

REVIEW

Milton Fernando Gonzalez Rodriguez, *Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema*

Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. x + 326

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(Received 22 April 2024; accepted 23 April 2024)

In this ground-breaking exploration of Indigenous (self-)representation in contemporary Latin American cinema, Milton Fernando Gonzalez Rodriguez disrupts Western, colonial paradigms of imagining and constructing indigeneity and applies a decolonising approach to his investigation. *Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema* references and analyses an extensive corpus of cinematic productions across the region ('sixty-eight representational films, thirty-one self-representational productions and twenty-two *cine regional* [regional cinema] cinematic works' [p. 45], to be precise), using imagology as its principal theoretical and methodological framework, to deduce patterns in representations of Indigenous communities. Aside from the filmic close analysis, the cinematic representation of Indigenous communities in Latin America is also evaluated and understood through qualitative data collected from surveys, interviews and social media posts. The presentation of some of these results in the introduction, shown in a 'mental schema' (p. 27) of how Latin Americans perceive the term 'Indigenous', was particularly original.

The politics of representation, a core-periphery dichotomy, and the ramifications of harmful ethnotypes in visual culture are central concerns explored in *Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema*. Gonzalez Rodriguez identifies how contemporary filmmakers are 'participants in the evolution and circulation of images and sounds' (p. 1) that frame – on a local, regional and global scale – how viewers perceive and imagine Latin American Indigenous communities. As explained extensively in the introduction and first chapter 'Mimesis', the visual construction of indigeneity is a longstanding practice rooted in colonialist fantasies and complex, asymmetrical power dynamics that has led to the gross under- and misrepresentation of these societies; indigeneity is primarily codified in essentialist, culturally violent, reductionist and exotifying terms. Indeed, the author fervently argues that colonial tropes and ethnotypes, such as the ones present in the listed films, have a direct effect on the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, who are subject to 'racism, social inequality, abuse, invisibility, oblivion and violence' (p. 3). In the context of transnational cinema distribution and global funding networks, a market of exotic images, that has evolved from sixteenth-century woodcuts of Indigenous 'savagery' to contemporary filmic examples of native Others, 'mirror

[s] the optics of [...] funders and creators, not necessarily the peoples [it] allegedly portray[s]' (p. 4).

Therefore, Gonzalez Rodriguez's goal throughout this volume is to mark a clear difference between 'histrionic' canons of representation (which tend to rely on pre-conceived formulas of indigeneity) and 'syntonic' portrayals, which involve a 'zoomed-in perspective with built-in social commentary on the individuality of indigenous characters' (p. 35). Self-representative films authored by Indigenous communities and examples of *cine regional*, a cluster of Peruvian films made by local filmmakers from the Andean highlands, are put forward by the author as examples of 'syntonic' representations that challenge, subvert and reconfigure overly simplified and racist depictions of indigeneity. While the author is intent on arguing that indigeneity-oriented representational films replicate formulas in a way that allows for these productions to be classified as a genre, Gonzalez Rodriguez's aim also consists of revising diversity among this corpus of films 'from a chronological, geopolitical, linguistic, epistemic-ontological, transnational, paradigm/point-of-view changing and self-representational perspective' (p. 42).

Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema draws insightful conclusions from its comprehensive study that suggest that global processes of socio-political change are continuing to shift paradigms of representation of Indigenous peoples in Latin America. Above all, Gonzalez Rodriguez finds that 'the future of indigeneity [...] lies in self-representational filmmaking' (p. 265). These films, in contrast to the 68 referenced representational films, were found to eschew visual strategies, and covert, commercial agendas. Although the author confirms that Eurocentric, transnational productions representing indigeneity remain the norm and continue to uphold 'core-periphery hierarchies' (p. 253) in Latin American cinema, they notice that these narratives also tend to propel Indigenous individuality and include complex, interesting protagonists. Gonzalez Rodriguez claims this newfound characterisation is one of the most significant shifts in contemporary indigeneity-oriented films and affirms that this aspect is particularly fruitful when seen through an intersectional lens: Indigenous female and LGBTQ+ characters such as those portrayed in *Roma* (2018) and *Retablo* (2017) blur the confining boundaries used to define ethnotypes.

Structured into seven chapters, *Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema* reaches these conclusions after a meticulous analysis of these representational concerns. In Chapter 1, 'Mimesis', Gonzalez Rodriguez guides readers through a historical overview of the construction, evolution and dissemination of (early) representations of indigeneity in colonial and Latin American visual culture: from the initial contact between the Americas and Europe to contemporary cinematic practices of Indigenous self-representation. Chapter 2, 'Metropolis', provides a detailed breakdown of how depictions of indigeneity vary between countries in Latin America due to the nuances in socio-political realities and definitions of national identities and citizenship that exist. Chapter 3, 'Lexis', offers some of the most remarkable insights in the volume with regard to the recurring dichotomy of core-periphery. Gonzalez Rodriguez problematises how Amerindian languages are used by non-Indigenous filmmakers as 'tokens of realism, exoticism and authenticity' (p. 43) in their narratives about fictional Indigenous communities. Chapter 4, 'Emphasis', discusses ontology and epistemology in connection to a well-established

binary in colonial rhetoric that frames indigeneity as the antithesis of modernity. Chapter 5, 'Axis', much like Chapter 3, offers some of the most thought-provoking arguments in the volume. The chapter discusses how the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender dialogues with the binary of Self-Other that is often present in films dealing with indigeneity in Latin America. Chapter 6, 'Catalysis', argues that *Roma* (2018) is a refreshing departure from histrionic representations of indigeneity, a 'catalyst for change' (p. 210), that destabilises the need for indigeneity-oriented films to rely on outdated formulas of representation. Finally, Chapter 7, 'Wääjx äp', explores a range of self-representative cinematic practices as a means for Indigenous communities to establish their own repositories of Indigenous images based on their experiences, lived realities and epistemologies.

Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema is a necessary and highly valuable contribution to the field of cultural studies. Gonzalez Rodriguez confidently confronts colonial paradigms that imagine and construct indigeneity in Latin American cinema and inspires readers to embrace the thriving decolonial efforts led by Indigenous filmmakers in the region.