

en la fotografía contemporánea latinoamericana: una deconstrucción de su construcción” (Cisneros Hernández 2014). Sin embargo, *Historias latentes* se distingue como aporte fundamental para los estudios culturales latinoamericanos y de la historia de la fotografía no solo por la urgencia de sus temáticas y la calidad de su escritura, sino también por el alcance geográfico, histórico y crítico de sus ensayos.

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JUAN SEBASTIÁN OSPINA LEÓN, *Struggles for Recognition: Melodrama and Visibility in Latin American Silent Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021.

Since the 1990s, audiovisual technologies, digital releases of early films, restoration efforts, and the digitization of periodicals have enabled film scholars like Juan Sebastián Ospina León to examine silent cinema. *Struggles for Recognition: Melodrama and Visibility in Latin American Silent Film*, a volume authored by Ospina León, is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on the understudied Latin American silent era. Through a transnational perspective that focuses on six urban centres—Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Medellín, Mexico City, Orizaba (Veracruz), and Los Angeles (California)—, Ospina León takes the reader from south to north to shed light on different experiences of modernity or, as he calls them, “multiple modernities” (164). To that end, he embarks on the challenging task of exploring silent melodramas. Silent films are difficult to access as most of them have been lost forever and many of those still accessible are poorly preserved, but Ospina León overcomes all these shortcomings by using press materials and other archival resources to reconstruct lost films.

Drawing from film studies, Latin American cultural studies, and melodrama theories, this comparative analysis revolves around two axes, cinematic melodramas and modernity—both of which are deftly discussed in the introductory chapter of the volume—to explore the way melodramatic narratives represented and shaped the social actors of urban modern life in early twentieth-century Latin America. With its stock characters, among which we find the mean villain and the virtuous female victim, melodrama has the capacity to denounce injustices and question social norms and inequities, thereby addressing the concepts of liberty, equality, and fraternity either by revealing or concealing them, and this is precisely the main concern of the book. The author invites us to consider “how [melodrama] is perceived, how it is retold and—through these practices

of mediation—how melodrama allows a part, to those who have no part, in the discursive and exclusive constructions of a given community” (172).

The monograph includes an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, as well as key images of film posters, stills, magazine covers, and advertisements that are reproduced to good effect throughout the book. Chapter 1, “‘Filmdom’ before and during the Great War,” presents the genesis of cinematic melodrama in Latin America. The chapter explains how the region became part of the global market for the distribution and exhibition of European and American films before and during World War I, but it also underscores that, as early as the 1910s, film distributors in Latin America ventured into making their own local films. While starting off with patriotic narratives exuding nationalism, these film pioneers soon turned to adapting Latin American melodramatic literary works, an endeavour that was well received among local audiences. Chapter 2, “Buenos Aires Shadows,” provides an in-depth analysis of *cinedrama porteño*—films set and made in Buenos Aires that tap into the trope of the “fallen woman.” By arguing that these films offer a critique of gender and social inequity, Ospina León seeks to demonstrate that Buenos Aires is portrayed as a contested space through the analysis of three settings that figure prominently in *cinedramas porteños*: the *conventillo*, or tenement housing, the department store, and cabarets and garçonnieres. As a result, the chapter speaks volumes about the stratification of society, the displacement of bodies and gendered spaces. The selection of films, most of which were directed by the legendary Argentine filmmaker José Agustín Ferreyra, is apt and to the point. Devoted to Colombian melodrama, chapter 3, “Bogotá and Medellín,” highlights that the experience of modernity in Latin America was not a homogeneous process. While *cinedrama porteños* revealed social inequality, melodramas from both Bogotá and Medellín buried society’s ills through *la moral* or morality. That is, the involvement of the Catholic Church and the state in the production of films morally controlled social subjects and legitimized traditional social hierarchies while praising material progress. Chapter 4, “Orizaba, Veracruz,” offers an interesting account of the preservation and restoration or rather reconstruction, as Ospina León stresses several times in his writing, of two Mexican silent films, *El puño de hierro* and *El tren fantasma*. Both of them were produced in the city of Orizaba and have survived almost in their entirety to this day. Of great significance in this chapter is the analysis of *la pelona*, the Mexican counterpart of the American flapper, in *El tren fantasma*. The author argues that alongside the technological advancement represented by the train, the fashionable but passive *pelona* typifies the modernized and economic potential of Orizaba. However, Ospina León reminds us that while the film celebrated progress by promoting the city and its modernity, it concealed the social unrest that engulfed its local industry.

Chapter 5, “South to North,” hinges on two transnational melodramatic narratives, *Una nueva y gloriosa nación* (made in Hollywood but financed with Argentine capital) and *Garras de oro* (a Colombian film probably produced by an Italian studio), to show the “two-way” exchanges or double movement between the film cultures of Latin America and Hollywood. The chapter shows how these two films curbed, although for a brief period of time, the “one way” dominance of Hollywood in Latin America. Portraying the romance between one of Argentina’s founding fathers, General Manuel Belgrano, and a fictional female character, *Una nueva y gloriosa nación* was intended for both an American and an Argentine audience. Despite being relatively well received in Argentina, the film had an all-American cast that did not totally convince Argentine viewers of its nationalistic sentiment. In the U.S., reviewers found it difficult to identify the film’s genre. For its part, *Garras de oro* is an overt critique of Theodore Roosevelt’s Big Stick policy, especially his support of Panama’s secession from Colombia in order to secure American interests in the future Panama Canal. Ospina León concludes the chapter by stating that the film “gained political import as a potentially subversive film, thus highlighting melodrama’s ability to upend visual regimes and social arrangements across borders and geopolitical hierarchies” (163).

In the introduction to his study, Ospina León explains that his book “builds on the rich Latin American corpus to fill gaps in American scholarship on the topic [of silent cinema]” (19), an undertaking he succeeds in achieving through strong theoretical frameworks and meticulous close readings of cinematic melodramas as well as other cultural products. In his undertaking, the author extolls the socio-political significance of melodrama in terms of denouncing or condoning social injustice. This well-researched volume is indeed an important contribution to Latin American studies as well as film and media studies and will be equally relevant for specialists and newcomers to these fields.

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PABLO PALOMINO, *La invención de la música latinoamericana. Una historia transnacional*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2021.

Muchas ideas bullen entrelazadas en el libro de Pablo Palomino. La “música latinoamericana” como *invención*, resultado de las apuestas programáticas de distintos actores intelectuales, artísticos, estatales y comerciales que postularon a partir de la década de 1920, la existencia de esta corriente musical, logrando hacia 1960 su aceptación y naturalización por parte de audiencias y agentes