

## How are themes of observation and audience presented in *‘También la Lluvia’*?

By Caitlin Taylor

*También la Lluvia* is a Spanish film directed by Icíar Bollaín. It follows a fictional team of filmmakers travelling to Cochabamba, Bolivia, to make a film about Christopher Columbus and his colonisation of the New World. Sebastián and Costa, the director and executive producer, aim to reveal Columbus' mistreatment of the indigenous Taíno people, who in their film are played by local Bolivians. It becomes clear over the course of the story that the people of Cochabamba are suffering; their water supply has been privatised, leaving them without access to clean water, reflecting the true story of the Cochabamba Water War of 2000. Daniel, a lead actor in the film, plays a key role in the protests taking place for access to water. The filmmakers observe these injustices, and are faced with a decision: to stay out of the conflict, separating themselves from the local people and remaining as onlookers, an audience to the events; or to take action.

The theme of audience emerges through the character of María, who represents the experience of people watching *También la Lluvia*. She is Sebastián's assistant director and frequently comes second to the opinionated, dominant men leading the project. She has very little voice, and is consistently dismissed; this is visually shown by her location in the background of many scenes. María often appears behind the camera, recording the making-of process, and from this position she becomes an observer, and arguably the narrator of the film. The grainy, greyscale footage from her camera contrasts sharply with the colour images used elsewhere in the film, but they are integrated together as she records the filmmaking process. As sections of the film are literally from her perspective, her point of view is better understood than any other character. I find her a much more effective narrator than Sebastián or Costa would be, as they are caught up in their creative vision. This means their film becomes their life, and in my view, the two men become blind to reality. María seems much less reliant on the film for her ego and worth, so is more able to be an objective observer.

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Although María doesn't take significant action to address the Bolivians' plight, she shows commitment to sharing their reality. When she watches Daniel's speech, in which he references the title of the film, "who takes even the rain?", she silently films it. She asks Costa about making a documentary regarding the events unfolding at Cochabamba, but he immediately dismisses her, saying it's nothing to do with them. My interpretation is that *También la Lluvia* is the film María would have made, if she'd been given that chance.

*También la Lluvia* is largely about filmmaking, and uses the metacinematic concept of a film within a film. This means that there are two sets of audiences: the fictional cast and crew watching the film about Columbus being made, and us, the viewers observing them. The parallels between the film being created and current events are clearly apparent, as are the similarities between Christopher Columbus and the filmmakers. Both are foreigners, arriving in a less wealthy country than their own, and using their power to exploit the locals in some way. Sebastián and Costa do this by paying the Bolivian people only two dollars a day for their acting work, and although Columbus' acts of brutality were much more severe, the hypocrisy is evident. Scenes from the Columbus film are interwoven with current events in Cochabamba, with little distinction between the past and the present, to highlight the parallel power imbalances in the two eras. An example of this is when Daniel is arrested, in part due to Sebastián and Costa's actions. The arrest takes place following the recording of a key scene in the film, and Daniel and the other Bolivians are still dressed in their costumes as the indigenous Taíno people. The film crew look on as a large crowd of local people attack the police car in protest. The rapid transition from past to present highlights the injustices of two vastly different communities. Sebastián and Costa observe the uprisings, both past and present, and appear oblivious to the connections. They are passionate about making a film to gain justice for the Taíno people, but are blind to the injustice in front of them and the part they may be playing in it. Their focus on telling the stories of the past increases the suffering of the people in the present, demonstrating the limitations of directorial observation. This forces the audience to question the purpose of the Columbus film, if not to encourage people to treat local or colonised communities more fairly. Does film need to be combined with activism and teach lessons for the present day, in order to be worthwhile?

As the audience, watching *También la Lluvia*, we are powerless to intervene in the injustice and unrest taking place in Cochabamba. The filmmakers are an audience too, but for them this position, of watching from a safe distance, is a choice. They have the opportunity to change things, due to their money and status, and when Costa finally does choose to help, we hear him say "money, that always works". For most of the film however, the filmmakers choose to remain separate from the Bolivian locals. This is visually represented by physical separation and use of indoor and outdoor spaces. The

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opening shot of the film shows the team driving through the city, their windows providing a barrier between them and Cochabamba. This symbolism appears repeatedly, most notably at the end, when Costa sees the unrest and destruction taking place as momentary glimpses through his car window. This reflects the audience's perspective, as they watch the action from behind the safety of a screen, just as Costa watches through the window.

Another key scene that separates the protesters and the observers is when the filmmakers meet with government officials complicit in the water privatisation. Outside, we hear gunshots in the background as the police hold back a demonstration. Inside, the filmmakers drink champagne in a mansion, clearly showing the class disjunction between the groups. Still Sebastián and Costa take no clear action. These scenes prompt the audience to ask what they would do in that situation: remain as observers, or attempt to make a difference. This concept is powerfully expressed in the tagline of the film: 'Many want to change the world... Few want to change themselves'.

In conclusion, *También la Lluvia* is a film about filmmaking, meaning that characters themselves become audience members, bringing themes of observation and audience to the forefront. The filmmakers watch issues of human rights that feature in their movie being raised in front of their eyes. Their choice through almost all of the story to behave as onlookers, prioritising their creative vision and not taking action, provokes reflection in the audience about their own prejudices and priorities. We watch this through the lens of María, an overlooked female character who acts as the narrator and mirrors the audience's reactions. Through María, the viewer becomes part of the film, stimulating a more profound emotional effect in them, and showing the importance of audience and observation across all filmmaking.