

Book Reviews

Aguirre, Carlos and Walker, Charles F. (eds.) (2017) *The Lima Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, Duke University Press (Durham, NC and London), xv + 272 pp. \$26.95 pbk.

'The Lima Reader' is a welcome addition to Duke University Press's by now well-established and well-regarded Latin American Readers series, edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn. Up until recently, this series has been primarily concerned with countries, but with the publication of 'The Rio de Janeiro Reader' in 2015, it has begun to branch out into Latin American cities, with 'The Lima Reader' being the second such volume.

But why choose the Peruvian capital? One can easily understand Rio de Janeiro as a first choice, long considered a byword for glamour, sophistication, and sun-kissed, exotic fun. But as a second volume, why not, say, Buenos Aires, with its famous boulevards and cultural and academic traditions, or Mexico City with its rich Aztec heritage and cosmopolitan nightlife? Lima does not seem to have the same cachet, with its peculiar humid, but rain-free climate, producing dark, cloud laden skies for much of the year, exacerbating its famously polluted air. Lima consequently seems the exact opposite of sunny, colourful Rio. Indeed, its lack of physical charms prompted one of the writers featured in this volume, Alberto Flores Galindo, to christen Lima 'one of the ugliest capital cities in the world' – *Lima, la fea*. As a result, up until recently, it was not uncommon for guide books to advise their readers to catch the few remaining colonial gems in the historical city centre as quickly as possible and then leave immediately for the richer tourist pastures of Cuzco or Arequipa.

Despite these handicaps, however, Lima is quickly becoming a must-see tourist stopover due, primarily, to its rich cultural heritage. This is, as the present volume amply recognises, due to multiple waves of both internal and external migration into the city, creating a culturally diverse and enriching, if sometimes perplexing and infuriating, ethnic and class mix. This has led, as the editors recognise, to the emergence of not one, but many Limas, which 'are connected in multiple ways' (p. 2). The result is a mosaic of sounds, smells, and sights which gives the city its unique and fascinating charm. The aim of this volume then is to help us understand those contrasts and dichotomies by providing 'a sample of Lima's complex history [through] a comprehensive and historically informed view of the city's changing physical contours, its ever-shifting populations, and the competing mythologies and imaginaries created around all of them' (p. 3). The main means by which they achieve this aim, is by introducing us to a vast array of what the editors call Lima's 'intellectuals (broadly defined)', meaning not just the traditional academic or writer, but also poets, songwriters, and sometimes ordinary citizens. In this way, the editors manage to transmit in periodized, chronological order and kaleidoscopic detail, the city's beguiling complexity and mystique.

Hence, we have well-known early chroniclers, such as Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca, José de Riva-Agüero and Ricardo Palma, but also excerpts from writing by Ursula de Jesús, an 'Afro-Peruvian mystic', Alexander von Humboldt, the famous German explorer and naturalist, and two Anonymous chroniclers of respectively the 1746 Earthquake and a failed 'Indian' uprising and its grizzly aftermath. Flora Tristan, an early feminist and social justice reformer, gives her impressions of a slave plantation in early Independence Lima, while the editors include a short but evocative passage from Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick', of 'tearless Lima, the strangest, saddest city thou can'st see' (p. 84). There is a generous helping of some of Peru's most famous writers and thinkers, such as Sebastian Salazar Bondy, Mario Vargas Llosa, Alfredo Bryce Echenique, José Ramón Ribeyro and,

Book Reviews

more recently, Daniel Alarcón, as well as the renowned, and much loved, Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui on the city's famous annual Lord of the Miracles Procession. The lyrics of a song from the magnificent and revered criollo singer Chabuca Grande is also included. Finally, the editors give voice to the 'many Limas' – modern representatives of the city's Afro-Peruvian, Indigenous, 'cholo' (Andean mestizos), and Jewish populations among others, including an acknowledgment of the city's long-established but now internationally recognised culinary culture.

These are but some of the wide variety of voices and themes included in the volume, and even then, only a reduced representation of those available which the editors had to choose from. Nevertheless, Aguirre and Walker, both well-established and accomplished 'peruanistas', have made an excellent effort at selecting a fair representation of the city's many peoples, identities and cultures since the city's founding until the present. However, there is a marked emphasis on ethnicity rather than, say, gender and an absence of representatives from the city's burgeoning LGBT+ scene. Nevertheless, it is an excellent introduction to the city for those embarking on a long stay there for professional reasons, or for the passing tourist who wishes to inform themselves of this fascinating city's many layered truths.

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