

IMPERIAL DESIRE AND MASCULINE CRISIS IN EARLY FRANCOIST FILM REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LOSS OF THE PHILIPPINES AND CUBA

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It is well known that one of the prime motives triggering the Nationalist uprising against the Second Republic in 1936 was military resentment at the loss of empire, perceived by the military as the fault of inept politicians to whose orders they were subordinate. As is also well known, the 1941 film scripted by General Franco, *Raza*, starts in 1898 with the return of its naval-captain patriarch, Churruca, from service in the Philippines, only to be despatched immediately to Cuba, dying in battle against the US fleet. Churruca complains that the Spanish government's 'neglect' of the Philippines is aggravating insurrection. The Spanish naval commander in Cuba, as he sends his captains into battle against the US fleet, tells them they are going to certain defeat but have to obey government orders. In *Raza*, this discourse on empire is intimately bound up with a discourse on patriarchy; past military defeats are compensated, not just by the Nationalist victory parade of April 1939 which ends the film, but by the docility with which, throughout the movie, women accept their role of "service" to men. The obverse of this is that male heroism depends on women continuing to play this instrumental role: a dependence on women that is the source of male unease. The two films discussed in this article - *Los últimos de Filipinas* and *Bambú*, both made in 1945 and set against the independence struggle in the Philippines and Cuba respectively- oscillate between stress on male bonding, which excludes women, and the dramatization of women's power over men. In both films, women's power over men leads to military disaster, though with different results and meanings.

In his political tract *Genio de España* (1932), the future founding member of Falange Española and lifelong fascist, Ernesto Giménez Caballero, persistently refers to the loss of empire -and to the concession of Catalan autonomy, seen as a continuation of the

process- as a "dismemberment," described metaphorically as the abandonment of the "yoke of marriage" by wayward women (Labanyi "Women"). The figuring of conquered lands as female is a traditional trope, allowing them to be seen as "virgin territory" waiting to be "filled" by the colonizer, and naturalizing their "feminine" surrender to the colonizing power. But, as Anne McClintock has shown (21-31), this supposedly "natural" scenario of male political and sexual domination is disturbed by anxieties about female seductive power. When Homi Bhabha (66-84) talks of the ambivalent fetishization of the colonized body (that is, denial/affirmation of racial difference) by the colonizer, he is co-opting a concept developed by Freud to refer to male ambivalence towards sexual difference- for the colonizer/colonized relationship is by implication that of male to female, even when the colonized is male.

Bambú, directed by the same José Luis Sáenz de Heredia who directed *Raza*, was premièred on October 15, 1945; *Los últimos de Filipinas*, directed by Antonio Román, responsible with Sáenz de Heredia for the screenplay of *Raza*, was premièred two months later on December 28. Both films figure colonial Cuba and the Philippines respectively as female, through their female leads (a mulatta and a Tagalog) who pledge everlasting love and loyalty to the Spanish colonizer, but also, siren-like, irresistibly seduce the Spanish military heroes through their singing.¹ The romance plots of both films (stronger in *Bambú*, entitled after its mulatta heroine) simultaneously naturalize and threaten male domination; one may note here that the intrusion of romance into the war film almost always signals a disturbance. Both these female leads are fetishized by the camerawork, played by Spanish actresses but strongly exoticized ("white but not quite" as Bhabha would say), showing that the ambivalence towards women is also an ambivalence towards racial difference. This contrasts with the representation of male Filipinos and black or mulatto Cubans, who are unambiguously untrustworthy or stupid. It is because of male ambivalence towards her that the figure of woman is, in these films, able to carry the burden of the colonizer's ambivalence towards the

¹ For the feminization of Cuba in *Bambú*, see Donapetry. The feminization of the Philippines in *Los últimos de Filipinas* is discussed by Tolentino.

colonized, in a way that the figure of the male cannot.

Spanish cinema of the 1940's is, like cinema elsewhere, heavily woman-centered, for this is the age of the studio system, with its largely female stars under long-term contract. In the Spanish case, this produces a tension between cinematic convention and the historical reality of regression under early Francoism to the most retrograde forms of patriarchy. I have argued elsewhere that the extraordinarily strong female heroines of so much 1940's Spanish cinema serve to work out anxieties about masculinity (Labanyi "Feminising"). That will be my argument here, though the female singing lead of *Los últimos de Filipinas* is not an example of the strong heroines who dominate so many Spanish films of the period, particularly in the second half of the 40's. Despite being made in the same year, and despite sharing anxieties about masculinity, *Los últimos de Filipinas* and *Bambú* can be seen as examples of two different phases in 1940's Spanish cinema: in the first case, that of the misogynist war film exalting fascist warrior values, dominant from 1938-1942; and in the second case, that of the massively woman-centered cinema of the late 1940's. Not all early 1940's Spanish films were misogynist: the immensely popular genre of the folkloric film musical, with its spunky trickster heroines, spans the whole period and indeed carries with it the legacy of the Republic, when the genre was created. *Bambú* belongs to this genre; indeed Imperio Argentina, as the eponymous heroine Bambú, was the principal folkloric singing star of the Republican period, when her films out-grossed Hollywood movies.

There are historical reasons why, overall, Spanish cinema of the later 1940's should have been more woman-centered than that of the early 40's. The period 1938-1942, with propaganda controlled by the Spanish fascist party Falange Española, was dominated by the propagation of a militaristic ethos which by definition excluded women (except in the ancillary role of nurse), and in the cinema encouraged the glamorization of the warrior male. When, in 1942, the Allies started to gain the upper hand in World War II, the Franco regime started to play down this fascist, militaristic rhetoric. After Allied victory in 1945, the Falange's political role was downgraded, with the Catholic Church filling the void: the dominant ideology now becomes

that of "family values" -the family being conceived in traditional patriarchal terms. Theorists of Hollywood *film noir* (whose heyday was the period 1945-50) have argued that the genre attempts to mediate male anxieties as, on demobilization at the end of World War II, American men found themselves navigating a difficult path between two opposing models of masculinity: that of the "tough guy" of wartime, and that of the "family man" appropriate to civilian life (Cameron; Kaplan; Copjec). 1940's Spain was traversing an infinitely more traumatic postwar period, aggravated for Spanish men by the fact that they were returning from the front to a civilian existence in which, under dictatorship, they were denied active participation in the public sphere. The need to persuade men to abandon warrior values for family values was thus urgent, for they had to be persuaded to limit their sphere of influence to the family; that is, consent to their "privatization" or "domestication." Despite prevailing patriarchal legislation aimed at keeping women in the home under male control, this "privatization" or "domestication" of the male role produced an awkward overlap with the position of women. Although *Bambú* was released two months before *Los últimos de Filipinas*, it foreshadows the move in Spanish cinema of the late 1940's towards a feminization of the male role. I shall thus discuss *Bambú* after *Los últimos de Filipinas*, which points back to the earlier exaltation of military values, albeit -as in the previous war films- exposing the male anxieties which the military ethos is designed to shore up.

Los últimos de Filipinas must be set in the context of the political vicissitudes of the time. In an interview, Román claimed that, while finalizing the film's script in late 1944, he received a letter from the National Secretary of Propaganda urging him to give a positive view of the United States since the regime, given likely Allied victory in World War II, was seeking a political rapprochement (Coira 115). Florentino Rodao has demonstrated that, from late 1944 to early 1945, Franco was engaged in secret negotiations with the United States to enter the war in the Pacific, on the pretext of Spain's historic duty to defend the Philippines. The US navy had been fighting the Japanese off the Philippines since September 1944, with US marines landing on the Island of Luzón in January 1945. On February 11, 1945, in the course of a massacre in Manila, Japanese troops shot those taking refuge in

the Spanish Consulate General; in March 1945, the Spanish press was full of rumors that Spain was about to declare war on Japan (Preston 525). The negotiations with the United States were not, however, made public; it was not until May 8, when Germany officially surrendered, that Franco broke off relations with the Third Reich. Spain did however sever diplomatic relations with Japan in April 1945. This marked a massive U-turn since in December 1941 Franco had supported the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and since then Spanish Embassies had represented Japanese interests in the Americas (Rodao).²

According to the interviews which Román granted Coira shortly before his death in 1989, *Los últimos de Filipinas* was conceived by him to give the lie to Imperio Argentina's remark, made in the summer of 1944 on his dismissal as the original director of *Bambú* in favour of Sáenz de Heredia, that Román was incapable of making a colonial film (Coira 101).³ In practice, the film's rewriting of the history of Spain's loss of the Philippines in such a way as to justify continued Spanish involvement in South East Asia, while making the United States look like Spain's ally rather than the enemy power which defeated it in 1898, is a brilliant sleight of hand entirely in keeping with Francoist foreign policy of the time. Spanish film historians, notably Zunzunegui (20), have seen *Los últimos de Filipinas* -which depicts the last stand against its Filipino besiegers of an isolated Spanish military garrison which has not heard that Spain had surrendered to the United States nearly a year before- as an allegory of Francoist Spain's "heroic resistance" to the political isolation imposed by the UN boycott and consequent withdrawal of ambassadors from Madrid, led by the US envoy.⁴ In fact, the UN boycott was imposed in December 1946, a year after the film's première, though Zunzunegui's point that the film

² Sánchez Biosca (Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca 397) notes that the Spanish state newsreel NO-DO's reporting of the Pacific War adopted an increasingly pro-US bias.

³ Román's dismissal was the result of his falling out with Imperio Argentina: "yo quería hacer una película colonial con Imperio Argentina; ella quería hacer una película de Imperio Argentina con ambiente colonial." (Coira 101).

⁴ See also Elena.

illustrates the Franco Dictatorship's siege mentality remains true, given the democratic powers' largely negative attitude towards the regime (albeit tinged with pragmatism) since its beginnings.⁵ However, the film's positive representation of the United States points specifically to the politics of the Pacific War, when the Philippines again became a battleground. As Coira notes (115), the credits state that the film was made with the US Embassy's assistance. The only American appearance in the film is the warship Yorktown's failed attempt to rescue the Spanish garrison holding out in Baler for 337 days after Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States (indeed, the American Ambassador was invited to the filming of this episode). The film does not mention that the ship was sent on the request of the Spanish archbishop and former authorities in Manila, and thus gives the impression that it was an American initiative. The film considerably exaggerates US casualties -in fact, these numbered just 3 dead and 4 wounded (Leguineche 308)- implying that US support was so strong that Americans were prepared to die to save the resisting Spaniards (who in reality were, of course, resisting the new American colonial masters). The US Naval Lieutenant Gilmore speaks English in the film, with Spanish sub-titles, despite the fact that the film was made after the 1941 Defense of the Language Law banning public use of foreign (and minority) languages and making dubbing obligatory.

What concerns me here is the film's dramatization of masculinity under siege.⁶ As has been noted (Santoalalla 53), the film illustrates a siege mentality that is common to two other notable early Francoist

⁵ Santaolalla perceptively notes that the same siege mentality characterizes many Hollywood movies set in World War II, especially those that depict the War of the Pacific, which frequently glorify heroic American defeats in the name of liberty. For her interesting comparison of *Los últimos de Filipinas* to the 1943 American movie *Bataan*, also set in the Philippines, see Santaolalla 54-55.

⁶ Interestingly, Hoganson notes that the concept of "manliness" was central to US attitudes towards its war on Spain in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898, and in its subsequent bloody war in the Philippines from 1899 to 1902. Indeed, she argues that it was its obsession with virility (at the time under threat from feminist demands) that led the US, having "freed" Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines from Spain's imperial yoke ostensibly in the name of anti-imperialism, to embark on its own imperial project in those nations, ostensibly to "save" colonized peoples seen as "feminine."

films which depict Nationalists besieged by Republican troops during the Spanish Civil War: *Sin novedad en el Alcázar* (1940), which depicts the siege of the Toledo military academy, and *¡El Santuario no se rinde!* (1949), which depicts the siege of the shrine of Santa María de la Cabeza in the Sierra Morena.⁷ Román referred to both these events in a June 1945 interview given while shooting *Los últimos de Filipinas* (Santaolalla 53). In both of these war films, the representation of gender is crucial. *Sin novedad en el Alcázar* celebrates the fascist, militaristic ethos of the sacrifice of the personal to the nation. The war story is, however, disturbed by the film's romance sub-plot, in which a frivolous city girl learns through love for a Nationalist officer the need to subordinate personal to national interest, which as a woman she never fully succeeds in doing. The film's end sidelines this romance plot by focusing on the embrace of two men: the commander of the Toledo garrison, General Moscardó (who, according to the Nationalist myth perpetuated by the film, had heroically sacrificed his son to the Nationalist cause) and his liberator General Varela -an embrace which is public rather than private since it represents a rejection of the feminine values of romance. By contrast *¡El Santuario no se rinde!*, made at a time of ideological stress on national reconciliation, subordinates its war story to its romance plot, with events narrated by the female voice-over of its active, sexually liberated Nationalist heroine. The film's message of national reconciliation is achieved by subordinating the masculine world of war to the feminine values of love. Despite its title, the film ends with Nationalist defeat, as the military survivors of the siege limp away in bandages, suggesting the defeat of a militaristic ethos based on the containment (barricading in) of private emotion.⁸

Los últimos de Filipinas stands halfway between these two films, both chronologically and thematically. Like *Sin novedad en el Alcázar*,

⁷ Triana-Toribio (48) notes the frequency of the siege metaphor in 1940s Spanish cinema in general.

⁸ The film's director, Arturo Ruiz Castillo, had worked for Lorca's travelling theater company La Barraca under the Republic and during the civil war had made documentaries for Republican organizations. For detailed discussion of these two cinematic depictions of Nationalist troops under siege, see Labanyi "Three Nationalist Film Versions."

it upholds all-male military values, dependent on the sacrifice of the personal to the national. But, like *¡El Santuario no se rinde!*, it ends with defeat. The film's interrogation of the thin borderline separating heroism from madness (incidentally, *Apocalypse Now* was partly filmed in Baler) is an interrogation of the male military obsession with maintaining an erect, stiff posture come what may: an obsession especially strong in the fascist soldier male, as Klaus Theweleit has shown in his classic psychoanalysis of Nazism, *Male Fantasies*. The film starts with a shot of erect palm trees, as does *Bambú*. Both films end with their military heroes defeated -though in *Los últimos de Filipinas* making a heroic effort to remain erect. What emerges most strongly from *Los últimos de Filipinas* is the futility of the male militaristic insistence on keeping boundaries intact by refusing to surrender, for the siege is of their own making- they are defending an empty signifier: the Spanish flag flying from the tower of the church where they are holding out, months after Spain had ceded the Philippines to the United States. The fact that this self-inflicted male suffering is unnecessary makes it poignant but also calls it into question.

The Spanish soldiers' typically fascist sacrifice of the personal to service to the nation (albeit based on a giant misunderstanding) is contrasted with the inability to transcend the personal of the film's one female character. Played by the Spanish actress Nani Fernández, with little deference to ethnographic realism, Tala stands for an idealized Filipino native population, who, before she fell for the Spanish soldier Juan, spent all her time swimming in the river and running by the seashore.⁹ She tells us this in a little-girl voice that represents the natives as innocent virgin territory awaiting conquest (construed as protection) by the colonizer. As she puts it, "antes de que tú llegaste, no me había dado cuenta de lo sola que estaba, ni de lo grande que era el bosque." Emotionally loyal, she is nevertheless a threat to the Spanish military cause because she is trapped in the realm of the subjective. Again and again, she is responsible for triggering a Filipino offensive against the Spanish, resulting in Juan's near death -as, for

⁹ Nani Fernández went on to play another "native" role as a Guaraní native woman who marries a Spanish settler in 18th-century Paraguay in *La manigua sin Dios* (1948).

example, when she spots Juan spying on the Filipino independence fighters through the window and screams his name, dropping the wine pitcher so the Filipinos cannot possibly not notice. Her inability to see beyond the personal also makes her a traitor to her own people. Although her unconditional love for Juan clearly represents the Filipinos' supposed love for their Spanish masters (at the start of the film, the garrison commander Captain Las Morenas writes to his son: "Los tagalos me quieren mucho"), we are, I think, meant to regard her betrayal of her own people with concern. As the words of her famous song, "Yo te diré," state: "No me dejes nunca sola / al atardecer... / que la luna sale tarde / y me puedo perder." She needs her Spanish protector to prevent her from going astray in a benighted primitive world (darkness reigns throughout most of the film).¹⁰

The male Filipinos in the film are feminized by being depicted as treacherous and devious (traditional marks of femininity, contrasting with male "firmness"). Indeed, they are further vilified by being represented as not quite human: the barman leading the Filipino revolt looks like the Vulcan Spock in *Star Trek* with his pointed ears and geometric fringe. The other two rebel leaders are seen preening themselves in colonial-style uniform, hair smoothed down with brilliantine, in an effeminate masquerade of "whiteness": they are, of course, played by white actors masquerading as Orientals masquerading as white, in what ends up being a white parody of whiteness.¹¹

The same feminizing parody occurs with Manolo Morán's comic rendering of a Spanish soldier clinging to his pin-up photo of "la bella Otero" (a famous contemporary music hall singer) -a parody which betrays the Achilles' heel of all the Spanish military: their need for a woman. His "enslavement" to a female object of desire feminizes him; in a carnivalesque scene, he goes off to see the garrison commander

¹⁰ This song, subsequently re-interpreted by many artists, has become one of the few traces in Spanish popular memory of three and a half centuries of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. Although the song became associated with Nani Fernández, she was in fact dubbed by the singer María Teresa Valcárcel.

¹¹ Tolentino notes that the film refuses any serious attention to the Filipino Independence Movement, twisting the plot to focus on the "liberation" of the Spanish garrison from its Filipino besiegers (135).

clutching his pin-up photo and singing "Me llaman 'la bella Otero'" (he is in fact the cook, a feminine occupation). The soldiers' need to deny such "weakness" is shown by Juan's brusque treatment of the adoring Tala, which ensures that his love for her is perceived not as feminine surrender but as masculine mastery. As in most war movies (including *Bambú*, as we shall see), the film has a "buddy movie" component: Juan's buddy, also in love with Tala, can afford to be nicer to her because her rebuttal of his advances means there is no danger of his surrendering to her. But in putting his jealousy aside to risk his life for Juan he is affirming that male heroism is predicated on male-male bonds, which women threaten but cannot break.

Among the many details which the film faithfully takes from Lieutenant Martín Cerezo's diary *El sitio de Baler*, published in 1904 (with a new edition in 1946, thanks to the movie) is the Filipinos' sexual taunting of the Spaniards, playing on their sexual frustration to break their male-male bonding. Manuel Leguineche's best-selling book, named after the film's theme song "Yo te diré," claims that, according to Filipino documentary evidence, this sexual provocation went beyond Martín Cerezo's prudish descriptions, with half-naked women and couples simulating copulation placed outside the church where the Spaniards had barricaded themselves in (296-297). The military sacrificial ethos differs significantly from traditional female self-sacrifice, since for women self-sacrifice takes the form of surrender (to a man), whereas the soldier sacrifices himself to superior (male) orders but never surrenders, remaining erect to the last. This creates an obvious problem since the male's mastery over the female, demonstrated by sexual conquest, requires him at some stage to surrender to desire. This contradiction is implicit in the ambivalence of Martín Cerezo's observation in his diary that the semi-starving Spanish soldiers' lamentable physical state "por desgracia y fortuna" "quitable su poder al 'reclamo femenino'." (Leguineche 297). The phrase "female decoy" is suggestive, for it constructs woman as a lure who at the same time is a pawn in an all-male game.

In a key sequence in the film, the Filipinos trick Tala into acting as "female decoy" by singing to the besieged Spaniards since "Los españoles, ya se sabe cómo son. Necesitan bastante a las mujeres." (In a nice historical coincidence, Imelda Marcos first made her name

singing to American GIs in the Philippines in 1945, precisely when the film was being made.) This sequence provides a brilliant exposure of the dependence of military heroism on the sublimation of sexual desire, experienced in a safely all-male environment (war) that eliminates the risk of breaching body defenses by surrendering to a woman -except that, in this case, the sublimation comes close to breaking down (the priest lowers his eyes and exits). The moment in this sequence when a soldier caresses his gun like a woman's body reminds viewers of the earlier flamenco *soleares* sung by the soldiers to the words: "tengo una bala / con el nombre grabado / de una tagala" (not for nothing does "bala" rhyme with "tagala"). What this scene shows so well is the difficulty of reconciling male warrior values with virility in the sense of heterosexual prowess, for the latter, despite the rhetoric of sexual conquest, supposes male surrender to desire -and indeed male dependence on women. As the soldiers finally surrender at the end of the film, Juan (Fernando Rey) is rewarded with Tala: the implicit message seems to be that it is a waste of time for men to wall themselves up together in an impenetrable fortress, and it would be better to go off with a woman. We are told in the film that several Spaniards deserted; what we are not told is that, immediately before surrendering, Lieutenant Martín Cerezo -who became the garrison's commander on the death of Captain Las Morenas- had two soldiers shot for attempted desertion, as he tells us in his diary. The film also elides the reference in Martín Cerezo's diary to certain soldiers' lapse into "perversiones" (Colmeiro 296) -likely to be a coded reference to homosexual behaviour, perhaps coyly insinuated by the effeminate cook, who is however played for laughs.

The military hero Martín Cerezo is played by Armando Calvo, who had specialized in the role of film gallant: this somewhat undercuts his heroic military persona. As in the real-life Martín Cerezo's diary, in the film he is at one point plagued with doubts as to whether he is a hero; that is, a "proper man." This scene occurs during his intimate homoerotic exchange with the doctor: another buddy-movie sequence that borders on a love scene. Throughout the film the doctor is more interested in botany than fighting; he is played by Guillermo Marín, known for his roles as smarmy villain -the real-life doctor Vigil de Quiñones's son complained at the film's première about this actor

being chosen to play his father (Leguineche 345). In this homoerotic scene, Lieutenant Martín Cerezo begs the doctor not to die of fever, because his presence has made him feel able to "llegar al final" and now he realizes he is not so strong as he had thought. As the men hold hands, the Lieutenant bending over the doctor's sickbed, the latter tells the former to be strong because "realmente el hombre es lo único fuerte" -at this, the camera cuts to the sick soldiers groaning, undermining his words. Shortly after, the doctor will say to the priest, "Al fin y al cabo, soy un hombre"; here, "hombre" no longer means strength but its opposite: weakness.¹² The film's defense of male heroics contains its own deconstruction, summed up by the Filipino independence fighter's comment to the Spanish messenger: "eres un valiente, como todos los tuyos, pero de nada sirve ya tu valentía."

The theme song of *Los últimos de Filipinas*, "Yo te diré," is, in fact, a Cuban *habanera*. Conversely, the cabaret in *Bambú*, set in colonial Cuba at the time of the Cuban independence struggle, is called El Pay-Pay -the name, adopted in Spanish from Tagalog, for a Filipino fan. These cultural cross-overs show how Cuba and the Philippines were imbricated in a common cultural memory. Just as in *Los últimos de Filipinas* the independence struggle was run from the bar frequented by the Spanish soldiers, so in *Bambú* the rebel leader in Santiago de Cuba is the owner of the local cabaret: in this case a white *criollo*. The association of the independence fighters with moral degeneration -that is, loss of masculine self-restraint- is clear in both films. The black *mambises*, who played such a legendary role as fighters in the Cuban War of Independence, are mentioned with terror but never seen. The fetishization of the colonial other is displaced onto Bambú, a mulatta fruit vendor -an exoticized Carmen-Miranda stereotype figuring an innocent Cuban populace whose "corazón de oro" is uncontaminated by materialism: she resists her father's attempt to sell her to the

¹² Santaolalla (58) notes the parallel between this homoerotic scene, when the sick garrison commander, Martín Cerezo, pleads with the doctor not to leave him because he needs him, and the words of Tala's song, addressed to Juan: "No me dejes nunca sola." For Santaolalla, this parallel constructs a contrast between an admirable male-male love, based on fortitude, by contrast with the debilitating love of a man for a woman. While agreeing with this view, I see the parallel as also suggesting a contrary feminization of the Captain and the doctor through their surrender to emotion, undercutting the film's explicit exaltation of masculine heroics.

cabaret owner. Like Tala, she represents virgin territory needing protection from the Spanish military: in this case, against the plotting *criollos*, and indeed against her own *mulatto* father. In a typically Francoist populist interpretation of history, Cuban insurrection is blamed on a decadent bourgeoisie, and on brutish members of the populace whom they have bribed into complicity, allowing the construction by contrast of an incorrupt “people” which, being represented by a woman (Bambú), can be figured as submissive and devoted to its masters. Indeed, Bambú will give her life trying to save the Spanish army from ambush by the Cuban rebels. As fruit vendor, she figures an exuberant, fertile, tropical “nature” which offers itself to the Spaniards as sustenance. But this implies that the Spaniards are governed by lack and have to look to the colonies to replenish lost energies. This, indeed, emerges as the film’s main message: a justification of Spain’s colonial presence in Cuba which seriously undercuts the depiction of the Spanish colonial masters. This is also a message about the need for men to revitalize themselves by internalizing a feminine capacity for emotion: that is, their need to drop their military stiff-upper-lip and surrender to love.

The protagonist Alejandro, a soldier in the Spanish army fighting in Cuba, tells Bambú that she needs “un hombre” to protect her; but she does all the succouring. Indeed, she is depicted as active and forthright, while he is static and indecisive. Played by movie gallant Luis Peña, he is a feminized man; indeed, he is by profession an avant-garde opera composer (throughout early Francoist cinema, the artist represents the feminized man). The film implies a critique of his initial elitist musical project but not of his artistic vocation: he finds new musical inspiration from the oral folk tradition represented by Bambú as woman and as colonial other.

The film’s depiction of military heroism is complex, for this is not a war film but a melodrama set against a background of colonial war.¹³ On the one hand, Alejandro is represented as heroic for abandoning the decadent bourgeois world of Madrid on the failure of his opera and his consequent jilting by his bourgeois fiancée, self-sacrificially offering to replace the theatre concierge’s son conscripted to fight in the Cuban

¹³ See note 3 above.

War. This privileges male-male relations, through Alejandro's embrace with the concierge (who explicitly takes the place of his fiancée as they drown their sorrows together) and by enabling the father-son bond to be preserved. But it is clear that Alejandro's motives in volunteering to fight in the colonial war in Cuba are purely personal: he is seeking death as a release from his sorrows. In this sense he remains a feminized hero, even when in military dress (the striped colonial uniform looks rather like pajamas). Importantly, there is no criticism of him for this "feminine" failure to transcend the personal.

Indeed, although the rebels are depicted as "baddies," the film is conspicuously lacking in patriotic rhetoric. The Spanish Governor of Santiago (acted by Alberto Romea who specialized in playing mad scientists and dotty old men) is played as an idiot almost as stupid as his embarrassingly stereotypical black butler; his wife is played by the comic actress Julia Lajos (a garrulous Hattie Jacques figure).¹⁴ Their daughter (acted by a very young Sara Montiel) is a spoiled, bossy creature: the decadence of the Spanish colonial masters is signalled by women getting out of control and caring only for their own interests - like the fiancée who had jilted Alejandro back in Spain. Alejandro is hired as the Governor's daughter's riding master to "entenderse con un potro salvaje." Women are also the sign of what is rotten in Cuban *criollo* society (and in those subaltern elements corrupted by them), figured by the cabaret where women prostitute themselves for money. Only the relationship between colonizer and colonized, figured by Alejandro and Bambú, is, it seems, based on mutual love -though not exactly on mutual altruism. Alejandro saves Bambú from her abusive father by taking her to a sugar plantation whose Spanish owners become idealized surrogate parents -Bambú conveniently has no maternal or paternal surname (we are told nothing about who her mother was) and can thus be appropriated for Spanishness. But it is also clear that Alejandro's love for her is a narcissistic delight in the musical inspiration and energy he draws from her singing talents. As his fellow-soldier friend Antonio comments, he is dreaming of her being

¹⁴ The script of *Bambú* was written by Joaquín Goyanes, at the time Imperio Argentina's partner, whose father had been the last Captain-General of Cuba. Given this, the comic treatment of the Governor of Santiago and his family is surprising.

his “intérprete”: the voice that, in performing his work, will communicate his musical talent to the world. The colonial relation is presented as one of ventriloquism, in which the colonial other becomes “his master’s voice.” This relationship is complex since, in restoring Alejandro’s creative energies, Bambú is not only healing his wounded masculinity but is also feminizing him, for she teaches him to abandon the masculine defenses he has built up through military prowess -he has several medals, though we never see him in combat- and to abandon himself to music and love.

Bambú’s function in the film is instrumental also in that she is the third term mediating the male-male relationship between Alejandro and his fellow soldier Antonio (played by Fernando Fernán Gómez). In a sense, the film is more about the male bonding of Alejandro and Antonio than about the love of either for Bambú, for she provides the excuse for them to vie with each other in self-sacrificial renunciation, each at different points replacing the other in military action so as to allow the other to have Bambú. As with the concierge’s son, we have the theme of male bonding expressed through a process of substitution. The film follows a repeated pattern of interruptions as, each time Alejandro is about to declare his love for Bambú, military action intervenes; here it is war that disrupts romance, rather than the other way round as in *Los últimos de Filipinas*. Like Tala, Bambú inadvertently causes military disaster since the cabaret owner, in tracking her down, overhears Alejandro outline the planned Spanish military operation. Bambú redeems this error by giving her life to save the Spanish troops but in the process inadvertently causes Alejandro’s death. The film’s culminating *Liebestod* serves as a final ecstatic release from the constraints of masculine reserve and military duty which have prevented the consummation of their love: in death, all body and national boundaries are exploded. Alejandro’s dream of taking Bambú back to Spain to perform his work is realized in the concluding ecstatic musical fantasia -choreographed with the lavishness of a Busby Berkeley routine- staged in his mind as he dies, which syncretically blends classical and Afro-Cuban popular song in a musical figuration of colonial union.¹⁵ But this end evades resolution of

¹⁵ The brilliant musical score was written by Ernesto Hallfeter, the principal composer of the

the dilemmas posed by the film: that of whether a man can remain masculine and "surrender" to love; that of Spain's imperial desire for Cuba -we end with the Spanish military under attack, not knowing the outcome of the battle since the political backdrop is completely supplanted by the romance plot. The message seems to be that imperial desire can persist only as a male fantasy. Loss of Cuba is rationalized by being figured in personal terms -a typical melodramatic strategy- in the form of Alejandro's failure to consummate his union with Bambú. It thus ceases to represent a political failure and is recast as the tragic outcome of male surrender to desire for the female/racial other, for the surrender of male defenses means death, albeit ecstatically experienced. Alejandro did, after all, enlist to fight in Cuba seeking death in the first place.

Los últimos de Filipinas applauds its heroes for their self-inflicted masculine refusal to surrender, but at the end rewards Juan with Tala. (According to Leguineche [349], after their surrender the heroes of Baler relieved their frustrations in the brothels of Manila, with the doctor footing the bill.) *Bambú* exalts love (the personal) and presents war (service to the nation) as a tragic interruption; but in the end it refuses its hero and heroine gratification except at a fantasy level -his fantasy. *Los últimos de Filipinas* was massively popular, as well as receiving critical and official acclaim (it was awarded the top rating of "De interés nacional"). Beyond its illustration of the regime's siege mentality, the film's stress on the material deprivations of its besieged heroes is likely to have struck a chord with popular audiences, struggling to endure the daily hardships of "los años del hambre," as the 1940's came to be known. By contrast, *Bambú* was panned by the critics at its première -the first flop in Imperio Argentina's career- and subsequently fell out of Spanish film history. Although one film was a success and the other a failure, both -despite the frivolity of *Bambú*- bind the discourses of gender and empire together. By equating the Spanish military struggle to hold on to the Philippines and Cuba with male anxieties

1927 Generation who developed the musical syncretism of Falla. Lest it seem strange that Sáenz de Heredia could make this musical melodrama when he had previously directed *Raza* in 1941, it should be remembered that he also wrote lyrics for Spain's top 1940's cabaret artist, Celia Gámez.

about surrendering to women, both films construe the union of the (male) colonizer with the (female) colonized as his surrender: Empire as *Liebestod*. This allows the loss of Empire to be recast as success in preserving male defenses. It was, in fact, a *topos* among the writers of 1898 that imperial conquest had drained Spain of her energies -a reading of history that echoes *fin-de-siècle* degenerationist fears of male energies being drained by women; for this reason, the 1898 writers largely took an anti-imperial stance.¹⁶ Juan can have Tala only after the imperial dream of union with the other is over and the military, having proved their ability to keep their defences intact, are despatched back to Spain. In both films, it is colonial defeat that makes the male protagonists heroes: that is, "men."

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¹⁶ An exception is Ganivet's advocacy of Spanish colonial expansion in Africa.

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