

As Gopalan relays to her reader, this book was not one that she had set out to write. Yet, in the course of her research on independent short-format filmmaking in India, Gopalan came to assemble an archive of feature-length films whose invitations to slow contemplation, and incitements to consider conditions of precarity amid the seeming plenitude of the digital, could not be left unanswered.

BOOK DATA Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinemas Dark and Slow in Digital India*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. \$109.99 cloth, \$ 99.33 e-book. 408 pages.

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## JUANA SUÁREZ

***The Cinema of Sara Gómez: Reframing Revolution*,  
edited by Susan Lord and María Caridad Cumaná with  
Víctor Fowler Calzada**

This edited volume is a timely contribution to the limited scholarship on the work of Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sara Gómez. To date, this scholarship has consisted mostly of loose references and chapters in academic anthologies and histories of cinema or in books and monographs in Spanish, which circulate sparsely. Gómez appears as an ubiquitous reference in these texts on how women participated in the first years of the Cuban Revolution and its promises. Gómez's work attests to the seismic transformations that the Cuban Institute on Cinematographic Arts and Industry (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, or ICAIC) brought to the island in the fields of film production, reception, and distribution by making cinema a pedagogical tool for societal transformation. Gómez is best known for her feature *De cierta manera* (*One Way or Another*, 1974), which was edited by Iván Arocha and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea with the collaboration of Rigoberto López in the wake of Gómez's sudden death during postproduction at the age of forty-three. Gómez is also known for her work as assistant director on Agnès Varda's *Salut les cubains* (1963).

*The Cinema of Sara Gómez* revisits those references while expanding access not only to Gómez's archive but also to the repository of the Cuban intellectual landscape in the 1960s and early 1970s. The kaleidoscopic insight offered in this book emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, class, social, and political issues that characterize not only the public persona of the filmmaker but also her work. The book elucidates the particular context from which the filmmaker's

rich work emerged, and how her intellectual interest and concerns gained shape in the form of film, cultural journalism, and activism. Gómez's prolific work as a documentarian is discussed at length in different approaches (interviews, academic essays, and memoirs, for example) and is referenced in the complete filmography that closes the book.

Susan Lord's introduction explains how the project was nurtured through the various stages of collecting materials and forging intellectual friendships and connections in Cuba and abroad. The process led Lord to the main questions that drive the book: What impact did Gómez's films, made in the 1960s and 1970s, have, and what do they offer today? *The Cinema of Sara Gómez* features a diverse array of texts, produced at different points in time by both local and diasporic Cuban voices and by scholars around the globe interested in her work. By collecting all these voices, the book becomes a reconstruction of Gómez's multifaceted activities as music connoisseur, journalist, and ethnographical filmmaker.

In some instances, this account has personal overtones, given that the book includes interviews with intellectuals and filmmakers who were close friends or worked closely with Gómez. This is the case with her friend Inés María Martiatu Terry; with writers, critics, and activists; and with fellow filmmakers Sergio Giral and Rigoberto López, editor Iván Arocha, and cinematographer Luis García Mesa. All of these friends/collaborators provide context for what the years before the Revolution were like as well as those of the Revolution itself. Their anecdotes reveal Gómez's critical stances during that time of transition, and, on occasion, they address the eventual erosion of the political process. Marguerite Duras's interview with Gómez in 1967 constitutes the epilogue of the book, inviting the reader to once again consider the frameworks between then and now that are at play in the reevaluation of Gómez's work.

*The Cinema of Sara Gómez* thus functions as a conversation among Cuban intellectuals, scholars, and film critics on Gómez and her times. This focus on Cubans making sense of the work of a fellow Cuban produces a decolonizing effect and charts a path for new types of research that can lend clarity to the complexities of Cuban intellectual thought and production across different eras. The scholarly chapters and essays touch on the multilayered nature of the filmmaker's work and on the intersectional capacities Gómez's public persona embodies: race, gender, and revolution.

Rather than partitioning the book by topic or genre, the editors have interwoven the texts, interviews, and essays, creating a polyphonic effect where references are shared yet never redundant. They all offer complex analyses of Gómez's particular manner of exercising feminism, evidenced in her

unique position at ICAIC as a Black woman and in her role as the one questioning the place of women in history and in the Revolution. The writings maintain a clear awareness of such exceptionality and the service that such uniqueness offered to the Revolution. Gómez sympathized and defended the working classes, yet she remained cognizant of the fact that her family formed part of the middle-class intellectual circles that were endowed with a mobility that was not common to all Black families (either before or after the Revolution). Gómez turned her irreverence and her awareness of her own intersectional identity into a key defiant stance that would inform the first years of the Revolution.

The book also includes three texts by Gómez, including a translation of *Residencial Miraflores* (the original script for *De cierta manera*, published by ICAIC in 2018), a document that supports Víctor Fowler Calzada's points of comparison between Gómez's plans for the film and the decisions made by Gutiérrez Alea and Arocha in her absence. Fowler Calzada offers a granular analysis of the discrepancies between the script and the movie, noting how they erase traces of Gutiérrez Alea and Gómez's earlier exchanges—a conversation that started with Gómez's work as assistant director on Gutiérrez Alea's *Cumbite* (1964). Fowler Calzada's discussion is also very illuminating with regard to the architectural transformations of Havana and how they inform (to the point of obsession) the pedagogical nature of Gómez's work; in his view, Gómez's output epitomizes Julio García Espinosa's definitions of an imperfect cinema.

Odetta Casamayor-Cisneros addresses Gómez's unique perspective and positionality regarding marginality in post-revolutionary Cuban society by offering a close examination of her documentaries. Joshua Malitsky analyzes the topic of education, central to the Revolution's agenda, as reflected in Gómez's work for ICAIC's *Enciclopedia popular* series and in *Iré a Santiago* (1964) and *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia* (1966). Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal's essay on *Iré a Santiago* traces Gómez's homage to Federico García Lorca; she notes how this joyful film is characterized by a parodic discourse and tone far removed from the rest of her work. Ana Serra, Devyn Spence Benson, and Sandra Abd'Allah-Alvarez Ramírez offer insightful examinations that challenge the Revolution's concept of the new man by interrogating the place not only of women but also of the new Black woman in post-Revolution society.

References to Gómez's training in music and her vast knowledge of jazz and Afro-Cuban traditions are frequent in all the chapters. Alan West-Durán closely examines how Gómez's creative uses of music in *Y... tenemos sabor* (1967), *De cierta manera* (1974), *Isla del tesoro* (1969), and *Una isla*

*para Miguel* (1968) insert her work into an extensive critical tradition that permeates Cuban intellectual and artistic production. West-Durán's text is preceded by a reproduction of Gómez's illustrated essay "Rumba," which was originally published in *Cuba, Revista mensual* in 1964.

María Caridad Cumaná's article on racial identity and the overlaps between the works of Sara Gómez and Cuban experimental filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Ladrián expands and explains the multiple references and parallels recurrently drawn between the two artists in most of the book's chapters. Cumaná pays attention to both their shared concern for black identity and the aesthetics of their films to examine how both filmmakers came to rely on ethnographic cinema. In recent years, there has been more academic production on Guillén Ladrián; notwithstanding, in the process of unveiling the life and work of Sara Gómez, as this book does, the legacy of Guillén Ladrián is also brought to the forefront, generating debate regarding whether the homogenizing project of the Revolution could deal with the "internal specificities provoked by the diverse cultural, political and economic dynamics of the nation" (65–67).

*The Cinema of Sara Gómez* is illustrated with a dossier of images of Gómez as a filmmaker, as a member of ICAIC, as a crew member for other contemporaneous Cuban productions, and with posters of her production, provided by the ICAIC archive. The book comes at a timely moment: Arsenal—Institut für Film und Videokunst, in Berlin, has restored a version of *De cierta manera*, and the Vulnerable Media Lab, at Queen's University, is completing the restoration of Gómez's documentaries (Susan Lord has led the initiative), for which the Havana Glasgow Film Festival already contributed digital restorations of three documentaries. The release of this important critical anthology, alongside the release of these restorations, reinstates the work of Sara Gómez in the living archive of women filmmakers and allows for her reintroduction into archives and counterarchives of Latin American cinema.

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