

Narratives of the village and narratives of the globe

(A Peruvian debate for cultural representation in the global scene)

Paul Alonso, University of Texas at Austin

“Con toda seguridad, el valor de mis escritos no lo determinarán las opiniones de un insignificante número de críticos (casi todos ellos escritores fracasados), o de escritores de segundo orden o de los subalternos asalariados por la mafia (encargados del trabajo sucio) ubicados en puestos estratégicos de los medios de comunicación más importantes.”

Miguel Gutiérrez, writer.

“Las coberturas de prensa, que yo sepa, se explican por el célebre olfato que manejan los periodistas. Y éstos saben que, en nuestros tiempos, los autores criollos generan más interés entre los lectores... Sé que no es de buen gusto que mencione mi obra, pero yo, modestamente, he agotado varias ediciones de mis novelas y cuentos, y una crónica novelada que se vendió como pan caliente.”

Fernando Ampuero, writer and journalist.

“Si alguna lección se puede deducir es que los andinos y los criollos no lo son tanto y, a pesar de frecuentar bares distintos, han leído los mismos libros.”

Julio Ortega, literary critic.

An intense controversy on cultural coverage and national representation among Peruvian writers started in Spain and was then taken to Lima's mainstream print media. It lasted nearly four months and reveals old and current social and cultural tensions in Peruvian society. In the first part of this paper, we organize more than forty opinion

articles, and highlight the main points of the chaotic debate. In the second part, we offer more contextualization and interpret the debate from a global perspective.

The main question addressed in this research is: what are the global implications of this debate on local representation and cultural coverage? Disregarding issues of identity and literary valorization, this paper focuses on the particular context of a Peruvian local cultural industry –fiction literature– and its relationship to the global scene based in Spain, one of the most important cultural linguistic centers.

The Congress of Peruvian Writers in Madrid

The last week of May 2005, a five day congress of Peruvian writers was held in Madrid, Spain. The event was organized by a Spanish association –Grupo Mirada Malva– and two Peruvian writers that live permanently in Madrid. It summoned forty Peruvian writers from diverse parts of the country –some live in Lima, others in provinces, and the rest abroad– who have published fiction narrative during the 80’s and 90’s. The key note was given by Mario Vargas Llosa, probably the most recognized, international, and well known Peruvian writer alive. The congress also had a peculiarity: it was acknowledged as plural, heterogeneous and representative of the multi-cultural reality of Peru. This was probably the cause of the most intense –for many, also very ridiculous– controversy in the Peruvian literary scene of the last decades.

In the development of the congress the argument started when some presenters made the distinction between “criollos” and “andinos” writers. The so-called Andean writers accused the hegemonic group (the so-called criollos) of being part of a “cultural mafia”, a non-inclusive system supported by the mainstream cultural journalism, especially print. They criticized an alleged biased discourse of literary critique and cultural coverage as part of a monopoly in the editorial agenda of mainstream cultural sections and newspaper supplements.

Back in Lima, a week later, the controversy took new dimensions. In a period of three and a half months more than fifty opinion articles by important intellectuals, writers, literary critics and journalists were published in diverse local publications about the issue. Some elaborated on the debate, while others wrote bitter attack letters. A great part of the pieces had high doses of irony and sarcasm, and some were an exhibition of talented writing and sharp humor. But more importantly: these discourses were symptomatic of the tensions in Peruvian culture and society, and they might be interpreted in terms of class, race, hybridization, esthetic valorization, cultural industries, ethnicity, and regional/national/global identity. For this paper, we focus on the global and local interconnections that the debate denotes.

A few considerations

1) A lot of categories were used in the controversy to group the writers. While most of them are questionable, we have divided the terms in two groups based on the

main patterns of the essays: the Hegemonic Group (Criollos, Urbanites, Cosmopolitans, Centrals, Neo- liberals) versus the Counter-hegemonic group (Andeans, Provincials, Excluded, Peripherals, Left Wing). It is important to highlight that this is primarily a division of discourses. We find mainstream oppositional journalists and popular or recognized authors in the group that we have denoted as Counter-Hegemonic, while we might also find individuals with no public echo that have taken the flag of the hegemonic discourse.

2) We have tried to organize here the essential ideas and themes that characterize the debate. However, a great part of the controversy were personal attacks and it was full of local references (erudite and popular), literary slang, and Lima's traditional gossiping that we are not quoting in our work.

3) The debate took place primarily in Peru.21, a daily newspaper owned by the entrepreneurial group of "El Comercio", the Peruvian paper of the record, which was the main target of the so-called "andinos" or Counter-hegemonic group. However, some pieces appeared in other publications and we are also considering them. The compilation of all the articles that took part in the argument is in the official site of the conference in Madrid.¹ The articles that appeared in Peru.21 are compiled in the newspaper's site.²

The controversy

¹ <http://www.omni-bus.com/congreso/debate/indicedebate.html>

² <http://www.peru21.com/P21online/html/debateIndex.html>

After the congress in Madrid, the writers that live in Peru returned to the country. The first stories on the event appeared in mainstream publications and were by writers who are also editors of cultural supplements or cultural journalists. These pieces had a positive vision of the congress and minimized the argument. The reaction was immediate: some voices said that the controversy existed, that it addressed important issues and it raised touchy subjects, while others disagreed with these claims. We have summarized the main ideas in the following chart:

COUNTER-HEGEMONIC	HEGEMONIC
“Andinos” Provincials Excluded Peripherals Marxists (radical left wing)	“Criollos” Urbanites (from Lima) Cosmopolitans Centrals Neo-liberals
There is a monopoly of media: a cultural mafia.	The cultural mafia does not exist. The polemic is motivated by resentment.
There is discrimination against certain esthetics and literary trends, in parallel to a social and racial discrimination.	The coverage is guided by a journalistic approach and according to the laws of the market. The discrimination was practiced by the “Andeans” in the 70’s and it was political.

Reaffirmation and re-elaboration of left wing postures.	Critique against political stands of the “Andeans”.
The competition is unfair in the reduced Peruvian cultural market.	Current Andean literary works don’t have good quality and writers are trying to be protagonists without merits. They do not even represent Peruvian hybridity.
Conclusion: the debate did not serve for anything.	Conclusion: the debate did not serve for anything.

The Counter-Hegemonic discourse: denouncing a biased and elitist coverage

The accusation was clear: there is a monopoly of communications media that included the cultural sections and supplements, and the scarce TV programs related to culture. The Andeans called this monopoly the “cultural mafia”. This mafia is supposed to be discriminatory in media coverage and also in the selection of representatives for national and international literary events.

The alleged cultural mafia –also called sect or “argolla”– has control over the official, mainstream Peruvian high culture. It works by links of friendship and class.

According to Miguel Gutierrez³, the principal polemist of the Counter-hegemonic group, there is a long history of this cultural mafia that had its most powerful period in the 50's and 60's. At the end of the 60's, the hegemonic group had a crisis in the context of the left wing military dictatorship of General Velasco Alvarado. They lost the cultural monopoly in the context when newspapers (including *El Comercio*) were expropriated by the state and given to peasant associations and governmental journalists. During the 80's, in the middle of the civil war between the state and the armed groups, the alleged mafia did not have much power while a new generation of right wing young writers and journalists emerged. Then, they took control again of mainstream media, which is represented essentially by the biggest daily newspaper, *El Comercio*, in its daily cultural section ("*Luces*"), the Saturday's magazine (*Somos*) and Sunday's literary supplement ("*El Dominical*").

According to the Counter-Hegemonic writers, one expression of Peruvian narrative is privileged over the others: it is urban with cosmopolitan aspirations, and it is elitist. Even though the Andean literature has obtained important awards and sells considerable amounts of books, it is discriminated against. From reading the mainstream media, a reader would have the impression that the Andean literature has disappeared. Another consequence of this discrimination would be the "whitening" of Andean writers trying to be accepted into the hegemonic group. At the same time, a mechanism of

³ Gutiérrez (1940) is the author of the novel "La violencia del tiempo" (1991), and the essay "La generación del 50: un mundo dividido" (1988), among other works. He was one of the founder of the magazine *Narración* (1966).

pernicious recruitment was also accused: the Hegemonic group would select new young journalists offering them “easy success” and “ephemeral glory” to make them serve elitist interests.

Some of the Counter-hegemonic intellectuals defended their political stands after being “accused” of Marxists, Maoists or sympathetic with the Shining Path, a violent armed group that was a protagonist in the civil war during the eighties. They made a reaffirmation of their ideological beliefs, but did not go further into details.

Two symbolic spaces were mentioned as a resistance to the hegemonic cultural pressure. The Narración magazine, a self named socialist publication, was mentioned by the Andean writers as an attempt to break the discrimination of the official culture. The other was Hora Zero, a counter-cultural movement of poets during the seventies that promoted the idea of the Poema Integral (a poem that included all kind of discourses), which was an intent to bring high art down to earth. Both Narración and Hora Zero were seen with sarcasm and regarded as low quality and biased products by the hegemonic group.

The passivity of the State regarding cultural policies was also criticized. The Counter-hegemonic group made the distinction between private and public media enterprises. El Comercio, they say, has a cultural agenda that does not include or fairly represent the plurality of Peru, but in any case it is a private corporation. On the contrary,

the public media (the state TV station, Channel 7, for example) has the obligation of being inclusive, which it is not always the case and it is handled by hegemonic actors.

The sum of these circumstances leads to an unfair competition in an extremely reduced cultural market. The biased cultural coverage might also rely, they say, on the fact that the hegemonic group does not want to share the market and is afraid of competing for it. In these circumstances, the policy of the mainstream publishing houses is also questionable. They do not take risks with new authors, and are deeply influenced by hegemonic actors.

The Hegemonic discourse or a defense against an “alliance of resentment”

For the criollos, there is no “cultural mafia”. The first prove of this would be that the debate (including the bitter attacks by the Andean writers) were published in the alleged controlled media: Peru.21 is a small serious daily newspaper owned by El Comercio. They idea of a cultural mafia is just a paranoid construction, the Hegemonic group say.

They also argued that Gutierrez and other Andean writers get coverage in the mainstream media and that the controversy is just motivated by resentment: the Andean writers are not satisfied with their portion of fame and recognition.

Arguing that the “criollo” authors (like Vargas Llosa or Bryce Echenique)⁴ raise more interest in the readers, the Hegemonic group justifies the cultural coverage in relation to the demands of the market and in the notion of newsworthiness. At the same time, it is argued that there are no reasons to give attention to the new Andean works because they are of a low quality. The important period of the Andean literature was in the 50’s (with Arguedas and Ciro Alegría)⁵ and now there are no important figures.

According to Fernando Ampuero⁶, one of the main Hegemonic protagonists, the changes in the capital city lead to the configuration of a new citizen in Lima, the product of the immigration. However, there is not a literary equivalent of the “mestizaje” shown in the music, referring to the boom of *technocumbias* and fusion rhythms. The closest written referent would be the popular and sensationalist *chicha* press.

Repeatedly, some Counter-hegemonic writers were accused by the criollos of being extremists, sympathetic to the thinking of the Shinning Path’s leader and guided by radical left wing ideologies. (Miguel Gutiérrez’s defense of Abimael Guzman –the leader of the Shinning Path– during the eighties was quoted a few times). In addition, it is regarded that the prejudice came from the Andean side too. *Narración* magazine was considered as an example of discrimination for ideological reasons.

⁴ The most well known contemporary and alive Peruvian writers in the international sphere.

⁵ The most important representatives of the Indigenist writers who published before the sixties.

⁶ Ampuero (1949) has published several novels and is the News Editor of the a cable TV station owned by El Comercio.

For the Hegemonic group, the “serranitud” (being Andean) is not a merit and they demand works of higher quality to get the attention of the press. They hypothesize in this controversy a possible public attempt to intimidate cultural editors to make a biased coverage in favor of Andean writers or in detriment of the *criollos*.

Identities and power

Peru is a society deeply divided by class with palpable social, ethnic and economic tensions. It is a centralized country in its mega capital city (Lima) that has received immigration from the provinces for decades. Once, a cultural and political center in colonial America, Lima is now a chaotic city of 8 million inhabitants in a country of 28 million people. Peruvian multicultural diversity and hybrid context is evident, but we would not like to confuse the current literary debate as one on identity.

The very concept of identity has been questioned in a post-structuralism context. From different disciplines, Althusser, Freud, Saussure, Lacan, and Foucault have made essential critiques that led to the de-centralization of the Cartesian subject. Identity has been re-conceptualized as a persistent cultural fantasy or myth (Barthes, 1978). In addition, the categories used in the controversy did not seem to denote any group or individual (who is an Andean or Criollo?, one that writes on Andean topics or urban scenarios?, one that was born in the Andes or in Lima?, etc.) This limitation was also acknowledged at certain point of the debate by many of the protagonists. This is why we

have divided the groups between Hegemonic and Counter Hegemonic, but we would not like to suggest any Manichean division.

All the actors in the controversy have and practice power. While a hegemonic system is supported by consensus, it has gaps that are filled by Counter-hegemonic discourses that are in a constant struggle for power (Gramsci, 1971). In this continuing dispute for the center, actors are varied and mixed. We find mainstream oppositional journalists and popular or recognized authors in the group that we have denoted as Counter-Hegemonic, while we might also find individuals with no public echo that have taken the flag of the hegemonic discourse. So, this is a problem of discourse and power between actors that, according to us, are trying to represent locality –not groups of people, political ideologies, or identities– in the global scene.

Global and local cultural markets

Spain is for Hispanic American literature as Hollywood is for the world film production. An important number of the current most important Peruvian writers live and/or publish in Spain, especially for a generation that is now in their thirties and forties.⁷ Any attempt to understand the current Peruvian literary industry should look in this direction in order to grasp the dynamics of cultural industries at various levels: local, national, regional and global (Straubhaar, 2006).

⁷ A recent generation of writers in their thirties and early forties: Jaime Bayly, Santiago Roncagliolo, Benavides, Fernando Iwasaki, among others that are already living there and in the process of getting involved with the cultural scene, like Toño Angulo, Carlos Torres Rontondo, Gabriela Wiener, and younger ones.

In this sense, Spain might be considered as the center of the regional cultural linguistic market of Hispanic American fiction literature. Madrid and Barcelona are global cities, where a Latin American writer might have much more possibilities to establish a network of contacts to introduce his/her cultural products in the global market. This is why it is more than symbolic that Madrid was the city where the debate among Peruvian writers was originated. A debate on national literature, identity politics and representation that we would like to interpret in terms of locality in the global/regional market of Hispanic American fiction literature.

Peru is a country with high rates of illiteracy and with a reduced cultural market that, according to the Cámara Peruana del Libro, is composed –in a very optimistic estimation– by 300 thousand citizens, mainly from the class A and B population sectors.⁸ The publishing industry has suffered in parallel with the country's crisis.⁹ In 1996, 3448 titles were published in Peru with a total of nearly 8 million of circulation. Three hundred seventy of the titles were adult fiction literature and had around one million and a half circulation in total, which does not indicate anything regarding sales. It was substantially lower than other countries in the region, like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, or Colombia.¹⁰

In a context of a non-supportive state with a traditionalist attitude on cultural policies, an ineffective *Ley del Libro* (Law of the Book, which implies exoneration of

⁸ Classes A, B, C, D, and E are widely used socioeconomic divisions for ratings and marketing purposes.

⁹ Even though Peruvian economy has growth around 4% a year since the democratic government took power in 2001, the underdeveloped status has not changed.

¹⁰ This data was collected from reports published in the website of the Cámara Peruana del Libro, an institution that groups Peruvian publishing houses.

taxes for the publishing industry), and the devastating problem of piracy, the publishing and literary cultural industry is in a critical situation. This means, fiction literature in Peru does not generate revenues, neither a significant amount of readers. So, it is unlikely to think that the debate implied a struggle for the national market.

In this context, the congress in Madrid was a scenario that offered the participants equal conditions of obtaining same amounts of international attention, and it is probably the most attractive market for a Hispanic American writer. So, how to be part of this market? What is this regional-global Hispanic American market for fiction literature made of? We argue that it is formed by a network of localities.

The local is not at all the opposite of the global. Moreover, globalization involves the creation and incorporation of locality. While the local might also be seen as the site of meaning construction, power struggles, and social action, it is not naturally formed: “What is called local is in large degree constructed on a trans- or super- local basis. In other words, much of the promotion of locality is in fact done from above or outside” (Robertson, 1995, 451). In the myriad of forces that shape locality, the global market is a crucial one for the survival of the cultural industries, especially when, as noted above, the local cultural market is extremely reduced and faces endemic problems.

In addition, in the global market, diversity sells. From the consumer’s point of view it can be a significant basis of cultural capital formation (Bourdieu, 1984). In a multicultural, hybrid and diverse country like Peru, the question would be: which locality

should represent this post-colonial, underdeveloped, third world country? While there are not anymore literary groups organized and defined as associations or -isms, what we find are individual writers –most of the protagonists of the debate– that can be related to certain literary trends, esthetics, topics, ideologies and social classes’ aspirations. They are the ones trying to represent locality –in an intentional or unconscious effort– in the Hispanic American global market of fiction literature. However, the issue became more paradoxical when we observed, as already noted, that locality is increasingly being invented by Peruvian writers living and publishing abroad –the ones that did not take part in the debate– than by Peruvians in Peru.

Hybridity

It is not our intention to take part of a disputable elaboration of literary hierarchies related to the “artistic quality” of the works, which was a recurrent issue in the controversy. In contrast, we prefer to elaborate on a concept mentioned in the debate which might help us to approach the issue of literary discourse and relate it to the global emphasis of our ideas: hybridity, an essential aspect of (Peruvian) reality in all the realms of culture. Hybridization describes a process in which elements of different cultures are synthesized together into new forms that reflect elements of the original cultures, but constitute distinct new cultures. These reciprocal borrowings take place in the midst of differences and inequalities (Canclini, 1995).

It was mentioned as part of the Hegemonic discourse that there are not equivalent literary products of the commercially successful hybridization shown in popular music or in the *chicha press*. According to one of the participants in the debate, this literary fiction would be the most representative literary product of the new Peruvian. We would like to question this idea, and introduce the logic of hybrid products from a global perspective.

The modern novel has a long tradition of being considered by nature a hybrid literary product. Bakhtin shows that the novel is well suited to the post-industrial civilization because it flourishes on diversity. The novel as a genre is able to embrace, ingest, and devour others. (Bakhtin, 1981). However, an important issue raises here: is fiction literature –a non massive cultural product that demands a not widely available cultural capital in Peru– able to become a hybrid product in the same sense of music, TV or visual arts? This paradox should be studied in more detailed by cultural and literary critics, but we would like to start with a few ideas.

The *chicha/sensationalist press* was highly developed in the nineties during Fujimori's dictatorship and it served the interests of the authoritarian political power (Gargurevich 2000; Macassi, 2001). On the other hand, there was a type of novel that was the closest idea of what we might regard as a hybrid, representative literary product of the new Peruvian: the *chicha novel*. A sort of gossiping novel created by people of the popular world of spectacle –*vedettes*, lovers of celebrities, talk show hosts, etc.– that

focused in sensationalistic topics. It was silenced and repudiated by the mainstream literary critique, and also in the publications of the Counter-Hegemonic actors.

Finally, as many scholars have noted, there is nothing to idealize in hybridity from a localist point of view. While hybrid products maintain original traits of the local culture (Martin-Barbero, 1993; Canclini, 1995), it is compatible with globalization and helps its rule.

“Hybridity entails the traces of other cultures that exist in every culture, offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities. As a discourse of intercultural relations, it conjures up an active exchange that leads to the mutual transformation of both sides. Mainstream public discourse usually frames this exchange as benign and beneficial, and gives hybridity an aura of legitimacy and hides its inherent contradictions as it mystifies globalization’s material effects. Hybridity, then, is not just amenable to globalization. It is the cultural logic of globalization” (Kraidy, 2005, 148).

While we consider that all novels are hybrid products by definition and are usually expected to reflect hybrid realities, we also acknowledge the symbolic limitations of this literary form to reflect national aspirations, especially in underdeveloped countries like Peru. For us, it makes sense to consider these cultural products in a global scenario.

Conclusions

Concentration of media is a global symptom in the post-capitalist era. *El Comercio* is the Peruvian mainstream newspaper, and is part of a corporate media enterprise that owns other newspapers, TV and cable channels. While it might have a biased local cultural coverage guided by commercial interests and social distinctions, its cultural section widely depends on news wire agencies. A quick look into their online version shows us that a great part of their daily cultural coverage is foreign news. In this sense, mainstream local media' coverage is looking outside and the intellectual actors are doing the same.

In the context of a reduced and limited local cultural market of a third world country with an important literary tradition, this global orientation is enhanced by the increasing number of publications by Peruvian writers –through publisher's investments or international literary contests– in Spain, and their parallel emigration. Despite Peruvian locality is increasingly being invented abroad, diverse individuals (more than defined groups that embody ideologies or identities) are trying to reach this global scene through struggles of power to represent that locality. The debate that started in Madrid is a symptom and a product of this constant dispute.

In a hybrid country like Peru there are diverse localities. While globalization might include locality through hybridization, the selection of cultural hybrid products that are going to be promoted to the international scene is shaped by the deepest tensions in Peruvian society. By the moment we finish this paper, the country has suffered a

polarized election among a nationalistic and militarist discourse of authoritarian traits, a right wing option that represents national and transnational corporate interests, and a traditional structure party option that sent the country to its crudest crisis during the eighties. They are also negotiating their power and trying to represent locality in the global system. We are sure that a novel will be written about this history, but the sales will totally depend on where it is published.

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