Guadalupan Diplomacy in *Tepeyac* (Mexico, José Manuel Ramos, Carlos E. Gonzáles, and Fernando Sáyago, *1917*)

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Abstract: The campaign against motion pictures deemed "immoral" during the silent film era is well-known. However, this essay examines a film that constitutes an attempt to introduce religious themes into the political sphere—the Mexican production *Tepeyac* (1917)—that narrates the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego. Focusing on the film's *mise en abyme* structure and inspired by scholarship surrounding twentieth-century Mexico's power struggles with the Catholic Church, I read *Tepeyac* against the backdrop of the ratification of Mexico's 1917 Constitution and, more broadly, *vis-à-vis* the ideological conflicts that characterized the Mexican Revolution. Thus, the article illustrates how motion pictures were also harnessed to promote religious thought against the specter of anti-Catholicism and anticlericalism.

Keywords: Guadalupanism, diplomacy, nationalism, Mexico, *Tepeyac.*

Diplomacia guadalupana en *Tepeyac* (México, José Manuel Ramos, Carlos E. Gonzáles y Fernando Sáyago, *1917*)

Resumen: Ya se ha estudiado bastante la campaña contra las películas consideradas 'inmorales' durante la era del cine mudo. Sin embargo, este ensayo examina una película que constituye un intento de introducir la religión en la esfera política: la producción mexicana *Tepeyac* (1917), que narra la aparición de la Virgen de Guadalupe ante Juan Diego. Centrándome en la estructura de puesta en abismo del film e inspirándome en los estudios en torno a las luchas de poder del México del siglo XX con la Iglesia Católica (Jürgen Buchenau y David Dalton, Matthew Butler, Rebecca Janzen), examinaré *Tepeyac* en el contexto de la ratificación de la Constitución mexicana de 1917 y, más ampliamente, frente a los conflictos ideológicos que caracterizaron a la Revolución Mexicana. Así, el artículo muestra cómo el cine también servía para promover el pensamiento religioso frente al espectro del anticatolicismo y el anticlericalismo.

Palabras clave: Guadalupanismo, diplomacia, nacionalismo, México, *Tepeyac.*

Diplomacia guadalupana en *Tepeyac* (México, José Manuel Ramos, Carlos E. Gonzáles e Fernando Sáyago, 1917)

Resumo: A campanha contra filmes considerados 'imorais' durante a era do cinema mudo já foi estudada extensivamente. No entanto, este ensaio examina um filme que constituiu a introdução da religião na esfera política: a produção mexicana *Tepeyac* (1917), que narra a aparição da Virgem de Guadalupe a Juan Diego. Com foco na estrutura de *mise en abyme* do filme e inspirando-me em estudos sobre as lutas de poder do México do século XX com a Igreja Católica, examinarei *Tepeyac* no contexto da ratificação da Constituição mexicana de 1917 e, de forma mais ampla, diante dos conflitos ideológicos que caracterizaram a Revolução Mexicana. Assim, o artigo mostra como o cinema também serviu para promover o pensamento religioso contra o espectro do anticatolicismo e do anticlericalismo.

Palavras-chave: Guadalupanismo, diplomacia, nacionalismo, México, *Tepeyac.*

Introduction

As scholars of cinema have shown, in Mexico, throughout Latin America, and beyond, the relatively rapid influx and immense popularity of films during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fostered a lively debate as to the moral character of both silent and sound cinema.[1] Mexico, a profoundly Catholic country that was experiencing a tremendous leap into modernity during film's first moments, provides a unique case study of how silent cinema was received and the ethical discussions that ensued.[2] Case in point is an article published in the February 1914 edition of *Cosmos*, a monthly magazine from Mexico. In "Crónica mensual," the magazine suggests that, even after growing pains, the fan base for films had become enthusiastic: "En México el gusto por el 'cine' se ha extendido ampliamente…el cine ha conquistado público, ha arraigado por decirlo así, y no hay peligro por ahora de que desaparezca."[3] Yet, cinema's ascendance aroused a bevy of critiques entailing the immorality of productions, places, and reception. In a tract from 1919, Salvador Alvarado Rubio (1880-1924), a general and politician who fought in the Mexican Revolution, refers to movie houses as an "agencia de corrupción"[4]. The ethical nature

[1] During the Porfiriato, cinema "había escandalizado al clero mexicano", REYES, Aurelio de los. *Los orígenes del cine mexicano (1896-1900)*. Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983, p. 132, thus providing grounds for the passage of censorship laws. Also see HERSHFIELD, Joanne, and David Maciel. *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. New York: SR Books, 1999, p. 61. Also see REY, Antonia del. *El cine mudo mexicano: Tribulaciones de una industria emergente*. Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Episteme: Centro de Semiótica y Teoría del Espectáculo, 1996.

[2] Movie houses "performed symbolic labor" emerging as symbols of modernity, civilization, and structured, progressive nationalism, SERNA, Laura Isabel. *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 58. In a similar vein, we are reminded that no one less than Porfirio Díaz "had quickly grasped the efficacy of the new audio-visual medium …when, in 1895 cinema arrived in Mexico", NOBLE, Andrea. *Mexican National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 51. Finally, for a general history of Mexican silent film, see GARCÍA RIERA, Emilio, et al. *Breve historia del cine mexicano: Primer Siglo, 1897-1997*. Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía; Ediciones Mapas, 1998.

[3] "Crónica mensual," *Cosmos. Magazine mensual*, t.IV, II, n. 24, Feb. 1914,

[4] ALVARADO, Salvador, and Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana. *La reconstrucción de México: Un mensaje a los pueblos de América*. México D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1919, p. 232. Such criticism of film also originated in other countries. For example, see DRENNAN, Max. "The Cinema and Its Dangers," *The Irish Monthly*, v. 45, n. 524, 1917, pp. 74–82.

of cinema was undoubtedly one of the cultural questions of the moment; as an article published in Mexico in 1912 wonders: "¿El cine es un espectáculo moral?"[5]

This essay analyzes a film that integrated religious themes into the realm of politics —*Tepeyac*—a Mexican production from 1917 that depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance to Juan Diego. By examining the film's *mise en abyme* structure and drawing on historical scholarship related to the power struggles between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government in the twentieth century,[6] I contextualize *Tepeyac* within the framework of the ratification of Mexico's 1917 Constitution and more generally, the ideological conflicts inherent in the Mexican Revolution. Thus, this article illustrates how film promotes religious beliefs in the face of anti-Catholicism and anticlericalism. In this way, the essay also extends the work of David Brading, who sees the importance of the Virgin Mary in Mexico not only in terms of her religious role, but in how she was reimagined to reflect Mexico's changing society.[7] *Tepeyac* re-signifies the religious figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a catalyst for felicitous relations among Mexicans and foreign nations.

Revolutionary Mexico's Religious and Political Crisis

Intense upheaval marked Mexico following Porfirio Díaz's flight from the country in late May 1911. The Mexican Revolution (1911-1917), lasting many years, saw various factions battling for land reform, social justice, and civil liberties. The insurrection catalyzed profound cultural and political changes, leading to ratification of the 1917 Constitution, which established landmark reforms in land distribution, labor rights, and education. How can we understand the role of silent film in Mexico at this time?

[5] Ultimately, the article proposes a middle ground: "El cine es un espectáculo moral, pero suceptible de corromperse, como todos los espectáculos", "El triunfo de los cines," *Cosmos*, v. 2, I, n. 7, September 1912.
[6] See BUCHENAU, Jürgen, and David S. Dalton (eds.). *Anti-Catholicism in the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1940*. Albuquerque N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 2024; BUTLER, Matthew. *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, and JANZEN, Rebecca. *Unholy Trinity: State, Church, and Film in Mexico*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021.
[7] See BRADING, David A. *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*. Cambridge: Centre of Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge, 1985, and BRADING, David A. *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Even as some pundits, politicians, and religious leaders decried cinema as a corrupting influence, others understood films as a moralizing force. Such was a debate from an article published in Mexico's *Revistas de Revistas* in 1916, after Pope Benedict XV rejected a camera crew's request to film inside the sanctimonious Vatican walls (fig. 1).[8] As reported in *The New York Times* on April 22, 1916, Pope Benedict XV vetoed Cardinal Merry del Val's plan to allow American film operators to record Holy Week ceremonies at St. Peter's Basilica, despite the film company's offer of several thousand dollars toward restoring the basilica's marble floor.[9] Amid these debates, how did directors employ religious plots and imagery in Mexican silent film? How did directors activate cinema during the Mexican Revolution—this conflictive, transformative moment—for the purposes of defining the spiritual character of the Mexican nation-state?

6.—Revista de Revistas. Através del Mundo Domingo 30 de Julio de 1916.

El Cinematógrafo en el Vaticano

He aquí cómo describe el corresponsal italiano de un gran periódico de Sudamérica, la entrada del cinematógrafo al Vaticano. Como se sabe, la casa del sucesor de San Pedro nunca se abre a los ojos profanos.

El Vaticano ha sido siempre, por antigua tradición, una roca cerrada al objetivo fotográfico.

El que entra en San Pedro, debe dejar su máquina fotográfica a la puerta.

Si alguno, por casualidad, consigue penetrar en el templo con un pequeño aparato, y lo saca durante una ceremonia, los gendarmes acuden y le secuestran la máquina. Para recuperarla, necesita darse algunas molestias. León XIII no era benévolo con el objetivo. Su fotógrafo, un sujeto poco emprendedor, que habría podido acumular una fortuna, en poco tiempo, no consiguió obtener sino pocas fotografías interesantes.

Pío X, resignado, posó centenares de veces.

Benedicto XV, que un tiempo fué un hábil aficionado, al principio de su pontificado permitió que varias máquinas enfocasen su gabinete de trabajo; pero luego dijo: "¡Basta!" Y hoy, solamente al fotógrafo pontificio le es permitido tomar vistas en el templo, lo cual, naturalmente, le proporciona bonitas ganancias.

Este año, durante las fiestas de Pascua, ocurrió un hecho extraño, nuevo, respecto del cual se discute todavía. El cinematógrafo logró pasar las puertas de San Pedro.

—¡Horror!—exclamaron algunos.

—Después de todo, ¿qué hay en ello de malo?—respondieron los modernistas.

El hecho es que, ahora, éstos se encuentran vencidos, porque el Papa ha hecho arrojar al invasor cinematógrafo...

Cuentan, en efecto, las crónicas que el Domingo de Ramos, tres aparatos funcionaban para fijar en la ceremonia, y que no había ningún mal en ello.

Continuó, pues, la ceremonia; y los canónigos se vieron bajo el fuego inflexible de tres objetivos, lo que acabó de indignarles.

Varios de ellos huyeron a la sacristía, en señal de silenciosa protesta contra la autorización dada por el cardenal Merry del Val a varias firmas norteamericanas para que reprodujeran en el film a sus venerables colegas en pleno ejercicio de sus funciones. El Papa concluyó por dar la razón a los canónigos, y ordenó que en adelante no se acordara permiso alguno a *operadores* cinematográficos. Al mismo tiempo, vedó a las casas norteamericanas que no exhibieran las cintas que habían impreso.

Y a propósito de cinematografía, quiero recordar un episodio curioso, desarrollado en la plaza de San Pedro, cuando se hacían las primeras tentativas cinematográficas.

Una mañana de abril, una casa cinematográfica organizó, con actores y comparsas, un cortejo cardenalicio en la plaza de San Pedro, teniendo como fondo la columnata Berniniana de la Basílica Vaticana. Estaban tan bien *trucados* los prelados que aparecían en lujosos automóviles y berlinas, como los agentes de policía y los carabineros de guardia en la plaza Rusticucci, habiendo notado la presencia de algunos cardenales, se cuadraron y presentaron armas. Entretanto, los suizos del Vaticano formaban la gran guardia en la Puerta de Bronce.

Pero poco después se descubrió que se trataba de actores y de comparsas cinematográficas. Y como es prohibido fotografiar la columnata de Bernini, el comisario del barrio hizo arrestar a los prelados y cardenales. Los actores fueron invitados a despojarse de las sagradas vestiduras, y el film fué secuestrado.

A propósito de lo anterior, consignamos lo que el mismo corresponsal dice acerca del Papa y la guerra:

El Papa se ocupa mucho de la guerra actual. Lee los diarios ávidamente; está en contacto con personas influyentes del "mundo negro"; recibe el diario a personajes autorizados; pregunta, escucha, indaga.

De carácter austero, autoritario, no se deja influenciar fácilmente. Sigue su idea fija y espera el momento oportuno para intervenir. Entretanto, hace recomendar a los católicos de todo el mundo que respeten la más escrupulosa neutralidad. Escribe también en el "Osservatore Romano", que tiene para él ser el órgano del Vaticano.

"La Santa Sede—ha dicho ese diario—a todo interés, antepone su misión de paz y caridad entre todos los pueblos de la tierra, sin distinción de razas ni religiones.

"Aun entre el fragor de las armas y entre los horrores de la guerra, los católicos nunca podrán perder de vista la gran responsabilidad que pesa sobre ellos; jamás olvidarán que, sobre las aspiraciones más legítimas del sentimiento patriótico, debe ponerse siempre el interés general de la Iglesia y de la humanidad, recordando siempre que son discípulos de Aquel que, aun en medio de los espasmos de su acerba pasión, no tenía palabras de amargura ni odio para sus verdugos y moría perdonando a sus propios enemigos."

Retrato de Benedicto XV, por Bernard.—El cine operando tras un órgano.—Palcos cardenalicios en la plaza de San Pedro, arrestados por la policía.

Figure 1. "El cinematógrafo en el Vaticano." *Revistas de revistas*, 30 July, 1916, p. 6. The article describes the Vatican's evolving view of cinematography. Courtesy of Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México.

[8] "El cinematógrafo en el Vaticano," *Revistas de revistas*, 30 July 1916, p. 6.

[9] See "Vatican Movies Stopped by the Pope; He Vetoes Permission to American Operators to Take Pictures of Holy Week Functions," *The New York Times*, 22 April 1916.

In recent years, scholarship has tasked itself with looking beyond traditional interpretations of religious conflict that have regarded motivations as simple byproducts of socioeconomic and political factors.[10] Indeed, while Porfirio Diaz's government (1876-1911) had adopted a policy of conciliation towards the Catholic Church (despite the Mexican constitution's anti-clerical laws), with the 1911 insurrection, public discourses that had embraced atheism and anticlericalism resurfaced, advocating for the separation of Church and State.[11] These dueling impulses—devote Catholicism versus the ongoing liberalization and secularization of society—were rendered acute with the ascendance of Venustiano Carranza as the *primer jefe* of the Constitutionalist faction and, later on, when the Coahuilan general convoked a Constitutional Convention in September 1916. The meeting, held in Querétaro, included one delegate for each 60,000 people from each Mexican state. Meanwhile, the National Catholic Party (PCN) existed in Mexico from 1911 to 1920 and managed to secure various seats in the legislature and, a number of those sympathetic to their commitment to Catholicism sided with the infamous Victoriano Huerta.[12]

Anti-Catholicism also began to consolidate gains looking ahead to the 1917 Convention: "Anti-Catholicism appeared across all social strata, from presidents to middle-class intellectuals to agrarian and labor activists."[13] Catholic leaders faced

[10] See BUTLER, Matthew. *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Also, PENSADO, Jaime M. *Love and Despair: How Catholic Activism Shaped Politics and the Counterculture in Modern Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023.

[11] See GUILLÉN VICENTE, Alfonso. "La cuestión religiosa en el Constituyente de 1916-1917, Carranza y la Primera Guerra Mundial," *Hechos y derechos*, n. 39, May-June 2017. Available at: https://revistas.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/hechos-y-derechos/article/view/11272/13235 [Accessed: 11 October 2025].. Also see RYAN-MCILHON, Katherine. "The Anticlerical Articles of the Federal Constitution of 1917 and Their Historical Consequences", *Ave Maria International Law Journal*, v. 1, n. 2, 2012. Finally, see BANTJES, Adrian A. "Mexican Revolutionary Anticlericalism: Concepts and Typologies," *The Americas*, v. 65, n. 4, April, 2009, pp. 467-480, DOI: 10.1353/tam.0.0105.

[12] GONZÁLEZ MORFÍN, Juan. "Entre la espada y la pared: el Partido Católico Nacional en la época de Huerta," *Anuario de historia de la Iglesia*, n. 21, 2012, pp. 387-399, DOI: https://doi.org/10.15581/007.21.2316 .

[13] BUCHENAU, Jürgen, and David S. Dalton (eds.). *Anti-Catholicism in the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1940*. Albuquerque N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 2024, p. 1. Also see HERNÁNDEZ VICENCIO, Tania and Marisol López Menéndez. *Derechas católicas y anticomunistas en la formación de una cultura*

accusations of their involvement in the 1913 coup d'état that ousted President Francisco I. Madero. In 1914, the Apostolic Delegation in Mexico closed and nearly all Mexican bishops sought exile.[14] An article from 1915 and published in *The Christian Advocate* laments that "Carranza is far and away the most intelligent leader in Mexico, but he has gone to extremes in his attitude against the Catholics"[15]. Leon Albert Smith, editor of a remarkable number of religious publications from the United States, urged readers to "condemn every decree that the Mexican government has enacted against the Catholic religion"[16]. Even the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV, sent a letter to Mexican Archbishops expressing his sympathy to their *Via Crucis*, along with his disappointment as to the anticlerical and anti-Catholic articles in the 1917 Constitution. All told, Carranza's presidency, along with the ratification of the Querétaro Constitution on February 5, 1917, constituted the most ambitious challenge to the Catholic Church in Mexican since Independence: "Entre todos los hombres de la facción carrancista, muy pocos osaban decirse religiosos…Carranza imponía su jacobinismo."[17]

Thus, the late 1910s and 1920s witness a unique confluence of religion and politics. The type and salience of diplomacy was also debated. As early as 1915, with World War I still ravaging Europe, the term "League of Nations" was commonly used among groups engaged in discussions about the future of peace organization. During the U.S. presidential election of 1916, both political parties endorsed American

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ciudadana. De la posrevolución a la crisis del régimen político (1920-1970). Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2025.

[14] VALVO, Paolo Antonio Benedetto. "Benedict XV and the Mexican Revolution." In: Giovanni Cavagnini and Giulia Grossi. *Benedict XV: A Pope in the World of the 'Useless Slaughter' (1914-1918)*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020, pp. 1313-1327. Also see ALEJOS-GRAU, Carmen José. *Una historia olvidada e inolvidable: Carranza, constitución e Iglesia Católica en México (1914-1919)*. Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2018.

[15] MCCONNEL, Francis J., Bishop. "Roman Catholicism in Mexico," *The Christian Advocate*, 8 July 1915, p. 12.

[16] SMITH, Leon Albert. *The United States in Prophecy; Our Country, Its Past, Present, and Future, and What the Scriptures Say of It*. Southern Publishing Association, 1914, p. 489

[17] MEYER, Jean, and Aurelio Garzón Del Camino, *La Cristiada, v. 2*. México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2023, p. 125. For distrust of Carranza's liberalism, also see SAX, Antimaco. *Los mexicanos en el destierro*. Mexico, D.F.: International Print. Co., 1916.

involvement in just such an assembly. Amid the battlefield carnage in Europe, the anti-Catholic attacks in Mexico, and an international push to diplomacy, the Vatican entered the fray. Facing the long slog of war, several nations looked to re-evaluate their relationships with the Vatican under Benedict XV. Britain, in particular, restored diplomatic ties with the Holy See soon after World War I began.[18] Papal diplomacy sought to engage the U.S. government in efforts to persuade Carranza to enter negotiations with the Church; the United States consistently promoted the Church as a means of resolving ongoing conflicts between factions.[19] Pope Benedict XV's unique diplomatic efforts during the years of World War I were recognized across the globe.[20] Perhaps tellingly, after his assassination in 1920, Carranza and his legacy received a markedly gloomy assessment by various U.S. newspapers. Some, like *The New York Times*, merely labelled Mexico's former president "a failure like his predecessors"[21]. Many others soured toward Carranza for his stances on religious practice in Mexico. For example, in an article titled "Exit Carranza" from Omaha, Nebraska's *Our Sunday Visitor*, editors excoriate Carranza's anticatholic attitude as tantamount to 'banditry.'[22]

[18] POLLARD, John. "Papal Diplomacy and The Great War,"*New Blackfriars*, v. 96, n. 1062, 2015, pp. 147–57.

[19] MARTÍNEZ, Anne M. "Catholic Monroeism: U.S. Support for the Catholic Church During the Mexican Revolution, 1914–1929," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, v. 39, n. 1, 2021, p. 49. "Facing anti-clerical rhetoric and policies that restricted the Catholic Church's freedom in Mexico between 1914 and 1929, the U.S. government intervened on behalf of the Church. State Department records show the church-state conflict in Mexico was at the forefront of diplomatic discussion between the two countries. The U.S. government, in weighing intervention in Mexico, believed that the Church could promote harmony and order during a time of national upheaval and violence. Defending Catholicism in Mexico served as a vital component of American foreign policy"

[20] See: "La Política del Papa.", *El automóvil en México*, January 1927, XXI, p. 38: "La suerte y el empeño de Benedicto XV por salvar a las naciones y a los individuos de la aflicción, han sido la causa de este gran cambio que se ha llevado a cabo en la diplomacia del Vaticano."

[21] "Carranza a Failure like his Predecessors; Did not Obtain Peace for Mexico During Seven Years—Defied the United States. Fought Huerta as a Usurper," *The New York Times*, 22 May, 1920, p. 2.

[22] "Exit Carranza," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 14 May, 1920, p. 4: "We know little enough about what is the attitude of the new regime toward the Church in Mexico. Certainly, it cannot be worse than Carranza's bandit regime, which persecuted and destroyed at will. During the past seven years the Catholic people of Mexico have witness the most horrible outrages of religious, the destruction of

Finally, also noteworthy is the fact that the Virgin Mary and especially, the Virgin of Guadalupe, had grown in stature during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. The Belle Époque did nothing to lessen Mexico's Guadalupan predilections. On February 8, 1887, Pope Leo issued a decree for the canonical coronation of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, while on October 12, 1895, a coronation ceremony was conducted at the old Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the outskirts of Mexico City and presided over by the Archbishop of Mexico, Próspero Alarcón y Sánchez de la Barquera. The Second Catholic Congress of Mexico and First Marian Congress was held in Morelia in October 1904, with 100 participants studying topics related to Marian devotion.[23] Finally, in 1910, Pope St. Pius X designated Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Patroness of Latin America.[24] But, as already noted above, the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1911 constituted another moment for political and religious transformation.

As warfare shook both Mexico (the Revolution) and Europe (World War I), believers looked for intervention (or, perhaps more appropriately, intercession) from religion and especially, from Our Lady, the so-called "Aurora de la Paz" (fig. 2).[25] In the press of the day, the Virgin of Guadalupe was presented as a civilizing force whose spiritual aptitudes were ideal and necessary for fomenting peace (fig. 3).[26]

Such was the historical, political, religious, and diplomatic context in which *Tepeyac* was filmed.

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churches and of libraries and have suffered persecution such as only bandits animated with the fury of hate against religion could inflict."

[23] See *Congreso católico de México Segundo Congreso Católico de México y Primero Mariano Celebrado en Morelia del 4 al 12 de octubre de 1904*. Morelia: Talleres Tip. de Agustin Martinez Mier, 1905.

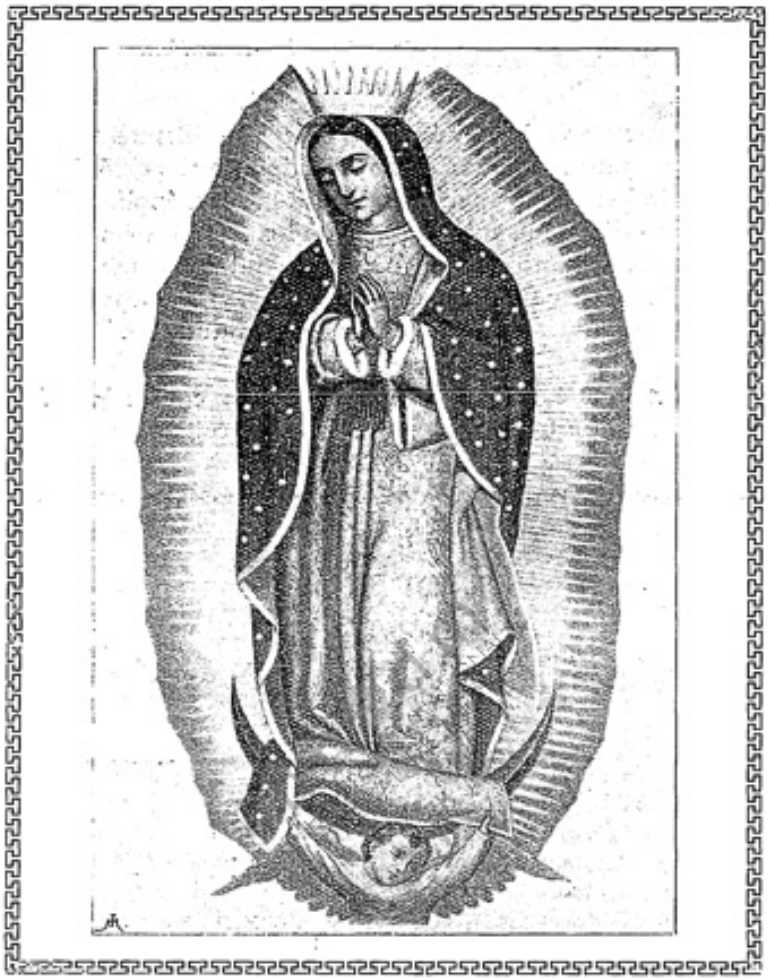
[24] TRASLOSHEROS, Jorge E. "Señora de la historia, Madre mestiza, Reina de México. La coronación de la Virgen de Guadalupe y su actualización como mito fundacional de la patria, 1895," *Signos Históricos*, v. 4, n. 7, January-June 2002, pp. 105-147. Available at: https://signoshistoricos.izt.uam.mx/index.php/historicos/article/view/89 [Accessed: 11 October 2025].

[25] "La Aurora de la Paz." *La Esperanza: periódico religioso, dedicado al pueblo católico mexicano*, 22 February 1913, p. 2.

[26] "La Sma. Virgen de la Paz." *La Esperanza: periódico religioso, dedicado al pueblo católico mexicano*, VIII, n. 27, 1 July 1911, p. 3.

AÑO X MÉJICO, SÁBADO 22 DE FEBRERO DE 1913. NÚM. 7

LA AURORA DE LA PAZ



Desde Noviembre de 1910, no ha habido un día de paz en esta República.

El Gobierno que brotó de la revolución maderista, lejos de laborar por ella, como era su deber, lanzaba combustibles al incendio con su conducta desatentada.

Y sin embargo, la paz era el anhelo más ardiente de todos los buenos mejicanos.

A medida que aumentaban los desórdenes, aumentaban también los deseos de la paz, y en estos últimos días habían llegado a su apogeo.

Sólo Dios sabe las plegarias que las almas justas han elevado hasta su trono divino para la conservación de la paz.

Y sabiendo que todo don perfecto desciende del Padre de las Lumbres mediante la protección de la Santísima Virgen, a ella han acudido, principalmente bajo su advocación predilecta de Guadalupe.

Se han celebrado triduos, novenas, peregrinaciones, rogativas diversas, funciones de toda clase ya en su Nacional Basílica, ya en catedrales, parroquias y otras iglesias.

Ultimamente, y mientras el cañón retumbaba amedrentador y horrísono en los amplios ámbitos de esta ciudad, por orden y mandato de nuestro Señor Arzobispo se repartieron unas hojitas con oraciones adecuadas a este objeto.

Una de ellas se dirigía a nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, prometiendo solemnemente *todas las mujeres mejicanas*, no solo contribuir al engrandecimiento de su culto, sino trabajar de hoy en adelante, con todo celo, en la obra de regeneración social que por medio de ellas ha empezado, *para restaurar en Méjico todas las cosas en Jesucristo*, "pues ese es, añádese, el único y seguro medio de alcanzar una sólida y verdadera paz."

Ese voto parece que ha sido escuchado.

Ya la aurora de la paz comienza a lucir en el horizonte de nuestra Patria.

Esta Capital ha entrado en sosiego. Los mensajes de los Gobernadores de Estado y de los Jefes de zonas militares acusan tranquilidad en casi toda la República.

Confiamos en Dios y en la Santísima Virgen de Guadalupe que, lo que hoy es aurora mañana será claro día y sol luciente de paz verdadera y de prosperidad y progreso. D. C., C. M. F.

Figure 2. "La Aurora de la Paz." *La Esperanza: periódico religioso, dedicado al pueblo católico mexicano*. 22 February 1913, p. 2. Courtesy of Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México.

AÑO VIII. MÉJICO SÁBADO 1º DE JULIO DE 1911. NÚM. 27.

El Buen Pastor.

La Sma. Virgen en la Política.

(CONTINUA.)

N motivo que nos ha de inducir á los católicos mejicanos á luchar en la política, es de justa correspondencia para con la Virgen de Guadalupe. Debido á su maternal afecto, vimos germinar muy pronto la semilla civilizadora, depositada en este suelo por los misioneros españoles. A María del Tepeyac atribuimos con razón el gran acontecimiento de la independencia; Ella nos ha hecho sentir su intervención en todo lo que se refiere á la prosperidad nacional. Ayer cuando anhelábamos por disfrutar de una vida que nacieva y se desarrollara en el fondo del propio organismo. Ella dirigió las tropas insurgentes desde el lienzo en que se veneraba la Santa Imagen, como aurora de paz que rayaba allí para ser luego astro esplendoroso en las alturas del horizonte patrio. Ella, podemos creer, al oir las invocaciones de sus amados hijos, ha traido la oliva de la pacificación á los dos ejércitos en que militaban hermanos nacidos de un mismo seno, ensangrentando el campo fecundo de la Patria. Justo es que demos pruebas de gratitud para quien ha manifestado tal interés en favor del pueblo mejicano. Nosotros le debemos la civilización, la vida material y moral de que gozamos; hemos pues de aclamarla por nuestra Reina y Soberana. Pongámonos bajo su patrocinio; defendamos sin temidez los fueros de la verdadera libertad, de la libertad cristiana, ya que por reclamar una libertad canallesca, propia de seres degenerados, pretenden borrar los enemigos de Cristo las páginas más bellas de nuestra historia, y poner sobre nuestras cervices la coyunda de la tiranía pagana.

Figure 3. "La Sma. Virgen de la Paz." *La Esperanza: periódico religioso, dedicado al pueblo católico mexicano.* 1 July, 1911, VIII, n. 27, p. 3. Courtesy of Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México.

Tepeyac, a Film for Conflictive Times

How to justify the bloodshed Mexicans had spilled over the last five years? What should the spiritual character of the reconstituted nation be? How should the Constitution reflect the country's religious beliefs? Carranza's proposed draft, expected to be approved rapidly, instead provoked a veritable "battle for the soul of the Mexican Revolution"[27]. The Catholic Question in Mexican politics remained unresolved long after the Constitution's ratification in February 1917, and even contemporary Mexico deals with its notions of spirituality vis-à-vis politics.[28] *Tepeyac*, we should remember, was produced within this conflictive milieu. The film, I argue, represents how deeply imbricated religion and politics are in Mexico, and how the nation was of utmost concern even during the earliest films productions. The film's *mise en abysme* structure will be of particular salience in reaching this conclusion.

In Mexico and beyond, cinema, politics, and religion have been strange bedfellows. Yet, when brought together, their tripartite association has, at times, been remarkably fruitful. During a later period in Mexican filmic history—the so-called Golden Age of Cinema (1930s-1950s)—movies, produced under the aegis of the state,[29] marshalled religious tropes to advance their message: as Rebecca Janzen proposes, "the explicit use of Catholic religious spaces, characters, and rituals in films from this period allow them to communicate…the state's understanding of the post-revolutionary nation"[30]. Laura Camila Ramírez Bonilla has also recently examined how Mexican television evinced religious themes during the midcentury. Within Mexican film production, directors saw something cinematic about the Virgin Mary:

[27] WORTHY, Matthew G. "The Twin Revolutions," *Pure Insights*, Western Oregon University. Available at: https://wou.omeka.net/s/pure-insights/media/13433. [Accessed: 22 May 2025]

[28] AGREN, David. "Mexico's Catholic Church Hopes for a Better Relationship with President Claudia Sheinbaum," *America Magazine*, 16 October 2024. Available at: www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2024/10/16/mexico-jesuits-lopez-obrador-catholic-church-claudia-sheinbaum-249043. [Accessed: 13 May 2025]

[29] For a thorough discussion of the origins of funding during the Golden Age, along with an examination of an adequate periodization of the Golden Age, see PAXMAN, Andrew. "Who Killed the Mexican Film Industry? The Decline of the Golden Age, 1946-1960," *EIAL - Estudios interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, v. 29, n. 1, 2018, pp. 9-33, DOI: https://doi.org/10.61490/eial.v29i1.1556.

[30] JANZEN, Rebecca. *Unholy Trinity: State, Church, and Film in Mexico*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021, p. 25.

throughout the twentieth century, she was no stranger to the nation's movies.[31] Beyond 1917's *Tepeyac*, the American Geo D. Wright directed *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (1918), released as part of the series titled *Escenas maravillosas de México*.[32] 1925 saw William P. S. Earle release *El milagro de la Guadalupana*, a silent film about a sinful dancer who repents thanks to the Virgin of Guadalupe. *Mexico y su gente*, a silent film portraying Catholic ceremonies, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and a dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, was produced by Mexican director Manuel Ramos between 1926 and 1928. Later on, during the years of the Cristero uprising, Alfonso Bustamante Moreno directed *Alma de América* (1931), which also tells the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. We could speculate that, given the filmic medium's novelty and in light of its questionable moral character, perhaps directors chose a non-polemical theme—something to be understood, celebrated, and adored. After all, early cinema in Mexico acquired its morally questionable reputation through the convergence of foreign films depicting secular, modern behaviors that challenged Catholic values, the creation of new exhibition spaces that enabled unsupervised social mixing outside traditional community oversight, and concerns about the medium's unprecedented visual power to influence and potentially corrupt audiences.[33]

Thus, Revolutionary Mexico was deeply interested in how cinematography could document and intervene in political matters: both Pancho Villa and Hollywood

[31] For visions of the Virgin Mary Mexican cinema, see the work of España, Feder, and Zamorano Rojas, respectively: ESPAÑA, Rafael de (España Renedo). "La conquista de México en el cine: el caso de la Virgen de Guadalupe," *Boletín americanista*, 2013, n. 66, pp. 29-49. Available at: https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/BoletinAmericanista/article/view/13711 [Accessed: 11 October 2025]. As well as: FEDER, Elena. *Engendering the Nation, Nationalizing the Sacred: Guadalupismo and the Cinematic (Re)Formation of Mexican Consciousness*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Also, ZAMORANO ROJAS, Alma Delia. "La Virgen de Guadalupe: Nexus Character Between Mexican Cinema and History," *Letras Históricas*, n.22, 2020, pp. 175-206, DOI: https://doi.org/10.31836/lh.22.7228. For a more general understanding of the Virgin Mary in terms of imagery associated with the Mexican nation-state, see VAUGHAN, Mary K., and Stephen E. Lewis. *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

[32] Given their closely-timed releases, the public may have confused *Tepeyac* and *La virgen de Guadalupe*. A 1918 advertisement for the latter film, screened at that time in Mexico City's Salón Rojo, informs readers that "no debe confundirse con ninguna otra que adoptando hoy este título se haya exhibido anteriormente…un verdadero suceso artístico e histórico nacional," *El Pueblo*, 1 July 1918, p. 7.

[33] See both MRAZ, John. *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*. Durham: N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009 and DE LOS REYES, *op. cit.*

executives hoped to capture the military exploits of the Mexican Revolution on the silver screen, while even the representatives at the Constitutional Congress in Querétaro filmed their activities in hopes of legitimizing the nation's new administration.[34] With *Tepeyac*, too, the film medium, bolstered by a Marian ethos, are harnessed to political ends. The film fulfills its ideological desideratum alongside spiritual, even Guadalupan, rhetoric.

A detailed study of the film's plot, scenography, and intertitles, shows that the production forwards what I argue is a Guadalupan diplomacy as a resolution to Mexico's bellicose political disputes. The film proposes that politics—when untethered from the Catholic beliefs and traditions that have sustained the Mexican nation-state for centuries—fail to settle ideological, intercultural, and international conflicts. In this way, *Tepeyac* is both a product of its historical moment and unique to it.

I thus understand *Tepeyac* as a whole "ejército de propagandistas de la fe católica" during the days of Madero, especially given its significant success during the time of its release; it was prominently advertised in the press of the day, and was screen in renowned theatres.[35] Publicity for the film regularly ran in the final pages of the newspaper *El Pueblo* (1914-1919) during the first months of 1918 where it was referred to as "la película nacional de mayor éxito."[36] *El Nacional* ran similar ads during these same months, promoting the film as "La Mejor Vista Nacional"[37]. Perhaps the most striking endorsement of the film was an op-ed that ran on February 2, 1918 and appeared in the long-standing newspaper *ABC* (1890-1949). Written by the lawyer,

[34] For filming endeavors in Mexico during the Revolution, see ORELLANA, Margarita de. *Filming Pancho: How Hollywood Shaped the Mexican Revolution.* London: Verso, 2009. For the screen of a film on the Constitutional Congress, see "Notas de Querétaro," *El Pueblo*, 1 February 1917, p. 2. The article recounts: "Se exhibirá una película interesante. Dentro de breves días se exhibirá en uno de los salones de espectáculos de esta ciudad, la interesante película de la Reconstrucción Nacional, habiendo sido invitado para verla el Primer Jefe, quien ha prometido asistir si sus ocupaciones se lo permiten."

[35] CANUDAS SANDOVAL, Enrique. "El conflicto Iglesia-Estado Durante la Revolución Mexicana," *Biblioteca Jurídica Virtual* IIJ-UNAM, 2012, Available at: https://archivos.juridicas.unam.mx/www/bjv/libros/7/3101/10.pdf [Accessed: 22 April, 2025], p. 144.

[36] "Tepeyac," *El Pueblo*, 24 January 1918, p. 5.

[37] "Tepeyac," *El Nacional: periódico de literatura, ciencias, artes, industria, agricultura, minería y comercio.* 24 January. 1918, p. 7.

writer, and diplomat Julio Jiménez Rueda (1896-1969) and titled "Una película genuinamente nacional," the piece begins by warning Mexicans not to give themselves to the "imitación cosmopolita…lo que nos viene de extranjismos." Jiménez Rueda then alludes to those past authors who were a source of national pride for Mexico—Ignacio M. Altamirano, Rafael Delgado, and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera—before turning to a new artform, movies: "Ahora nos ensayamos en el cine. Comenzó por ser, como todo, cine de imitación." Yet, the author happily proposes, "una falange de jóvenes entusiastas rectifica ahora el camino, va las fuentes vivas de la tradición y lava las culpas de la pantalla con las aguas lustrales del 'pocito' del Tepeyac"[38]. He was not mistaken: the directors of *Tepeyac*, José Manuel Ramos and Carlos E. González, were aged 25 and 23 years old respectively at the time. The film was shown at prominent theatres like Cine San Hipólito, located just across the street from the northwest corner of downtown Mexico City's Alameda Park; there, it was screened at 5, 7:30, and 10 pm. It was also seen at Salón Rojo, located at the intersection of Francisco I. Madero and Simón Bolívar streets, and known for its status as the first building in Mexico to house an escalator.

The film's historical milieu, in short, cannot be forgotten. Produced in such a weighty year as 1917 suggests that Mexican audiences were more deeply concerned with politics, religion, and international affairs: Would Mexico remain a devout nation? What were the promises of diplomacy both within Mexico and abroad? What were to be the exact governing contours of Mexico if the nation's deep tradition of *guadalupanismo* was taken into account? These were the central concerns of *Tepeyac*.

Mise en Abyme as Political Strategy

Tepeyac's narrative unfolds in two parts—a crucial point that, I argue, aids us immensely in unlocking the film's religious, historical, and political, meaning. *Tepeyac*'s structure as a type of oneiric *mise en abyme* or story within a story: an historical plot regarding the origins of the Virgin of Guadalupe is nested within—or, bookended by—a present-day story about a diplomat who returns safely to his lover after risking his life for the cause of international relations. As we shall see, the film

[38] JIMÉNEZ RUEDA, Julio. "Una Película Genuinamente Nacional," *ABC*, 2 February 1918, p. 2.

includes a few 'doubling' devices—similarities between plotlines, characters with the same names, etc.—that indicate the film's message of Guadalupan diplomacy.

During much of the twentieth century, few remembered *Tepeyac*, until film scholar Aurelio de los Reyes rescued and restored the film in 2016, with the help of the Filmoteca at the UNAM—the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Nevertheless, since its restoration, both scholars and film buffs alike have paid attention to the film for its historical and artistic merit.[39] In terms of the scholarship on the film since *Tepeyac*'s restoration, interpretations of the film are cogent but also, divergent. Two articles are of special note. Mónica García Blizzard argues that *Tepeyac* "privileges whiteness as the model for Mexican citizenship and national identity in the early 20th century" by way of symbolically figuring the film's protagonist couple, Lupita (Pilar L. Cotta) and Carlos Fernández (Roberto Arroyo Carrillo), "as the ideal citizen-couple, and through the whiter representation of la Virgen de Guadalupe herself"[40]. James Ramey proposes a manifestly different and more sanguine argument as to the message and meaning of *Tepeyac*, forwarding that the film allows "voices and perspectives of the victims of the conquest to 'resonate in the world' by means of complex discursive representations of indigenous subjectivity in Mexico"[41]. Both Mónica García Blizzard's and Ramey's respective interpretations of *Tepeyac* are careful and cogent. Given that the Holy Mother was uniquely *morena*, García Blizzard is right to signal the oddity of casting the phenotypically White actress Beatriz de Cordova as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Ramey, too, compellingly argues that scenes filmed at the Villita capture the nobility of the indigenous population via an ethnographic yet

[39] DOMÍNGUEZ BATIS, Mariana. "A más de un siglo de filmada, se restrena Tepeyac, con banda sonora integrada," *La Jornada*, 6 April 2018, p. 7 https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/04/06/espectaculos/a07n1esp [Accessed: 11 October 2025].

[40] GARCIA BLIZZARD, Monica. "Whiteness and the Ideal of Modern Mexican Citizenship in Tepeyac (1917)". *Vivomatografías. Revista de estudios sobre precine y cine silente en Latinoamérica*, n. 1, December 2015, p. 93 Available at: http://www.vivomatografias.com/index.php/vmfs/article/view/15 [Accessed: 11 October 2025]. Also see García Blizzard's full-length book for a brief discussion of film alongside other first Mexican movies. *The White Indians of Mexican Cinema: Racial Masquerade Throughout the Golden Age*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022.

[41] RAMEY, James. "Conquest and Dialogism in Tepeyac". Traslated into English by the author, *Vivomatografías. Revista de estudios sobre precine y cine silente en Latinoamérica*, n. 2, December 2016, pp. 245-264. Available in: http://www.vivomatografias.com/index.php/vmfs/article/view/93 [Accessed: 11 October 2025].

empathetic gaze. Both scholars correctly point out the national interest in Mexico's racial makeup both before, during, and after the Revolution.

Yet, neither of these interventions interrogates *Tepeyac*'s historical moment—the époque's concomitant political and spiritual debates. In this way, earlier scholarship may have been keener to the film's central message—its defense of Guadalupan diplomacy against the specter of a rapidly secularizing political scene. For instance, Emilio García Riera emphasizes how the film "identificó el tema patriótico con el religioso"—how imbricated Mexican politics and religious belief really were.[42] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, in a similar vein, situates the film with a legacy of religious films from throughout Latin America. Particularly astute is the scholar's observation that, within the thematic logic of *Tepeyac*, "no hay revolución sino respeto a la tradición"[43]. While Paranaguá is correct that the film generally silences explicit references to warfare, as I shall show, the threat of armed conflict isn't so much hushed but rather, held at bay by devotion and faith. Indeed, it may be tradition itself that serves to quash violence: that is, it is the Virgin Mary who intercedes in politics—she saves Mexico. Isabel Arredondo, too, hits on an intriguing point with the suggestion that the film speaks directly to international filmic and commercial relations: "*Tepeyac* asserts Mexico's national identity contextually. By creating a film about a national symbol, the amateur director and actors of Tepeyac wanted to counter the dominant role played by foreign films in the Mexican theaters."[44] Finally, particularly suggestive is how, in the paragraph immediately following discussion of *Tepeyac*, Gabriel Ramírez turns to conversation regarding the "discutido y discutible Carranza, [quien] se propuso imponer y consolidar el sistema ideológico y político que le hiciera triunfar."[45]

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[42] GARCÍA RIERA, Emilio, et al. *Breve Historia Del Cine Mexicano: Primer Siglo, 1897-1997*. Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía; Ediciones Mapas, 1998, p. 42.

[43] PARANAGUÁ, Paulo Antonio. *Tradición y modernidad en el cine de América Latina.* Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2003, p. 45.

[44] ARREDONDO, Isabel. *Motherhood in Mexican cinema, 1941-1991: The Transformation of Femineity on Screen.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2014, p. 34.

[45] GARCÍA RIERA, Emilio, et al. *Breve historia del cine mexicano: Primer Siglo, 1897-1997*. Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía; Ediciones Mapas, 1998, p. 86.

In *Tepeyac*, Beatriz de Córdova portrays the Virgin, while Gabriel Montiel takes on the role of Juan Diego; Feliciano Gutiérrez, in turn, plays Juan Bernardino, Juan Diego's uncle who suffers from typhus before he is miraculously cured, ostensibly, by a type of Guadalupan intercession. The film was directed by Fernando Sáyago, José Manuel Ramos (1892-1980), and Carlos E. González (1894-1961). The latter's artistic life was particularly storied, as he acted in the famed noir film from 1919, *El automóvil gris*, while later in life he worked with celebrated anthropologist Manuel Gamio in the study of indigenous art. In 1944, González worked on the murals Museo de Arte Popular y Pabellón Turístico in Toluca, a building which today houses Biblioteca José María Heredia y Heredia.[46]

The first two minutes of the film are noteworthy for their abundant intertitles and ingenious transformations, as the film's actors are introduced one by one. The first intertitle clearly outlines the filmmakers' goals: "Tepeyac" is an "adaptación cinematográfica de una tradición mexicana" (0:14). Amazingly, film—this most modern of mediums—is marshalled to underscore what is traditionally Mexican: Catholicism, devotion, indigeneity and even perhaps, diplomacy—intercultural or (shall we say?) *mestizo* relations. The necessary persistence and inherent worthiness of time-tested Catholic values—even in contemporary times—is underscored with the second intertitle card sixteen seconds into the film: "El día que no se adore a la Virgen del Tepeyac en esta tierra, es seguro que habrá desaparecido, no solamente la nacionalidad mexicana, sino hasta el recuerdo de los moradores del México actual" (0:16). The cited text above appropriately comes from Ignacio M. Altamirano (1834-1893), renowned Mexican journalist, novelist, and liberal intellectual who embraced both his native identity as well as European notions of progress.[47] Altimirano's text, titled "La fiesta de Guadalupe," was first published on December 12, 1880, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and in Altamirano's newspaper *La República*; therein, the author signals the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the uniting force in Mexico.

[46] "Carlos E. González (nombre verdadero, Carlos Epigmenio González Fuentes), Director de cine." In: *Diccionario de Directores del Cine. Mexicano*. Available at: diccionariodedirectoresdelcinemexicano.com/directores-cine-mex/gonzalez-carlos-e-nombre-verdadero-carlos-epigmenio-gonzalez-fuentes/ [Accessed: 17 June 2025].

[47] For full text, see ALTAMIRANO, Ignacio Manuel. "La fiesta de Guadalupe." In: *Textos Costumbristas, Obras completas*, Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1986 [La República, 1880].

The Holy Mother's popularity is described as reaching across all the social, ethnic, and political groups.[48] Altamirano's tract is fitting for the opening of a film whose message is also that of inserting Guadalupan ethos into the political sphere. Intriguingly, there is some evidence that, during the contentious and combative 1910s, Altamirano's reading of the cult of Guadalupe once again made headlines. Perhaps the Virgin of Guadalupe was both religious and political intercessor: "El esclarecido escritor Dn. Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, en un libro que trata de las costumbres nacionales, al ocuparse de la Virgen de Guadalupe, demuestra de un modo irrefutable que en política o en la religión, cuantos han procurado ensalzar a la Guadalupana han salido mal."[49] Altamirano, the wondrous writer of *Clemencia* (1869) and *Navidad en las montañas* (1871), whose intellectual work promoted a renewed sense of Mexican patriotism, Christian values, and the heritage of Native peoples was the ideal author to reference at the opening of *Tepeyac* and thus, weigh in on ongoing national issues.[50] In short, Altamirano was one of the first to study the Virgin of Guadalupe vis-à-vis the Mexican nation.[51] He was the ideal writer to quote at the opening of a film about Our Lady. As Altamirano writes in his *Paisajes y leyendas, tradiciones y costumbres de México* from 1884: "El día en que no se adore en esta tierra a la Virgen del Tepeyac, es seguro que habrá desaparecido no sólo la nacionalidad mexicana, sino hasta el recuerdo de los moradores de la México actual."[52]

The opening roll call of actors continues during the film's first two minutes; here, and as already mentioned above, a few 'transformations' are significant. At approximately 1:41, Gabriel Montiel, the actor portraying Juan Diego appears in a black suit,

[48] MARTÍNEZ BARACS, Rodrigo. "Ignacio Manuel Altamirano y la fiesta de Guadalupe," *Historias*, v. 48, January-April 2001, p. 31.

[49] "¡Ingrata!" *El Faro: órgano oficial del sínodo general de la iglesia presbiteriana en México*, 4 October 1912, n. 40, t. XXVIII, p. 2.

[50] For more on Altamirano's Christian values, see SANTILLÁN, Gustavo. "Virtud cristiana y progreso liberal en *La Navidad en las Montañas* de Ignacio M. Altamirano," *Revista de Historia de América*, n. 164, 2022, pp. 77–101, DOI: https://doi.org/10.35424/rha.164.2023.2297.

[51] "Altamirano es el primero que estudia como creyente, pero con un punto de vista laico sobre el fenómeno guadalupano, considerándlo en toda su extensión, desde la conquista española hasta el porfiriato", MARTÍNEZ BARACS, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[52] The quote also appears on the first page of *La Voz de México. Diario religioso, político, científico y literario* on 20 October 1895.

complete with a smart tie, vest, and a pocket square. He is the spitting image of a gentlemanly, 'Westernized' Indian. After a short, almost magical edit, Montiel reappears as the character Juan Diego, wearing a tunic with a unkept look and a shifty-eyed timidity. For García Blizzard, the filmic trompe-l'oeil underscores an "underlying anxiety about the relationship between indigeneity and modern Mexican national identity"[53]. Although this interpretation is compelling, we can also note that one of the primary conceits of the film is the worth of tradition even amid change: *Tepeyac* suggests that the past is present and that even the humblest of Mexicans can be transformed into modern citizens.

A second transformation during the introductions of actors is equally clever. At roughly 2:30, the camera fixes on a portrait of a priest, explained by the subsequent intertitle as "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, según un cuadro existente en el Museo Nacional de Historia y Arqueología." Perhaps viewers are even being summoned to the museum. During the Porfiriato, the museum had expanded and in 1908, it moved to Mexico City's El Chopo. By 1916, the need for a national history museum was clear. An artillery museum was added, contributing 30,000 objects including porcelain, miniature weapons, and furniture. The portrait transitions into an actor dressed as the priest who remains within the painting's frame. Ramey correctly notes that the inclusion of the religious man coincides with the film's messaging, given that "Bernandino Sahagún was seen as one of the most indefatigable white defenders and proto-ethnographers of the indigenous people in Mexico"[54].

While the sacred image remains static on display throughout the movie, it is only through cinema's fantastical capabilities—reminiscent of Georges Méliès' early film tricks—that the Virgin can transcend her painted form and become a living presence. The scene illustrates how modern cinematic technology doesn't merely reproduce these significant images (whether Sahagún's historical documentation or the sacred image of La Virgen) but actively transforms and amplifies them.

[53] GARCÍA BLIZZARD, "Whiteness and the Ideal,"*op. cit.*, p. 96.
[54] RAMEY, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

But there is even more to the message: Sahagún's image originates in a "cuadro *existente*," thus drawing attention to *lived* history—the meaning and morals embodied by Sahagún are among us. They, too, are part of a tradition across time and come alive in the present. Interestingly, even Sahagún's name—Bernardino—is doubled in the film's second plot line: that of Juan Diego's typhus-ridden uncle, also named Bernardino. This, too, coincides with the overarching message of the film, that sees *mexicanidad* develop in tandem: spiritually and politically, in the present and the past, between Hispanic and Indigenous communities. As Paranaguá has notes, "[l]a estructura narrativa de *Tepeyac* muestra una indudable voluntad de modernizar la tradición"[55]. However, I would argue that the inventive back-and-forth editing (both between plotlines and across time) is more than a means of forging a sort of modernist, even Buñuelian aesthetic. The structure itself is political, cultural, and spiritual: in *Tepeyac*, the past is present, and those truths that Juan Diego miraculously ascertained on a hill located the outskirts of Mexico City also serve us today to think through intercultural conflicts. Guadalupan diplomacy took place among communities that were, effectively, "Mexican" even before the modern Mexican nation-state existed.

Diplomatic Parallels, Past and Present

Minute two of the film highlights the two plotlines that structure the rest of narration: "Un grupo de soldados españoles" reads the intertitle before we cut to five men who scan a hilly Mexican landscape, each outfitted with morion helmets, pointy beards, and armed with rapiers. Two of the men signal far off in the distant, having spotted the next step for their reconnaissance mission amid an unknown Mesoamerican civilization. The next intertitle reports that "En las residencias presidenciales de Chapultepac, Carlos Fernández acaba de recibir del señor Presidente una delicada comisión para la vieja y revuelta Europa" (2:12). Suddenly finding ourselves in the present-day, as viewers we have traversed some 400 years; yet, characters (that is, both Carlos and the Spanish conquistadors) are tasked with similarly ambassadorial missions that demand their discernment, tact, and

[55] PARANAGUÁ, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

intercultural understanding. Donning a bowler hat, cane, and a smart suit, Carlos walks across the storied black and white checkered floor of the patio at Chapultepec Castle en route to his meeting with the president. Those of us familiar with Chapultepec will know that from that privileged height, all of Mexico City can be seen in the distance. Clutching important documents, he climbs into an awaiting car before the next intertitle reads: "En la secretaria de relaciones. – Los últimos papeles" (3:06). After a short car ride, Carlos enters a government, ostensibly the Ministry of Foreign Relations, where he meets with a bespectacled, professional, older gentleman—a bureaucrat of sorts who, after exchanging a few words with Carlos, signs a document that Carlos careful folds and takes with him (fig. 4). In the next scenes, Carlos says goodbye to his beloved Lupita and sets sail on his diplomatic mission to Europe.

Figure 4. Carlos's pre-departure meeting with the Minister of Foreign Relations (3:57). Courtesy FILMOTECA UNAM

Carlos returns home to Lupita after receiving his mission; they share a tender moment before his departure. Naturally, she gives him a silver medal engraved with the Virgin Mary, pinning it to the inside of his suit jacket (4:57). The intertitle underscores the danger of the moment and the importance of Carlos's diplomatic journey: "Lleva siempre contigo esta medulla: ¡es tan incierta una travesía por mar en estos tiempos de guerra!" "Hacia lejanas tierras" reads the subsequent intertitle before we see a steam engine train pull away. Not unlike the conquistadors, Carlos's journey, too, takes him to faraway lands, where both diplomacy and preternatural intervention are necessary.

With Carlos on his way, Lupita and her doting mother receive word via a newspaper that the ship Carlos had set sail for Europe on—a French vessel named "Champagne" (perhaps the chosen drink of diplomatic affairs?)—has been sunk by a German submarine. According to the news story, many of those aboard had perished. We see a quick scene of formidable ships travelling in the ocean after the intertitle reading: "Un telegrama desde Veracruz anunció la partida del vapor" (9:52). Amazingly, even with *Tepeyac*—this filmic homage to Our Lady's sixteenth-century apparition to a humble Indigenous man—international relations, modern communication, and advanced transportation are front and center. Perhaps the film exhibits modernity so emphatically precisely to counter the pervasive notion that Catholicism equates with obscurantism and intellectual backwardness. The film challenges Pope Benedict XV's rejection of cinematographic technology, already referenced above.

Fearing the worst, Lupita's mother urges her daughter to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe for help. After having supplicated the Virgin for intercession between sobs, the exhausted Lupita finally lays down on her bed. Plagued by insomnia, she opens one of her mother's antique books: *Felicidad de México en el principio, y milagroso origen, que tubo el Santuario de la Virgen María N. Señora de Guadalupe*, written by Luis Becerra Tanco in 1675. Engrossed in the reading, Lupita as she dozes off, and viewers, too, are transported to the film's dreamy second plot. The next intertitle reads: "Y el divino soplo de la Tradición conmueve el alma de Lupita, que conforme corre las páginas del viejo libro cree vivir las escenas que pasaron siglos atrás, en los épicos

tiempos de la Conquista" (11:49). Thus, tradition (significantly, capitalized on the title card) inspires and orientates Lupita to deal with the uniquely modern problems she faces. Of course, worth mentioning is that within Catholic theology, divine revelation is transmitted through two interconnected channels: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which both work as means of preserving and transmitting God's revelation to humanity.[56]

As the flashback dreamscape story of Juan Diego develops (oneirically bookended by Lupita comforting herself with a book about the Virgin), examples of compromise, conversation and, in short, diplomacy are worth mention. First, within Lupita's mind's eye, we are transported to the dry, rocky hills outside of Mexico City, where a group of indigenous men, en route to one of their hidden temples and located side of a mountain, encounters a squad of six Spanish conquistadors. They, in turn, are accompanied by famed priest and proto-ethnographer, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. The intertitle reads: "¡LOS CONQUISTADORES! Un piquete de soldados españoles en compañía de un fraile, rumbo al pueblo de Tolpetlac" (19:24). At first, a scuffle ensues between the two groups: the Aztecs capture one of the Spaniards in order to sacrifice him before a second group of conquistadors, endowed with armament and swords, surround the four Indigenous men. Bernardino de Sahagún brandishes not a sword but rather, his crucifix. The title card reads: "Fray Bernardino resuelve entrar al de los soldados para interponer su cruz entre los conquistadores sedientes de venganza y los infelices conquistados" (19:49). The Friar avails himself to the Gospel—nothing less than the Word of God—to intercede in the skirmish: "Detenida la soldadesca por las frases amorosas del Fraile, en la caverna destinada al saguinario culto de la diosa, resuenan apacibles las palabras del Evanglio" (20:22). Sahagún places himself in the thick of the quarrel (fig. 5), as the intertitle reads, "Y como otras muchas veces, la intervención del fraile salvó a los indios de una muerte segura" (21:07). Eventually, the good friar is able to negotiate a peaceful meeting and soon, the indigenous men given themselves over to Christianity, and are baptized by Sahagún. Hence, Catholic belief

[56] See GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, Réginald. *On Divine Revelation: The Teaching of the Catholic Faith*, v. 1. Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2022.

has been marshaled to solve a diplomatic problem between distinct cultures. Christian faith, either in the present-day or in the past and in the face of invaders, is our saving grace.[57]

Figure 5. Bernardino de Sahagún places himself between the conquistadors and the group of Aztecs. (23:35) Courtesy FILMOTECA UNAM

Before detailing the events immediately following Carlos's departure, we need to partake in a bit of temporal to and fro ourselves: we shall fast-forward narration a bit so as to see how *Tepeyac* constructs thematic and visual associations between past (the legend of Juan Diego) and present (Carlos's transatlantic assignment) to establish the film's moral proposal: that all relations—whether international or

[57] García Blizzard correctly signals that this scene "aligns Catholicism with peace and unity", GARCÍA BLIZZARD, *The White Indians*, *op. cit.*, p. 208. In term of invasion, it is worth remembering that the U.S. occupation of the Port of Veracruz occurred just three years before the film in April of 1914.

otherwise—need spiritual guidance. Mexico, to be true to its history and its identity, must evince a distinctly Guadalupan diplomacy.

Two primary narratives follow. One is Juan Diego's concern for his sick uncle Bernardino, who suffers from typhus. Juan Diego implores the Virgin to intercede and bring healing to his ill relative. A second plotline entails Juan Diego's otherworldly meeting with the Virgin of Guadalupe and his ongoing conversations with the bishop, whom he (Juan) pleads to believe in the miraculous events witnessed on Tepeyac. This latter narrative thread makes evident the film's central theme of diplomacy: what tactical negotiations look like, how to convince others that your opinion rings true, the value of patience and the need for divine intervention. The plotline also deals with intrigue and spy tactics, as the bishop sends two of his officials to secretly follow Juan Diego to Tepeyac in hopes of adjudicating if his claims are true. Even as war raged in Europe and even as Mexico was enticed to enter into international politics by way of the clandestine Zimmermann telegram, *Tepeyac*, too, includes talk of political plotting.

Twenty minutes later into the film, Juan Diego, having encountered the Virgin of Guadalupe on a craggy hill, hurriedly runs to the house of Fray Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico and perhaps, Mexico's first diplomat (28:12).[58] That is, it is the appearance of the Virgin that necessitates transcultural diplomacy. Juan Diego implores a group of three Franciscan friars, dressed in robes, their hair cut in a tonsure, to listen to his vision of Our Lady. At first, they deny his request to share his miraculous vision with the bishop. The next intertitle informs us that "El Indio encuentra mayores dificultades para ver a Fray Juan" because, as the subsequent intertitle reads, "El Obispo tenía visita" (30:00). In an intimate, solemn, and somewhat luxurious room, a monk and the bishop meet with a state dignitary. Numerous crucifixes adorn the room and a large painting of the Virgin Mary hangs on the wall (fig. 6). Perhaps no negotiation is possible without the appearance of the

[58] For Zumárraga as a diplomat, see AREVALO ROBLES, Gabriel Andrés. "La diplomacia indígena: un enfoque transdiplomático," *Si Somos Americanos* [online], v.17, n.1, June 2017, pp.141-169, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0719-09482017000100141.

Blessed Mother. The composition of this scene, compared to the previous meeting between Carlos and the foreign affairs bureaucrat, is striking (fig. 4 and fig. 6). The characters appear to be the same actor—the same shock of white, curly hair, the same Van Dyke beard, the same ceremonial mien. Negotiation, conversation, and in short, diplomacy between social and groups or professional classes, are crucial—one could be a bishop of colonial times or a present-day functionary, one must come to the table in good faith. This is just one of various negotiations in the film; first, however, we should return to Carlos's departure and the beginning of the film's *mise en abyme*.

Figure 6. A second ambassadorial meeting. This time, between Franciscan monks and the bishop of Mexico City (28:04). Courtesy FILMOTECA UNAM.

It is then that Juan Diego arrives at the bishop's house for some diplomatic maneuvering. The title card reads: "obligáronle a esperar mucho tiempo, hasta que conmovidos de su tolerancia le dieron entrada" (25:10). Perhaps the bishop, just as dictator Porfirio Díaz was said to have done, makes his visitors wait an undue

amount of time to test their wherewithal.[59] When Juan finally receives an audience with the bishop, he pleads his case to no avail (fig. 7). Only when Juan Diego unfolds his tilma with a bundle of roses and the image of Our Lady on the cloth does the bishop come to believe Juan Diego's tale. That is, the intervention of Our Holy Mother—the Mother of God as intermediary—makes intercultural communication possible. The spiritual message gets through, and intercultural communication ensues.

Figure 7. Juan Diego implores the bishop to believe his story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Courtesy FILMOTECA UNAM (30:52)

Viewers return to Lupita's bedside during the film's final nine minutes. Awakened by her mother carrying an urgent telegram, Lupita's faith is reaffirmed when she learns

[59] Díaz's clever trick is explained in: KRAUZE, Enrique, and Aurelio Reyes. *Francisco I. Madero: místico de la libertad*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987, pp. 38-39.

that Carlos in fact survived a German submarine attack. Upon Carlos's return, the couple celebrate by visiting Villa de Guadalupe on December 12, where they enjoy the fair, watch the native processions, and climb Tepeyac Hill—the spot where the Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared. At the summit, they share a heartfelt moment overlooking the Valley of Mexico. The tender scene closes—at least according to the intertitles—with a kiss (fig. 8). Temporalities collapse, as the intertitle simultaneously references the Guadalupanism that was crucial to Mexico's Independence from Spain and, perhaps, the fact that in the present day, in times of war both at home and abroad, her intercession is needed: "Lupita habla de su devoción religiosa por la imagen…Y Carlos le recuerda una enseña sagrada a cuya sombra se inició el primer movimiento libertario" (38:25).

Figure 8. Carlos and Lupita looking back at Mexico City from Tepeyac Hill (54:46). Courtesy FILMOTECA UNAM.

Conclusions

Here, I have read *Tepeyac* as a series of doubles—binary plotlines, complementary characters, and a *mise en abyme* structure—all of which forwards the film's primary message: the need for Mexico, as a nation, to embrace diplomacy that is distinctly Guadalupan. The present and the past are intertwined in the film: Juan Diego negotiates the status of Indigenous culture with the bishop by attempting to convince him of the veracity of his vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Juan Diego's plea to the bishop constitutes an ambassadorial mission to gain recognition for the Indigenous community. In a similar ambassadorial gesture, Carlos negotiates Mexico's foreign relations with European nations. In both cases, intercession on the part of the Virgin is needed in order to forward their respective diplomatic projects. Juan Diego's supplication to the Virgin gives way to the negotiated peace (that is, the *mestizaje*) between Indigenous and Spanish cultures, the adoration of Our Lady on the part of the aptly-named Lupita affects the salvation of her beloved, Carlos, who himself is on a diplomatic mission.

While other scholars have been rightly intrigued by the film for its treatment of race, here, I proposed that we examine the film vis-à-vis its historical, political, and cultural moment: at a time when Mexicans interrogated their nation's status as inherently Catholic, when the world at large looked to diplomacy to end war, and anticlericalism seemed to be Mexico's future. *Tepeyac* argues that Mexico needed to reconnect to its Guadalupan roots in order to weather stormy times. As one author of the time wrote in a tract dealing with international relations between the United States and Mexico, it was crucial to remember that "la Virgen de Guadalupe es más entendida que todos los diplomáticos del mundo."[60]

[60] TERRAZAS, José Joaquín. *La bandera guadalupana patriótica: escrita bajo las inspiraciones de la poesía, de la historia de la política, de la ciencia, de la filosofía y de la religión*. Mexico, D.F.: Impr. del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1888, 71. This text deals with the so-called "Cutting Affair"of 1886, a conflict between A.K. Cutting, an American journalist and publisher of the *El Paso Sunday Herald,* and the Mexican authorities in Ciudad Juárez. Cutting was detained on allegations of libel against a Mexican citizen, which heightened tensions between the United States and Mexico. See ROLIN, Alberic. "A Continental Review of the Cutting Affair," *The American Law Review* (1866-1906), v. 23, May-June 1889, p. 329.

Tepeyac reminds us that, although the Catholic Church's crusade against "immoral" films during the decades of silent cinema in Latin America was significant, it was in no way totalizing. The case of *Tepeyac* suggests that the story of silent films was not simply one of censorship, but also of dialogue, devotion, and diplomacy. The film constitutes an attempt to educate the masses regarding the centrality of spiritualism in politics. In this way, it is correct, as previous scholars already have proposed, that *Tepeyac* is a thesis films—one of various "antecedentes del filme argumento."[61] To unlock one of the film's key meanings, however, we must first grapple with the particular historical moment it both emerges from and speaks to.

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[61] CAMPOS LARA, Adriana, Federico Dávalos Orozco, Esperanza Vázquez Bernal and Antonieta de la Vega Aduna. "El cine mudo en México," *Cine* 2 (14) March 1979: s. 105-112; 2 (15) April 1979, p. 45.

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