. “La espiral de violencia desatada por el grupo terrorista... no tiene cuando parar,” with the middle of his sentence interrupted by Zambrano’s car crashing into a bread cart. Mendoza’s withholding of the Shining Path’s name in this instance is strategically-designed to bolster its capacity to induce terror—there are no limits to the abomination of a monster unrevealed. References to the Shining Path’s reign of terror are made in smaller, indirect ways like this throughout the opening scenes. When Zambrano’s son speaks of his friends leaving Peru, the danger caused by terrorism is strongly implied as the reason for departure. Moreover, a keen eye can spot the wanted poster of Guzmán as well as red, hammer-and-sickle symbols scattered on the walls throughout the opening scenes. All of Mendoza’s intentional details contribute to the film’s foreboding mood and bolster the villainy of the Shining Path and its leader. Tension climbs to its maximum in the film’s early stages as Zambrano drives his son from school, and the soundtrack turns to somber, distorted guitar. The camera, shooting from inside the vehicle, slows down to show a dead man lying in the street. Next to his bloody face, a white flag with red lettering reads, “muerte a los perros traidores.”



The camera cuts to a high angle shot, meditating on the carnage. Slowly, Mendoza's intimations built to this moment of shock. Even still without calling the organization by name, Mendoza reveals, in one disturbing pass, the undeniable danger and cruelty of the Shining Path. Presenting the various manifestations of the organization without allowing for characterization keeps the Shining Path completely dehumanized and impersonal, making them more terrifying in turn. Mendoza keeps the organization hidden, while revealing its handiwork, as a way of heightening its effectiveness as the villain of his film.

Whereas Mendoza keeps the Shining Path at arms length for dramatic effect, he humanizes the GEIN as a collective. Mendoza's characterization of the Shining Path remains ambiguous and looming, much like the red face of Guzmán in the poster, throughout the first half of the film. Contrarily, Mendoza invites the audience to connect with the GEIN, humanizing them through familial and intimate situations and relationships. For example, Mendoza shows the GEIN crew at the dinner table as they debrief after a day's work of intelligence. Despite the magnitude of their task at hand, they are not cold and professional in their interactions. Rather, they are jovial and easygoing, cracking jokes and telling stories. The camera follows the dialogue around the table with consecutive over-the-shoulder shots which succeed in giving the whole conversation a feeling of privacy.



By impressing upon the audience that they are on the outside peeping in, the camera work underscores the intimate, familial structure of the GEIN unit. At the end of this scene, the power goes out in the restaurant, and the agents take bets on which government building has just been bombed. This moment is emblematic of Mendoza's heroes and villains framework: the GEIN's representation seeks to build a connection to the audience through their humor and camaraderie, and the Shining Path introduces itself in the form of impersonal and mysterious darkness. With each abrasive manifestation of the Shining Path, Mendoza's construction of a nameless villain becomes increasingly powerful. With such stark juxtaposition between the GEIN and the Shining Path in this scene, the mechanics of Mendoza's heroes and villains construction are displayed undeniably.

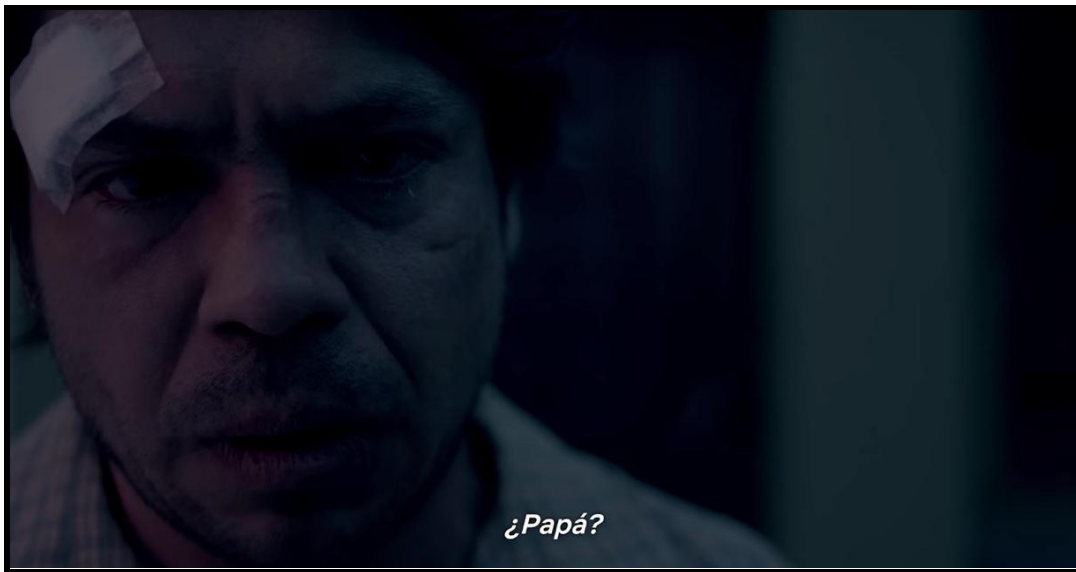
Mendoza succeeds in humanizing his protagonists to an even more profound degree than his humanization of the GEIN as a unit. In the case of Zambrano, Mendoza depicts the agent's struggling efforts to connect with his son in a poignant and humanizing sub plot. Zambrano's ex-wife is attempting to gain full custody of his son so that she can flee with him from Peru to somewhere safer. Zambrano's son, Gonzalo, could choose to prevent that scenario, but a palpable disconnect between father and son makes Gonzalo's eventual departure seem inevitable. Zambrano's frustration is ever-present in his character, and it eventually becomes evident how overwhelmed he feels. In one clear instance of his nerves made manifest, an emotional argument with his ex-wife cuts directly to a take of him out on patrol, using his inhaler and lighting a cigarette in one fluid motion. In several instances across the film, Zambrano voices his frustration with the mission's slow-going nature to the other GEIN agents. His complaints come across, at first, as the whinings of an immature investigator who lacks the foresight necessary to

accomplish such an operational feat as the capture of Guzmán. But as the precarity of his familial situation becomes clearer, Zambrano's impatient outbursts become understandable in the eyes of the audience: whether or not he will watch his son grow up very much depends on whether or not he can put Guzmán behind bars. This anxiety-rich reality of a father longing to know his son makes Zambrano more relatable to the audience and, consequently, easier to root for as the story's hero. So when the GEIN agents finally storm the Shining Path's hideout, Zambrano is naturally the one who discovers Guzmán. The significance of the moment is striking as a close up shot reveals, on Zambrano's face, the bewilderment of an impossible mission having been accomplished.



But even more compelling is the following scene when Zambrano goes to find his son. After no one comes to the door, Zambrano turns to leave, evidently upset, concluding that his ex-wife and son must have already fled the country. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up shot as a defeated Zambrano stops in his tracks. The voice of his son can be heard through the door. “¿Papá?” he says, as Zambrano's eyes well with tears of triumph.

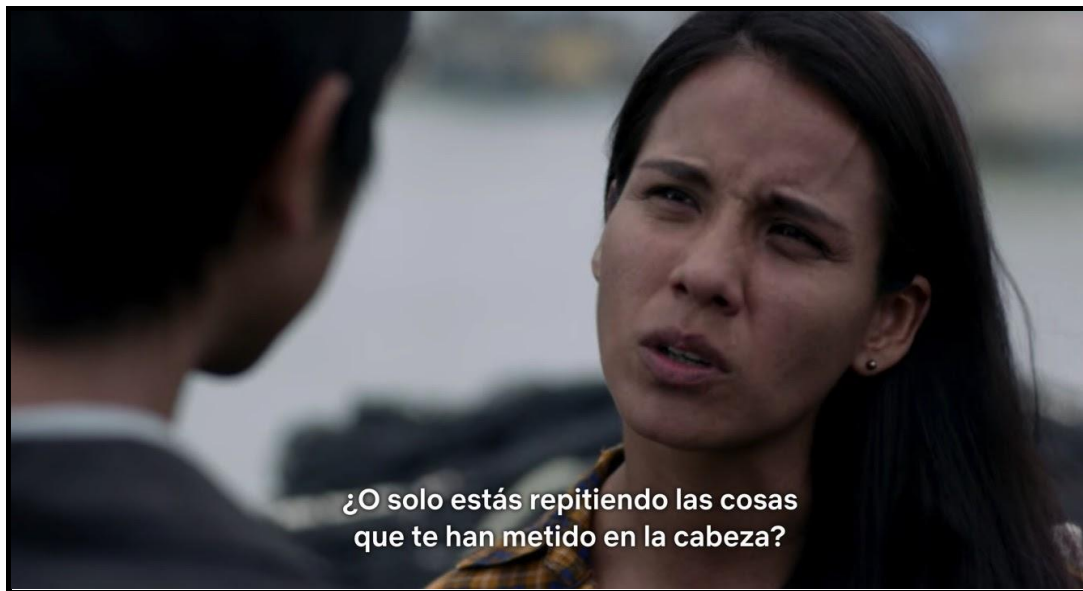




Through extended characterization, combined with the use of emotion-magnifying close-up shots, these two moments of satisfaction seek to affect the viewer tremendously. As the credits roll, Zambrano's hero status in the film is unquestionable. Mendoza did not only want his hero to take down Guzmán, he also wanted him to win the hearts of the audience.

In the same way the GEIN's collective humanity is juxtaposed against the static malevolence of the Shining Path, Mendoza's focus on the individual characterization of the GEIN agents is especially evident when compared to his portrayal of the only Shining Path character with significant screen time, Fidel. This claim stands in opposition to one of the few available academic sources with reference to *La hora final*, which argues in favor of Mendoza having achieved sufficient development of his "insurgent" character to move beyond essentializing tropes. The author, Karen Bernedo, identifies three levels of villain complexity in Peruvian post-conflict cinema and places Fidel in the third level reserved for the most complex, arguing that his status as the estranged brother of GEIN agent Gabriela Coronado goes beyond most insurgent character development done historically (269). While Fidel's nuance may indeed represent a step further relative to prior films, calling him a developed antagonist is doubtless a

step too far. For one, Mendoza's development of Fidel is from the outset inherently limited—not enhanced—by his status as the estranged brother of Gabriela. Having grown up together in the chaos of Ayacucho, the two find themselves reunited in Lima on opposing sides of the internal armed conflict. The familial connection succeeds in adding depth, vulnerability, and humanity to Gabriela, but contributes towards reducing Fidel to a predictable foil of Gabriela's level-headed heroism. Additionally, the heroes and villains framework that Mendoza constructs in the opening scenes results in Fidel's characterization having a preordained direction and limitation. That is to say, moral judgements of Fidel are governed by the Shining Path's established collective standing as the unequivocal villains, and Mendoza makes it hard to sympathize with Fidel when Gabriela represents what he could have been. The restricted humanization of Fidel is especially evident when Gabriela confronts her brother over his involvement with the Shining Path, which leads to his sermonizing of the party doctrine and the necessity of bloodshed: “¿Es lo que piensas?...O sólo estás repitiendo las cosas que te han metido en la cabeza?” asks an emotional Gabriela. “¿Qué tengo que pensar?” replies Fidel. This exchange, which exemplifies the broader conversation, solidifies Fidel as the unthinking *senderista* footsoldier incapable even of being awakened to reality by his own sister, with a lack of sympathy so shocking as to put his humanity in question. He remains detached and unshakeable even as Gabriela begins to cry. The cinematography of this scene further underscores the heroes and villains framework in action through a clear physical representation of Fidel's emotional dominance. During the back and forth of their conversation, Mendoza rotates between close-up shots of Fidel and over-the-shoulder shots of Gabriela. With Fidel positioned at a noticeable height advantage, both shots confer an intense and menacing presence, reinforcing his villain status.



In the same way he avoids calling the Shining Path by name, Mendoza limits the humanization of Fidel, constructing him as the prodigal brother and brainwashed insurgent to be feared. In a dramatic final scene that parallels Zambrano's capture of Guzmán, Gabriela unknowingly interrupts Fidel in the middle of committing an act of terror. She has struggled throughout the film with overcoming the intrinsic desire to protect her brother despite his participation in a terrorist organization. This scene represents the moment when her family loyalty manifests itself in lives lost, and she is left with no alternative to arresting her brother. When the car he is driving breaks down, the bomb contained within detonates in a residential area. Although he pulled Gabriela to safety prior to the explosion, dozens of civilian bodies lay strewn in the bomb's horrific wake. Gabriela gathers herself slowly, finds Fidel cowering in an alleyway, and raises her pistol to initiate his arrest. Her dominant positioning represents a complete reversal from the aforementioned scene, and the Shining Path graffiti behind her pays tribute to the monumental nature of the task just completed. Zambrano has performed the heroic act of capturing Guzmán, and Gabriela has completed, by arresting her brother, her heroic journey from Ayacucho to moral

justice. The representation of Fidel as the less-than-human personification of the Shining Path reinforces the heroic power of the GEIN agents and all their humanity.



The familial structure of the GEIN, Zambrano's fatherhood, and Gabriela's relationship to Fidel function together as a rhetorically powerful theme of family that further separates the complex and relatable humanity of the heroes from the shallow and repellent antagonism of the villains. But not only does Mendoza's theme of family work as a vehicle for heroic humanization, it also serves as a cultural pronouncement of what it means to be Peruvian. Each time Mendoza introduces the theme of family as characteristic of the heroes and inapplicable to the villains, he is constructing a meta-narrative that simultaneously seeks to define the members of the Peruvian family and force the audience to decide whether or not they belong. In fewer words, Mendoza aligns family with patriotism in such a way that rejecting one's family is comparable to rejecting Peru. Gabriela's first exchange with Fidel, before she can be certain of his Shining Path affiliation, is highly representative of this theme in action. Although they have not seen each other in years, Fidel coldly rebuffs any of his sister's attempts at reconnection. He

has been in her city for two months without looking for her. He is confused when she hugs him and refuses her offer to have breakfast together. He replies bluntly in Spanish when she speaks to him in their native tongue of quechua.



Mendoza's commentary in this scene is obvious: Fidel's indoctrination into the Shining Path also represented a renouncement of his literal family membership. But taken in context with Mendoza's extended development of the family theme as a positive point of relation to the protagonists, Fidel's desertion of his family for the Shining Path is representative of a generalized judgment made by the director, one in which affiliation with the Shining Path comes only through a rejection of membership in the Peruvian family. Gabriela's detainment of Fidel is complicated and delayed by the fact of her family loyalty and her patriotic duty being pit against each other—until the carnage caused by Fidel is displayed undeniably before her eyes, she was unable to sacrifice her familial bond for her civic responsibility because both demands came from the same source. That Zambrano's capture of Guzmán is interwoven with his fulfillment of his role as father makes Mendoza's point in the opposite direction. Mendoza's investment in the

theme of family attempts to force his audience into choosing between aligning themselves with the state intelligence forces or abandoning their status as authentic Peruvians altogether.

Vile Savivors in *La casa rosada*

*La hora final*'s Eduardo Mendoza de Echave and *La casa rosada*'s Palito Ortega Matute employ similar means to reach opposite ends. Whereas Mendoza focuses on manufacturing heroes dynamic and human enough to inspire the audience's fervent support, Ortega attempts to forge villains so monstrous as to invalidate the morality of their mission. Whereas Mendoza compels the audience towards viewing Peruvian state actors as examples of the utmost heroism, Ortega compels an understanding of the state as clear-cut and visceral villainy. For Ortega, the internal armed conflict was a futile exercise of the blind chasing the blind in which state actors perpetrated no less evil than Shining Path guerrillas. The 2016 film portrays the shameful underbelly of the Peruvian state as it follows the military's wrongful detainment and horrific abuse of Ayacuchan university professor Adrián Mendoza Torres. In addition to following Adrián through his suffering, viewers also experience the atrocity through the eyes of his two young children who have been left to fend for themselves in the village. In contrast to the direction of *La hora final*, director Palito Ortega Matute refrains from any extensive characterization, instead leaning heavily on the use of symbolism to drive his poignant work. Throughout Ortega's depiction of the Peruvian armed forces, this lack of characterization has a dehumanizing effect and represents a powerful tool in amplifying their villain status. Together with other thematic elements—like the use of children as forms of symbolic innocence—Ortega directs his viewers towards an understanding of Peru's armed forces as unquestionable villains. In other words, Ortega uses *La casa rosada* to implicate the state to the highest degree.

The late Palito Ortega Matute could also relate personally to the content of his work, perhaps to the furthest degree imaginable, having been born and raised in Ayacucho, Peru. In

addition to *La casa rosada*, Ortega's work as a director featured the notable titles of *Dios tarda pero no olvida* (1997), *El rincón de los inocentes* (2005), and *El demonio de los andes* (2014).

Ortega is renowned nationally and across Latin America for his trailblazing role in the development of "regional" or "new Andean" cinema characterized by its degree of intimacy with the region of Ayacucho (Ulfe 104). Ortega's films utilize common, provincial elements with the principal goals of connecting with an Ayacuchan audience and displaying an unapologetically authentic product. In a 2008 interview, Ortega spoke at length of the ways in which the content and style of his storytelling had been influenced by his upbringing in Ayacucho at the height of the internal armed conflict: "I was lucky to have lived and witnessed the process of political violence in Ayacucho. I say 'lucky' because this is what permits me a certain proximity to that reality and what enables me to tell these stories in a closer way, with convincing details, to portray realistically those years that were so hard" (Milton 157). In the same interview, Ortega recounts his harrowing experience of being captured, taken to the real-life *casa rosada*, and tortured by members of the armed forces (Milton 163). Ortega doubtless lived the story he set out to tell. While Ortega was awarded a government grant to produce his film in 2009, most production costs were handled by himself and his close-knit network of family and friends across Ayacucho (Ulfe 113). Marketing and distribution of the film in its early stages was of such a grassroots level as to have the director's family passing out flyers, as well as promoting the movie through WhatsApp (Ulfe 115). In keeping with the director's grassroots style, the cast of Ortega's film is Peruvian without exception. The success of *La casa rosada* is defined by an abundance of critical acclaim and a strong provincial appeal. *La casa rosada* is one of the most awarded Peruvian films of recent years, with four wins and eleven nominations across the



international festival circuit. It also received a nomination for the best picture at the *Premios luces* award show of 2018 hosted by the preeminent Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio*. To receive such sweeping acclaim is especially remarkable given the modest, local roots of *La casa rosada*'s production process. With respect to its reception from the press, the film was praised for its directness and emotional affect, alongside an acknowledgement of its evident limits and imperfections as a low-budget work. Writing for the online platform *La disonancia*, Peruvian university professor Alexandra Hibbett wrote of the film's poignant realism and social relevance: "Retrata hechos de hace muchos años, pero con la fuerza de quien recién los experimenta: con el afán de expresar el dolor, de denunciar, de reclamar." Hibbett's praise centers on Ortega's ability to communicate his personal relationship with the subject matter through his cinematography. Furthermore, Peruvian writers Julio Daneri Toledo and Julio Escalante applaud Ortega's work for similar reasons, calling the film "una película estéticamente bella y de gran relevancia" and "una película intensa y útil para recuperar la memoria" respectively. Alongside mostly positive feedback from the press, Ortega's film has been praised in academic circles for its use of distinctive sites and landmarks as a means of building connections with a local audience (Ulfe 111). In other words, although it may only be appreciated by those with ties to Ayacucho, Ortega does well in depicting regional events with high regional verisimilitude. Despite its budget-related limitations, Ortega's most outstanding work puts raw emotion on display and connects with both mindful critics who appreciate its artistic ethos and a regional public who values its loyalty to the Ayacuchan reality.

*La casa rosada* premiered on 3 May 2018, making it capable of representing a product of present-day leverage in the cultural memory arena. Public reactions to the release of *La casa*

*rosada* are evidence of the film's value to the dialogue of contemporary Peru. Just before the film's premiere, conservative congressman Edwin Donayre publicly condemned Ortega's production for denigrating the armed forces and lambasted the Ministry of Culture for having provided funding for the film. In the eyes of Donayre, whose argument was later seconded by actress Karina Calmet, *La casa rosada* was a clear example of "una apología al terrorismo" for its scathing depiction of the military and its whitewashing of the Shining Path (Redactor web). Making a public defense of terrorism was a part of antiterrorism legislation enacted during the Fujimori administration that was later deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 2003. Part of the law was, however, edited and reintroduced into the penal code. That is to say, an individual convicted of inciting or defending a specific act or actor of terrorism could face up to fifteen years imprisonment (Milton 182). While Ortega was never charged with such a crime, and while the case against him would have been an imaginative legal stretch, the presence of such language in the penal code alongside public outcry in reference to that language demonstrate the combative reality of modern cultural debate surrounding art in reference to the internal armed conflict. After the initial pushback from Donayre, Congresswoman María Melgarejo introduced legislation entitled "Ley para el desarrollo de la cinematografía y el audiovisual peruano" which sought to prohibit Peru's Ministry of Culture from awarding any funds to films deemed to be engaging in the infamous "apología al terrorismo." The proposed law was then publicly denounced by the Peruvian Filmmaker's Union as a threat to artistic freedom and an attempt to limit the dialogue surrounding the internal conflict era ("Cineastas de Perú"). Although the proposed law shows no real signs of traction in the legislature, both the proposition itself and the debate surrounding it represent important markers of Peru's discordant

cultural domain. Not only does its recency constitute an advantage to research, but the recent relevance of *La casa rosada* demonstrates that such research is significant considering the current state of discourse in Peru.

Like Mendoza's film, the framing of the audience's perspective begins with the film's promotional poster and opening intertitle. Crudely wrapped in a bloodstained blindfold, the face of protagonist Adrián Mendoza Torres is displayed front and center on the film's poster. Surrounding this profile are three images overlaid atop the poster's shadowy backdrop. The superior vertical border of the poster is framed by the modest Ayacuchan skyline at sunset. Just to the right of Adrián's forehead, his young children are seated on either side of a somber candelabra. Below his left shoulder, an unending queue of armed and uniformed soldiers march two-by-two. The phrase "¿Qué harías si desaparecen a tu padre?" appears above the image of the children. The phrase "La historia jamás contada de la guerra interna en el Perú" appears above the image of the soldiers. This phrase in particular, as well as its deliberate placement above the marching troops, introduces Ortega's cinematic mission of disrupting a conventional heroes-conquering-villains narrative of the internal armed conflict. Moreover, by highlighting the conflict's victims and omitting any reference to the Shining Path, the poster prepares the viewer for an unexpected presentation of events where the traditionally well-documented car bombs and assassinations of the terrorists are overshadowed by the clandestine kidnappings, torturings, and summary executions of the armed forces. In other words, the poster sets the stage for an unorthodox assignment of roles in which the Peruvian armed forces achieve the greatest villainy on their hubristic quest for heroism.



The film opens in familiar fashion with an intertitle composed of paragraphs of text against a black screen to establish the historical context of the story. The information given in the intertitle demonstrates Ortega's channeling of the audience towards an understanding of the state as the conflict's predominant villains. A review of the full text is in order:

Ayacucho, años 80's, El grupo terrorista Sendero Luminoso inicia sus acciones atentando contra la propiedad pública y privada, asesinando centenares de autoridades y pobladores. Es el inicio de la llamada "guerra popular"... En 1982, el gobierno decreta el ingreso de las fuerzas armadas en la lucha contraterrorista... Esta medida, que algunos la calificaron de decisiva en defensa de la "democracia", trajo como consecuencia la masacre de miles de ciudadanos inocentes... Medios de comunicación, parlamentarios, partidos políticos, El Poder Judicial, incluso la Iglesia Católica, fueron cómplices del actuar del estado, el cual dejó un saldo aproximado de 70 mil muertos en el país.

While Ortega does introduce the Shining Path as the "grupo terrorista" responsible for initiating the conflict, his selective presentation emphasizes the antagonistic role of the "estado" to a far greater degree. His attribution of "centenares" of killings to the terrorists is quickly drowned out by his attribution of "la masacre de miles de ciudadanos inocentes" to the government's launch of its counter-terrorism offensive. Furthermore, Ortega's syntax in the intertitle's final paragraph is so strategic as to remove responsibility from the Shining Path and ascribe the conflict's 70,000 deaths to the state and its accomplices. The intertitle's imbalanced focus on the crimes of the state is plain evidence of the initial stages of Ortega's villain-making mission. Both the poster and intertitle succeed in priming the audience for an understanding of the conflict as a contest of villains and altogether lacking heroes.

Ortega anchors his story within a context of fear directly created by the presence of the Peruvian armed forces. In the film's opening scene, protagonist Adrián gives viewers an introduction to Ayacucho as the camera follows him and his young son driving through the desolate town. Ortega's wide-angle, establishing shots offer the viewer a melancholic supercut of

the city as the car labors its way up and down the lonely streets, while his moving shots invite the viewer to imagine themselves as passengers along for the ride. A company of marching troops move swiftly past the car window in a homogenous blur of black and green to the tune of anti-terrorist marching chants.



Ortega's Ayacucho seems to be bracing for impact as plain-clothes townspeople hurry back to their homes down dusty sidewalks. Close-up shots of the car's passengers reveal anxious faces. Another blur of troops stomps across the screen. Scholar M. E. Ulfe outlines how Ortega makes intentional use of silence, in this scene and others, to emphasize the haunting desolation of Ayacucho and establish a palpable tension. In her eyes, Ortega's use of silence captures the essence of life caught in the crossfire: "During the conflict, to see or to hear something was to enter into contact with the violence, that is, to establish a relationship with it and to confirm its very existence. Therefore, the safest language of the war was silence" (109). While Ulfe's observations are enlightening, her analysis falls short of fully capturing Ortega's thematic objectives. The intentional use of silence is only as valuable as that which it amplifies. To fully grasp the silence's cinematic utility, it is critical to identify the Peruvian armed forces as the

actors who disturb the silence. While Ulfe is correct in identifying the symbolic power of silence, she fails to capture how Ortega's use of silence directly contributes to his villainization of the armed forces. This claim is evidenced by Ortega's startling instigation of conflict in the opening scene: the film's growing, eerie tension comes to a head as black-clad troops, armed with machine guns, pull Adrián from the car for being out past curfew. A haphazard interrogation ensues, and the protests of Adrián exacerbate the chaotic exchange: "¿Por qué me ruega? Solo me ocupo de mi trabajo y mi trabajo es capturar terroristas. Queda detenido, profesor."



Ortega's opening scene shows the unlawful arrest of an innocent man—allegedly justified by the threat of terrorism posed by the Shining Path—before any introduction to the Shining Path or its destructive acts of terror is made. Ortega's choice to open his film with a crystal-clear portrayal of the military's abuse of power sends a signal of his intentions to emphasize the state's villainy to the maximum degree. For Ortega, as well as Mendoza, an aura of fear is prerequisite for the story's proceeding. However, while the context of fear created in the early scenes by Mendoza was driven primarily by shadowed manifestations of the Shining Path, the fearful mood built

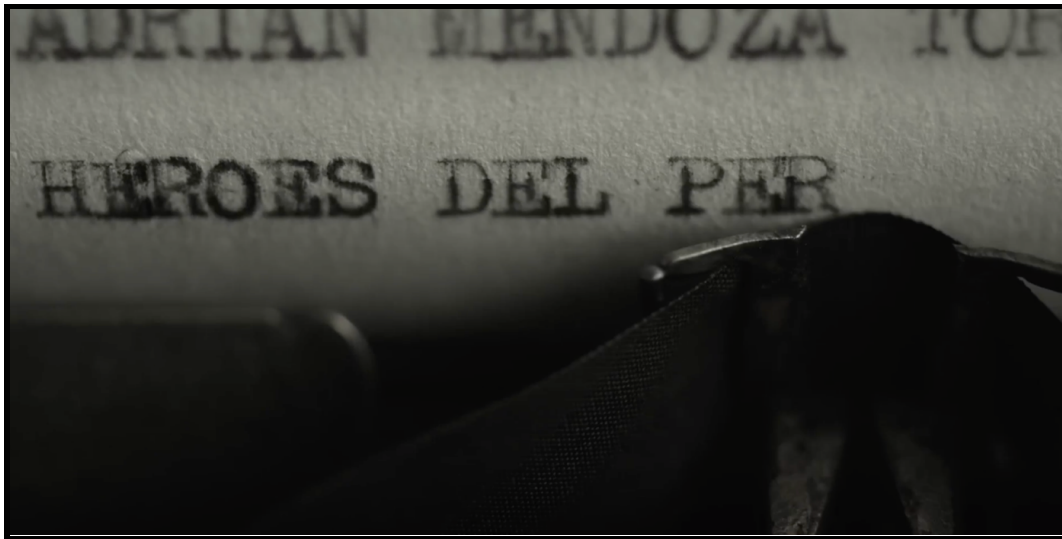
through the opening scene by Ortega is owed almost exclusively to the Peruvian military's counter-terrorist efforts.

Ortega develops a theme of impunity throughout the story to underscore the evil of the atrocities committed by the state. For Ortega, the most disturbing element of the internal armed conflict was not merely the state's horrific actions, but rather the brazen manipulation of its authority which facilitated these actions. That is to say, the Peruvian government, as portrayed in Ortega's film, ought to be understood as the most sinister kind of villain—the kind disguised as a hero. There are several instances in which the dialogue of the armed forces reflects an understanding of their untouchable status, oftentimes loaded with highly caustic language bent on affecting the audience. For example, in one scene, after the military tracks Adrián back to his home following his initial escape from captivity, the lead officer berates the innocent man with ruthless intensity. When Adrián makes mention of his children, the officer says, “Qué pena... habrá que matarlos... para que no sufran.” When a fuming Adrián then accuses the officer's forces of having killed his wife, the officer replies, “Nosotros solamente matamos a terrucos... así qué tu esposa habrá sido una terruca pues.” In addition to demonstrating a chilling lack of empathy, these two quotes acknowledge the officer's awareness of his limitless authority and twist the knife deeper into both Adrián and the audience. Ortega meanwhile leverages the cinematography of this same scene to bolster the villainous image of the armed forces even further. Over-the-shoulder shots angled upwards from behind a seated Adrián maximize the dominance of the military officer. His physical positioning above the innocent man intimates a symbolic standing above any restraint save his own judgment.





Ortega continues to cultivate this theme of impunity for the duration of the film. In one disturbing scene, Adrián and another man accused of terrorist affiliations are brought to a military compound and seated across from an officer who records their information. The man tells them they are receiving their freedom papers. The camera cuts to a detail shot of the typewriter as the phrase “HEROES DEL PERU” is stamped in ink on the page.



Adrián looks with disbelief and disgust when he reads the typed document, but the officer pressures him into signing and fingerprinting the page. Quickly, they are snatched up from the table and taken behind the compound to be shot. Ortega films this moment through the narrow

opening of the compound door, making the audience feel as though they have finally witnessed the undisguised truth.



This scene represents the apotheosis of Ortega's theme of impunity by demonstrating the stark juxtaposition between the official and unofficial realities of the military's role during the internal armed conflict: they hailed themselves in typed documents as the heroes of Peru, but they were condemned by camera footage as the true villains they were. Ortega's utilization of vituperative dialogue, subliminal camera work, and bold storytelling succeeds in accentuating the impunity wielded by the armed forces and solidifying their image as detestable villains. The director is intent on leaving the audience no choice but to view the state as the power-hungry policers who ought to have been policed.

Ortega further fleshes out the villainy of the state by juxtaposing their monstrosity against the absolute innocence of his victims. In other words, Ortega presents his version of the internal armed conflict not as a clash of state armed forces and terrorists, but as primarily a clash of state armed forces and perfectly innocent civilians wrongfully accused of being terrorists. One way he accomplishes this narrative presentation is by using the stranded children of Adrián as striking

symbolic representations of pure innocence caught in the crossfire. While Adrián is being held captive by the armed forces, his young children are forced to navigate alone through the precarious streets of Ayacucho, hiding in the shadows as the military makes their rounds. In one scene, on the way to their aunt's house, the children must scurry down a dark alleyway to avoid an approaching truck. Crouched low behind the front steps of a house, their faces fill with terror as the truck stops, and a man begins to sweep the alley with a flashlight. He fires his pistol into the air. A second man emerges and aims his pistol down the alleyway towards the children. At the last possible moment, their radios buzz, and they abandon the search.



Ortega's illustrative aims are most evident in this striking scene, as there can scarcely be a more depraved act than the hunting of kids. When the camera cuts from the soldier's raised pistol to the cowering children, the audience is confronted point blank with the depths of state-sponsored evil. This moment is representative of the state's abandonment of all ethical guardrails in their unchecked quest for the defeat of terrorism. Whether or not the soldiers would have pulled the trigger had they discovered their targets to be children remains in question. Nevertheless, the terror on the children's faces suggests they were not willing to take their chances, and the film's thick tension seems to validate their unwillingness. Also noteworthy in this scene and the others like it is the Shining Path's absence. Unlike the security forces, the terrorists are never an unmediated threat to the children. This fact is symbolic of Ortega's overall message: while the terrorists may have started the war, they are not the ones pointing pistols at kids.

Ortega makes no apologies with his depiction of the state's treatment of its prisoners, impressing upon the audience explicit images meant to disturb. In one especially gruesome scene, Adrián is blindfolded, bound, and left to dangle from the ceiling rafters of a room filled with slumped bodies of other captives. Two soldiers enter the room and strip down his underpants. They proceed to electrocute his testicles with jumper cables, as a close-up shot zeroes in on his agony. This scene represents the culmination of Adrián's physical torture by the armed forces, and it seeks to shock the viewer with its graphic nature more than anything else. In fact, its length and intensity disproportionately outweighs any contributions it makes to the film's storyline or character development. It is not necessary for the plot's advancement, nor does it add nuance or complexity—it simply takes what has already been established to the furthest, most abhorrent degree. Ortega seeks with this scene to rub salt into the open wounds of the audience's

psyche. He succeeds—as the anguished cries of the innocent man burrow into the mind of the viewer—in driving home the bone-chilling villainy of the state security forces.



Moreover, Ortega reinforces his villainous depiction of the security forces by showing heavy drug use and drinking within their ranks. One highly symbolic scene shows the unit seated around the dinner table as they drink and smoke to the tune of upbeat music. When one senior officer gets up and turns off the radio, he is confronted by another, younger soldier whose nose and mustache exhibit the unmistakable white of cocaine usage. The older man vents his frustration and guilt: “Estoy harto de todo esto... no soy asesino...” he says. “Eres cobarde,” says the younger man. An altercation ensues, a pistol is fired, and the doubter falls to the floor. Later the shooter is shown, noticeably inebriated, shoving the slacked body of the dead man into a crude, wooden coffin. These proceedings function as a representation of the thoughtless, animalistic culture of the security forces. Their unrestrained usage of drugs and alcohol in itself transmits an image of gross recklessness and irresponsibility—the substances are at once a literal display and a metaphorical, thematic illustration of power's intoxicating effects. But going even further, Ortega uses the rage of the young, drug-fueled soldier to demonstrate how the

power-craven forces defended their moral certainty without limit, silencing all critics, both internal and external, with brute violence. Ortega's cinematography in this scene compliments his messaging in symbolic fashion.



Just prior to being attacked by the younger man, the older man is depicted in a close-up shot, bearing down above his soon-to-be assailant. Ortega suggests that the older man, by casting doubt on the ethics of the unit's actions, has established himself on the moral high ground and thus threatens the insecure conscience of the younger man. The fact of this figurative depiction of dominance being quickly and ultimately reversed is indicative of its symbolic purpose. The armed forces were powerful beyond criticism—any challenge to their heroism was punishable by death. Ortega builds his villains by forcing the audience to watch their most savage torture practices and depicting their drug and alcohol consumption as a literal and metaphorical example of their delinquency.

While Ortega does not attempt to portray the Shining Path as heroes, the insurgents do fulfill unconventionally heroic roles in his film. In other words, the Shining Path militants, at times, emerge as the heroes against the backdrop of the overwhelming villainy of the state

security forces. For example, after weeks of torture, the security forces take Adrián back into town to use him as a clandestine means of access into a university-based Shining Path circle. On their way to the suspected safe house, they cross the path of two college-aged *senderistas* who recognize Adrián and catch wind of the operation. The young insurgents, acting quickly, shoot and kill the two officers, and leave Adrián to run free. Because of Ortega's concentrated construction of the armed forces' villainy up to this point, the Shining Path's terrorist designation matters little—in this moment, they are the heroic saviors of Adrián, directly responsible for his escape from the cruelty of the state. This self-same pattern is repeated at the end of film to even greater effect. When Adrián and his children are finally together, safe, and en route to Lima, their bus is stopped by a *contraguerrilla* unit. Brandishing machine guns and clad in red berets, the soldiers line the bus passengers up on the mountainside and collect their documents. The unit's leader calls out several names to step forward and come with him, Adrián's being one of them. They are marched at gunpoint back up the mountain as the bus rumbles off in the opposite direction. Suddenly, an explosion and the crack of gunfire. A regimen of *senderistas* bare down



on the *contraguerrillas* from the high ground, and Adrián is able to slip away amid the chaos. He

catches up with the bus and is reunited with his children. He has escaped for good, thanks to the Shining Path. Although Ortega does not wholly conceal the Shining Path's violent tactics—and even underscores their horrific nature at times—he also permits them to perform the film's paramount heroic act.



## Conclusion

Societies characterized by an absence of unifying national myths demonstrate this discord with their cultural products. In the case of contemporary Peru, publication of the CVR's *Informe final* expanded the dialogue surrounding the memory of the internal armed conflict, as many aimed to enhance or challenge the findings of the state's official version of events through cultural products. The amalgamation of these cultural products represents the subjective frame of Peruvian culture that exerts pressure on contemporary understandings of history outside the formal historical discourse. Ongoing disagreements over who is most at fault for the atrocities of the conflict are manifested in recent cinematic productions. *La hora final* and *La casa rosada* are excellent windows into the current cultural memory conflict in Peru as bonafide Peruvian productions with substantial success, contemporary relevance, and pertinent content. The recency of their production additionally affords this project a characteristic of pioneering originality, allowing entry into an already rich discussion from an unprecedented angle.

Both Eduardo Mendoza de Echave and Palito Ortega Matute seek to influence modern cultural memory of the Peruvian internal armed conflict by leveraging opposite ends of a heroes and villains archetypal paradigm in their films. Mendoza guides the audience towards an understanding of the internal armed conflict as a clash of clearly distinguishable heroes and villains. All the way to the final credits, Mendoza represents the GEIN and its individual agents as that which is wholly righteous and good, while portraying the Shining Path as the subhuman evil to be feared and destroyed. Mendoza attempts to impress this understanding of the internal armed conflict upon the viewer by focusing on the up-close humanization of his heroes and the removed demonization of his villains in his direction and cinematography. Moreover, thinking

through the various elements of Vogler's cinematic schema, it is possible to identify the specific strategies employed by Mendoza to build his archetypal heroes and villains. Mendoza's development of both universal and idiosyncratic characteristics in his heroes demonstrates his understanding of their dramatic purpose in the film, which Vogler defines as the audience's window into the story—the characters with whom the individual viewer is invited to merge on a personal level (30). Vogler notes how emotional connection to the hero can additionally be fostered through the presence of humanizing character flaws which allow the audience to “recognize bits of [themselves] in a Hero who is challenged to overcome inner doubts, errors in thinking, guilt or trauma from the past, or fear of the future. Weaknesses, imperfections, quirks, and vices immediately make a Hero or any character more real and appealing...” (33). Both Zambrano and Coronado, as well as the GEIN unit as a collective, display an undeniable rough-edged authenticity throughout the film. There are myriad examples of this pattern specific to all three heroic figures, including Zambrano's asthma-exacerbating cigarette addiction, Coronado's initial blindness to the danger posed by her brother, and the GEIN's lack of resources and staffing. Mendoza's heroes also accomplish several of the foremost functions of the archetypal hero as outlined by Vogler. Firstly, Vogler emphasizes the narrative power of heroic “learning and growth” which represents the internal manifestation of the external challenge confronted by the Hero (31). This pattern can be seen most evidently in Zambrano's personal growth throughout the investigation, as the audience watched him mature from reckless cop and clueless deadbeat to judicious investigator and loving father. Vogler goes on to underscore sacrifice as the “true mark of a Hero” and the virtue that transcends all others, bringing to mind the film's final scene where agent Coronado arrests her brother Fidel and sacrifices their fraternal

kinship on the altar of moral justice (31). Mendoza's construction of the Shining Path villain, on the contrary, follows the archetypal structure of "the Shadow," defined by Vogler as "the energy of the dark side, the unexpressed, unrealized, or rejected aspects of something" and often "the home of the suppressed monsters of our inner world" (65). The Shadow archetype is most directly reflected in the villainous character of Fidel who, having shared the same upbringing as his heroic sister, represents the resentful insurgent that Coronado could have become, but rejected. In broad strokes, Mendoza's conscious attempts throughout the film to maintain an ominous, dehumanizing distance between the Shining Path and the audience reflects the essence of the Shadow archetype. Mendoza, in other words, affirms the Shadow status of the Shining Path by suppressing its malevolence with his direction. Mendoza's suppression of the Shadow subsequently succeeds in amplifying the film's paramount moments of confrontation, the moments that exemplify what Joseph Campbell dubbed "the Ordeal." For Vogler, this critical moment is when "the Hero stands in the deepest chamber of the Inmost Cave, facing the greatest challenge and the most fearsome opponent yet" (155). When wide-eyed Zambrano aims his pistol at Abimael Guzmán—after having entered the house, climbed the stairs, and pushed through the private study door—he is staring at the supreme human projection of the Shadow, finally conquering the elusive evil, and living out his archetypal Ordeal. When Coronado raises her pistol at Fidel, she is definitively confronting and conquering her own shadow, putting to rest the negative possibilities of herself, and facing her own Ordeal. When the credits for *La hora final* roll across the screen, the viewer is left with a clearly defined archetypal explanation for the internal armed conflict that contributes at scale to the ongoing conflict over culpability in Peruvian cultural memory.

Palito Ortega Matute seems to direct his film in conscious defiance of the heroic narrative spouted by Fujimori's Peru and echoed by Mendoza's representation of the conflict in *La hora final*. Ortega ushers the audience into understanding the internal armed conflict as a foul exercise in futility in which the heavy-handed government response to the threat of terrorism perpetrated just as much suffering as the terrorism itself. Ortega accomplishes this narrative presentation through an unfettered villainization of the state security forces. At times, the emotional response he inspires in the audience through his depiction of the state's atrocities is sufficient to have them cheering the Shining Path as heroes. Like Mendoza, Ortega accomplishes his villainization by leaning into the archetypal image of the Shadow, albeit from the opposite perspective and with greater intensity. Adrián's principal foe is the Shadow's "mask," worn at different times by different members of the armed forces (Vogler 66). Specific characters across Ortega's film wear the mask of the Shadow in various moments, but ultimately their villainy bleeds together, creating an amorphous, unbounded enemy which pursues Adrián from all sides, united by a common barbarity and hubris. Collectively, Ortega's various mask-wearing Shadows represent the figure which Joseph Campbell dubs the "tyrant monster":

The figure of the tyrant-monster is known to the mythologies, folk traditions, legends, and even nightmares, of the world; and his characteristics are everywhere essentially the same. He is the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of "my and mine." The havoc wrought by him is described in mythology and fairy tales as being universal throughout his domain... The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world—no matter how his affairs may seem to prosper. Self-terrorized, fear-haunted, alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of his

environment, which are primarily the reflections of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself, the giant of self-achieved independence is the world's messenger of disaster, even though, in his mind, he may entertain himself with humane intentions. Wherever he sets his hand there is a cry (if not from the housetops, then—more miserably—within every heart): a cry for the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence, will liberate the land. (16)

His tyrant-monster may stretch the textbook definition on the surface, but Ortega invokes the lionshare of the archetypal villain's functional qualities. For example, Ortega's tyrant-monster hoards control, with his presence sending the townsfolk scurrying to their houses and his stern command having them search for their *documentos*. The tyrant-monster's havoc reaches every corner of Ayacucho, kicking down the locked doors of peaceful homes and invading the lives and psyches of children. The tyrant-monster curses Ayacucho with his pride conferred upon him by the impunity he enjoys. Most importantly, underlying Ortega's tyrant-monster is the bleak reality of his having been first summoned as the hero—a reality that dooms the innocent to unmitigated suffering and incessant fear. *La casa rosada* seeks to portray the internal armed conflict from the Ayacuchan perspective and challenge any judgment which casts the state in a heroic light. Ortega's film and its inversion of the heroes and villains archetypal paradigm fan the flames of conflict in the Peruvian cultural memory sphere.

Contemporary Peruvian post-conflict cinema stands as a reflection of the nation's debilitating, bone-deep polarization. The divergent historical narratives espoused by *La hora final* and *La casa rosada* demonstrate the silent war of perception ongoing in the country's cultural arena. This discord is also made manifest in the political realm. While only having

served eight months in office, President Pedro Castillo has had to escape two congressional bids for his impeachment. To date, he has also been forced by public pressure to reshuffle his cabinet of ministers on four separate occasions. Peru, lacking a unifying national narrative and still licking its wounds from the ravages of civil conflict, is incapable of facing its future with confidence because its history remains in flux and up for interpretation. It might be necessary to follow up with Orwell: Who controls the future if the past still runs rampant?

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