

## Indigenism, Mestizaje, and National Identity in Mexico during the 1940s and the 1950s

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In the 1940s the Mexican state stepped up its efforts to integrate the Indian into mainstream society, hoping to stimulate racial mixing or *mestizaje*, which it viewed as key to the nation's social and economic welfare. This article explores the diverse ways that some of Mexico's most renowned artists and intellectuals aided the state's efforts to promote mestizaje during the 1940s and the 1950s. It also reveals the contradictions in their works, and shows how film's attempts to promote mestizaje hindered those of writers and anthropologists.

Durante los años 40 el Estado mexicano dobló sus esfuerzos para integrar al indio, esperando estimular el mestizaje, lo cual consideró como de primordial importancia para el bienestar social y económico del país. Este artículo examina las diversas maneras en que algunos de los artistas e intelectuales mexicanos más conocidos ayudaron al estado a promover el mestizaje durante los años 40 y 50. También revela las contradicciones en sus obras, y demuestra cómo los intentos del cine para promover el mestizaje entorpecieron los de los escritores y antropólogos.

During the 1940s, the indigenist movement in Mexico gathered momentum as the state stepped up efforts to integrate the Indian into national life. Signaling indigenism's growing importance (not only in Mexico, but also in many other Latin American nations), the Mexican state hosted the Primer Congreso Indigenista Interamericano in 1940. This meeting led to the creation of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano in 1942, based in Mexico, and the foundation of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in 1947. This decade also marked a period of intense modernization. The social reform of the Lázaro Cárdenas years (1934–1940) came to an abrupt end in 1940 with Manuel Avila Camacho's election

to the Mexican presidency (1940–1946). Priority shifted dramatically from social to economic progress, a trend that accelerated during the Miguel Alemán presidency (1946–1952).

Indigenism formed an integral part of the state's economic development plans. It was also critical to the nationalist project, which reached its apogee during this period. According to Mexico's 1940 census, Indians composed 20 to 25 percent of the nation's population, or some three million people (Labastida 1952, 1). Most lived in abject poverty, isolated from the rest of Mexican society and lacking any sense of citizenship. Integration would provide access to Indian land and labor, and help create an adequate domestic market necessary to supporting the nation's economic growth. It would also strengthen national unity by compelling the Indians to begin identifying themselves not with an isolated community but with the nation as a whole. In other words, it would encourage the Indians to regard themselves as Mexican rather than as members of a particular indigenous group. Ultimately, the Mexican state hoped that integration would stimulate racial mixing or *mestizaje*. By racially homogenizing the nation, *mestizaje* would greatly diminish racial conflict and truly unify the Mexican populace.

In addition to stepping up its efforts to integrate the Indian, the state initiated a new direction in the indigenist movement that would persist into the following decade. The changes were reflected in economic and educational policies involving the Indian. In the 1930s, Lázaro Cárdenas and his supporters had favored an economic model oriented toward agriculture rather than industry, one that would mainly benefit the campesino and Indian populations. Cárdenas attempted to deviate from classical capitalism, hoping to avoid some of its enormous social costs by making industry subordinate to the creation of newly formed agrarian communities. He stimulated agrarian reform, and ordered the creation of the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos, whose ultimate goal was the socialization of agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Cárdenas further organized indigenous cooperatives managed by Indians, and provided funds to enable indigenous communities to purchase agricultural equipment and to construct schools. Avila Camacho and Alemán, on the other hand, instituted a capitalist model of economic development that favored large-scale properties over the ejido, and industry over agriculture. They wished to prepare the Indian for entrance into the mainstream work force.

1. Cárdenas's agrarian reform program resulted in the beginning of the break-up of the haciendas and the end of a rural form of life that dated back to colonial times. In 1930, ejidal properties constituted about 13 percent of the cultivable lands, while in 1940 they represented some 47 percent, with almost half of the rural population depending on the cultivation of ejidal lands (Meyer, 1976, 169).

In contrast to his successors, Cárdenas had also supported an educational program that favored the group over the individual, that championed social programs such as agrarian reform, and that emphasized a technical education over a literary one. This program aimed to improve the Indian's social and economic status by teaching practical skills such as farming and hygiene. It further sought to bolster the Indian's self-esteem by teaching prehispanic history and allowing native languages as a first step towards learning Spanish. Beginning in the 1940s, however, the rural school began increasingly to copy its urban counterparts, educating the Indians no differently from the rest of the population. Its aim was to assimilate the Indian into Mexican society as quickly as possible; it did not view a cultivation of the Indian's culture or heritage as necessary or favorable to that process.

The new economic and educational policies were accompanied by a different view of the Indian's role in Mexican society. Cárdenas and his supporters had maintained that Mexico's authentic identity was grounded in its indigenous heritage and that the Indians had a vital role to play in the formation of a future Mexico. As such, they attempted to stimulate interest in indigenous history, customs, arts and languages, and held up the Indian as a symbol of national pride. Their goal was not to Indianize Mexico but to Mexicanize the Indian while at the same time preserving indigenous culture (language, dress, religion, customs, etc.). By contrast, Avila Camacho and Alemán were eager to promote the image of Mexico as a modern, mestizo nation rather than an indigenous one which, to many, connoted backwardness and underdevelopment. They continued to encourage pride in Mexico's indigenous past, but emphasized mestizaje as key to the nation's social and economic welfare.

This article explores the diverse ways that some of Mexico's most renowned anthropologists, writers, and filmmakers aided the state's efforts to promote mestizaje during the 1940s and the 1950s. Anthropologists, such as Alfonso Caso and Manuel Gamio, redefined the term Indian, making culture rather than race the determining factor. By doing so, they reduced the number of Mexicans considered Indians, made mestizaje seem easier to achieve by eliminating the need for racial mixing, and stressed that culture, not biology, distinguished the Indian from the non-Indian (thus discrediting the idea that the Indian was biologically incapable of participating in the civilized world). They further spurred efforts to westernize the Indian while at the same time preserving and fomenting indigenous art work, an important expression of national identity and source of employment for Indians. Essayists (Héctor Pérez Martínez, Agustín Yáñez, and Luis Villoro) and novelists (Miguel Angel Menéndez and Francisco Rojas González) took two different tactics towards pro-

moting mestizaje. Some pointed out the admirable qualities of indigenous history, culture and psychology, hoping to inspire respect for the Indians and their acceptance by white and mestizo Mexicans. Others probed the mestizo's psyche in order to discern the reasons for his denigration and exploitation of the Indian. They wanted the mestizo to gain self-awareness and an improved self-concept in order that he might appreciate rather than reject his indigenous heritage. They further wished to construct a new type of mestizo Mexican who was emotionally stable, self-confident, and secure. Finally, filmmakers such as Emilio Fernández portrayed the Indian as a noble savage who is exploited by outsiders. They wished to inspire sympathy for Mexico's indigenous groups, and to combat racism. More importantly, they sought to identify the masses with the Indian by stressing shared experiences and characteristics.

These artists and intellectuals undermined their own efforts to stimulate mestizaje by unconsciously fostering negative stereotypes of the Indian. The anthropologists' and writers' efforts were further stymied by their inability to reach the masses, the majority of whom were illiterate. The popular arts also failed to help them. Cinema rarely focused on the Indian. Moreover, while a few films like *María Candelaria* (directed by Fernández) glorified the native Mexican, others depicted him in minor roles as the stereotypical villain or clown. Films generally cast the Indian in black and white terms, and did not address the problem of racism. None followed the writers' lead by either probing the mestizo psyche or encouraging mestizaje.

These artists and intellectuals were joining many others during the period who, since the end of the Revolution, had struggled to forge a new national consciousness. These included such famous artists as the muralist Diego Rivera, the musician Carlos Chávez, the engraver José Guadalupe Posada, and the filmmaker Fernando de Fuentes. They also included intellectual giants like Martín Luis Guzmán, Agustín Yáñez, and Samuel Ramos. Myths of a national consciousness satisfied the interests and desires of both Mexicans and the state. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution, many Mexicans demanded new articulations of the national identity that reflected the changed historic conditions. Constructions of national identity under Porfirio Díaz, which had privileged wealthy Mexicans of mainly European descent, were simply no longer valid. At the same time, the new myths of Mexicanness were critical to the nationalist project. As Roger Bartra points out in *The Cage of Melancholy*, they helped the state legitimize and consolidate itself in the following ways: (1) by providing a means by which the state could control Mexicans' attitudes and behaviors, (2) by linking the state's ideals to those of the masses, and (3) by strengthening the sense of national unity (stressing that Mexicans belong to a community of people who share similar ex-

periences, values, and characteristics). In sum, they enabled the state to secure its hegemony over the Mexican masses.

In *The Cage of Melancholy*, Bartra studies some of the major forms that constructions of national identity assumed in the work of intellectuals (primarily essayists) during the twentieth century. However, he does not examine in any depth the work of intellectuals concerned with mestizaje's impact on the national character. Bartra focuses on general studies of Mexicanness that either ignore or subordinate the role of race in the formation of a national consciousness. This may be due to Bartra's desire to show how articulations of Mexicanness form part of a long Western tradition (mestizaje is a uniquely Mexican and Latin American phenomena). Bartra also neglects to examine the contradictions in studies of Mexicanness. He regards these studies as uniformly powerful, yet as will be shown here, the work of artists and intellectuals dealing with mestizaje was so riddled with contradictions that it could not have been very effective.

Prominent Mexican intellectuals had published works promoting mestizaje long before the 1940s and the 1950s. In particular, Andrés Molina Enríquez's *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909), José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* (1925), and Manuel Gamio's *Forjando patria* (1916) profoundly influenced indigenist literature and governmental policies of the 1940s and the 1950s. These intellectuals believed that mestizaje was fundamental to the nation's well-being and that it would provide the unity the country needed to defend itself against foreign intrusions and to progress economically. Molina Enríquez and Vasconcelos formed part of the eugenics movement in Mexico which, as Joanne Hershfield explains, was "a pseudoscientific body of work influenced by the evolutionary writings of Charles Darwin and Mendelian genetics. Racists saw eugenics both as a descriptive science that proved that human races were biologically 'unequal' and as a prescriptive practice of race improvement" (Hershfield 1999, 82). Molina Enríquez argued that the mestizos are the largest, the most powerful, and the most patriotic of all the races in Mexico, sharing a "*comunidad de sentimientos, de actos y de ideas, propia de los miembros de una familia*" (Molina Enríquez 1978, 393). He also sustained that the mestizos are superior in character to either the Creoles or the Indians. The mestizos, he contended, are "*enérgicos, perseverantes y serios,*" while the Creoles are "*audaces, impetuosos, y frívolos*" and the Indians "*pasivos, impasibles y taciturnos*" (Molina Enríquez, 1978, 419). Vasconcelos argued that mestizaje throughout the world has historically produced superior civilizations. He further maintained that mestizaje was advancing all over the world, leading to a new race (which he called the fifth or cosmic race), that was superior to all others. Vasconcelos contended that the white

race has the highest ideals and should serve as the base for mestizaje. The idea was that through racial mixing, the inferior traits of non-whites would be replaced by those of the whites. In Vasconcelos's own words,

*Los tipos bajos de la especie serán absorbidos por el tipo superior. De esta suerte podría redimirse, por ejemplo, el negro, y poco a poco, por extinción voluntaria, las estirpes más feas irán cediendo el paso a las más hermosas. Las razas inferiores, al educarse, se harían menos prolíficas, y los mejores especímenes irán ascendiendo en una escala de mejoramiento étnico, cuyo tipo máximo no es precisamente el blanco sino esa nueva raza* (Vasconcelos 1994, 42–3).

What Vasconcelos and Molina Enríquez wanted was nothing less than the Indian's extinction through racial mixing. They believed that the Indians had no future but that of entrance into the modern world, and that they would be morally and intellectually uplifted through mixing with whiter Mexicans.

In *Forjando patria*, Gamio addressed the problem of how to integrate native Mexicans into mainstream society. Gamio regarded whiter Mexicans as morally, spiritually, and intellectually superior to the Indians. For example, he praised the mestizos for their superior intellectual aptitudes and their rebellious nature, which he said leads them to fight against oppression and injustice. In his view, the mestizos are Mexico's true leaders. However, he disagreed that the Indians are biologically inferior to non-Indians. In fact, he believed that such an attitude led non-Indians to deprecate and discriminate against Indians, and thus hindered the integration process. Gamio's views were particularly influential during the 1940s.

### Official Indigenism

During the 1940s and early 1950s, artists and intellectuals struggled to make Molina Enríquez, Vasconcelos, and Gamio's vision of a unified, mestizo-based society a reality. They approached the task in different ways. Anthropologists, including most famously Alfonso Caso and Manuel Gamio,<sup>2</sup> took concrete steps to integrate and *mesticize* the Indian. They continued some of the work of their predecessors, implementing measures designed to improve the Indian's economic plight.

2. Caso, also an archaeologist and a historian, published extensively on the Indians and held numerous high governmental posts. In 1939 he founded the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and he founded and became the director of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in 1947. He was known as one of the celebrated "Grupo de Siete" sages. Manuel Gamio also published widely and held many governmental positions. He served as director of the Interamerican Indian Institute from 1942 to 1960.

For example, they struggled to provide indigenous communities with roads, hospitals and schools, modern agricultural and industrial implements and techniques, fertile land, access to reliable water sources, protection for their industries (particularly the arts), and an education (in part so that the Indian might learn Spanish). They also took the new step of reformulating the definition of Indian so that culture rather than biology held precedent.<sup>3</sup> Peasants of indigenous descent who did not live in or feel a part of a particular indigenous community were reclassified as mestizos. Caso's definition was the most commonly cited:

*Es Indio, todo individuo que se siente pertenecer a una comunidad indígena; que se concibe a sí mismo como Indígena, porque esta conciencia de grupo no puede existir sino cuando se acepta totalmente la cultura del grupo; cuando se tienen los mismos ideales éticos, estéticos, sociales y políticos del grupo; cuando se participa en las simpatías y antipatías colectivas y se es de buen grado colaborador en sus acciones y reacciones. Es decir, que es Indio el que se siente pertenecer a una comunidad indígena* (Caso 1948, 215).

It is important to point out that the Indians were not in reality granted self-definition, as Caso contends. Rather, as Alan Knight points out, the decision about whether one was Indian or not was imposed from without by others—census takers, politicians, anthropologists, and so on. In fact, as Knight notes further the very term Indian was constructed by non-Indians. He writes, “the Indians lacked any shared sentiment of Indianness . . . They often lacked even the ‘tribal’ allegiances imputed to them, in that they gave their primary loyalty to the community” (Knight 1990, 75).

The new definition benefited the state in three major ways. First of all, it enabled it to decrease the number of Mexicans previously classified as Indian, and increase those classified as mestizo. In other words, it made Mexico appear less indigenous and more mestizo, at least in numbers. Second, it made the process of mestizaje easier by eliminating the need for racial mixing. An Indian could become mestizo simply by adopting Western ways of life. According to Gamio, native Mexicans didn't even have to be completely Westernized in order to be considered mestizo:

*Conforme la proporción de características de origen prehispánico va disminuyendo y las de origen europea aumentando, los grupos estu-*

3. Besides Caso's “Definición del indio y lo indio” (1948), see Manuel Gamio, “Consideraciones sobre el problema indígena en México” (1942), “Las características culturales y los censos indígenas” (1942), and “Calificación de características culturales y los censos indígenas” (1942); Oscar Lewis and Ernest E. Maes, “Base para una nueva definición práctica del Indio” (1945); and J. De la Fuente, “Definición, pase y desaparición del Indio en México” (1948), by J. de la Fuente.

*diados pueden considerarse como culturalmente mixtos y cada vez menos indígenas, pero también merecen una proporcional atención indigenista. Cuando tal proporción es muy pequeña y la de características europeas muy alta, los grupos e individuos ya no son culturalmente indígenas, aun cuando desde el punto de vista racial sí lo sean* (Gamio 1942b, 16).

Integration, thus, became synonymous with mestizaje.

A third important result of the new definition was to emphasize the cultural rather than the biological differences between indigenous and nonindigenous Mexicans. Anthropologists were eager to counter the widespread notion that the Indians were biologically inferior to nonindigenous Mexicans—a notion that Molina Enríquez and Vasconcelos had helped to inculcate. As Gamio pointed out in *Forjando patria*, such an idea obstructed the process of integration/mestizaje by making it appear as if the Indians were incapable of being productive citizens. Anthropologists during the 1940s and the 1950s wished to emphasize that the Indians' social, economic, and cultural backwardness was not a consequence of biology but of mistreatment and neglect by the rest of Mexican society. They contended that the Indian would be capable of participating in mainstream society at an intellectual level equivalent to the rest of Mexicans were he provided with the same social and economic opportunities. For example, explaining the Indian's current state of backwardness, Caso states, "*No se trata de un problema racial, sino de un problema social o cultural... Raza es un concepto puramente biológico y nada tiene que ver con las capacidades intelectuales o culturales de un individuo; la diferencia que hay entre las comunidades del país no es una diferencia racial.*" He adds that it would be difficult to find Mexicans who lacked either indigenous or mestizo/white ancestors, and sums up the indigenous problem by stating that "*hay tres millones de mexicanos por lo menos, que no reciben los beneficios del progreso del país; que forman verdaderos islotes, incapaces de seguir el ritmo del desarrollo de México; que no se sienten mexicanos*" (Caso 1956, 391–93). Similarly, Gamio argues that any biological deficiencies on the Indians' part were owed not to heredity but to a long history of living under poor economic and cultural conditions. He maintains that under the same conditions as nonindigenous Mexicans, the Indians actually possess "*mejores defensas biológicas contra enfermedades autóctonas y los efectos adversos del ambiente geográfico que los elementos de origen extranjero*" (Gamio 1942b, 20).

By stressing the Indian's likeness to the mestizo, it is probable that anthropologists were attempting not only to encourage racial tolerance, but also to eventually spur racial mixing, the only way to eliminate the

physical differences between the Indian and the mestizo and achieve a truly homogenous population. Yet the general public could hardly have been aware of the new definition and its intended implications. It was also unlikely that Mexicans would suddenly begin regarding those they previously considered Indians as mestizos.

At the same time that they wished to mesticize the Indian, anthropologists wanted to avoid the loss of Indianness altogether. After all, Mexico's (and indeed Latin America's) indigenous populations had long constituted a source of national identity, helping to distinguish the nation from the rest of the world. They likely wanted to avoid sacrificing this cultural uniqueness. Some anthropologists, including Caso and Gamio, argued somewhat idealistically for a fusion of the best of indigenous culture with the best of western culture. In Caso's words, "*lo que se necesita es transformar los aspectos negativos de la cultura indígena, en aspectos positivos, y conservar lo que las comunidades indígenas tienen de positivo y útil; su sentido de comunidad y de ayuda mutua, sus artes populares, su folklore*" (Caso 1956, 396). Gamio argues that indigenous culture "*se distingue, entre otras cosas, por su bella y épica tradición, altas manifestaciones éticas y estéticas, excepcionales dotes de persistencia contra toda clase de obstáculos y adversidades, mucho menor sujeción al perjudicial egoísmo individualista que la cultura extranjera, etc.*" (Gamio 1942b, 22). Yet the positive qualities of indigenous culture they mention are relatively few, and the anthropologists never discuss in any real detail how the Indian was to retain them once he was integrated into mainstream society. They also fail to address the problem of how the Indian was to avoid adopting the negative qualities of Western culture. They seem to assume that, notwithstanding the corrupting influences of Western culture, the Indian would be better off integrated than in his current state.

In reality, indigenists were primarily concerned that just one aspect of indigenous culture remain intact: the artwork. Popular art constituted an important source of national identity and pride, and of employment for many Indians and mestizos. As Alfonso Caso put it,

*Las artes populares en México tienen en los momentos actuales, una importancia especial, no sólo por lo que significan como conservación de una manifestación cultural que es propia de nuestro pueblo, sino también por la importancia económica que tienen, ya que forman la base única del sustento de una buena parte de la población indígena y mestiza de la República* (Caso 1942, 25).

Caso, Gamio, and others conducted numerous studies of indigenous artwork, both prehispanic and contemporary, repeatedly praising its aesthetic qualities. They also vigorously promoted the preservation of in-

indigenous art and its protection from foreign (especially European) influences. Gamio urged Mexican artists to take inspiration from indigenous art. He also initiated a campaign, which subsequent governments would continue, to breathe life into this art by modernizing its production and distribution.<sup>4</sup>

### The Essay

Notwithstanding the general optimism over the Indian's integration, indigenists perceived some major obstacles. Besides scarce resources, these included the rest of Mexican society's continued exploitation, denigration, and neglect of the Indian. Hoping to address this problem, some artists and intellectuals in the 1940s took a new approach towards promoting racial harmony. Héctor Pérez Martínez, Agustín Yáñez, and Luis Villoro, among others, began to spiritualize the Indian and the mestizo. They were joining other writers at the time, including Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, and Octavio Paz, who were probing the national psyche. All these writers were influenced by Samuel Ramos's *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934), the first in-depth study of the Mexican character. Ramos had applied psychoanalysis to diagnose an inferiority complex in the national soul, which he regarded as the source of Mexicans' most severe character defects. His goal was to provide the Mexican with self-awareness—the necessary prerequisite to self-improvement. He believed Mexicans must overcome their character deficiencies in order to defend themselves against cultural intrusions by foreign nations (especially the United States) and to participate effectively in the modern world.

Pérez Martínez, Yáñez, and Villoro shared Ramos's goals and methods but were unique in their treatment of the ethnic component of the national character. Neither Ramos nor the essayists' contemporaries (Zea, Uranga, Paz) considered mestizaje a significant factor in the development of the national character. In their view, indigenous culture made little impact on the Mexican psyche. Consequently, they denounced artists

4. Caso circumvented the problem of how the Indians would continue to produce indigenous artwork once they were mesticized by contending that popular art isn't exclusively indigenist. Rather, it is "*un arte mexicano porque ha resultado de la lenta intrusión de ideas europeas en un fondo indígena*" (1942, 25). In other words, he appropriates indigenous art as mestizo or just plain Mexican by arguing both that it was infused with European influences and also that some mestizo Mexicans produced it. Thus, it wasn't necessary to participate in indigenous culture in order to create popular, Mexican art. Caso and Gamio thereby made it seem possible at once to integrate the Indian into mainstream society and to maintain the production of an authentic indigenous or popular artwork.

and intellectuals who idealized Mexico's native roots, claiming they were practicing a false nationalism. In their view, the authentic Mexican culture and mentality had European, not indigenous, roots. The problem was that Mexicans have blindly tried to copy Europe rather than adapting its culture to their own environment.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, Pérez Martínez, Yáñez, and Villoro argue that Mexico's indigenous heritage made a profound and lasting impact on the national psyche. They further maintain that mestizaje led to a particular psychological condition in which the indigenous and European cultures—two contradictory forces—battle with each other deep within the mestizo's soul. This conflict causes the mestizo anguish, and leads him to behave in contradictory, irrational, and even dangerous ways. Moreover, because the Spanish heritage dominates, the mestizo denies his indigenous roots and disparages the Indians. Thus, these essayists diverged from Molina Enríquez, Vasconcelos, and Gamio, by focusing on what they believed were the mestizo's character deficiencies rather than his positive traits. While these essayists shared the same desire as their predecessors to promote mestizaje, they believed it was first necessary to end the psychological warring they contended goes on within the mestizo's soul.

Pérez Martínez and Yáñez examine the Indian's culture and mentality, stressing the positive qualities. Their goal was not only to educate the mestizo about the Indian, but also to help him understand the indigenous component of his own character, from which they believed he was estranged. They further sought to inspire the mestizo's respect and appreciation for the Indian so that he might begin treating his fellow countrymen more humanely and, at the same time, come to terms with his own indigenous heritage.

In *Cuauhtémoc: vida y muerte de una cultura* (1948), Pérez Martínez describes the Aztec culture and mentality, and recounts the battle between the Aztecs and the Spaniards from the indigenous point of view. He aims to illuminate aspects of the indigenous culture and character that prevail to his day. For example, he says that the Aztecs' submission to the sacred accounts for many of the Indians' qualities, including his passivity and fatalism. He contends that contact with the Spaniards was another determining factor in the indigenous mentality. The two worlds that met were incompatible. The Spaniards' world was "*objetivo, individualista, y directo,*" and the Indians' was "*el de la imaginación atormentada, subjetivo, y en el cual el individuo desaparecía bajo el peso*

5. Although they agreed with Ramos on many points, Zea, Paz and Uranga viewed the Mexican character more favorably than he did. They argued that in an age of rapid modernization and greater reliance on technology, certain qualities of the Mexican, including his introspective, sensitive nature, could serve as a model for humanity.

*de la tribu*" (71). Consequently, the Indians were forced to sacrifice practically their whole way of life following the Conquest. This explains their profound sense of loneliness and "*esa rara mezcla de éxtasis y hosquedad, amor y pesadumbre, ansiedad y fatalismo que hace de los indios de hoy esos seres que asisten sordos a la vida llenos sólo con el rumor de la muerte*" (22–23).

Pérez Martínez contends that it is impossible to separate the Spanish from the indigenous component of the mestizo soul. Together they form a particular character and sensibility that defines the mestizo but is also universal. He lists a number of what he believes to be the mestizo's character traits: the capacity for abstraction, stoicism, dissension, the extremes of exaggerated happiness and grim solitude, discretion, sobriety, a love of the grandiose, an extraordinary power of artistic creation, a contempt for life, and a preoccupation with death.

In a similar manner, in "Meditaciones sobre el alma indígena" (1942), Yáñez examines prehispanic art, languages and religious beliefs and practices, discovering in them copious evidence of cultural genius. The ancient indigenous people, he finds, possessed a mastery over abstraction, realism, paradox, poetics, detachment, and plastic expression. Plastic expression, he maintains, entailed other aptitudes, including mathematical mastery, aesthetic taste, a knowledge of physics and chemistry, a competitive spirit, and the tendency to order the world hierarchically. He adds:

*Y si reflexionamos acerca de la resistencia de los materiales, de los secretos para la coloración de estatuas, edificios, códices; o pensamos en la sabiduría astronómica que produjo sistemas cronológicos como el azteca y el maya, en los recursos para tallar el cristal de roca y las piedras preciosas, para labrar canteras, para fundir metales, para conservar las plumas y hacer con ellas mosaicos, etc., convendremos en la magnitud espiritual demostrada por la plástica de aquellas razas* (Yáñez 1942, 125–6).

Yáñez even takes negative traits such as fatalism and passivity and gives them a positive twist by relating them to the Indian's propensity towards detachment. The quality of detachment, he asserts, is responsible for "*sus estados de ánimo que van desde la melancolía hasta la oscura, pesadísima tristeza; desde la expectación hasta la inercia, el desprecio por la vida y sus pompas, la gozosa familiaridad con la muerte, lo imperturbable de su gesto frente a miserias y calamidades*" (121).

In contrast to Pérez Martínez and Yáñez, Villoro focuses exclusively on the mestizo psyche. In *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo* (1950) he explains a philosophical process by which he believes the mes-

tizo may reconcile himself with his indigenous roots. Villoro argues that the mestizo is currently at the point where he wants to understand the Indian in order to mend the split he feels within his soul. While in the past the mestizo believed the Indian should change his mentality and ways of life to conform with those of the mestizo, now he views indigenous culture as part of himself: "*Tal sucede como si el mestizo tratara de recuperar al indio, de hacer suyos los valores de éste, de recobrar su espíritu arcano*" (197). The mestizo therefore begins to reflect upon himself, finding that he is insecure, contradictory, and unstable.

According to Villoro, reflection fails to illuminate indigenous reality for the mestizo because it is a Western and not an indigenous principle. Only the Indian can reveal himself to the mestizo. Villoro outlines two ways the mestizo may come to a true understanding of his indigenous roots. The first is through what he calls "loving action," in which Indian and mestizo come together as one. The two groups identify with each other on the level of class, realizing that their behavior as part of this social group is one and the same. They then confront the Other, which for the mestizo used to be the Indian himself, but is now the foreigner or the Creole. They distance themselves from this Other racially, culturally, and socially. However, at a later stage they reject all such distinctions. Echoing Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica*, Villoro envisions future Mexican society as lacking racial distinctions and inequalities altogether. "*Vendrá el momento en que no haya jerarquías en las razas ni dominio de una sobre la otra; en que todas las que ahora se diversifican se reconozcan recíprocamente*" (229). He explains that current indigenism affirms the indigenous element of the mestizo soul as of supreme value only to later reject such action in order to allow for "*una sociedad donde se reconozcan mutuamente el indio y el blanco*" (229).

The second way the mestizo may appropriate his indigenous self, according to Villoro, is through indigenous history. Since the mestizo has assumed the Indian as a dimension of his own spirit, the Indian's past becomes his own. He approaches this history in a preliminary state of expectation or perplexity. The historical object or fact is an enigma, which the mestizo cannot understand through known laws. Instead, he must allow the object/fact to reveal itself to him. In other words, by contemplating indigenous history, the mestizo becomes awakened to his native roots, reliving that history as if it were his own.

Ironically, Pérez Martínez, Yáñez, and Villoro undermined their own efforts to foment respect for the Indian and the mestizo's indigenous heritage. By emphasizing the admirable traits of prehispanic rather than contemporary indigenous culture, Pérez Martínez and Yáñez suggest that the latter lacks laudable qualities. In other words, they imply that contemporary indigenous culture is incapable of inspiring respect, but that

an appreciation of the Indian could be cultivated by pointing out the commendable aspects of ancient Mexican civilization. Furthermore, the essayists actually find very little to redeem the Indians beyond that group's aesthetic prowess. They point to traits that have traditionally been ascribed to the Indians—apathy, fatalism, passivity, melancholy, indifference, and so on. These traits had negative connotations, despite the authors' attempts to present them in a positive light. They were especially unsuited for a modern nation. The Indian and the mestizo (by virtue of his indigenous heritage), embodied characteristics that hindered economic progress. The essayists seemed to want the mestizo to understand and appreciate the indigenous part of himself only to later rid himself of his indigenous qualities. These were contradictory goals.

These essayists' efforts were further undermined by other artists and intellectuals of Mexicanness, such as Zea, Uranga, and Paz, who did not seem to believe mestizaje merited much attention, and who valued Mexicans' European heritage over their indigenous one. Perhaps more importantly, mass culture revealed little interest in the topic of the Indian, much less in any indigenous component of the national character. For instance, while essays and novels on the Indian flourished, only one film on this topic achieved wide success during the 1940s: *María Candalaria*. No films dealt with mestizaje's impact on the national identity. Thus the essayists' ideas were not reaching a mass public—those very mestizos whom, the writers stressed, most needed to do the soul-searching.

### The Indigenist Novel

Several indigenist novels were published during the 1940s, initiating a new direction in literature of this type. Indigenist novels of the 1930s, such as *El indio* (1935), by Gregorio López y Fuentes, and *El resplandor* (1937), by Mauricio Magdaleno, had denounced the metizo/white Mexicans' continued abuse and neglect of the Indians. They argued that such treatment has alienated the native people from mainstream society and caused integrationist policies to fail. Consequently, the Indians have remained mired in poverty, and have become hostile and even dangerous to non-Indians. Indigenist novels of the 1940s attempt to address the problems the 1930s novelists had pointed out. However, they followed the general trend in the novel by turning away from the outward manifestations of the national character to examine more closely the Mexican psychology. Some examined the indigenous psyche and society, including, most famously, *Juan Pérez Jolote*, by Ricardo Pozas. These writers hoped to combat racism by providing an understanding and appreciation of indigenous culture, inspiring respect and sympathy for the Indian, and/or underlining the urgency of integrating the Indian. Two

novels contributed to the ongoing dialogue on mestizaje: *Nayar* (1940), by Miguel Ángel Menéndez, and *Lola Casanova* (1947), by Francisco Rojas González. *Nayar* probes the mestizo psychology, concluding as did the essayists that the mestizo's mixed heritage leads him not only to mistreat the Indians, but also to behave in irrational and violent ways. *Lola Casanova* examines the destructive relationship between Indians and non-Indians, mainly from the indigenous point of view. It proposes mestizaje as the ultimate solution to this problem, and to the Indian's isolation and backwardness. However, it emphasizes that both the indigenous and Creole heritages should be equally valued.

*Nayar* forms part of the repertory of so-called novels of land that predominated in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century. It develops a strong identification between the nation and the land, focusing on the tensions and contrasts between domesticated and undomesticated social spaces like the city and the jungle. The narrator, Enrique, who is traversing Mexico's hinterland for the first time, describes in minute detail and with obvious emotion the region's flora and fauna. He also closely observes the customs and behavior of the Indians, whom he meets deep within the forest. Enrique's fondness for the land and the Indians mimics other populist novels of the land, in which civilization sets out to conquer barbarity through love. Doris Sommer explains that "the founding fictions of the last century tend to be about daring political deals that would construct a national territory. By contrast, populism is about a rigid fortification of those now feminized constructions" (Sommer, 1991, 265). These novels, which may be read as allegories of the nation, set out to metaphorically establish alliances with forces outside of the nation's control. Frequently this meant falling in love with the object of control, which often took the shape of a female. *Nayar* replaces the female with that of the also feminized (through his relationship to the land) Indian.

*Nayar* is not principally about the Indian or the jungle, however. Its main purpose is to explore the mestizo's character. Throughout the novel Enrique, who is white, closely observes the behavior of his companion, Ramón, who is mestizo. Ramón's racial composition is brought to the reader's attention at the novel's onset, indicating the importance it will have within the story that Enrique is about to tell us: "*Me urge precisar el color de Ramón: color de madrugada en el estero, a punto de acabar la noche; levadura mestiza en que aparentemente predomina el indio*" (9). On a symbolic level, their journey through the forest represents a search for the mestizo's identity. Contact with the Indians, deep within the jungle's recesses, reveals and explains obscure aspects of Ramón's character.

At first, Ramón shows a natural affinity for the forest and the Indi-

ans, which the author of the novel infers is a vestige of his indigenous heritage. It is he, not Enrique, who leads the way through the dense foliage after the two become lost, and adapts more easily to the harsh environment. Ramón even sleeps with his eyes open at night, like the Indians, constantly vigilant for unexpected dangers. When he meets with the Indians, Ramón immediately understands and sympathizes with them. Because of this and his darker skin color, the tribe accepts him more readily than they do Enrique. However, Ramón becomes increasingly more critical of his Indian friends. After a few months of living among them, he proposes to Enrique that they join the government forces. Enrique refuses, saying “*no nos gustaría matar indios . . .*” Enrique later regrets not having realized at the time that Ramón “*estaba cansado de vivir la vida de los indios. Era que su arcilla mestiza reclamaba*” (237). Outraged by the tribe’s decision to kill an innocent man accused of sorcery, Ramón runs to town in search of the federal troops. Enrique attributes this behavior to his mixed racial heritage:

*Claro que no lo hizo por traidor. Algo que había en él sin su propia voluntad, algo siniestro que le venía de muy lejos, le obligó a galopar entre la noche, sobre el filo de los cerros y en los enredijos del barranco. Su levadura mestiza venció por fin al color de su piel, color de madrugada a punto de aclarar el día. Pudo más la luz de lo español que la sombra de lo indio. Le imaginaba yo tendido sobre el galope de su caballo en pelo, vuelto loco por la tempestad de afuera y por la tempestad de adentro; deslocado su espíritu por el choque de las dos herencias (262–3).*

Ramón perishes in the battle that ensues, while his best friend within the tribe, Pedro Gervasio, ends up in jail accused of homicide. Ramón’s mixed heritage thus literally causes his own destruction and that of the Indians who had befriended him.

The mestizo in *Nayar* exemplifies many of the characteristics that the essayists also pointed out. Above all, he is irrational and destructive. This is a result of the battle that rages between his indigenous and European selves. Besides turning against the Indians, Ramón kills two human beings without suffering from the least bit of remorse: the town judge, whom he had caught sleeping with his wife, and an adolescent boy who had spied him trying to sneak back into town to visit his son. He joins Enrique in order to avoid being punished for his crimes. The novel also blames mestizaje for the ignorance, hatred and brutality that Enrique observes in the villages of Mexico’s interior. For example, it underscores the extreme brutality of the Cristero war: “*De Jesús María llegan familias huyendo de Juan Pistolas. Entraron al pueblo los cristeros y barrieron: matazón de campesinos y secuestro de muchachas. Desoregaron al maestro, vaciaron los trojes. Después, tropa del gobier-*

*no reocupó la plaza, ensangretándola con represalias*" (189). The war, Enrique comments, is led by "*caciques mestizos, surgidos de ancestral alianza con el clero*" (195) and excites the passion of the mestizaje that "*se revuelve hecho la mocha buscando el albur para que ver sale*" (197). Enrique notes that Ramón "*oscila entre los berrinches del iconoclasta y los éxtasis monjiles. Se le cuatrapea la sangre de dos razas, al sentir que una histeria mesiánica barre la sierra, incendiando espíritus, tronchando cuerpos y engordando el odio*" (188).

To underscore Ramón's emotional instability, the novel compares him with Enrique, who is rational, compassionate, and emotionally secure. Enrique is not in the least bit inclined to contribute to the atrocities he witnesses. To the contrary, they horrify him. He does, however, observe that in the forest his most basic, animal instincts emerge. For example, he recognizes that even though he loves nature, he still feels compelled to hunt. After committing the murderous act of shooting a heron, Enrique concludes that the instinct to kill is primitive and virile. But while it is common to all men, the novel stresses that it is much stronger in the darker mestizo than in the whiter Mexican. Enrique's instinct to kill only emerges in the forest, and it is limited to the wildlife. Even then, it causes him guilt.

Thus the novel implies that the mestizo's barbarity owes itself both to the war between his indigenous and Spanish identities, and his indigenous blood, which causes him to behave more primitively than whiter Mexicans. Neither of these conditions are within the mestizo's control. According to Enrique, it is impossible even to separate out what is Spanish from what is indigenous in the mestizo's psyche: "*Dos inmensidades . . . luchan aún, mordidas, enredadas, ya sin saber dónde comienza y acaba la una; ya sin saber cuáles la otra. Pero aquí están, luchando en el alma mestiza, dos inmensidades*" (261). Thus *Nayar* is pessimistic about the mestizo's ability or inclination to act as his own agent to initiate a process of self-awareness and change. The mestizo in this novel doesn't even seem to be aware he has a problem. Integration is also impossible under these conditions since, on the one hand, the mestizo cannot control his urge to brutalize the Indian and, on the other hand, the Indian clings more fiercely to his ways of life the more he is exploited. Unlike the essayists, Menéndez doesn't propose any solutions to these problems. Rather, his aim is to simply provide the reader with an understanding of the mestizo psyche.

*Lola Casanova* functions as an allegory for the birth of mestizaje and is much more optimistic than *Nayar* about its potential. It envisions a different type of mestizo—one who values his indigenous and European heritages equally, rather than privileging only the European. Set during the nineteenth century, it is structured like a romance. Don

Casanova, a prosperous merchant, is left bankrupt after a ship carrying his merchandise sinks at sea. In a desperate attempt to regain his fortune, he agrees to gamble at cards with don Néstor Ariza, using his home as collateral. Ariza sets up the game so that Casanova will lose. He hopes to force Casanova's daughter, Lola, to marry him. Lola detests Ariza who, besides being much older than she, is cruel, pompous and avaricious. She is also in love with another man. Nevertheless, Lola agrees to marry Ariza in order to regain her home and appease her father, who is anxious about her future. While she is traveling to her wedding site, the Seri Indians attack her caravan. They are seeking revenge on Ariza, who recently burned down their entire village and confiscated their land. They capture Lola. While she is held prisoner, the tribal leader, Coyote, courts her. Lola eventually falls in love with him. The tribal leaders, reluctant to allow Coyote to wed a *yori*, or white/mestizo outsider, concede to the union after Coyote kills Ariza, who had escaped during the attack. They rename Lola *Iguana*, and she renounces all ties to her former, privileged way of life. At first shunned because of her skin color, Lola slowly gains the Indians' trust, and eventually becomes one of their most esteemed leaders.

Although *Lola Casanova* is highly melodramatic, its main purpose is not to entertain but rather to educate. In the first part of the novel, which takes place in the small coastal town of Guaymas, Rojas González inserts long passages designed to teach the reader about indigenous history and customs. He also explores white/mestizo attitudes and behaviors towards the Indians. The second part, following Lola's capture, explores Seri culture and attitudes towards the *yoris*. It also provides a solution for ending the conflict between the whites and the Indians, and a new model of mestizaje that is respectful of the Indians and Mexico's indigenous identity.

The first part of the novel reveals and then discredits two distinct attitudes towards the Indians. It informs us that some of the townspeople, believing the Indians are like animals and cannot be civilized, favor the native people's annihilation. The novel predictably rejects this as cruel and inhumane. Another group argues that the Indians easily may be civilized if they are treated humanely. The novel demonstrates that, while well-meaning, this is unrealistic. First, other mestizo/whites wreck the efforts of those who try to civilize the Indians. The novel offers Ariza's attack on the Seri Indians as a case in point. Following the assault the Indians, who had been living peacefully under the guidance of a Catholic priest, resumed their primitive ways of life and now seek revenge against the whites. The novel cites similar cases that extend back to the period of conquest and colonization. Second, it demonstrates that the white/mestizo population at large scorns and discriminates against

the Indians. As a consequence, the Indians loathe the yoris and want nothing to do with them. The novel further questions the humanity of forcing the Indians to abandon their entire way of life to live among the whites. It is careful to note the emotional anguish that Indalecio, an Indian boy captured by Ariza and given to Lola, experiences while living among his captors. Even though he is treated well, the boy cannot adapt to his new environment, and he eventually escapes. Lola later encounters him living among the Seris, and observes how much more content and confident he is. In contrast to Indalecio, Lola decides voluntarily to live among the Seris, and for the most part is accepted by them as their equal. Coyote, though not white or mestizo, also was originally an outsider. A member of the Pima tribe of Indians, he was adopted by the Seris as a young boy. In other words, the novel portrays the Seris as more tolerant than the yoris.

*Lola Casanova* does not idealize the Indians, however. In fact, Rojas González portrays them as primitive, even frequently comparing them to animals. He notes that they eat raw meat, practice polygamy, and are highly superstitious. They also are eager to engage in battle, and can be quite savage. For example, they scalp their victims. Furthermore, they regard themselves as superior to all other races, including the yoris. Their arrogance, combined with their adherence to tradition, causes some of them to be intolerant and resistant to change. One faction of the tribe, for example, opposes Lola's marriage to Coyote, arguing that her blood will contaminate that of her children. The faction is led by the witch doctor, Tórtola Parda, who is jealous of Lola's healing powers (Lola cures a wounded boy whose condition had been aggravated by the witch doctor's intervention).

Trade between the Indians and the yoris is the first step towards bringing peace and prosperity to the Seris. Concerned about her sons' futures, Lola decides on her own to initiate trade with the yoris. She explains to Coyote the benefits of commerce with the whites: "*los yoris persiguen a los seris porque no producimos nada para su codicia.*" By trading with the whites, she adds, "*indios y blancos nos pondremos a la misma altura*" (242). Under her leadership, the village thrives. The Indians produce objects that their white neighbors eagerly consume: baskets, weavings, boxes decorated with shells, straw hats, and so on. They also sell them fish and agricultural products.

Tórtola Parda and her followers destroy Lola's efforts, however. When Lola, Coyote, and other members of the tribe are visiting Guaymas in order to formalize peace with the yoris, the others burn down the village and flee with all the valuables to Isla de los Tiburones. There they plan to live according to tradition alone. Upon discovering the betrayal, Coyote and his men set off to avenge themselves, but they return

defeated. Coyote is mortally wounded, and the group must escape to the interior to avoid attacks by the other Seris. They elect Lola as their maternal leader. The group settles in an area that is barren, but through hard work and determination, and with Lola's encouragement and guidance, the group manages to get water running in the well (a symbol of hope). They name the place Pozo Coyote. Years later, it is a small, but thriving community, with industry, agriculture, and a school for the young. In this happy community, mestizo and Indian coexist and even intermarry. The inhabitants progressively adapt yori language, dress and culture, but "*no ha dejado de sentir, de gozar y de sufrir como seri.*" (269) They consider their Indian heritage as valuable as their European/white one. This is just the beginning of a future race of mestizo Mexicans: "*Hay algo como un soplo, como un aliento, como un jadeo misterioso de alguien que se agazapa, vigila y espera la oportunidad de revolverlo todo, de amalgamarlo todo, para plasmar un hombre nuevo, y con él, crear un mundo y, tras de él y para él, un destino*" (269).

Lola and Coyote are posed as the symbolic parents of this new race of Mexicans. Significantly, neither of them are originally from the Seri tribe. Having severed their roots to their original communities, and having bucked convention by marrying each other, they are particularly well-suited to forge a new society and race of Mexicans. Once they and their followers are free of the more traditional elements of the tribe, this new society becomes possible.

Rojas González thus offers an alternative to the myth that identifies Hernán Cortés and Malinche as the parents of the mestizo race. Malinche was Cortés's mistress, thus according to the myth, the mestizo race was born of illegitimacy. Furthermore, she is widely considered to have betrayed her people by serving as Cortés's translator, guide and mistress. In other words, she helped Cortés conquer her own people. In contrast, Lola and Coyote's union is based on love and respect. Furthermore, while Lola leaves her own kind to join the Seris, she never helps the Indians fight against the whites. To the contrary, she is responsible for having brought peace among the two races. The product of a healthy union, Lola and Coyote's mestizo offspring are less likely to suffer from the kinds of psychological problems that might afflict the children of Malinche and Cortés. They can be proud of their parents and of themselves as mestizos.

The fate of the Seris who chose to live on Isla de los Tiburones serves to demonstrate the consequences for those Indians who refuse to accept change and who insist on isolating themselves from the rest of the nation. Their society falls into complete disrepair. The Indians suffer from extreme physical and moral depredation. Besieged by hunger and disease, they have become increasingly apathetic, fatalistic, and supersti-

tious. Unable to help themselves, these once proud Indians are forced to accept government handouts, which causes them to lose their dignity and self-respect. Consequently, they become self-destructive. Alcoholism has spread. Men sell the sexual favors of their wives and sisters for practically nothing, mutilate women's stomachs so that they can't give birth, and subject the elderly and the weak to the death penalty.

Rojas González thus considers mestizaje the Indians' only hope. But while he envisions a type of mestizaje that values the indigenous and European heritages equally, his narrative in some senses contradicts this. Notably, it is a Creole and not an Indian who succeeds in improving the Indian's plight. The novel thus implies that the Indians lack the intelligence or the willpower to do this on their own. It establishes a dichotomy, symbolized by the union between Iguana and Coyote, in which the white stands for refinery and intelligence, and the Indian for bravery, strength and fortitude. Coyote tells Lola: "*haremos una nueva familia diferente a las otras; de nuestra casa llevarán mujeres los hijos de otros y tu nombre será símbolo de un linaje, porque de esa gran familia tú serás la cabeza y yo el brazo*" (204–205). This dichotomy is reinforced in the author's descriptions of indigenous culture which, as previously noted, focus on the primitive. Most tellingly, the author ultimately favors the destruction of the Seri culture through mestizaje.

### Cinema

While essays and novels on the Indian flourished, only one film on this topic achieved wide success during the 1940s: *María Candelaria* (1943), directed by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández. *María Candelaria* won several important prizes at two major film festivals: Cannes in 1946, and Locarno in 1947. These prizes stemmed more from the film's technical merits than its treatment of the Indian, which was little changed from that of 1930s films on the Indian. Julia Tuñón suggests that in the aftermath of World War II, European audiences also were likely attracted to the image of the Indian as naturally benevolent (Tuñón 1995, 182).

Fernández was one of Mexico's most popular and nationalist directors during Mexico's so-called Golden Age of cinema in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> Teamed up with the cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa; the writer, Mauricio Magdaleno; and the actors, Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río, and María Félix, Fernández dominated filmmaking during this decade. His films, however, expressed the ideals of the Cárdenas years. The director wished to convey social messages of relevance to the poor, such

6. Fernández directed such widely viewed and acclaimed films as *Flor Silvestre* (1943), *Río Escondido* (1947), and *Enamorada* (1947).

as the need for land reform and education. Throughout his career, he demonstrated a strong interest in dignifying the Indian. This was probably at least partially due to his own indigenous origins (his mother was a Kikapú Indian), which apparently made him feel excluded from society on a personal and professional level (Tuñón 1995, 180–1). Because there was no longer a threat of socialism, the Mexican bourgeoisie opened their arms to Fernández, who made it appear as if revolutionary ideals were still alive, even as governmental policies were indicating otherwise.

*María Candelaria* represents the culmination of a genre of films focusing on the Indians. It is modeled after the first film of its type, *Janitzio* (1934), directed by Carlos Navarro and starring Fernández. Along with *Redes* (1932), *Janitzio* formed part of a current of filmmaking, financed by the government, that sought to portray the struggles and heroism of Mexico's peasant and indigenous populations. These films usually portrayed the Indians as noble savages—morally and spiritually pure, courageous and strong—whose peaceful existence is shattered by outsiders who attempt to exploit them. Often the films were set to nationalistic music (such as that of the famous composer, Silvestre Revueletas), and glorified indigenous customs. The Indian represented what was authentically Mexican, and was intended as a source of national pride. Stylistically, many of these films were influenced by the Soviet director, Sergei Eisenstein, who worked in Mexico during the late 1930s and developed an aesthetic of nationalism.<sup>7</sup> This aesthetic involved using shots of the landscape and people to evoke the national essence. Eisenstein and his many followers (including Fernández), sought to capture the beauty and timelessness of Mexico's nopals and magueys, indigenous features and clothing, historical and artistic objects like churches, altars, and monuments.

The indigenist films of the 1940s, most famously *María Candelaria* and *Maclovía* (1948) (both based on *Janitzio* and directed by Fernández), did not reflect the changes that had taken place in indigenism since the 1930s. Their portrayal of Mexico's indigenous communities was not very different from that of 1930s Indianist films. None dealt directly with the issue of mestizaje, for instance. The Mexican film audience as a whole seemed uninterested in the topic of the Indian. Very few films of this type were produced in either the 1930s or the 1940s, and none, with the exception of *María Candelaria*, gained much popularity. Further-

7. Eisenstein traveled throughout Mexico while working on the film *¡Que viva México!*, paying close attention to the land, the people, and post-revolutionary culture. He left the country before finishing the film, which was nevertheless released without his authorization.

more, the audiences did not seem eager to engage in the sort of soul-searching that indigenist essays and novels encouraged, especially if that required acknowledging any character deficiencies or complicity in the Indians' suffering. In fact, rather than critically analyzing the national character, film during the 1930s and the 1940s tended to exalt the so-called national character. *María Candelaria* was no different.

*María Candelaria*'s popularity within Mexico may be attributed to its use of two major film stars as its protagonists (Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz), and its melodramatic formula, which was highly popular with the film audiences. It may also be attributed to the film's effort to identify its audience with the Indian. *María Candelaria* stressed that the Indian shared experiences and characteristics with the lower classes. The masses could relate to the protagonists' woes: their struggle to earn a living, their exploitation by the powerful and corrupt, and their marginalization. The audiences could also recognize in the two protagonists traits that film had also repeatedly ascribed to them: dignity, honesty, stoicism, self-respect, sensitivity, and loyalty. The protagonists represent Mexican society's ideal images of the male and female. Lorenzo is strong, protective, and honorable, while María Candelaria is beautiful, innocent, and self-sacrificing. In other words, the film attempts to identify the masses with the Indian by making them both symbolic of the national spirit.

Like *Janitzio* and other indigenist films, *María Candelaria* portrays the native Mexican as a noble savage whose idyllic life is shattered by the intolerance of his community and exploitation by outsiders. It focuses on the tribulations of a young Indian woman and her fiancé. María Candelaria and Lorenzo are simple people who wish only to marry and live peacefully. They are waiting until María's pig is grown so that they can sell it and purchase a wedding dress. However, the mestizo storeowner, Don Damián, wants to confiscate the pig as payment of a debt María owes him. He also fancies María, and wants to prevent her from marrying Lorenzo. To avoid losing the animal—her only hope of wedding Lorenzo—María tries to sell flowers in the village. The residents refuse to let her step foot in the village because her mother was allegedly a prostitute and they force her to turn back. Lorenzo tries to reason with Don Damián but only succeeds in fueling his anger. The events turn for the worse: Don Damián surreptitiously kills María's pig. Then, María falls ill from malaria and, to cure her, Lorenzo tries to obtain quinine from Don Damián, who is in charge of distributing it to the community. The storeowner refuses it to him. Desperate, Lorenzo breaks into the store at night and steals both the quinine and a dress for María. She recovers and they set off to get married, but just before they are about to say the vows, Don Damián arrives to take Lorenzo away. María turns for help to

a local artist, who had seen her at a marketplace and asked to paint her (the couple had refused and fled). In return for his help, she agrees to let him paint her face, but when he asks her to pose nude, she flees. Another model poses in her place. A woman sees the “naked” María Candelaria and spreads the gossip. Outraged, the townspeople hunt her down and, in front of Lorenzo who is staring helplessly from the prison, they stone her to death. Lorenzo manages to escape from the jail, and the movie ends as he impassively carries her body away.

*María Candelaria* circumvents the issue of collective guilt for the Indians’ suffering by blaming others. María and Lorenzo are not victims of the average Mexican, but rather of the Indian community, a villainous mestizo, and an artist. The community shuns her because her mother supposedly prostituted herself. Don Damián persecutes her for her refusal to yield to his advances. And the artist exploits her for her beauty—to paint a portrait that will eventually cause her death. But the film never condemns mainstream society for its involvement in the marginalization and impoverishment of the indigenous people.

The movie, moreover, allows the audiences to actually maintain their stereotypes by very clearly indicating that the two protagonists are atypical. Not only do they behave differently from the rest of the community, but also they have European features and light skin. Neither Dolores del Río nor Pedro Armendáriz were indigenous. The star system was critical to marketing films during this period, and famous indigenous actors were scarce. Thus Fernández employed nonindigenous actors to play the key characters.

Fernández presents an ambiguous view of the indigenous people in this film. On the one hand, he idealizes the protagonists.<sup>8</sup> As noted earlier, María Candelaria and Lorenzo distinguish themselves through their physical beauty, their peaceful coexistence with nature, and their moral and spiritual purity. By choosing an Indian woman as the authentic embodiment of the national essence, Fernández appears to be trying to counter the negative connotations associated with La Malinche, just as Rojas González had done in *Lola Casanova*. On the other hand, not all the Indians in this movie are depicted positively. In fact, the indigenous community as a whole is portrayed as petty, cruel, and intolerant, as evident in its treatment of María Candelaria. Not one person from the community takes her side, although she is very clearly innocent of any of the so-called crimes her mother committed.

8. Many critics denounced the film for this reason, arguing that the Indians are nothing more than noble savages. Carl Mora, however, sustains that “false idealization or not, Fernández presented a positive view of Indians—a group that more often than not had been the butt of music-hall jokes” (65–6).

The movie is further ambiguous regarding the Indian's integration. On the one hand, this group's isolation is considered to be undesirable. The community has not benefited in any way from its seclusion. Its traditions (at least those shown on the film) are rigid and unfair, and ignorance, poverty, and disease are rampant. Clearly, the indigenous community cannot survive well on its own, as evidenced by its dependence on the government's distribution of quinine to fend off malaria. Through María Candelaria and Lorenzo's example, the film further suggests that the Indian is capable of exemplary conduct only if he is separated from his community. In other words, it implies that the indigenous community has a negative impact on the Indians' morality. On the other hand, the film reacts somewhat negatively to the modern world (in the form of don Damián and the artist) for exploiting the Indians.<sup>9</sup> However, it refrains from criticizing mainstream society too much. For example, it shows the artist deeply repentant for his part in María Candelaria's death. Don Damián, furthermore, does not represent mestizo Mexicans as a whole, and in fact the movie attempts to generate anger at him for having caused the Indian's mistrust of mestizo/white Mexicans. Whereas much of indigenous literature had blamed mestizo society as a whole for the Indians' isolation, *María Candelaria* points the finger at just a few individuals. Thus, in the end the film seems to favor the Indian's integration.

In some ways *María Candelaria* thwarts its objectives of inspiring pride in and identification with the Indian, just as the essayists did in their works. Because the protagonists are exceptional in character, experience, and even appearance, it must have been difficult for the audiences to consider the Indian in general as embodying the best and most authentic qualities of Mexicanness, as Fernández would have liked them to do. It is even more difficult given the film's negative characterization of the larger indigenous community, as discussed previously. Moreover, while the audience may have sympathized and identified with the protagonists, they would likely have distanced themselves from the indigenous community, which lacks admirable qualities. Thus it is unlikely that the film did much to bridge the gap between the mestizo and the Indian. Finally, the film's ability to help combat racism and thus speed the Indian's integration into mainstream Mexican life is impeded by its complete avoidance of a serious treatment of the real problems confronting the native Mexicans.

Not only did indigenist writers and filmmakers subvert their own

9. By showing the obstacles to the Indian's integration, the film is similar to indigenist literature, and in fact was written by one such author, Mauricio Magdaleno, who wrote *El resplendor* (1937).

efforts to promote *mestizaje*, but also film undermined the writers' efforts. The writers' goals were incompatible with those of the filmmakers. The writers sought to improve the *mestizo's* understanding of the Indian, and to induce self-awareness so that he might begin to appreciate and accept his own indigenous heritage. In contrast, cinema—which reached a mass audience—rarely dealt with the Indian, and never with the indigenous component of the *mestizo* character. Cinema, moreover, did not try to directly promote *mestizaje*. Indian and white/*mestizo* couples, for example, were virtually nonexistent in film. This is especially significant given that romanticized couples—the symbolic parents of an emerging revolutionary family—abounded in films in the 1940s, especially in those directed by Fernández.

Most writers and filmmakers did not wish to blame their particular audience for racist actions and attitudes, so they pointed elsewhere or ignored the issue altogether. The writers studied here, whose main audience was composed primarily of the intellectual and economic elite (who also tended to be lighter in color), blamed the darker *mestizo* for racism. They also attributed some of the most troublesome national identity traits to the *mestizo*. This was characteristic of most literature dealing with the national identity. Beginning with Ramos, who used the *pelado* (lower class, urban Mexican) as an archetype to demonstrate Mexicans' character defects, writers often blamed the poor for harboring traits that were detrimental to the nation's well-being. Cinema, in contrast, was hesitant to criticize its mostly *mestizo*, lower class audience. Film as a whole during this time seemed to have an implicit pact with the audience: filmmakers gained the approval of the audience by portraying the poor as heroes, and at the same time it promoted nationalist goals. For example, it cultivated a sense of national identity, unity and pride, and served as social containment by idealizing the popular classes as morally and spiritually superior to the wealthy. Thus, racism was never really addressed in film.

Finally, practically all of these discourses on the Indian and the *mestizo* were themselves racist. Alan Knight points out that this was characteristic of post-revolutionary indigenism overall.<sup>10</sup> He explains that

To equate ethnicity and race, and to suppose they determine significant ascribed characteristics of such strength and staying power that they are, in practical terms, immutable, is to fall prey to racism, even if those characteristics are not biologically determined. In other words, if Mexican Indians are what they are because of environmental pressures—and what they are

10. Knight studies indigenism in Mexico from 1910 to 1940 but his observations on racism in official indigenist policies are applicable to the 1940s and 1950s as well.

scarcely admits of change, since it is part of their very being—then the question of whether biological, environmental, or historical factors determined this being is secondary. It is the inescapable ascription that counts (Knight 1990, 93).

By assigning particular traits to the Indian and the mestizo, whether biological or psychological, these artists and intellectuals were perpetuating racist ideas, even when they attributed those traits to environmental or historical factors. Thus, they exacerbated one of the very problems they sought to resolve—pervasive racism. Furthermore, they marginalized the Indian from their own work. As Knight points out, indigenism had never been led by Indians but was a state project, presumably with the Indians' best interests in mind. Discourses on the Indian, in other words, generally lacked indigenous voices. At a time when intellectuals were encouraging Mexicans to understand and value the Indian and their own indigenous heritage, the Indians themselves remained as alienated from mainstream society as ever.

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