

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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WOUNDED DOVE / Paloma Herida (1963)

Emilio Fernández

Genre: Drama

Link to the video: https://youtu.be/9a0dCCg_ya4

OVERVIEW

This film represents one of director Emilio Fernández's powerful films illustrating the absolute brutality and injustice against the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Guatemala. In addition to directing the film, Emilio Fernández also acts in it, and is unafraid to play a wholly unsympathetic character, the sadistic, rapacious "cacique" or head of a ruthless gang of criminals and prostitutes. A joint production between Mexico and Guatemala, *Paloma Herida* was filmed in Guatemala near Lake Atitlán and the coastal city of Puerto San José. The arrival of the cacique, Danilo Zeta, parallels the brutal invasion of the Europeans in the 15th century, and it sets up a number of themes that resonate throughout the film, and include a critique of colonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalism, as well as a powerful remonstrance against modern urban society, which degrades both the individual and the family, while ripping apart communities and their traditions.

KEY CHARACTERS

Paloma	Young, blonde indigenous woman
Danilo Zeta	Cacique / top leader of invading group or gang
Fidencio	Paloma's father
Esteban	Paloma's fiance
Juez Justo	Judge in Puerto San José
Amalia	Judge Justo's wife

SYNOPSIS

Paloma is a young blonde indigenous woman who arrives in a coastal town where she goes to the local canteen to cold-bloodedly assassinate the Patrón, Danilo Zeta. The young woman is arrested and, being called in front of a judge in the public square of Puerto San José, refuses to speak. In prison, after giving birth to a child, Judge Justo and his wife Amalia try to convince her to tell what led to this point. Before coming to Puerto San José, Paloma lived with Fidencio, her father, in a traditional Mayan village on the shores of Lake Atitlán, where they wore traditional woven clothing and play traditional musical instruments (flutes, etc.). She is planning to marry Esteban, a fisherman from the region, when Danilo Zeta, the "cacique," head of a powerful gang arrived with a group of killers and prostitutes to take over her tranquil village, San Antonio Palopó. Claiming he is the owner of the entire region and all the people who live there are now his subjects, he forces the people who have lived for many generations in their ancestral home to give it all up to spend day and night under brutal conditions working in the fields and on road construction. While he does pay them, he ultimately gets it all back by requiring them to blow their paychecks in a trashy dancehall and bar that he set up just for that purpose. Those who can, flee. Those left behind live in humiliation and fear. Danilo orders Esteban to be knifed in the back. Her father, Fidencio, is killed by Danilo. Danilo even kills his own men if he suspects them of challenging him. Once he has eliminated any impediments, Danilo rapes Paloma. After hearing the story, the judge, Juez Justo, decides to release her, who leaves with her son walking along the beach at sunset.

THE STORY

PEACEFUL LIFE

In calmer, tranquil times A traditional life of the indigenous Maya people on the shores of Lake Atitlán



A peaceful, joyous life Paloma plays the wooden flute, a traditional musical instrument, and wears the traditional outfits of the Mayan indigenous people who live on the shores of Lake Atitlán. Paloma and Esteban are planning to marry. Danilo feigns joy and claims he will pay for the wedding reception.



CRUEL PEOPLE ARRIVE

Arrival of Danilo Zeta Savage and relentless, Danilo stands and announces he controls this territory and describe the penalties to anyone who crosses him.



A gathering to announcement his taking over the territory. He announces he is the new owner of the entire region and that everyone will work for him from now on. He is accompanied by a band of thugs and prostitutes.



Brutal Subjugation Danilo Zeta and his band of thugs and prostitutes bring the indigenous people to their knees with cruel conditions of degrading work and forcing them into lives of vice and depravity.



Esteban shot in the back. On the eve of their marriage, Esteban is shot in the back and murdered.



Fidencio, Paloma's father is killed Danilo Zeta kills the only remaining obstacle separating him from Paloma. Fidencio is visiting Esteban's grave when Danilo kills him.



Paloma is attacked. Danilo Zeta assaults Paloma as she has no one who can protect her.



REVENGE

Murder in Cold Blood by Mysterious Woman A woman walks along the beach in bare feet, cloaked in a dark shawl and long white dress. From beneath her large rebozo (shawl), she pulls out a pistol and shoots a prominent man who is in a beach cantina, drinking and carousing with women.



Judge Justo arraigns the woman In an open-air deposition, the mysterious murdering woman is formally charged with murder by Judge Justo. There is no doubt that the woman shot the man, who turns out to be Danilo Zeta, the local "cacique" (town boss or chief), a brutal and corrupt man who turned part of the land into his own corrupt fiefdom.



Giving birth alone in jail The mysterious woman gives birth to a baby while she is in her bare, dank jail cell.



A tragic mystery The Judge's wife, Amalia, implores the woman to tell her story. Paloma tells her story to Amalia. Amalia comforts Paloma after she finishes telling her story.



Painful freedom. Released from jail, Paloma walks along the beach with her newborn baby, returning to her village.



THEMES

The extermination of indigenous communities: The film is extremely violent and difficult to watch because of the sadistic and cruel behavior of Danilo and his gang, who immediately seize resources and force the villagers to work for them to construct the kinds of infrastructure and buildings that they consider to be “civilization.” Literally every aspect of the indigenous villagers’ traditional way of life is destroyed. First, they are forced from their homes, and the family units destroyed. They are forced to work manual labor and any money they might earn is spent at Danilo’s cantina, where the indigenous people are forced to drink alcohol to the point of near fatal inebriation. Instead of playing the flutes and singing their traditional songs, Danilo brings in a record player that plays discordant American rockabilly music, and instead of wearing traditional embroidered huipiles, the outsiders (the prostitutes) wear tight-fitting pants or short poodle skirts. The parallels between the arrival of Danilo and his gang, and the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 1500s are inescapable.

Greed: The motivation to take the lands and to force the communities to do their bidding seems to be simply an act of greed. It is hard to understand any other motive, except that of wanting to have what others have. Danilo is greedy to the point of wanting to take literally everything that the villagers own. Even what little he pays them for their labor is spent in the horrible cantina / bar that he owns.

Cruelty: There is both psychological and physical cruelty in *Paloma Herida*. The physical cruelty is overt and unmistakable -- he takes people’s homes, has them whipped or even murdered when they cross him, and violates the women. The psychological cruelty involves destroying the beliefs, invalidating their traditions and customs, and forcing the people to witness harmful, depraved acts against their loved one.

Violence against women: The violence against women takes many forms. Danilo badgers Paloma, but then pretends to be in favor of her wedding to Esteban, all the while planning to have his way with her and sexually assault her. The prostitutes represent what happens to women who are the victims of repeated sexual assaults and encounters. They move about like zombies, and do not seem to have any agency or self-determination whatsoever, and are simply forced to do the bidding of men with power. The violence against them is psychological as well as physical, and both flow from a deep lack of respect toward women.

Critique of modernity and “civilization”: Throughout the film is an implicit critique of the concepts of “progress,” “modernity,” and “civilization” as defined by the non-indigenous people, which are the urban mestizo or white Mexicans who arrive at the little traditional village of fishermen living on the shores of Lake Atitlan. At the beginning of the film, the traditional life of the descendants of the Maya is shown to be tranquil, peaceful, and in harmony with nature and with each other. There is no need for authority or local laws - they simply follow their traditional roles, and they maintain a sustainable lifestyle. Their music is soothing and natural, played with wooden flutes and ocarinas, and their voices are soft, mellifluous, and kind. When Danilo claims he is bringing “civilization” to the villagers, what he is bringing in reality is the eradication of a culture and its people, and he does so in a way that will leave generational scars on any survivors. There seems to be no way for the two cultures to co-exist. The “modern” destroys all it has contact with, and it is unstoppable as long as there are greedy, megalomaniacal leaders in the world.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

PALOMA: Paloma is an unusually light-haired indigenous woman living in a Mayan community in Guatemala on the shores of Lake Atitlan. She lives happily in her community with her father until the arrival of the new “owner” of the region, Danilo Zeta.

Loyal: Paloma is loyal not only to her father and fiance, but also to her community and traditions. Her loyalty is demonstrated in her willingness to defy the orders of Danilo to give up their home, and also to participate in the debauchery at the impromptu dancehall.

Idealistic: The cinematography creates dramatic contrasts between the vicious and cruel Danilo and the subjugated and abused Paloma. Although he is shown in positions of power and authority, standing apart and above all those he claims to control, Paloma stays apart, refusing to look at him. She focuses on supporting her father, Fidencio, who was widely regarded as the wise man of the community, and is a force for continuity rather than change.

Traditional: Paloma follows the traditional customs of her community. She plays traditional musical instruments such as the panpipe, ocarina, and the wooden flute. In addition, she wears traditional clothing including the weaving patterns characteristic of each community. Her adherence to tradition is emphasized when she appears in the same frame as the bevy of prostitutes brought by Danilo. The prostitutes wear the “mod” outfits of the 1960s with thick eyeliner, pancake makeup, and dangling earrings, and more.

DANILO ZETA: Danilo Zeta is an outsider who claims to be the new owner of the entire region surrounding and including Lake Atitlan. He is a brutal thug, similar to the head of a criminal gang, even if he has somehow obtained legal title for the land. He comes to Lake Atitlan and the village of San Antonio Palopo. He comes to the town with the intention of indenturing the local populace, subjecting them to brutal forced labor. He demoralizes the spirit of the people not only with cruelty but also immorality, forcing them to drink alcohol and participate in drunken dancing to rockabilly songs played on a record player.

Cruel: From the outset, Danilo demonstrates his cruelty and cruel nature in many ways. First, he arrives in town with his group of men and women who consist of violent criminals and prostitutes, and tells the people he is bringing “civilization” to them, as though the indigenous traditional ways of harmony and self-rule somehow lacked civilization, and he immediately seized the property he wants and compels the people to work from dawn to dusk on building roads and other manual labor. Second, he punishes those

who annoy him in very cruel ways, which include hanging people by their wrists, whipping, lashing, humiliating, and finally, murdering. He is sadistic as well as cruel and laughs at the pain and suffering of others.

Authoritarian: Danilo announces that he is the new owner of the land around Lake Atitlán, and even the lake itself. He warns the villagers that anyone who defies his authority will be punished and his word is law. People who cross him are summarily whipped, hung by their wrists, or executed. His henchmen obey him, and those who do not are also executed in the same way as the villagers -- a rock tied to their feet and thrown into the lake. The prostitutes appear drugged, and simply look at him blankly, chewing gum with open mouths, something that comes across as lewd, taudry, and devoid of morals. They seem to have no emotions except that of fear and mechanical obedience to him.

Scheming: Danilo is a scheming, conniving person who plots to eliminate barriers to his obtaining what he wants. He wants Paloma, but she is in love with Esteban, a fellow indigenous villager and fisherman. He pretends to be happy about the wedding and offers to pay for a lavish party / reception after the wedding. However, those are not his intentions at all, and he compels one of his henchmen to kill Esteban by knifing him in the back in full view of Paloma. Paloma tells everyone what happened, and Danilo has the killer (who was obeying orders) killed by tying a large rock to his foot and throwing him into the lake. Later, as Fidencio is visiting Esteban's grave, he also kills him, thus eliminating any protection Paloma might have had.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Members of an indigenous Maya community, Paloma, her father, Fidencio, and her fiancé, Esteban, lived in a small village on the shores of Lake Atitlán. Please describe the village and the people who lived there. What did they do? How did they earn a living? How did they dress?
2. Please describe the arrival of Danilo Zeta and his first speech upon arrival. What kind of person is he? How can you tell? How do the villagers respond? How does their traditional manner of being quiet and non-confrontational make it easier for Danilo to dominate them?
3. Danilo claims to own all the lands as far as the eye can see. Could this be true? Describe a few ways that Danilo may have obtained control over such a large expanse of land. After you do that, please research the concept of "latifundios" during the time of the Spanish empire. What were the arrangements? Who gave the rights to the land? Was their original right legitimate?
4. Refer to the scenes with the women who come with Danilo. What are they? When they first arrive, how are they dressed? What are they doing? In the scene where they erect a cantina / dancehall, what are the women wearing? How are they dancing? How do they contrast with the indigenous women?
5. Describe the behavior of the judge and his wife. What is their opinion of Paloma and her plight at first. Why is the judge's wife so adamant about obtaining information from Paloma about the situation that brought her to the jail and also the baby? As Paloma slowly describes what happened, what are some of the ways on which one's view of her changes? What is the judge's final decision about Paloma's fate?