



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

VICTIMS OF SIN (Victimas del Pecado) (15)

Director: Emilio Fernández

Starring: Ninón Sevilla, Tito Junco, Rodolfo Acosta, Rita Montaner

Mexico, 1951, 1 hour 30 minutes, Spanish/French + English subtitles

The 1940s were a boom period for Mexican cinema thanks in large part to increased investment from the United States and the development of the Banco Cinematografico, a fund aimed at modernising production means. It was a decade that bore witness to the growth of the fledgling Mexican auteur cinema – directors like Fernández, Roberto Gavaldón, Julio Bracho and Alejandro Galindo dominated – as well as the consolidation of the Mexican star system, in the prevailing image of María Félix, Dolores del Río, Pedro Armendáriz or Arturo de Córdova.

While much of the world was reeling from the effects of World War II, Mexico benefited from a long period of uninterrupted economic growth – often referred to as the Mexican Miracle – that lasted from the 1940s well into the 60s....But with urban growth came a series of new social problems, including the development of barrios bajos (poor, slum-like neighbourhoods) that were home to a criminal underworld peppered with cabarets and bars, where money talked and morality was increasingly redundant. ...

At the same time that noirs were enjoying popularity at the Mexican box office, one of the Golden Age's most important and prolific directors, Emilio Fernández, was also gaining notoriety (both at home and abroad) for a wholly different kind of cinema. ... A string of films made during that time ... offered a new style of Mexican cinema, one that celebrated a rural and conservative (often indigenous) Mexican identity...

Though reportedly with some reluctance, Fernández also began making urban films at the end of the 1940s, perhaps because by then his formulaic model was beginning to fall out of favour with Mexican audiences. Films like *Salón México* (1949) and *Victims of Sin* (*Víctimas del pecado*, 1951) represent a transition from the director's rural, more nationalistic work towards more urban concerns, specifically the increasingly popular rumbera film. A fascinating hybrid genre, the Mexican rumbera had manifold and disparate influences, including the extravagant studio musicals made in Hollywood in the 1930s, the femmes fatales of film noir (both Mexican and from abroad) and the Afro-beats of Cuban rumba music, wildly popular in Latin America for most of the first half of the 20th century. Much like Mexican noir, the genre reached its peak during the late 1940s thanks to a boom in city nightlife and cabaret culture.

... even while both protagonists are prostitutes, and even if they are presented as independent and strong-minded, Fernández's films made sure to position both women in the role of self-sacrificing mother, representative of and reproducing traditional values and structures.

Extracts from [Deep focus: the Golden Age of Mexican cinema](https://www.bfi.org.uk/deep-focus-the-golden-age-of-mexican-cinema), bfi.org.uk

Notes compiled by Jo Comino