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Fernández and Cinematic Propaganda in the U.S. and Mexico

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Abstract: In her article "Fernández and Cinematic Propaganda in the U.S. and Mexico" Renae L. Mitchell discusses the competing ideologies on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. As one of the foremost filmmakers of the Mexican Golden Age of cinema, Emilio Fernández established what would is recognized as "Mexicanness" by means of Indigenous characters in his films, most apparent in the film *María Candelaria*. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures, as the principal purveyor of US-American propagandist cinema, led Hollywood into the cinematic market of Mexico revealing its intentions by means of the RKO film *The Falcon in Mexico*. Fernández sought to establish a particular Mexican nationalism and Hollywood used this nationalism to establish an apparent Mexicanness in its own cinematic portrayals of Mexican culture. Mitchell's comparison of these two films sheds light on how *Mexicanidad* was interpreted in the U.S. and in Mexico during a period of power struggle and how the idea of Mexico was an invented concept exploited on both sides of the border for different purposes.

Renae L. MITCHELL

Fernández and Cinematic Propaganda in the U.S. and Mexico

The intervention of the United States in Mexico just after the latter's revolution (1910-1920) signaled the beginnings of a relationship that was increasingly "neighborly" but at the same time exploitative. The Mexican Revolution resulted in the transformation of Mexican national identity and the rejection of the "cultural and racial inferiority complex" that had accompanied a Native American heritage until Mexico's independence (O'Malley 119). It is through this nationalism that the move was made in the 1920s by the Mexican government to "threaten to ban [U.S.] movies in Mexico if they continued to portray Mexicans as 'greasers' and bandits," and encouraged the Mexican film industry to make films that glorified the Indian and *lo Mexicano*" (O'Malley 120). By institutionalizing Indigenous culture and the Indigenous body as national symbols, the government embarked to strengthen the support of its population and establish a new nationalism and identity which are characteristic of what Néstor Canclini describes as "the capacity of cinematic narratives and characters to represent Mexican national culture and contribute to the sentimental education of the masses" (112).

In the 1940s Mexican cinema exploded in what is now considered its Golden Age and it is ascribed principally to films by Emilio Fernández. One of his first and most successful films, *María Candelaria* (1943), projected the idea of a nation by focusing on the *indígena* (masculine form of the English noun "Indigene") rather than the *Criollo* ("Creole") as the "quintessential" Mexican. Fernández's film had an enormous impact on its entire Latin American audience, so much so that it caught the attention of film production studios in the U.S. At this time, U.S. studios were preoccupied with the production of propaganda films for U.S. troops in Europe. Yet, in the later 1940s, the Mexican film industry was suffering financial difficulty. Canclini attributes this economic shortcoming to "the reduction of state support; the closing off of the Cuban market … the rapid expansion of television … [and] competition from US cinema" (112). As the U.S. entertainment industry was gaining control of national markets it took this opportunity to bolster ideological collaboration. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures was instrumental in this infiltration, since the studio was closely involved in the U.S. government's Latin American film propaganda during the war (Fein, "Transcultured" 84). The emergence of RKO's plans to develop propagandist films and enter the Mexican cinema market is evident in its production of *The Falcon in Mexico*, one of several in a popular series of detective films produced in Hollywood. *The Falcon* appears to adopt many elements of *María Candelaria*, modifying them to correspond to US-American stereotypes of Mexico. *The Falcon* was released the year before RKO founded a subsidiary studio, Estudios Churubusco, in 1945 in Mexico, in collaboration with Mexican businessman Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, a deal that demonstrated the studio's successful infiltration of the Mexican cinema market. This intervention is solidified by RKO's/Estudios Churubusco's production of the film *La Perla* (1945), a film that Fernández himself directed.

Fernández's films center on "indigenousness, nationalism, [and] agrarianism" and helped reform a post-Revolution and bifurcated Mexican national identity that idealized its whiter-skinned and Eurocentric citizens (Tuñón 47). Fernández hoped that his portrayal of Native peoples would "provide the kind of representation that would make possible the imaginative incorporation of the indígena within the nation state … *María Candelaria* is continually cited as the film which best exemplifies both Fernández' depiction of the indígena and the project of cultural nationalism" (Tierney 80). His portrayals of *indígenas* reflect the contemporaneous "ideal" of assimilating the unsophisticated Native into modern society, while exploiting the Native body as a symbolic representation of the director's nationalist objectives. The use of the Indigenous body as symbolic device is indicative of, as Carlos Monsiváis suggests, "definitive illustrations of a mythological undertaking then in fashion: reverence before a pure and abstract Mexicanness which gradually spreads from people to objects" (84). The plot of *María Candelaria* is organized into a frame narrative, commencing with a scene of a well-known painter who reveals a long concealed portrait of an Indigenous woman. He tells the story of the portrait by means of a flashback on María Candelaria, the subject of the portrait, and her fiancé Lorenzo Rafael. María is vilified by her community in Xochimilco because her mother was a prostitute and for this reason she faces antagonism throughout the film from the other Native characters. Nevertheless, María and Lorenzo long to marry each other but are held back by a lack of income.

María's ideological significance as a character is demonstrated in part by means of her subjectivity, as the focus of a contending male gaze between her fiancé Lorenzo, and the unnamed Painter who believes that she embodies the "pure Mexican race," eventually convincing her to pose for him in a portrait. The film ends after the Indigenous Nahuatl community has discovered the portrait of María, a work of art for which she posed only for the face. The painter, however, has added a nude body to the painting that the Indigenous neighbors believe is the naked body of María. Fernández portrays the villagers' reaction to this discovery as an unsophisticated uproar over María's supposed scandalous behavior in exposing herself. They form a mob, locate María, and stone her to death. This scene reveals the director's fascination with the idea of retrograde Indigenous behavior that stems from the "violence of Nature" of which they are a part (Tuñón 50). Important to note is that Fernández's representation of Indigenous peoples illustrates his ideology at work. His split in values is embodied in the traditional virgin versus whore images imposed upon María. *María Candelaria*, through the interaction of *indígenas* and *criollos*, is ostensibly a veneration of Mexico's Indigenous roots. However, the abject state of the Indian relative to the *criollo* "suggest[s] that rather than the incorporation of the indígena within the modernizing state, isolation is the only means to protect indigenous people" (Tierney 83). This isolation is necessary, the film insinuates, because indigenous characters adhere to irrationally conservative and backward behavior that causes catastrophe for them when they enter progressive, non-indigenous Mexico.

The adoption of elements from Fernández's film is obvious already in the opening scenes of *The Falcon*, such as a view from a fishing boat as it glides over water during the opening credits. The adoption of characteristics of the Mexican film continues by means of the exoticized portrayal of Mexico and Mexican characters versus the White English-speaking ones in *The Falcon*. Centering on the character named Tom Lawrence, inexplicably referred to as "Falcon," the plot of the film commences on a dimly lit New York City street where Falcon is giving a good-night kiss to his girlfriend Barbara Wade, daughter of the famous and dead artist Humphrey Wade whose paintings, much like the painter's from *Maria Candelaria*, seem to center on aestheticized portraits of Latin American women. Falcon is afterward seen strolling down a street when he encounters Dolores Ybarra attempting to break into an art gallery. In mixed Spanish and English, she begs his assistance to retrieve what she insists is her painting. Falcon helps her and after breaking in, he discovers that Dolores is not only the presumed owner of the portrait but its model and the action and suspense of the narrative ensues. The gallery owner is found murdered and the portrait disappears. Falcon breaks into the home of a wealthy collector of Wade's paintings, Winthrop Hughes, to search for clues to the murder and the portrait. Falcon then decides to travel to Mexico with Barbara to visit the site of Wade's grave and search for clues about the fate of the mysterious painting and artist. The passage of time during Falcon's flight is portrayed by a succession of jungle-like landscape images interspersed with tourist posters flashing on the screen, underscoring the distinction between the civilized United States that Falcon has just departed and the primitive and undeveloped environment into which he is descending. Soon after Falcon's arrival several murders take place, including that of Dolores Ybarra who is killed without ever having regained possession of the painting. The artist Wade (who, it turns out, has been alive all this time) is killed by Hughes, the capitalist who hopes to increase the value of his paintings. With the mystery surrounding the painting and its artist solved, Falcon boards a plane and flies home to his modern society over the border.

Both Fernandez's and the Hollywood film use stereotypes that exploit a marginalized population to accomplish propagandist objectives. RKO utilized nationalistic elements from *María Candelaria*, thereby creating a vision of Mexico that, ostensibly, would appear believably "Mexican." It is this amalgamation of Mexican and US-American culture within the film that not only promoted the United States' recently instituted Good Neighbor policy, but helped the Hollywood studio explore a transnational means of film production and thus *The Falcon* was one among "so-called 'Good Neighbor' features in English that would be reviewed for any potentially offensive Latin imagery" (O'Neill 81). There are many reasons that elements of *María Candelaria* seem to have been incorporated into *The Falcon*, one of which can be explicated by the said Good Neighbor policy, which was active from 1933-45 under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and was purposed to encourage good relations with Latin America during a time of conflict in order to garner its support. However, as Frederick B.

Pike argues, the Good Neighbor policy stemmed from a desire to create a hemispheric environment more propitious to U.S. investors by means of non-blatantly interventionist policies (xii). Thus, the Good Neighbor policy was in reality a "smoke screen" for Roosevelt and U.S. investors' real intentions to permit U.S. capitalists to take advantage of their less affluent fellow [Mexican] citizens (Pike xiii). What is crucial about this U.S. policy is its ideology regarding how Latin Americans were perceived by US-Americans: "the assumption that Latins had a lot of growing up to do before they could adjust to US culture" (Pike xiii).

After Barbara and Falcon arrive in Mexico, they are greeted by a young girl selling flowers who perpetually and absently smiles, enacting the childishness of the Mexican characters that subsequently appear. Lawrence is then approached by a cabbie, Manuel Romero, who is exceedingly eager to be of service. Lawrence accepts the cabbie's offer, and is transported to the outskirts of the city where they come upon a street scene of many mostly male Mexicans, dressed in white, standing or sitting idly by the side of the road and who eagerly respond to Manuel when he pulls over to ask for directions. Although this scenario is not unusual in Mexico, it reveals "other film conventions that have become stereotypical signs by which Indians are recognized [which] include their straight black hair and white peasant dress, their extremely submissive attitude and … their sing-song Spanish with mispronounced words" (Berg 138). The blatant difference between the cabbie, his passenger and the Mexican standers-by is deliberate, thus lending a privileged status of modernity to those within the car as opposed to the apparently "backward" individuals who stand outside of it, a distinction that the US-American characters retain throughout their presence in Mexico.

Both the Mexican and the Hollywood film depict the *indígena* in idiosyncratic ways that reveal their relative ideologies toward the portrayal of Indigenous characters: in one the Indigenous is, although paternalized, portrayed as the embodiment of Mexicanness; in the other, although the Mexican is portrayed as affable, they are aestheticized, overdetermined, and demeaned as backward relatives to their Northern neighbors. Aspects of *The Falcon* exemplify Indigenous elements of *María Candelaria* in the background settings for the opening credits which, like the opening scenes of *María Candelaria*, take place from a first person view within a boat as it glides along the water. However, in *The Falcon* this view is shown as one among a series of touristy Mexican scenes that, accentuated by wistful music, suggests an environment that is both quaint and under-developed. The scenes include a view of an ancient Catholic church; a scene of peasants leading donkeys on a mountainside; traditional festival boats; and finally a view of pyramid ruins that foreground Mexican Indigenous roots, now rendered picturesque.

Once the Falcon and Dolores have entered the art gallery, the portrait that the woman searches for is discovered, and he recognizes immediately the subject of the painting as Dolores herself. As is the case in *María Candelaria*, the narrative of *The Falcon* centers on the portrait of a beautiful Mexican woman who is the subject of multiple male gazes: the gaze of the artist who paints her and a male character who is attracted to her. If María functions as simultaneously the subject of the gaze and feminine embodiment of Mexico, it may be conjectured that the character of Dolores Ybarra functions in a similar way. A crucial difference between the characters of María and Dolores, of course, is the fact that María serves as the protagonist of the film in which she is portrayed and Dolores, although important, only appears intermittently throughout the film. But these characters share crucial characteristics that, within their roles as embodiments of Mexicanness, reveal a great deal about the ideologies of the respective directors who reside on opposite sides of the U.S. and Mexican border.

In *María Candelaria*, although the viewer knows that the portrait portrays María, the painting is never actually seen by the audience, leaving a mystery that the director intends the audience to contemplate: the viewer is left to imagine what the portrait of a young woman of "pure Mexican race" would look like. The Indigenous María, as "depicted" in the portrait, is the subject of what Andrea Noble describes as "delineated gazes with origins in the colonial period," originating from María's fiancé Lorenzo and the unnamed European painter, who, respectively, represent Aboriginal Mexico versus White *criollo* (74). The value of the portrait lies in its physiological representation of what María symbolizes: "María Candelaria's commodity value resides in what she represents, namely … 'el rostro mismo de México' [or] 'the very body of Mexico' … the (feminine) embodiment of the nation" (74). In *The Falcon*, however, the portrait is revealed immediately, leaving no mystery as to how woman-as-

Mexico may be represented. The viewer sees the entire portrait from its first appearance on the screen and it is this dichotomy — the revealed portrait versus the hidden one in *María Candelaria* — that illustrates the manner in which cultural artifacts such as *The Falcon* unveil an invented Mexican identity. The producers of the film portray Mexicanness by means of an archetypal Spanish woman in traditional dress holding an "abanico de puntilla," a Spanish hand fan symbolic of the European culture from which it originated. This painted female subject projects *criollo* descent (if she is not a direct immigrant from Spain). She has light skin and European features and is the subject of multiple non-Indigenous gazes: that of the US-American artist who painted her, the daughter of the artist, and Falcon. If viewed within the context of the commodification and objectification of the gaze, the portrait of Dolores represents a colonial past made manifest and is the subject of contention and thievery among the embodiment of Mexico herself, Dolores, and the U.S. capitalists who want possession of the painting (read Mexico) for the potential value and profit it will attain on the market. The portrait is never viewed by Indigenous characters, insinuating that it is only a white European or US-American gaze that is allowed to look upon the embodiment of Mexico. The portrait plays out in miniature the larger market-driven contention between Mexico and the United States. Inevitably, as the film demonstrates, the capitalists gain control of Mexico: the portrait returns to the hands of the "rightful" US-American heir of the portrait, Wade's daughter Barbara, who will doubtlessly profit from it in the U.S., and through her, Falcon will also benefit.

Both Dolores and María die at the end and the manner of their respective murders, like the depiction of their portraits. In *María Candelaria*, the murder of the vilified and ostracized María is enacted in a collective stoning by her own community assembled with torches in hand, who proceed to murder her for her supposed agreement to pose nude for the painting. This scene has been widely criticized for the barbaric and hopelessly backward treatment of the Indigenous people of Mexico by Fernández. The characters, according to Noble, are depicted as "decidedly premodern," who have adopted conservative colonial ideologies of morality (82). This conservatism is reinforced by the fact that the viewer knows that María never actually posed nude, which ultimately confirms the *populacho*'s (pejorative for "masses") scandalized morality as naïve (Noble 82). Within this context, the murder of María signifies an act of barbarism performed by collective Indigenous antiquated morality even for the time period within which the film was released (Noble 83). Although the film ostensibly intends to glorify the Indigenous as quintessentially Mexican, it relegates them simultaneously to hopeless inadequacy.

As opposed to the death scene in *María Candelaria*, in *The Falcon* Dolores is discovered after the fact by Indigenous villagers, drowned in the Lake Pátzcuaro. The informed spectator would recognize this area, near Janitzio (allusive to Fernández's earlier film by the same name), as peopled by Indigenous inhabitants. The scenes leading up to the discovery of Dolores's body are crucial in forming a constrained ambiance, since these scenes foreground underlying class-based hierarchies: the presence of both the US-American Falcon and Don Ybarra in this region underscores the "backwardness" of the general Mexican population who perform antiquated manual labor: washing clothing in the lake and fishing by means of picturesque but unmodern "butterfly boats." This lack of modernity is again reinforced as Falcon and the Don travel across the lake in a romantic skiff, rowing in a slow and relaxed manner with gondola-style music in the background suggesting upper-class leisure. During this trip, a young Mexican boy suddenly emerges from the water, answers questions posed by the Don, and just as quickly disappears beneath the surface again. This relationship of the Indigenous population with water suggests a primal connection to Nature that is typically associated with Indigenous populations, a relationship that foregrounds the Native primitive as lacking sophistication. The differences between the death scenes of each of the "embodiments of Mexico," María and Dolores, are clear as both scenes involve the presence of the Indigenous *populacho* who look upon the corpse of Mexico, but the scene within *The Falcon* suggests an Indigenous population that appears to feel sympathy toward Dolores rather than the antagonism of the crowd in *María Candelaria*. These attitudes toward the corpses insinuate the backwardness of the Natives in different ways: one portrays *indígenas* as irrationally conservative and the other portrays them as childlike simpletons. Additionally, a difference between the bodies of the women concerns their manner of dress: as opposed to María, Dolores is wearing the Western bourgeois style of garments she has worn

throughout the film, continuing her embodied metonymy of the upper class Hispanic individual who has a connection to the North, while María wears a simple percale "traditional" dress, exemplifying her poverty as an *indígena*. This distinction, when viewed comparatively, foregrounds two aspects of Mexico's relationship to consumer culture, one suggestive of the "civilized," the Other as uncultivated. Moreover, each of the women is carried in the arms of an Indigenous male character, but whereas María lies in the hands of Lorenzo for whom she was the subject of a contested gaze, the character carrying Dolores remains unnamed and, thus, unimportant — a laborer whose strength is exploited to carry the body of the imperial bourgeoise. This distinction between the two films, drawing attention to "who is doing the carrying," underlines the film producers' relative perception of the Indigenous Mexican: *María Candelaria* glorifies the heroic Indian, who nonetheless would not have suffered if he had not ventured into the *Mestizo* world, as did Lorenzo, wherein he is incapable of adaptation to modernity. *The Falcon*, on the other hand, portrays an intrusion into an already isolated community, the Indigenous inhabitants who are made to labor under the bourgeoisie.

Another difference between the two men in the two scenes involves their status relative to the *populacho*: whereas Lorenzo faces the crowd in an antagonistic gesture, implicitly using María's body to foreground the mob's irrational and misplaced vilification, the unnamed man in *The Falcon* stands with the crowd, leading them in collective support for the body of bourgeois(e) Mexico, thus signifying a willingness to empathize with Western culture. The lighting in each of these scenes is significant as well: whereas Lorenzo carries María in darkness, the only light emanating from the torches that the mob carries and the spotlight that focuses on his face and the body of María, the crowd in *The Falcon* is illuminated by natural daylight. The obscurity of the lighting in *María Candelaria* relegates the faces of the *populacho* to the shadows thus reinforcing its menacing and aggregate quality. The sunlit scene in *The Falcon*, however, allows all faces in the crowd to be seen, revealing individual expressions of concern. The inherent ideologies that these death scenes evince reflect upon the producers' objectives toward their representation of the Mexican masses: in *The Falcon* the extreme concern displayed by the Indigenous crowd for a *criollo* member of the wealthier, Westernized class insinuates an "ideal" Mexican submissive population, even if they are members of a group that cannot actively participate in this social caste. In *María Candelaria* the mob, although ostensibly significant in the Mexican nationalist ideology that Fernández intended to pervade the film, portrays a *populacho* that embraces an irrationally conservative sensibility that is better left to isolation and that functions as a reinforcement of the relatively progressive and modern gaze of the viewer.

Inasmuch as the female Mexican protagonist of each film, as respective embodiments of "Mexicanness," reveal the producers' inherent ideologies, the Mexican male supporting roles provide an additional reinforcement of the ideology that the women characters portray. The "relegation" of the Other as feminized is a common historical trope, presuming "the nation-state as (masculine) principle that brings regulatory order to the undisciplined and excessive (feminized) masses," as reflected in the United States' "penetration" of Mexico (Layoun 15). Similarly, the portrayal of the Indigenous as feminized is common in Latin American culture, a trope that can be traced to Spanish colonization, as Octavio Paz illustrates in his "Hijos de La Malinche" ("Sons of La Malinche"), wherein the Spanish conquistador embodies the "macho" in his conquest of the Aztecs (82-83). Anyone familiar with Latin American history is aware of La Malinche, the Indigenous woman who assisted Cortés in his dealings with the Aztecs, a role for which she has since been blamed as treacherously bringing about the defeat of the Natives (Hardin 17). The historical association of the Indigenous woman as a traitor is the mother-whore from whom María was born, thus making her a symbol of the new Mexico that is free from pre-Revolutionary ties. Nevertheless, as a woman, María, like La Malinche with Cortés, is subject to masculine contention and "machismo" ideology. The substantiation of this ideology is engendered by the dichotomy between Lorenzo and the painter in *María Candelaria* and Manuel who acts as a hybrid of Mexican stereotypes and US-American influenced *criollo* ideology in *The Falcon*. Further, their conflict can also signify the cultural struggle that the Indigenous population must endure against the ideal ethnic *criollo* elite. The painter's behavior toward the *indígena* corresponds to that of the Mexican government's "challenge" with regard to the Aboriginal population "involving the Indian in Mexico's economy encompasses both an awareness of the Indian's predicament and a state plan for dealing with it" (Berg 141). Nevertheless, "the State's relationship to Indians remained on the whole

what it had always been: contradictory, paternalistic, separatist" (Berg 141). It is by means of the metaphoric quality of his characters that Fernández's nationalist goals are projected in the film: the glorified Indigenous persists in a retrograde culture that clashes with the progressive *criollo*, even if the *criollo* is oppressive and exploitative toward the Native.

A similar situation occurs with the character of Manuel, who represents the relationship between *criollo* idealism and pejorative Mexican stereotypes by embodying both, a hybrid character who has a light-skinned European appearance yet enacts a racist parroting of Indigenous Mexicans. *The Falcon in Mexico* was released during a period of heightened racism against Mexican (im)migrants and Hispanic US-Americans, exemplified by such events as the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots when military service members attacked Mexican US-Americans and were widely supported for their violent actions. However, in order to gain entrance into the Mexican cinematic market, Hispanics necessarily had to be portrayed in a positive light, so as to garner the support of US-American citizens and to serve as a prelude for propaganda films to be released in Mexico. Despite the history of racism against Hispanics in the U.S., "in times of relaxed and even friendly Mexican-American relations, as during the period of both world wars, the image of Mexicans and Hispanics tended to be less offensive though no less stereotypical variations of the 'happy Latin'" (Williams 14-15). The character of Manuel exemplifies the "happy Latin" who is obsequious to outsiders from the North, falling into the trope of that Norman Smith refers to as "the peon": a non-threatening "member of the lowest class, the class that was born to serve. The *peon* was portrayed as the … good and faithful servant" (535). From his first appearance on the screen, Manuel embodies the "peon" stereotype by running up to Falcon at the airport, proclaiming his English-speaking ability and drawing attention to his "fine automobile." He proclaims his qualities as a guide by assuring Falcon that Mexico's only assets lie in its characteristics as a tourist destination, features that only he can reveal: "Mexico, she's heaven, but without me, she's disappointment." However, the services Manuel offers are not without a price, thus augmenting the peon stereotype with that of the Mexican as mercenary. Most surprising is the behavior of Manuel's "son," who mimics the behaviors of his father, suggesting that acquisitive, peon-like conduct is inherent in the Mexican character. Yet, it seems unclear exactly what race Manuel embodies. He has light skin relative to his supposed son whose dark skin, disheveled black hair, and Aboriginal features suggest Indigenous ethnicity.

Manuel's obsequious behavior continues throughout the film, involving ostensibly "humorous" scenes of childish manners, absent-mindedness, and goofy mistakes. Manuel is presumably the comic relief for the film, but comedy is enacted at the expense of Mexican racial categorization. However, near the end of the film Manuel's hybrid character is revealed, demonstrating a racism that surpasses even his stereotypical mannerisms. Near the end of the film, when another murder victim is discovered, Falcon approaches Manuel to inquire about it. Suddenly Manuel pulls out a gun and in accent-less North American English demands that Falcon not move. After apologizing (in a confident, very non-obsequious manner), Manuel reveals that he is a member of the federal police and proceeds to demonstrate gentlemanly manners for the remaining minutes of the film, even buttoning up his coat and walking erect to emphasize his transformation. It is clear now that Manuel is not the Indigenous simpleton that he was pretending to be, but, rather, a *criollo* authority figure who adopted racist stereotypes of a non-*criollo* Mexican to gain information. In the adoption of the peon persona, the character of Manuel illustrates a clever and intelligent means of duping the US-American. The question may be asked: why was it necessary for the character Manuel to adopt this peon-like behavior in order to portray the non-*criollo*? In my opinion, the contrived silliness that Manuel enacts is characteristic of the Mexican who demonstrates the racist ideology of the US-American producers of the film.

The resemblances of *The Falcon in Mexico* to *María Candelaria* foreground the attempt to engender authentic "Mexicanness" for the Hollywood film. Authenticity, or the appearance of it, was essential to RKO's successful establishment of U.S.-Mexican relations in the minds of its viewers, and subsequent penetration of the Mexican market. However, RKO's plans fell within the larger strategy of the U.S. government's Motion Picture Division (MPD), which "modernized and expanded Mexican film production, within a Hollywood-led industrial framework, but also strengthened ideological collaboration between both states and film industries" (Fein, "Transcultured," 83). In fact, the MPD

intended its relationship with Mexico to engender films that would serve as propaganda, making use of "transnational mass culture as an instrument of postwar US foreign policy and of American state formation," and as a result, Hollywood's wartime film objectives in Mexico became increasingly crucial as the Mexican industry grew more successful (Fein, "Transcultured," 83). RKO became a significant instrument in the government's strategy. The film studio was at the forefront of U.S. intervention, since "RKO's involvement in the U.S. government's Latin American film propaganda during the war exceeded that of other US studios," and RKO, with the hope of profiting from an expanded market for its productions, "interested itself in Latin American matters in a way which no other company has done" (Fein, "Transcultured," 84). This interest is clear in the subject matter of films like *The Falcon*, which were not originally intended for a Mexican audience, yet exemplified the characteristics of "Mexicanness" that reinforced the burgeoning ideological campaign.

The year after the release of *The Falcon* RKO co-produced *La Perla* (*The Pearl*, based on the Steinbeck novel) by means of its newly established Estudio Churubusco. It was a successful film Fernández directed, yet it did not reflect his Mexican nationalist ideals as faithfully as *María Candelaria*. This departure is evident because the film subordinates the Fernández's Indigenist model of nationalism to portray instead a Steinbeckian *noble savage* (Tierney 98). The fact that, relative to his other films, *La Perla* proves to be particularly non-Fernándezian in its portrayal of the *indígena* is characteristic of a move toward what the Mexican press "stigmatized [as] the stain of pochismo, a derogatory term Mexicans used to refer to ethnic Mexicans in the US who had lost touch with 'their culture'" (O'Neill 86). Fernández may have been perceived as a "sell out," but Mexican producers who defected to Hollywood insisted that the U.S. offered major contributions to their careers and, as they insisted, benefits to Mexican cinema as a whole: they would earn more money, garner wider international appeal via Hollywood's publicity machinery, and filmmakers would acquire invaluable technical skills working in Hollywood (O'Neill 86). These were offers that successful Mexican directors found difficult to turn away from, particularly when Mexican cinema was immersed in financial constraints. Nevertheless, Fernández was able, by means of *María Candelaria*, to assert a nationalistic sentiment that proved to become increasingly intertwined with US-American interests.

In conclusion, artifacts of popular culture which embody revolutionary intentions seem almost always to reflect complex political ambitions which, in turn, are not immediately obvious and the study of these technologically-driven means of communication gives us a clearer picture and a critical awareness that identity and nationalism often stem from larger social and state ambitions. Fernández established what would be globally recognized as "Mexicanness" by means of Indigenous characters, which U.S. film producers manipulated to add *Mexicanidad*. However, no such films would have been produced if the sentiment of nationalism had not erupted just at the time when U.S.-Mexican relations were in a tenuous state. Mexican nationalism stemmed from a desire to be rid of the perpetual dominance of various empires and to reclaim an identification as Americans (meaning the continent). Benedict Anderson expounds upon this reclaimed identity when he writes that "the fact that early Mexican nationalists wrote of themselves as *nosotros los Americanos* (we the Americans) and of their country as *nuestra América* (our America), has been interpreted as revealing the vanity of the local creoles who … saw themselves as the center of the New World" (62). Nevertheless, both the Mexican government itself and the "imperial" United States capitalized upon this "new Mexicanism," adopting the movement as a means to generate profit and political alliance. This issue is particularly relevant as Mexican cinema has again burgeoned by means of the movement Nuevo Cine Mexicano starting in the late 1990s and represented by such relatively high-budget films as *Amorres Perros* and *Habla con Ella*: "national cinema is not neglected by the majority. Nor is this interest limited to the golden age of Mexican cinema. What is evident … is that there is not only one national film public … The question that arises here is whether current cinematographic policies … can take into consideration this multicultural diversity of publics" (Canclini 115). The films of Nuevo Cine Mexicano, and many other films to emerge out of Latin America are critical of US-American neoliberalism which has affected Mexican culture, yet these films have become popular and profitable by means of the same globalization they criticize. Thus, films such as *María Candelaria* and *The Falcon in Mexico* reveal the tenuousness of constructions of national identity in cross-border relationships wherein dominance almost invariably ends up possessed by the wealthier nation.

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