

Emilio Bustamante & Jaime Luna-Victoria. *Las miradas múltiples: El cine regional peruano. (Overlooked treasures. An introduction to Peruvian Regional Cinema)* (Vols. I and II). Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo Editorial, ISBN 9789972453939 (Vol. I), 2017, 492 pages and ISBN 9789972453946 (Vol. II) , 2017, 444 pages.

Las miradas múltiples: el cine regional peruano, volumes I and II, is the result of eight years of exhaustive research by Peruvian scholars, Emilio Bustamante and Jaime Luna-Victoria. The authors define “Peruvian regional cinema” as any film that is produced by local filmmakers in the regions outside of Metropolitan Lima and the Constitutional Province of Callao. Volume I situates regional cinema within the larger system that is the Peruvian film industry, and offers a comprehensive analysis of 100 representative works of cinema produced in sixteen regions of Peru. Volume II is a selection of in-depth interviews with thirty-two filmmakers from across the country. The publication includes 123 pages of supporting statistical data and images. The ambitious scope of this research makes it the most comprehensive publication on Peruvian regional cinema to date. The book’s greatest contribution is that it highlights the cultural contribution of hundreds of Peruvian filmmakers whose work has been systematically overlooked in the capital city. To redress this situation, the authors critically comment on the ways inefficient public policies have affected regional filmmakers and offer recommendations to improve this situation.

The book calls attention to a dynamic film movement that has been growing strong for the past twenty years in the provinces of Peru, but continues to be largely overlooked in the capital city. The authors emphasize the richness of the films’ counter-hegemonic narratives and aesthetics, pointing to their potential to decolonize Peruvian screens and magnify the voices of the filmmakers, bringing forward their experiences navigating the national film industry. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria point to the role of public institutions to call into question the adequacy of their current policies to effectively support the work of filmmakers from across the country.

I have been familiar with Bustamante and Luna-Victoria's study since I was a Communications student in Lima, where I attended many of the screenings organized by the authors to raise awareness of these little-known films. Bustamante's preliminary articles on Peruvian Andean films inspired me to focus my master's research on Andean horror films. Today, I approach *Las miradas multiples* as an independent media researcher, and as a programmer at the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival. My lived experience as a Peruvian and my interest in the decolonial potential of cinema, allow me to engage deeply with this book; however, I believe both the Peruvian and international public (especially students, filmmakers, scholars, programmers and policy makers) will find in these volumes an invitation to further explore the true diversity of Peruvian cinema and learn from its transformative potential.

The title of the book, *Las miradas multiples*, literally translates to "the multiple regards", alluding to the many perspectives and voices that are being raised through a nationwide movement that features narratives, aesthetics, cultural practices and landscapes that were previously missing from national screens. As a Peruvian, I find that the decolonial potential of these "multiple regards" becomes all the more relevant when considering that Peru's government, economy and elites are highly centralized in Lima, which draws a sharp division between Lima and the rest, and pushes other regions, especially the Andean and Amazonian, into peripheral sites of restricted agency.

This is manifest in the production and distribution of media, particularly film and television, as the only distribution channels with national reach are based in the Capital and program content that is mainly produced by and for the urban, middle class Limeñx consumer. This unidirectional distribution of images and narratives favours the construction of a hegemonic imaginary that replicates the experience and worldview of the more Westernized, urban cultures that inhabit Lima and the wealthier cities along the Coast, and often fails to include diverse, authentic content produced in other provinces of Peru by filmmakers of different backgrounds and heritage. This is especially problematic when considering that the Indigenous population in Peru represents an estimate of 26%

of the total population¹ (National Census, INEI, 2018), being the third country in Latin America with the largest Indigenous population (Cruz-Saco, 2018). Moreover, an estimate of 70% of the total Indigenous population lives in the Andean region of Peru. In this sense, the greatest contribution of Bustamante and Luna-Victoria's research is that it brings to light the efforts of many racialized filmmakers who are overcoming the barriers imposed by a centralized, neocolonial system, to tell stories that speak of their own culture and lived experience.

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria define "Peruvian regional cinema" as any film that is produced by local filmmakers and publicly screened in the regions outside of Metropolitan Lima and the Constitutional Province of Callao. For this study, the authors interviewed a total of eighty-five filmmakers from across the country and analysed over 200 films produced in sixteen regions of Peru, including short, medium and feature-length films. Additionally, the authors refer to an extensive interdisciplinary bibliography, which includes academic theses and publications, articles, reviews, reports and statistics from the fields of Anthropology, Film Studies, Peruvian Film Studies, Public Policy and Peruvian History, among others. The ambitious scope of this research makes *Las miradas multiples* the most comprehensive and detailed academic publication on the subject to date.

In volume I, the authors present their findings in a remarkably synthesized manner that is both straightforward, yet detailed. They situate regional cinema within the larger system that is the Peruvian film industry, and offer a comprehensive picture that allows the reader to gain a solid understanding of the movement as a whole. In volume II, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria offer a selection of thirty-two interviews with representative filmmakers, featuring important discussions

¹ The Census also shows that 60% of the population identifies as Mestizo, or mixed race, 5.9% identifies as White, 3.6% as Afro-descendants, 0.1% as Japanese-Peruvians, 0.1% as Chinese-Peruvians and 4% as Other or Unsure. While it is beyond the scope of this review to unpack the ethnocultural nuances and politics in Peruvian demographics, I thought this additional data could allow non-Peruvian readers to have an idea of how diverse the Peruvian population is. For a more comprehensive analysis of the Peruvian Mestizo, please refer to Marisol de la Cadena's book, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Duke University Press, 2000).

on their artistic motivations, production methods, sources of funding and distribution strategies. One of the strengths of the book as a whole is the way the interviews, featured in volume II, expand on the key issues discussed in volume I, revealing the nuances of the complex venture that is film production and distribution outside of Lima.

Volume I is divided into three parts: 1) *A New Peruvian Cinema*; 2) *Cinema in the Regions*; and 3) *Film Listings, Synopsis and Comments*. In chapter one, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria introduce the reader to the Movement. The authors' analyze the historical context that enabled a continuous production of films in the regions and highlight the main differences in the modes of regional cinemas, pointing to the cultural heritage of the filmmakers, their socioeconomic backgrounds, the genres of films they produce and their production and distribution methods. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria also comment on the critical role the Ministry of Culture, local governments and public institutions play in supporting national film production and distribution, as well as the role of commercial exhibitors, festivals and film critics, in determining the reach these films may have outside of their local audiences. In chapter two, the authors dive into the particular history and contexts of film production in each of the sixteen regions studied, demonstrating that there is not a homogenous "Peruvian regional cinema", rather there are as many cinemas as there are regions in Peru. The third chapter offers a rich analysis of the 100 most representative films produced in the regions since 1996, including the technical information, synopsis and a review of each film.

Chapter one, *A New Peruvian Cinema*, lays the ground to better understand the decolonizing potential of regional cinema, as well as the very complex relations between regional filmmakers and their perspectives with regard to the future, including the level of involvement they expect from private and public institutions, including the Ministry of Culture. For this reason, I will comment on some of the most relevant considerations Bustamante and Luna-Victoria discuss in this first chapter.

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria date the beginning of regional cinema as 1996 with the commercial release of *Lagrimas*

de Fuego (Tears of Fire), a feature-length drama produced in Ayacucho by local filmmakers. It is important to note that this was not the first time in the history of Peruvian cinema that a film was produced and exhibited outside of Lima; however, *Lagrimas de Fuego* marks the beginning of a continuous, self-sustained production in the regions of Peru. Between 1996 and 2015, the authors have found 145 feature-length films produced in the regions, plus an estimate of 100 films of under-45 minutes duration, and note that the regions with the most production would be Ayacucho, Puno, Junin and Cajamarca, all located in the Andean region (Vol. I, p. 21).

The authors believe this sustained production in the regions is the result of two main factors. The first would be an economic/technological factor, namely the fact that consumer video cameras became more accessible in the mid-nineties, enabling a global surge in independent film production, as seen in Ecuador's *cine bajo tierra* (underground cinema), Nigeria and Ghana. As the authors explain, these consumer video cameras were first used in the Peruvian provinces to document social events and rituals (weddings, religious celebrations and carnivals), and later to produce fiction films. With regard to the aesthetic appreciation of these films, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria concur with anthropologist Raul Castro, who theorizes that the low definition aesthetics of the first feature films would have actually helped the audience assimilate these films, since this was a way of documentation and representation they were already familiar with (Vol. I, p. 29).

The second factor that would have allowed regional cinema to become popular is the medium's adaptability to traditionally oral cultures. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria argue that the Andean and Amazonian cultures may have found in audiovisual language an ideal vehicle of expression, more accessible than written language ever was. To support this, the authors reference the works of Jose Maria Arguedas (1953) and Pablo Landeo Munoz (2014) who suggest that traditional Andean storytelling relies on the live performance of the storyteller, who acts out different characters and situations through their bodies and inflexions in their voices. As an example, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria point to the *willakuy* (oral tales), where the storyteller summons animals and fantastical creatures, like

jarjachas, *umas* and *condenados*². Furthermore, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria call attention to the fact that Amazonian and Andean cultures have a rich visual arts tradition, as seen in their textiles, pottery, *tablas de Sarhua*³, and *retablos*⁴, many of which often incorporate narrative content. In this sense, the authors suggest that cinema's audiovisual language would not only be compatible with Andean and Amazonian traditional ways of storytelling, but cinema's capacity to record and reproduce content would allow traditionally oral cultures to actively participate in the narrative exchanges of the current digital age.

Drawing from their film analysis and the interviews, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria find that there are two main modes of regional cinema, and two distinct profiles of regional filmmakers. The first mode is generally produced by filmmakers of Indigenous heritage living in the urban centres of the Andean region, mainly in Ayacucho, Puno, Junin and Cajamarca (Vol. I, p. 31). The authors find that many of these filmmakers are self-taught and usually hold post-secondary degrees in other professions. These filmmakers focus their efforts on the production of feature-length genre films, mostly horror, fantasy and melodrama, as these are popular with their local audiences and make good box office revenue. The horror and fantasy films are usually adaptations of local legends and *willakuy*, and feature characters like the aforementioned *jarjachas*, *umas*, and *condenados* (Vol. I, p. 59). In the case of the melodramas, the stories often speak of the hardships experienced by people in their provinces, mainly extreme poverty, alcoholism, post-war trauma and violence (Vol. I, p. 65). According to the authors, the better part of these feature films are produced with microbudgets (under \$10,000 USD) and the filmmakers

² *Jarjachas*, *umas* and *condenados* are Andean mythical creatures. *Jarjachas* are incestuous couples condemned to turn into half-man-half-llama demons. *Umas* are witches whose heads detach from their bodies at night to fly over the villages. *Condenados* are restless souls condemned to stay on Earth.

³ A traditional artform from Sarhua, Ayacucho. Sarhua tablets depict religious, historical, or everyday events.

⁴ *Retablos* are a traditional artform from Ayacucho. These sophisticated art pieces in the form of portable boxes depict religious, historical, or everyday events.

oftentimes source the funds from their own savings and family loans, and depend on a volunteer cast and crew (Vol. I, p. 35)⁵. Because of this financial commitment, the films are conceived as an entrepreneurial project, and the filmmakers need to be very business-savvy and strategic to minimize loss. Therefore, the films are commercially released in their cities, often to great success, and then they tour the films extensively throughout their regions, screening them in theatres, schools, town halls, and public squares in the hope of recovering the investment and raising funds for future projects.

The second mode of regional cinema consists of documentaries, experimental and auteur films, the better part of which are shorts (Vol. I, p. 32). Bustamante and Luna-Victoria find that this mode of cinema is generally produced by filmmakers who come from middle-class urban families, often from the traditionally wealthier provinces of Peru, like Arequipa, Cusco, Trujillo and Chiclayo. Most of these filmmakers have studied media-related programs at post-secondary institutions in their hometowns, in Lima or abroad. The authors note that the short films are usually funded by the directors' savings, and the feature films are sometimes funded through sponsorships from private and public institutions, or by funding prizes awarded by the Ministry of Culture. The filmmakers do not always depend on a return on their investment, so the films are primarily intended for the national and international festival circuit, and after they've toured the festivals, the award-winning features may have commercial release in movie theatres (Vol. I, p. 53).

While Bustamante and Luna-Victoria underscore that regional films are very popular with their local audiences, they also highlight the fact that "Peruvian cinema" is still commonly understood as "films produced in Lima", pointing to the limited distribution regional films have on a national scale, specially

⁵ The exception would be the few projects that are awarded with funding prizes from the Ministry of Culture. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria have noted that between 2006 and 2015 only sixteen feature-length projects were awarded funding prizes by the Ministry of Culture. In those cases, the filmmakers would have budgets between S/.100,000 and S/.260,000 Peruvian Soles (equivalent to \$30,000 and \$80,000 USD). Winning the prize, however, comes with a set of technical requirements and deadlines that can be challenging for the directors to meet.

when compared to Limeño films, which are part of mainstream media. Drawing from their interviews with the filmmakers, the authors suggest this would be due to a lack of support from private and public institutions, as well as some discriminatory practices by key players based in Lima, such as programmers, film critics and policy makers. Bustamante has also noted that there continues to be a prejudice against regional cinema, particularly against the genre features produced in the Andes, often considered deficient or “folkloric” by the film institutions located in Lima, which would demonstrate the extent to which Peruvian screens continue to be colonized.

The authors show that both modes of regional cinema struggle to access formal distribution and exhibition channels that would otherwise allow them to reach audiences beyond their regions, such as movie theatre chains (multiplexes), national television, and film festivals (Vol. I, pp. 52, 97). I found myself particularly concerned when learning how difficult it is for regional films to get released in multiplexes⁶, especially when considering that these theatres are the best articulated distribution system in the country, with the widest reach at a national level. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria suggest this is due to the combination of a lack of interest on the part of the programmers and a lack of legislated policies designed to protect the local film market. The authors point to the case of Cineplanet (Peru’s largest movie theatre chain), and highlight the negative impact Cineplanet had on the local film industry when it opened multiplex theatres in Juliaca and Puno (Vol. I, p. 49). Bustamante and Luna-Victoria argue that, in the absence of screen quotas, or similar legislated policies, commercial movie theatres have no real incentive to screen local productions; therefore, instead of programming regional feature films, they favour international blockbusters and Limeño films, which they consider to be more profitable. Unable to access or compete against the multiplexes, local filmmakers in Puno and Juliaca have slowed their production. Thus, regional films not only have a weaker presence at a national level than international and Limeño films, but they are also more vulnerable to being marginalized in their own regions.

⁶ Bustamante and Luna-Victoria have counted only twelve regional feature films screened in movie theatre chains between 1996 and 2015.

As mentioned earlier, the authors take a critical stand regarding the adequacy of current public policies and the role of public institutions to effectively support regional filmmakers in the production and distribution of their work. In each interview, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria ask the filmmakers about their experience approaching their local governments for funding or in-kind support, whether they have applied to the funding grants awarded by the Ministry of Culture, if they feel the current policies meant to support film production are effective or not, and what would be the areas for improvement. Not surprisingly, many of the filmmakers regret that their local governments have shown little to no support regarding their requests for in-kind assistance for shooting or exhibiting their films. The filmmakers explain that many local authorities consider cinema solely a business venture and not an artistic/cultural practice, and refrain from investing public funds to support it.

Regarding the funding grants awarded by the Ministry of Culture, many filmmakers express mistrust in the deliberation process by authorities (some) based in Lima, and sometimes feel discriminated against. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria also point to many occasions when the funding prizes were declared null because the judges were not familiar with the specificities of regional cinema and found the proposals deficient in terms of screenwriting, visual treatment and budgeting (Vol. I, pp. 92-93).

When asked about the funding prizes awarded by the Ministry of Culture, and how to make its support more effective, filmmakers expressed different opinions. Most filmmakers believe the Ministry of Culture should invest in increasing the number of filmmaking and grant writing workshops held in the different regions so that filmmakers can improve their technical skills and better their chances of winning funding grants for their projects (Vol. I, p. 95). A second group of filmmakers believe there is no need for the Ministry to invest in filmmaking workshops because this should be a matter of self-improvement, pointing to the vast resources currently available online (YouTube, online courses, etc). Instead they call for an increase in the amount assigned for the post-production awards, so they can cover the production of DCP copies needed for distribution. A third group of filmmakers argues that the current structure of the funding

awards fails to consider the particular characteristics and circumstances of regional filmmaking and aims to assimilate regional cinema's modes of production and distribution to those employed by Limeño films (Vol. I, pp. 96-97). All filmmakers, however, agree that the government should implement more efficient policies that guarantee the access of regional films to a reliable distribution and exhibition system that allows them to reach larger audiences and benefit economically from the screenings (Vol. I, p. 97).

It is not surprising that filmmakers would feel the current government policies are insufficient to protect and promote film production at a national level. Other Latin American countries, with a similarly diverse demographic, like Bolivia and Ecuador, have been successful at implementing public policies aimed at protecting their national film industries and empowering indigenous communities to exercise their cultural citizenship through the production and circulation of audiovisual media. In the case of Bolivia, these policies include the creation of an autonomous agency dedicated to the promotion, financing and distribution of Bolivian cinema (with an emphasis on Indigenous cinema); screen quotas for national productions; and taxing exhibitors and distributors on the sales of foreign films (Cinema Law of Bolivia, No. 1134, Articles 9, 13, 17).

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria affirm that the Ministry of Culture has no specific strategy set in place to support the distribution and exhibition of regional films (Vol. I, p. 97), and propose some short-term and medium-term measures that can be put forward by the government, including: 1) to partially subsidize the rental cost of public venues for the screening of regional films; 2) to actively support the screening of regional films in commercial theatres through legislated policies aimed to protect the national film market; 3) to increase the financial support provided through post-production prizes so that filmmakers can afford DCP copies to submit to film festivals and movie theater chains; and 4) to invest in adequate marketing campaigns when regional films are programmed on national public television and pay filmmakers the corresponding screening fees (Vol. I, p. 97).

As a whole, *Las miradas multiples* paints a comprehensive picture of the history and current state of Peruvian regional

cinema. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria do a great job of showcasing the diversity of the narratives and aesthetics of the films, inviting reflections on the potential of Andean and Amazonian cinema to decolonize the screens by contesting narratives that distort indigenous or non-Western realities. At the same time, the authors call attention to the complex relationship regional filmmakers have with their local governments, the central government based in Lima, and with the different institutions in the larger system that is the national film industry. The authors denounce the inadequacy of current policies to effectively support filmmakers living and working outside of Lima and encourage the readers to consider media production and distribution as a cultural right, protected by the State and guaranteed through effective public policies. As a Peruvian and a media researcher, I believe that implementing some of the recommendations brought forward by the authors and the filmmakers can allow underrepresented and racialized groups to actively and safely participate in the construction of our national identity, enriching our collective imaginary of what it is to be Peruvian.

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