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Remembering the Empire: Imperial Nostalgia and Amnesia in *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* (2016) by Salvador Calvo

Este artículo analiza el filme español 1898: Los últimos de Filipinas *(2016) del director Salvador Calvo, una dramatización del evento histórico de la guerra hispano-estadounidense. Varios críticos han abordado este filme como una representación matizada y antipatriótica, en contraste con el filme de propaganda franquista* Los últimos de Filipinas *(1945) de Antonio Román. A partir de la noción de "amnesia imperial", argumentamos que la película de Calvo resalta el heroísmo de los españoles al tiempo que minimiza la violencia colonial. Al final, esta narrativa pone en escena la fantasía de reconciliación entre España y Filipinas.*

Palabras clave: *amnesia imperial, colonialidad, patriotismo, Imperio español, Filipinas*

This article analyzes the Spanish film 1898: Los últimos de Filipinas *(2016) by director Salvador Calvo, a dramatization of an episode of the Spanish-American War. Several critics have read the film as a nuanced and anti-patriotic adaptation of this historical event, in contrast to the Francoist propaganda film* Los últimos de Filipinas *(1945) by Antonio Román. Drawing on the term "imperial amnesia", we argue that the film patriotically highlights the heroism of the Spanish characters while downplaying the violence of the colonial relationship. In the end, this narrative enacts a fantasy of reconciliation between Spain and the Philippines.*

Keywords: *imperial amnesia, coloniality, patriotism, Spanish empire, Philippines*

In this article, we carry out a decolonial reading of the 2016 Spanish film *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* (2016) by director Salvador Calvo. Following the historical events of the 1898 Siege of Baler, an episode of the Spanish-American War, the film tells the story of a battalion of some fifty Spanish soldiers that resisted a Filipino rebel attack in a local church for 337 days,

taking reports that Spain had lost the war and ceded the colony to the United States as a Tagalog ruse (Morales). The film is a remake of the 1945 Francoist propaganda film *Los últimos de Filipinas* by director Antonio Román that dramatizes the same events. The 2016 film has received praise from Ramón Muñiz Sarmiento for its "mirada desmistificadora," offering a "punto de vista muy desprejuiciado sobre lo ocurrido en Baler" (49) that counters the earlier film's position. This reading is echoed by many others, like critic Asier Manrique, who describes *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* as an "historia antibélica y antipatriota" and argues that "[e]l patriotismo barato, de chichinabo y exacerbado no tiene lugar en esta película."

These positive readings are perhaps unsurprising given the strong, idealized nationalist sentiments that dominate the 1945 film. As Antoni Rigol and Jordi Sebastián have noted, the 1945 film was associated with the Spanish political context of the time. Its isolated and starving protagonists under siege at Baler are resolved to defend at any cost "el antiguo imperio español ... símbolo máximo de la grandeza de España en el pensamiento nacionalista hispano" in a way that paralleled Spain's position at the end of the Second World War, isolated internationally in both political and economic terms due to its close ties to Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. José Colmeiro has similarly argued that the Franco-era film "tiene su centro de gravedad en la añoranza de un orden perdido, ensalzado y ennoblecido, rememorado con nostalgia" (298). Filipino scholar Roland Tolentino continues this critique, pointing out how "Spain's last days of colonial involvement are renarrativized with the tropes of imperial heroism ... imbued with a colonialist nostalgia," while simultaneously "the history of colonial state violence is omitted from the film narrative" (133, 145). In this way, for Tolentino, the 1945 film frames the Siege of Baler in a way that promotes imperialist nostalgia while remaining largely oblivious to the violence of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines.

While Calvo's 2016 film is less obviously nationalistic than its 1945 predecessor, in this article we will argue that *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* subtly reproduces and feeds nostalgia for Spanish imperial power in a way that resembles Román's version. We ask not only how this imperial nostalgia presents itself in the film, but also how it can simultaneously engender readings of the film as "anti-patriotic." In what ways does the film's nostalgia reaffirm ethnocentric colonialist hierarchies and uncritically reproduce colonial tropes? How does the film's nostalgic approach to this historical episode erase or obscure the history of Spanish imperial domination in the Philippines?

Our analysis of *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* reveals the extent to which colonialist patterns may continue to hide in works that attempt to

"modernize" or counter outdated, imperialistic discourses. In this way, we aim to bring the film's coloniality, or what Walter Mignolo might call its "darker side," to light. For Mignolo, while "modernity" can be defined as a "narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements," it is also a narrative with a "hidden agenda" (2, 1). This hidden, "darker side" of modernity is coloniality, "the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today" (Mignolo 2). Coloniality, the constitutive other side of modernity, is closely linked with violence, having "emerged with the history of European invasions of Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu, and Anáhuac; the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean; and the massive trade of enslaved Africans" (Mignolo 2-3).

With this premise framing our analysis, we will show how imperialist nostalgia presents itself in the film in three different ways. First, we argue that the ambivalent representation of the film's main characters, Lieutenant Martín Cerezo and the soldier Carlos, allows the film to be read as anti-patriotic. This ambivalent representation draws attention away from the film's amnesia regarding the characters' status as defenders and agents of the colonial occupation of the Philippines. Next, we show how the film's portrayal of the colonial Other, including the Tagalog rebel fighters, the tropical nature, and women, reproduces long-standing colonial tropes while serving as an ideal backdrop against which the soldier's superiority and stoic heroism can be highlighted. We end with an examination of the final scenes of the film that portray an amicable reconciliation of the Spanish and Tagalog bands after the former's honourable surrender. Here, we argue that this scene constructs a nostalgic fantasy of reconciliation that seeks to further erase the violence of Spain's colonial occupation of the archipelago.

The term "imperialist nostalgia" was coined by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo to refer to the way in which "agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed" (107-08). It has been taken up by many analysts of colonial and postcolonial cultural productions since. In his article "The Art of Forgetting: Imperialist Amnesia and Public Secrecy," Robert Fletcher draws on Rosaldo's term and proposes the complementary "imperialist amnesia" to refer to "a tendency on the part of 'agents of postcolonialism' to either ignore the history of colonial domination in their accounts or to present a sanitised version of colonialism from which evidence of exploitation, persecution, subjugation, and genocide has been effectively effaced" (423). Fletcher calls the latter type of amnesia "partial amnesia," one "in which colonialism is acknowledged but its distasteful aspects effaced" (424). Rather than being a distinct and unrelated concept, "imperialist nostalgia is complemented – and supported – by an equally pervasive sense of amnesia concerning colonialism's role in shaping

the postcolonial world" (Fletcher 425). Along similar lines, Derek Gregory, in *The Colonial Present*, also emphasizes the role of amnesia in imperialist nostalgia, arguing that "[p]ostcolonial critique must not only counter *amnesiac* histories of colonialism but also stage 'a return of the repressed' to resist the seductions of *nostalgic* histories of colonialism" (9). In this sense, he argues that postcolonialism not only seeks to recall the violent history of colonialism, but also to reveal "the continuing impositions and exactions of colonialism in order to subvert them" (Gregory 9). Gregory goes on to affirm that such nostalgia is harmful because, even though it might include guilt and anxiety over colonial violence, it tends to work as "cultural cryonics" in which "other cultures are "are fixed and frozen, often as a series of fetishes, and then brought back to life through metropolitan circuits of consumption" (10) At the same time, he contends, it is often characterized by "the aggrandizing swagger of colonialism itself" and an "ethnocentric assumption of Might and Right" (Gregory 10-11).

While Gregory clearly states the violence that imperialist nostalgia implies, Fletcher notes that this form of nostalgia and the amnesia that accompanies it often rely on an ambivalent presentation of colonial history "both acknowledging and denying – or at least downplaying – colonialism's impacts simultaneously" (430). He argues further that:

> [T]he colonial narrative … is an extremely selective and self-serving one, emphasizing the ostensibly heroic, courageous aspects … and downplaying or ignoring … the economic exploitation and violent subjugation that were quite often the express motives (and underlay the financing) of the colonial encounter. (430)

In this way, by omitting the "unfortunate unpleasantness" of colonialism through imperialist amnesia, imperialist nostalgia is allowed to thrive in such texts (Fletcher 430). *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* follows this pattern of ambivalent representation of Spain's colonial presence in the Philippines. Contextualized in the dying days of Spain's global empire, the film, to paraphrase Fletcher, regularly "downplays" Spanish exploitation while emphasizing the heroism of the soldiers sent to defend it (430). This discursive device operates in the opening scenes, in which the agents of colonialism, the Spanish garrison, are portrayed as suffering and stoically resisting the hardships and violence inflicted by the colonized Tagalog rebels.

At the beginning of the movie, through a voice-over narration, Carlos, a young soldier who serves as one of the film's protagonists, recalls his naive ideas about war: "[P]ensaba que, para sobrevivir, solo necesitaba un poco de suerte y sentido común. Era joven. Era ingenuo..." (00:04:52). In this way,

he anticipates a loss of innocence, which comes not only as a result of facing the cruel realities of war that were previously unknown to him, but also from the absurd workings of the colonial system. It is from this perspective of a young and innocent soldier that the opening scene sets the stage and provides a frame from which the events of the film will unfold. It is worth noting that Carlos's voice-over narration introduces viewers to the film – the only moment of the film in which he or any other character assumes this role – and provides the initial approach to the conflict and the stage where it takes place: "La primera vez que oí hablar de Baler tenía veinte años. Me dijeron que era una aldea tagala al norte de Manila, un sitio maldito, rodeado de mar y selva y habitado por *rebeldes sanguinarios que odiaban a España*" (00:01:20; emphasis added). In this way, the first thing that Carlos hears about Baler, the violent and oppositional characteristics of the town's inhabitants, is the first information about the town that the viewers receive as well. His narration is accompanied by images of the bare-chested Tagalog rebels stealthily emerging from the jungle to enter Baler by night, followed by a graphically violent attack on the Spanish garrison in which "*el destacamento que defendía el pueblo fue masacrado sin piedad*" (00:02:00; emphasis added). The action of the film revolves around Carlos and the rest of his troop who are sent to replace this previously massacred garrison.

Although the "barbaric" image of the Tagalogs and the conflict between them and the Spaniards is nuanced in the rest of the film, it is worth noting that the beginning represents them as a violent and treacherous enemy. This representation frames the viewer's perception of them throughout the film. As Edward Said has explained, the construction of the other, in the end, is a form of construction of the self, and, in this case, this construction is at the service of the colonial discourse that reproduces an imperialist amnesia (7). The image of the Tagalog rebels depicts the Spaniards as a defenseless group, and the narration highlights the fact that they were massacred while defending Baler. Underlying this statement, the Spaniards are positioned as defenders, which implies that, by opposition, the Tagalogs are the attackers. However, as it becomes evident over the course of the film, "defending Baler" does not mean protecting the town itself or the people who live in it, but rather defending what it represents within the frame of colonization: the last outpost of the Spanish Empire.

While we see the Tagalogs piling up the corpses of the massacred Spanish garrison after the attack, a small group of soldiers covered in blood huddle together to avoid further aggression from the rebels. The narrator claims: "Fue una vergüenza. De cincuenta soldados solo sobrevivieron trece. Ellos luchaban por su libertad; nosotros, por la supervivencia de un imperio. Y perdimos" (00:02:40). This affirmation establishes an equivalence, and

simultaneously a contrast: while it suggests a parallel – both groups were fighting for a greater goal – it also reflects the conflict between the Spaniards and the Tagalogs by emphasizing the tension between the ultimate goal that each group pursued. Under this strategy lies a sort of depersonalization of the conflict that suggests the goals of the two parties were simply in tension with one another, without addressing the power dynamics underlying such conflict and, thus, remaining oblivious to the violence of the Spanish colonial enterprise. The fact that this statement is accompanied by images of the very agents of this enterprise, the Spanish soldiers, in a moment of defeat and loss supports a colonial discourse in which the power dynamics are inverted or forgotten.

Carlos's words at the beginning reflect how the film is framing this historical event as the end of the empire. *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* recovers the Siege of Baler from a marginalized space in Spain's national history (Hermoso). However, it is worth noting that the event that sealed the Spanish colonization of the Philippines had little to do with the confrontation between Spaniards and Tagalogs at Baler. Rather, Spanish domination ceased with the moment in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States. Thus, Calvo's gesture of claiming a place in history for the siege reconfigures the conflict as the last battle and the last chapter of Spain's colonial era, and the loss of Baler as the very end of the Spanish Empire.

To represent this historical event, the film alternates between two parallel stories narrated with different discursive strategies. The protagonist of the main story is Carlos, a naive young man, who comes from a small town and has never been on the battlefield. He decides to enroll in the army because the mayor of his town told him that he would pay for his studies in an art academy if he came back with a certificate of exemplary conduct. The secondary story focuses on Lieutenant Martín Cerezo, a middle-aged, recently widowed professional soldier with seemingly "little to lose." In this narrative line, there are a series of events that are presented from a third-person, omniscient perspective. The entanglement of these two stories allows the film to present two different viewpoints on the events.

It is worth noting that Carlos's role as "witness" is ambivalent, since there are a series of events of the secondary story in which he is not involved and to which he does not have access. Despite his ambiguous position as narrator and witness, Carlos assumes a central role, since he introduces us to the events that will unfold throughout the film, thereby framing the viewer's approach to them. Since Carlos is the protagonist, the viewer identifies more closely with him. His low rank and the fact that he did not go to war in search of glory or greatness contributes to a reading of the film as

"demystifying" the historical facts. This allows *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* to bring the viewer closer to the hardships that he faces and, thus, to become indignant about the injustices that he experiences (Muñiz Sarmiento 54). By following Carlos, the film can bring out its critique of the Spanish leadership. However, the third person narration facilitates the retelling of the historical events and engagement with other characters' perspectives, which destabilizes Carlos as the only authorized point of view. His viewpoint is counterbalanced by the way that the film pits Carlos against Cerezo, whose positionality is also ambivalent. Although the Lieutenant criticizes the system based on his long experience in the army, he is also within the system, which often clashes with Carlos's perspective.

The main characters' ambivalence is set in the background of the film, second to its frequent and severe critiques of the inefficiency and corruption of the Spanish military, political, and religious leadership. This dynamic has led Muñiz Sarmiento to read the film as strongly anti-nationalist in stark contrast with the 1945 version (59). However, ambivalence can also play out as a discursive strategy supporting the colonial discourse (91). By articulating contradictions, it is possible to resignify the ideological narratives that enable hierarchical discursive practices and politics (Bhabha 92). This strategy can be seen in the film's ambivalence toward Spanish patriotism, both criticizing the Spanish leadership while underscoring the "true patriotism" of the Spanish soldiers, providing an ideal backdrop against which their stoic heroism can be highlighted.

Throughout the film, the failure of the military, political, and religious institutions, and ultimately their responsibility for the loss of Spain's overseas empire, is suggested both through the words of the characters and the visual presentation of the spaces that the soldiers inhabit. Shortly after the Spaniards' arrival in Baler, they barricade themselves in the local church. This space quickly comes to function as an allegory for the Spanish empire in its dying days prior to the 1898 Spanish-American war. As Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso have pointed out, in Filipino colonial towns, "[the] church was the most impressive building and a visible representation of Spanish power" (53). The power of the Church in alliance with the colonial military is also highlighted in a scene that shows the dark interior of the church as the Spanish commander addresses the soldiers and the local priest from the pulpit with a large crucifix in the background (51).[1] If these scenes function as an allegory of Spanish power, the presence of disease within the stronghold shows that this is a corrupt association. After three months of siege, the film shows us how the soldiers become sick due to contaminated food supplies and beriberi caused by malnutrition. Sergeant Jimeno, a survivor of the previous garrison, leads viewers to believe that this

is at least in part due to mismanagement. At any rate, the captain, Enrique de las Morenas, soon dies a horrific death with symptoms of beriberi (00:50:50) and Lieutenant Cerezo assumes command. The disorganization and incompetence of the Spanish military leadership also comes to light through the soldiers' lack of access to proper military supplies and later criticism of military decisions. As Cerezo himself makes evident, soldiers of his battalion have been sent to Baler poorly equipped – Carlos's boots are not even his size – and untrained, they do not even know how to shoot a rifle.

However, as Muñiz Sarmiento points out, the strongest critiques in the film are aimed at corrupt elements in Spanish society and politics. In particular, he highlights a dramatic scene in which Carlos confronts Cerezo for his decision to remain in the church despite overwhelming evidence that the Philippines are no longer Spanish territory (Muñiz Sarmiento 59). After returning from an unsuccessful mission to reach Manila in order to request help from the colonial government, Carlos returns with newspapers that announce Spanish defeat in the Spanish-American war and the sale of the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the USA for 20 million dollars. Cerezo refuses to believe the "mentiras" in the newspapers and that by "sentido común" the stories it contains are ridiculous and clearly a Filipino ruse. To this, Carlos replies, in a scathing critique of the Spanish government, that "¿Cree que nuestros gobernantes en Madrid tienen sentido común? Le recuerdo, mi teniente, que fue ese gobierno en Madrid que me mandó aquí sin saber disparar, sin botas" (01:41:30).

The words of the deserter, Juan, defending his actions to Carlos constitute an even more mordacious critique of the Spanish leadership:

> ¿Traidor a qué? ¿Traidor a quién?... España les vendió Filipinas a los yanquis por veinte millones de dólares. Tanto heroísmo, tanta mierda que nos piden y ¿qué cuenta? El dinero es lo que cuenta, lo de siempre. Esos millones. ¿Qué te crees que van a hacer con ellos? ¿Se los van a dar a la familia de los muertos de Cuba, Filipinas, Puerto Rico? ¿Te crees que se los van a dar a tu madre cuando te entierren aquí? (01:38:43)

Juan's comments here demonstrate a critique of corrupt and elitist politics in Spain and an anti-war stance. Interestingly, the critique of elitism in Spanish society, coming from a low-ranking deserter, is later echoed by Lieutenant Cerezo. While much of the critique of the nation in the film comes from interactions between low-ranking soldiers like Carlos and their superiors, Muñiz Sarmiento affirms that even Cerezo maintains an ambivalent relationship with Spanish nationalism. Although he is faithful to

his duty as a soldier, he also criticizes his superiors (60). This position can be glimpsed in a comment made to Carlos regarding the mayor of his town, Don Gabriel, who encouraged the soldier to enlist in the army so that he could later study with the recommendation of his captain. Responding that "España está llena de patriotas como don Gabriel, que mandan a otros mientras ellos comen jamón de bellota" (qtd. in Muñiz Sarmiento 60), Cerezo criticizes the elitism of Spanish society at the time.

In this sense, as Muñiz Sarmiento argues, in the film "se pone en entredicho el concepto de patria como madre. Aquí es más bien una madrastra que deja a sus hijos abandonados a su suerte" (61-62). For Muñiz Sarmiento, this anti-nationalistic critique in the film is a key way in which it presents a "mirada desmitificadora" of the historical events of the Siege of Baler. However, in these statements from Carlos, Juan, and Cerezo, the critique is aimed at the inefficiency or lack of scruples of those in power. This reveals an ambivalence in the film's anti-war and anti-patriotic critique: even as these characters label the leadership as "false patriots," they implicitly reaffirm their own commitment to the nation as its true defenders, patriotically committed to their duty and nation, despite their resistance to the Spanish leadership.

The representative of religious power in the film, the local Spanish priest, Fray Carmelo, is also portrayed ambivalently. As Muñiz Sarmiento points out, the local priest in the 2016 version of the film could not be more different from his counterpart in the 1945 film. While the earlier version of the character is a strong and traditional defender of the faith who dedicates himself to comforting the soldiers, Fray Carmelo "se sale del patrón eclesiástico a la norma para convertirse en un ser irónico, cáustico" (Muñiz Sarmiento 58). Despite (or because of) his atypical behaviour, Fray Carmelo is generally portrayed sympathetically in the film. He quickly takes Carlos under his wing, inviting him to exercise his artistic talent by repainting the murals in the church. Furthermore, as Muñiz Sarmiento suggests, his religious faith is not dogmatic. In one of the scenes, while telling Carlos about the many religions around the world, Carmelo explains that some Eastern religions believe in reincarnation, and this means that one could reincarnate as an elephant or as a cockroach. After Carlos's reply asserting that he would not want to be a cockroach, Carmelo claims: "Yo tampoco. Por eso, le doy las gracias al Creador por la bendita suerte de ser cristiano" (01:00.03). Here too, ambivalence comes into play. On one hand, the priest's religious tolerance endears him to the viewer: he is not a strict and dogmatic defender of the faith as the priest in the 1945 film. On the other hand, he reaffirms his Christian faith while subtly poking fun at or ridiculing other religions.

However, he also has a secret: he has a stash of opium which he shares with Carlos. The two become quickly addicted to the drug, but when supplies run low on New Year's Eve, the priest overdoses and dies leaving Carlos to suffer alone from severe withdrawal symptoms (01:13:30). The portrayal of Fray Carmelo in the film clearly brings into question the Church's authority as Muñiz Sarmiento argues (56). Nevertheless, the priest's ironic character also endears him to viewers while his ambivalent characterization functions as a counterbalance to the "perfect" priest in the 1945 version. This ambivalence distracts attention from the absence of a critique of the Church's violent role in Spanish colonization in the Philippines and elsewhere.

As another strategy to reinforce the Spanish soldiers' heroism in the face of insurmountable obstacles, the film uncritically reproduces colonial tropes about Otherness. The Tagalog rebels, the seductive and hostile natural surroundings, and the treacherous Tagalog women also constitute dangers against which the soldiers must contend. The film's treatment of the Other in this case is another aspect that reveals the film's "darker side." By uncritically reproducing long standing colonial tropes, the film plays into a nostalgic colonial desire for "Might and Right" by reaffirming colonialist hierarchies (Gregory 10). Moreover, in this way, the film also downplays or effaces references to the effects of colonial violence perpetrated by the Spanish colonial occupation of the Philippines, while illustrating Spanish stoic heroism against overwhelming odds.

If the Spanish side of the conflict consists of an alliance between military power and the Church, on the Tagalog side the film establishes a problematic association between the indigenous rebels and nature. This "alliance" is established early on in the captain's address to the soldiers upon their arrival in Baler. While describing the freedom fighters, he specifies that they have powerful allies: "el calor, la malaria, los tifones y las bestias" (00:13:10). As Aníbal Quijano has argued, in colonial thought, "los europeos occidentales imaginaron ser la culminación de una trayectoria civilizatoria desde un estado de naturaleza," while conceiving of other groups as inferior and therefore occupying a hierarchical position closer to nature (212). By explicitly allying the Tagalog rebels and the natural world, the film reaffirms not only a common trope of colonial thinking but also European superiority with respect to the rebels.

At the same time, the film's repeated depiction of nature itself as both dangerous and seductively abundant constitutes another trope common to colonial representations since Columbus's first letters (Pratt 126). A good example of this and the alliance between the Tagalog rebels and nature can be seen in one of the first forays by the soldiers into the world outside the

church. In the scene immediately following one in which the soldiers cook the late captain's dog in a soup, Carlos observes the bright and verdant village of Baler with its pens of fattened pigs as the camera follows a woman carrying a recently slaughtered chicken (00:54:10). The scene contrasts strongly with the dark and diseased church interior and of course proves irresistible for the famished soldiers. Lieutenant Cerezo orders Carlos and another soldier to sneak into the village at night to steal food to stifle the beriberi epidemic, but, once outside of the protective fortifications of the church, the seductive abundance of the village turns into a dark and menacing world. The soldiers are forced to creep through tall grass during a rainstorm, and, as they approach the Tagalog houses and observe the bunches of bananas held within them, the two are forced to flee from the attacks of a large dog (00:54:30). These scenes illustrate not only the colonialist depiction of nature – both seductive and dangerous – but also how the film reasserts Spanish superiority by emphasizing how the rebels take advantage of the natural world in their fight. After all, if it were not for the bad weather and the violent animal, the soldiers may have been successful in their attempt to collect food from the village.

Furthermore, the depiction of an enticing but treacherous natural world as something that the soldiers must stoically and heroically overcome is part of the way that the film frames nostalgic desires to subtly assert European colonial might. This is perhaps most clearly displayed in one of the first scenes of the film, an impressive aerial pull-back shot in which the regiment, immediately after their arrival to the Baler area, wades up the middle of a river on the way to their post. This aerial shot is reminiscent of Mary Louise Pratt's "monarch-of-all-I-survey" scene (201). However, while for Pratt such perspectives are associated with illusions of colonial mastery and power, in this instance, the shot seems to emphasize the fragility of the film's protagonists in the face of a menacing nature. The aerial shot is preceded by close-ups of the soldiers' frightened faces as they wade slowly, and in silence, up the river, holding their rifles closely while listening to the sounds of animals hidden by the abundant vegetation on the banks. As the camera moves away from the earth, accompanied by an eerie and suspenseful music, the line of soldiers in the water at the centre of the frame becomes progressively smaller in comparison to the forest on the banks of the river that only grows in size, encircling them, heightening the sense of danger coming from nature. Simultaneously, the heroic quality of the soldiers' presence in the face of such risks that they must overcome is highlighted.

Spanish stoic heroism in the face of threatening colonial nature is dramatized even more clearly in a sequence that shows Carlos's attempt to

reach Manila to bring back news for the contingent about the Spanish war effort. Despite the enticing fertility of the tropical vegetation as Carlos first leaves the church, the forest soon takes on more menacing overtones. First, mirroring the river scene, the camera takes an overhead shot of Carlos, emphasizing again his insignificance in the face of an overwhelming nature as he hacks his way through the undergrowth with a machete. The danger that the forest represents is reinforced by suspenseful music. Next, the camera cuts to shots of the forest that emphasize darker greens and greys, resembling the perpetual darkness of the church. As if the threatening nature of the forest were not already clear enough, the scene cuts abruptly to a close-up shot of a large spider patiently waiting in its web.

The following scenes show Carlos walking through the labyrinthine undergrowth while the calls of forest animals echo in the background. The sequence is intercut with shots of the spider trapping and wrapping a grasshopper in silk (1:345:40-1:35:10), suggesting that Carlos finds himself in a situation similar to the unfortunate insect. The subsequent scene shows Carlos sleeping on a log next to a large snake. Just as the spectators prepare themselves for the snake's bite, it is deftly removed by two lurking rebels that surprise Carlos, tie him up, and take him to their commander (01:35:50). On the way, they walk past a horrific scene of dismembered bodies of American soldiers, some of them hanging from trees in a way reminiscent of the grasshopper strung up in the spider's web from moments earlier (01:36:40).[2] Here again the Tagalog "alliance" with nature is reinforced through the portrayal of the rebels with characteristics of the jungle animals like the spider and the snake, carefully hiding in the jungle waiting for an opportunity to attack their unsuspecting prey. Still, the fact that the Tagalogs are associated so closely with nature fades into the background in these scenes. The focus is placed on Carlos's dramatic and unflinching feat of bravery, which draws attention away from the violent exploitation of the islands under Spanish rule. Another indication of this is the emphasis on the Filipino atrocity committed against the American soldiers in this scene, while no mention is made of violence committed by colonial agents and the centuries of exploitation of the natural resources of the islands under Spanish rule.

The characterization of nature as treacherous in the film, both seductive and deadly, extends to the Filipina women, again reproducing a common colonial trope. As Val Plumwood, among others, has argued, women, like indigenous people, are often associated with nature in colonialist thought (133). In a way similar to the film's treatment of nature, the local women constitute a threat which the Spaniards must stoically resist. Whereas the film emphasizes the violence of the natural world, the Tagalog women –

particularly the prostitute and rebel collaborator, Teresa – are instead associated with the temptation to desert the Spanish regiment. Throughout the film, Teresa is characterized as both alluringly beautiful and dangerous. Her seductive power awakens the sexual desire of the Spanish soldiers. Her association with the natural world also transforms her into a symbol of the abundance of the exterior space. Thus, Teresa embodies an overlap of temptations: the promise of an escape from the dark and sickly space in which the soldiers are trapped during the siege and of sexual pleasure, tempting the soldiers – even Cerezo himself – to give up and surrender.

Teresa's power of seduction is manifested not only through her body but also through her repeated singing of her siren song, "Yo te diré," across enemy lines.[3] Consistently in the film, Teresa is heavily sexualized: exposing her body and captivating the soldiers' attention through her singing, she partakes in a ploy to demoralize the Spaniards. This dynamic is clear in a scene that portrays a New Year's Eve celebration. As a Tagalog rebel calls out to the soldiers, "dejad las armas y venid al pueblo, que estamos de celebración" (01:05:20), Teresa has sex with a man in plain view while the rebel continues to taunt the Spaniards: "Mirad qué mujeres tenemos aquí para vosotros… ¿Hace cuánto no tocáis una mujer, españoles?" (01:05:40). These scenes convert Teresa and the other women into yet another natural resource of the outside world that the soldiers yearn after. The film work, always from the interior of the church looking out through door and window frames, mirrors that of the earlier scene in which the soldiers hungrily eye the village pigs and chickens.

A similar association is made in a scene in which Teresa and five other Tagalog women approach the church carrying oranges for the Spanish soldiers. Teresa explains to Cerezo that these are gifts from the rebel commander Luna that will help cure beriberi; she also says that they can use the seeds to plant oranges next to the church and that the terrain would be "terreno amigo" (01:01:20). With this offering, Teresa hands them newspapers, which claim that Spain has sold the Philippines to the USA and takes the opportunity to tell Cerezo to "salve a sus hombres … en vez de estar ahí, encerrados, podrían estar aquí, celebrando, disfrutando. Nosotros no somos rencorosos y a mí me gustan los hombres españoles" (01:02:33). Thus, Teresa's offering not only promises to satisfy the sexual desires of Cerezo and his soldiers or even to establish a friendly understanding between Spaniards and Tagalogs, but more importantly she offers salvation from disease and, by extension, death. In this way, to fully accept Teresa's offer is a first step on the road to surrender. Because of her power to incite desertion, Teresa, like the tempting natural world outside of the church,

simultaneously represents salvation, pleasure, and a dangerous threat for the garrison.

This threat is so great that, after the New Year's display, Lieutenant Cerezo is forced to improvise an impromptu celebration for the soldiers in response to Tagalog provocations. However, as time passes and the Spanish soldiers struggle with the siege's hardships, Teresa becomes a constant temptation that can no longer be resisted, pushing Cerezo to kill her. The Lieutenant's decision cancels the possibility of falling into different levels of temptation, not only for him, but for his soldiers as well, i.e., the temptation to abandon the church to be with Teresa or to desert the Spanish regiment. In this sense, Cerezo's act of killing Teresa, something that he clearly does with hesitation and distaste, reaffirms his faithful allegiance and duty to Spain.

As previously mentioned, Cerezo's actions are portrayed in parallel with Carlos's storyline. Through this dynamic, a connection between the two is established in which one character mirrors the other or sheds light on the actions of his counterpart. Shortly before Cerezo moves to kill Teresa, a storm falls on Baler and the camera shows the soldiers shivering from the cold as water leaks through the church roof. At the same time, Carlos suffers from opium withdrawal, curled up and trying to consume the last residues of the substance (01:09:30-01:10:50). After this scene of the suffering soldiers stoically resisting the elements, Teresa's voice seeps into the church over the coughing of the beriberi afflicted soldiers. As Teresa continues to sing, the camera follows Cerezo as he decidedly grabs his rifle and walks to the makeshift fortifications that surround the church. As he aims his rifle at her through a loophole in the wall, Teresa notices him and looks back at him with a defiant smile. The shots of Cerezo and Teresa alternate, showing both of their reactions to the event: Teresa's resolve contrasts with Cerezo's agitated breath. Finally, he closes his eyes and pulls the trigger (01:11:05-01:13:10).

The fact that this dramatic scene follows the episode in which Carlos struggles against opium withdrawal reinforces the connection between these two actions as acts of resistance. It also suggests that killing Teresa is, in the end, a way in which Cerezo attempts to prevent his soldiers from falling into a temptation similar to that of the opium. Moreover, it is worth noting that both Carlos and Cerezo are represented here as men who falter or waver in their struggles. Even if the latter firmly maintains his temper, several scenes show how his gaze is destabilized by Teresa's presence. However, the other side of the coin of these characters' weaknesses is the way they confront them. In fact, as mentioned before, one of the soldiers, Juan, decides to join the rebels and he even tries to convince his peers to

surrender. Nonetheless, this only reinforces the troop's stoic heroism and superiority. As opposed to the devout, unfailing soldiers in Román's film, Calvo's *1898 Los últimos de Filipinas* show a group of men that *do* waver, that *do* feel temptation. However, it is precisely these characteristics that allow for the portrayal of the soldier's strength and power: the soldiers face temptation yet do not fall prey to it, consistently choosing to take the "right path."

In the last scene, we see the troop's final dramatic exit from the confines of the church. With a shot from the inside looking out, sunlight floods the dark interior of the church as two soldiers slowly open the front doors. Behind them, the Tagalog rebels wait in formation. The garrison's exit is filmed in slow motion and accompanied by glorious music. The shots alternate close-ups of Cerezo and the rest of the troop and long shots from the perspective of the Spaniards in which we see Commander Luna and the Tagalog troops standing as part of an honour guard. The Tagalogs' solemnity further exalts the Spaniards, creating an aura of greatness around them that mitigates their representation as the "losers" of the conflict, thereby nuancing the idea of a Spanish defeat at Baler.

Moreover, the film explicitly avoids representing this historical event as a defeat. For example, when Cerezo signs the memorandum of surrender, he clarifies to Carlos that he does this "no porque me hayan derrotado. Nos queda munición para dos meses y ese muro se puede reparar" (01:54:41). With these words, he suggests that the troop could continue to resist the Tagalog attacks and that he is not personally responsible for their surrender.[4] Cerezo's refusal of responsibility for the garrison's defeat is also evident in the discussion he has with Carlos prior to signing the document. This scene does not turn out to be as humiliating for Cerezo as we might expect based on the lengthy debates with Carlos in which the Lieutenant maintained that the Philippines were still Spanish territory despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. When Cerezo informs Carlos that he has realized that the newspapers were in reality not a Tagalog trick, Carlos asks him how he feels in an attempt to force the Lieutenant to admit his guilt. Cerezo, however, maintains that he has done nothing but comply with regulations and that, although he may have been mistaken, his conscience is at peace (01:56:00). When Carlos urges him to admit that the Tagalogs were indeed telling the truth, Cerezo evades the question, affirming that "[h]emos perdido la guerra. Nuestro ejército se rindió y hemos perdido. Esa es la única verdad" (01:56:36). This statement, however, transfers the responsibility to others through the use of a collective third person ("nuestro ejército se rindió") while never stating that they (i.e., the soldiers at Baler) had surrendered.

This ambivalence or contradictory approach to the colonial fact is reminiscent of Glen Sean Coulthard's analysis of recent Canadian politics of recognition and reconciliation with Indigenous nations. In his book, *Red Skin, White Masks*, Coulthard takes the example of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2008 official apology to the survivors of the colonialist Indian Residential Schools (105). This apology was followed little more than a year later by the Prime Minister's 2009 G20 address in which he affirmed that Canada "has no history of colonialism" (qtd. in Coulthard 106). Coulthard explains the Prime Minister's apparent amnesia by arguing that processes of recognition and reconciliation over colonial abuses, like the apology to Indian Residential School survivors, work "by allocating the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settler-coloniality as such" (108). In this way, as Coulthard observes, "reconciliation takes on a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent legacy of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (108-09).

While *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* addresses a very different context from current Canadian settler colonialism, the film also seemingly erases the unsavoury history of Spanish colonial exploitation of the Philippines, showing us instead Spanish heroism in the face of hardships faced by colonial agents. Furthermore, the film's final scenes consist of an imagined reconciliation between Commander Luna and Lieutenant Cerezo, in which the former voluntarily puts centuries of Spanish colonial rule in the past and pays tribute to the Spaniards with an honour guard and special treatment. The heightened drama present in this scene is worth mentioning. After exiting the heavily battered church to meet Commander Luna and his army, assembled in formation, Cerezo salutes the commander and defiantly presents his only condition of surrender: that they be allowed to leave freely and honourably, carrying their weapons. Commander Luna acquiesces, affirming that he has no desire for vengeance, despite the heavy casualties inflicted on them by the Spanish garrison. As Cerezo hands the memorandum to Luna, who accepts it with grace and a humble bow of the head, a triumphant music begins to play. Then, Luna informs him that he will ask his soldiers to salute them with "una guardia de honor." When Cerezo asks about this, surprised at the Commander's demonstration of respect for the Spaniards, Luna replies: "Han sido cuatro siglos, teniente," referring (with slight exaggeration) to the period of Spanish colonization of the Philippines.[5] The Commander offers his hand in friendship and the scene cuts to a close-up of Cerezo and Luna's handshake as the music reaches a climax (01:58:30-02:00:30).

In reality, according to Miguel Leiva and Miguel Ángel López de la Asunción, the Spanish surrender was much less glorious than it is portrayed in either the 1945 or 2016 film. First, prior to realizing that reports of Spanish defeat were true, Lieutenant Cerezo was already planning to escape from Baler with his troops due to a lack of supplies (197). Second, and more importantly, the terms of surrender described in both films, particularly that the soldiers would be allowed to leave the church unhindered and with their weapons, were not those accepted historically by Cerezo. On the contrary, the historical terms of this agreement state that "los sitiados deponen las armas, haciendo entrega de ellas al jefe de la columna sitiadora, como también los equipos de guerra y demás efectos pertenecientes al Estado español" (qtd. in Leiva and López de la Asunción 202). This detail was changed in the 1945 film on the advice of Martín Cerezo who was still alive at the time and with whom the filmmakers consulted (244). The terms presented in the 1945 film and maintained in the 2016 version actually correspond to terms offered by the Filipino Secretary of War Baldomero Aguinaldo earlier in the conflict but rejected by the Spanish contingent (Leiva and López de la Asunción 185).

This scene, which pays respectful homage to the colonial relationship between Spain and the Philippines, enacts a fantasy in which the colonized subjects (represented by Commander Luna) express gratitude to their former rulers for centuries of colonial domination. The Spaniards' desire for this grateful and respectful appreciation of Spanish colonial rule from the colonized Tagalogs is expressed near the beginning of the film in a speech by the captain. In it, he suggests that the Tagalogs are ungrateful: "Quieren la independencia de Filipinas. Les da igual que España lleva aquí cuatrocientos años, que hayamos construido sus ciudades" (00:13:10). Commander Luna's display of respect and gratitude with an honour guard effectively satisfies this demand for recognition of the "good parts" of Spanish colonization. Of course, it also effaces the legitimate reasons for which the Tagalogs would wish to fight for their independence and oppose the Spanish regiment's occupation of Baler in the first place. This scene presents a fantasy that resembles the processes of reconciliation described by Coulthard. In it, centuries of colonial exploitation are seemingly "allocated ... to the dustbins of history" and both parties seem to simply "move on" from this violent past (Coulthard 108).

In this way, while the film addresses and represents the historical event of the Siege of Baler, as we have shown throughout this article, *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* is an example of how the legacy of imperialism continues to operate in the present. If, according to Carlos's retrospective voice-over at the beginning of the film, the soldiers' mission to "recuperar la grandeza

de España" (00:03:59) is unsuccessful at a diegetic level, at an extradiegetic level the film itself works to recover this imperial grandeur in the present by exalting the stoic tenacity of the Spanish participants in the historical episode. In an interview published in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, Calvo states:

> [L]os políticos de la época eran un desastre y no se ponían de acuerdo en nada, y de repente surge un grupo de 50 tíos que se meten en una iglesia para defender una patria sin saber que aquello ya no era español … Y la película sirve también para recordar a la gente que España será lo que sea pero fue un imperio, la historia no se la puede quitar nadie. En España no se ponía el sol. (qtd. in Hermoso)

Calvo's claim suggests how the film's "hidden" patriotism is closely linked to a sense of nostalgia for Spain's "glorious" imperial past. The director's gesture of bringing a forgotten episode of Spanish colonial past into the present is also a way of recovering the lost greatness of the Empire. Thus, it invites us to reflect on the dynamics of imperialist nostalgia and amnesia and how they operate in the present. Underlying this nostalgia, we see a representation of coloniality – even in cases such as *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* that clearly aim to "modernize" or "make up for" distasteful aspects of past – that simply present the colonial period as "a thing of the past" that has been overcome (Coulthard 22). This practice subtly denies the existence of continuing colonial violence and impedes a critical reflection on the darker side of modernity and a decolonial approach to the present.

A recent survey of European citizens suggests that critical questions around its history of colonization remain relevant, and that nostalgia for the Spanish Empire seems to be alive and well. When asked if, thinking about their country's former empire, whether they would say it is more something to be proud of, something to be ashamed of, or neither, 51% of Spaniards indicated that they were "neither proud nor ashamed" of their country's former empire, while 18% said that they were "proud" (Smith).[6] These statistics reflect that, in the Spanish imaginary, the imperial past is generally seen in neutral or even positive terms by the majority. This situation is indicative of what Fletcher calls partial imperialist amnesia, the simultaneous acknowledgement of a colonial past and downplaying of its effects.

Imperialist nostalgia even emerges in readings of Calvo's film as a viewpoint that demystifies this episode of national history. Despite the film's clear distinction with respect to the Francoist nationalism of its 1945 predecessor, *1898: Los últimos de Filipinas* patriotically exalts the Spanish characters for their heroic resistance to the many hardships they must

endure while under siege, while largely omitting any reference to the violence of the colonial system that they defend. Furthermore, the film reproduces colonial tropes in its portrayal of the natural world and the Tagalog rebels and women, using them as a backdrop upon which the soldiers' heroism can be displayed and reaffirming the superior position of the Spanish protagonists on the colonial hierarchy. Moreover, the film creates a sort of fantasy of reconciliation in these final moments in which not only are colonial abuses ignored, but the exploitative colonial relationship is also nostalgically praised by a Tagalog honour guard. This gesture not only contributes to give the film's ending a glorious air, thereby attenuating the feeling of loss, but also reconfigures the memory of the colonial period in a way that makes it more palatable (for a certain audience). Thus, the film reflects and reproduces a reticence to address continued coloniality in the present tense.

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NOTES

1 As Abinales and Amoroso point out, in Spanish colonial Philippines, "[the] mission to convert was inseparable from the goal of political pacification" (51).

2 This scene that evidences the supposed ferocity and barbarity of the Filipino rebels is interesting in that it also obfuscates the atrocities of the US imperial occupation that replaced the Spanish colonial regime following the Spanish-American War. According to Abinales and Amoroso, "[the] Philippine-American War has been described as the United States' first Vietnam War because of its brutality and severity" (117). While the war led to the deaths of some 4,000 Americans, more than 250,000 Filipinos died in the conflict. American soldiers committed many atrocities, including torture, executions of any males suspected of insurgency and burning entire villages in an effort to stifle Filipino guerrillas (Rafael).

3 The song "Yo te diré" was composed by Enrique Llovet and Jorge Halpern for the 1945 film and performed by the Argentine singer Yvonne de Lys (Leiva and López de la Asunción 243).

4 According to Leiva and López de la Asunción, prior to surrendering, Cerezo was planning an escape from the church due to a shortage of basic supplies in case the negotiations with the Filipino contingent failed (193, 200).

5 Ferdinand Magellan claimed what is now the Philippines for Spain during his visit in 1521. While in the islands, he attempted to spread Christianity and create alliances with local leaders but in a battle with the chief Lapulapu, who

had refused to convert and submit to the Europeans, he was killed. Spanish control over the islands was not truly established until 1571 when Miguel López de Legazpi conquered the city of Maynilad and renamed it Manila (Abinales and Amoroso 48-51). In any case, even taking the date of Magellan's visit as the starting point of Spanish colonization, the period lasted at most 377 years.

6 Responses to the question, "Thinking about [your country's] former Empire, would you say it is more something to be proud of, something to be ashamed of, or neither?". An additional 18% responded that they "don't know" while 19% answered "more something to be ashamed of." Furthermore, 23% of Spaniards responded that former colonies were "better off" due to Spanish colonization, while 35% responded that they were "neither better nor worse off" (Smith).

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