

# JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA



Maria Barea [left] on location for *Antuca*.



Peruvian director, Nora de Izcue.



Peruvian-Norwegian director: Marianne Eyde.

## Warmi: the first Peruvian women-led film collective

by [Isabel Seguí](#)

Warmi Cine y Video, the first group of Peruvian women filmmakers, was founded in Lima in 1989. They released their last work in 1998. The 1990s were an agitated period in Peru. The totalitarian drift of the state, under a de facto dictatorship headed by Alberto Fujimori, created an asphyxiating atmosphere. Political agendas focused on the bloody internal armed conflict (1980-2000).[1] [[open endnotes in new window](#)] In that troubled context —without ignoring it but determined to highlight what did not make the headlines— this collective, led by María Barea, managed to make a series of films that constituted a new kind of discourse in Peru due to their ability to *mettre-en-scène* the lives of unacknowledged lower class women.

Warmi's films give voice to slum settlers, Indigenous domestic workers and girl gang members and emphasize their subjects' political practice and subjectivity. Other Peruvian filmmakers have worked with oppressed populations in collaborative cinematic processes (i.e., the Cusco School, Nora de Izcue, Federico García and Pilar Roca, or the Chaski group). However, Warmi's focal programmatic goal was to highlight women and girls' agency. Even now, the contribution of the Warmi collective to Peruvian cinema has not been properly historicized; indeed, it has been silenced. Film historians in Peru have a certain contempt with which they have treated María Barea —and other crucial female figures, such as Marianne Eyde—in a way that speaks to the historical monopolization of the cultural sphere in Peru by privileged westernized men.

A masculine bias to the construction of the historical narrative is not surprising, but it is harmful. These women filmmakers delivered timely contributions to national social process as they developed collaborative alliances with working-class organizations and disenfranchised subjects. They employed resourcefulness and ingenuity while receiving very little institutional or financial support, only later to be systematically neglected by the gatekeepers of film scholarship and film criticism.[2]

A verb in Spanish describes perfectly this kind of neglect: *ningunear*. It literally means to make nobody (of somebody). The Cambridge dictionary translates it as “to look down on, to belittle.”[3] The Warmi group, and so many other women in Peruvian film history, have systematically been “made nobody,” erased, and dismissed from the official accounts. My article, devoted to Warmi, has a simple goal: to start historicizing the collective and stop the *ningunear*.[4]

In fact, mine is not an individual initiative. In recent years, several film scholars have been contributing to the subversion of the patriarchal narratives of Peruvian cinema history. They are colleagues, members of RAMA (Latin American Women's Audiovisual Research Network) such as Gabriela Yepes, Lorena Best, Sara Lucía Guerrero, Marina Tedesco, Sarah Barrow and Carla Rabelo, and others, like Mónica Delgado and Fabiola Reyna. Feminist film histories across Latin America are collective endeavors that seek to change hierarchical academic practices and transform colonial institutions of knowledge creation.

### Framing Warmi using Third Cinema theory and María Lugones' feminist perspective

Canon formation, awards systems, the festival circuit, and other often-unquestioned mechanisms propped up by film scholars, film critics, and the industry contribute to a narrow vision that gives pre-eminence to two types of

value: aesthetic and commercial. Nevertheless, a methodological focus on film as an object reduces the scope of its political significance. All of the above aspects of cinema, in fact, contradict the essential principles of Latin American political cinema, and this led Third Cinema theoreticians and practitioners to propose a schema that inverted the priorities.[5] Consequently, many Latin American filmmakers accepted a different goal, insisting that in their work ‘use value’ was crucial (Burton 1997, 180). Julio García Espinosa, in 1969, in his groundbreaking manifesto “For an Imperfect Cinema” affirms a new goal for filmmaking:

“Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in quality or technique (...) is no longer interested in (...) ‘good taste.’ (...) The only thing it is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the ‘cultured’ elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work? The filmmaker who subscribes to this new poetics should not have self-realization as his [their] object.” (García Espinosa 1997, 82)

Warmi practiced Third Cinema by questioning the forms and structures of both first and second cinemas. From the outset, they challenged technical magnificence and refused to accept the external impositions of a seemingly perfect cinematic language. Moreover, they ignored fetishism in the cult of the auteur’s personality. Barea, the director of Warmi’s films, did not have self-realization as a goal. Furthermore, if Barea had been a formal perfectionist, she probably would never have dared to make films because she lacked the technical background and training in European traditions—two aspects that, from a colonial approach to cinema, give legitimacy to a filmmaker.



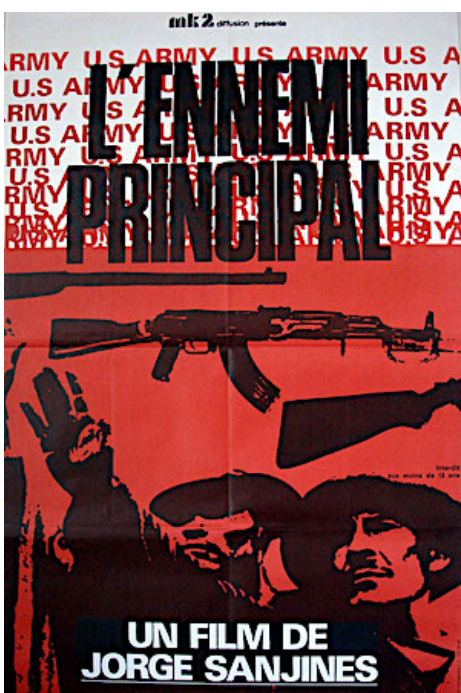
Jorge Sanjinés and Beatriz Palacios editing *Get out of here* (1977). Photo by Cristobal Corral.

Theories of Third Cinema shifting attention to ‘use value’ allows us to see film’s political work far better than a primary focus on aesthetics or representation. When accomplished women producers and disseminators (such as María Barea) become directors, their films are made with an eye to communicative effectiveness. Barea’s priority was to represent the human experience of the subjects of her films and to create of politically useful movies to be employed as consciousness-raising and popular-education tools, in the Freirean sense. Although an aesthetically bold style may be absent in Warmi’s films, they are thematically adventurous and efficient. The films fulfilled different functions, such as increasing poor women’s self-esteem, raising their social awareness and fostering their agendas. Warmi’s cinematic practice is exemplary in that it offers a sympathetic modality for a cinematic practice where care and community building are at the core.

In their practice, few women making Latin American social cinema were publicists. They rarely devoted themselves to reflecting publicly about how their cinematographic practice challenged a Western paradigm. Some like Beatriz Palacios, Marta Rodríguez, and the collectives Cine Mujer in Mexico and Colombia did do some of this, although they rarely gathered the attention of critics and scholars. Those, such as Barea, who did not theorize their approach and did not deliver highly aestheticized products, have been even more ignored—regardless of the remarkable political processes behind their work and the precious resulting films. Meanwhile, male directors like Julio García Espinosa, Fernando “Pino” Solanas, and Jorge Sanjinés wisely both made films and explained the theory behind what they considered political cinema. They knew they were making films for the people while using avant-garde aesthetics and also writing theory to feed the intellectual sphere (Tedesco 2019, 15-16).

Barea was not a public intellectual. Moreover, by often being one of the few women of on a film crew, she was frequently expelled from the artistic decision-making core group (who share techie interests and cinephilic discussions). These well-known practices of exclusion are why, in the neighboring country, Bolivia, Jorge Sanjinés and Beatriz Palacios (the driving forces behind the Ukamau group from 1974 to 2003) staked a claim for a decolonized film criticism. And that is why Palacios spent her entire life collecting the testimonies of subaltern spectators, many of them Indigenous women, to gather convincing arguments to justify the meaning of work made side by side and in collaboration with the voiceless. A director making political cinema might have reason to remain distanced from the gatekeepers of taste (Seguí 2021, 81-83).

In fact, the only evident influence that Barea recognizes by a filmmaker is Sanjinés. However, she never refers to those Sanjinés-style linguistic innovations





Titles reveal collaborative making of *Women of El Planeta* both with women settlers of barrios jóvenes, their organizations, and her family and friends.



Maria Barea and her son Horacio Faudella, cameraman during the filming of *Antuca* (1992).

that mesmerize filmmakers, scholars, and critics. She recalls that during her work experience with him she learned how he approached the Indigenous *peasants* who were the subjects and protagonists of the film *The Principal Enemy* (*El enemigo principal*, 1974). She was fascinated by his respect towards them and how he earned the trust that allowed them all to create a meaningful and useful film together.

Hence, inspired by Sanjinés but soon beating the teacher, Barea directed emancipatory films using a participatory methodology. The work method was collaborative not only due to her partnership with the protagonists but also in how she managed the horizontal workflow of each project. She fostered distributed creativity effectively and in a more organic way than she had seen in the Ukamau group. Barea listened to the crew, learned from them, and considered their professional opinion. Her approach to collaborative work and collective filmmaking was not abstract but ethical and practical.

In that regard, Barea's approach is similar to that of philosopher and activist María Lugones, who talked about, wrote and practiced a feminist ethos based on friendship that she named Pluralist Friendship:

“I find friendship interesting in the building of a feminist ethos because I am interested in bonding among women across differences. Friendship is a kind of practical love that commits one to perceptual changes in the knowledge of other persons. The commitment is there because understanding the other is central to the possibility of loving the other person practically. Practical love is an emotion that involves a commitment to make decisions or act in ways that take the well-being of the other person into account. Because I think a commitment to perceptual changes is central to the possibility of bonding across differences and the commitment is part of friendship, I think that friendship is a good concept to start the radical theoretical and practical reconstruction of the relations among women” (Lugones 1995, 141).

Warmi's politics and practices were a materialization of Lugones' ideal. For example, in *Women of El Planeta* (*Mujeres de El Planeta*, 1981), the two pillars of the project were, first, working in films with migrant rural women, the settlers of Lima's sandbank slums; and second, bringing together a group of dear friends, family and collaborators to work on her films/projects. Both strands were imbued with this kind of Lugonian model. The members of Warmi sought to establish bonds that would allow them to “generate the radical reconstruction of relations” among themselves as a group of filmmakers and also between all of them and the women portrayed in their films. Some trustworthy men, such as the cinematographers Jorge Vignati and César Pérez, and the cultural activist Mark Willens, also shared the safe space of Warmi. These were not women's only spaces, but they were women-led, and this option was based on Barea's previous work experiences, some of which were traumatic.

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*The Starving Dogs/Los perros hambrientos* is a major film crediting Figueroa as director but Barea's work was largely unacknowledged. She also wanted to find new ways to give silenced women a voice.



Maria Barea.



Grupo Chaski.

## Barea's background and testimonial methodology

When *Warmi* was created, Barea was a seasoned filmmaker. She started her career in the 1970s as the producer for her husband, the cusqueño director Luis Figueroa.[6] [[open endnotes in new window](#)] They created the small film company Pukara Cine that produced among others *The Starving Dogs* (*Los perros hambrientos*, 1975) and *Yawar Fiesta* (1979). Besides being Figueroa's producer and Pukara's manager, Barea did uncredited creative work like screenwriting. She soon realized that women were absent in Figueroa's progressive but patronizing representations of the Indigenous peasantry. In addition, her own sensibility was sidelined in her husband's projects. Hence, she started a parallel process of giving herself and other silenced women a voice. This process fostered the agency of all those involved, primarily her. María Barea regularly and openly refers to her own trajectory as a media maker, including her insecurity as a creator and how she relentlessly grew out of it.

After divorcing Figueroa in 1980, she directed her first piece, the documentary *Women of El Planeta* (*Mujeres de El Planeta*, 1981), awarded at the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival (East Germany) in 1983.[7] During the pre-production, she conducted thorough research among and with the female inhabitants of Lima's shantytowns or *pueblos jóvenes* (new towns). Massive migration from the Andean countryside to the cities was Peru's most relevant social phenomenon of the 20th century. The waves of population arriving in the capital were caused by the workforce demanded by the increasing industrialization, the perennial need of servants in middle and upper-class households, and, in the last two decades of the century, the internal armed conflict that forcibly displaced peasant communities. Migrations were accompanied by overcrowding. The increasing demand for living space led to practices of land grabbing commonly known as "invasions." [8]

The eye-opening knowledge Barea acquired thanks to the ethnographical work conducted with the dwellers of the slums was the seed for all the projects she undertook during her career. In the testimonies of the *invasoras*, she found intersectional structural injustice and a solid spirit of overcoming. From that moment on, she felt called to tell their stories, not of victimhood but of collective strength, via the cinematic medium. Barea is a case in point of how the testimonial process works in two directions, emancipating the listener and the speaker. Barea's role models were grass-roots women. She was free from the patronizing gaze that, sometimes, characterized leftist intellectuals wanting to "give voice to the voiceless" in Latin America. Conversely, she carefully listened to the narration of the life journeys of the women of the slums and took advantage of the act of compiling their testimonies to reflect and incorporate changes into her own life and career. The resultant films combine the expressive efforts of women of the working and middle-classes, becoming precious interclass cultural products.

In her work, Barea made use of emotional and intuitive types of thinking committed to action. This is an applied form of creativity, in which the aesthetic form was used to reach transformative goals. This type of creativity invests in visual products that are designed to be usable in a practical communicative and educational way, not purely objects of contemplation. That is also the point of testimony: to convert an intimate encounter between a speaker and a listener—where crucial information about personal, historical, and/or structural abuse is shared—into documented material, to foster public awareness that leads into political action.[9]

After the crucial experience of making *Women of El Planeta*, in 1982 Barea founded the Chaski group with Stefan Kaspar, Alejandro Legaspi, Fernando Espinoza and Fernando Barreto. As I have explained elsewhere, her experience in Chaski was disappointing. The group's organizational aspirations—mirroring their emancipatory ideological underpinnings—were to create a horizontal workflow, freed from auteurist hierarchies. However, soon enough, Barea realized that her



Warmi leaflet cover. Click on the image to see the contents and statements of the group's goals.



Maria Barea (right) and Micha Torres (left) featured in an article in *Revista Meridiano*.



Rosa Dueñas in *Women of El Planeta*.

male colleagues were discriminating against her—a common practice on the Left that she described humorously as *machismo-leninismo*. Although when the group started, she was the member with more experience and international recognition, she was soon relegated to the role of the producer and made responsible for the most painstaking but necessary tasks. At the same time, her ideas were systematically dismissed (Seguí 2018, 27-30). With Chaski she made two films, *Miss Universe in Peru* (*Miss Universo en el Perú*, 1982) and *Gregorio* (1985). After fulfilling her responsibilities in the distribution of *Gregorio*, Barea was burned-out and left the group.

## Founding Warmi Film and Video

In 1989, Barea founded the Warmi group with two other women who had left Chaski for similar reasons, Amelia (Micha) Torres and María Luz Pérez Goicoechea. The three of them appear as the founding members in the statutes of civil association, which also establish the thematic focus of the group's work: women's and children's rights (Statute of Constitution of the Civil Association Warmi Colectivo Cine y Video 1989). Micha Torres has long been working with Barea. She had worked in the international department of Chaski as an assistant to Stefan Kaspar. Torres affirms Chaski's practices of machismo. She affirms, for instance, that she had the idea for the third film of the group about a run-away street girl, *Juliana* (1989), but nobody credited her. (Torres, interview, 2016). In addition to Barea, Torres, and Pérez, Sonia Llosa, Jorge Vignati, Mark Willems, and Lieve Delanoy joined Warmi.[10] They all contributed with small amounts of money to the project. Other friends and relatives were part of the collective, such as the German film curator Gudula Meinzolt, María Barea's son, Horacio Faudella, and her niece, Petruska Barea.

Barea and Torres were to lead, but Barea assumed the manager role because Torres had a regular job in an environmentalist NGO, which allowed her to provide for her family (interview 2016). At that point, Barea and her son already had provided an infrastructure for video editing. Their U-Matic video studio was a bit old-fashioned but still vital in doing autonomous audiovisual production. However, the commercial distribution of video did not create much profit. For that reason, Warmi decided to make a film in 35mm that could be released in cinemas, benefiting from the mandatory exhibition of Peruvian films guaranteed by the national film law.[11] They wanted to do a movie about domestic workers, who in Peru are mostly peasant girls who migrate to the cities (interview September 28, 2016).

## Collaboration with the Association of Domestic Workers

Barea met Vittoria Savio in Lima at the end of the 1980s. The Italian aid worker was displaced by internal conflict within her community of residence in the Southern Sierra, a place where she had lived for the previous ten years.[12] Savio shared Barea's priority of working with the mostly invisible domestic workers, especially the little girls. To understand and document this overlooked kind of human trafficking, they travelled to collect testimonies in peasant communities in the region of Cajamarca. Barea was well acquainted with the area because she had filmed *The Starving Dogs* (*Los perros hambrientos*).[13]

Savio and Gudula Meinzolt secured funding from German and Italian NGOs (MLAL - Latin American Movement for Latin America; ASW - Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welte, Berlin; Terre des Hommes; and Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst Bayern). While the funding was European, the local partner for the documentary was the Peruvian association of domestic workers, *Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Empleadas del Hogar* (Institute for the Promotion and Training of Domestic Workers, IPROFOTH). This cinematic alliance had two results, the short video documentary *Because I Wanted to Go to School* (*Porque quería estudiar* 1990) and *Antuca* (1992), a feature docudrama in 35mm.

In the early 1990s, Cecilia Blondet published studies focusing on women's organizations in *pueblos jóvenes* (new settlements) of the capital city (1990, 1991). She notes that Lima's environment was precarious and conflict ever-present so that for the migrant women, establishing a social presence was a slow, uncertain, and insecure undertaking. It involved negotiation and conciliation and required



Rosa Dueñas in a mass demonstration.

massive strength and courage. The new social identity of the women settlers was shaped by their individual and collective struggles and by the positions they maintained in facing numerous private and public institutions (Blondet 1990, 12). Collective identity was key to the survival strategies of the migrant women. For that reason, women's organizations play an essential role in Barea's films starting with her first work, *Women of El Planeta*, which features the Aurora Vivar Ladies' Committee and its leader Rosa Dueñas. In the cases of *Because I Wanted to Go to School* and *Antuca*, the organization of domestic workers, IPROFOTH, was also fully involved in the production. As a result, the tie between individuals and support group is crucial in the narrative structure of the films.

Household workers are probably the most isolated and challenging to organize. Most are females who begin their working life as eight- or nine-year-old girls. They live under the domination of adults who make them work without a schedule, salary, or fundamental rights like schooling. Many of them suffer physical and sexual abuse. It is complicated for women raised under that terror regime to find the time and strength to organize themselves and claim their rights, but they do so against all odds. Significantly, at the same time that they depict the harsh living conditions of domestic workers, the two films do not develop a victim discourse. On the contrary, they represent these women as agents and reinforce the idea that household workers can change their living conditions and emancipate themselves through solidarity. However, these were made in the 1990s. Before that time revolutionary dreams had been shattered in Latin America in a two-step strategy, first, by waves of dictatorships and immediately after by neocolonial economic mandates imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In the 90s, these organized workers were not aiming at overthrowing the capitalist system. To them, "emancipation" meant building a straw hut in an illegal settlement with the help of some *comadres* and calling it home, as we witness in the happy but realistic ending of *Antuca*.



*Antuca*: housemaid



*Antuca*: building own home

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### *Because I Wanted to Go to School* (1990) and *Antuca* (1992)



Screenshot of Gabriela Huayhua's testimony in *Because I Wanted to Go to School*.

Based on testimonies collected in the city and the countryside, Barea and Torres wrote the screenplay for *Antuca*. However, they agreed that the interviews constituted fantastic material and decided to edit a video documentary with the footage.<sup>[14]</sup> [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) They called it *Because I Wanted to Go to School* because one of the reasons frequently given by the girls when asked why they left their homes to become maids was that they wanted to go to school. This short film proved useful for the domestic workers association as an educational and awareness-raising tool. The film depicts many children, adolescents, and youngsters with differing environments, work experiences and politicization stages. Furthermore, it portrays the mothers of these child workers, who often are the ones who impotently send them out, unable to feed the family with their meagre earnings as peasants and craftswomen.

From its very name, the video highlights the fact that the girls want to improve themselves. Moreover, many of them had been lured into exploitative work with the promises made by their patrons that they would be sent to study at night while working during the day. Much of the testimony was obtained in one of these night schools in Lima. A focus on the girls' continuous efforts is the film's key message. It underlines the overall aim of Warmi's political work: showing the human value of these migrants both to themselves and to a racist *limeño* society that considers them disposable.

Indeed, the most impressive testimony to the camera gathered in *Because I Wanted to Go to School* is from Graciela Huayhua Collanqui. She shares with the interviewer (Barea) and the spectators her traumatic memory of being an exploited girl, with the lucidity of someone who is no longer one. Thanks to the assistance provided by the association of domestic workers, Huayhua is now a politically trained young woman who understands the systemic causes of her oppression. However, that does not detract her from this pain. Part of her childhood has been robbed and will never be returned.

In an interview with Barea conducted by Gudula Meinzolt, Barea states that a life of forced seclusion creates emotional blockages in the psyches of domestic servants. That is one reason why the practice of *testimonio* is used as a healing tool in Latin American political cultures. Overcoming communication impediments and taking the floor, perhaps for the first time, allows the *testimoniante* to move forward in a socially needed way and thus helps to overcome their psychic trauma (Barea and Meinzolt 1992, 19). Furthermore, *testimonio* functions as a mirroring experience. Other women who have experienced the abuse can live a similar catharsis by watching or reading first-person accounts that stand for the entire oppressed collective.

The members of Warmi were so impressed by Huayhua's testimony with its balance between vulnerability and a fierce determination that they decided to offer her the role of Antuca, the protagonist of their docu-fiction film in preparation. This choice fit in with the aesthetic and political reasoning behind selecting a format halfway between documentary and fiction for the film *Antuca*. Barea states they choose not to stray too far from a documentary treatment.<sup>[15]</sup> That is why they opted to offer the lead to a non-professional actor, whose life experience was similar to the fictional character's one. This choice of actor provides a robust indexical quality to the film. The script was based on the combination of several life stories. However, many events resonated with Huayhua's biography, helping her leading role in this docudrama.

Using the classical genre of the *bildungsroman* and a recourse to flashbacks to construct the narrative, *Antuca* tells the story of a little girl (by the same name) who sees her life changed after the sudden death of her father. As the girl's mother leaves to work in the city, she places Antuca as a servant in her godmother's



Graciela Huayhua, non-professional lead of *Antuca*, in a newspaper article about the film. [Click here to see whole article.](#)



*Antuca's* pastoral childhood.



After a decade, Antuca returns to her community for the annual festival and meets her childhood sweetheart. Despite the affection, a cultural divide is manifested. She is now an urban girl, a "señorita".



Antuca and her comrade from the Housemaid's association, tourists in Cajamarca, her homeland.



Maria Barea acting as an employer of the maid Antuca.

house.[16] Finally, Antuca ends up in Lima working for her mother's employers. A fellow maid informs Antuca that her mum had died some time ago. Embodying the cruellest side of disposability, Antuca is forced to work in the house where her mother worked and then died. The screenwriters dramatically draw on the slave-owner mentality of the employers in this gesture. However, the traumatic events depicted in the film, far from being poetic license, are based in the testimonies gathered during its preproduction and before. Barea put ten years of research work into the script of the film. For instance, a scene shows the *señora* of the house brutally cutting Antuca's braids, which symbolize her Indigenous identity, with the excuse that the long hair is unhygienic. Rosa Dueñas, the community leader protagonist of *Women of El Planeta*, confided this disorienting and cruel experience to Barea years before during the research work for her first documentary.

When the fictional character of Antuca grows up a bit, she leaves this oppressive and dangerous place and starts a journey through a series of households, where she continues to experience a range of abuse. At a certain point, she meets a young woman who is part of the association of domestic workers. Timidly, Antuca starts frequenting their center and learns about her rights while finding solace in the company of other women in the same situation. At a crucial point of the story, she decides to go back to her village to see her family from whom she had been separated. Accompanied by a friend, Antuca returns to the Andean mountains and meets her brother and grandfather. Her childhood sweetheart is now a community leader who works the land and has never thought of emigrating. After the first joy of the encounter with them, Antuca starts feeling alienated. She knows that she does not belong to the village anymore after so many years in the city. Hence, she again decides to part, leaving behind her exclusively Indigenous identity, which is hybrid now. Antuca reencounters the young women in the association, bringing village food and drinks as souvenirs to the city where she now belongs.

The dichotomy between city and countryside is crucial in the film. Antuca is forcibly taken to the capital; however, the different experiences over the years make her change, learn other customs, and finally forget peasant lifestyle and culture. When she returns to her community, she is perceived as an alien. Her identity is conflicted. In the city, she is a "dirty Indian." In the village, she is a *señorita*—a term used by the peasants with sarcastic class undertones. Both worlds distrust and reject her, yet her life belongs to the city. The organization is her new family. The movie ends with a scene of hope, Antuca and her comrades invading and building a hut made of straw mats in a sandy settlement of Lima. It is the celebration of the conquest of autonomous space. The moral is that although Antuca is still vulnerable, her life belongs to her. She has self-esteem, joy, and hope. She has managed to move forward; however, a whole life of struggle lies ahead.

The film functions as a vehicle of expression, perhaps subtle propaganda, of the message transmitted by the association of domestic workers. The film's overall message is that Antuca knows her rights and how to fight. However, it is not a Latin American *macho* militant film. The criticism of society is multi-layered, and the resolution is determined but humble. This kind of contention also affects the narration, such as the slow pace as a formal choice that tries to create an atmosphere that reflects the Andean rhythms and the worldview of the protagonists. There is no euphoria or radical combativeness (Barea and Meinzolt 1992, 21).

The two films, *Because I Wanted to Go to School* and *Antuca*, act as instruments for consciousness-raising with two target groups. First is internally within the group of workers. Barea describes the films as "instruments of liberation" by and for the organized domestic workers (Barea and Meinzolt 1992, 19). At this level, Warmi is helping creating a proletarian public sphere in Peru. Second, both movies, but mainly *Antuca*, were intended to function as awareness-raising tools for the social class to which the members of Warmi belong: the urban middle class.

The narrative follows Antuca through a series of households, suggesting a taxonomy of femininity in Peru through the variegated spectrum of mistresses that take advantage of the peasant girl. She works for cruel bourgeois women, who do not let her go to school and turn a blind eye when their children or husbands harass her sexually. Other patrons are racist and frivolous, but not cruel. She even





Friends laughing together in the women's association.

finds some that treat her with respect, like a sex worker who originally was a low-class person but has opted to use her sexual capital for upward social mobility in a calculated move. Or the feminist university lecturer who helps Antuca in her education, including her sexual education. Thus, through Antuca, we take a tour of the lives of middle-class urban women, and we also receive information about their oppression in a misogynistic society. The two bourgeois women are immoral, but they are not free. Their husbands deceive them, and they live in a situation of dependence. However, independent women such as the sex worker or the left-wing university lecturer cannot live fully either because of their difficult moral or economic fit in a patriarchal society.[17]



Antuca's conclusion: creating a new settlement together outside Lima.



A precarious life but also a move toward collaboration and a kind of independence.

*Antuca* makes the case for a new approach to solidarity among women to overcome class and race discrimination. Portraying the middle-class with sophistication, Warmi offers an analysis that shows the power imbalance in the highly stratified Peruvian society, which is almost a caste system where the sexual division of labor and the absence of value assigned to domestic chores generates the cruelest woman-by-woman exploitation, only to reinforce the patriarchal structures that exploit them all. *Antuca* is a cry of empathy and liberation addressed to female employers, who in Peru, due to the meager price of the domestic labor, are legion.[18] Sadly, the film never enjoyed massive theatrical release because Law 19,327 was abolished when the production was finishing. Neither the Warmi collective nor Barea alone would have another opportunity to undertake a feature film.

### Warmi's last finished project: *Daughters of War* (1998)

In 1997, Barea received a commission for an episode in the series *Girls Around the World* (1998), produced by Brenda Parkerson. This is a collection of six documentaries on a diverse group of 17-year-old girls from across the globe. The different episodes are made by women filmmakers from Benin, Germany, Finland, Pakistan, China, and Peru. The series aims to provide a critical cross-cultural perspective into the lives of young women as they transition into adulthood, targeting young Western women as the audience.

Warmi's proposal was *Daughters of War* (*Hijas de la Violencia*, 1998), a film that touches on the lives of a very particular type of girl, gang members in Ayacucho. [19] The character-led documentary focuses on Gabriela del Pilar Bendejú Flores, an orphan whose mother was among the thousands of innocent civilians killed during the bloody internal conflict in Peru. This situation drove her to the streets, where thousands of children, raised in the same violence, gathered in gangs that reproduced this violent behavior. *Daughters of War* offers a raw portrait of these gangs of teenagers through poignant re-enactments of their criminal activities, fighting, and binges.



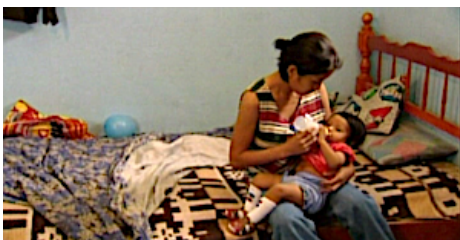
In this film, Barea takes to the extreme her empathic capacity when gathering the protagonist's testimony. She admits to having contacted Bendejú after accessing her judicial files thanks to a journalist friend's tip—this gives a glimpse of the lack of protection that juvenile offenders had when the film was made. Bendejú and her sister have been living with their paternal grandparents since an early age. The lack of love and the permanent abuse they endure at the hands of family members in their early life, and the subsequent killing of their mother, mark Pilar traumatically. The problems start when the father abandons the family and the mother, to make ends meet, establishes herself as a settler in the rainforest, unable to bring their children to the remote region. However, she visits the girls in



Close-up of Gabriela Pilar Bendezú.



Reenacting a party, children became unhinged.



Bendezú feeding her baby.



Traditional floral floor decorations on the square of Huamanga.

town whenever her activities allow her to do so. But one day, she is assassinated—just another innocent peasant victim of the internal armed conflict.

The approach used by the film to explain the devastating consequences of war in the lives of Peruvian children is subjective. There is no voice of God narration. The focus is on the unexplained and unexplainable suffering of the children and their violent reaction to it. The documentary does not take the side of the military or the Shining Path, apportioning blame equally on both groups, which was a bold approach in that particular moment. However, the description of the overall context is not explicit; the mix of talking-heads footage and the extreme reenactments staged by the gang members is at the same time intimate and uncanny.

The reconstruction of Gabriela's terrible childhood is done using the testimonies of the grandfather and the sister and a few family photos. The story told by Gabriela's sister—older and more balanced, who has managed to remain connected with her emotions despite the constant abuse—is intertwined with the protagonist's testimony, who remains alienated from her feelings because of the trauma. For that reason, the oral account by the sister is key to reconstructing her story. She describes how the series of violent events made Gabriela change, hardening her heart and driving her to join a gang of lost girls like herself. Together, they drink, consume drugs, and commit minor crimes. Gabriela, unruly and desperate, behaves this way for some years until she is detained and processed, condemned and sent off to jail. Subsequently, after her release, she becomes pregnant with her daughter.

After the information about the past provided by the sister, the narration confronts us with Gabriela's testimony. As an experience for the viewer, those two testimonies are at odds. At the moment of the filming, Gabriela is not a desperate child or rebel adolescent but a taciturn (or depressed) young woman, focused on raising her baby daughter and surviving in a menacing environment. For Barea, an experienced interviewer and a careful listener, the subject of the interview is challenging. It has been rare to hear even a word out of her mouth in the previous films during the interviews. However, Gabriela Bendezú is so sparing with words that Barea needs to include the entire dialogue, without editing out the questions, to make sense of the answers. We hear the voice of the filmmaker out of focus asking: "What saddens you?" Gabriela responds, just shaking her head. Barea then asks: "What gives you joy?" The girl answers: "Nothing. Only my baby." This statement is followed by a photograph of a fifteen-year-old Gabriela embracing her newborn baby. The baby girl is maybe the only element of hope in the entire film. However, there is a permanent suspicion that extreme violence will emerge suddenly and somehow affect the baby too, as it affects everybody else in this haunted region.

In the collective sequences, Barea invited Ayacuchoan boys and girls, actual members of gangs, to re-enact their criminal activities on the street and perform in their gathering spaces. She admits that, often, things got out of hand. For instance, in one scene, although the idea was to shoot a re-enactment of a party—with a fake buzz and phony squabbling—the kids ended up bringing actual alcohol and organizing a melee. The result is spine-chilling, like a window open to a universe characterized by mayhem and unrestrained violence. Moreover, in contrast with the other films analyzed here, there is no clear message of self-overcoming, empowerment, or hope. The psychological consequences of the internal armed conflict in the inhabitants of the Ayacucho region are so heart-breaking that it leaves the witnessing audience speechless. The war between the State and the Shining Path has killed the soul of its most vulnerable victims. A hard-working, well-meaning Spanish catholic nun appears in the movie's second part bringing a discourse that could potentially convey hope. Still, her point of view ends up looking simplistic—a foreign kind of faith amid so much devastation and senselessness.

## Concluding with an unfinished film

The Warmi group stopped producing films at the turn of the century not due to the lack of ideas or willingness but lack of funding. In 1992, the advantageous film law, the Decree 19,327 promulgated in 1972 by the revolutionary-military regime of Juan Velasco Alvarado, was derogated. Consequently, *Antuca*—which was made having in mind a protectionist law that guaranteed the theatrical release of all Peruvian productions—was never released commercially and was only

distributed via alternative circuits with not enough profit to fund a subsequent film. From that moment onward, surviving was a struggle. They worked on-demand when the opportunity came, such as in *Daughters of War*, and that was it.

Little known is the fact that the first project that the Warmi group wrote and tried to fund is a feature fiction called *Rocío y los pollitos* (Rocío and the chicks). This ambitious drama was set in Villa El Salvador, one of the most vanguardist slums of the city. This *pueblo joven* started with a land take over in the zone of La Tablada de Lurín, in 1971. The government of the revolutionary military regime of General Juan Velasco Alvarado supported the invaders and decided to try and build an experimental “model town.” The Catholic church also played an aiding role in this utopian project. As a result, the Self-managed Urban Community Villa El Salvador (Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria Villa el Salvador, CUAVES) was created in 1973. Women’s organizations thrived particularly in this context. In time, they got centralized in the Popular Women’s Federation of Villa El Salvador (Federación Popular de Mujeres de Villa El Salvador, FEPOMUVES), which, by 1990, had ten thousand members and eight hundred leaders (Blondet 1991,13).



Burial of Maria Elena Moyano

Warmi’s film project *Rocío y los pollitos* was set in the transforming reality of Villa El Salvador around 1990. The background themes were women’s and children’s rights, but the storytelling had more literary elements than any other film by Warmi. The narrative’s novelty, which uses Indigenous myths to generate a story focused on the subjectivity of a little migrant girl and her mother, would have been a neat contribution to the thematic and formal diversification of Peruvian cinema at a time. Other features make it remarkable, such as the participation of the theatre group Yuyachkani, or that one of the characters is based on the Afro-Peruvian community leader María Elena Moyano (assassinated by the Shining Path in 1992, during the preproduction of the film). In any case, we only have the paper records of this project, and some oral history, to fantasize about its realization.[20]



Burial of Maria Elena Moyano

I shall end on a circular movement with this unfinished movie because it was the first and last of Warmi’s projects. The effort they put into it and the fact that it was never made epitomizes the struggles of the cinematic group and the migrant women settlers, the dwellers of Lima’s outskirts. These women of Indigenous origin have fought until today for recognition while sustaining the life of the Hispanic capital of Peru. This is not a metaphor. Migrant women of the popular classes and their descendants clean the city’s homes and streets, feed and take care of its inhabitants, stimulate the economy, participate in politics—at all levels, from grassroots to the nation’s parliament—and still, their contributions go severely unrecognized. They suffer permanently from racism, classism and sexism. Moreover, the Peruvian political reality is becoming increasingly conflictual, in consonance with the extreme polarization of political positions worldwide. In these appalling times, it would be good to go back to the utopian ideal of pluralist friendship preconized by María Lugones and embodied in Warmi’s films and María Elena Moyano’s leadership and sacrifice, which was not in vain. The three Marías—Lugones, Moyano, and Barea—are ethical points of reference. Interclass alliances come both from practical love and creative self-criticism. A feminist, situated, committed film scholarship can be a humble ally in these processes, too.

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### Notes

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Torres, Amelia. Lima, September 29, 2016.

## Notes

1. The internal armed conflict between the Peruvian State and the Shining Path lasted from 1980 to 2000. In 2003, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated that almost 70,000 people died or disappeared as a result of the conflict. [[return to page 1](#)]

2. A paradigmatic example of this mixture is Ricardo Bedoya's book *100 años de cine en el Perú: Una historia crítica*. Lima: Universidad de Lima, 1992.

3. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/spanish-english/ningunear>.

4. This article is based on an oral history work that has been going on since 2015 when I first met María Barea almost by chance in the context of my research on the Ukamau group. My communications with Barea have taken many forms over the years: semi-structured interviews, informal conversations (in person, online, or on the phone), emails, WhatsApp messages. Due to the nature of my dialogic research methodology, based on creating an emotional bond with the subjects of my research, the information gathered is not going to be referenced with scientific exactitude on every occasion. A previous result of this ongoing research is a chapter of my doctoral thesis *Andean Women's Oppositional Filmmaking: On and Off-Screen Practices and Politics* devoted to María Barea. Some of its content, mostly referring to her work as a producer in mixed gender teams, appears in my article "Auteurism, Machismo-Leninismo, and Other Issues: Women's Labor in Andean Oppositional Film Production." *Feminist Media Histories* 4.1 (2018): 11–36.

5. The theoretical framework of this research is informed by Anglophone histories of women's documentary filmmaking written by scholars such as Julia Lesage (1978), Alexandra Juhasz (1994), Patricia Zimmermann (1999), and Shilyh Warren (2019).

6. She can also be described as a creative servant if we make use of the term "creative service" coined by Erin Hill meaning a series of roles "cohering around their most essential shared function: serving creative work by subtracting all noncreative work from the process." (Hill 2016, 134). [[return to page 2](#)]

7. This was part of the series of five episodes *As Women See It*, produced by Faust Films (Munich, Germany), which includes *Selbe et tant d'autres* by Safi Faye; *Sudesh* by Deepa Dhanraj, *Bread and Dignity: Open letter from Nicaragua* by María José Álvarez and *Permissible Dreams* by Atiat El-Abnoudi.

8. See Jürgen Golte and Norma Adams. *Los caballos de troya de los invasores: estrategias campesinas en la conquista de la gran Lima*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1987.

9. About her political position, Barea describes her younger self as "ignorant in political issues." She was close to leftist organisations (such as *Vanguardia Revolucionaria*) and participated in Marxist reading groups, and all the cenacles of leftist intellectuals and wannabe filmmakers. However, like many women, she

did not participate with an authoritative voice in these meetings, yet she was actively engaged in logistics and other types of feminized labor (Interview September 17, 2016).

10. Peruvians Sonia Llosa and Jorge Vignati were experimented filmmakers. Vignati is one of Peru's most prominent cinematographers. Belgians Mark Willens and Lieve Delanoy worked for the Antoon Spinoy Foundation, which managed a theatre in Andahuaylas. The couple created an exciting bilingual cultural project to promote national films, plays, and music. In Belgium, Willems had been part of the solidarity organisation Liberation Films (distributors of Ukamau in Europe among other collectives). Delanoy is part of the theatre group Yuyachkani.

11. The Decree Law 19,327 was promulgated by the government of Juan Velasco Alvarado in 1972 and derogated by Alberto Fujimori in 1992. One of its most striking features was the guaranteed theatrical exhibition of Peruvian films, which undoubtedly helped foster film production in the country for twenty years.

12. María Barea's last film project, *Mamacha*, is a documentary devoted to Vittoria Savio's life and legacy, the Yanapanakusun center in Cusco. It has not been released.

13. (*Los perros hambrientos*. Dir: Luis Figueroa: Prod: María Barea, 1975) and also the ethnographic video *Porcón: Palm Sunday* (*Porcón: Domingo de Ramos*, María Barea, 1989/92).

14. The three films analysed in this article are available on YouTube in their original version without subtitles. [[return to page 3](#)]

- *Porque quería estudiar*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMS-rV9Yx6c>
- *Antuca*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYFXdA\\_xj\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYFXdA_xj_Q)
- *Hijas de la violencia*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qIX05Bflzs>

15. Barea admits that if they had had a bigger budget, they would have included more fictional elements in the scenes located in the countryside (Barea and Meinzolt 1992, 20).

16. In the Andean culture the figures of the godmother and godfather are part of a clientelist system of social relations. The people in the villages are related not necessarily by kinship but other bonds of servitude to *madrinas* or *padrinos*, who live in provincial towns.

17. At the end of the 1970s two important books containing testimonies of Peruvian women were published: Esther Andradi and Ana María Portugal, *Ser mujer en el Perú* (Lima: Mujer y Autonomía, 1977); and Maruja Barrig, *Cinturón de castidad. La mujer de clase media en el Perú* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1979).

18. For a sharp analysis of the contradictions of Peruvian white feminists who perpetuate the exploitation, both material and symbolic, of the Indigenous domestic workers see Maruja Barrig, *El mundo al revés: imágenes de la Mujer Indígena*, 2001.

19. Barea affirms that Warmi Cine y Video does not appear as producer in the credits of *Daughters of War* due to an imposition of the ZDF, the German broadcaster that commissioned the film. WhatsApp communication 2021. I opted to include it anyway because Warmi consider it part of their corpus of works.

20. For more information on *Rocío y los pollitos*, see a chapter of mine in the collection *Undone. The Feminist Possibilities of the Unfinished Films*, edited by Alix Beeston and Stefan Solomon. University of California Press, 2023 (in press).

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