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Cabaretistas and *Indias Bonitas*: Gender and Representations of Mexico in the Americas during the Cárdenas Era*

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Abstract. This article examines the promotion of Mexico's national image in the Americas during the Cárdenas period, using as a starting point a scandal arising from a 1940 performance of Mexican dancers at a cabaret in Panama. Mexican diplomats found the show objectionable because it clashed with the image of women that they used in their efforts to raise the country's reputation abroad. By investigating these efforts, as well as the career of Eva Pérez Caro, the dance troupe's leader, the article contributes to our understanding of the relationship between gender, cultural performance and nationalism, and the role that they played in Mexico's foreign relations.

Keywords: Cárdenas, dance, diplomacy, gender, inter-American relations, Mexican foreign relations, nationalism

Dressed in revealing versions of national costumes that prominently displayed the colours of the flag, a troupe of eight Mexican women gave their debut performance at The Alamo cabaret in Panama City in July 1940. The '*cabaretistas*' danced erotically to a selection of Mexican music that included the national anthem. After the show, clients who invited the dancers for a drink paid for their company with tokens or *fichas*; in order to encourage the sale of alcoholic beverages, the owner of The Alamo, Luis Vecchio, assigned

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each woman a quota of fichas for the evening.[1] Located in Panama's *zona de tolerancia*, The Alamo catered to a bawdy clientele consisting primarily of US soldiers and sailors. Mexico's minister to Panama, José Maximiliano Alfonso de Rosenzweig Díaz, sent two employees from the legation to observe the cabaret act. Scandalised by what they had witnessed, Ignacio D. Silva and Manuel Hernández Velarde gave a statement of their findings to the minister on 9 July.[2] They reported their shock at seeing the cabaretistas dressed in national colours. Shock turned to horror when the women performed their 'vulgar gyrations' to the tune of the Mexican anthem. The diplomats claimed that the director of the troupe, Eva Pérez Caro, was a well-known Mexico City madam, and that she and Vecchio had conspired to bring the women to Panama under false pretences, forcing them to work as prostitutes. In Mexico City the practice of *fichándose* had long been considered a cover for prostitution, and cabarets were seen as little more than glorified brothels. Silva and Hernández Velarde concluded that the women, most of whom were members of the *Asociación Nacional de Actores de México*, had been unwitting victims of the so-called 'white slave trade'.[3] Moreover, the diplomats believed that the troupe's 'shameful spectacle' harmed Mexico's good name and threatened to subvert the legation's efforts to raise the country's international reputation. Although they did not make reference to the historical significance of The Alamo's name, their national pride must have been wounded to see such carousing in a bar named to commemorate Mexico's loss of Texas. During the weeks that followed, Rosenzweig and his staff attempted to resolve this incident, which they perceived to be a scandal. Their actions and assumptions, as well as those of the dancers and their leader, Eva Pérez Caro, are indicative of the ambiguous role that women and gendered representations of the nation played in Mexican foreign relations during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40).

The members of the Mexican legation in Panama were charged with projecting an image of the nation that supported their efforts to gain support for the Cárdenas government's domestic projects, and with obtaining a leadership position in international relations. In bilateral negotiations and multilateral organisations, and even in the artistic and musical exhibitions they mounted,

[1] For a description of the *ficha* system in the cabarets of Mexico City, see Katherine E. Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park PA, 2001), p. 173.

[2] This description is drawn from Silva and Hernández Velarde to Rosenzweig, all of whom use the term 'cabaretistas' instead of the standard *cabareteras*: 9 July 1940, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter AHGE-SRE), Mexico, 'Trata de Blancas – Bailarinas mexicanas en Panamá', exp. III-430-4.

[3] There are also reports of theatrical troupes falling into the hands of white slave traders in early twentieth-century Argentina: Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln NE, 1990), p. 149.

these emissaries represented and interpreted the nation and the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. Underlying these efforts was a particular portrayal of Mexican women, their embodiment of the nation and their place in society as beneficiaries of revolutionary reforms. Although this was also true of the efforts of representatives of earlier revolutionary governments, such images were especially prevalent during this period as diplomats aimed to convince the world of Cárdenas' unprecedented commitment to the pursuit of social revolutionary goals. These efforts bore special significance in Panama because US presence in the country made it a potent symbol of hegemony in the region.[4] In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, inter-American relations took on increased importance as the US government attempted to create hemispheric solidarity in the face of mounting world tensions. For the Cárdenas government, the outbreak of war presented an opportunity to solve the economic crisis that had resulted from the worldwide depression and the boycott of Mexican oil that followed the expropriation of the foreign petroleum companies on 18 March 1938. In addition, the British and French declarations of war against Germany vindicated the many pronouncements against fascist aggression that the Cárdenas government had made in the League of Nations. During the Abyssinian crisis and the Spanish Civil War, Mexico had often been a lone voice in favour of upholding the League's principle of non-intervention. The efforts made by Mexican diplomats at the inter-American meetings in Havana (1928) and Montevideo (1933) had culminated in this principle being enshrined in the western hemisphere at the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace held in Buenos Aires in December 1936.[5] Cárdenas' international policies were an extension of his domestic policies which, in areas such as the organisation of workers and agrarian reform, championed the rights of the weak against the powerful.[6] Throughout his presidency Cárdenas and his diplomats attempted to promote this alternative strategy of peace and justice in the hope that the leaders of other Latin American republics would rally behind them. As a result, promotion of the accomplishments of the Revolution in the areas of social and economic justice constituted an essential part of their efforts to achieve a leadership

[4] Ricardo D. Salvatore, 'Imperial Mechanics: South America's Hemispheric Integration in the Machine Age', *American Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2006), pp. 662–91.

[5] Carlos Marichal (ed.), *México y las conferencias panamericanas, 1889–1938: antecedentes de la globalización* (Mexico City, 2002).

[6] For the Cárdenas government's limitations and achievements, see Alan Knight, 'Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1994), pp. 73–107. On the uneven results of Cárdenas' reform programme, see Adrian Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington DE, 1998); and Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham NC, 2001).

position for Mexico in inter-American relations. Conversely, any incident that sullied the nation's honour, or called into question its claim to hold the moral high ground, undermined this diplomacy.

This article investigates how diplomats reacted to an incident in which a group of Mexican women abroad unsettled the Cárdenas project by presenting a cultural performance that was at odds with the image of the nation which the government wished to portray. The troupe of cabaretistas, who performed in national costumes and played part of the national anthem during their act in Panama, challenged diplomats' ideas about acceptable gendered representations of the nation, calling into question their exclusive right to determine the manner of the revolutionary nation's portrayal abroad. In the preceding years, images of women had gained a central place in diplomats' representations of *mexicanidad*. Drawing on folkloric images of women in film, art and dance, they promoted a particular feminine image, exemplified by the sponsorship of the film *La india bonita* by the Mexican legation in Panama in 1938. The discursive representations of women in this film differed markedly from the image performed at The Alamo. This conflict over who could legitimately represent the nation, and in what manner, provides a view into the construction of Mexico's national image abroad.

An analysis of this conflict contributes to, and makes connections between, several bodies of historical scholarship. Studies of Mexican foreign relations have most often been focused on bilateral relations with the so-called Colossus of the North. Although this tendency began to change with the inclusion of German, French, British and Soviet sources, the discussion of Mexican relations with Latin America remains relatively limited.[7] Moreover, cultural history, while bringing new approaches to bear on diplomatic history, has tended to refocus attention on US–Mexican relations.[8] This article reveals some of the connections between US–Mexican cultural relations and Mexican diplomacy in Latin America. By drawing on the literature regarding 'sex in revolution', analysis of the performance that took place in Panama demonstrates the important role that gender played in this

[7] Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981); Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Albuquerque NM, 1997); Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham NC, 1999). On Mexican–Latin American relations, see Jürgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant: The Making of Mexico's Central America Policy, 1876–1930* (Tuscaloosa AL, 1996); and Pablo Yankelevich, *La revolución mexicana en América Latina: intereses políticos e itinerarios intelectuales* (Mexico City, 2003); *Miradas australes: propaganda, cabildeo y proyección de la Revolución Mexicana en el Río de la Plata, 1910–1930* (Mexico City, 1997); and *La diplomacia imaginaria: Argentina y la Revolución Mexicana, 1910–1916* (Mexico City, 1994).

[8] See, for example, Gilbert M. Joseph et al. (eds.), *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US–Latin American Relations* (Durham NC, 1998).

diplomacy.[9] Images of Mexican women were central to cultural diplomacy and were as common in popular art, tourist literature and music in Latin America as they were in the United States during this period. These were accepted representations of the nation, and Eva Pérez Caro's performance deviated from these established norms.[10] However, an analysis of Pérez Caro's long stage career suggests that she was not the procuress that the diplomats made her out to be. She contributed greatly to the development of modern dance and its use by the Mexican government in representing the nation abroad, as evidenced by her participation in the musical revue *Mexicana*, which was performed in New York as an adjunct to the 1939 World's Fair. In illuminating the connections between performances in New York, Panama and Mexico, this analysis of the construction and promotion of gendered representations also contributes to the literature on cultural production and nationalism.[11]

Indias Bonitas

'¿Cuál es más bonita? LA INDIA PANAMEÑA O LA INDITA MEXICANA?' asked Panamanian newspapers and magazines in September 1938. When *La india bonita* (directed by Antonio Helú, 1938) hit Panamanian theatres, impresarios organised their own India Bonita contests to promote the film and generate ticket sales.[12] Cinemas held contests at screenings of the film, which told a fictionalised version of the beauty contest that had captivated the Mexican public in 1921. In doing so, they enhanced the popularity of images of *mexicanas bonitas* that were common throughout Latin America in film, tourist literature, music and art. The Mexican minister to Panama, Vicente Estrada Cajigal, sponsored the contest and gave a *china poblana* costume to the lucky winner. An examination of the types of activities that diplomats sponsored and the images of women they endorsed gives an indication of the gendered representations of the nation they promoted in the region. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that Mexico was as 'in vogue' in Latin America as it was in the United States, diplomats certainly did their best to make it so.[13] In addition to carrying out their roles in

[9] See, for example, Jocelyn Olcott et al. (eds.), *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham NC, 2006).

[10] See Robert Buffington, 'La "Dancing" Mexicana: Danzón and the Transformation of Intimacy in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2005), pp. 87–108.

[11] See, for example, Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (eds.), *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940* (Durham NC, 2006).

[12] Vicente Estrada Cajigal to SRE, 10 Oct. 1938, p. 15, AHGE-SRE, exp. 30-4-3, IV parte.

[13] Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa AL, 1992).

consular, economic and international affairs, they were at the forefront of a movement to promote Mexican culture and the ideas of the Revolution in the region. Diplomats gave lectures, penned newspaper and magazine articles, presented propaganda films produced by the *Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad* (Autonomous Press and Publicity Department, DAPP), hosted radio programmes, opened art exhibitions, unveiled statues of national heroes and organised educational exchanges. They promoted the Revolution's achievements in agriculture, irrigation and education, undertaking this campaign during a period in which the cultural symbols of the nation were being standardised at home; the image of the nation they projected reflected the results of this process.[14] Although their primary goal was to gain support for Cárdenas' domestic and international policies by demonstrating the great strides he had made in fulfilling the goals of the Revolution, the national image they used in pursuit of this objective included representations of women in its construction. By promoting that image in Latin America through the sponsorship of Mexican films and the promotion of tourism to Mexico, they contributed to its popularisation.

La India Bonita tells the story of Lupita, a beautiful and modest Indian girl who is torn away from her home and the love of her life, Manuel, when Don Joaquín, the worldly son of *hacendado* Don Gonzalo, takes her to Mexico City to participate in the India Bonita contest. Luis, Joaquín's friend and co-worker at *El Universal*, suggests that taking Lupita and her friend Ana María to the city will facilitate their conquest of the young women. Naturally Luis does not count on Lupita's honour, or the comedy of errors that will ensue when her mother Gertrudis confesses to Don Gonzalo that Joaquín and Lupita are actually half-brother and sister. Gertrudis and Don Gonzalo race to the capital to prevent catastrophe, arriving just in time to witness the contest. Lupita's beloved Manuel performs an impromptu love song for the assembled crowd, convincing her of his love and saving her from certain ruin.[15]

Several scholars have examined the construction of national identity in Mexican films of the Golden Age, but the role that these images of the nation played in influencing Mexico's relations with Latin America has yet to be investigated.[16] *La India Bonita* was one of many films that took Latin

[14] On this homogenisation process, see Alex Saragoza, 'The Selling of Mexico, Tourism and the State', in Gilbert M. Joseph et al. (eds.), *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham NC, 2001), pp. 91–115.

[15] I thank the staff of the University of Texas at Austin Library for making this film available to me via inter-library loan.

[16] Laura Podalsky, 'Disjointed Frames: Melodrama, Nationalism, and Representation in 1940s Mexico', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 12 (1993), pp. 57–73; Julia Tuñon, 'Mexico and the Mexican on the Screen: The Construction of an Image', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 10 (1991), pp. 329–39.

America by storm in this period. Mexican films had been gaining popularity throughout the 1930s, and they represented an essential cultural export that popularised images of the nation, and its women, in the region. Hollywood productions were certainly popular in Latin America, as were Argentine films, but the Mexican film industry had begun to gain an edge in the Spanish-language film market that would later be cemented by the discriminatory practices of the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs and the Motion Picture Society of the Americas against the Argentine film industry during the Second World War.[17] Works on the portrayal of Mexican women in film are certainly suggestive of how these gendered performances were constructed, but it is essential to understand that though the ideas may have been formed (and filmed) in Mexico, the images that they projected were also consumed in Latin America.[18] Distribution companies and diplomats alike ensured that these films, and the images of women they presented, reached a wide audience throughout the hemisphere. Mexico's representatives in Latin America commented on these box-office hits in their monthly reports to the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* (Secretariat for External Relations, SRE), and in 1938 Minister Vicente Estrada Cajigal included clippings from local newspapers with advertisements for the films that ran in Panama.[19] The runs

[17] Tamara L. Falicov, 'Hollywood's Rogue Neighbor: The Argentine Film Industry during the Good Neighbor Policy, 1939–1945', *The Americas*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2006), pp. 245–60.

[18] On women in film, see Joanne Hershfield, *The Invention of Dolores del Rio* (Minneapolis, 2000), and *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940–1950* (Tucson AZ, 1996); Julia Tuñon, *Los rostros de un mito: personajes femeninos en las películas de Emilio Indio Fernández* (Mexico City, 2000); and *Mujeres de luz y sombra en el cine mexicano: la construcción de una imágen (1939–1952)* (Mexico City, 1998); and Ana M. López, 'Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema', in John King et al. (eds.), *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London, 1993), pp. 147–63. On the role of film in US–Mexican relations, see Seth Fein, 'Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema', in Joseph et al. (eds.), *Fragments of a Golden Age*, pp. 159–98; 'From Collaboration to Containment: Hollywood and the International Political Economy of Mexican Cinema after the Second World War', in Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel (eds.), *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington DE, 1999), pp. 123–64; 'Everyday Forms of Transnational Collaboration: US Film Propaganda in Cold War Mexico', in Joseph et al. (eds.), *Close Encounters of Empire*, pp. 400–50; and 'Transnationalization and Cultural Collaboration: Mexican Film Propaganda during World War II', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 17 (1998), pp. 105–28. On the same subject, see also Rogelio Agrasánchez, *Mexican Movies in the United States: A History of the Films, Theaters, and Audiences, 1920–1960* (Jefferson NC, 2007); Alex Saragoza, *Mexican Cinema in Cold War America, 1940–1958* (Berkeley CA, 1983); and Laura I. Serna, '"We're Going Yankee": American Movies, Mexican Nationalism, Transnational Cinema, 1917–1935', unpubl. PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006.

[19] For the exhibition of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (directed by Fernando de Fuentes, 1936) in Buenos Aires, see AHGE-SRE, Archivo de la Embajada Mexicana en Argentina (AEMARG), leg, 48, exp. 1. Estrada Cajigal's reports from 1938 include an enormous number of clippings: AHGE-SRE, exp. 30-4-3, X partes.

of several acclaimed Mexican films coincided with the legation's efforts to legitimise Mexico's oil expropriation through propaganda.[20] The annual celebration of the Mexican *fiestas patrias* in Panama took on a fevered pitch in September 1938, the first anniversary of independence since the expropriation. Theatres screened *Nobleza ranchera* (directed by Alfredo del Diestro, 1938) and *Refugiados en Madrid* (directed by Alejandro Galindo, 1938), among others, but the sensation caused by *La india bonita* outdid them all. Using ballots printed in *La Estrella de Panamá* and *El Nuevo Diario*, members of the public chose the Panamanian women who would compete against the India Bonita at gala screenings of the film at the *Teatro Cecilia* in Panama City on 26 September and the *Teatro Colón* in Colón on 12 October.[21]

Just as the original participants in the 1921 contest had contributed to the construction of mexicanidad, the film contributed to the construction of an image of the nation, and Mexican women, that diplomats in Panama were happy to promote.[22] As might be expected, the women who played Lupita and Ana María in the film (Anita Campillo and María Luisa Zea) were not indigenous. Similarly, the finalists for the contest in Panama City were all light-skinned. As well as promoting a particular image of Mexican beauty to Panamanians, the film presented the ideal demure Indian woman. Lupita remained innocent in her relations with men, honourable in her poverty on the hacienda from which she hailed, and incorruptible by the fashions and fun of the metropolis. She longed for home and her sweetheart, Manuel, instead of succumbing to the desires of her urbane suitor. Estrada Cajigal reported to the SRE that his offer to award a china poblana costume to the winner had surely increased the popularity of the contest, and both the film and Estrada Cajigal's gift of the costume popularised Mexican folk images.[23] Just prior to the film's climax, viewers were treated to a montage of folk dances set to regional songs that illustrated the characteristics of women from Juchitán, Taxco and other areas with distinctive cultures. Through the film and the excitement surrounding the contest Panamanians became familiar with officially sanctioned ideas of Mexican beauty and appropriate female

[20] This connection is made explicit in the special issue that the magazine *Social Cine* (published by the newspaper *Panamá América*) dedicated to Mexico. This included several articles about independence, the Revolution and the oil expropriation, as well as articles on film. Advertisements indicate that the company that distributed these films in Panama was the *Distribuidora Hispano Mexicana*: see *Social Cine*, vol. 3, no. 51 (10 Sep. 1938).

[21] 'Hay entusiasmo en Colón por un concurso', *La Estrella de Panamá*, 4 Oct. 1938.

[22] Rick A. López, 'The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 82, no. 2 (2002), pp. 291–328; Apen Ruiz, '"La India Bonita": National Beauty in Revolutionary Mexico', *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2002), pp. 283–301; Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano* (2nd edition, Mexico City, 2003), pp. 171–7.

[23] Estrada Cajigal to SRE, 10 Oct. 1938, p. 15, AHGE-SRE, exp. 30-4-3, IV parte.

behaviour and dress, learning, for example, that the china poblana wore her dark hair braided with the *tricolor*. To thank him for his support of the contest, the organisers dedicated the gala performance at the Teatro Cecilia to Estrada Cajigal.[24] The minister had seen the popularity of the film and the India Bonita Panameña contest as an opportunity to promote Mexican culture and femininity, and included these cultural representations in his broader diplomatic strategy for the promotion of the image of the nation abroad.

Representations of Mexican women in tourist literature played a similar role in popularising officially sanctioned images of women in the region. Several scholars have investigated the role of US tourism in the construction of Mexican national identity.[25] A brief examination of Mexico's efforts to promote its culture and identity in Latin America highlights the pervasiveness of the image presented in *La India Bonita*. By the late 1930s the folkloric image of a smiling *mestiza* woman in regional indigenous costume was used by the *Asociación Mexicana de Turismo* and government publications in packaging the nation for foreign consumption, and this image became the personification of Mexican modernity and hospitality.[26] Although the main goal of the tourism industry was certainly to tap into the highly lucrative US tourist market, reports from diplomats in Latin America indicate that they too attempted to promote tourism and the image of Mexican women this entailed.[27] Literature featuring modest 'indigenous' women welcoming tourists to Mexico certainly reached the region, and by promoting tourism through the use of these brochures, posters and pamphlets, which also pictured the landscape and rural people, diplomats sanctioned and contributed to the role these images had in constructing representations of the nation in Latin America. Like Lupita's character in *La India Bonita*, their beauty hinted at sensuality, but, at least until the end of the Cárdenas presidency, the

[24] 'El lunes será presentada en el Cecilia "La India Bonita"', *La Estrella de Panamá*, 25 Sep. 1938.

[25] Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York, 2006); Eric Zolov, 'Discovering a Land "Mysterious and Obvious": The Renarrativizing of Postrevolutionary Mexico', in Joseph et al. (eds.), *Fragments of a Golden Age*, pp. 234–72; Saragoza, 'The Selling of Mexico', pp. 91–115.

[26] Berger, *Mexico's Tourism Industry*, pp. 93–6. See Berger's analysis of the image that appeared on the cover of the Mexican Tourist Association's 'Mexico – The Faraway Land Nearby' (Mexico City, 1939).

[27] Because of their proximity, Guatemala and Cuba seem to have contributed the largest number of tourists from the region. In 1934–5 the government of Jorge Ubico even tried to deter Guatemalans from visiting Mexico because of the drain on the local economy. On Guatemala, see AHGE-SRE, exp. 34-6-12; on Cuba, see AHGE-SRE, exp. 34-6-18; and on Mexico's participation in the tourism exposition held in Rio de Janeiro in 1935, see AHGE-SRE, exp. 27-26-19.

women were portrayed as being modest.[28] Overtly sexualised images would not have been among those promoted in Latin America because they would have undercut diplomats' desire to represent Mexico as a nation that was achieving modernisation through moral redemption and the implementation of revolutionary reforms.

As part of a broad programme of cultural activities designed to gain support for the Cárdenas government in the region, diplomats promoted a homogenised image of the nation in Latin America. By sponsoring and promoting representations of Mexican women which, like the India Bonita contest, reinforced the gendered construction of mexicanidad, they contributed to its pervasiveness. The SRE controlled this image tightly through diplomatic functions and practice: it managed the issuance of passports and travel permits, it could censor Mexican films before they reached Latin American screens, and it decided which artists, musicians and dancers to patronise. As a result, it had much greater control over the construction of Mexico's image abroad than the government had over the construction of the national image within Mexico itself.[29] Instances in which this image was challenged took on increased importance and urgency for diplomats, both because of their relative rarity and because they challenged the diplomats' control over representations of mexicanidad.

The folkloric images of women that the diplomats promoted represented a far-away and exciting locale to Panamanians, therefore, but they were neither overtly sexualised nor erotic. In that sense they conflicted directly with the image Eva Pérez Caro and her dancers presented at The Alamo in 1940. As Silva and Hernández Velarde watched the sexy cabaret act and saw the women hustle drinks after the performance, they immediately recognised that these were not the modest mexicanas bonitas they wished to have represent their nation, especially in the tense atmosphere of wartime Panama.

The Battle of The Alamo

Following the outbreak of war in Europe, representatives of the American republics met at the Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers held in Panama between 23 and 30 September 1939. Rosenzweig had taken up his post as minister in the Panamanian capital a few months previously, following

[28] Both Dina Berger and Alex Saragoza make a distinction between the periods before and after 1940, when the images of women used in tourist literature became much more sexualised: Berger, *Mexico's Tourism Industry*; Saragoza, 'The Selling of Mexico', pp. 91–115.

[29] Alex Saragoza describes the complex process whereby local representations were subsumed by *lo mexicano* in the government's cultural project in 'The Selling of Mexico', pp. 95–101. On local challenges to the educational programme, see Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson AZ, 1997).

four years as minister in Bolivia.[30] The meeting resulted in the Declaration of Panama, providing for increased naval patrols in the waters adjacent to the Americas. Since the United States controlled the strategically important trans-isthmus waterway and the Canal Zone, this led to a significant build-up of US troops in Panama. The social tensions caused by the mounting numbers of soldiers and sailors were certainly palpable to the staff members of the legation in Panama, who were not pleased to find that Mexican women were among those filling the increased demand created in Panama's entertainment industry. While reconnoitring at The Alamo, Silva and Hernández Velarde spoke with one of the dancers, who reported that prior to leaving for Panama, Eva Pérez Caro had boasted that she was sure to make a pretty penny because she was bringing '*carne de cañón*' for the US fleet. Literally translated as 'cannon fodder', this term may have had a sexual connotation for those involved – but it also hints at the expendability of these women, and what little regard Pérez Caro may have had for them.[31]

Eva Pérez Caro's dancers, in their performances at The Alamo, turned the widely accepted images of Mexican women that diplomats in Panama had promoted during the Cárdenas presidency on their head.[32] They wore the national colours and variations on national costumes, but instead of donning traditional china poblana outfits, they were nearly naked. Instead of braiding long, dark tresses with the tricolor, they wore their hair in short modern bobs.[33] They played the national anthem, but instead of standing to attention, they moved 'scandalously' to the music. Instead of acting the accepted role of the demure india or the modest mestiza, they were '*chicas modernas*', advertising their sexuality in their dances on stage and in their flirtations with the men who bought drinks with them after the show.[34] The erotic performance at The Alamo presented the common symbols of mexicanidad in a sexualised manner that conflicted directly with the image of the nation that its diplomats wished to portray. This was not merely a representation of an exotic, far-away and exciting place for the audience in Panama; it was a sexual performance in a seedy cabaret where alcohol and prostitution contributed

[30] See Rosenzweig's personnel file, AHGE-SRE, exp. 14-22-1, VI partes.

[31] Silva and Hernández Velarde to Rosenzweig, 9 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.

[32] The following description is drawn from Silva and Hernández Velarde's report, as well as contemporary photographs of Eva Pérez Caro. There were no advertisements for or reviews of the performance in *La Estrella de Panamá* or its English version, *The Panama Star & Herald*. This suggests that The Alamo was a particularly low-rent establishment, as prominent theatres and cabarets all regularly took out advertisements for their performances. I thank Ryan Alexander for his assistance in consulting these sources.

[33] See Anne Rubenstein, 'The War on *Las Pelonas*: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924', in Olcott et al. (eds.), *Sex in Revolution*, pp. 57–80.

[34] See Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining* la Chica Moderna: *Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917–1940* (Durham NC, 2008).

to the dangerous mix. The performance at The Alamo threatened diplomats' control over where, how and by whom the nation could be represented.

The diplomats did not find the act any less unsettling because they thought Pérez Caro had tricked the dancers into performing. In their reports on the cabaret performance, the diplomats refer to her dancers variously as 'cabaretistas', '*artistas*' and '*bailarinas*'. They believed that the dancers were trained professionals who were being exploited 'as though they were public women'.[35] Concerned for both Mexico's international reputation and the safety of the women involved, on 11 July 1940 Rosenzweig wrote to General Eduardo Hay, the secretary for foreign relations in Mexico City, to alert Hay to what he saw as an unfolding scandal. He included a copy of the report by Silva and Hernández Velarde and informed Hay that one of the eight dancers had been placed under protection. She had come to the legation to complain that she had been contracted as a dancer but was being forced to perform services that were 'outside her profession'.[36] Before the SRE had received the minister's letter outlining the incident, the legation staff had put Elodia Pía Navarro Garnica on a Japanese steamer destined for Manzanillo.[37] A few days after Navarro's departure on 16 July, Eva Pérez Caro arrived at the legation. She alleged that the dancer had broken her contract, leaving Pérez Caro to pay the substantial debt of US$ 170 that Navarro had left at The Alamo, and demanded that her erstwhile employee be arrested upon arrival in Manzanillo.[38] Pérez Caro's appearance at the legation enabled the staff to investigate the case further: that day, the remaining dancers and their director agreed to make a deposition to Carlos Peón del Valle, the secretary of legation, outlining their side of the story. In the written statement, dated 22 July, Esperanza Leticia Lara, Blanca Rosa Montenegro, Carmen Vora Escobar, María Luisa Revilla Garza, Enriqueta Iglesias and Consuelo Carillo claimed to be wholly satisfied with the treatment they had received from Eva Pérez Caro, Luis Vecchio and the patrons of his establishment. They maintained that they had not been required to act against their will, consume unwanted alcoholic beverages or perform services outside of their contract. Pérez Caro declared that she had undertaken an artistic tour of South America with the express approval of the appropriate Mexican authorities, and the dancers pledged that their travel documents, which had been issued by the SRE, were all in order.[39] Upon inspection of these documents Rosenzweig noticed that the passport of Consuelo Carillo had been falsified, appearing instead to

[35] Silva and Hernández Velarde to Rosenzweig, 9 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.
[36] Rosenzweig to Hay, 11 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.
[37] Rosenzweig to Hay, 17 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.
[38] Rosenzweig to Hay, 23 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.
[39] Memorandum of the statement made by Eva Pérez Caro and company, 22 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.

belong to the sister of one of the other dancers.[40] Nevertheless, their deposition seemed to allay the minister's fears that the women were victims of the so-called white slave trade.

That Rosenzweig would be concerned about the possibility that Mexican women had fallen prey to what was commonly referred to as the white slave trade was not surprising, given the prominence of international efforts to prevent the traffic in women and children in the previous decades – multilateral negotiations in which Mexican diplomats had recently played a strong supporting role.[41] Interestingly, the Mexican legation's attempt to protect the mestiza dancers from the overwhelmingly white US servicemen turned on its head the original racist ideas of European reformers who had feared that white women were being victimised by foreign men.[42] The diplomats' reaction also suggests that they saw it as part of their masculine duty to protect Mexican women both from foreign men and from themselves. Protection of female nationals abroad was tantamount to a 'patriotic gesture' designed to maintain the honour of the male diplomats, and that of the nation, by safeguarding the women's virtue.[43] In his letter to Hay on 23 July, Rosenzweig speculated that the dancers had been so corrupted by the lowlifes with whom they associated at The Alamo that they really did not mind their deplorable treatment. Regardless of their deposition, the minister continued to believe that the dancers at The Alamo were mixed up in the city's seedy nightlife. Nevertheless, he remained sceptical that the women would have agreed to the degrading terms of their employment, and suggested that Pérez Caro's presence during the dancers' interrogation might have coloured their testimony.[44] The ambiguous position of women in Mexican society, viewed as both 'prostitutes and guardian angels', meant that he saw the dancers as both corruptible and potentially corrupting.[45] The flight of Elodia Navarro, and the lurid description that Silva and Hernández Velarde had provided of the entertainment at The Alamo, may have been cause for concern, but the large debt Navarro left also opens up the possibility that, knowing the diplomats' objections to the performance, she

[40] Rosenzweig to Hay, 23 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.

[41] Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, pp. 14–17.

[42] For a discussion of the idea of white slavery as it related to Latin America, see Donna J. Guy, 'Medical Imperialism Gone Awry: The Campaign against Legalized Prostitution in Latin America', in Teresa A. Meade and Mark Walker (eds.), *Science, Medicine, and Cultural Imperialism* (New York, 1991), pp. 79–81.

[43] Donna J. Guy, '"White Slavery", Citizenship, and Nationality in Argentina', in Andrew Parker et al. (eds.), *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York, 1992), p. 202.

[44] Rosenzweig to Hay, 23 July 1940, AHGE-SRE, exp. III-430-4.

[45] William E. French, 'Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 4 (1992), pp. 529–53.

manipulated their masculine (and nationalist) sensibilities in order to evade her obligations and secure a free trip back to Mexico.

The final section of the deposition made by Pérez Caro and her dancers contained a statement of paramount importance to Rosenzweig. In recognition of the concerns of the legation, the women agreed to remove the national anthem from their musical programme. Eva Pérez Caro and her dancers had clearly challenged his idea of what constituted acceptable behaviour and the reverence appropriate to national symbols.[46] Rosenzweig did not mention whether he had asked the women to change the colours of their costumes, but the removal of Mexico's hymn from their cabaret act seemed to satisfy his sense of diplomatic propriety and his sense that Mexico's reputation was being dishonoured through the performance. Rosenzweig and his predecessors had worked hard to establish Mexico's reputation in Panama. Because they usually had a near-monopoly on representations of the nation, they reacted swiftly to Eva Pérez Caro's alternative cultural presentation, neutralising the most salacious aspects of her act. Ultimately, however, they were either unable or unwilling to close down the show and send all of the women back to Mexico. The performances continued, albeit now in a less objectionable manner. Moreover, the possibility that Pérez Caro's cabaret act, however questionable in taste and decorum, had been undertaken as part of a legitimate artistic tour of Latin America cannot be discounted.

Eva Pérez Caro, Mexicana Bonita

The director and choreographer of the performances in Panama, whom Silva and Hernández Velarde had called a notorious madam, does not seem to have been the unsavoury character they made her out to be. Further investigation into her character reveals that her career as a dancer and choreographer had already lasted two decades, and her claim to have official authorisation for her South American tour is in keeping with her many experiences as a cultural representative of Mexico abroad. Although her performances in Panama

[46] In a similar incident, Mexicans in Los Angeles expressed dismay over the inappropriate use of the national anthem when Hollywood starlet Lupe Vélez, a former chorus girl from Mexico City's *Teatro Lírico*, entered a gala at the Chinese Theatre promoting her new film *El Gaucho* (directed by F. Richard Jones, 1928) as the national anthem played: Laura Serna, '"As a Mexican I Feel It's My Duty": Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films, 1922–1930', *The Americas*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2006), pp. 241–2. Evidence of broader concerns regarding the appropriate use of national symbols is also found in the DAPP's publication of works on the national anthem and the flag: Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad, *Himno nacional mexicano y cantos revolucionarios y deportivos* (Mexico City, 1939); Roberto Guzmán Araujo, Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad, *Bandera, dama de seda* (Mexico City, 1944).

conflicted with the image of the nation that the SRE hoped to project, they were a product of her experience of the cultural effervescence that formed an integral part of the Revolution. Through the scattered references to her in secondary and archival sources, we can begin to reconstruct the career of an important contributor to the evolution of dance and its role in representations of Mexico.[47] Although it is impossible to say for certain that Pérez Caro never engaged in prostitution or served as a procuress, it seems highly unlikely.[48] That the diplomats would characterise her as such only underscores the dubious respectability of her profession and the ambiguous position of women in society.

Pérez Caro's place as one of the most important choreographers in Mexico City became assured in 1919 when she taught Anna Pavlova to dance the *jarabe tapatío*. The celebrated Russian ballerina, a member of Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, had come to Mexico to study folk dance, and Pérez Caro choreographed her *Fantasía mexicana*, which debuted that year.[49] Seen as a reference point for the emergence of modern dance in Mexico because the show dignified popular dances and costumes, Pérez Caro was the woman behind Pavlova's phenomenal triumph.[50] Thereafter, Pérez Caro found continued success as a diva in the 1920s, forming a group, Las Hermanas Pérez, with her sisters Celia and Alicia.[51] Suggestive photos from the period show Pérez Caro posing alone, seemingly topless (with a carefully placed sombrero), and with her sisters, scantily clad.[52] Although the women had established careers as professional dancers, eroticism and sensuality were central to the images they presented in their chosen profession, demonstrating the ambiguous place of dancers in early twentieth-century Mexico.

Sometime in 1925 the sisters took their show on the road and began an artistic tour of South America, thus marking the beginning of Pérez Caro's foray into cultural representations of Mexico abroad. Sadly, tragedy broke up the trio in 1926 when Celia died of tuberculosis.[53] Her sisters had her buried

[47] Josefina Lavalle, *En busca de la danza moderna mexicana* (Mexico City, 2002). I thank Mary Kay Vaughan for drawing my attention to this source and for encouraging me to seek out information on Eva Pérez Caro's career as a dancer.

[48] Katherine Bliss graciously offered to check her research notes for references to Eva Pérez Caro and was unable to find any evidence that she had been involved in prostitution.

[49] Alberto Dallal, *La danza en México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City, 1994), pp. 40–5; Pérez Montfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo*, pp. 131–3.

[50] Lavalle, *En busca de la danza*, pp. 30–1.

[51] Dallal, *La danza en México*, p. 31.

[52] Digital copies of these photographs were provided by the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de la Danza José Limon (CENIDI-Danza). The originals can be found in the Fondo Compañía Industrial Fotográfica in the Fototeca at the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

[53] Celia's last dance took place on 14 January 1926 in Santiago de Chile, where she eventually succumbed to the disease on 6 December 1926: Oliverio Toro, 'La última danza sobre la tierra', *Revista de Revistas* (9 Nov. 1930), pp. 36–7.

in Santiago's general cemetery and, after mourning her loss, continued on their tour.[54] Two years later Eva wrote to President Plutarco Elías Calles from New York City, explaining that after three triumphant years touring the Americas and introducing the public to the folkloric masterpieces of Mexico, her costumes and sets had become rather old and tired. She planned to mount an expedition to the *Exposición Ibero-Americana* in Seville, and hoped that in recognition of the important propaganda work she was undertaking the president might be able to provide her with the sum of 5,000 pesos. Fernando Torreblanca, President Calles' private secretary, forwarded her request to Moisés Sáenz, the undersecretary for public education, who responded that the budget for such expenses had already been depleted: this was not surprising given that her request came to his attention a few short months before the end of the Calles presidency.[55] These documents suggest that if Pérez Caro and her sisters had not undertaken their tour of the Americas with the express approval of the government, their activities were at least known to the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP), which, along with the SRE, was in charge of cultural representations of the nation that appeared abroad.

Pérez Caro's vast experience made her a veteran of national dance by the late 1930s. As such, she was invited to be one of the principal choreographers for the 1939 extravaganza of dance and music called *Upa y Apa*, which was sponsored by the SEP and the DAPP.[56] After its debut in Mexico City, the show travelled to New York City under the name *Mexicana*. Pérez Caro choreographed several numbers for the Broadway production, a musical revue which was produced by the *Departamento de Bellas Artes* to coincide with the 1939 World's Fair in New York. After a long and varied career that had taken her all over North and South America and earned her a reputation as an important dancer and choreographer, she lent her services to this high-profile production. It aimed to showcase the national popular culture that had evolved by the late 1930s to the masses assembled in New York for the fair.

Upa y Apa opened in Mexico City on 14 March 1939 to a storm of controversy that only deepened when critical reviews of the production were

[54] The Mexican ambassador to Chile wrote to the SRE in January 1932 that he had received a communication from the cemetery to the effect that Celia's remains were to be removed from their resting place due to non-payment. Eva and Alicia immediately presented themselves at the SRE with a copy of the receipt they had retained that clearly stated that they had paid for her to remain in the cemetery 'in perpetuity'. The ambassador wrote back, apologising on behalf of the cemetery for the regrettable 'clerical error': AHGE-SRE, exp. IV-369-35.

[55] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Obregón–Calles, Caja 261, exp. 805-P-300.

[56] The title loosely translates as 'Whoopee'. 'Mexican Show Girls Join Easter Parade', *New York Times*, 10 April 1939.

uniformly damning.[57] The reviewer for *Excélsior* thought it was so bad that the government should neither sponsor it nor allow it to go abroad as a representative of Mexican popular culture.[58] The review in one arts magazine, *Ilustrado*, was equally negative, calling it at times 'ridiculous and absurd'. One number ended with several *tehuanas* dancing the *huapango*, a mixture of cultural practices that did not accurately represent the canon of folklore that constituted mexicanidad.[59] The controversy surrounding the Mexican debut of *Upa y Apa* demonstrates considerable anxiety over how the show and the image of the nation that it represented would be received abroad. The handbill that was printed for the premiere is prefaced by a justification of the production written by the celebrated playwright and director Celestino Gorostiza, which states that he aimed to bring the praise previously reserved for Mexican painters to popular theatre, elevating the latter to the status of art.[60] In an open letter that was published in several of the capital's daily newspapers, 20 of the participants in the production came out in its defence. The signatories argued that they had assembled the best of what Mexican theatre and dance had to offer, and they hoped that after making some changes it would open to wide acclaim in New York.[61] What they had created in *Mexicana* was their idea of what would best represent the nation. Drawing on their experience of the cultural production of the 1920s and 1930s, they

[57] The production of *Upa y Apa* in Mexico City was fraught with disaster. Celestino Gorostiza of the *Departamento de Bellas Artes* contracted with Sam Spiegel of International Shows Ltd. for the production of the extravaganza. The Austrian-born impresario was paid 160,000 pesos (more than US$ 50,000) to mount the production and take it on the road, but allegations of fraud surfaced when several of the artists' pay cheques were returned due to insufficient funds. Moreover, there were considerable protests against the fact that Bellas Artes had hired a foreigner to produce the show when so many able and out-of-work Mexicans were available to mount the revue: 'Protesta de los actores', *Excélsior*, 13 March 1939, p. 1.

[58] 'Los diecinueve cuadros de Upa y Apa a juicio del cronista', *Excélsior*, 16 March 1939, 2nd section, p. 2.

[59] Marco Aurelio, 'El espectáculo "Upa y Apa" estrenado en el Palacio de Bellas Artes', *Ilustrado*, vol. 21, no. 1142 (10 March 1939), p. 16. I thank Sophia Koutsoyannis for bringing this source to my attention.

[60] Biblioteca de las Artes, Centro Nacional de las Artes (CENART), Colección Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez (CENIDIM), Programas de Mano, *Upa y Apa* (Mexico City, 1939), p. 2.

[61] Eva Pérez Caro was not listed as having supported the document, which was signed only by men, but a celebrated composer, Silvestre Revueltas, who had contributed several pieces to the show, joined in the appeal: 'Los autores, compositores e escenógrafos del "Upa y Apa" hacen defensa su labor', *El Nacional*, 17 March 1939, p. 9. Sam Spiegel would not be among those who presented the new and improved version of the show on Broadway. His company's accounts were frozen following an investigation by the *Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público*, which found that Spiegel had lined his own pockets with money intended for the production. The government was forced to put up additional funds to pay the passages and guarantee the wages of the artists, who after considerable delay left for New York in April: Jorge Piñó Sandoval, 'Cosmópolis', *Excélsior*, 13 April 1939.

constructed a representation of the nation that was firmly rooted in their shared understanding of mexicanidad.

Pérez Caro participated in this vision both as a dancer and as a choreographer.[62] With more than 20 years' experience as a contributor to artistic development, and as an interpreter of its supposed essence for foreign audiences, she was eminently qualified to participate in the production of *Mexicana*. Analysis of the revue suggests that the artists who contributed to it and the government departments which sponsored it intended to present New York audiences with a performance of the folkloric image of the nation which by this period had become standard. Representations of women were essential to the construction of the image of the nation they presented in New York, but, unlike Pérez Caro's cabaret act in Panama, *Mexicana* was performed at a reputable venue for a respectable audience. Because the artists interpreted the revolutionary repertoire of folklore rather than simply performing erotic dances, their performance reinforced rather than challenged the diplomats' control over the image of the nation.

On Broadway Eva Pérez Caro shared the stage with several well-known dancers, including Carmen Molina, already a celebrity because of her roles in *No te engañes, corazón* with Cantinflas (directed by Miguel Contreras Torres, 1937) and *Adiós Nicanor* opposite Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández (directed by Rafael E. Portas, 1937). *Mexicana* received the explicit support of diplomatic representatives, with Consul-General Rafael de la Colina acting as the production's sponsor. Like Estrada Cajigal's promotion of the film *La india bonita* in Panama and the use of folkloric images of women in tourist literature distributed throughout the Americas, this was an image of the nation that the government could, and did, support. The Mexican government, along with other Latin American nations, included representations of women in the image of the nation they promoted in New York, building on practices that had developed since the late nineteenth century, particularly in the context of World's Fairs. Women's participation in the construction of mexicanidad that the government promoted was therefore essential to the image of the nation that it hoped to present.

The coverage that *Mexicana* received in New York suggests the role that dancing girls played in shaping international views of Mexico. After a postponement of several days, the 142-member cast opened the revue at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre on the evening of 21 April.[63] Reviews of the show reveal that the performance was not taken particularly seriously. Nevertheless, unlike those that had marred *Upa y Apa* in Mexico City, they

[62] The handbill lists Pérez Caro as having danced in five of the 19 routines, and having choreographed three.

[63] 'News of the Stage', *New York Times*, 19 April 1939, p. 21; 'Mexico to Present Show This Evening', *New York Times*, 21 April 1939, p. 26.

were generally favourable. This discrepancy in reception and critical opinion might certainly be explained by different subjective positions of the audiences. The *New York Times* dance critic, John Martin, opined that:

> To be sure, those who like their dancing streamlined, speedy and sophisticated in presentation may find the Republic of Mexico not to their taste as theatrical entrepreneur, but there must be hordes of people who can discount all these things with a measure of relief and relish dancing that is simple, flavorsome and fairly reeking with rhythm. If so, the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre will be filled for some time to come, as it roundly deserves to be.
>
> It is perhaps a dubious form of praise to claim 'flavor' for any kind of dancing that has a hint of folk art even remotely associated with it … 'Mexicana', however, succeeds in wearing its folkishness with a difference: its dances reveal a great deal of fine-mettled professional skill, enormous variety and at least one extraordinarily engaging talent.[64]

The engaging talent to whom Martin referred was Carmen Molina, whom he called a 'delight to the eye'. Nevertheless, he referred to the *oaxaqueña*, the dance in which she had starred, as an 'enjoyable piece of lusty tomfoolery'.[65] While Mexican critics had blasted the show for not properly representing national folklore, which they felt might attain the status of high art if interpreted correctly, Martin saw it as merely quaint and charming. Although he praised the show, his reaction could hardly have been that for which the government had hoped in sponsoring the programme. Moreover, it seems as though the public did not relish the 'flavorful' style of *Mexicana*: the revue closed on the evening of 20 May after only 35 performances.[66] Celestino Gorostiza had explained to the press that the revue was intended to 'familiarise Americans with Mexican talent and to serve as an adjunct to the Mexican exhibition at the World's Fair'.[67] It certainly lasted longer and was more successful than it had been in its earlier incarnation as *Upa y Apa*, but it was not the wildly popular propaganda extravaganza that its producers had desired.

The Mexican government was not alone in using dance and song as an integral component of its propaganda efforts in New York. Several Latin American governments attempted to tie the performances of female dancers to the success of their pavilions at the World's Fair.[68] The end of *Mexicana*'s run on Broadway coincided with the arrival in New York of Carmen

[64] John Martin, 'Notes of the Dance World', *New York Times*, 7 May 1939, p. X3.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Internet Broadway Database, www.ibdb.com/production.php?ID=12447, accessed 6 March 2009. Officials reportedly suggested that the show might reopen after some changes were made to the routines, but that does not appear to have occurred: 'Six Shows in City to Close Tonight', *New York Times*, 20 May 1939, p. 16.

[67] 'Mexican Show Girls', p. 18.

[68] The New York World's Fair also included a pavilion that featured 'prohibited Cuban dancers': Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago, 1993), p. 142.

Miranda, the 'Brazilian Bombshell'. Miranda took the city by storm, and her outlandish fashions soon became all the rage on the streets of New York.[69] The Brazilian president, Getúlio Vargas, hoped that her trip would improve Brazil's relations with the United States and maybe even result in an increase in coffee exports.[70] Miranda became the quintessential Latin American 'ambassadress of goodwill' in the United States. Like Eva Pérez Caro she had an extensive history of touring in South America, which undoubtedly prepared her for the role she was to play on Broadway and in Hollywood.[71] In the heady days surrounding her arrival in New York, she was Brazil's most important export.[72] For Brazil, as for Mexico, women performed as an essential component of cultural representations of the nation abroad.

Promoting their understanding of the Revolution and its domestic and international projects constituted one of the primary goals of diplomats during the Cárdenas presidency, and the administration consistently used cultural relations to further this aim. In his examination of Mexican participation in World's Fairs, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo states that the pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition was designed to market 'Mexico's most cosmopolitan product: the Mexican Revolution and its social and cultural surroundings'.[73] For the Cárdenas government, participation in the exposition at New York was part of a broader strategy designed to secure better relations between Mexico and the United States into the future.[74] Analysed

[69] Martha Gil-Montero, *The Brazilian Bombshell: The Biography of Carmen Miranda* (New York, 1989), p. 84.

[70] The story of Miranda's departure from Rio de Janeiro to star in Lee Shubert's production of *The Streets of Paris* (1939), and her subsequent rise to stardom, is well known. Vargas had considered sending her to New York to perform at the opening of the Brazilian pavilion at the World's Fair before Shubert offered her a contract on Broadway: Gil-Montero, *The Brazilian Bombshell*, pp. 69–70.

[71] On Carmen Miranda's experiences in Argentina see Ana Rita Mendonça, *Carmen Miranda foi a Washington* (Rio de Janeiro, 1999), ch. 3. Miranda's films and songs contributed to the homogenisation of Latin American culture in the eyes of the North Americans for whom she performed: see Walter Aaron Clark, 'Doing the Samba on Sunset Boulevard: Carmen Miranda and the Hollywoodization of Latin American Music', in Walter Aaron Clark (ed.), *From Tejano to Tango: Latin American Popular Music* (New York, 2002), pp. 252–76. Accusations that she had become 'Americanised' marred her subsequent performances in Brazil: Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham NC, 2004), pp. 148–50.

[72] Her band's passage to New York was paid for by the Brazilian government, and the band performed at the opening of the Brazilian restaurant at the Fair on 17 May 1939: Gil-Montero, *The Brazilian Bombshell*, p. 70.

[73] Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley CA, 1996), p. 23.

[74] Several authors have shown that ideas of progress, imperialism and modernity have all played important roles in creating the national representations presented at universal expositions: Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The* Expositions Universelles, *Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, 1988); Rydell, *World of Fairs*; Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*.

with particular reference to the other cultural manifestations that often accompanied participation in the World's Fairs, national pavilions can be seen as part of a coherent strategy used to pursue diplomatic goals. The dedication of the Mexican pavilion took place on 27 May 1939. Attended by thousands of spectators, the ceremony featured speeches by Consul-General Rafael de la Colina and the president of the fair, Grover A. Whalen. Before inviting the crowd to explore the two-storey building that housed exhibitions dedicated to the pre-Columbian, colonial and contemporary periods, Colina interpreted history for his audience by presenting Lázaro Cárdenas' policies as the culmination of Mexico's efforts to become an independent, modern and democratic nation.[75] In this respect his speech was typical of the remarks that Mexican diplomats made to commemorate the unveiling of statues, the opening of art exhibitions and the presentation of musical tributes to the nation that occurred throughout this period. The three million fairgoers who visited the pavilion in the summer of 1939 received exposure to Colina's version of Mexican history as well as the message of goodwill embodied in the exhibition.[76]

The New York World's Fair did not generally sponsor off-site events, but several cultural institutions and foreign governments organised events that coincided with it. In both 1939 and 1940 the Mexican government organised events designed to profit from both the increased number of tourists in New York and the increased attention that foreign governments received in the atmosphere of friendly cooperation. In 1939 the Cárdenas government presented *Mexicana* as its adjunct to the fair. In 1940 the administration took advantage of the second season of the fair to gain exposure for the exhibition of Mexican art that Nelson Rockefeller, who was soon to be named head of the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs, organised at the Museum of Modern Art.[77] Both projects can be considered essential components of the government's strategy of participation in the fair and its larger project of cultural diplomacy.[78]

[75] 'Weather Brings Out a Throng of Fairgoers; the Mexican Pavilion is Dedicated', *New York Times*, 28 May 1939, p. 20.

[76] Francisco Sarabia, a Mexican pilot who had recently flown non-stop from Mexico City to New York, also spoke at the event, calling his journey one of goodwill: *ibid.*

[77] On the exhibition see AHGE-SRE, exp. III-413-19. As president of the Museum of Modern Art and a charter member of the New York World's Fair, Rockefeller understood the publicity opportunity that the fair represented: Francis Edmonds Tyng, *Making a World's Fair: Organization, Promotion, Financing and Problems, with Particular Reference to the New York World's Fair of 1939–1940* (New York, 1958), p. 115. The Museum of Modern Art also hosted an exhibition of the work of Brazilian painter Cândido Portinari: see Museum of Modern Art, *Portinari of Brazil* (New York, 1940).

[78] James Oles, 'For Business or Pleasure: Exhibiting Mexican Folk Art, 1820–1930', in Susan Danly (ed.), Casa Mañana: *The Morrow Collection of Mexican Popular Arts* (Albuquerque NM, 2002), pp. 11–30.

What becomes clear through the examination of the musical revue to which Eva Pérez Caro contributed in New York is that female performers were essential to the representation of the nation abroad. In his analysis of the American International Expositions, Robert Rydell highlights the role that eroticism played in World's Fairs.[79] Among the most successful of the entertainments at the Great Exhibitions were the erotic shows of scantily clad female dancers, the foremost of whom was 'the fantabulous' Sally Rand, whose nearly-nude fan dance at the 1933 Chicago Century-of-Progress Exposition shocked and thrilled fairgoers.[80] The precedent of Rand's entertainments cast a long shadow over Flushing Meadows, where the New York fair was held, and explains in part why the Mexican and Brazilian governments included female performers in the cultural events they sponsored. Nevertheless, *Mexicana* did not include erotic numbers akin to Sally Rand's fan dance. Instead, the women performed the jarabe tapatío, the oaxaqueña and other dances that were part of the folkloric canon. In creating images of the nation that they wished to promote abroad, the government sponsored events that contributed to the overall goal of representing Mexico as a revolutionary nation engaged in positive social reform, even in the titillating environment of New York City. As a result it was important that they maintain control over the image of the nation being represented. Folk dances were seen as non-threatening because they were not overtly sexual. Pérez Caro's contributions to *Mexicana*, unlike her act in Panama, were consistent with the image of the nation that diplomats promoted in tourist literature, film, music and art throughout the Cárdenas presidency.

Suffering from Sobriety

Although diplomats promoted mexicanidad abroad through gendered performances, the images of women they sponsored were not erotic. The images they did promote supported their diplomatic strategy of presenting Mexico as a leader in Latin America by virtue of its revolutionary social and economic policies. In the period of revolutionary reconstruction, these policies emphasised sobriety and propriety. The image of morality that

[79] Rydell analyses the famous Midway at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, where fairgoers could ride the Ferris wheel, purchase refreshments and see 'hootchy-kootchy' dances: Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 60–71.

[80] Rydell, *World of Fairs*, pp. 136–7. For the second season of the fair in 1934, Rand upped the ante and danced in a custom-designed giant bubble. Rand's brand of eroticism became a feature of expositions throughout the United States, sometimes clashing with the wholesome family environment that fair organisers hoped to provide for their patrons: Matthew F. Bokovoy, *The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwestern Memory, 1880–1940* (Albuquerque NM, 2005), pp. 219–21.

diplomats protected from the subversion posed by Pérez Caro's cabaret act at The Alamo in Panama derived not only from strategic diplomatic considerations, but also from the intimate connections between revolutionary nationalism and the reformist zeal of the times. Mexico's capital city was not yet the cosmopolitan centre it would become just a few years later: swanky nightclubs such as Ciro's had yet to open, and the exciting floor shows of the 1940s were not part of the social experience. Although a culture of vice had long existed on the US–Mexican border, reformers tried to shield Mexico City, the seat of revolutionary reconstruction and state-building, from the pernicious influences of gambling, drinking and sex, hoping to save the lower classes from themselves.[81] The restrictions placed on the entertainment industry in Mexico City in the late 1930s may have been one of the motivating circumstances behind Pérez Caro's decision to embark for Panama, where the zona de tolerancia continued to thrive. The culture of morality that these restrictions exemplified also explains, in part, the strong reactions of the Mexican diplomats who witnessed her dancers' performance.

After returning to Mexico from her run on Broadway, Pérez Caro seems to have fallen on hard times. Throughout his presidency Lázaro Cárdenas undertook a series of anti-alcohol and anti-gaming initiatives that drastically affected life in the capital.[82] The anti-vice movement endorsed by the teetotal president changed the atmosphere of the entertainment industry in Mexico City.[83] Cabarets and other establishments associated with prostitution were closed by government clean-up campaigns designed to protect women from the possible descent into vice that these places represented. Women were also banned from patronising or working in establishments that served alcohol, because it was believed they would use their sexuality to entice men to drink. Women were viewed somewhat ambiguously, as both in need of protection and potentially dangerous to the nation. In May 1939, while Pérez

[81] See Eric Michael Schantz, 'All Night at the Owl: The Social and Political Relations of Mexicali's Red-Light District, 1913–1925', *Journal of the Southwest*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2001), pp. 549–602; and 'From the "Mexicali Rose" to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States–Mexico Border, 1910–1965', unpubl. PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.

[82] See Gretchen K. Pierce, 'Parades, Epistles and Prohibitive Legislation: Mexico's National Anti-Alcohol Campaign and the Process of State-Building, 1934–1940', *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2009), pp. 151–80; and 'Sobering the Revolution: Mexico's Anti-Alcohol Campaigns and the Process of State-Building, 1910–1940', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2008. Also see Ben Fallaw, 'Dry Law, Wet Politics: Drinking and Prohibition in Post-Revolutionary Yucatán, 1915–1935', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2001), pp. 37–64.

[83] On women's participation in the temperance movement, see Stephanie Mitchell, '*Por la liberación de la mujer*: Women and the Anti-Alcohol Campaign', in Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (eds.), *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953* (Lanham MD, 2007), pp. 165–86.

Caro was still in New York, the *Departamento de Salubridad Pública* began to close down Mexico City's zonas de tolerancia in anticipation of the abolition of the *Reglamento para el Ejercicio de la Prostitución* that had governed the trade since 1926. Prostitution became illegal on 14 February 1940, and a whole host of businesses that had thrived because of official tolerance towards it suffered.[84]

Although there is no evidence that Eva Pérez Caro was the madam that Silva and Hernández Velarde considered her to be, as a by now middle-aged entertainer she would have been adversely affected by these measures, especially since the changes seem to have coincided with a slump in attendance at the theatre. The contemporary guidebooks of Anita Brenner, Frances Toor and T. Philip Terry all agreed that Mexico City nightlife was nothing to write home about.[85] In the 1940s guides to the city painted a different picture, one filled with fancy hotels, supper clubs, big bands, floor shows and a wide selection of more risqué establishments where visiting tourists and the rising middle and upper classes could 'slum'. These developments had to await the lifting of the almost puritanical atmosphere that pervaded the city during the Cárdenas presidency. In the name of revolutionary reform, the federal and municipal governments implemented a broad programme of legislation designed to inculcate sobriety and propriety in the capital. These reforms put many women in the entertainment industry out of work, and Pérez Caro did not escape their effects. She had written to President Cárdenas once before, and in 1940 she sent an apparently tongue-in-cheek invitation to the rather strait-laced president inviting him to a tribute performance.[86]

Friends and colleagues organised this homage to Pérez Caro, the 'applauded artist' who was by now a veteran of the stage, in February of that year.[87] The gala event, held at the *Cine Roma* in Mexico City, included six hours of entertainment presented by some of the best performers in the capital, many of whom had also starred in *Upa y Apa/Mexicana*, all for the price of a one-peso admission fee.[88] After a four o'clock showing of the film *Carmen, la de Triana* (directed by Florián Rey, 1938), starring Imperio

[84] Cabarets were closed in 1931 under the Mexico City *Reglamento de Cafés Cantantes, Cabarets y Salones de Baile*, and again in 1937 under the *Departamento de Salubridad Pública*: Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, pp. 173–5, 197, 201–5.

[85] Dina Berger, 'A Drink between Friends: Mexican and American Pleasure Seekers in 1940s Mexico City', in Nicholas Dagen Bloom (ed.), *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism beyond the Border* (Lanham MD, 2006), pp. 13–34.

[86] Ten years after requesting assistance from Calles, Pérez Caro wrote to President Cárdenas requesting a meeting: Eva Pérez Caro to Cárdenas, 4 Feb. 1938, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, caja 32, exp. 111/2258.

[87] 'Cine Roma Mañana', *El Universal*, 27 Feb. 1940, p. 8.

[88] 'Cine Roma Hoy', *El Universal*, 28 Feb. 1940, p. 8.

Argentina, more than 30 of Pérez Caro's friends and colleagues took the stage and performed in her honour.

Pérez Caro wrote to Cárdenas to say she intended to dedicate her homage to him.[89] In the short letter she attached to the formal invitation and handbill she asked whether Cárdenas remembered her father, Agustín Pérez, who had served the government of Michoacán for many years, or her brother, Coronel Pérez Caro. In so doing she established her credentials as the daughter and sister of honourable participants in the Revolution who hailed from the president's home state. In the letter she called the homage a 'benefit' that her friends and colleagues had organised for her because of the great difficulty in which she found herself due to lack of work. She closed by naming herself among Cárdenas' most fervent admirers. Pérez Caro may indeed have hoped that the president would attend the affair, but it is more likely that she wanted to draw his attention to the fact that many women, who believed themselves to be completely honourable, had been put out of work when the cabarets had closed.[90] The handbill she sent to the president along with her invitation exhorted the public to cooperate in the *Campaña Pro-Limpieza de la Ciudad.* Ironic or not, her letter employed many of the tropes seen in the myriad petitions Cárdenas received from *ejidatarios*, factory workers, professionals and prostitutes during his time in office.[91] She, like those others, appealed to the office of the presidency in the belief that Cárdenas could help her, just as he had the landless farmers of La Laguna and the exploited oil workers of El Aguila. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that Cárdenas attended Pérez Caro's homage, and when further assistance did not appear to be forthcoming she must have decided to go abroad once again.

The example of Sally Rand may have been present in Pérez Caro's mind when she made this decision. In April 1940 Rand had visited Mexico City. In addition to performing her show at the *Teatro Folies Bergère*, Rand and 20 of her dancers participated in a huge fashion show sponsored by the *Cervecería Cuauhtémoc* in Chapultepec Park on 2 April, the anniversary of Puebla's

[89] Eva Pérez Caro to Cárdenas, s/f [1940], AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, caja 32, exp. 111/2258.

[90] On declarations of honour among prostitutes and other women workers, see Bliss, *Compromised Positions*; Pierce, 'Sobering the Revolution'; Guy, *Sex and Danger*; Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourse and Material Conditions, 1879–1931* (Tucson AZ, 2003); Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Durham NC, 2000); Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil's Industrial Working Class, 1900–1955* (Durham NC, 1993); Margareth Rago, *Os prazeres da noite: prostituição e códigos da sexualidade feminina em São Paulo (1890–1930)* (São Paulo, 1991).

[91] The wording of Pérez Caro's appeal is similar to that of the 'daughters of disgrace' analysed in Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, pp. 1–7; see also María del Carmen Nava Nava, *Los abajo firmantes: cartas a los presidentes, 1934–1946* (Mexico City, 1994).

recapture from the French in 1867.[92] Rand was an impresario who was noted for her independence. Although the Mexican government had remained firmly in control of the image of the nation and the women who participated in its presentation in New York, Rand's phenomenal reception may have influenced Pérez Caro to think that, after gaining travel permission, she might be able to mount an independent cultural presentation free of the direct control of the government. She embarked on her tour of South America, with eight dancers in her charge, a few months after Rand's tour de force and the declaration of honour she had made to President Cárdenas. She fled the stifling confines of Mexico City during this period of revolutionary nationalism. A veteran of the stage who found her opportunities limited by the lack of work in Mexico City's cabarets, she knew from her previous travels that going abroad might be a good business venture. Pérez Caro soon found herself in Panama City, where the cabarets in the city's zona de tolerancia were booming, catering to the influx of US servicemen. The staff of the Mexican legation, who had so much invested in the image of the nation they portrayed in their cultural relations with Latin America, were not prepared for her challenge to their diplomatic project.

Remember The Alamo!

When Pérez Caro arrived in Panama, she used the images of Mexico that she had become accustomed to employing in her many previous cultural performances. In choosing to use the costumes, colours and representations of women that appeared in tourist propaganda, film and art, she drew on the earlier efforts of Mexican diplomats and the extensive stock of folkloric images that had become pervasive in this period. As a performer and entrepreneur she also had an idea of what would 'sell': during this era, images of women sold vacation packages, fashion accessories, cigarettes and alcohol, and as an astute businesswoman she had no qualms about using them to sell tickets to her show or *fichas* for the owner of The Alamo. The difference in her use of these images in Panama was their overt eroticism. The objectification of women lay just below the surface in the types of glossy tourist magazines and posters that carried images of the china poblana. It also figured in the experience of the dancers who had participated in *Mexicana* as an adjunct to the pavilion at the World's Fair in New York. Regardless of the fact that Pérez Caro's representation of the nation drew on a common stock of images, once she inserted an overt sexual discourse into these images they

[92] 'Sally Rand tomará parte en la Fiesta de Cuauhtémoc', *Excélsior*, 10 April 1940, pp. 1, 4. Fashion shows were typical of the commodification of women at the New York World's Fair: Rydell, *World of Fairs*, pp. 143–6.

became unacceptable to diplomats. At the disreputable location of The Alamo in Panama, Pérez Caro's show seemed extremely harmful to Mexico's reputation to diplomats who were steeped in the propriety of revolutionary nationalist culture and unaware of her long experience on the stage. Even if they had been aware of her experience as a dancer and choreographer, they surely would have objected strenuously to the way in which she and her dancers represented their nation to an audience of rather unsavoury characters in the tense atmosphere of wartime Panama City.

Artistic performances that were both under and outside the direct control of diplomats called into question the image of a scrupulously moral and progressive revolutionary nation that diplomats attempted to portray in order to claim leadership in international relations. The comments that Silva and Hernández Velarde made about the depravity of US soldiers and sailors, and their disinclination to have Mexican women provide them with entertainment, appear hypocritical given that Bellas Artes and the SRE had funded and organised a musical revue that enabled the perpetuation of stereotypes of Mexican women before New York audiences, but the character of the audience was as important as that of the performance. The Forty-Sixth Street Theatre where Pérez Caro performed *Mexicana* was a reputable venue that had seen the debuts of such memorable musicals as Cole Porter's *Panama Hattie* and *Anything Goes*.[93] The Alamo, on the other hand, was a cheap nightclub that contemporary observers considered a den of prostitution and vice. While it was acceptable for them to entertain fair-goers in New York, the dancers were degraded if they performed for common soldiers. The differences between Forty-Sixth Street and Panama's wartime zona de tolerancia were simply too great for the performances to be received in the same manner, even had the message remained the same. The diplomats' shock at seeing Pérez Caro's show is therefore explained in part by the location, one that permitted prostitution, and the reputation of the US soldiers and sailors who frequented the cabaret. The performances at The Alamo were also racier than those that the Mexican government sponsored on Broadway. The sensuality of *Mexicana* was not lost on its audience in New York, as the review of the production by the *New York Times* writer who was partial to Carmen Molina indicates, but in the less controlled environment of a cabaret in Panama, where alcohol flowed freely, Pérez Caro's performance took on even more erotic tones. The dancers' costumes were provocative and their moves suggestive, and it became more difficult for diplomats to control the sexuality of the performers.

[93] Internet Broadway Database, www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=1028 and www.ibdb.-com/production.php?id=9382, accessed 6 March 2009.

In addition to the varying sexual content of the shows in New York and Panama, another difference was that the show at The Alamo was organised by a woman who operated beyond the direct control of the male diplomats responsible for constructing Mexico's national image in Panama. By presenting a performance that portrayed Mexico and its women in a manner that conflicted with the diplomats' conception of revolutionary nationalism, Pérez Caro challenged their masculine prerogative to construct the image of Mexico abroad. Even though hers was an erotic dance show performed for profit, the image of the nation she and her dancers performed in Panama was rooted in their shared understanding of the Revolution and what she perceived as her honourable contribution to its artistic achievements. Nevertheless, it challenged the established practices of diplomacy in Panama, because it turned on its head the cultural repertoire of mexicanidad promoted in film, tourist literature, art and music by sexualising it. These were not the modest women of *La india bonita* or the smiling chinas poblanas of a government-produced tourist brochure. For statesmen who had staked their diplomatic project on an image of the nation that represented its revolutionary social and economic policies, in part, through gendered performances of national identity, this constituted a challenge. Pérez Caro's performances abroad had been considered legitimate by the government when they conformed to the folkloric canon of mexicanidad and occurred under diplomatic control, but when she struck out on her own with an erotic cabaret act, she was no longer acceptable as a representative of the nation. Suspected of procurement and portrayed as a participant in the white slave trade, Pérez Caro relented and removed the national anthem from her programme, but the show went on.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo examina la promoción de la imagen nacional de México en las Américas durante el periodo de Cárdenas, utilizando como punto de partida un escándalo surgido del espectáculo en 1940 de bailarinas mexicanas en un cabaret en Panamá. Los diplomáticos mexicanos encontraron la presentación como objetable debido a que chocaba con la imagen utilizada por ellos de las mujeres en sus esfuerzos por levantar la reputación del país en el extranjero. Al investigar tales esfuerzos, así como la carrera de Eva Pérez Caro quien era la directora del grupo de bailarinas, el artículo contribuye a nuestro entendimiento de la relación entre el género, el espectáculo cultural y el nacionalismo, y el papel que esto jugó en las relaciones exteriores mexicanas.

Spanish keywords: Cárdenas, baile, diplomacia, género, relaciones interamericanas, relaciones exteriores mexicanas, nacionalismo

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo examina a promoção da imagem nacional do México nas Américas durante a era Cárdenas, tomando como ponto de partida um escândalo decorrente da apresentação de dançarinas mexicanas em cabaré panamenho. Por esta desafiar a imagem da mulher mexicana que promoviam ao tentarem elevar a reputação mexicana no exterior, diplomatas mexicanos opuseram-se à performance. Ao investigar estes empenhos e a carreira de Eva Pérez Caro, líder do grupo de dançarinas, o artigo contribui para o nosso entendimento da relação entre gênero, as performances culturais e o nacionalismo, e o papel desempenhado por estes elementos nas relações internacionais do México.

Portuguese keywords: Cárdenas, dança, diplomacia, gênero, relações inter-americanas, relações internacionais mexicanas, nacionalismo