



IXCANUL

A film by Jayro Bustamante

Guatemala's entry for the Academy Awards, Best Foreign Language Film

Winner Silver Bear Alfred Bauer Prize, 2015 Berlinale Film Festival

Official Selection, 2015 Telluride Film Festival

Official Selection, 2015 Toronto International Film Festival

2015 / Guatemala/France / 91 min. / Color / In Kaqchikel

with English subtitles

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Synopsis:

Maria, a 17 year old Mayan girl, lives and works with her parents on a coffee plantation in the foothills of an active volcano in Guatemala.

An arranged marriage awaits her: her parents have promised her to Ignacio, the plantation overseer. But Maria doesn't sit back and accept her destiny.

Pepe, a young coffee cutter who plans to migrate to the USA becomes her possible way out. Maria seduces Pepe in order to run away with him, but after promises and clandestine meetings, Pepe takes off, leaving her pregnant, alone and in disgrace. There's no time to lose for Maria's mother, who thinks abortion is the only solution. Yet despite her mother's ancestral knowledge, the baby remains, "destined to live".

But destiny has more in store for Maria: a snake bite forces them to leave immediately in search of a hospital. The modern world Maria has so dreamt about will save her life, but at what price...

Director's Statement:

I spent my childhood in the Guatemalan highlands, land of the Maya, surrounded by volcanoes and ancient indigenous traditions. As a child, I crossed the mountains with my mother on her medical campaigns, which consisted of convincing Mayan mothers to vaccinate their children. It was hard work trying to create alliances between the Mayan and mestizo communities. In most cases, the Mayans didn't speak Spanish and the mountains were unsafe due to the armed conflict that was ravaging the country at the time.

Years later, my mother shared her outrage with me, when she found out that some public health employees had been involved in the abduction of Mayan children, contributing to the breakdown of the bonds they'd struggled so hard to create.

This was the jumping-off point for this story and it is where it will come full circle.

Unfortunately, the Guatemalan highlands where I grew up always suffered from a high rate of discrimination and were deeply affected by the trafficking of children during and after the country's armed conflict (1960-1996). The abduction of children in my country is no secret. With only 14 million inhabitants, Guatemala became the number one exporter of children in the world. The UN reported 400 abductions of minors each year, carried out with complete impunity. A very broad and dark issue, it brings together many guilty parties such as public notaries, judges, doctors, orphanage directors and so many more.

Despite the density and resonance of the subject, my interest focused on the mothers, victims of this aberration. Tackling it from the point of view of a mother and her environment, so far from modernity, allowed me to also talk about indigenous women in general: their life, their people and their position up against a westernized culture that always dominates, and within a culture where they will always end up being the victim of abuse and injustice. Maria is a young character who belongs to this culture and who fights to create her own destiny, but isn't allowed to.

My work began at the heart of the Maya community, setting up workshops for people to discuss the social problems that concerned them. Drawing from these real-life stories, meetings and one testimony in particular, I wrote the narrative. Also during this process, I trained members of the community to be actors in the film. It was an eye-opening experience to me.

I want the story to build slowly. Starting within a naturalist world, from the nucleus of a Maya family. Discovering their everyday gestures, language, tradition and rites. Revealing their communion with the local volcano, Ixcanel, which acts as another character in the story. Human life and nature living as one. Finally, reaching the moment in which this idea of life and the world becomes fertile ground for the vultures who come to drink from the source and taking advantage of the abyss that separates two opposing conceptions, leaving impotence as the only possible answer.

About the Director:

Jayro Bustamante was born in Guatemala in 1977 and trained as director in Guatemala, Paris and Rome. Bustamante's short films have been awarded prizes in several festivals. The most recent, *Cuando Sea Grande*, debuted at the Clermont Ferrand Festival where it won the CNC quality award, and was broadcast on French, Swedish and Dutch television.

His script, *El Escuadron De La Muerte* was selected in the San Sebastian, Guadalajara, Cartagena, Biarritz, Amiens and NALIP Film Festivals.

Ixcanul is his first feature film. It is a story that takes place in the heart of a Kaqchikel Mayan community.

Cast:

Maria...Maria Mercedes Coroy

Juana...Maria Telon

Manual...Manuel Antun

Ignacio.... Justo Lorenzo

Pepe...Marvin Coroy

Crew:

Written and Directed by...Jayro Bustamante

Produced by...Marina Peralta, Pilar Peredo, Edgard Tenenbaum, Jayro Bustamante

Associate Producer...Georges Renand

Director of Photography...Luis Armando Arteaga

Production Designer...Pilar Peredo

Editor...Cesar Diaz

Sound Director...Eduardo Caceres

Sound Mixer...Julien Cloquet

Music Supervisor...Herminio Gutierrez

Original Music...Pascual Reyes

Costume Designer...Sofia Lantan

Make-Up...Aiko Sato

Line Producer...Ines Nofuentes

Post-Production Supervisor...Amiel Tenenbaum