

**Cinema, Espionage and World War II:
New Evidence from a Forgotten Missed Film (1939) in Argentina**

A research work by

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Summary

Sombras en el Río (1939), (*Shadows on the River*), an Argentine film shot in Punta Lara and along the Río de la Plata, has been revealed by recent inter-disciplinary research by Prof. José Luis Mac Loughlin and Prof. Dr Norma G. Sanchez to have functioned as a covert high intelligence operation linked to the early stages of *World War II*.

Based on newly correlated archival sources and internationally documented evidence, the study demonstrates that the film's technical surveys of riverine and coastal zones were strategically relevant and directly connected to intelligence later used in the naval conflict involving the *German battleship Admiral Graf Spee*.

These findings reposition the region of **Ensenada-Berisso-La Plata** within an unrecognized chapter of global twentieth-century history, cultural and geopolitical actuality. The research further identifies the true identity of the film's director, reconstructs his international filmography, and relates *technical filming at the Museum of Natural Sciences of La Plata* by the same very professional team.

Keywords

World War II; Río de la Plata; cinema and espionage; Admiral Graf Spee; Argentine and Latin America film culture and history; coastal intelligence; sound cinema; new project of film and book associated

Short Abstract

Recent historical research has revealed that the Argentine film *Sombras en el Río* (1939), *Shadows on the River*, shot in Punta Lara and along the Río de la Plata and premiered in the city of La Plata, functioned not only as a cinematic production but as a covert high-level intelligence operation connected to geopolitical events of the early Second World War. The investigation identifies the film's technical exploration of riverine and coastal environments as strategically linked to subsequent naval operations, including the battle involving the German battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* in the Río de la Plata. **This discovery situates the cities of Ensenada, Berisso and La Plata within an unexpected but significant chapter of global twentieth-century history.**

Background and Context

Sombras en el Río has historically been regarded as a marginal and largely forgotten Argentine film. However, new archival correlations, new found international documentation and critical analysis of this new research work by Mac Loughlin & Sanchez demonstrate that its production coincided with systematic technical surveying of river depths, coastlines and port zones during 1939 and then after. These activities were previously unexplained within conventional film historiography and regional cultural history.

Main Findings

This research establishes three previously unknown and academically significant findings:

1. Director's Identity

The true identity and biography of the film's director have been reconstructed. The investigation demonstrates that the director's publicly claimed French nationality and personal history were false, and that biographical data circulating for decades were inaccurate or deliberately misleading.

2. Reconstruction of Filmography

A comprehensive international and Argentine filmography of the same director has been identified, revealing a systematic pattern of coastal exploration carried out under the appearance of cinematic activity. Archival materials and films previously unknown to researchers are documented in the study.

3. Scientific Filming at La Plata Museum of Natural Sciences

The research confirms that the same production team carried out technical documentary filming in 1939 within the Museum of Natural Sciences of La Plata, recording scientific materials and archives. Photograph and a dedicated article on this filming activity are included in the research paper.

Cinematic and Technological Significance

In addition to its geopolitical relevance, *Sombras en el Río* is identified as the first professional Argentine sound film with full lip synchronization, constituting an important advancement in the history of Argentine and Latin American cinema.

International and Institutional Interest

The findings have attracted formal interest from the French Consulate in Argentina and the region, as well as from Franco-Argentine cultural institutions. In France, the rediscovered film and its implications have begun to generate academic and cultural attention. The research has also been acknowledged by internationally recognized Argentine cultural figures, including actor, theatre and film director **Norman Briski** and other personalities.

Ongoing Research and Future Work

As a continuation of this investigation, the authors propose the development of a book and a creative and documentary film in the present places, aimed at integrating archival research, territorial history and community memory.

The project foregrounds the port region of La Plata–Berisso–Ensenada as a key geographic and cultural anchor connecting local history to transnational warfare and intelligence networks of the early Second World War.