

Guest Editor: Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx Cinema

Vanessa K. Valdés • City University of New York—CUNY

I thank Sonja S. Watson and Dorothy Mosby for the invitation to serve as guest editor of *PALARA* 23 (Fall 2019). I received the invitation to work in this capacity as I was preparing to teach a class dedicated to Caribbean film; fairly certain that a cursory search would result in an abundance of scholarship dedicated to Cuban cinema, I decided instead to focus my course on films from the Dominican Republic. Given that I work in the same building as the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, the only repository of its kind outside of the island of Hispaniola, I thought it would be fairly easy to find work in this area. I was surprised, therefore, to learn that the nation's film industry has grown only in the last three decades, beginning with laws passed under the administrations of Leonel Fernández, from 1996 to 2000 and from 2004 to 2012. Tax incentives have spurred film production there in recent years, and yet scholarship about these films remains scant.

In the course of editing this issue, I came to understand the extent to which the analysis of Latin-American film particularly that which is focused on *afrodescendientes* in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, remains rife with possibility as a specialty. I am excited to introduce the essays which make up this issue. First, Ebony Bailey and Talia Weltman-Cisneros provide a vibrant discussion of *La Negra* (Mexico, 2018); with "Codings of Blackness in Mexican Cinema: An Analysis of *La Negra*," Bailey argues that in spite of its attempt at valorization of the Afro-Mexican population, the film reproduces images of Blackness present in popular culture since the seventeenth century. In her essay "Cinematographic Landscapes of Blackness in Mexico: (Re) Framing Afro-Mexican Lives and Futures," Weltman-Cisneros contends that *La Negra* (2018) and *Artemio* (2017) both offer alternate visions of Blackness within a Mexican context, presenting nuanced portrayals of a populace long-ignored by the Mexican state.

With "Black Agency and Aesthetic Innovation in Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco*," Philip Kaisary examines the first of Giral's trilogy of films focusing on enslavement in Cuba, the others being *Ranchedor* (1976) and *Maluala* (1979). Released in 1975, Kaisary argues that this adaptation of Anselmo Suárez's nineteenth-century novel salvages Afro-Cuban autonomous efforts for liberation. Dawn Duke's "So What if She Can't Dance and Sing: A Testimony from the Afrohabanera" underscores how

Si me comprendieras, a 1998 documentary about the lives of eight Afro-Cuban women, perhaps unwittingly repeats problematic renderings of women of African descent first made popular in *negrista* poetry of the early twentieth century while simultaneously making space for these women to serve as protagonists of the film.

Next, Ana Lucía Mosquera-Rosado examines governmental representations of Afro-Peruvians in "Marca Peru: Representations and Exclusions of the Afro-Descendant Population from the Official Narratives of the Peruvian Government." She asserts that Black Peruvians continue to disappear within depictions of *peruanidad* that emphasize its *mestizaje*. Sarah Ohmer's "Afro-Latin American Documentary Resistance from the Pacific Coast: How *Voces de Resistencia* (2017) Changes the Landscapes of Aesthetics, Academia/Community Collaboration, and Black Feminist Activism During the Colombian 'Peace Process'" maintains that this documentary centers Black women's agency in their efforts to survive continued threats of displacement. Finally, Amílcar Priestley details the history of the Liberación Film Festival with his "Cultural Heritage and Citizenship: Curating the First Afrolatino Film Festival in the US." Taken together, these scholars give us a fascinating glimpse at the current state of cinematic representations of peoples of African descent in Latin America. In smaller markets, it appears that documentary and films that incorporate documentary techniques are the genre of choice; one wonders at what point narrative film with fully-developed Black protagonists will be a viable cinematic option in the Americas.