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Recovering the Forgotten Puerto Rican and Chicano Soldiers of the U.S. Wars in East
Asia. Cultural Representations at the Limits of the Scholarly Archive

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Katrina Haugsness Oko-Odoi

Committee in charge:

Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Chair
Professor Luis Alvarez
Professor John D. Blanco
Professor Milos Kokotovic
Professor Max Parra

2014

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The Dissertation of Katrina Haugsness Oko-Odoi is approved, and it is acceptable
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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my partner in life and love Clifford Oko-Odoi for tirelessly supporting, encouraging, and inspiring me. Above all else, you made sure that I never lost sight of what is truly important and that I did not forget to *live* along the way. To my parents Allen White and Julie Haugsness-White for paving the way for me to make it this far, and to my sister Jocelyn Threatt for believing in me throughout this long journey. I wouldn't be here without all of you.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to those historically marginalized men and women whose stories of resilience go untold and whose adversities remain undocumented. There is much work that remains to be done.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
VITA.....	xv
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION.....	xvi
INTRODUCTION “I am an American fighting man”: Interrogating Diversity in Twentieth & Twenty-First Century U.S. War Literature.....	1
Ethnic Minorities At Home and Abroad during The Cold War Era	6
Theoretical Framework: The “Political Unconscious” and the “Outsider Within”	15
Interrogating the Limits of the Archive	20
Unique Histories, Unique Narratives.....	25
Chicanos in the U.S.: “We Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us”	25
The Roots of Imperialism, or the “World’s Oldest Colony”	30
Chapter Breakdown	41
Conclusion	45
CHAPTER ONE Interrogating Absence: the Puerto Rican Soldier in United States Historiography and the American Consciousness	48
The Limits of Extant Historiography and the Scholarly Archive	54
The Makings of War: Puerto Ricans in the Korean War	65
The Literary Generation of 1950: the Work of José Luis González in Context.....	85
José Luis González’s Literature: The Themes of Race and War.....	90
Presenting Absence: The Critical Function of Lacunae in José Luis González’s “El arbusto en llamas”	102
CHAPTER TWO An Insider’s Perspective: The Reality of the Puerto Rican Experience in the Korean War.....	122
A Veteran’s Experience, Fictionalized: The Work of Emilio Díaz Valcárcel.....	126
A Close Reading of “Proceso en diciembre”	153
Mirroring the Effects of Imperialism through the Antagonistic Relations between U.S. and Puerto Rican Soldiers.....	158
Feeling Trapped: Cross-Cultural Gender Relations in a Marriage Based on False Pretenses	167
Life Devalued: Puerto Rican Soldiers’ Tenuous Solidarity when Confronting their Treatment as Expendable Bodies.....	175
A Metaphorical Castration: Loss of Mustache Equals Loss of Manhood	182
The Role of Patriarchy in the Structure of Recognition	188
Conclusion	196
A Closer Look at the Screenplay “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte”	198
Conclusion	208

CHAPTER THREE “Cannon fodder is just good old Army chow”: Problematizing the Chicano and Latino Experience in the Korean War	210
“Equal” Sacrifice and Heroism in <i>Finnigan’s War</i> : Connor Timmis’s Take on the Korean War	212
Rolando Hinojosa’s Re-creation of the Korean War	216
Troubling Transnational Racism: From Belkin County to Korea, and Back	220
Comprehending the Intersection of Race and Class through the U.S. Military Machine	230
The Specter of Death as a Permanent Residue of War	241
Preserving Chicana/o History through Orality: José Montoya as Artist, Activist, and Korean War Veteran	245
Problematizing Anglo-Chicano Racial Tensions and Internalized Racism in “The Bully”	256
Critical Differences in the Puerto Rican and Chicano Experience of the Korean War	261
CHAPTER FOUR (Re)presenting the Vietnam War era through the Chicana Perspective: The Fragmented Chicana/o Family and Crises in Female Identity.....	266
How Can We Move On? Puerto Rico’s Military Presence in the Aftermath of the Korean War	268
Centering the Female Perspective: The Chicana/o Experience of the Vietnam War Era	274
Contextualizing Chicana/o Late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Century War Literature	276
¿Darles voz?: Chicana Narrative as Reaffirming National Belonging in Stella Pope Duarte’s <i>Let Their Spirits Dance</i>	282
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the (Non)return in Patricia Santana’s <i>Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility</i>	299
A Chicana’s Guernica: Reliving a Life-altering Loss through Autobiographical-based Fiction in Gloria Velásquez’s <i>Toy Soldiers and Dolls</i>	327
Conclusion	337
EPILOGUE “Strange but this place where we are at is unreal almost”: Exploring Latina/o and Chicana/o Military Participation in the post-9/11 Era	340
Whose Homeland? Targeted Recruitment and Non-Citizen Soldiers	343
Expanding the Archive	352
Conclusion	353
BIBLIOGRAPHY	360

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VITA

- 2006 Bachelor of Arts
University of California, San Diego
- 2007-2008 Teaching Assistant, Sixth College Writing Program
University of California, San Diego
- 2009-2013 Teaching Assistant, Literature Department Intermediate Spanish Language
University of California, San Diego
- 2011-2012 Teaching Assistant, Literature Department Multi-Ethnic Literature Series
University of California, San Diego
- 2011 Master of Arts and Candidate of Philosophy
University of California, San Diego
- 2014 Doctor of Philosophy
University of California, San Diego

AWARDS

- 2009 Center for International and Latin American Studies Federal Tinker Travel Grant
University of California, San Diego
- 2012 Institute for International, Cultural and Area Studies Travel Grant
University of California, San Diego
- Fall 2012 Literature Department Quarter-long Dissertation Fellowship
University of California, San Diego
- 2013-2014 Graduate Dissertation Fellowship in the Humanities
University of California Humanities Research Institute

PUBLICATIONS

“A Self-Reflective Feminist Collaboration: Understanding Female Artistic Solidarity within Latin America.” *Brújula: Art and Encounters*, 6.1 (December 2007). Print.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Recovering the Forgotten Puerto Rican and Chicano Soldiers of the U.S. Wars in East Asia. Cultural Representations at the Limits of the Scholarly Archive

by

Katrina Haugsness Oko-Odoi

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Chair

This dissertation addresses the diverse literary and cultural representation of the experiences of Puerto Rican and Chicano minority ethnic soldiers in the U.S. military during the Korean and Vietnam wars. As a minority ethnic soldier—an “outsider within,” to borrow from Patricia Hill Collins—I argue, the Puerto Rican and Chicano soldier, as well as his extended community, have the potential to view the U.S. military through a critical lens. This unique positioning stems from the minority ethnic soldier’s

marginalization within the armed forces, and informs his ability to draw attention to the systemic racism within that very system. I analyze this potentiality in the work of Puerto Rican authors José Luis González and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel (Korean War veteran), and related audiovisual production on the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. military; literature by Chicano Korean War veterans Rolando Hinojosa and José Montoya; and narratives by Chicana novelists Stella Pope Duarte, Patricia Santana, and Gloria Velásquez. With the goal of expanding this conversation beyond the limits of the academy, I also propose and lay the groundwork for a more accessible archive on U.S. Latina/o military participation.

In *Recovering the Forgotten Puerto Rican and Chicano Soldiers of the U.S. Wars in East Asia*, I consider to what extent – if any – this cultural production contributes to an anti-imperialist project that challenges the underpinnings of the United States’ interventionist foreign politics through the military. I conclude that while there is a potential for the construction of an anti-imperialist stance, the perspective of these texts varies depending on what is at stake for the community in question. I identify three salient threads among the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican texts examined in this dissertation. These include: texts that participate in an openly anti-imperialist project; texts that display discontent with larger structural issues within U.S. society and grapple with the complexities of modern, “multicultural” America; and texts that reinforce U.S. nationalist projects by foregrounding their community’s contribution to the American nation. I acknowledge that these threads are as fluid and complex as the experiences they represent, and recognize that many works straddle them.

INTRODUCTION

“I am an American fighting man”¹: Interrogating Diversity in Twentieth & Twenty-First Century U.S. War Literature

It is no secret that war literature has a long-standing history within the lettered tradition. War has as enduring a presence as religion or politics in the history of humanity, and there have been countless wars and countless volumes of literature written on those wars over the centuries. From early literature on the crusades during the middle ages to Tolstoy’s classic *War and Peace* (1869) and other literature on the Napoleonic Wars, to twentieth century literature on the Great War and ensuing Second World War, the genre of war literature persists to the present day. Most wars throughout history have given rise to some sort of literary or oral history that remains long after its protagonists have passed on. Oftentimes, the literature that emerges out of war is nationalistic, written in support of one’s nation and the cause for which the war is being waged. Generally, this literature is written from the perspective of the victor. There is also a substantial body of anti-war literature, ranging from Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939), both about World War I, to *The Things They Carried* (1990) by Tim O’Brien about the horrors of the Vietnam War. In recent decades, many of these war novels, memoirs, or autobiographies have been

¹ Josean Ramos, *Antes de la Guerra*, page 18. The novel is set in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War, and two insular Puerto Rican enlistees are in boot camp in the continental U.S. The line is the first in a series of six codes of conduct inscribed on a wallet-sized card that is given to the new military recruits by their captain at the beginning of boot camp. For the novel’s protagonist, this line is triply ironic since, as a Puerto Rican native, he doesn’t speak English, he doesn’t identify as “American,” and he doesn’t consider himself a violent person, or “fighting man.” Ironic contradictions of this nature were confronted by many different groups of ethnic minorities in the U.S. military who did not identify with the traditional image of the quintessential Anglo American soldier.

made into movies. *The Hunt for Red October* (directed by John McTiernan, 1990), and *Born on the Fourth Of July* (directed by Oliver Stone, 1989) are two such films.

Within this genre, one type of literature that has received less critical attention than the more mainstream literary production on war is literature that is written from the perspective of ethnic minorities in imperialist nations like the U.S.² My dissertation addresses cultural production within this literary tradition. War literature written by U.S. ethnic minorities addresses the adversities that these individuals and their communities have faced both at home and in the military. In the last forty to fifty years, there has been a notable growth in U.S. cultural production about war and the military experience from a minority perspective. The themes addressed in this production vary widely, and the stance adopted by each minority author is unique. In these texts, experiences of racism and discrimination are mixed in with reflections on the horrors of war, on solidarity or tension among troops, and on the perceived heroism or cowardice of certain soldiers or officers. It is often the case that war literature of this nature encompasses a broader reality than just the violence occurring on the front lines, as many authors use the minority soldier's experience at war as a premise to reflect on overarching social issues that are also present on the home front.

² Another type of literature that has received less attention within the U.S. academy is the production by “victims” of U.S. imperialist wars, including Vietnamese, Korean, Latin American, Filipino, Iraqi, Afghani, and Libyan – the list could go on – writers and artists, among others. While there is more scholarship in certain areas than others – on Asian and Latin American war literature in particular – further research is clearly needed in this area of cultural representation. Unfortunately, it lay outside of the scope of this dissertation project. I am, however, interested in exploring as part of a future project the potential intersections and dialogues between literature by minority ethnic soldiers and their communities, and literature on and by the victims of imperialist wars. In relation to the wars waged in Asia (including Korea and Vietnam) as part of the Cold War, Jodi Kim (*Ends of Empire*, 2010) has begun important work examining some of the cultural production emerging out of those experiences from the Asian perspective. One novel of particular interest on the Korean War is Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* (1998), which explores the Korean War's traumatic impact on a young Korean man after resettling in the U.S. in its aftermath.

In an effort to consider certain elements of minority ethnic war literature and cultural production that past scholars have overlooked, this dissertation contributes a fresh perspective to the scholarly conversation on the representation of war in the literary and cultural production of U.S. Latina/o ethnic minorities. With the goal of expanding this conversation past the oftentimes exclusionary boundaries of the academy, this dissertation also proposes and lays the groundwork for the construction of a new, more accessible archive on the subject of ethnic minority mobilization in the U.S. military. In order to begin this archival process, this dissertation project has entailed the collection and analysis of a wide range of texts of diverse origins, among which are unpublished and (some) previously undiscovered documents; “informal” (non-peer reviewed) online materials including articles, blog posts, email correspondence, and discussion boards; cultural production including films, protest songs, screenplays, and documentaries; published literature; and “formal” (peer-reviewed) historiography and scholarship. By placing these “informal” and “formal” texts into direct dialogue, I not only complicate and deepen the existing knowledge on ethnic minority military mobilization in the U.S., but I also open this dissertation up to a broader conversation on the limits of the academy and the future of scholarship and the archives in light of the digital age. In particular, my dissertation contributes valuable knowledge to the currently limited academic work on the experience of Puerto Ricans in the military and how it is represented in various texts, which is further enhanced by the archival research I conducted in Puerto Rico. Moreover, my examination of the unique positionality of Chicana authors to reflect on the Vietnam War’s impact on the Chicana/o community acknowledges the alternative perspective they

add to the existing, male-authored body of Chicano narratives on Vietnam – many of which have already received much critical attention.

The post-9/11 era has seen a new wave of literature and film representing the U.S. experience in earlier wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars in particular. This new wave is evidenced by Toni Morrison’s 2013 novel *Home* that examines the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on an African American Korean War veteran, as well as the emergence of several Chicana/o and Latina/o novels on the Korean and Vietnam War eras, and the publication of new anthologies and critical work addressing minority literature on both wars.³ Despite increased cultural production in these areas in recent years, however, the contributions of ethnic minorities to the U.S. military continue to be largely overlooked or ignored by dominant U.S. historiography and master narratives that perpetuate the homogenizing image of the quintessential Anglo American soldier – or the “American fighting man,” as Josean Ramos characterizes this American notion of the war hero (18) – fighting for the “greater good” worldwide. “The place of the ethnic and racial minorities in U.S. military history generally remains unrepresented,” historian Alexander Bielakowski recognizes (xviii). During the Cold War era specifically, a type of “consensus” historiography dominated in the U.S., which “posited an American

³ Among these are Chicana novels *Let Their Spirits Dance* by Stella Pope Duarte, *Their Dogs Came with Them* by Helena María Viramontes, *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* and *Ghosts of el Grullo* by Patricia Santana, as well as publications by Puerto Rican authors including *Antes de la guerra* by Josean Ramos, *Los diablos de las montañas* by Jorge Feliciano Ruíz, and *Corea/Vietnam: Dos guerras que quise olvidar* by Ángel Matos Torres. Relevant critical works include *Raza Sí!, Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (2005) by Lorena Oropeza, *Carnales: A History of Chicano Vietnam Veterans* (2013) by John C. Trejo, and *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (2004) by Lea Ybarra.

ideological homogeneity that effectively obscured conflict and difference” within the system, particularly when it came to race or ethnicity (xviii).

While the approach of historians has since evolved and more emphasis has been placed on the contributions of individual minority groups in recent decades, many marginalized communities continue to go unrepresented or underrepresented in U.S. master narratives. The relatively unknown and untold experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars is one such example, as are the long-term consequences that these wars have had on Chicano soldiers, their family members, and their larger community. In an attempt to interrogate this gap in U.S. historical consciousness, I analyze literature and other modes of cultural representation in this dissertation that address the experiences of Puerto Rican and Chicano soldiers in the Korean and Vietnam Wars in order to critically reflect on the unique positionality of these soldiers who are frequently viewed and treated as “outsiders” within the structure of the United States military. I analyze this potentiality in the work of Puerto Rican authors José Luis González and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and related audiovisual production on the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. military; literature by Chicano Korean War veterans Rolando Hinojosa and José Montoya; and narratives by Chicana novelists Stella Pope Duarte, Patricia Santana, and Gloria Velásquez.

Through this exploration, I strive to determine to what extent – if any – this cultural and artistic production contributes to an anti-imperialist project that challenges the underpinnings of the United States’ interventionist foreign politics as they are embodied by the U.S. military. My dissertation suggests that while there is a potential for the construction of an anti-imperialist stance, the perspective of these texts varies,

depending on what is at stake for the community in question. I identify three salient threads among these texts, as I explain later in this introduction. My analysis of this broad range of texts in the following chapters gestures towards a more open scholarly stance and intervention that opens up a more accessible dialogue on these subjects and involves a broader audience that falls both within and outside, or *at the limits of*, the traditional boundaries of the academy. In the following sections, I first consider the historical framework of this dissertation, which encompasses the Cold War era. I then explain the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this dissertation project, including my engagement with the archive, and with the notions of the “political unconscious” and the “outsider within.” The third section provides a more detailed historical background on Chicana/o and Puerto Rican communities, respectively, in order to acknowledge each group’s unique cultural, political, and historical circumstances. Finally, I provide a brief summary of the four chapters and epilogue that make up this dissertation.

Ethnic Minorities At Home and Abroad during The Cold War Era

The period my dissertation covers began in the aftermath of World War II (WWII) and the allies’ ensuing redistribution of territory in formerly Nazi occupied zones. Within a year of the war’s end, the allied powers also established the United Nations, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted soon after. The United States began to assume its new role as the global superpower but faced opposition from the Soviet Union, a former WWII ally turned enemy in the post-war period. The deterioration of relations between the US and the Soviets led to the Cold War era, which lasted from the late 1940s to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1991. This period of struggle for global supremacy pitted US capitalist interests against the Soviet communist system.

The United States used its influence in the Western hemisphere to enforce a strong anti-communist climate, drawing on the Monroe Doctrine to justify an active foreign interventionist policy specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico. This interventionist approach was not limited to the Western hemisphere, however, as the U.S. began to construct a myth of a benevolent superpower whose role it was to protect the world from Communism and to defend freedom and democracy. This myth, which Lisa Yoneyama has called an “imperialist myth of liberation and rehabilitation,” informed the rhetoric and propaganda surrounding the United States’ involvement in two wars in East Asia in the span of a decade (59). The first intervention took place in Korea, officially beginning in 1950, despite the military’s presence in the country dating back to 1945 when the U.S. ran a full military government in the country for three years (Cumings and Halliday 16). The U.S. military’s participation in the conflict that escalated in 1950, then, was justified as the superpower’s mere cooperation with the United Nations in order to “defend” South Korea against North Korea’s invasion of southern territory. A direct result of the division of territory following World War II, this military “conflict” is a key example of the lengths to which the U.S. went to defend capitalism in the face of communist threats during the cold war era.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Chicano and Latino⁴ populations were disproportionately overrepresented in the ranks of the military during the Korean and Vietnam War period

⁴ My usage of the gendered male term “Latino” or “Chicano” versus the more gender-neutral term “Latina/o” or “Chicana/o” in this dissertation depends on the specific time period and context about which I am writing. In general, I use the gendered male term “Chicano” or “Latino” when discussing situations that refer solely to the male experience. Therefore, when I discuss the minority ethnic soldier’s experience in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, I will refer to the “Chicano” and “Latino” soldiers given that only males participated on the front lines in these wars due to military restrictions on female participation in combat duty during that era. I use the gender-neutral term “Chicana/o” or “Latina/o” when discussing the larger

(Villa et al. 123; Mariscal, *Aztlán and Viet Nam* 18, 21) – a phenomenon that continues today – their numbers in the military much greater proportionally than their numbers in the U.S. civilian population (Villa et al. 123; Kagan 1). While the overrepresentation of many racial/ethnic minority groups, most notably Latinos and African Americans, in earlier wars has not been widely contested, there is greater controversy over the racial makeup of the military in the twenty-first century. Several well-documented, large-scale studies have been conducted since the year 2000 that consistently point to the overrepresentation of Latinas/os (“Hispanics”) in the military. For example, findings published in 2010 by Valentine Villa, Nancy Harada, and Anh-Luu Huynh-Hohnbaum on the poor health of Latino Vietnam and Latina/o Iraqi Veterans relied on more accurate adjusted aggregate population numbers, concluding: “The Hispanic population age eighteen to thirty-five represents approximately 4 percent of the total U.S. population and 9 percent of the active duty military,” indicating that the numbers of Latinas/os in the military today are twice as high as those in the civilian population (124). Villa and colleagues also found that there has been a steady decline in the general military participation rates of whites and African Americans since 1990, compared to a constant climb in Latina/o participation rates during the same period (124).

Lack of education stemming from depressed socioeconomics for Puerto Rican, Chicana/o and Latina/o communities during the cold war era and into the present day have partially determined the level of risk of the combat assignments these ethnic soldiers receive during their military service. While in-depth research of this phenomenon

ethnic minority community that encompasses both genders. For example, when discussing the impacts of the war on the community in general, I refer to it as the “Chicana/o” community. My usage of the gendered male term shifts to the gender-neutral term in the epilogue when I discuss minority military participation in contemporary wars given that the combat restrictions for women have now been lifted.

remains scarce in relation to the Korean War, a 1996 study by Alan Booth and Cynthia Gimbel on the processes behind combat assignments in Vietnam points to this phenomenon. Booth and Gimbel document that those individuals who enlisted with lower AFQT scores were more likely to receive combat arms assignments than combat support assignments and to be deployed to Vietnam rather than other locales like Europe (1139, 1152).⁵ Moreover, Booth and Gimbel note the correlation between race and low AFQT scores, which they explain as being directly related to the fact that nonwhites “were more likely to see combat” than whites during the Vietnam War; a phenomenon which they acknowledge points to “institutional or nonpurposive discrimination” within the military (1152). Villa and colleagues also point to structural issues related to poverty and a lack of other alternatives for financial stability to explain this overrepresentation of Latinas/os in the military today and in the past (125). Corroborating Villa et al.’s findings is a more recent 2003 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, which found: “while Latinos make up 9.5 percent of the actively enlisted forces, they are over-represented in the categories that get the most dangerous assignments – infantry, gun crews and seamanship – and make up over 17.5 percent on the front lines” (cited in Kagan 1). Thus, as is the case in countless aspects of U.S. society to this day, the practices built into many of our national institutions – be they public education, the military, or other public organizations –

⁵ The Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) is the main aptitude-related assessment given to those who enlist in the military, and scores are computed based on the combined results from four subtests: Arithmetic Reasoning, Mathematics Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, and Word Knowledge (“Understanding ASVAB Scores” 1). Low AFQT scores, therefore, can be directly linked to deficits in education and English-language competency (Booth and Gimbel 1137-9), both of which are common among underserved communities of primarily nonnative English speakers, as is the case for insular Puerto Ricans. The researchers note that their study “strongly supports the idea that even in the theater of war, the field of combat was the site for men not suited to other tasks” (1154). I would challenge this conclusion, however, and posit that instead, the field of combat was deemed the ideal site for men who were *perceived* not to be suited to other tasks, as previous research has widely documented the limitations of aptitude tests, especially among linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minority groups.

perpetuate long-standing structural inequalities that, more often than not, are drawn across socioeconomic and racial lines.⁶

This over-representation of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in the military reflects a long-standing approach to U.S. military recruitment that targets impoverished, working class youth, presenting a military career as an idealized alternative to the limited options available to this population (Lutz 184-5; Wyant 1). Largely racial and ethnic minorities, these young men continue to end up on the frontlines, far too many returning home in body bags (Kagan 1). A 2008 study by the National Priorities Project (NPP) revealed that between 2004 and 2007, the number of military recruits with scores in the higher half of the AFQT results who possessed a high school diploma fell by 15 percent (Wyant 1). Recruiting data analyzed as part of the study indicates that a large majority of Army recruits during this period were from low- and middle-income families making less than \$60,000 a year. Greg Speeter, the executive director of the NPP that conducted the study, remarked: “Once again, we’re staring at the painful story of young people with fewer options bearing the greatest burden” (cited in Wyant 1). Like many Chicana/Latina mothers today, during both the Korean and Vietnam wars, many mothers from minority communities felt as if they were being forced to send their sons off to die. Puerto Rico’s role in both wars evidences not only the disproportionate presence of Latinos in the military during that period, but their overrepresentation in combat zones: “Although Puerto Rico ranked approximately twenty-sixth in population among the fifty states... [it] ranked fourteenth in casualties and fourth in combat deaths” during the Vietnam War

⁶ For more on race and class as determining factors in military combat participation, see Christian Appy’s *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (1993).

(*Aztlán and Viet Nam* 21). This fact speaks to U.S. imperialist tendencies as much as it does to the government's domestic targeting of minority populations, revealing the structural forces at work that perpetuate the under-education of historically marginalized groups like Puerto Ricans, whose low aptitude scores then land them on the front lines.

While the Korean War officially ended in 1953 – although some would argue that the civil war within Korea continues to this day⁷ – the Vietnam War began less than two years later and lasted almost two decades until 1975 (although U.S. involvement ended in 1973). The motivations for U.S. intervention in the conflict were very similar to those from the Korean War: to protect U.S. anti-communist, capitalist interests in response to the threat of North Vietnam. Recruitment of working class, undereducated youths increased during this period, partially as a result of Project 100,000, introduced by Secretary of Defense McNamara in 1966 that drastically lowered the standards for entrance into the Armed Forces and consequently further increased the presence of racial and ethnic minorities, specifically Chicanos/Latinos and African Americans.⁸ The war escalated in the 1960s, and would result in the deaths of millions of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, and more than 50,000 U.S. servicemen.

The war faced much domestic opposition since its beginning, which only grew as it dragged on and news of American military abuses continued to surface. The Chicana/o

⁷ See *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (2013) by Sheila Miyoshi Jager.

⁸ In *Aztlán and Viet Nam*, Mariscal states, “McNamara was well positioned to make the deadly connection between ‘curing poverty’ and supplying additional men for the military... McNamara followed Kennedy in claiming that disadvantaged youth would be well served by the military, that they would learn valuable skills: ‘The poor of America have not had the opportunity to earn their fair share of this Nation’s abundance, but they can be given an opportunity to serve in their country’s defense and... to return to civilian life with skills and aptitudes which, for them and their families, will reverse the downward spiral of human decay’” (20). A recent study by the National Priorities Project (2007), as well as research by Sociologist Amy Lutz (“Who Joins the Military: A look at Race, Class, and Immigration Status,” 2008) indicates that a similar trend to recruit undereducated, impoverished youth persists in the military today.

and Latina/o communities on the U.S. mainland played a significant role in the anti-war movement, forming several organizations in opposition to the war including the National Chicano Moratorium Committee and the Brown Berets. The Moratorium Committee organized marches and demonstrations in 1969 and 1970 throughout the Southwest, drawing tens of thousands of supporters, and facing brutal police repression. Other forms of anti-Vietnam war protest emerged on the island of Puerto Rico, where a mandatory draft, also in place, faced mounting criticism from the Puerto Rican people, many of whom could not understand why their young men were being forced to fight in a war that had nothing to do with them for a nation that did not even recognize them as full-fledged citizens. During the Vietnam War era, the local Puerto Rican media frequently condemned the mistreatment that Puerto Rican troops were facing during the war (“Denuncia Discriminación” 4), and community members began letter-writing campaigns to then Puerto Rican governor Roberto Sánchez Vilella demanding that he put a stop to Puerto Rican youths’ mandatory draft to fight in Vietnam (FLMM Archives, file 1324).⁹ Increasingly violent student protests on the University of Puerto Rico’s main campus in Río Piedras were ongoing during the war, with major standoffs between anti-Vietnam protesters and ROTC officers documented in 1964 and 1970, the latter ending in the murder of university student Antonia Martínez at the hands of the police (Cabot and Salgado 1).

The decades of the 1960s and 70s were an incredibly difficult and complex moment in Chicana/o and Puerto Rican history. Tensions emerged within the Chicana/o

⁹ These forms of protest, as well as Puerto Rican literature that represents them, are discussed in Chapter Two.

and Latina/o communities since a large portion of the male population was participating actively in the war while another large faction of the population was at home actively protesting that war. Several texts have been written on this issue from the Chicana/o perspective, including the novel *Let Their Spirits Dance* by Stella Pope Duarte, which I discuss in Chapter Four.¹⁰ The Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s emerged in conjunction with the anti-war movement in the continental U.S., as a response to blatant discrimination against Chicanas/os and the violation of their civil rights, including police brutality. At the same time that African Americans fought for equality and civil rights under the law, Chicanas/os in the Southwest (primarily) struggled to protect their own rights in the face of increasing government abuse and discrimination.

Also during the Vietnam War era, the United States faced a period of increasing migration and growth of the Latina/o population, specifically after the removal of ethnic quotas on immigration in 1965. Much of this migration was a direct result of political and economic unrest in Mexico and other areas of Latin America during the 1970s, 80s and 90s prompted by the neoliberal policies of international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as well as U.S. military and economic interventions in the region. This economic instability resulted in the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants north to the United States, as well as migrants from Central and South America and the Caribbean. Puerto Ricans, despite having U.S. passports and limited citizenship, also made up part of these migration flows as the island experienced a widening socioeconomic gap between the working class, and

¹⁰ To my knowledge, there are no Puerto Rican novels written on the anti-Vietnam war movement that took place on the island. The only narrative that I am aware of that touches on Puerto Ricans' anti-Vietnam war sentiments is the short story by Emilio Díaz Valcárcel titled "La prueba," which I discuss in Chapter Two.

the middle and upper classes. Primarily resulting from industrialization efforts beginning in the late 1940s, the entrenched poverty of Puerto Rican lower classes was exacerbated by foreign corporations' exploitation of their "cheap" labor, serving as a strong push factor for migrants to seek better opportunities on the U.S. mainland.

Unfortunately, the rapid growth of the Latina/o population and the increased presence of undocumented immigrants in recent decades have been met with xenophobia and nationalist rhetoric within the United States. This stigmatization is nothing new given that the Chicana/o and Latina/o community in the U.S. has been historically marginalized by dominant discourses of ethnic and cultural inferiority reinforced by a nation-state apparatus that has institutionalized this discrimination through legislation against undocumented immigrants but also against Latinas/os in general (Propositions 187 and 227 in California; more recently, Arizona law SB-1070), police brutality and racial profiling, unequal social services and a lack of access to higher education, to name a few.¹¹ The Puerto Rican community, regarded as part of the "Latina/o" population if residing in the continental U.S., but as part of a separate group if residing on the island, has faced similar structural inequalities and has consistently received unequal or substandard treatment and services from the U.S. government, as is further discussed in a later section.

The time periods that I focus on in this dissertation are the 1950s (U.S.) Korean war era and the 1960s (U.S.) and early 1970s Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement

¹¹ There is a rapidly growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship on the history of anti-immigrant sentiment against the U.S. Latina/o community. While many other books have since emerged, two publications that shed much insight on the situation are David Gutierrez's *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1995) and *Operation Gatekeeper* (2002) by Joseph Nevins.

era. The war literature I examine in the following chapters is analyzed chronologically, beginning with production on the Korean War, and followed by a discussion of texts on the Vietnam War. This chronological approach allows me to account for the significant changes in the cultural and political climate of the United States between the Korean and Vietnam War eras. I therefore expect the literary and cultural production addressing these two eras to be different, and will acknowledge the distinct historical moments presented in the different texts that I discuss. Moreover, when these texts were produced also informs the stance and perspective they present. The production discussed here emerges from different eras, including the immediate aftermath of the wars in the 1960s and early 1970s, texts produced in the mid to late 1970s and the 1980s when these wars were still recent history, and the recent wave of literary and filmic production in the 2000s. As will be demonstrated in the analyses of these texts, the distinct social and political situations associated with a specific period of production influence the literary and artistic modes that were employed by the authors. For example, while racial oppression and violence continued to dominate the reality of Chicanas/os and Puerto Ricans during the 1950s Korean War period, the upsurge in political activism in the U.S. – and particularly the activism of people of color in the 1960s and 70s as seen in the Chicano movement, among others – greatly changed the political climate and established a burgeoning sense of solidarity through resistance that had not existed before among those communities.

Theoretical Framework: The “Political Unconscious” and the “Outsider Within”

In part, my dissertation aims to explore the ways in which literary mode and historical period come together politically through the theory of the “outsider within,” introduced by Patricia Hill Collins in her seminal 1986 essay “Learning from the

Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought” in *Social Problems*. A sociologist, Hill Collins views the unique historical positionality of Black women as both within dominant white society due to their predominant role as domestics in the first half of the nineteenth century while still remaining outsiders, or strangers, marginalized from that society due to their racial otherness. Instead of interpreting this status as solely negative, Hill Collins identifies the potential benefits of an “outsider within” status, asserting that it “has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Afro-American women,” both historically, and in the present day (Hill Collins, “Learning from Outsider Within” S14). Hill Collins applies this concept specifically to discuss the experience of Black feminists in academia, and particularly in the sociological field; it is nevertheless a term that can easily be adapted to other marginalized individuals or communities, as Hill Collins herself has acknowledged (“Learning from Outsider Within” S29, *Black Feminist Thought* 12).

This special standpoint, or perspective, afforded to other marginalized individuals, allows them to view the dominant society, and the conditions of their marginalization, in a critical manner. Just as African American female intellectuals are “prevented from becoming full insiders in any of these [scholarly] areas of inquiry,” so too are other minorities alienated from their respective spheres of influence, forcing them to remain “in outsider-within locations, individuals whose marginality provide[s] a distinctive angle of vision on... intellectual and political entities” within those spheres (*Black Feminist Thought* 12). My dissertation therefore proposes adapting the “outsider within” theory to the minority ethnic soldier. Frequently viewed and treated as “outsiders” by the military institution due to their ethnic “otherness” and despite their U.S. citizenship, Puerto Rican

and Chicano soldiers – as well as other minorities including African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans – are marginalized within the very system that they serve.

Oftentimes, these soldiers struggle to find a sense of belonging in the face of continual mistreatment and stigmatization from Anglo soldiers and officials. This dislocation enables them to see and understand both sides of the military project as “outsiders within,” (*inside the armed forces*, i.e. exposed to and forming part of the inner workings of U.S. military hegemony; but considered *outsiders* in the armed forces given their experiences of cultural, ethnic/racial, and linguistic marginalization), and prompts many to begin to question and sometimes challenge the U.S. military’s imperialist projects, be they in Korea, Vietnam or elsewhere.

Hill Collins, as well as other scholars including Barbara Smith, maintain that the outsider-within position illustrates the complexity of power relations along multiple lines: “intersecting oppressions of sexuality, race, gender, and class produce neither absolute oppressors nor pure victims” (126). Therefore, this positionality is much more fluid than simply pitting the minority victim against the majority oppressor; the interests and challenges of ethnic minority and majority individuals intersect in a multiplicity of ways that can have a myriad of implications. Some of these include working class solidarity between Latinos/Chicanos and Anglos in the military, intra-ethnic tensions between minority community members who deny their identity and those who seek their support as members of the same collectivity, Anglo-Chicano or Anglo-Latino hostility within the ranks of the armed forces, ethnic solidarity and recognition between Chicano/Latino soldiers and local inhabitants during foreign wars, and so on. These different intersections

and their implications on the minority ethnic soldier and his outsider-within status are explored in more detail in the following chapters.

This dissertation is heavily grounded in and informed by the historical, cultural, political, and social circumstances out of which each text emerged. The literature, films, unpublished documents, online materials, and historiographical texts examined in the following chapters are approached from a theoretical framework that analyzes the positioning of the texts and the soldiers and communities portrayed in them as lying at the margins of Anglo America, to determine if and how that unique positioning is reflected in the narratives that are produced. Some of these texts may gesture to the “political unconscious,” as proposed by Frederic Jameson, while some may pursue individual projects that are relatively independent from collective forms of historical remembering. My work is grounded in the understanding that textual interpretation of any form is above all else a political act. As Jameson posits, “the political perspective... [is] the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (Jameson 33). As cultural artifacts, texts are, in essence, socially symbolic acts. Thus, any literary critic must first acknowledge that every text or cultural product is both social and historical in nature, and as such is inextricably connected to the political—since, in Jameson’s words, “everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (36). With that in mind, the framing of my dissertation will focus primarily on the first of the three interpretive horizons that Jameson identifies in *The Political Unconscious*; that is, the narrowly political horizon, which requires the interpretation of the individual symbolic act (37).

As Jameson explains, “the will to read literary or cultural texts as symbolic acts must necessarily grasp them as resolutions of determinate contradictions” (58-9).

Therefore, instead of emerging from a single author, the symbolic act is the result of competing modes of production that are inherently contradictory in nature, and the text or cultural artifact addresses, or attempts to work out, these contradictions. Thus, the *form* of a text is essential to understanding its underlying political significance, since the formal structure of an individual narrative is at heart “the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (Jameson 38). Understanding the contradictions being grappled with in a single symbolic act requires an attention to the circumstances out of which such contradictions arise. These circumstances can be best comprehended by considering the collective social histories of the community associated with a given symbolic act. For example, if the text in question were a Chicano novel on the Korean War, then identifying the contradictions that the text is seeking to resolve would entail examining the broader historical circumstances of the Chicana/o community during the Korean War era. This dissertation therefore seeks to uncover the political unconscious in the work of the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o authors examined in the following chapters, with the goal of “restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history” of minority ethnic soldiers in the U.S. military (Jameson 4). The outsider within theory informs this project, interrogating the positionality of the minority ethnic soldier in the armed forces as it is evidenced in the texts being examined, at the same time that the literary form of each text is also being interpreted to determine whether it participates in an anti-imperialist politics on any level.

While the relationships between literary mode, time period, or collective social history in cultural production are oftentimes complex and contradictory, I posit that there are several underlying perspectives that give form to the way the minority ethnic soldier’s

reality is presented in the texts I explore here. Acknowledging that there exists a wide spectrum of viewpoints represented in the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican texts examined in this dissertation, I identify three salient threads among them. These include: texts that participate in an openly anti-imperialist project; texts that display discontent with larger structural issues within U.S. society and grapple with the complexities of modern, “multicultural” America; and texts that reinforce U.S. nationalist projects by foregrounding their community’s contribution to the American nation. I acknowledge that these threads are as fluid and complex as the experiences they represent, and recognize that many works straddle them. Although these perspectives vary, I demonstrate that on some level, each text evidences an attempt by the authors to construct an alternative collective memory that functions to preserve their community’s history. Another integral part of my theoretical approach for this dissertation encompasses a dialogue with the archive in its myriad forms, which I outline in detail in the following section.

Interrogating the Limits of the Archive

As discussed earlier, my dissertation hinges on a new approach to scholarship that considers and incorporates diverse texts into the conversation, many of which have often been excluded from the annals of traditional scholarship as it has been historically perceived. Central to this new approach is an interrogation of the notion of the archive and its relation to the academy. To begin with, my use of the term archive in this dissertation draws from Jacques Derrida’s exploration of the processes surrounding the archive in “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.” In the simplest terms, Derrida defines the archive as encompassing any act of printing or writing (11, 17). Perhaps more

important than the definition itself, however, are the processes that underlie the construction of an archive in the first place. The process of most interest to me here is that of consignation, as Derrida describes it, meaning both “the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit),” as well as “the act of consigning through gathering together signs” (10). This second aspect of consignation, Derrida explains, “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (10).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I address what I will call the *scholarly archive*; that is, the unified corpus of academic scholarship that members of the academy have generated and out of which new scholarship emerges and is legitimated through its participation in this corpus. As with any type of archive, the process of consignation for the scholarly archive entails acts of inclusion and exclusion that inform the gathering of materials that are then conserved as part of the archive and remain static over time. Diana Taylor explains: “What changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied... the unchanging text assures a stable signifier... Insofar as it constitutes materials that seem to endure, the archive exceeds the live” (Taylor 19). This permanence of the archival text that outlives human beings is what embodies the archive with much of the perceived power that it wields within the academy today. Moreover, the exclusive nature of the archive in general, and the scholarly archive in particular, reinforces that power while simultaneously playing into processes of valorization that privilege formal education over informal education, graduate degrees over undergraduate degrees, peer-reviewed publications over non peer-reviewed publications, closed access over open access

scholarship, etc. These often unproductive valorizations are an unavoidable consequence of the archival process. Taylor maintains, “what makes an object archival is the process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis” (19). Furthermore, by excluding certain knowledge or materials as unworthy, scholarly writing thus serves “as a strategy for repudiating and foreclosing the very embodiedness it claims to describe” (Taylor 36). And while the academy is slowly bending to the new realities of the digital age, it is slow to let go of the marginalizing practices built into our scholarly institutions that continue to privilege the thinking or writing of certain individuals over that of others.

Derrida explains that the archive denotes power, as “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (11). Thus there is an element of control and power in the very act of a scholar entering his or her work into the scholarly archive that reflects the politics that surround the academy. While this discussion could be taken in many different directions, I raise it here to get at the marginalizing effects of the scholarly archive – among other types of archives – on nontraditional forms of knowledge or information. These forms may include different types of embodiment – dance, ritual, healing practices, song, theater – that Taylor describes as making up the “repertoire,” as well as other more informal utterances – blog articles, social media posts, Wikipedia entries, YouTube videos – that are increasingly dominating our everyday lives in the digital age. As Taylor writes, we are now “on the brink of a digital revolution that both utilizes and threatens to displace writing,” a shift that she sees as directly related to the repertoire and that, she posits, “necessarily alters what academic disciplines regard as appropriate canons, and might extend the traditional disciplinary boundaries to include practices previously outside their purview” (16-7). As I explore the current body of

knowledge that exists on the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o experience in the U.S. military – much of which lies outside or at the limits of the corpus of the scholarly archive – I simultaneously consider the serious limits of the archive and gesture toward a shift away from traditional academic practices of exclusion and inclusion, valorization and de-valorization. This shift away from the exclusionary scholarly archive is embodied by the scholarly practice I have undertaken in this dissertation, which is made apparent through the direct dialogue I establish in the following chapters between informal and formal texts without privileging one over the other.

Kathy Lou Schulz explains, “the process of gathering and declassifying that Derrida describes is not neutral; it contains—and conceals—within it the power to assign and interpret meaning, to ‘speak the law’ ... This power is played out in the institutionalization of the archive” (110). Thus, there are clearly mechanisms at force that determine what is meaningful and what is not, rendering certain information unworthy of entry into the archive. The voices of those groups who have been historically underrepresented in the academy – including Latinas/os, Chicanas/os, African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans, among others – are consequently often marginalized due to a lack of representatives on the “inside,” so to speak. Therefore, I posit that alternative knowledge forms that lie outside or at the limits of the exclusive corpus of the scholarly archive are particularly imperative to incorporating these minority voices into the larger public consciousness in more powerful ways that shed light on their experiences. I no longer see the incorporation of these experiences into an exclusively scholarly dialogue as necessarily beneficial due to the limited reception that such scholarship receives. Therefore, I call for the expansion of the traditionally “academic”

discussion of the representation of minority experiences to a broader audience, encompassing the general public that participates in Internet and community forums and both shares their knowledge and experiences and learns about those of others through accessible virtual, community, and print channels. I posit that these fluid, productive processes in turn contribute to the ongoing expansion of knowledge on subjects such as U.S. military mobilization of minority groups. As such, merging the texts and dialogues emerging from the broader public sphere with those emerging from the narrower academy makes for a more open, accessible archive that expands beyond the currently restrictive scholarly archive.

It is important to recognize that, despite the historically exclusionary practices of the academy, the publishing industry is a separate, complex entity that also plays a key role in determining which knowledge becomes formalized and which remains unformalized. Just as the voices of ethnic minorities have remained historically marginalized within the academy up until recent decades, publishing houses have also deemed the experiences of many minority groups unmarketable and therefore unprofitable. A case in point is major publishers' historical perspective that the war narratives of soldiers of color were not a topic of interest to mainstream readers. William Arce recognizes these processes at work in the inability of many Chicano veterans to publish their manuscripts. Publishing houses, he states, felt that "there was no recognizable community that would be interested in purchasing the texts and so publishing Chicano/Latino war literature may have seemed like a risky business venture" (Arce 29). Book publishers did not view the Latina/o or Chicana/o community as a legitimate target market until very recently. To this day, the very small Puerto Rican

community remains insignificant to mainstream continental publishers who lump these individuals in with the rest of the U.S. Latina/o or “Hispanic” community. The mechanisms at work in these processes of inclusion and exclusion within the scholarly archive and the publishing market become clearer as we examine the available body of formal and informal knowledge on the subject of Puerto Rican and Chicano participation in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Unique Histories, Unique Narratives

In order to comprehend the complex histories and political and cultural circumstances out of which the texts I discuss in the following chapters arise and within which the lives of these soldiers are rooted, it is important to understand the situation of the minority ethnic collectivity on the home front. To this end, in this section I briefly explore the history of the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican communities, respectively.

Chicanos in the U.S.: “We Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us”

This popular slogan associated with the immigrant rights movement in the U.S. alludes to the Mexican American’s unique history within America, which dates back to even before the Mexican-American War, which began in 1846. Upon Mexico’s surrender in 1848, the government ceded large tracts of Mexican territory to the U.S. as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexicans who called these areas home – including large parts of the present-day states of California, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico – found themselves suddenly living in foreign territory, effectively colonized by the U.S. Following this annexation of Mexican lands, Mexican migrants from further south began to cross the border into the new U.S. territory, drawn by the promise of land and the rapidly growing mining, ranching, and agricultural industries during the second

half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. This early Mexican immigration saw the gradual emergence of the cycle of agricultural migrant labor, where agricultural laborers would migrate across the U.S. following the harvest season of different crops in order to make a living. Agricultural workers faced particularly harsh working conditions, and their experiences of exploitation and dangerous health conditions would later be the impetus for the United Farm Workers movement founded by César Chávez in 1962.

While agricultural work is a particularly notable industry for its exploitation of Mexican American laborers, U.S. employers in other industries have exploited Mexican migrants for their labor for nearly two centuries. Taking advantage of the undocumented status of many of these informal Mexican migrants, American employers have historically offered them poverty wages well below the federal minimum – if they are paid at all –, forced them to work long hours in sometimes dangerous or unhealthy conditions, all the while denying them job security and benefits. While the Bracero Program, a temporary worker program, was formed by an agreement between Mexico and the U.S. granting Mexican laborers temporary work contracts to help assuage the labor shortage during and after WWII, these contracts eventually expired and those who were originally invited to the U.S. with open arms found themselves facing forced mass deportation back to Mexico (Nahmias 119-120).¹² Although the official government program may have ended in the mid-1960s, Mexican migrants in search of better employment opportunities and a brighter economic outlook continued to migrate north to

¹² The Bracero Program lasted from 1942 to 1964, and ushered in an estimated 5 million Mexicans into the U.S. to work as temporary laborers, mainly in the cattle and agriculture industries (Nahmias 104). For a detailed discussion of the program, see *The Migrant Project: Contemporary California Farm Workers* (2008) by Rick Nahmias.

the U.S. throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Official government reports estimate that approximately 1 million Mexican immigrants entered the country legally between 1981 and 1990 (Meier and Rivera 192-95), with an additional 3 million Mexican nationals migrating north between 1995 and 2000 alone (Passel et al. 1).

The U.S. Chicana/o community has experienced vehement racism and racially motivated violence since the Mexican-American War. This violence was manifested in many ways, among which included lynching in the form of extralegal hangings or firing squads (Gonzales-Day i). Between 1850 and 1935, Ken Gonzales-Day documented that there were at least 350 lynchings against ethnic minorities in the state of California alone, the majority of whom were Chicanas/os or Latinas/os (i). As segregation between African Americans and Anglos reigned in the American South during the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, similar segregation and racial hostilities between Anglos and Mexican Americans persisted in the Southwest – where the majority of the Chicana/o population resided at that time – into the 1950s. Those Mexican American servicemen returned from WWII to find that very little had changed for their community; most Chicanas/os and Latinas/os lived in segregated neighborhoods away from Anglo residences, attended segregated schools, could only eat in designated restaurants, and were limited to low-paying jobs, the majority of which required back-breaking manual labor. As Elena Poniatowska notes, “In César Chávez’s childhood there were signs saying ‘No dogs and Mexicans allowed’” (40). Poniatowska also cites a Kern county assistant sheriff as stating in 1945, “The Mexicans are trash. They have no standards of living. We herd them like pigs” (40).

This open hostility towards Chicanas/os played out on a large scale during the notorious “Zoot Suit Riots” that first broke out in Los Angeles in 1943 between Anglo military servicemen and Mexican American youth called “Pachucos” or “Zoot Suiters.”¹³ Responding to violent aggression from Anglo sailors and marines, the Chicana/o youth attempted to defend themselves, only to be overpowered by gangs of Anglo servicemen, civilians and police who viciously attacked and beat dozens of Chicanos over a period of several weeks (Pagán 7, 10).¹⁴ The fact that racialized violence of this nature was not only condoned but also perpetrated by police and other government representatives during the riots heightened the disillusionment and unrest of the broader Chicana/o community during the mid-twentieth century – a discontent that would later be harnessed by the Chicano Moratorium and Chicano Movement, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four.

Despite the open racial hostility many Mexican Americans confronted on a daily basis during earlier periods in U.S. history, they have a long record of military service dating back to the Civil War. Indeed, Chicano soldiers fought side-by-side with Anglos in both world wars, and were disproportionately represented in the military throughout the twentieth century. Following WWII, a group of Chicano servicemen spearheaded by Hector P. García founded the American G.I. Forum (AGIF) in 1948 to advocate for veterans of Mexican descent who were not receiving the benefits and services entitled to

¹³ Zoot Suits were not solely associated with Chicanas/os and Latinas/os; there is a deep history of Zoot Suit culture in the African American community as well. See Luis Alvarez’s *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (2008) for an in-depth history on the zoot suit and its cultural and racial associations.

¹⁴ These riots were motivated, at least in part, by the “Sleepy Lagoon” murder of José Díaz in 1942 and the ensuing trial of his accused murderers. For a detailed account of the Sleepy Lagoon murder and the related Zoot Suit Riots, see *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (2003) by Eduardo Obregón Pagán.

them as U.S. military veterans. The AGIF soon began to advocate for many non-veteran issues that the Chicana/o community was facing as well, including segregation, voting rights, and other civil rights issues. This organization, as well as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), set the stage for more outspoken forms of Chicana/o activism that emerged during the Vietnam War era.

The Chicano presence in both the Korean and Vietnam wars was notable; scores of Chicanos died fighting in Vietnam, which was a much more prolonged war that took whole families of sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers away from their families and communities to fight. While the Chicana/o community was less politicized during the Korean War era—the AGIF and LULAC being notable exceptions, the emergence of the Chicano Moratorium in the early days of the Vietnam War, combined with a growing anti-war, anti-military consciousness within the Chicana/o community, marked a stark difference in the Mexican American population's social and political circumstances between the two U.S. wars in East Asia.

Although widespread political activism was still a relatively new phenomenon in the Chicana/o community at the beginning of the Chicano Movement in the 1970s, the Mexican American people have a deep history of collective resistance to marginalizing forces. In an attempt to contest and speak back to such alienating, oppressive forces, Mexican natives across the Southwest began recording collective and individual *testimonios* narrating their community's spatial and social marginalization within urban communities soon after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in the late nineteenth century. The oral histories of "Californios" – Mexican natives residing in California prior to the secession of Mexican territory to the U.S. – in Los Angeles during this period are one

such example of these efforts. As Rosaura Sánchez explains in *Telling Identities: the California Testimonios*, a group of Californios contributing to Bancroft's historiography of California, "began mapping their imaginary sense of position within a conquered terrain no longer recoverable except in memory" (1). This reliance on memory to recall a communal space that has been destroyed is echoed in much contemporary Chicana/o literature, including that of Rolando Hinojosa, as I discuss in Chapter Three. The work of many Chicana/o authors discussed in the following chapters broaches similar issues of social marginalization as those addressed by their predecessors, linking their production to this historic Mexican American tradition of discursively bearing witness to critical moments in their community's collective history. As this deep collective consciousness in the Chicana/o community suggests, the influence of oral and folkloric traditions on twentieth and twenty-first century Chicana/o literature is notable, and contemporary authors continue to wield these traditions as tools to contest different forms of adversity and record their community's history.

The Roots of Imperialism, or the "World's Oldest Colony"

The insular Puerto Rican community, which has been under U.S. imperial control since 1898, has continued to remain in a colonized status to the present day, receiving limited rights of U.S. citizenship since 1917, and facing discriminatory treatment and institutionalized racism through unequal access to public services and substandard government services, including critical health care programs like Medicaid (Chacón and López 1).¹⁵ Although participating in the U.S. military since the very year of the island's

¹⁵ In an open letter to Congress dated September 25, 2009, Guillermo Chacón and Oscar Raúl López of the Latino Commission on AIDS reported that Congress places arbitrary caps on Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico, resulting in the monthly expenditure of \$20 per Medicaid participant in Puerto Rico compared to

annexation in 1898, through the mid-twentieth century, Puerto Rican military members endured derogatory treatment from Anglo officers who regarded the islanders as lazy ethnic “Others” who did not take military service seriously (Villahermosa 11). The broad racial spectrum of Puerto Ricans residing on the island – due to the large African presence there from the island’s history as an active slave importer and plantation economy during Spanish colonialism – rendered even light-skinned Puerto Ricans “black” in the eyes of Anglo Americans. Consequently, Puerto Rican residents faced cultural, linguistic, and racial discrimination from Anglo individuals and institutions alike.

The island of Puerto Rico was one of the first to be “discovered” by Christopher Columbus in his famed expedition of 1492.¹⁶ Puerto Rico became a Spanish colony upon Columbus’ conquest and settlement of the island in 1493, and remained under Spanish rule until 1898. Control of the island of Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States in 1898 at the end of the Spanish American War. Interestingly, the official name of the island was changed by the U.S. government to “Porto Rico” in 1898, its original name not being restored until 1932 (“Military Government in Puerto Rico”).¹⁷ The island,

\$330 per participant in the continental U.S. in 2008. Moreover, Chacón and López state that Puerto Rican hospitals are substantially underfunded since they are “denied equal federal dollars” compared to funding for hospitals in the continental U.S. (1). Several studies also document the fact that Puerto Rican veterans receive substandard health benefits compared to military veterans that reside on the U.S. mainland (Chacón & López 1; Matos-Desa 291).

¹⁶ It is widely documented that the Americas were inhabited by indigenous communities long before the arrival of the Spanish or any other European explorers. In Puerto Rico specifically, the Taíno population was dominant (Arce et al. 1-2). Unfortunately the Taíno peoples and culture were largely wiped out upon the arrival of the Spanish (35-37).

¹⁷ This fact in itself points to the xenophobic discrimination prevalent in U.S. policy at that time (and still present today, some would argue), in the government’s need to change the spelling of the Spanish word “puerto” to an English bastardization of it in order to facilitate Americans’ pronunciation of the island’s name.

officially a U.S. territory,¹⁸ was under U.S. military government for two years until the passage of the Foraker Act of 1900, which established a civil government in Puerto Rico (Arce et al. 183).¹⁹ This act avoided the issue of granting U.S. citizenship, instead creating, “a body politic under the name of ‘The People of Puerto Rico,’ composed of citizens of Puerto Rico entitled to the protection of the United States, but with very limited rights—a real colonial anomaly” (Morales Carrión 156).²⁰ This left the legal status of Puerto Rican citizens incredibly ambiguous since Puerto Rico was not an independent nation-state, thus leaving Puerto Ricans technically stateless for seventeen years. The act basically placed the island under the tutelage of the United States, a decision that clearly “proclaimed their inferiority,” as McKinley’s special commissioner Henry K. Carroll had warned (154-55). It reflected a clear paternalistic overtone that rendered Puerto Ricans little more than children who needed to be guided by a wiser, more mature parental figure. While the Foraker Act was strongly opposed by the Democratic Party and the Puerto Rican people themselves, Congress passed it nonetheless (Morales Carrión 156-59).

¹⁸ The official status of Puerto Rico in 1898 (colony, territory, etc.) is not clearly defined in many historiographies of the island, including *Historia de Puerto Rico* by Lucas Morán Arce, et al. This points to the ambiguous nature of Puerto Rico’s political status, which continues to this day. Arturo Morales Carrión, however, clearly identifies Puerto Rico as a conquered U.S. territory beginning with the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898, and lasting until 1952 with the establishment of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth (Morales Carrión 43).

¹⁹ The issue of including U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans in the Foraker Act was discarded by McKinley’s Special Commission on Puerto Rico partially based on “the fear that granting citizenship implied statehood” (Morales Carrión 156).

²⁰ The Foraker Act preserved a military government run by the U.S., including Federal control over executive power including the justice, education and security sectors, and control of the legal system through presidential appointments of judges to the Puerto Rican Supreme Court and U.S. District Court. Puerto Ricans were only able to freely exercise their political voice in the legislative branch (Morales Carrión 152).

It was not until 1917 with the Jones Act that Puerto Ricans gained U.S. citizenship.²¹ The act also authorized Puerto Rican residents to elect a Senate, thus expanding the island's legislative self-government (Arce et al. 179). However, the U.S. President still retained the power to appoint the governor, attorney general, and Supreme Court justices, among other officials on the island. As Morales Carrión recognizes, "basic decisions on economics, education, justice and security were still made in Washington. Furthermore, the Jones Act was no constitution; it was an act of Congress, which Congress could amend at will" (200). In spite of the passage of subsequent legislation pertaining to Puerto Rican citizenship – most notably the 1952 Puerto Rican Constitution, a 1989 document from Congressional Research Services demonstrates that the ultimate fate of Puerto Rican citizenship remains under the control of Congress to this day: "US citizenship of Puerto Ricans (born in Puerto Rico) was not granted under the 14th Amendment, but rather was given legislatively under the Jones Act of 1917 and, therefore, the US Congress has the power to revoke the US citizenship of these Puerto Ricans" (quoted in Ramos-Zayas 37). While there exists some controversy to this day regarding why Puerto Ricans were originally granted U.S. citizenship by Congress,²² their decision appears to have primarily functioned to cement the United States' control

²¹ Puerto Rican citizenship was still limited by the fact that Puerto Ricans residing on the island could not vote in presidential elections. The Jones Act included a clause permitting Puerto Ricans to retain their Puerto Rican citizenship if they made an official declaration expressing such. However, upon making this declaration, Puerto Rican citizens automatically lost their voting rights in elections since one had to be an American citizen in order to vote. For this reason, the clause was largely symbolic and for practical purposes, even opponents of U.S. dependency were forced to convert to American citizenship in order to express their political preferences in elections (Arce et al. 187).

²² Some people believe that granting Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship in 1917 was directly prompted by the U.S. military's need to draft additional troops to fight in World War I (Morales Carrión 53-4). While several popular Internet sources and articles have reinforced this belief, the claim is generally unsubstantiated, particularly because the Selective Service Act did not yet exist when Congress passed the Jones Act. Moreover, non-citizens have long been allowed to serve in the military, dating as far back as the Civil War.

over Puerto Rico. As it was first presented to Congress, the idea of Puerto Ricans' federal citizenship was described, "not as an acknowledgement of the individual rights [Puerto Ricans] might have but rather as recognition 'that Puerto Rico belonged to the United States of America'" (Ramos-Zayas 34-5). Based on the nature of the debate surrounding the issue in Congress that led up to the Jones Act, therefore, contemporary scholarship, including the work of Ana Ramos-Zayas, Juan Perea, and Marvette Pérez,²³ among others, sees the congressional decision as a move to reinforce the U.S.'s claim over Puerto Rico and thus strengthen their strategic military control in the Caribbean.

The United States' interest in Puerto Rico's critical role for national security has long trumped its concern for the livelihood of the actual inhabitants of the island. "Congress would act when issues related to Puerto Rico's political future somehow involved national security and the U.S. position in the Caribbean" (Morales Carrión 53-4).²⁴ Interestingly, Puerto Rican historian Héctor Andrés Negroni refers to this role that his native island played with pride and a strong sense of patriotism despite its dehumanizing effects on Puerto Rican residents (29). The U.S. naval base of Vieques is a

²³ See "Delinquent Citizenship, National Performances: Racialization, Surveillance, and The Politics of 'Worthiness' in Puerto Rican Chicago" by Ana Ramos-Zayas in *Latino Studies*, vol. 2 (2004); "Fulfilling Manifest Destiny: Conquest, Race, and the Insular Cases" by Juan Perea in *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (2001); and "The Political 'Flying Bus': Nationalism, Identity, Status, Citizenship and Puerto Ricans" by Marvette Pérez in *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 22 (2002).

²⁴ Puerto Rico's tactical importance due to its geographical positioning in the heart of the Caribbean has been coveted by colonial powers since the fifteenth century (Negroni 23). In his *Historia militar de Puerto Rico*, Héctor Andrés Negroni cites numerous colonial documents praising the tactical advantages of the island. For example, Alexander O'Reilly, a Marshal for the Spanish empire, declared that "the conservation of this island is incredibly important for our American commerce, and for the security of all of our colonial settlements in the area: one could not ask for a more ideal situation for a military site/base than the stronghold of Puerto Rico, be it for the aid or invasion of Santo Domingo, Cuba, Havana, Caracas, Cartagena, Campeche, etc." (Negroni 24). See Negroni's examination of the "teoría de las llaves" on pages 25-31, a system developed by the Spanish empire to identify the political and military importance of different sites in the Caribbean and Latin American region. According to Negroni, this system designated Puerto Rico as "la llave de las Antillas y de las Indias," the key site of the Antilles and West Indies (25).

perfect example of this blatant disregard for the wellbeing of Puerto Rican natives, having been used for naval tactical and bombing practice for nearly a century despite the serious health risks to native residents.²⁵ This tendency to manipulate Puerto Rican territory and politics to the United States' own interests has continued through recent history, and has contributed, among other things, to the ambiguous political status of the island to this day.

The period of the 1930s to 50s was marked by widespread political and economic instability for the island. It was the difficult economic situation brought on by the Great Depression that prompted high levels of migration to the U.S. mainland, primarily New York, beginning in the 1940s (Soto-Crespo 10).²⁶ Puerto Rican author José Luis González wrote extensively about the experience of Puerto Rican migrants in New York, specifically in his 1973 short story collection *En Nueva York y otras desgracias*. An additional draw for Puerto Ricans to migrate was the intense recruitment of the island population by the U.S. military and companies on the mainland. The island experienced several other dramatic changes during this period. In 1949, Luis Muñoz Marín became the first democratically elected governor of the island as a result of an act passed by the U.S. Congress the previous year. Muñoz Marín introduced several ambitious projects aimed at boosting the local economy, including “Operation Bootstrap,” which had as its

²⁵ For a discussion of the ongoing struggle between inhabitants of Vieques island and the U.S. Navy, as well the serious consequences of the Navy's field maneuvers and bombing practice on the health of island residents, see “Resisting Toxic Militarism: Vieques Versus the U.S. Navy” by Déborah Berman Santana. See also “Social Struggle against the U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico: Two Movements in History” by Katherine T. McCaffrey, and “Expropriations and Displacement of Civilians in Vieques, 1940-1950” by César Ayala and Viviana Carro. The novel *USMAÍL* by Puerto Rican author Pedro Juan Soto paints a striking picture of the reality faced by Puerto Rican natives living on Vieques island in the first half of the twentieth century.

²⁶ This period is commonly referred to as “la Gran migración” (the Great Migration) among Puerto Ricans. See James A. Tyner's discussion of this era in “Puerto Rico: Between the nation and the diaspora - migration to and from Puerto Rico” in *Migration and Immigration: A Global View*.

objective the rapid industrialization of the island. The project relied heavily on foreign investors, enticing U.S. companies to move plants or factories to the island by offering low wage scales and exemption from a range of local and federal taxes (Morales Carrión 269, 273). Agrarian reform was also part of Muñoz Marín's project, which limited the expanse of land that could be held by large corporations.

While Operation Bootstrap succeeded in accelerating the shift from a mainly agricultural to an industrial society and led to the emergence of a middle class, it did little to address the needs of the working class (Morales Carrión 286-88). In fact, the project actually served U.S. interests much more directly than those of the Puerto Rican community, who were further exploited and oppressed by the foreign companies seeking to save money in an underdeveloped state. Muñoz Marín had pushed for this foreign industrial presence on the island but did not anticipate the consequences it would have on Puerto Rican citizens. Large-scale migration to the mainland began partly as a result of the exploitative practices of foreign companies in the late 1940s and 1950s (Morales Carrión 288), while simultaneously stemming from strong "pull" factors including the perceived promise of greater employment and educational opportunities. Indeed, the history of Puerto Rican migration from the island to the mainland throughout the twentieth century – similar to immigration trends from many Latin American countries – has been one of combined "push" and "pull" factors.

Sparked by the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century, several pro-independence groups became active on the island, including the Puerto Rican Independence Party, which believed in achieving independence through elections, and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, which advocated armed revolution

(Arce et al. 190, 94).²⁷ This pro-independence period culminated in numerous uprisings on October 30, 1950 led by Pedro Albizu Campos, known as the October Revolutions (Arce et al. 207).²⁸ The United States military violently suppressed these and several other rebellions in the hope that this would serve as a warning against future uprisings.

The most significant change in Puerto Rico's political status in the twentieth century came in 1952 with the ratification of the island's new Constitution, establishing Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth, or "estado libre asociado," free associated state (Morales Carrión 275-78). In 1950, the U.S. federal government had passed a law allowing Puerto Rico to establish its own constitution through a Congressional Assembly. The process took a year, and the completed constitution was voted on and passed by the general Puerto Rican population on June 4, 1951 (Arce et al. 206). The final constitution, with several changes incorporated by the U.S. federal government, was ratified and put into law on July 25, 1952. This change in Puerto Rico's status plays a central role in Jorge E. Feliciano Ruiz's novel *Los diablos de las montañas*.²⁹ The new constitution

²⁷ Beginning in the early 1930s, The Nationalist Party, with Pedro Albizu Campos as party president, organized numerous demonstrations in protest of the U.S. government's presence and power on the island. Following the assassination of Puerto Rican Chief of Police Colonel Elisha Francis Riggs in 1936 by nationalists Hiram Rosado and Elías Beauchamp, the two men were detained and killed by police (Arce et al. 194-5). Albizu and seven other members of the party were accused as conspirators. Albizu was sentenced to ten years in prison, the majority of which he served in an Atlanta federal prison (Arce et al. 239-40). Upon his release in 1947, Albizu rejoined the nationalist cause, participating actively in his party and helping plan the October uprisings of 1950 (Arce et al. 207). Unfortunately, he was arrested again following the failed rebellion, and spent the majority of the years leading up to his death in 1965 in prison. For more information, see *Albizu Campos: Puerto Rican Revolutionary* by Federico Ribes Tovar.

²⁸ Members of the Nationalist Party organized several other rebellions and attempted assassinations, including one against President Truman. See *A History of Puerto Rican Radical Nationalism, 1920-1965* by Jaime Ramírez-Barbot and *La represión contra el independentismo puertorriqueño: 1960-2010* by Ché Paralitici for more information.

²⁹ Ruiz's novel is based on actual eyewitness accounts of veterans of the 65th Infantry who served in the Korean War, and covers the passage of the new Puerto Rican constitution. The first law passed in Puerto Rico under the new constitution adopted the single star flag as the official flag of Puerto Rico (Morris 50). The flag was a source of national pride, and it served as an inspiration to Puerto Rican troops off at war

founded a representative and democratic government that recognized the division of power between Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches, modeled after the U.S. governmental system (Arce et al. 2006). The Executive power rests on a governor, whose role is very similar to that of any U.S. state governor. The biggest limitations of this new Commonwealth status were (and still are today) the fact that Puerto Rico's one Congressional representative does not have voting power, and that Puerto Rican citizens on the island continue to have limited citizenship due to their inability to vote for the U.S. President (Arce et al. 2007).³⁰

Since the 1960s, the ambiguous status of the island continues to generate debate, and current political parties have different visions for Puerto Rico's future, either advocating for nationhood, for conserving its current status, or for its becoming the 51st state of the Union (Morales Carrión 310-12). This sense of uncertainty is present in much Puerto Rican literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, if only in the background.³¹ The lack of political status has defined Puerto Rico for more than a century, and Puerto Rican authors are forced to confront the issue in one way or another in their writing. Certain authors have been more vocal on the issue than other authors,

during that time. Ruiz depicts the raising of the Puerto Rican flag in South Korean territory and how it helped provide soldiers with a sense of national pride and belonging.

³⁰ Like all other residents of United States territories, Puerto Ricans residing on the island are not allowed to vote in presidential elections, although they are allowed to vote in primaries (Johnson 116). Moreover, Puerto Ricans born on the island are not eligible to become president, regardless of whether they become residents in the continental U.S. However, Puerto Ricans who become residents of a U.S. state *can* vote in presidential elections. Kevin Johnson discusses the negative implications of this limited citizenship on the Puerto Rican people: "As a consequence of their disenfranchisement, Puerto Ricans regularly receive less favorable treatment from the federal government than citizens of the various states. For example, federal benefit programs offer significantly lower benefit levels to United States citizens in Puerto Rico than to those on the mainland" (468).

³¹ A recent example is the two part book *Barataria* by Puerto Rican author Juan López Bauzá, which presents a modern-day version of *Don Quijote* situated in Puerto Rico that strongly satirizes and ridicules the political divisions and tensions between "anexionistas" and "independentistas," as they are generally referred to on the island.

including José Luis González, Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel. González's collections of essays titled *El país de cuatro pisos* reflects on many of the issues raised by U.S. intervention and imperialism on the island, and discusses its socioeconomic divisions, which are partially a result of the continued foreign presence in Puerto Rico throughout the twentieth century. Many scholars and politicians continue to theorize on the best solution for Puerto Rico's continuing socioeconomic issues, but the island's status has remained the same.³² Puerto Rico has not been a focus of interest for the U.S. federal government for over fifty years,³³ and until it is brought into the spotlight, it is clear that nothing will change. The issue is far from simple, complicated by political division on the island, and the pressures of outside interests from the mainland. Morales Carrión perhaps describes the current situation best declaring, "under these circumstances, the Puerto Rican political mind is the subject of a tug of war among outside interests while internally the sharp, partisan squabbles make the road to consensus very rocky" (312).³⁴ The results of the November 2012 Puerto Rican referendum on the island's political status revealed that a slight majority (approximately 61%) of Puerto Ricans favor statehood (Garrett 8). The results of this recent plebiscite

³² It is for this reason that Puerto Rico is often referred to as "the world's oldest colony" (Monge 3). There are conflicting interpretations of the island's current political status. For a discussion of the island as a modern colony, see *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* by José Trias Monge. For an understanding of the island as a more autonomous state, see *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* by Ramón E. Soto-Crespo.

³³ President Barack Obama's visit to the island in June of 2011 was the first "official" visit by any U.S. president since John F. Kennedy's visit in 1961 (Cooper 1). Unfortunately, his visit did not accomplish anything concrete and does not seem to have brought more public attention to the ambiguous political status of the island, or any of the other issues being faced by Puerto Ricans on a daily basis. On the contrary, Obama's visit appeared to be more about "wooing Hispanic voters back in the swing state of Florida" for the upcoming 2012 election than anything else (Cooper 1).

³⁴ Although Morales Carrión's text was published in 1983, the current reality of Puerto Rico's political status has unfortunately changed very little in the past thirty years.

have been the source of controversy, however, and as of April 2014, no major legislative steps had been taken to resolve the issue of Puerto Rico's political status.³⁵

While Puerto Rico continues to preserve its own culture and traditions, including the dominance of the Spanish language on the island, its direct ties to the United States cannot be denied or overlooked. Much of the literature produced by Puerto Rican and Puerto Rican-origin writers in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries focuses on the marginalizing effects of the U.S.'s continuing imperialist project on the island.³⁶ Other common themes include the institutionalized racism and discrimination within the government inflicted on Puerto Ricans on the island, and on multiple generations of Puerto Rican immigrants currently living in the U.S. Many authors of Puerto Rican origin now reside in the U.S., especially New York, and are critical of state assimilationist projects imposed by the educational system and other governmental institutions in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. that promote the repression or marginalization of Puerto Rican cultural identity. An excellent example of this critical stance is Abraham Rodríguez Jr.'s short story "The Boy without a Flag" in his short story collection of the same title.³⁷

³⁵ For more information on the 2012 plebiscite, see *Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions*, a Congressional Report prepared in 2013 by R. Sam Garrett.

³⁶ For more on the modern-day effects of U.S. imperialism on Puerto Rico, see *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (1999) by José Trías Monge, *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century* (1996) by Ronald Fernández, and *Sentencia impuesta: 100 años de encarcelamientos por la Independencia de Puerto Rico* (2004) by Ché Paralitici. A more innovative, although highly problematic, reading of Puerto Rico's status is Ramón Soto-Crespo's *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (2009). Soto-Crespo argues that Puerto Rico's government is "non-colonial" and characterizes Puerto Ricans' restricted U.S. citizenship as "unassimilated citizenship," a positioning that he sees as affording Puerto Ricans some sort of "radical autonomy" (18-19). While Soto-Crespo may not have set out to write a colonial apologist text, he closely reproduces many of those problematic arguments, and his interpretation of Puerto Rico as a borderland (recalling Gloria Anzaldúa) and the Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. as a "mainland passage" (asserting a potentially offensive parallel with the violent "middle passage" of the trans-atlantic slave trade) severely weaken the book's overall project.

³⁷ In Rodríguez's story, the protagonist is a young boy who learns about the history of his homeland through his father's stories and through books given to him by his father. Within the confines of their

Pedro Juan Soto's short story collection *Spiks* also addresses the experience of Puerto Rican emigrants in New York and the harsh discrimination they face. A more detailed history of twentieth century Puerto Rican literature is presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation is divided into four chapters and an epilogue. A brief summary of each chapter is provided below.

CHAPTER ONE - Interrogating Absence: the Limited Cultural Representation of the Puerto Rican Soldier in the United States Military

The first chapter of my dissertation focuses on the limited representation of the Puerto Rican soldiers' experience – as it was specifically represented by the 65th Puerto Rican Infantry Regiment – in the Korean War in a range of cultural texts. My examination of existing cultural production on this subject is informed by theory on the archives and the exploration of the processes at work that may have affected the way the community's experience in the U.S. military was presented or ignored. The first part of this discussion includes a studied consideration of different types of informal and formal texts on this subject in order to provide an in-depth history of the Puerto Rican military experience in the U.S. that presents alternative knowledge forms that have not been considered in existing literature. I then turn to a discussion of the literature of Puerto Rican author José Luis González related to the themes of racism, black identity and the military. This leads into my in-depth analysis of the author's short stories on the Puerto Rican experience in the military, including “Una caja de plomo que no se podía abrir”

home, the boy's father expresses politically “radical” views denouncing the negative role of the U.S. in Puerto Rico and praises Pedro Albizu Campos as a hero.

and “El arbusto en llamas,” both on the Korean War. A central theme in this chapter is absence, or lacunae, which I explore both in the informal and formal texts on the experience of the Puerto Rican soldier, and as a trope in González’s fictional work.

CHAPTER TWO - An Insider’s Perspective: The Reality of the Puerto Rican Experience in the Korean War

In my second chapter, I continue my discussion of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War through an analysis of several works by Puerto Rican author and Korean War veteran Emilio Díaz Valcárcel including short stories from his collection *Proceso en diciembre*, and his screenplay “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte,” both of which are partially based on the author’s experience in the Korean War. My close reading of these texts examines the openly anti-imperialist politics that is central in these narratives, as well as the tropes of intra-ethnic solidarity, the structure of recognition with the Korean people, hostility between Anglo and Puerto Rican soldiers, cross-cultural gender relations and the Puerto Rican soldier’s emasculation, and the military’s devaluation of the life of Puerto Rican soldiers. Through this comparative discussion of different genres within Díaz Valcárcel’s work, I also explore how his representation of the Puerto Rican soldier’s experience differs between the short story, long form narrative and screenplay forms. My analysis of “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte” is the first critical scholarship on the screenplay, which is a little known work of Díaz Valcárcel’s produced as a short film on one of Puerto Rico’s public television stations during the 1950s. In particular, I analyze this text as a form of dialectical theater – borrowing from Bertolt Brecht – which, by portraying the experience of war in a disruptive manner, challenges the discourses of heroism and patriotism that dominate traditional war discourse.

CHAPTER THREE - “Cannon fodder is just good old Army chow”³⁸:

Problematizing the Chicano and Latino Experience in the Korean War

My third chapter opens up a more comparative discussion of the Chicano and Puerto Rican soldier’s war experience through an analysis of the recently released documentary, “Finnigan’s War” (Conor Timmis, 2013), which reflects on the experiences of minority soldiers from diverse backgrounds in Korea; as well as the poetry collection *Korean Love Songs from Klail City Death Trip* and the war chronicle/journal *The Useless Servants* by Chicano author and Korean War veteran Rolando Hinojosa, and poetry and prose by Chicano poet José Montoya. My discussion addresses these authors’ varying stances on Chicano participation in the U.S. military, noting a divergence in the political stance of Hinojosa and Montoya’s work. I also examine the authors’ varying commentary on different issues faced by Chicano soldiers in the Korean War, including arbitrary punishment of the Chicano soldier by Anglo officers, the effects of internalized racism on intra-ethnic solidarity, the potential for cross-racial working class solidarity, and hostility between Anglo and Chicano soldiers within the U.S. military. Despite the divergences in their work, I maintain that both Hinojosa and Montoya evidence an awareness and criticism of U.S. national myth-making projects that paint America as the benevolent protector of freedom and democracy worldwide.

³⁸ Line from the poem “Boston John McReedy Drinks with Certain Lewd Men of the Baser Sort,” in Hinojosa’s *KLS* (24).

CHAPTER FOUR - (Re)presenting the Vietnam War era through the Chicana Perspective: The Fragmented Chicana/o Family and Crises in Female Identity

My fourth chapter turns to a discussion of three narratives written by Chicana authors on the Vietnam War era, including *Let Their Spirits Dance* by Stella Pope Duarte, *Motorcycle Ride in a Sea of Tranquility* by Patricia Santana and *Toy Soldiers and Dolls* by Gloria Velásquez. I examine the unique positionality of these female authors to reflect on the war's impact on the Chicana/o community and the alternative perspective they add to the extant, male-authored body of Chicano narratives on Vietnam (many of which have already received much critical attention). I identify the Chicana authors' preoccupation with the effects of the war on the Chicana/o family, and the implications that the crisis of masculinity brought on by the military service of young Chicanos had on female identity and on a burgeoning awareness of unequal gender roles within traditional Chicana/o culture. My discussion also considers the circumstances surrounding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as it is depicted in Santana and Velásquez's narratives.

EPILOGUE - "Strange but this place where we are at is unreal almost"³⁹: Exploring Latina/o and Chicana/o Military Participation in the post-9/11 Era

My epilogue considers the contemporary context of Latina/o (Puerto Rican) and Chicana/o participation in the U.S. military in the twenty-first century, post-9/11 era. I reflect more broadly on this dissertation, drawing brief conclusions on the texts examined

³⁹ September 9, 2006 MySpace blog post by Army Specialist Daniel E. Gómez, killed in action in Iraq (cited in Alvarez and Lehren 12). Gómez's MySpace entry speaks to the seemingly "unreal" nature of the U.S.'s "War On Terror" and his own personal attempts at simultaneously *comprehending* that strange reality and *surviving* it, both physically and mentally. His entry continues: "I hope I come back mentally in shape. lol." Like so many soldiers in war, he fears for his mental stability in the face of so many horrors. Gómez's surname suggests a Mexican American background, and the news article in which these entries were published describes him as: "Texan to the core" and "enamored of the military" (12). The MySpace entry speaks to two phenomena: the evolving nature of war coverage and literature with the advent of the Internet, and the growing rates of Latinos in the military, as I have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.

here, and gesturing to future areas of expansion. I also discuss several recent texts and events in order to explore the continuity between historic and contemporary issues of structural racism and U.S. ethnic minority military participation. Through my analysis of these phenomena, I explore the shift in rhetoric and ideology that has redefined the concepts of “homeland” and “empire” in U.S. master narratives, entering into a brief dialogue with former ASA President Amy Kaplan’s polemic 2003 speech on issues of U.S. imperialism after 9/11. One of the texts I discuss as part of this broader reflection is a 2009 poem by Stella Pope Duarte entitled “I’m Not the Enemy,” which recalls the Chicana/o community’s history of military participation in the U.S. armed forces. I also consider the growing prevalence of non-citizen (green card) soldiers in the military today, as well as the U.S. government’s recent award of 24 Medal of Honors to military service members – primarily racial/ethnic and religious minorities – from earlier twentieth century wars who were originally overlooked for the honor due to prejudice at the time. I analyze the rhetoric of official government remarks surrounding non-citizen soldiers and the Medal of Honor awards and the implications that they have on the future of cultural and ethnic/racial minorities in the U.S. military.

Conclusion

This dissertation strives to open up a broader discussion not only about the experience of Chicano and Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean and Vietnam wars, but also about the minority ethnic soldiers’ experience in the U.S. military in general. Many themes that I identify in this discussion are also present in the cultural production on the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican experience in more contemporary wars, including Iraq and Afghanistan, as I consider briefly in the Epilogue. Moreover, similar trends are also

present in the literary representation of other minority ethnic soldiers' experience, including African Americans,⁴⁰ Native Americans,⁴¹ and Asian Americans.⁴² While scholars have begun to address this cultural production, the literature remains minimal (Bielakowski xviii). I therefore hope to contribute to a broader dialogue on the nature of U.S. military structure, recruitment, and protocol in relation to different types of marginalized groups, including those marginalized based on race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, and religion. As such, in addition to providing much-needed insight into the particularities of the

⁴⁰ While there is a growing body of oral histories on African Americans' war experience, including *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* by Gail Buckley (2002) and *We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans, from World War II to the War in Iraq* by Yvonne Latty (2005), among others, studies of African American war literature remain limited. The most in-depth study to date is *A Freedom Bought with Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II* by Jennifer James (2007). See also Charles Heglar's essay "War of Words: War 'with' and 'against' in African American Literature" in *War and Words: Horror and Heroism in the Literature of Warfare* (2004).

⁴¹ The scholarship on Native American war literature is notably scarce compared to that of other ethnic minority groups, and clearly warrants further study. There exists no book-length examination of this cultural production that I know of to date. The few article-length treatments include "Borderline Experience: Visions of War in Three Native American Novels" by Patrycja Kurjatto-Renard in *Passion de la guerre et guerre des passions dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (2008), and Heike Raphael-Hernandez's essay "'The First Animal I Ever Killed Was a Gook': The Vietnam War and Its Legacy in African American and Native American Novels" in *Literature on the Move: Comparing Diasporic Ethnicities in Europe and the Americas* (2002). A notable Native American novel on the experience of a WWII Native American veteran is Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977). The majority of histories on the Native American military experience focus on historical involvement in the Civil War and other nineteenth century internal conflicts, with the main exception being the studies of Native American involvement in WWII, including *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* by Jere Franco (1999), and *Warriors: Navajo Code Talkers* by Kenji Kawano (1990).

⁴² The body of work on Asian American war literature is unarguably the fastest-growing scholarship out of these three minority groups (Asian American, African American, and Native American). Indeed, criticism on Asian American war literature has carved out a significant presence within Asian American literary studies today that is closely paralleled with the growing scholarship on Chicana/o and Latina/o war literature. The most logical explanation for this phenomenon is the fact that Latin America and Asia are the two main regions that have remained constant targets of U.S. imperialism throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. On Asian American war literature, see in particular Jodi Kim's *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (2010) and Bunkong Tuon's unpublished dissertation *Specters of War: Reclamation, Recovery, and Return in Southeast Asian-American Literature and History* (2008). Other valuable scholarship on U.S. militarism and the Asian American experience includes Yen Le Espiritu's *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (2003) and the collection of essays, *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (2010), edited by Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho.

Puerto Rican and Chicana/o military experience, my discussion in the following chapters also reveals the importance of a broader scholarly dialogue on U.S. militarism, U.S. imperialism, and marginalized communities.

CHAPTER ONE

Interrogating Absence: the Puerto Rican Soldier in United States Historiography and the American Consciousness

*Lástima que haya una guerra. Lástima que seas puertorriqueño y tengas
que batirte por un país que no es el tuyo. Lástima que hayas nacido.
Lástima, sobre todo, que ahora te estés inspirando lástima tú mismo.*⁴³
-José Luis González⁴⁴

To characterize the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico as complicated would be an extreme oversimplification of the oftentimes tense, rocky, and violent relations between the two states. This chapter opens my discussion of Puerto Rican war literature by examining the impact of U.S. imperialism on the island in the mid-twentieth century, which was a significant moment in U.S.-Puerto Rican relations. In particular, I focus on the limits of the cultural representation of the Puerto Rican soldier's experience⁴⁵ in a range of texts that address the Korean War and U.S. military mobilization in the twentieth century, as well as the Puerto Rican soldier's limited incorporation into what I call the scholarly archive – with a specific emphasis on the

⁴³ “What a shame that there’s a war. What a shame that you’re Puerto Rican and you have to fight for a country that isn’t your own. What a shame that you were born. What a shame, above all else, that you are now inspiring pity in yourself.”

⁴⁴ *Mambrú se fue a la Guerra*, p. 63

⁴⁵ For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the specific experience of Puerto Rican soldiers from the island. Since soldiers from the island were still assigned to segregated units (primarily based on birthplace) during the period of the Korean War, their experience differed greatly from that of the Puerto Rican soldier from the mainland who was drafted into the regular military. Nonetheless, the experience of the soldier of Puerto Rican descent in the regular military is another understudied subject that warrants further research. It is of particular interest due to the reality of racial segregation that mainland Puerto Ricans faced upon entering the military at that time. A future study would focus on the range of experiences within the mainland population of Puerto Rican soldiers based on their racial categorization in the military as either Black or Caucasian prior to the official desegregation of the military in the mid-twentieth century, and the implications of this official categorization on their experience in the military.

experience of the 65th Puerto Rican Infantry Regiment.⁴⁶ The texts I explore in this chapter include multiple forms of cultural production that are often excluded from academic scholarship, including unpublished archival documents, informal (non-peer reviewed) Internet articles and blog posts, military publications, and historiographical texts and monographs, as well as the more “conventional” literary and cultural forms of fiction, memoir, *testimonio*, and film. While my work on Puerto Ricans’ military mobilization in the U.S. in the following two chapters includes an in-depth literary analysis of the work of Puerto Rican authors José Luis González and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, among others, my discussion in the first two sections of this chapter necessarily begins with a studied consideration of the historical context and circumstances out of which that mobilization has stemmed.

Given that the Puerto Rican reality in the U.S. military is a widely unpublicized and understudied subject – and a complicated one at that – a detailed introduction to the participation of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.’s historic war efforts and military interventions is warranted. To that end, in this chapter, I explore the striking limits, and in many cases, complete absence, of the perspective of Puerto Rican soldiers and veterans in the published and formally recognized texts on the mobilization of the U.S. military in the twentieth century, and the circumstances surrounding that absence. The first two sections of this chapter present a consideration of the representation of the Puerto Rican soldier in historiographical texts, including the official histories that have been published by the

⁴⁶ Due to the segregation of insular Puerto Rican soldiers into their own units within the U.S. Armed Forces during this period, the 65th Infantry encompassed the large majority of Puerto Ricans who participated in the Korean War. There were two main exceptions to this policy: darker skinned Puerto Ricans were occasionally placed into the African American segregated units (although by this time, these units were being desegregated), while individuals of Puerto Rican descent born on the mainland were incorporated into regular North American military units (Santiago 1).

U.S. military, as well as the few existing monographs currently available to the public on this subject. I incorporate into this discussion many texts that the academy generally considers “informal” or “unreliable” in order to provide a deeper, more complex understanding of Puerto Rican military mobilization in the U.S. This approach also begins the work of constructing a new, more inclusive archive on this subject, which – as I explained in the Introduction – is one of the main objectives of this dissertation. As part of this archival construction project, in the third section of this chapter, I present an analysis of literature by José Luis González that reflects on the absence, or at least marginalization, of the Puerto Rican soldier’s experience in the dominant American consciousness, focusing especially on one of González’s short stories, “El arbusto en llamas.”

The Korean War marked an important turning point in the U.S. military’s⁴⁷ history of interracial relations as it was the first war after the presidential order for the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces.⁴⁸ In view of African American soldiers’ extensive contributions to WWII, the military’s act of desegregation was seen as a hopeful sign by many in the African American community, especially since they already made up a large sector of the armed forces. However, racial desegregation did not include desegregation based on national origin, and thus the infantry regiment designated solely

⁴⁷ In order to be consistent, I will either use the term “military” or “armed forces” when referring to the overall military institution of the U.S. While my discussion of Puerto Rican soldiers’ experiences in the next two chapters focuses specifically on the Army, my broader project pays attention to the experience of ethnic soldiers in different divisions of the armed forces.

⁴⁸ The U.S. Armed Forces were racially segregated through the end of World War II. The Korean War was the first war fought by the U.S. when the military was slowly beginning the racial desegregation process, in response to President Truman’s Executive Order 9981 issued in 1948 (MacGregor 312, 460). While the order for integration was given in 1948, the military was still in the process of reviewing and implementing that order at the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. Therefore, the large majority of African American and Puerto Rican units remained segregated throughout their time in combat in Korea.

for Puerto Rican soldiers, the 65th Infantry Regiment, remained separate from the American troops through the end of the Korean War in 1953.⁴⁹ This contradictory call for the unification of some troops while the segregation of others continued did not escape the attention of Puerto Rican soldiers, or of the larger Puerto Rican community, although it went unnoticed by the mainstream American public. Moreover, the war in Korea was simultaneous with the composition and ratification of Puerto Rico's new constitution. For Puerto Ricans like filmmaker Noemi Figueroa Soulet and military veteran and historian Tony Santiago (whose work is discussed later in this chapter), it is ironic that what many saw as a hopeful development for Puerto Rico could have contrasted so completely with the discriminatory, denigrating treatment suffered by Puerto Rican troops in Korea during the same period.⁵⁰

Finally, the nature of the Korean War differed greatly from WWII, not only because it was deemed a police action rather than a war by President Truman, but because it was the first war in which the 65th infantry regiment saw sustained active duty on the front lines.⁵¹ While WWII offered Puerto Rican troops an opportunity to prove themselves and come home as heroes, the unpopular and largely unpublicized Korean War offered no such opportunities, and instead ended with the court martial and

⁴⁹ Integration of Puerto Rican soldiers into regular military units only occurred in 1953 as a result of the complete reconstitution of the 65th Infantry. This decision was part of the military's response to the court martial of dozens of Puerto Rican soldiers for their role in the Battles of Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights (Villahermosa ix). These events are examined in detail later in this chapter.

⁵⁰ This feeling of hopefulness of some Puerto Ricans resulting from the new constitution appears to overlook/ignore the political divisiveness and tension that dominated the insular community during the late 1940s and 50s resulting from the clash between groups lobbying for the island's independence and those in favor of continued dependence on the U.S. Such an apparent contradiction in sentiment, however, is reflective of the complexity of Puerto Rican politics as well as U.S.-Puerto Rican relations in general.

⁵¹ As I discuss in more detail in a later section, the 65th Infantry only briefly saw combat towards the end of WWII. Prior to that, the 65th had mainly functioned as homeland defense in the U.S. sphere of influence in the Caribbean and Latin America (Stetson et al. 412, 428).

imprisonment of dozens of Puerto Rican soldiers. The consensus among the insular Puerto Rican community was that their countrymen were being unjustly used as scapegoats for the larger errors and misjudgments of the U.S. military's leadership in Korea (Sosa A1).⁵² This function as scapegoat is reflective of the role that has traditionally been assigned to marginalized communities and to ethnic soldiers in the U.S. Armed Forces, and is a theme that appears consistently in the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o literature discussed throughout this dissertation. In the next two chapters, I explore how the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean and Vietnam Wars has been documented and portrayed in historiographies, narratives and memoirs, and I interrogate the glaring lacunae and clear limits and limitations of mainstream English language documentation to address the Puerto Rican experience in the Korean War.

I begin this discussion by examining the problematic nature of the information available on the role of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War. While the war in itself has largely been forgotten and obscured as a dark moment in United States history, there is a remarkable lack of reliable, accessible historiographies on the experience of the 65th Infantry in the Korean War within the ever-growing body of scholarship that has emerged on the war in the last few decades (Villahermosa xiii). I therefore will examine the implications of the fact that the voice and perspective of the Puerto Rican soldier is largely absent in the available documented history on the Korean War. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I consider the available historiographies

⁵² Among the texts on this subject is a series of news articles published in the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Mundo* during the spring and summer of 1953 criticizing the court martial of members of the 65th during the Korean War, including the July 13, 1953 article, "Liberan numerosos soldados boricuas convictos" by R. Santiago Sosa. Archival material was accessed at the University of Puerto Rico's Colección Puertorriqueña thanks to a generous Graduate Student Travel Grant from the UCSD Institute for International, Comparative and Area Studies.

and scholarship on Puerto Ricans in the Korean War and discuss their limitations, gesturing towards an opening up of the scholarly archive to incorporate more informal sources that contribute valuable knowledge on this subject. Second, I lay out the conditions surrounding the Korean War and Puerto Ricans' presence in the military during that time based on the, albeit problematic, sources available, in order to contextualize my broader discussion and analysis of different fictional and autobiographical texts on this issue.

I initiate my own literary analysis in the third section with an examination of work by Puerto Rican author José Luis González, including the short stories “Una caja de plomo que no se podía abrir” and “El arbusto en llamas,” among other works. I explore the theme of the Puerto Rican people's racial and cultural marginalization by the U.S. military apparatus as it is portrayed in González's work, as well as the simultaneous emasculation and dehumanization of the male ethnic “other” by Caucasians on the battlefield and at home during the mid-twentieth century, whether they were African American, Puerto Rican, Chicano or Korean. Through my analysis of these texts, I consider the potentially critical function of lacunae as a literary tool to draw attention to the historic marginalization of Puerto Rican soldiers from U.S. mainstream consciousness. This discussion relates to my discussion of Puerto Rican veterans' memoirs and autobiographically-based fiction in the following chapter. It is in response to the lacunae, limits, and limitations of U.S. scholarship that I now turn to a consideration of the existing English-language historiography on the Puerto Rican soldiers' experiences in the Korean War.

The Limits of Extant Historiography and the Scholarly Archive

Writing about the history of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military presents several challenges. To begin with, there are very few comprehensive historiographies on Puerto Rico's presence in the U.S. Military. Most of those sources are written in Spanish and are not easily accessible from the United States. To date, there are four published historiographies that address the role of insular Puerto Rican soldiers in the U.S. Military dating back to the late nineteenth century through the disbandment of the 65th Infantry in the 1950s. These include *Historia del Regimiento 65 de Infantería, 1899-1960* (1960) by José Norat Martínez, *El 65 en revista* (1961) by Antonio E. Padrón, *Historia Militar de Puerto Rico* (1992) by Héctor Andrés Negroni, and *No quiero mi cuerpo pa' tambor: El servicio militar obligatorio en Puerto Rico* (1998) by Ché Paralitici. Very few copies of these texts are in circulation in the United States, and the fact that they are written in Spanish makes them inaccessible to a large portion of the American public. In addition, two of the historiographies are largely outdated – note that two of the four were published in the early 1960s – particularly in regards to Puerto Rican participation in Cold War conflicts, since much of the military intelligence on the Korean War has been only recently declassified. Negroni's text focuses more on the island's military history prior to U.S. annexation, and only provides a very broad overview of Puerto Rican military involvement in the twentieth century. While Paralitici's book addresses the effects of U.S. imperialism more directly, very little attention is given to the specific case of the Korean War. There is also an unpublished dissertation titled *Fighting For the Nation: Military Service, Popular Political Mobilization and the Creation of Modern Puerto Rican National Identities: 1868-1952* (U. of Massachusetts, 2010) by Harry Franqui that

addresses much of this military history as well but remains largely inaccessible since it is unpublished.⁵³

The only English language resource available on the entire history of the 65th Infantry (which made up the majority of Puerto Ricans' presence in the military through the first half of the twentieth century) is a documentary available in both English and Spanish called *The Borinqueneers* (2007, El Pozo Productions). Directed and written by Puerto Rican producers and directors Noemí Figueroa Soulet and Raquel Ortiz, it tells the story of the 65th Infantry through interviews, archival footage, and photographs.⁵⁴ Other historiographies that address this subject focus on specific moments in Puerto Rico's

⁵³ A new collection of oral histories about the experience of veterans of the 65th Infantry was published March 14, 2014, titled *Puertorriquenos Who Served With Guts, Glory, and Honor: Fighting to Defend a Nation Not Completely Their Own* by Greg Boudonck. A self-published book, the author seems to have collected some valuable autobiographical insights into the experiences of these veterans, and the text therefore warrants further analysis.

⁵⁴ *The Borinqueneers*, a title that invokes the Puerto Rican people's nickname for those serving in the 65th Infantry Regiment, "los borinqueños," is a 78-minute documentary film written, produced and directed by Noemí Figueroa Soulet and co-directed by Raquel Ortiz. A condensed, one-hour version of the film originally aired on PBS in 2007, and has since been released as an extended bilingual English-Spanish film that has been aired in Puerto Rico and the continental U.S., and has also been screened by the Armed Forces Network to U.S. troops overseas. The documentary constructs the narrative of the 65th infantry dating back to its inception following the U.S.'s annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898 and goes up to the infantry's adversities during the Korean War and its ensuing disbandment in 1953. The documentary draws on archival footage and photographs as well as interviews with veterans of the 65th and their family members and with Puerto Rican historians and military experts. As of 2014, *The Borinqueneers* was the only major documentary to tell the story of the soldiers of the 65th infantry, and it devotes a significant amount of time and attention to the infantry's experience in the Korean War, highlighting the horrors of combat and the dangerous nature of many of the missions their units were assigned, including the anger of the few surviving veterans who failed to understand why they were basically "being sent to their deaths." While it does document the sentiments of anger, disillusionment, and injustice shared by some of the veterans and their family members, the film largely functions as a tribute to the heroism of the Puerto Rican soldier and serves to recognize what it characterizes as the "valiant" contributions of the 65th infantry to the democratic cause of the U.S. military throughout the twentieth century. Given this approach, the documentary's reification of master narratives of military heroism and valor (perhaps unintentionally) perpetuates the long-standing marginalization of minority groups – including Puerto Ricans – within the U.S. military. Moreover, the documentary upholds prevailing discourses of "warrior masculinity" (Cutler, "Disappeared Men," 584) or "warrior patriotism" (Mariscal, *Aztlan and Viet Nam*, 27) that many scholars have identified as underlying traditional Latina/o and Chicana/o patriarchal culture, as I discuss in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Interestingly, the website for *The Borinqueneers* provides the most comprehensive bibliography of sources on the 65th Infantry that I have seen to date.

military history, primarily WWII.⁵⁵ By considering just these facts, it is clear that there is a large gap in the United States' official historical archive regarding the role of Puerto Ricans in the military.

As I began preliminary research for this project, I came to realize that I would be unable to approach this specific history from a more traditional process of drawing solely on the published “official” historical texts on the subject. It is this approach, however, that is generally expected of scholars – especially those in literary studies – unless they go directly to the source and try to find valuable archival documents that can inform our understanding of a certain issue or time period. What I found instead were many “informal” or “unofficial” texts that lay at the very limits of the scholarly archive – blog or wiki posts, discussion threads, online articles, videos, and so forth. Up until that point, I had always been of the firm belief – which my professors and colleagues further engrained in me – that no self-respecting scholar would draw from a Wikipedia article for reliable information. However, as I dug deeper, it became apparent that much of the seemingly informal knowledge available from various sources online provided me with

⁵⁵ It is not surprising that more scholarly attention has been given to Puerto Ricans in WWII since it was the first war in which Puerto Rican troops participated on a greater scale, and their assignments were largely successful and painted in a heroic light. Among these are *History of the 65th Infantry, 1899-1946* (1946) by José A. Muratti, *We Can't All Be Heroes: A History of the Separate Infantry Regiments in World War II* (1975) by Melvin Curtis Walthall and *Return to Avalon* (2008) by Gabriel Fuentes. Fuentes' text has a very strong patriotic undertone, rendering it more dramatic than factual. Muratti's text ends with WWII but also covers earlier events in the twentieth century, while Walthall's text encompasses all segregated units in the war. There are also several autobiographical or semi-autobiographical accounts written by Puerto Rican veterans on WWII, the most well known being *¿Hacia dónde heroes?* (1948) by Manuel Muñoz Rivera. *Las Wacs: participación de la mujer boricua en la Segunda Guerra Mundial* by Carmen García Rosado (2000) is a fascinating autobiographical account of a Puerto Rican woman's experience serving in the Women Army Corps (WACS) during WWII. Approximately 200 Puerto Rican women participated in the Army's WACS or the Navy's WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Service) during that war (Oropeza 1).

more detailed, well-researched information than what I was able to find via the standard scholarly avenues of journal articles and monographs.

My resulting determination to be more flexible in the information gathering process ultimately enabled me to discover many informal sources that deepened my understanding of the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in the U.S. military – sources that I likely would not have noticed if this were any other project. This realization has allowed me to develop a more reflective outlook on the scholarship process and to rethink my own positioning as an academic in relation to the scholarly archive. While my interrogation of my own positioning and process as a scholar is ongoing and fluid, my dissertation project afforded me the perfect platform through which to pursue a more open, publicly-oriented approach to scholarship. This approach is rooted in the goal of removing the scholarly values or hierarchies associated with different types of texts or cultural production, which allows me to place them in dialogue with one another on a more equal playing field. In the historical discussion that follows in the next section, I attempt to begin this process.

One example of the reliable knowledge available through informal sources is the work of Tony Santiago. It was out of concern for the exclusion of Puerto Rican figures from mainstream American history that retired Marine Tony Santiago first became involved in Puerto Rican military history. Born in New York to Puerto Rican parents, Santiago recalls having no legitimate “Hispanic” heroes to look up to. “Our history books failed to make mention of the numerous contributions which Hispanics have made to the formation of our country. I didn't know about our participation in the Revolutionary War nor about our heroes in the Civil War” (“Author’s Biography” 1). Now a regular

contributor to Wikipedia entries on Puerto Rico and a dedicated historian who contributes to several online Latino periodicals, Santiago has been recognized as “Puerto Rico’s foremost military historian” by Puerto Rico’s Secretary of State Kenneth D. McClintock (“Author’s Biography” 1). However, despite the numerous recognitions Santiago has received both on the island and the mainland (he also received a United States Army Special Warfare Center and School Medal of Excellence) for his work preserving Puerto Rican military and cultural history, his articles have not been officially published in print nor recognized by scholars, remaining on informal websites such as Wikipedia and small online periodicals with limited exposure and readership. The scholarly archive, through its consignment process, continues to exclude the valuable insights that individuals like Santiago are able to contribute to our understanding of the experience of minority groups like Puerto Ricans. Moreover, the actual U.S. history books taught in our schools continue to present a narrative that largely erases the presence of Puerto Ricans from the United States’ national past. Therefore, Santiago’s work, like that of so many others, has not yet been incorporated into the annals of either mainstream U.S. historiography nor of the scholarly archive.

It is not surprising that there is even less material available on the subject of interest to this project: the experience of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War. To date, there is only one well-researched English-language historiography on the Puerto Rican experience in the Korean War, titled *Honor and Fidelity: The 65th Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953* (2009) by Col. Gilberto N. Villahermosa.⁵⁶ As the first historiography

⁵⁶ While there is one other published English-language book on this topic, *Puerto Rico’s Fighting 65th U.S. Infantry, From San Juan to Chorwon* (2001) by William W. Harris, the former Caucasian Commander of the 65th Infantry leading up to and during the Korean War, it reads more like a personal memoir,

that attempts to record the specific history of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War, Villahermosa's text is an important historical resource. Lieutenant Colonel Baltazar Soto, retired 65th Infantry veteran, acknowledges the importance of Villahermosa's book and the gap it begins to fill in U.S. historiography, claiming that "it is the first book to formally document the entire history of the 65th in the Korean War and finally tells the story of the Army's only Regular Army Hispanic (Puerto Rican) segregated Regiment" (Soto 1). Soto's opinion reflects similar sentiments expressed by other members of the larger Puerto Rican community regarding Villahermosa's contribution to this glaring lacuna in documented U.S. history.⁵⁷

Villahermosa, the author of *Honor and Fidelity*, is a Puerto Rican who was born on the island, graduated from West Point in 1980, and served as an Armor officer in Germany and the United States. Villahermosa served as the Chief of the CJ-5 Security Cooperation Division at U.S. Central Command's Central Asia Branch through 2013, when he retired from the military. Villahermosa's identity as both a Puerto Rican native and a high-ranking U.S. Military officer is fraught and potentially contradictory for several reasons, but most specifically because he was employed by the very military that originally conquered his native island and which still functions as an imperialist power in Puerto Rico. The strong U.S. military presence on the island is an ominous reminder of the empire's power over the future of its "Commonwealth," a power especially evidenced

presenting events in a dramatic and unreliable way. Villahermosa himself acknowledges, "William W. Harris' *Puerto Rico's Fighting 65th U.S. Infantry: From San Juan to Chorwon...* proved to contain passages more dramatic than factual" (Villahermosa 306).

⁵⁷ Historian Tony Santiago and filmmaker Noemi Figueroa Soulet have also made statements to this effect.

by the Navy's use of the island's waters for bombing practice.⁵⁸ There is therefore a tension in Villahermosa's role as the recorder of his island's history given that he was participating in an official military assignment. As an investigator for the armed forces, Villahermosa privileged the interests of the U.S. empire over those of Puerto Rico, restricting his ability to include potentially controversial ideas or present alternative perspectives on certain events such as the court martial of members of the 65th Infantry during the war.

In addition to the tension in Villahermosa's authorial role, the text has several other limitations. First, it was commissioned and published by the Center for Military History and thus had to meet the requirements and pass the inspection of the U.S. Military prior to publication. Second, it relies mostly on the U.S. Military Archives for its primary sources, and does not incorporate any material on the subject available on the island of Puerto Rico. This means that the author did not take advantage of the wealth of material on this subject available in Puerto Rico's General Archives, National Library, or the University of Puerto Rico's Library Collections, which all have relevant material.⁵⁹ Additionally, the large majority of officers quoted in Villahermosa's book are Caucasian, and it is clear that he did not conduct interviews with any of the remaining veterans of the 65th Infantry still residing in Puerto Rico or the continental U.S. It is extremely important to record these voices before they pass on in order to document the experience of the troops on the ground, not just the officers in leadership positions. Often, the perspective

⁵⁸ This regular Navy drill that used an island off of Puerto Rico for bombing practice was only recently ended in the 2000s due to public scrutiny and political pressure. The controversy over the Vieques Naval Base was mentioned in the previous section. For additional information, see Santana, McCaffrey, and Ayala and Carro.

⁵⁹ The assistance of the research librarian at the Puerto Rican General Archives in San Juan has been paramount to finding these sources.

of soldiers versus their officers varies greatly. Lastly, Villahermosa's account of the facts surrounding the accused misconduct of Puerto Rican troops at Jackson Heights and Kelly Hill seems to be quite one-sided and has been criticized by veterans of the 65th as well as other experts on the topic including Noemi Figueroa Soulet and Lt. Col. Baltazar Soto.⁶⁰ It is clear, therefore, that while Villahermosa's text begins the process of filling in the lacunae in the U.S. historical archive on the 65th Regiment in Korea, there is still much more that needs to be added.

It begs the question then, as to why there is such a large gap in U.S. historiography on this subject. One may be inclined to conclude that, with the Puerto Rican community making up such a small percentage of the U.S. population, there has simply been a lack of scholarly interest in the issue. However, that does not seem to be the case. Interestingly, there is a plethora of unpublished resources on the Internet regarding the role of Puerto Ricans in the military overall, and in Korea in particular. As I mentioned earlier, these are not amateur, uninformed individuals sharing inaccurate information, but rather informed historians and veterans who have been researching the topic for years, but have only been able to "publish" their findings online.⁶¹ These include individuals like Tony Santiago who have been publicly recognized for their contributions to Puerto Rican history, as well as other Puerto Rican veterans including Luis Asencio Camacho, who has posted several articles online and has also authored an unpublished

⁶⁰ The controversy surrounding this information is explored in detail in the next section.

⁶¹ Several individuals have been posting articles on the 65th Infantry online for years without them ever being picked up for publication. Among these internet sources are: "Jackson Heights, Korea, 28 October 1952" by Lt. Col. Baltazar Soto, "More Truths about Jackson Heights" by Noemi Figueroa, and "Puerto Ricans in World War II" (which includes a section on the Korean War) by Tony Santiago, "A Borinqueneer Christmas Carol" by Luis Asencio Camacho (who has also written an unpublished novel on the borinqueneers), and the website dedicated to the 65th Infantry, *Valerosos.com*, run by Danny Nieves.

novel on Puerto Ricans in the Korean War. An extensive website dedicated to the Borinqueneers, Valorosos.com, has also compiled numerous valuable resources on the 65th Infantry. Run by Danny Nieves Ortiz whose uncle is a veteran of the 65th from WWII, the site incorporates articles, military reports, photographs and film clips, all honoring the Borinqueneers. Similar to the work of Tony Santiago, Danny Nieves' website has been recognized with a Four Star Best Site Award from the American War Library and a Puerto Rico Website Achievement Award.

Despite these online projects having gained so much recognition, very little of that information has made it into published historiographies. The fact that there is so much well-researched, valuable information available on the Internet but not in print, while perhaps reflective of the era in which we live, is also a reflection of the selective process of the scholarly archive, which privileges the writing and historical research performed by those who have been accepted into the U.S. academy. While the public may recognize Santiago and others as historians, they do not possess the advanced degrees, a professorship within the academy, or tenure, accolades which would grant them the "authority" to be included within the scholarly archive.

The fact that the few English language historiographies on Puerto Ricans in the military privilege primary sources from the U.S. Military Archives in Washington, D.C. brings up the issue of what type of "history" is being recorded by the very institution that represents the hegemonic world power of the United States.⁶² This discussion recalls scholarship on the colonial archives that began emerging in the 1970s and which,

⁶² There is a clear necessity for further research on this issue to be conducted on the island to gather any relevant documents available in the Puerto Rican General Archives or private special collections, and to engage with Puerto Rican veterans of the Korean War who are still alive today, before this history completely disappears.

according to Carolyn Steedman, focused on the “silence—the effacement of so many of [sic] subjects of colonial power” (3). These practices of silencing and effacement, however, are not just historical phenomena, but rather processes of political exclusion and marginalization that continue to this day. The very conventions of the archive dictate what type of information is privileged and what knowledge is considered unreliable. “Archival conventions might designate who were reliable ‘sources,’ what constituted ‘enough’ evidence and what—in the absence of information—could be filled in to make a credible plot” (Stoler 103). Villahermosa’s historiography is one example of these conventions at work; the text is automatically deemed reliable because of its publication by the Center for Military History, and due to the backing of this military institution, the information it provides on complicated events such as the controversy of Jackson Heights is judged to be sufficient evidence on the issue.

Ann Stoler states, “what constitutes the archive, what form it takes, and what systems of classification and epistemology signal at specific times are (and reflect) critical features of colonial politics and state power” (87). As we have already witnessed in Puerto Rico’s recent history, colonial politics are still very much alive and at work in the twenty-first century. The power of the colonial archive is therefore still incredibly relevant to the way that the U.S. wields its imperialist power today. Imperial archives, just like colonial archives, do not organize knowledge objectively, but rather *produce* knowledge through the processes of categorization, classification and preservation. The documents that are privileged through preservation are not done so arbitrarily but rather because they make up an important part of a narrative being constructed by the archive. Just as state institutions such as the military marginalize individuals based on their

ethnicity or legal status, the archive marginalizes certain information by judging it less important than other types of knowledge. Stoler emphasizes the need for scholars to “critically reflect... on the making of documents and how we choose to use them, on archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production, as monuments of states” (90). It is precisely for this reason that I find it so important to interrogate the current scarcity of documentation on the existence of the 65th Infantry in the U.S. military in the first place, let alone the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in that infantry.

Whether it be the result of the exclusionary nature of the scholarly archive that marginalizes alternative knowledge forms, or the influence of the U.S. military that controls the knowledge production surrounding its most powerful governmental institution, the fact remains that the experience of minorities in the military, including Puerto Ricans, continues to go largely unaddressed and undocumented.

This current lacunae in U.S. historiography therefore reflects “the conditions of possibility that shape what [can] be written, what warrant[s] repetition... what stories c[an] not be told, and what [can]not be said” (Stoler 5). Those conditions include the existence of such an entity as the U.S. Center for Military History which enabled the government’s ability to control the information disseminated on the 65th Infantry in the Korean War by commissioning and publishing its own book. Another condition is the structure of knowledge and the scholarly archival conventions that render documents produced from within the academy more legitimate and authoritative than those stemming from informal avenues like blogs or social media. While there is no immediate solution to these conditions that marginalize the stories of Puerto Rican veterans of the Korean War, projects that attempt to collect the alternative, unofficial information

available on this subject on the Internet would participate in the process of “writ[ing] into the voids in official records, making their own histories, highlighting the fact that the construction of the archive—of memory—must constantly be tended,” as Schulz suggests (109). This dissertation attempts to begin that process.

My project thus comes up against the limits and limitations of existing historiography and the scholarly archive to faithfully represent the lived experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in the ranks of the U.S. armed forces. I address these limitations, therefore, by reading this flawed, partial history “against the grain,” as Walter Benjamin famously suggested in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” While considering the facts and statements presented in these historiographies, I also examine what is not said, and how these facts and data can be reinterpreted from alternative perspectives in order to better understand that which may have been originally left out of the text.

The Makings of War: Puerto Ricans in the Korean War

Explaining the significance of Puerto Ricans’ experience in the Korean War is not simple and necessitates a deeper understanding of the conditions surrounding Puerto Rican troops’ entry into and tasks assigned during the war. Some of the factors that contributed to the war becoming such an important phenomenon to the Puerto Rican community have been alluded to above in my discussion of the history of the island. These include: the timing of the war and nationalist uprisings on the island which contributed to conflicting sentiments by Puerto Rican soldiers fighting for the country that their compatriots were rebelling against; the fact that this was the first war in which the entire 65th Puerto Rican Infantry Regiment had been placed on the front lines; the discrimination and mistreatment experienced by these troops during the war, including

being sent on the most dangerous missions and basically being used as “cannon fodder;” and, perhaps most importantly, the clearly unjust nature of the arrest and court martial of so many Puerto Rican soldiers. Additionally, the very segregation of the Puerto Rican regiment was problematic and made it much easier for these “outsiders” to be targeted since they were all amassed in one collective. The identity of the troops of the 65th as individuals with limited citizenship from a homeland that was geographically separate from the U.S. mainland made it easy for Caucasian officers and infantrymen to view the Puerto Rican soldiers as “other,” thereby distancing them from the notion of an “authentic” American identity in the U.S. military.⁶³

The presence of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military dates back to the turn of the twentieth century following the United States’ acquisition of the island as a result of the Spanish American War in 1898. From the initial stages of Puerto Rico’s involvement with the U.S. military, native Puerto Ricans were viewed and treated as inferior. When the War Department was first considering forming an infantry on the island, the (Caucasian) General stationed there, General Henry, stated that “military employment of the island’s native population ‘may prove to have an excellent effect upon the people of Porto Rico’ and advised that the island possessed ‘an abundance of fine material’ from which soldiers could be selected” (Villahermosa 2). Adopting an incredibly paternalistic viewpoint, the General, and likely the U.S. War Department itself, viewed the formation of a Puerto Rican infantry as beneficial to the local community, privileging it as a better alternative than any other opportunity on the island. As is evidenced throughout the

⁶³ By “authentic,” I refer here to the public image of the armed forces as an institution made up of full-fledged, patriotic citizens dedicated to the protection of their homeland. The complex political status of Puerto Ricans took away from that so-called authenticity since their citizenship was limited and the continental U.S. was not their technical homeland.

history of U.S.-Puerto Rican relations as well as its relations with other Latin American nations, this paternalism is reflective of the United States' larger imperialist project. In his historiography, Villahermosa includes many problematic quotes such as that quoted above without addressing the overt racist and paternalistic tone employed by the officials being quoted. While it is important to include this information to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the formation of the 65th Infantry, it is equally important to acknowledge the limitations of that information. Much of the discrimination experienced by these ethnic soldiers within the U.S. military is founded on a paternalism that renders the ethnic "other" inferior and in need of guidance from its superior "father," Uncle Sam.

Following General Henry's suggestion, the U.S. War Department first incorporated Puerto Rico into the military by establishing a volunteer infantry in 1899 to help police the island against rising crime rates (Villahermosa ix).⁶⁴ This infantry did not become a part of the regular army until General Order no. 100 of the War Department was issued in May of 1908 (Villahermosa 4). It was at this point that this regiment became known as the 65th Infantry. The 65th was formed and based on the island and made up of predominantly Puerto Rican men, although for about a decade until Puerto Rican soldiers were able to advance in rank, all of the commanding officers were Caucasian men brought in from the mainland.⁶⁵ It is important to note that, although

⁶⁴ While Puerto Rico already had a local police force, it is important to note the United States' need to monitor and control the islanders through their own federally approved unit.

⁶⁵ This fact in itself demonstrates the military's belief that Puerto Rican soldiers were unfit for higher ranks. While Puerto Rican infantrymen were allowed to apply for higher ranks once the regiment was incorporated into the regular army, it still took several years for Puerto Ricans to advance very high in rank. Even so, non-Hispanic officers still played a prominent role in the leadership of the 65th when it was sent into combat zones. This was also the case for segregated black units that fought alongside Puerto Ricans in

Puerto Ricans were not regarded as “white” by Anglo officials and the Anglo public in the continental U.S., the majority of the Puerto Rican men in the 65th infantry were what would be considered “white” Puerto Ricans on the island. Although there was some range in the racial makeup of members of the 65th, as can be seen in the available archival photographs of the unit, the vast majority of the infantry were very light-skinned and therefore could have passed for Caucasian. As I mentioned earlier, most dark-skinned or “Black” Puerto Ricans who were drafted into the military were assigned to segregated African American units rather than the 65th infantry. Despite this distinction being made by the military institution, it did not mean that the light-skinned Puerto Ricans were classified as “white;” in the majority of military documentation as well as the autobiographies and testimonials of Anglo military officials, the 65th infantry regiment was called a “nonwhite” combat unit. Indeed, most Anglos still regarded the Puerto Ricans of the 65th infantry as ethnically and culturally different, and the discriminatory treatment they endured within the military clearly stemmed from that ethnic “otherness.”

As the infantry regiment grew in the first few years of the twentieth century, it was relied on by the War Department “to protect America’s strategic interests in the Caribbean” (Villahermosa ix-x). With the looming threat of the Communist East in those early years of the Cold War, the Caribbean was a strategic military holding for the United States to confront potential enemies before they reached the mainland.⁶⁶ Thus from the very moment of its acquisition, the island became a strategic location from which the U.S. could continue to enforce the policies originally established by the Monroe

the Korean War (Villahermosa 19). It begs the question as to what mechanisms were in place that maintained the Caucasian makeup of the majority of the army’s leadership.

⁶⁶ U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico became even more critical with the emergence of the new Communist regime in Cuba in 1959.

Doctrine, and further bolster their power as a so-called protectorate of Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶⁷ The incorporation of the regiment into the regular army was “indicative of its growing importance... [as] a regular formation responsible for the defense of Puerto Rico, which, along with Cuba, guarded the nation’s key Atlantic approaches” (Villahermosa 5). However, the regiment did not see much combat until the Korean War since up until then, U.S. Army policies had restricted “most predominately nonwhite units to noncombat roles” (Villahermosa 6).⁶⁸ I do not intend to downplay the infantry’s role in prior wars but rather to point out the discriminatory practices incorporated into the very structure of the military by preventing soldiers from entering combat zones solely based on their ethnicity.

The combat abilities of Puerto Rican soldiers specifically were belittled and undermined by stereotypes rampant among military leadership in the Pentagon that characterized the island regiment as a “‘rum and Coca Cola’ outfit” (Harris 1). Reducing these trained, disciplined soldiers to mere consumers of beverages associated with leisure and diversion like rum and Coke simultaneously exoticized and ridiculed them, connecting them with the caricature of carefree, ignorant island natives with no moral conscience or sense of social responsibility. This invented image unfounded in any concrete evidence thus rendered Puerto Rican men incapable and unfit for regular

⁶⁷ The Monroe Doctrine was originally issued by U.S. President James Monroe in 1823 in order to ensure that no European powers interfered in the Americas. It established a sphere of U.S. influence that served as a deterrent to other nations to intervene in the region of North and South America. The doctrine was added onto in 1904 through the Roosevelt Corollary which asserted the right of the United States to intervene in Latin American nations in cases of “flagrant and chronic wrongdoing by a Latin American Nation” (Roosevelt). Since this period, the U.S. has functioned essentially as the policeman of Latin America, often with very detrimental and destructive effects to the countries in question.

⁶⁸ Villahermosa once again presents this information matter-of-factly with no reflection on the direct implications racial restrictions in the military had on the limiting of ethnic minorities’ civil rights domestically. While this may not be of concern to the armed forces itself, it is a criticism that has been raised by scholars. See particularly MacGregor and Walthall.

military duty in the eyes of Anglo military leadership. The policies limiting ethnic soldiers to noncombat duties were not just imposed on Puerto Rican soldiers, but also on other ethnic soldiers, specifically African Americans.⁶⁹ Puerto Rican soldiers did play important roles in both World Wars, primarily assigned to homeland defense which included guarding military bases throughout the Caribbean and thus allowing more American (Caucasian) soldiers to be sent on overseas duty (Villahermosa 6).⁷⁰

The predominantly noncombat missions experienced by the 65th through WWII quickly became obsolete with the United States' entry into the Korean War in 1950. The Puerto Rican infantry was one of the first assigned to Korea in the initial months of the conflict. The order came in July 1950 and the 65th was one of the largest units sent to the war, numbering 3,920 personnel (Villahermosa 29). The Puerto Rican troops making up the unit upon its entry into Korea in 1950 were primarily volunteer enlistees (Villahermosa 22), many of whom saw military service as an ideal job alternative to the relatively dismal employment prospects on the island at the time. Moreover, Puerto Rican

⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, the U.S. military was ordered to desegregate its ranks in 1948. However, this desegregation did not apply to the 65th Infantry, which continued to be segregated based on birthplace rather than skin color. This type of segregation is clearly a form of racialization of an entire people, rendering them other and inferior because of their Puerto Rican identity. See Tony Santiago's article "Puerto Ricans in World War II" for more information on discrimination experienced by Puerto Ricans in the military's general ranks. The 65th Infantry was officially reconstituted and Puerto Ricans began to be integrated into the regular army on a larger scale in February of 1953, largely as a result of lowered morale of the infantry towards the end of the Korean War (Villahermosa 281). The discrimination did not stop following integration, however. See especially Villahermosa, p. 120.

⁷⁰ In World War I, the 65th's battle casualties numbered one soldier killed in combat, and five wounded (Villahermosa 6). A much larger number of Puerto Ricans participated in World War II since they were now considered citizens (dating from 1917 with the Jones Act) and were therefore subject to the draft. In 1943, there were 17,000 Puerto Ricans in the military, making up part of either the 65th Infantry or the Puerto Rican National Guard (Stetson et al. 412, 428). The 65th briefly saw combat in France in 1944 where it suffered forty-seven casualties, including twenty-three soldiers who were killed in action (Santiago 2). During both World Wars, Puerto Ricans residing on the mainland were drafted into the regular ranks of the military and those identified as black were sent to segregated black units. These darker skinned Puerto Rican soldiers faced racism from the government through segregation as well as suffering discrimination from the African American troops with whom they served.

WWII veterans, who dominated the group of volunteer enlistees on the island for service in the Korean War, recalled their service in the Second World War with great pride (22). About the standard of living enjoyed by members of the 65th, a former officer with the regiment recalled with pride: “Over the years those who served in the Regiment were in a status of life above that of most of the people on the island” (22). However, not all enlistees were aware that they were to be sent to Korea. One private complained to the inspector general of the Army Forces in Puerto Rico on behalf of 172 soldiers with whom he had voluntarily enlisted: “We signed papers stating: ‘I enlisted for service in the Department of Panama Canal Zone Units.’ How is it that we have been sent over to the Far East Command? Request that for the benefit of future enlistees in the territory of Puerto Rico, appropriate action be taken to correct this situation” (Villahermosa 22).

Indeed, much of the literature representing the Puerto Rican soldier’s experience is from the perspective of the Puerto Rican soldier who was either a draftee or who felt that he had somehow been misled about their deployment to Korea, as I discuss further in Chapter Two.⁷¹ Moreover, 90 percent of the replacement troops (all Puerto Rican) assigned to the 65th in 1952 were draftees, with volunteers making up a mere 2 percent of the group and the remainder filled in by reservists and members of the National Guard (195). Villahermosa notes: “the motivation of the average draftee, when compared to the

⁷¹ Emilio Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories on the Korean War are primarily narrated from the perspective of Puerto Rican draftees. In particular, Díaz Valcárcel’s screenplay “Una puerta hacia la muerte,” analyzed in Chapter 2, explores the internal tensions within the 65th between volunteers and draftees and the divergent motivations and attitudes between these two groups. Taking up a similar theme of the Puerto Rican enlistees’ disillusionment with U.S. military service, Josean Ramos’s later text *Antes de la guerra* (2005) narrates the challenges and shocking incidents experienced by two Spanish monolingual Puerto Rican soldiers in training camp in the continental U.S. in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War and their efforts to find a way out of the military without being court martialed or facing prison time. A tragic comedy of sorts, Ramos’s novel speaks to the strong cultural and linguistic dissonances many Puerto Rican soldiers have experienced within the U.S. military institution.

long-serving regular soldiers of the regiment's initial enlisted contingent, is different enough to warrant further examination" in the case of the troops of the 65th infantry (269). He explains: "many Puerto Rican draftees had never left their home island, even to visit the continental United States" prior to their conscription into the military, were Spanish monolingual, and had undergone minimal military training, making the transition into military life difficult and exacerbating already tense relations between Puerto Rican troops and continental Anglo officers (269).

From the very outset, it seemed to members of the 65th that they were "sent to do every dirty job," their less valuable lives as ethnic others being readily sacrificed for the greater good of the war (*The Borinqueneers*). The Puerto Rican Infantry was incorporated into the Army's 3d Division upon its arrival in Pusan, Korea. The racial makeup of the 3d Division that arrived in Korea in September of 1950 does not seem coincidental, consisting of, "7 white battalions (5 infantry and 2 artillery); 4 black battalions (2 artillery, 1 infantry, and 1 armor); and 3 Puerto Rican battalions (all infantry)" (Villahermosa 19).⁷² While Villahermosa presents this diversity as a positive phenomenon, he fails to recognize the fact that the culturally and ethnically marginalized background of the majority of this unit at least partially influenced the assignment they received upon deployment (Booth and Gimbel 1152).⁷³ As discussed in the Introduction,

⁷² In military terms, "infantry" refers to foot soldiers while "artillery" refers to groups of soldiers trained to use special firearms and artillery from a strategic location to back up the foot soldiers, and "armor" refers to the armored vehicles (tanks, etc.) assigned with each battalion.

⁷³ During the Korean War, "one out of every 42 U.S. casualties was a Puerto Rican; and the island had one casualty for every 660 inhabitants, compared to one casualty for every 1,125 inhabitants of the United States" (Morales Carrión 286). The disproportionate number of Puerto Ricans on the casualty list raises many questions, and points to the presence of racial discrimination in the military. As Jorge Mariscal explains (quoted by Berkowitz), to this day, "nearly 25% of Latinos in the military are involved in combat or hazardous duty occupations. They are basically the grunts" (Berkowitz 3). This high percentage rate of Latino (including Puerto Rican) soldiers on the front lines evidences the perception of the lives of ethnic

the lack of education stemming from depressed socioeconomics and the limited opportunities afforded Puerto Ricans during this period appears to have at least partially determined the level of risk of the combat assignments given to these ethnic soldiers on the front lines (*Mariscal, Aztlán and Viet Nam* 21).

Villahermosa also fails to address the problematic nature of the leadership of these battalions, the majority of which were made up of non-Puerto Rican Anglo officers from the continental U.S. (19). The 65th Infantry, as well as the three African American battalions referenced above, were chosen to fill the sparse ranks of the 3d Division before dispatching it to combat in Korea.⁷⁴ President Truman had originally authorized the 65th's deployment only to Japan, assuming that "because of the division's relatively low combat effectiveness, MacArthur would permit it sufficient time to reach a minimum acceptable level of training before committing it to battle" (Villahermosa 18). It is clear therefore, that the upper ranks of the Army not only failed to prepare the troops of the 3d Division adequately before deployment, but also targeted ethnic battalions to serve in the intense combat zones. As Villahermosa acknowledges, the deployment of the 65th "was driven more by the severity of the crisis in the Far East and the immediate need for infantry units than by confidence in the Puerto Rican regiment" (19). It is important to note however that this trend of acting quickly due to "the severity of the crisis" sums up the entire war, and is reflective of the unique nature of this conflict. Bruce Cummings and Jon Halliday characterize the United States' role in the war as "interven[ing] on the side of the good...

brown and black bodies as less valuable than white ones by the U.S. Military, and by a large portion of the Anglo American public. The high numbers of Latinos coming home in body bags, especially in the 1950s, would not draw nearly as much media attention as such high numbers of Caucasian deaths.

⁷⁴ This need for additional troops was a result of the 3d Division having been stripped by the Army earlier in the year to fill the 2d Division, which was deployed to the war in July (Villahermosa 18).

appear[ing] to win quickly only to lose suddenly, finally [eking] out a stalemated ending that was prelude to a forgetting” (Cummings and Halliday xv). Within a Cold War context, the “side of the good” used by Cummings and Halliday clearly refers to the non-Communist side, although the word “good” is quite problematic. If one thing is clear, the U.S. military was unprepared for what it was to face upon intervening in Korea.⁷⁵ What is of interest here however is how the structural inequalities built into the military institution informed the decisions and actions of military leadership in the face of such a crisis.

Before arriving in Korea, the soldiers in the 65th Infantry Regiment selected a nickname for themselves in order to boost morale in preparation for combat. The name agreed upon was “The Borinqueneers,” which has become the preferred title of members of the 65th since then, and much of the media attention they have received has identified them by this nickname, including the previously mentioned documentary with the same title. Former General William Warner Harris explains that “The Borinqueneers” originates from the name of one of Puerto Rico’s indigenous tribes (Harris 49-50).⁷⁶

By November of 1950, the 65th had participated in two significant battles and several smaller skirmishes, taking 921 North Korean prisoners and wounding more than 600 enemy soldiers while sustaining only thirty-eight casualties. General MacArthur reported to the Puerto Rican government that the regiment was “showing magnificent ability and courage in field operations,” praising the unit as “a credit to Puerto Rico”

⁷⁵ See the Introduction to this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of the Korean War and the circumstances surrounding U.S. involvement.

⁷⁶ The name “Borikén” was originally given to the island by the Taíno tribe, a pre-Columbian indigenous community on the island. The Spanish version “Borinquen” is still used colloquially by Puerto Ricans to refer to the island, and the term “boricua” originates from this name as well.

(Villahermosa 40). There is an implied assumption in MacArthur's statement that the Puerto Ricans had something to prove in their performance in the war; Caucasian military leadership once again doubted their combat readiness. Having moved well past the 38th parallel and recaptured Seoul and several other critical Northern cities by the end of November, General MacArthur was convinced that the war was almost won. His overconfidence proved premature however, placing the Eighth Army, including the 65th Infantry, directly in the line of fire.

Major General Edward M. Almond, commander of the X Corps to which the 65th was attached during November and December of 1950, had serious reservations regarding the presence of "colored troops" under his leadership. "Harris responded that although there were indeed some black Puerto Ricans and Virgin Islanders in the ranks of the 65th, the bulk of his troops were white. 'The men of the 65th are white Puerto Ricans,' he stressed, 'and I might say that the colored troops have fought like real troopers. We haven't had any trouble with them'" (Villahermosa 50).⁷⁷ Harris's response is indicative of the complex racial politics at play within the military during this period. The white Hispanic identity that Harris associates with the Puerto Rican troops of the 65th reifies the white-black racial binary that continues to dominate in mainstream U.S. discourses today. Harris's response also reveals the fluid ethnic identity of Puerto Ricans as it was depicted and perceived by the continental Anglo officers. Although the 65th was at once regarded as the "rum and coke" infantry and exoticized as the ethnic "other" in everyday exchanges and duties, the trope of "whiteness" was imposed upon the group by Anglo

⁷⁷ Villahermosa's presentation of this quote once again completely ignores the overt racism present in the exchange between Harris and Almond, failing to address the implications of this condescending racial attitude towards Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the military.

officials when it was deemed convenient to uphold certain images of military honor and performance and to maintain the reputation of those Anglo officers. While the Puerto Rican troops themselves could not necessarily claim this “whiteness” of their own accord, it came in handy at times to differentiate the soldiers of the 65th from the “colored” troops who remained even more stigmatized and marginalized within the military institution during the mid-twentieth century.

Around this time, the North Korean Army was reconstituted by incorporating Chinese troops, strengthening the enemy’s manpower exponentially. The X Corps and Eighth Army were ambushed multiple times by reinforced North Korean units made up primarily of Chinese troops, forcing the withdrawal of U.S. and Allied troops from Hungnam in Northeastern Korea to the South Korean stronghold of Pusan (68-69). MacArthur’s aspirations for complete Korean reunification were soured, and the U.S. Army’s new objective was to defend the already secured perimeter south of the Changjin Reservoir. The 65th Infantry was the target of several heavy blows from the Chinese enemy during this period, including an ambush on Dec. 14, 1950 that forced their withdrawal across the Songch’on River and resulted in four dead and fourteen wounded (70). The Puerto Rican troops rallied however, launching a counterattack that forced the Chinese to withdraw with substantial losses. This is only one example of the many skirmishes the regiment was involved in leading up to Christmas of 1950. By the end of the year, the 65th had suffered 714 casualties and “played a critical role in the expansion of the X Corps bridgehead at Wonsan... in the withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division and remnants of the 7th Infantry Division from the Chanjin Reservoir... and in the defense of Hungnam that followed” (76).

The 65th Infantry, along with other regiments from X Corps and the Eighth Army, regrouped in Pusan in January of 1951. In summer of this year, the 65th gained several hundred replacement Puerto Rican soldiers to supplement for casualties and for infantrymen who were rotated out of active duty (77). Villahermosa explains that the regiment's "performance began to suffer as experienced cadre rotated out of the regiment and were replaced by new leaders and soldiers who lacked the skills and special cohesive bonds displayed by their predecessors" (Villahermosa ix). It became clear that the Puerto Rican regiment's performance later that year was directly affected by the loss of experienced infantrymen and leadership as well as the new replacements' lack of skills and training. The majority of this new influx of troops came from the Puerto Rican National Guard, who had little if any combat experience (296). While officers did make an effort to "collect and disseminate vital combat lessons that the troops had learned during the previous several months" (Villahermosa 77), many newly enlisted Puerto Rican soldiers lacked basic training which rendered their performance in active duty largely ineffective (*Aztlán and Viet Nam* 20-21). As the either exhausted remaining troops or inexperienced new infantrymen of the 65th participated in mission after mission in late 1951 and early 1952, their resolve began to crumble. It was exactly in this moment of crisis that they were sent to participate in two of the most horrific, bloody battles in the entire war: Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights.

To summarize, Villahermosa recognizes three distinct phases for the 65th Infantry in the Korean War prior to its disbandment as an all-Hispanic unit and the ensuing "integration" of Puerto Rican infantry into other regiments (295). The first phase encompasses the 65th's initial months in Korea, between September of 1950 and May of

1951, which were marked by the unit's outstanding performance. During this period, the regiment was highly praised and it "stood out as one of the major assets of... [the] 3d Infantry Division" (295). However, as noted above, the regiment's performance during the second phase, from late spring 1951 until spring 1952, had declined dramatically, which was compounded by the new commanding officer Col. Juan C. Cordero-Davila's lack of battlefield experience or formal military education (296). His flawed leadership was devastating to the unit and resulted in him being relieved of duty after only eight months in command. The circumstances surrounding Cordero-Davila's very assignment to such a crucial military post in the middle of wartime is suggestive of the prioritizing of the U.S.'s political interests over military concerns, as he had close ties with Puerto Rico's political elite and it was this influence which earned him the position of commander. This purely political move was devastating to the cohesion and success of the 65th infantry, and not only points to the interference of politicians in matters of warfare, but also to the negligence of the regiment's higher chain of command that failed to address the severe shortcomings of Cordero-Davila's training program. Finally taking a stronger stance regarding the events surrounding the 65th's demise, Villahermosa actually condemns this lack of action on behalf of military leadership, asserting that "it was the responsibility of the division commander to intervene and mentor his much-less-experienced-but-motivated subordinate [Cordero-Davila]" (297).

The final phase of the 65th's time in Korea lasted roughly from May to September of 1952, and encompassed the two main battles that led to the dissolution of the 65th infantry, and their aftermath. Prior to the infamous battles of Outpost Kelly (or Kelly Hill) and Jackson Heights, a third wave of enlisted soldiers arrived to replace the

National Guard soldiers. This third wave of troops was made up generally of “draftees or new volunteers with basic military training and experience and little if any comprehension of English” (296). Their inability to communicate with primarily monolingual English-speaking officers caused a complete breakdown in the unit’s cohesion, and severely weakened the 65th’s ability to perform well in intense combat zones. The fact that the division’s leadership did not address the language issue represents a clear failure of the military chain of command. The circumstances surrounding this “language problem” were officially investigated but it was concluded that “the unit’s alleged marginal performance” was to blame rather than any individual military officers (296).

The Battles at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights

The tragic turning point for the 65th infantry in Korea came with the battle for Outpost Kelly in September of 1952. While Villahermosa refers to the site as “Outpost Kelly,” I will refer to it as “Kelly Hill” since that is the more commonly used name for the outpost among Puerto Rican veterans. The unit was tasked with holding a strategic position at Outpost Kelly under the command of Cordero-Davila (Villahermosa 228). Facing little cover atop this bare hill with no place to dig trenches for defensive positioning, the troops of the 65th were basically sitting ducks to be picked off by the enemy. The battle lasted nearly 8 days, from September 17 through September 25, 1952 and the unit suffered its greatest casualties ever since its entrance into Korea in 1950. Despite countless setbacks and the loss of hundreds of troops in the first few days of battle, Cordero-Davila would not grant permission for retreat. On one particular occasion, Cordero-Davila ordered the coronel in charge to commit his battalion reserve to the

battle. However, as the force was maneuvered toward Kelly Hill, “enemy artillery zeroed in on his company, fracturing it with several direct hits. The men of Company I began to scatter and to drift back to the regiment’s main line” (229). During this prolonged attack, the commander “repeatedly sought permission to withdraw; but Cordero-Davila ordered him to hold at all costs” (229). However, the colonel in charge disagreed with Cordero-Davila’s order and went over his head to the general, who ordered them to cease the attack. By the time the surviving troops made their withdrawal, they had suffered 352 casualties, including 45 killed, 97 missing, and the remaining wounded (231).

The veterans interviewed in *The Borinqueneers* documentary discussed earlier recall the battle at Kelly Hill with a mixture of grief, guilt, and anger. They describe having to step on the bodies of their dead comrades during the retreat, and remember gruesome scenes of men with two or more limbs missing desperately trying to escape with their lives. While these horrific experiences are part of the nature of war, the indignation of many of these veterans stems from their belief that the entire operation was severely mishandled and that Cordero-Davila and other military leaders had knowingly led them and their comrades to a slaughter with little regard for the value of their lives (*The Borinqueneers*). The mortal blunderings of Cordero-Davila and other officers during Kelly Hill clearly proved disastrous, and Cordero-Davila stepped down from command of the 65th a few weeks following the incident. However, the long series of missteps in the leadership of the 65th infantry points not only to the failings of the armed forces during the Korean War in general, but also to what was clearly the neglect of a nonwhite combat unit by the larger army command who willingly overlooked major shortcomings within

the unit, including poor English-language skills and a lack of combat experience and training, which proved disastrous for those Puerto Rican men under their leadership.

The battle at Jackson Heights, which took place less than one month later in October 1952, mirrored that of Kelly Hill in many ways, and its results were even more disastrous than those of the previous month's battle. Another hill which proved a strategic military outpost, it was the site of a fierce battle between several companies of the 65th infantry and two North Korean companies, as well as nearly a full battalion of Communist Chinese troops (Soto 2). What ensued was a chaotic and brutal battle that resulted in the deaths of all of the commanders of one company and those of many other commanding officers in other companies. The intense casualties and loss of leadership during the battle resulted in many troops abandoning their position at Jackson Heights and retreating, despite not having received a direct order to do so. As Soto explains, "The wounded were ordered evacuated and no doubt some troops took advantage to assist their comrades and save their own lives at the same time. Despite the chain of command's demand that the position be seized and held, the necessary resources and support required to hold the outpost were not provided," orders which point to the failings of higher-ranking officers in overlooking this lack of resources to adequately support the objectives of the operation at Jackson Heights (Soto 15). Moreover, Soto notes, "The death of so many officers led to many soldiers abandoning the position" (15).

The documentation of this battle is contradictory and highly contested, with many Puerto Rican veterans claiming that they and their comrades were unjustly blamed for breakdowns in communication and orders among higher-ranking officers (Soto 14-5). What resulted was the mass court martial of 103 members of the 65th infantry for alleged

offenses committed during Jackson Heights (Villahermosa 270). Ultimately, 91 soldiers, and only 1 officer, were sentenced and imprisoned for those offenses, which primarily revolved around their abandonment of the battle at Jackson Heights and disobeying the orders of superiors (268). The only officer to be court-martialed was a lower-ranking Puerto Rican officer; all higher-ranking Anglo officials associated with Jackson Heights were exempted from the military sanctions (Soto 15).

While the official military record has placed blame on confusion amongst the lower-level company commanders, all of whom were Puerto Rican, Lieutenant Colonel Balthazar Soto and Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Betances Ramirez, both veterans of the 65th who fought at Jackson Heights, argue that the leadership errors reached much higher up in the chain of command of the continental Anglo officers. Both Soto and Betances maintain that many of the military studies and much of the investigation into Jackson Heights following the battle functioned mainly to exonerate the higher-ranking officers of any responsibility. Moreover, several commanders – both continental Anglo and Puerto Rican – who participated in the battle have since acknowledged that Jackson Heights was essentially indefensible (Soto 16). One official, Colonel Wilcomb, wrote in his memoirs, “I don’t believe anything could have ever made the Jackson Heights defensible that day. As I look back on it, I’m afraid I have to sympathize more and more with the troops that went on down the hill. In their innocence they knew a stupid operation when they saw one” (Wilcomb 12).

Betances argues that one of the reports that came out of the military investigation of Jackson Heights, the 3d Division Staff Study, “served as a cover-up of the responsibility of Division and 65th Regimental commanding officers for the dismal

performance of this regiment during 1952. It unloaded that responsibility on others, the fall-guys, the soldiers for their ‘lack of discipline and will to fight,’ and also on the Puerto Rican officers by claiming ‘superiority of Continental officers’” (Betances 2). Of this study, Soto writes, “According to this Staff Study, Continental Officers of the Regiment were superior to the Puerto Rican officers, and this statement would explain the behavior of the chain of command in discriminating against Puerto Ricans. Only Puerto Rican officers and soldiers were punished” (Soto 15). For his supposedly poor leadership that day, Betances was relieved of command following Jackson Heights. After nearly 50 years had passed, the U.S. military reversed its decision and awarded Betances with the Bronze Star Medal in October 2001 for his heroism and service in the Korean War. He passed away several weeks later. A report issued in 2002 by the Army Board for Correction of Military Records found that “LTC (Ret) Betances-Ramirez had been treated in an ‘inequitable’ manner” (Soto 16). Moreover, the board concluded, “it seems clear that a double standard was operative where the 65th Infantry was concerned. The 3d Infantry Division took pains in its official report on the episode on Jackson Heights to absolve its ‘continental’ (i.e., ‘white’) officers of all responsibility” (quoted in Soto 16). While the Puerto Rican troops originally court-martialed for their involvement at Jackson Heights have been officially exonerated of their crimes (Villahermosa 301), none of these soldiers received any military recognition or honors for their service, despite the fact that their Anglo counterparts involved in the same battle received promotions and high military honors for their actions.

Soto concludes about the 65th’s perceived failure at Jackson Heights, “The actions taken by senior Continental officers focused all attention to the Puerto Rican 65th

personnel, none to themselves... All of this was primarily motivated by racial prejudice and discrimination by use of double standards, where a Puerto Rican was strictly held to the standard, but a Continental was forgiven” (17). Villahermosa’s take on the situation takes a much more neutral stance and does not directly acknowledge the failings of the continental Anglo officers. Instead, he emphasizes the overarching shortcomings of the command: “For the 65th, a catastrophic shortage of trained NCOs, unaddressed language problems, and inept command leadership temporarily undermined its combat effectiveness. Making matters worse, senior commanders reacted in a heavy-handed manner with little analysis of what was really going on” (Villahermosa ix). Moreover, Villahermosa concludes that the decision to pardon the convictions of the Puerto Rican troops was “a political one” (301), a claim which rests legitimacy from the exoneration of those soldiers who were placed in an unimaginable situation with no resources or support to guide them, and who ultimately became victims of a double standard rooted in xenophobia and racial prejudice.

Interestingly, no U.S. army unit sent to Jackson Heights since the 65th was ever able to hold the position. Today, that nondescript hill rests well within the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. Following the 65th’s loss of Jackson Heights, General Smythe removed the infantry regiment from the front line. “The failure of the unit to retake Jackson Heights, he explained, was not due to enemy action, but rather to the disintegration in discipline and esprit de corps” (261). Once again, Puerto Rican soldiers were blamed for the operation’s failure, as Smythe cites their lack of morale and discipline as the cause for the disaster that was the battle at Jackson Heights. In February 1953, only four months following the failed battle, the U.S. Army decided to

reconstitute the 65th infantry regiment “as a fully integrated regiment with non-Puerto Rican personnel assigned in the same proportion as in other U.S. regiments” (281). While the timing of the decision was clearly not coincidental, the reconstitution of the 65th was presented by the military as part of the larger desegregation process the armed forces was undergoing during that period. While insular and continental Puerto Ricans have continued to serve in the U.S. military in large numbers since the Korean War, they now serve in fully integrated units across all divisions of the armed forces, just as do African Americans and other ethnic and racial minorities.

The Literary Generation of 1950: the Work of José Luis González in Context

During the mid-twentieth century, Puerto Rican writers on the island began to address the Korean War as one of several themes associated with an emerging generation of writers. The Puerto Rican literary scene underwent a transformation in the mid-1940s, at least partially breaking away from the literary tradition of the 1930s generation whose work focused primarily on “defending the cultural values and sovereignty of the Puerto Rican people” on the island (González-Ferreira 1), as well as defining what is “authentically” Puerto Rican, and exploring the sociology of the island, including rural traditions and the “jíbaro” identity (Rodríguez Sánchez and Torres Viera 21).⁷⁸ The most recognized authors of this period, mainly essayists, include Antonio S. Pedreira, Tomás Blanco, Enrique Laguerre, and Luis Palés Matos (one of the most well-known poets of the era).

⁷⁸ The term “jíbaro” can be roughly translated as peasant, or someone residing in the countryside. Today, the term has been largely embraced by the Puerto Rican people and is representative of the ideology of the “traditional” Puerto Rican who is hard-working, independent, and “prudently-wise” (Rodríguez, Carmen 6). The term is however sometimes used in a derogatory manner. See Rodríguez, C. for a detailed discussion of the *jíbaro*.

Authors of the new literary movement, known as the Generation of 1950 and sometimes also referred to as the Generation of '45, were responding to “the accelerated industrialization of the 40s... when Puerto Rico underwent the most dramatic social, economic, cultural and political change in its history” (Dolores Hernandez xiv, my translation⁷⁹).⁸⁰ Authors associated with the Generation of 1950 include José Luis González, Pedro Juan Soto, René Marques and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, among others. In general, the literature of this new generation shifted its focus from insular political and social issues to themes of Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. mainland. Authors such as González and Valcárcel were specifically interested in the experience of the Puerto Rican immigrant residing on the mainland, primarily in New York since it was the principal destination of migrants from the island. Josefina Rivera de Álvarez (quoted in Hernández Hernández) identifies three main events which shaped this generation of writers: the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the end of World War II, and the economic upswing experienced by the island following the war (Hernández Hernández 77). The economic upswing specifically drew the attention of this new generation due to the socioeconomic structure that emerged as a result, as well as the rise of a new bourgeoisie obsessed with consumerism and individualism.

Authors of this generation were critical of these changes and the alienating effects they had on the rest of the community, creating a widening gap between the new bourgeoisie and the working class. While these writers were critical of the consequences

⁷⁹ All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁰ As mentioned earlier, Puerto Rico faced widespread political and economic instability from the 1930s to the early 1950s. As a result, migration to the mainland grew immensely in the 1940s. Other changes were the election of Governor Muñoz Marín and the implementation of “Operation Bootstrap” which included a plan for agrarian reform. These changes led to the economic stabilization and growth of Puerto Rico in the mid to late 1950s (Hernández Hernández 78-79).

of the rise of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) and Muñoz Marín's politics, some adopted more overt political stances than others (Hernández Hernández 78-79).

Nonetheless, the majority of this generation seemed to echo similar political values to those espoused by Pedro Albizu Campos and followers of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. This is reflected in the attempt of authors of the Generation of 1950 to deepen and reaffirm their Puerto Rican roots through their writing as a response and challenge to the process of rapid Americanization that the island was undergoing.⁸¹ On a more existential level, these authors reflected on issues of life and death, insanity and the disintegration of traditional cultural and spiritual values as a result of the worldwide chaos of the Cold War era.

It was during this period that literature of the Puerto Rican diaspora began to emerge as Puerto Rican residents on the mainland started to document their experiences as foreigners in America.⁸² While some of these authors were contemporaries of the Generation of 1950, they made up a different group of early "Nuyorican" writers.⁸³ This group included Piri Thomas, Ed Vega and Pedro Pietri, and became the first generation of authors of Puerto Rican descent who wrote primarily in English and resided in New

⁸¹ This process was only heightened with the reaffirming of Puerto Rico's dependency on the U.S. through its designation as a U.S. Commonwealth by Congress in the early 1950s (see "The Roots of Imperialism, or The 'World's Oldest Colony'" section in the Introduction for more information on this issue). While a new Puerto Rican Constitution was ratified in 1952, these developments greatly frustrated any remaining hopes of achieving Puerto Rican sovereignty.

⁸² I use the term "diaspora" to refer to the broad geographical region encompassing the Caribbean and North America where a large number of individuals of Puerto Rican descent reside today. This term is more appropriate than "transnational" since Puerto Rico is not a nation-state, thus migration to the mainland U.S. is technically internal, not across national boundaries.

⁸³ The term "Nuyorican" not only references the birthplace of an individual of Puerto Rican descent, but it also denotes the social commitment and activism of writers to critique and challenge "the social and political institutions and policies that were hindering Puerto Ricans' life opportunities in New York City" (Rebollo-Gil 7-8). This identity would later be closely linked to the Nuyorican poetry movement of the 1970s. See "The New Boogaloo: Nuyorican Poetry and the Coming Puerto Rican Identities" by Guillermo Rebollo-Gil.

York.⁸⁴ Thus the term “Nuyorican” was coined as a combination of the identity markers “Puerto Rican” and “New Yorker.” While it is important to be aware of this generation of writers belonging to the Puerto Rican diaspora and the growing cultural and literary presence of Puerto Ricans on the mainland because of their close ties to the insular literary scene, the literature of particular interest to this study originates from the writers of the Generation of 1950.

The new insular literary generation of the 50s was much more mobile than earlier generations, and many of these authors were heavily influenced by their travel to other countries and experiences with other cultures, specifically that of the U.S. Some of these writers spent time in the United States, primarily New York, and their work began to enter into dialogue with the literature of the diaspora, relating what they had witnessed in mainland America for the readers back home on the island. Soto, Díaz Valcárcel, and González all resided in New York for a significant amount of time, an experience that is clearly present in their writing. One of the principal distinctions between mainland and insular literature, however, was language. Despite their exposure to the English language and U.S. culture in New York, members of the Generation of 1950 continued to write almost exclusively in Spanish, reaffirming their ties to insular readership.

The English language works of Nuyorican writers, on the other hand, distanced them from the island, targeting instead a growing Puerto Rican readership on the

⁸⁴ As mentioned above, a group of self-labeled “Nuyorican” poets popularized this identity by writing about the Nuyorican’s unique experience in the city and both celebrating their identity as well as criticizing the status quo that left so many Puerto Ricans oppressed, exploited and in dire poverty. Miguel Piñero and Miguel Algarín were two of the founders of the Nuyorican Poets Café and are among the most well-known of the Nuyorican poets. Piñero’s well-known poem “Lookin’ for a cause” addresses the loss of identity that comes with assimilation and conforming to dominant American societal expectations. It can clearly be read as a direct call to Nuyoricans to embrace their unique cultural identity and contribute positively to their community. There is still quite a strong Nuyorican poetry movement today made up of a younger generation of poets.

mainland. Interestingly, both Soto and González published volumes of short stories written entirely in Spanish that addressed the experience of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.— primarily New York. The collections were clearly targeted at a monolingual Puerto Rican audience to inform them of the reality of life in the U.S. Soto's 1957 short story collection titled *Spiks* presented narratives illuminating the prejudice, discrimination and marginalization experienced by Puerto Ricans living in New York. González's collection *En nueva york y otras desgracias* emerged nearly twenty years later in 1973, portraying the life of the Puerto Rican in New York in a similar light through a focus on human suffering, discrimination and moral degradation. The title story narrates the trajectory of a newly arrived Puerto Rican immigrant in New York who becomes so desperate due to the discrimination and adversities he faces that he is reduced to a life of crime.⁸⁵ The themes of discrimination, oppression, and violence are quite prevalent in the majority of González's work and also reflect his commitment to social and political resistance through his writing.

As previously mentioned, a common theme in some of the literature of the Generation of 1950 is the Korean War and the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers on the front lines. While some authors actually served in the U.S. military and therefore wrote from personal experience (including Díaz Valcárcel), others attempted to reimagine the experience for their Puerto Rican brothers who had served in the war, adopting their perspective in narratives specifically representing the Puerto Rican soldier's experience

⁸⁵ González's narrative ends ironically as the protagonist Marcelino robs a woman of her purse only to discover, upon hearing her exclamation of surprise in Spanish, that she is a Puerto Rican herself and that he has robbed a member of his own community. The impoverished immigrant experiences a moment of realization and humiliation, as he understands how the desperation of his situation has forced him to act out against his own people.

in Korea. Soto has been credited for being the first author to write on this issue in *Los perros anónimos*. Others followed suit, namely Díaz Valcárcel and González, although there are some lesser-known texts on the subject, the majority of which were written by Puerto Rican veterans. These include *Corea/Vietnam: Dos Guerras Que Quise Olvidar* by Ángel Matos Torres, *Los diablos de las montañas* by Jorge Feliciano Ruiz, *El fuego y su aire* by Enrique A. Laguerre, *Vivencias de la Guerra de Corea* by Angel M. Rivera Ortiz, and *Unos breves apuntes sobre la historia de dos gemelos puertorriqueños que se convirtieron en: Guiñapo y Renegado, novela* by Francisco M. Rivera Lizardi.

The predominance of Korean War narratives in Puerto Rican literature cannot, or rather should not be overlooked when considering Puerto Rican literature of the twentieth century in general. The fact that numerous authors devoted so much attention to this specific war clearly gestures to the importance it had for the general Puerto Rican population, and to the unique circumstances surrounding the presence of Puerto Rican troops in this particular war.⁸⁶ Before entering into a discussion of González's Korean War literature, I will briefly address the equally important themes of race and racial relations that are present in his work. Understanding González's personal background, as well as his emphasis on the themes of race and war, is particularly central to my interpretation of his Korean War narrative, "El arbusto en llamas."

José Luis González's Literature: The Themes of Race and War

Knowing the author's background is important in order to understand González's political stance, which is directly related to his writing. Born in the Dominican Republic

⁸⁶ It is important to note however that the majority of the works listed above are either unpublished, out of print, or have a very limited circulation. The limitations of the archives discussed in the previous section, as well as in the Introduction, are evidenced again by the lack of publishers' interest in these types of stories.

in 1926 to a Puerto Rican father and Dominican mother, González and his family were forced to flee the country during the 1930s with the rise to power of military dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. As a result of this escape, González spent the majority of his childhood in Puerto Rico, and is considered by the literary community to be a Puerto Rican writer. The experience of exile in his life was central, as González himself admitted, “la palabra ‘exilio’ acompañó toda mi infancia puertorriqueña como una mala sombra” (quoted in Díaz Quiñones III).⁸⁷⁸⁸ After graduating from the University of Puerto Rico, González moved to New York toward the end of the 1940s in order to study at the New School for Social Research. His time in the city had a powerful impact on his writing, greatly influencing his transnational perspective and increasing his interest in modern urban culture as well as the Puerto Rican migrant population in New York. It also inspired his publication of the short story collection *En nueva york y otras desgracias*, which I discussed previously.

During his years in New York, González was also exposed to the discriminatory treatment of the Puerto Rican population on the mainland, as well as the racism endured by other racial and ethnic minorities including African Americans and other individuals of Latin American or Caribbean descent. González was witness to the violent period in American history leading up to the Civil Rights Movement.⁸⁹ He portrays the virulent

⁸⁷ “the word ‘exile’ accompanied my entire childhood in Puerto Rico like an evil shadow.”

⁸⁸ The term “exile” is used in different ways in scholarship and literature. In official terms, exile refers to an individual’s forced removal or departure from their home country by the government. However, exile is also used in more general terms to refer to an individual’s absence from their homeland as a result of violence or the threat of violence, usually related to their political ideology. For the purposes of this discussion, I use the latter definition of the term in order to discuss González’s extended absence from Puerto Rico.

⁸⁹ During the 1940s and 50s, segregation in the U.S. was still prevalent and racial violence against African Americans throughout the country, not just in the South, was the norm, and to a degree continues to this day (the murder of Trayvon Martin is a perfect example). The Supreme Court’s 1896 ruling of *Plessy v.*

racism experienced by African Americans very powerfully in the story “En este lado,” narrating the story of a young African American man whose interracial relationship with a white girl at his university almost gets him lynched, forcing him to flee the country and find refuge in Mexico.⁹⁰ The narrative reveals the complexity of racial relations not just between blacks and whites in the U.S., but between blacks, Mexicans, and white “gringos” in Mexico. While the protagonist Bill Rawlings does face some discrimination in Mexico as well, it is ultimately his Mexican friend who comes to his defense when a gringo tourist couple attempts to get him kicked out of a restaurant in his new hometown of Cuernavaca. As is the case in several of his narratives, González presents race/ethnicity as binding and emphasizes the potential for solidarity between individuals of minority ethnic groups like Mexicans and African Americans.

The author’s experience in the U.S. clearly influenced his writing, and its impact on him is especially notable in “El arbusto en llamas.” In 1943, González joined the Puerto Rican Communist Party, quickly becoming one of its most outspoken advocates from the intellectual arena. As a result of his strong socialist alliance and the growing strength of McCarthyism in 1950, the author was forced into official exile (from Puerto Rico) for the first time, first prolonging a trip to Czechoslovakia into a three-year stay, and then establishing residence in Mexico beginning in 1953. This mandated exile was principally a result of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952

Ferguson that had established “separate but equal” had yet to be reversed, and it wouldn’t be until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 when the original ruling was overturned. The tradition of lynching African Americans was unfortunately still a common reality during the 1940s, especially in the South. Statistics from the Tuskegee Institute indicate that approximately 4,730 people died as a result of lynching in the United States between 1882 and 1951, 3,437 of those being of African descent (Gibson). However, the actual number is most likely much higher since many lynchings went unreported or undocumented, for obvious reasons.

with the passage of its new constitution. The new immigration authorities on the island, now part of the U.S. administration, denied González entrance into Puerto Rico for more than twenty years.

José Luis González's work on the presence of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War takes a critical stance that reflects the numerous layers of meaning behind Puerto Rico's involvement in the Korean War. Examining the experience of the Puerto Rican soldier as yet another manifestation of the United States' oppressive imperialist powers over the island, González not only situates these soldiers within Puerto Rican history, but within a larger framework of racially marginalized groups in the United States, namely African Americans.⁹¹ While González paid particular attention to the subject of race in several of his works, he himself was relatively light-skinned, and would be considered a "white" Puerto Rican by his compatriots on the island. His own racial identity aside, what interested González as a writer was depicting and reflecting on the diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural identity of the Puerto Rican people, which included strong African influences.

As such, González's treatment of race in his writing was not limited to a discussion of U.S. racial relations. The author brought attention to issues of racial oppression occurring on his own island as well, as is evidenced by short stories like "En el fondo del caño hay un negrito" which comments on the impoverished life of many

⁹¹ Historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups within the United States include African Americans, whose marginalization dates back to the institution of slavery, as well as immigrant groups and their succeeding generations, such as Mexican Americans, immigrants from Central America, and individuals who emigrated from the Caribbean, many of whom are of African descent. Many Puerto Rican immigrants of African descent identify themselves as Afro-Puerto Rican, and belong to a growing community of Afro-Latinas/os in the United States. The marginalization of Afro-Latinas/os is complicated due to the discrimination they experience within their national-origin communities as well as by African Americans and the larger American population. I will discuss this identity in more detail later in this chapter.

dark-skinned Puerto Ricans who are forced to live in informal slums on the outskirts of cities, near sewage pipes and human waste, and the desperation and dehumanization they suffer. Told through the perspective of several different characters, the first-person viewpoint of the dark-skinned toddler Melodía wins out over that of the other characters through his innocence as he gazes out the door of his family’s makeshift house that is positioned precariously over a deep canal below. In one of the only scholarly discussions of González’s representation of the life of blacks in Puerto Rico, Maria Zielina notes, “Within Caribbean narrative, this writer has been one of the few to address and re-address the black boy, and he accomplished it with great skill, sympathy and sensitivity” (Zielina 22, my translation). Melodía’s parents are poor Afro-Puerto Rican laborers – referred to as “negros arrimaos”⁹² in the text – who were forced to construct a shelter on the only piece of land they could find (“En el fondo” 3). This meant that their shack was dangerously close to the water, especially with such a young child crawling around the house. The child protagonist sees his reflection in the “caño” – canal – three times, each one thinking it is another child wanting to play with him. The last time Melodía sees the boy – a dark-skinned (“negrito”) baby like him – he decides to jump in and go play with the boy, drowning tragically in the canal outside of his family’s home. González comments powerfully in this narrative on the oppressive socioeconomic conditions that lead Afro-Puerto Ricans like the text’s protagonists to live in such inhumane conditions, and a culture that stigmatizes people of African descent to the point of dehumanizing them.

⁹² “Arrimao” is a colloquial pronunciation of “arrimado,” which is generally a pejorative term in Puerto Rico used to refer to “squatters” or “slum dwellers” who live in informal, makeshift housing not recognized by the government.

Another story by González, “Historia de vecinos,” explores issues of race related to the migration of Caribbeans to Europe, specifically France. A Puerto Rican man is studying in Paris when he goes to take a job and discovers that the employee who he is to replace is a black man from Martinique. An educated young man, the Puerto Rican protagonist is frustrated by the xenophobia he experiences in France, where he is looked down upon as a racial “other” and only offered positions consisting of menial and exploitative physical labor, given that strict immigration laws in the country prevent him from working legally. The Puerto Rican man’s sense of solidarity with a fellow Caribbean immigrant is therefore reinforced by his negative experience in France and the oppression that he and the Martinican have in common. “Historia de vecinos” ultimately presents race as binding in the Puerto Rican protagonist’s decision not to take the job out of respect for and solidarity with his Martinican “neighbor.” The attention to race evidenced in these narratives becomes even further crystallized by González in the short story “El arbusto en llamas.”

Notably, González composed and published the majority of his works during his time in Mexico. González’s transnational identity, having been born in the Dominican Republic, growing up in Puerto Rico, and establishing his career in Mexico, afforded him with a unique perspective on the complexities of national and racial identity as well as transnational relations and U.S. imperialism. This distinct point of view is apparent in his short stories, some of his writing even alluding to Afro-Puerto Rican identity,⁹³ like in the

⁹³ Appearing to many Americans as “black,” individuals of African descent from the Hispanophone Caribbean or Latin America are often excluded from both racial origin and national origin communities because they are seen as not belonging. African Americans are reticent to accept them because they speak different and have a different culture and traditions, whereas national origin groups such as Puerto Ricans or Cubans discriminate against them due to their dark skin color. Most commonly referred to as Afro-

narrative “Santa Claus visita a Pichirilo Sánchez” that explores the complex issues of race on the island from a Puerto Rican child’s innocent perspective regarding his friendship with a black boy named Alejo.⁹⁴ It seems quite possible that González’s distance from Puerto Rico allowed him to view the status quo with a more critical lens than many writers residing on the island. Maria Zielina notes that “González is a writer who occupies a very unique place in the history of African-ness in Puerto Rican literature, since his writing demonstrates his continual preoccupation with the situation of the black Puerto Ricans in this country; a concern that he professed despite having lived in Mexico since 1955” (Zielina 22). González’s work consistently demonstrated a concern for the adversities faced by all types of marginalized people and his narratives often attempt to give a voice to those who are usually rendered voiceless.

The author’s writing from this period forward was marked by an obsession with the fragmentation of time and space as a result of continual displacement, mirroring the experience of exile that was so central in his own life (Díaz Quiñones VI). González obtained Mexican nationality in 1955, earning his doctorate in literature from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) a few years later, where he taught

Latinos, Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román describe how this community struggles with “triple consciousness,” drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois’ term. “In their quest for a full and appropriate sense of social identity Afro-Latinas/os are thus typically pulled in three directions at once and share a complex, multidimensional optic,” in limbo between the Latino, African American and “white” American communities (Flores and Román 14). There has been a growing body of scholarship on Afro-Latino identity, culture, and literature in the last two decades that helps to facilitate our understanding of the complexities of national origin communities in the U.S. like the Puerto Rican community whose collective identity stems from not only Spanish, but also African roots.

⁹⁴ The narrator Pichirilo is a young light-skinned Puerto Rican boy who wants to ask Santa Claus for a bicycle for Christmas. He shares his wish with his dark-skinned best friend Alejo who also wants to ask Santa Claus for a Christmas gift, but does not think he should bother since Santa Claus is only for white kids. Pichirilo ignores his friend’s fear and aligns himself in solidarity with his black friend by writing a joint letter to Santa Claus. The text reflects on the internalization of racism by dark-skinned islanders like Alejo that occurs at such a young age as a result of the discriminatory beliefs that the dominant culture (perpetuated by adults) inculcates in them.

as a professor for many years. His publication of two collections of short stories during this period, *El hombre de la calle* (1948) and *En este lado* (1954), the second of which included “El arbusto en llamas,” demonstrated his mastery of prose, evidenced in a unique narrative style characterized by a concise, succinct plot. Other themes that became prevalent in González’s work during this period were the dereliction of the lower classes by the state, the displacement of Caribbean emigrants, and the experience of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War.

González’s attention to the presence of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military throughout the twentieth century reflects his concern with the effects of imperialism on the larger Puerto Rican populace both on the island and in the United States. The author’s preoccupation with the role of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico extends to several other war narratives set in earlier historical moments prior to the Korean War. *La Llegada: crónica con ficción* (1980) is set the furthest back historically, positioned in the moment of the United States’ occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898 as a result of the Spanish American War. As several critics have noted,⁹⁵ *La Llegada* functions as a sort of “antiheroic” chronicle/novel⁹⁶ that demystifies the circumstances regarding the entrance of the U.S. military to the island that year. What contemporary politicians’ rose-colored lenses and national myth-making projects have come to represent as an invasion, González instead depicts as a more complex process of negotiation and collaboration

⁹⁵ See in particular Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (2004) and “Del ‘trauma de la literatura’ al ‘relato del trauma’: (con)figuraciones de la vergüenza en los relatos sobre la presencia militar norteamericana en Puerto Rico” in *Revista iberoamericana* (2009) by Juan Carlos Rodríguez.

⁹⁶ The text is presented as a hybrid narrative that combines elements of nonfiction chronicle with fictional prose. Part of the “chronicle” element is the series of historical photographs of the island from 1898 that are reproduced in the pages of the text.

between Puerto Rican landowning elites and U.S. authorities. As the text's title suggests, the new government's landing on the island in 1898 was more of an *arrival* rather than an actual armed, violent invasion (Negrón-Muntaner 37).

In *La Llegada*, González therefore turns a critical eye to the internal class divisions on the island, condemning the Puerto Rican elite's historic and contemporary complicity with the U.S. government and its imperialist designs. This attention to the complexity of the politics and socioeconomic, cultural, and racial circumstances within which different issues in Puerto Rican society are embedded is present in the majority, if not all, of González's literature. Therefore, the author's anti-imperialist politics are not solely condemnatory of the U.S. government or military, but are also openly critical of the essential supporting role that influential Puerto Ricans – mainly politicians and wealthy business owners – play in reinforcing U.S. capitalist and imperialist projects.

Another powerful war narrative by González is his short novel *Mambrú se fue a la guerra* (1972) – from which the epigraph for this chapter was drawn.⁹⁷ The novel appears in a collection that bears the same name, which contains several other narratives by González, including “El arbusto en llamas,” discussed later in this chapter. Set in Europe during WWII, the narrative features a Puerto Rican soldier from New York who has been drafted into the U.S. military, and his experiences in Europe during this period. The narrative is divided into three parts – which González calls “jornadas”⁹⁸ – including

⁹⁷ To date, there is no in-depth analysis of this text available in Spanish or English. While a close reading of this novel was not within the scope of this dissertation, I plan to pursue that project in the near future, particularly since so many connections and parallels can be drawn between the author's Korean War narratives and this WWII narrative.

⁹⁸ The author's choice of the word “jornada” could be interpreted as referring to a “military expedition” or to a day's journey or work day. In the context of the novel, it seems likely that González was playing with the word, simultaneously referencing both the notions of workday and expedition.

“Liberación,” “Los héroes,” and “Maruja (seis años después).” The text presents a non-linear narrative that covers three distinct periods: the protagonist’s participation in the Allied troops liberation of France from the Nazis, his earlier combat experience in North Africa during WWII, and his experience living as an expatriate in Europe six years after the end of the war. The entire novel presents a nuanced study of numerous themes related to the Puerto Rican diasporic experience during the mid-twentieth century, including racial tensions – particularly American Anglo-Puerto Rican tensions within the ranks of the military – as well as the experience of exile and anti-immigrant sentiments as a Puerto Rican living in Europe, the horrors of war, the United States’ capitalist-motivated imperialism and its effects on Puerto Rico, among others. González’s exploration of many of these themes evidences strong parallels to the Korean War literature explored in this dissertation.

The second of the three parts in *Mambrú se fue a la guerra* presents the most direct reflection on the Puerto Ricans’ war experience, which details the ambush that the protagonist and his racist Anglo sergeant find themselves in and their desperate attempts to escape alive. Only the protagonist makes it, his sergeant dying in front of him as they are finally rescued by friendly troops. The protagonist and sergeant struggle to overcome the mutual animosity that has dominated their relationship since the first day they met, when the sergeant referred condescendingly to the Puerto Rican community in New York and interpellated him as an ethnic “other.” The continuous cultural dissonances he experiences with other Anglo soldiers are encapsulated well in the closing scene of the section when he is being rescued by medics:

Uno de los camilleros tropezó ligeramente y el movimiento de la camilla me lastimó el hombro herido. –Suave, muchachos –murmuré en español. – What did he say –preguntó el camillero que había tropezado. –I dunno – contestó el otro—. I guess he’s raving. “Delirando.” Delirando estará tu madre. “Delirando” porque hablé en español, yanqui pendejo. *Qué carajos tengo yo que hacer aquí?* (69)⁹⁹

This scene illustrates the clear miscommunication and misunderstanding resulting from the linguistic differences between the Anglo soldiers and the Puerto Rican protagonist, and his resentment at constantly being perceived as mentally or intellectually inferior – taking particular offense at the word “raving” used by one of the men. Throughout his service in the war, the Puerto Rican soldier in this novel wrestles with feelings of alienation, resentment and anger at being forced to participate in a war that he doesn’t believe in and fight for a country that colonized his own people and continues to treat them like second-class citizens. This strong anti-imperialist tone is latent throughout the text, coming through in the man’s dialogue with his different lovers, as well as those individuals he befriends along the way. In many ways, *Mambrú se fue a la guerra* is a much more openly anti-imperialist text than the two Korean War narratives that I will now discuss. However, reading those narratives in dialogue with González’s earlier war literature informs my interpretation of the author’s Korean War literature as equally anti-imperialist in nature.

Following WWII, the mandatory draft imposed on Puerto Rican citizens during the early 1950s highlighted the unjust nature of the island’s political status; they could not vote for the U.S. president, yet they had to fight in his wars. González’s short story

⁹⁹ One of the men carrying the stretcher tripped slightly and the movement of the stretcher hurt my injured shoulder. –Careful, guys –I murmured in Spanish. –What did he say –the man who had tripped while carrying the stretcher asked. –I dunno –answered the other—. I guess he’s raving. “Raving.” Raving your mother. “Raving” because I spoke in Spanish, stupid Yankee. *What the hell am I doing here?*

“Una caja de plomo que no se podía abrir”¹⁰⁰ reveals the devastating impact that the war had on the Puerto Rican community, and specifically on small rural towns, through the story of how Puerto Rican soldier Moncho Ramírez’s family and entire community found out about his death in the Korean War. The story provides detailed description of the series of letters that Moncho’s mother receives as he is first declared missing in action, and then declared killed in action, and his body is finally delivered in a small lead box by a group of urban Puerto Rican soldiers who can barely veil their disgust at the conditions in which the Ramírez family and their community live. Narrated from the first-person perspective of Moncho’s childhood friend from his *pueblo*, the text illuminates the profound sense of loss experienced by his mother, focusing on the special maternal bond between mother and son, and her horror at not being able to open the lead box in which her son’s remains are sealed.

Guillermo Irizarry writes of the narrative: “the colonizing power’s national agenda is imposed on the proletariat and he is sent to die... The lead box reifies the oppression of the proletariat and this historical reference points to an international issue that is inscribed in global subalternity” (77, my translation). The trauma of not being able to practice the traditional mourning process due to the mother’s inability to open the box that carries her son’s remains highlights the permanent, long-term consequences of U.S. imperialism on the Puerto Rican people through the loss of so many lives on the front lines of foreign wars in which they have no stake. “Una caja de plomo” also emphasizes the cyclical nature of war and its consequences through the arrival of a draft notice addressed to the narrator at the end of the story. Taken together, *La Llegada*, *Mambrú se*

¹⁰⁰ I will refer to this story as “Una caja de plomo” from here forward.

fue a la guerra, and “Una caja de plomo” demonstrate that González’s war narratives are complex denunciations of U.S. imperialism that interrogate the multiple forces complicit in these projects. Moreover, the author’s war literature also reads as a condemnation of the devastating phenomenon of war itself.

Presenting Absence: The Critical Function of Lacunae in José Luis González’s “El arbusto en llamas”

In contrast to “Una caja de plomo,” “El arbusto en llamas”¹⁰¹ takes place primarily on the battlefield in Korea. Specifically, “El arbusto” connects the violent racism experienced by African Americans to that experienced by Puerto Ricans in mid-twentieth century America. González’s narrative tells the story of a Caucasian soldier in the Korean War who recalls participating in the lynching of a black man in Mississippi as he lies on the battlefield surrounded by enemy soldiers. In the following analysis, I argue that the distinct absence of any Puerto Rican characters in the text serves a critical function. By presenting this absence to the reader, González draws attention to the lacunae in the dominant U.S. community’s awareness of the Puerto Rican soldier’s presence and racial subordination in the Korean War, as well as American citizens’ ignorance regarding the violent history of racial discrimination against African Americans in this country. The connection that González implicitly draws here is the African origins of both African Americans and Puerto Ricans, suggesting similar histories of oppression between these two communities.

A comprehensive reading of González’s story “El arbusto” needs to consider the Afro-Latino identity as a critical element of the text. This consideration offers a new

¹⁰¹ From this point on, I will refer to the text as “El arbusto.”

dimension to literary analysis, considering the racial undertones and tensions present in the narrative. While González himself is not of African descent, his work presents a clear awareness of Africa's influence on Puerto Rican culture and history and, I argue, constructs a consciousness of the Puerto Rican diaspora that incorporates the Afro-Latino population. Reading Hispanophone Caribbean literature along racial lines can help us see the complexity of such national origin identities and understand internal racial tensions within such groups, but also envision the potential for cross-cultural alliances, to which "El arbusto" gestures. Puerto Rican soldiers in the U.S. military felt these racial tensions and alliances more starkly than their Caucasian counterparts. As will be discussed further in later chapters, the experience of the ethnic soldier is one that has many commonalities across cultural and national identities, and I will draw out those commonalities between Puerto Rican/Latino and Chicano soldiers.

"El arbusto" narrates the story of Lee Maloy, a Caucasian Southerner from Mississippi, who finds himself on the front lines of the Korean War. The story begins in the present moment with the protagonist in a state of shock after his battalion was ambushed by North Korean forces. Presented in a third person limited narration, the reader has access to Maloy's thoughts but does not see things through his eyes. González wastes no time in introducing us to Maloy's racist mentality in the second line of the narrative, a mindset that is further developed as the narrative continues, "*Los malditos monos allá arriba quieren agarrarme vivo*" (González 232, author's emphasis).¹⁰² Italics are employed in the text to signal the protagonist's thoughts or dreams. Maloy's initial internal dialogue employs the racial slur "mono" (monkey) to refer to the North Korean

¹⁰² "The damned monkeys up there want to catch me alive."

troops, a derogatory term which has also been used historically to refer to African Americans in the United States. The text immediately establishes continuity between the racism experienced by two different ethnic groups, one abroad in Korea, and another in the American homeland. Most important, however, is the third ethnically marginalized group that is alluded to in the narrative, the Puerto Rican, who also has African racial origins and is often pegged as “black” by mainstream America. The author’s use of Spanish for this internal dialogue is deliberate and seems to function to situate the protagonist in a more familiar cultural environment for the Puerto Rican readership.

González’s decision to write this narrative in Spanish targets a primarily Puerto Rican and Latin American population. This move also enables the author to avoid subduing the text’s politically critical overtones, one of the unspoken requirements of English-language publication in the U.S., especially during the mid-twentieth century. There is clearly a heavy dose of irony in the fact that Lee Maloy, a Caucasian monolingual man, is spouting racial slurs in a language spoken by another ethnic minority in the U.S. (Latinos/as and Chicanos/as) who also experienced brutal racial discrimination, which they continue to endure to this day. One type of racial discrimination faced by these communities in the nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century was lynching.

It is important to note that the legacy of lynching in American history extends to other races and regions than the general American public is aware of. Ken Gonzales-Day documents that “in California, the majority of lynchings were perpetrated against Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans; and that more Latinos were lynched in California than were persons of any other race or ethnicity” (Gonzales-Day, Book jacket).

The phenomenon of lynching racial minorities other than African Americans was common throughout the nation in the early to mid-twentieth century, with lynchings functioning as “a public spectacle predicated upon the violent destruction of the racialized body juxtaposed against the integrity and mastery of the white bodies in the audience,” (Jabour 28). Many lynchings criminalized innocent men and women just because they were viewed as “other” by society. Lynchings of accused bandits and rapists were extremely common with civilians taking justice into their own hands, often urged on by a mob mentality and a strange sense of voyeurism. Lynching became a ritual then that participated in national discourses of citizenship, identifying those who belonged while designating others as inhuman and ineligible for U.S. citizenship, thus not belonging (28). The unique political status of Puerto Ricans in legal limbo, neither full-fledged citizens nor members of an independent nation-state, points to the perpetuation of these marginalizing discourses of citizenship. It was this second-class citizenship status linked to ethnic discrimination that landed them in the most dangerous combat zones during the Korean conflict.

González continues to play with language in incredibly interesting ways throughout the text, switching to English briefly as a way of emphasizing the heavily racist undertones of speech in the American South during the Jim Crow era.¹⁰³ This type of derogatory speech was all too common in the U.S. military at the time and was adapted to the unique circumstances of the Korean War in which the North Korean and Chinese

¹⁰³ The Jim Crow era refers to the period in the United States between 1876 and 1965 when state and local laws were enacted establishing racial segregation in all public facilities in the South. These facilities supposedly recognized a “separate but equal” status for African Americans although this was far from the truth. The term “Jim Crow” was a common pejorative expression used to refer to African Americans during the nineteenth century.

soldiers were the racial “other” whom American troops and military propaganda dehumanized in an effort to desensitize the men from the potential guilt associated with having to kill these ethnic bodies. This is exemplified later in the text when Maloy recalls his Lieutenant’s snide remark, “que más valía pegarse un tiro que rendirse a aquellos monos” (234).¹⁰⁴ The ethnic other is animalized first by the racial slur and second by the context of the remark, which alludes to the “savage” nature of the North Korean. Later in the narrative, González uses the American racial epithet “nigger” very deliberately when referring to a black man back in Maloy’s hometown, to call up this specific moment in the United States’ collective past. What is ironic in Maloy’s nonchalant use of such racial slurs as “monkey” and “nigger” is the fact that members of his own military, in this case Puerto Ricans, endured the same pejorative labels while fighting and sacrificing their lives for a nation that perpetually marginalized and oppressed their community.

Mariscal notes that minority ethnic soldiers in the wars of Southeast Asia tended to identify with the lifestyle and hardship of local Koreans and Vietnamese during the wars. Referring to this phenomenon as “the structure of recognition,” Mariscal explains, “for many GIs of color, the reality of daily life in Southeast Asia was hauntingly close to what their own lives had been in the United States... the Chicano/[Latino] community sees in the... enemy a ‘reflection’ of its own class or ethnic positions” (*Aztlán* 36-9). González implicitly references this identification of the self in the “other” on the part of minority ethnic soldiers (including Puerto Ricans) in the U.S. military through the attention he gives to the dehumanization and animalization of the enemy soldier carried out by Maloy in the text. This focus on the denigration of the North Korean soldier

¹⁰⁴ “It was better to shoot himself than surrender to those monkeys.”

therefore highlights the strikingly similar realities of the North and South Koreans as impoverished farmers living in rural zones.

I argue that in addition to criticizing the U.S. public's lack of awareness of the plight of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War, González's text presents a wider criticism of mainstream America's lack of consciousness about the war's impact on *all* minority communities, both domestically and abroad. This commentary includes Koreans through the author's condemnation of the animalization and dehumanization of North Korean troops by paralleling it with the animalization and dehumanization of the black lynching victim in Mississippi. It is more than a bit ironic that Lee Maloy ends up dying as a victim of the chemical warfare that killed and maimed so many innocent civilians, both in Korea *and* Vietnam—napalm. González's use of irony throughout the narrative functions in conjunction with the lacunae in the text to construct his condemnation of the devastating and far-reaching effects of U.S. imperialism on a transnational level.

As a reader, we continue to follow Maloy through the painfully slow steps as he struggles to regain lucidity following the ambush and begins to realize the gravity of his current situation, “Como un animal acorralado... comprendió que el enemigo sabía perfectamente dónde se encontraba y sólo se cuidaba—por lo pronto—de imposibilitar su escape” (232-33).¹⁰⁵ This is the first instance where the animalization is turned onto the protagonist himself emphasizing his vulnerable nature, like prey being hunted by a more powerful predator. The narrative tool of irony becomes more prevalent from this point forward as González begins to draw strong parallels between the Caucasian soldier and

¹⁰⁵ “Like a cornered animal... he understood that the enemy knew exactly where he was and was only making sure—for the moment—that they made his escape impossible.”

the ethnic “others” that he has unquestioningly disparaged and oppressed throughout his life up to this point. Maloy begins to remember the details of the ambush and the death of his three fellow soldiers, also young Caucasian men from the South who suffer a violent death from two hand grenades that explode right in front of them, “levantándolos del suelo como muñecos descoyuntados” (232).¹⁰⁶ It is not this brutal image that sticks in his mind however, but rather the initial image “de los dos coreanos erguidos súbitamente frente a él como una aparición” (232).¹⁰⁷

The text immerses the reader in the chaotic, volatile atmosphere of the war, forcing the trauma of the protagonist’s experience onto us through vivid, detailed description. The memory of the North Korean perpetrators of his friends’ deaths literally haunts Maloy’s thoughts, as he recalls “el de la izquierda, el más joven... sonriendo infantilmente en el momento de lanzar la granada. Y el otro, el de la derecha, casi viejo, desnudo de la cintura arriba, flaco (campesino, guerrillero sin duda) con los dientes apretados y los ojos bien abiertos en el instante de enviar su porción de muerte al enemigo” (232-3).¹⁰⁸ The protagonist continues to racialize the enemy through his recollection, assuring himself of their inferiority and subhumanity by his interpretation of the young soldier’s infantile smile and the older man’s half-naked, seemingly emaciated body with his contorted mouth and widened eyes. Maloy’s apparently subconscious disassociation from the North Korean soldiers through this process of racialization functions to distance himself from the enemy’s “barbaric” brutality, despite the fact that

¹⁰⁶ “lifting them up from the ground like disjointed dolls.”

¹⁰⁷ “of the two Koreans suddenly standing up right in front of him like an apparition.”

¹⁰⁸ “the one on the left, the youngest of the two... smiling childishly at the moment that he launched the grenade. And the other, the one on the right, almost old, naked from the waist up, skinny (farmer, guerrilla, without a doubt) with his teeth clenched tight and his eyes open wide in the instant that he sent his portion of death to the enemy.”

he perpetrates the same violence being a soldier himself. Once again, he and the rest of his unit are the prey being hunted by the savage ethnic other. The continual inversion of power occurring throughout the text emphasizes the complex nature of power relations and the fact that they are not stable but rather fluid, forever changing depending on one's positionality and circumstances in a specific moment. Maloy is just beginning to realize that the hatred with which he attacked the enemy has now been turned on him and he has no escape.

The scene continues with an eerie silence that unsettles Maloy as he continues immobile in his hiding place until he hears a strange voice “*produciéndole un repeluzno a lo largo de la espalda, la voz extraña resonó allá arriba... sonó tan cerca, tan sorpresivamente cerca, y en inglés: ‘Are you ready to surrender now, soldier?’*” (233).¹⁰⁹ The first sentence in English that appears in the text catches both the protagonist and reader off guard, surprised to hear a new language interjected into the narrative but also surprised by the fact that it is a North Korean pronouncing it. The ominous question hangs in the air, signaling to Maloy that the enemy knows his exact location amongst the bushes. He experiences “*un descorazonamiento*” (a moment of discouragement) upon realizing that he is unarmed, and slowly becomes aware of the inevitability of his capture by the North Koreans. He does not even have the (unappealing) option of shooting himself, as had been crudely suggested by his lieutenant who had judged it a better fate than falling into the hands of the enemy.

¹⁰⁹ “that raised the hairs all along his back, the strange voice echoed from above... it sounded so close, so surprisingly close, and in English.”

The desperation of Maloy's entrapment is further illuminated by a personal anecdote he recalls as he falls asleep, surrendering to the exhaustion while he's hidden amidst the bushes tinged red by the setting sun. "Una luz rojiza de crepúsculo temprano se filtraba desde fuera a través de la fronda tupida, creando en torno al hombre un resplandor como de incendio lejano" (234).¹¹⁰ Conjuring up the image of the burning bush by this allusion to the "reddish light of dusk" and imagery of fire, González sets the stage for a much more literal and cruel type of fire that comes later in the text. Italics distinguish Maloy's dream in the text, as they are also used to refer to the protagonist's internal thoughts, guiding the reader into what appears to be a dreamed flashback as the protagonist recalls an event that occurred in his hometown in Mississippi prior to his entrance in the war.

In the flashback, still narrated from a third person limited perspective, we follow Maloy as he awakens in the dead of the night and sneaks out of his parents' house to meet up with three other men, only one of whom is more than twenty years of age. By calling attention to the young age of three of the four men in the group, González emphasizes their naive, impressionable nature, still minors, only teenage boys. Yet this detail does not function to discount or undermine their role in the task at hand nor to lessen their guilt, but rather to paint a clear picture of the specific circumstances of that night. Three young white boys in a small rural town in Mississippi rendezvous in secret with an older, influential man in the community, Bill Caldwell (the owner of the town's sole hardware store), in the dead of night. If we take the time period into account, which judging from

¹¹⁰ "The reddish light of early dusk filtered from beyond through the dense foliage, creating a glow around the man like that of a distant fire."

the details provided within the text can be assumed to be a few years prior to the Korean War, meaning the mid to late 1940s, it is not hard for one to anticipate the event that is about to unfold.

The entire incident is pre-meditated, organized and agreed upon by the group of four men prior to the night in question. Bill Caldwell has everything ready, explaining the plan to his “minions,” (in Spanish, “secuaces”) as they are characterized later in the story (237). “Bill Caldwell repartió las armas: un revólver a cada uno. Después dijo: ‘Dejé el carro a la vuelta de la esquina. Allá están la soga y la gasolina. Vamos...’” (235).¹¹¹ The boys’ anticipation of what is to come is perhaps the most disturbing part of the operation, bringing to life the voyeuristic mentality that often surrounded lynchings. “Lee Maloy iba gozando ya las primeras sensaciones físicas de la aventura: aquel encogimiento insólitamente agradable del estómago [y]... la absoluta incapacidad de concebir ningún pensamiento complejo, la activa y casi perfecta inconciencia animal” (235).¹¹² González returns again to the animal imagery, except this time Maloy is not the prey but rather the predator, anticipating the thrill of the hunt. The contradictory positioning of the protagonist as both the hunter and the hunted points to a (clearly ironic) parallel being constructed in the text between the hunted, violated black body in the Jim Crow South and the entrapped, vulnerable body of the unarmed soldier, once again revealing the instability of power relations and relying on irony as a central narrative tool. Yet this apparent parallel becomes more of a triangulation in the text’s allusion to a third, absent

¹¹¹ “Bill Caldwell distributed the weapons: a revolver for each one. Then he said: ‘I left the car around the corner. The rope and gasoline are over there. Let’s go...’”

¹¹² “Lee Maloy was already enjoying the first physical sensations of adventure: that unusually pleasant contraction of the stomach and... the absolute inability to conceive of any complex thought, the active and almost perfect animal unconsciousness.”

party—the Puerto Rican soldier within the ranks of the U.S. army and his vulnerability to racial discrimination within this institution. The ethnic Puerto Rican body is vulnerable in both spaces, the racist reality of 1940s America, and the front lines of the Korean War where institutionalized racism positions him in the direct line of fire.

It is soon revealed that the target of this lynch mob is an unnamed black man who has been arrested because of his accused rape of a white girl named Nancy Collins. Yet the men admit that the supposed rape is not the true motive behind the planned lynching, but that their motivation comes from the fact that, “ese negro hace tiempo que se viene saliendo de su lugar” (236).¹¹³ González’s depiction of the racist mentality that dominated amongst the primarily working class residents in this small southern town is strikingly faithful to the reality of African Americans in the U.S. South during that time. The black man had “forgotten his place” by failing to abide by the white society’s expectations of African Americans during the era. González’s meticulous reconstruction of a lynching in the Jim Crow South clearly reflects a deep understanding of the circumstances surrounding segregation, yet his decision to do so, as a transnational Spanish-language author, points to the complexity of racial discrimination in America and the multiplicity of the racial other in the eyes of the Caucasian oppressor.

It is for this reason that the absence of any character of Latino descent in the text assumes such a central importance to González’s social and political commentary. An informed (Puerto Rican) reader would know that Puerto Ricans were present on the front lines in Korea as well as on the U.S. mainland, subjected to similar types of racial violence as is being depicted in the narrative. It is in this way that the text *presents*

¹¹³ “that black man has been defying/forgetting his place in society for a while now.”

absence, consciously alluding to the glaring lacunae in the consciousness of mainstream America regarding the history of racially marginalized communities in the U.S. While the author points concretely at racist violence perpetuated against African Americans, it is what he *doesn't* say that is the most important part of this narrative. González doesn't say that Latino bodies¹¹⁴ were lynched along with black bodies in the early twentieth century, or that darker skinned Puerto Ricans on the mainland were often confused for African Americans and subjected to the same racial violence. Therefore, the black body that is about to be lynched in the text could very well be a Puerto Rican body, or a Chicano body. To a racist individual like Lee Maloy, the identity of that ethnic body didn't matter—the man about to be lynched was nameless precisely because his identity was irrelevant to the white men making up the lynch mob. And, in González's eyes, the U.S. military's use of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War as virtual cannon fodder is an equally reprehensible form of racial violence.

When the men arrive at the local town jail, the sole guard, Luke Chapman, comes out to meet them. Bill Caldwell immediately shoves a gun in his stomach, uttering the next English statement, "All right, Luke, where's the nigger?" (235). Once again, the code switching here is used purposefully to call attention to the use of the highly-charged racial slur "nigger," which doesn't have a direct translation in Spanish (although there are many other derogatory terms in Spanish that have been historically used in similar ways against individuals of African descent). The epithet serves to remind African Americans of their inferior, scorned existence in a society where the Anglo has the power.

¹¹⁴ I have chosen to use the masculine form for this identity marker specifically because it was primarily *male* bodies that were targeted for lynchings.

González's development of the character of Chapman, the jail guard, presents the reader with another archetype of the white southerner, not a member of the lynch mob, but the individual on the sidelines who feigns concern out of selfish interests but lets the violence happen nonetheless.

The guard is clearly complicit in the events of that night despite his weak protestations against the actions of Caldwell and the other men. ““Oigan esto bien, muchachos. Si el negro de veras violó a la hija de Nat Collins, ustedes saben de sobra lo que le espera. Este es todavía un país de hombres blancos, ¡maldita sea! Pero dejen siquiera que el jurado y el juez hagan su trabajo”” (236).¹¹⁵ By appealing to their rational side, Chapman is clearly more concerned with keeping his job than preventing the kidnap and lynching of the anonymous black prisoner. His emphasis on the identity of the U.S. as a “white man's country” portrays a similar racist mentality to that of Caldwell and Maloy, yet his position as a town authority prevents him from participating actively in the violent act.¹¹⁶

As the reader visualizes Caldwell walking down the hallway between the jail cells, followed by Chapman and the three young men, the figures of multiple black prisoners begin to appear behind the bars. “En la penumbra del fondo de algunas celdas se adivinaban los cuerpos apelotonados de tres o cuatro negros sobrecogidos de terror” (237).¹¹⁷ Aside from the town drunk and a local man who murdered his cousin for

¹¹⁵ ““Listen to this carefully, boys. Whether or not the black man really raped Nat Collins' daughter, you all know well enough what is awaiting him. This is still a white man's country, goddamn it! But at least let the jury and judge do their job.””

¹¹⁶ It is widely known, however, that government authorities of various (city, state and federal) levels were active participants in many lynchings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

¹¹⁷ “In the semi-darkness in the back of some of the cells one could make out the bodies of three or four blacks crowded together, overcome with terror.”

sleeping with his 14-year-old daughter, who are both Caucasian, the prisoners are all black. This once again seems to be a rather accurate portrait of a local small town jail in the South during the 40s; the racial other was the criminal, if for no other reason than the color of their skin. The criminalization of African Americans further reflects the exclusionary discourses of citizenship mentioned previously that rendered them and other racial minorities as subhuman and not belonging.

The black prisoners' fear permeates the scene as we envision these men cringing out of fear for their life, not knowing if it is they for whom the mob has come. The prisoners' bodies are amassed together, further highlighting their containment and the vulnerability resulting from it. The white men's intended victim is located in a separate cell, but his body language is immediately likened to that of the other black prisoners. "Se hallaba, al igual que los demás negros, hecho un ovillo en un rincón. Sólo el blanco de sus ojos desmesurados resaltaba en la oscuridad; y cuando Luke Chapman metió la llave en la cerradura, dejó escapar un gemido gutural" (237).¹¹⁸ The sensorial description of both the sounds and sights surrounding the targeted prisoner reveals poignantly the level of dehumanization that these men have suffered as a result of the brutal abuse of both the local government and the local civilians. The darkness of the man's skin is highlighted in the passage through the description of how it blended in with the darkness of the jail cell, emphasizing his racial otherness, and also animalizing him through the animal-like sound he makes upon realizing that he is the target of the lynch mob.

¹¹⁸ "He was, just like the rest of the blacks, curled up into a ball in a corner. Only the enormous whites of his eyes could be seen in the darkness; and when Luke Chapman inserted the key into the lock, he let out a guttural groan."

González's description of all of the black prisoners clearly emphasizes the extreme level of their degradation by white society and the men's very real fear of racial violence.

As the kidnapping of the nameless black man unfolds, the reader learns more about Lee Maloy's role in the violence. From within the dream, Maloy recalls an event even further in the past. "Nancy Collins se había acostado con medio pueblo, eso no era secreto para nadie. Con medio pueblo pero no con Lee Maloy, ni siquiera el día que se la encontró sola en el monte... Trató de derribarla y ella se resistió como un demonio hasta hacerlo caer... loco de humillación y furia" (238).¹¹⁹ Maloy's humiliating experience with Nancy Collins was a direct affront to his masculinity; her rejection emasculated him and injured his sense of manhood. How dare she stoop so low as to sleep with a black man and not him? We discover that Maloy's personal vendetta is not really against the anonymous man but is rather his way of seeking revenge for his humiliation suffered as a result of Nancy Collins' rejection. It appears that Maloy did not know the soon-to-be lynch victim personally, that he had never even seen him before. Yet for Maloy, this black body is synonymous with the sexual rejection of a promiscuous woman—he is an easy target for the young white man's anger. Maloy's experience of emasculation at the hands of Nancy Collins could be paralleled with the emasculating experience of racial violence perpetrated against men. The male bodies of the black prisoners including the intended lynch victim are completely emasculated, their masculinity stripped from them as a result of their imprisonment and criminalization. Puerto Rican soldiers in the war experienced emasculation in similar ways (as mentioned previously) as they were

¹¹⁹ "Nancy Collins had slept with half of the town, that wasn't a secret to anyone. With half the town but not with Lee Maloy, not even the day that he came across her alone on the mountain... He tried to push her down, but she resisted like the devil until she made him fall... crazy with humiliation and rage."

subjected to verbal humiliation by their superiors and forced to shave their mustaches, a central symbol of their masculinity.¹²⁰

It becomes clear to the reader that the lynch mob's intended victim is a perfect stranger to Maloy as he confronts him face-to-face for the first time. "Así, Lee Maloy pudo ver por primera vez la cara del negro. Era joven—no debía tener más de veinticinco años—y el terror que lo poseía en aquellos momentos le había vuelto la tez oscura de un ceniciento enfermizo" (237-8).¹²¹ Maloy is not affected in the least by the man's frightened appearance however, instead imagining him "en una excitante figuración visual [In an arousing daydream]" in the middle of the sexual act with Nancy Collins. Maloy's excitement at the imminent lynching of his enemy combines with his sick sexual arousal as he hypersexualizes the anonymous black man through this imagined scenario, reducing him to a sex-hungry beast. There is once again a strong sense of irony here as we see Maloy projecting his own violent sexual desires onto this unknown black man, when it is actually Maloy who is sexually stimulated both by the idea of raping Nancy Collins and by the violence that he is about to perpetrate against his invented enemy.

What proceeds is an incredibly detailed and horrific account of the details surrounding Maloy's participation in the lynching of a black man by burning him alive in the bushes of the Mississippi backcountry. The man continues to be dehumanized and abused as he is dragged out of the jail and driven by the lynch mob to the site of the

¹²⁰ In his short story "Proceso en diciembre," Emilio Díaz Valcárcel explores this specific humiliation endured by members of the 65th Infantry when they were all forced to shave their beards as a form of punishment for their lack of discipline by their new commander. I discuss this narrative in detail in the next chapter.

¹²¹ "That way, Lee Maloy was able to see the face of the black man for the first time. He was young—he could not have been more than 25 years old—and the terror that possessed him in those moments had turned his dark skin to a sickly ashy color."

solitary leafy oak elected by Caldwell for that specific purpose. The man's attempt to flee as Maloy and the others prepare the lynching instruments and bicker over who gets to light the match, is foiled as he realizes that he is trapped in the bushes to which he escaped. Not wanting to move and reveal his exact location, the black man remains amidst the underbrush even when Caldwell lights it on fire in order to scare him out of his hiding place. The white men awaited, pistols cocked, for their victim to flee from the flames. "Pero el negro no salió. Todos lo sentían moverse de un lado a otro entre los arbustos, tratando de eludir las llamas que se propagaban con inexorable rapidez... súbitamente una serie de gritos entrecortados salió de entre los arbustos, y los cuatro hombres vieron desde afuera el oscuro bulto erguirse envuelto en llamas en el centro de la maleza" (241-2).¹²² The last the lynch mob sees of the black man's burned, disfigured body is it collapsing on the scorched earth with a howl, "levantando en su caída una nube de chispas y humo denso [Raising in its wake a cloud of sparks and dense smoke]" (242). The so-called black rapist's body has been reduced to ashes and dust, the man's death reflecting the value that his life had to the lynch mob: none. Maloy's dreamed flashback ends with him muttering the words "¡Hijo de perra! [Son of a bitch!]"

As the reader witnesses Maloy's being startled awake by the deafening sound of bombers flying overhead, the trapped soldier quickly becomes the prey once again. The text does not spell out any clear connection between Maloy's horrific dream and his own demise, once again leaving the interpretation up to the reader. González's use of repetition however, clearly emphasizes the parallels between the mirrored scenes.

¹²² "But the black man did not emerge. They all heard him moving from one side to another in the bushes, trying to evade the flames that spread with relentless speed... suddenly a series of stifled screams came from within the brush, and the four men watched from afar as the dark shape engulfed by flames appeared in the middle of the undergrowth."

Unaware of his presence amidst the North Koreans, American bombers drop a load of napalm directly over the brush within which Maloy is hidden. As mentioned earlier, González's specific reference to the chemical compound napalm which was used against the East Asian enemy in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars subtly alludes to the violent consequences that these wars had on innocent Korean and Vietnamese civilians as well. "Cuando Lee Maloy se irguió súbitamente entre las llamas con un largo alarido espeluznante, el fusil coreano... hizo fuego una vez más... la antorcha humana se desplomó pesadamente sobre la maleza achicharrada" (244).¹²³

Maloy suffers an eerily similar fate as did the lynching victim in Mississippi; both die engulfed by the flames of the burning bush. The repetition of certain verbs including "erguir" and "desplomarse" draws attention to the Caucasian soldier's ironic fate. Both charred bodies collapse onto the ground and raise "una nube de chispas y humo denso"—the line is repeated verbatim—figuratively reducing Maloy's white body to the same worthlessness with which he had associated the lynched man's body in Mississippi. The vulnerable body of the American soldier is dispensable, González demonstrates, no matter what his race. Gunfire, bombs and grenades do not discriminate based on skin color or any other physical trait; it is only humans and their institutions of power, like the U.S. military, that do so.

Maloy's violent demise has a clear retributive quality, bringing the biblical metaphor of the burning bush full circle through González's allusion to the vengeful nature of a just God represented by fire's destructive force. Maloy's divine punishment

¹²³ "When Lee Maloy appeared suddenly amidst the flames with a long, terrifying howl, the Korean rifles opened fire once again... and the human torch collapsed heavily on the scorched undergrowth."

for his direct participation in the lynching can be interpreted as González's authorial condemnation of the United States' destructive force as an imperialist power. Lee Maloy, as the quintessential southern white male, stands in for the white supremacist values upon which the United States continues to base its discourses of citizenship and foreign intervention, rendering the bodies of ethnic "others" like Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and Chicanos/Latinos excluded from the national imaginary.

Ultimately, the absence of a Puerto Rican character, specifically a Puerto Rican soldier, in González's text, could be read as a condemnation of the deliberate erasure by U.S. master narratives of the criminal injustices endured by Puerto Rican troops in the Korean War. However, the narrative's downfall is that if an uninformed reader were to pick up the story, this deeper sociopolitical commentary would be lost on them. Any piece of literature or work of art is up to the interpretation of its audience, and the danger of such a complex piece is that not every reader will have the critical tools to analyze, or even identify, the absence in the text. Thus the idea of the "reader's burden"—the responsibility of the reader to decipher and interpret the meaning of a literary text—becomes central to the transmission of the critique behind the absence of Puerto Rican characters in González's narrative.¹²⁴ By writing the text in this way, the author relies heavily on the reader's prior knowledge of Puerto Rican history in relationship to the United States. However, as demonstrated above, González employs irony and repetition

¹²⁴ Legal scholar Howard Darmstadter refers to this concept as the "reader's burden of understanding," asserting that "writing requires decisions about when your readers should be carried along by the current... and when they should be forced to swim against it. And there's often much to be gained by heading upstream" (Darmstadter 148-49). This notion of challenging a reader's passivity (by purposefully leaving gaps in the information presented in a text, for example) in order to force him/her to actively engage with the text can be potentially productive, but it also has its dangers.

as narrative tools that work hand-in-hand with absence to draw attention to his underlying message. The author's very obvious repetition of verbs, phrases, and even entire lines illuminates the irony in the shared fate of the lynching victim and Lee Maloy.

The text therefore conveys a strong denunciation of many issues, not just the erasure of a minority community's collective past, but also the destructive nature of U.S. imperialism on a global scale, the systemic nature of racism in American institutions including but not limited to the military and the engrained discourses of white supremacy from which it stems, as well as the phenomenon of war itself. As I explore further in the next chapter, literature of different genres (fictional narrative, poem, letter, etc.), be it fictional or autobiographical, written by Puerto Ricans on the Korean War enables a similar condemnation of such issues from a position *within* the U.S. military.

CHAPTER TWO

An Insider's Perspective: The Reality of the Puerto Rican Experience in the Korean War

*El primer infarto lo tuvo [mi padre] cuando el Tío Sam me mandó tan indelicadamente a una guerra que se libraba en un desconocido país del lejano oriente. Mi padre se había encerrado largos días en su habitación porque nadie debía atestiguar cómo un hombre completo puede deshacerse en un mar de lágrimas.*¹²⁵

—Emilio Díaz Valcárcel¹²⁶

The obligatory conscription of Puerto Rican men to fight in the Korean War was received with shock and fear by many of the families on the island who were forced to send their brothers, husbands or sons off to war in a country of which many had never even heard.¹²⁷ The unlucky draftees were forced to confront the anguish of their family members as they said goodbye, trying to comfort parents, grandparents, and often siblings, while these young men struggled with their own fear of joining an army foreign to them (as if they were not its citizens) to fight for the “democracy” of a country to which most had no personal ties. The reaction of the father of Puerto Rican author and Korean War veteran Emilio Díaz Valcárcel is particularly notable because of the serious implications that the author’s mandatory conscription had on his family. Whether it was the thought of losing his son (either temporarily or permanently), or the knowledge of the extreme level of danger to which Díaz Valcárcel would be subjected in combat, or the

¹²⁵ “My father had his first heart attack when Uncle Sam sent me so insensitively to a war that was being fought in an unknown country in the Far East. My father had locked himself up in his bedroom for days on end because no one should bear witness to a grown man falling apart in a sea of tears.”

¹²⁶ *En el mejor de los mundos*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ While the initial ranks of the 65th destined for Korea were filled by voluntary recruitment in August of 1950 (Camacho, *Cruz de Malta* 108-9), mandatory conscription became necessary by 1951, when the Puerto Rican regiment was in dire need of replacement troops. It is during this period of turnover in military personnel that Díaz Valcárcel and many of his compatriots were drafted.

anger at the fact that his son had to fight for an imperialist power to whom he had no national allegiance, the very fact that his father's reaction culminated in a heart attack reveals the life-altering effect that Puerto Ricans' obligatory draft into the war had on the larger community. The serious health implications of this news on Díaz Valcárcel's father embodies the profound confusion and distress of many civilians in response to the mandatory draft on the island, which lasted from June 1950 through June 1953 (Selective Service System, "Induction Statistics" 1). Traces of these reactions and the experiences of Puerto Rican soldiers in Korea are present in the few extant pieces of literature on this experience written by the veterans of the Korean War.

In this chapter, I continue my examination of the experience of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War that I began in Chapter One. I shift my focus away from the limits of the archive and the fictional interpretations of this experience by civilian authors distanced from the war, to an in-depth analysis of the war experiences that actual Puerto Rican veterans have documented since returning from the war. My interest here is two-fold: on the one hand, I focus on the insight provided by the textual documentation of soldiers' experiences, represented primarily by the work of Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, whose writing on the subject is the most elaborate and extensive of any extant fictional narrative. On the other hand, I examine the ways that these texts interpret and interrogate the lived experience of the Korean War on which they reflect. These different instances of cultural production engage in various ways with the standing historical archive on the subject that was explored in Chapter One, sometimes contributing to its expansion, and other times altering or challenging the "official" archive on the Korean War. This chapter focuses on

fiction written by actual veterans of the war through two principal literary genres: the fictional short story and the screenplay/televised movie.

I posit that these different forms of expression created by Puerto Rican soldiers and current veterans reflect the unique positionality of these individuals as second-class citizens within the structure of the United States military. My analysis of this positioning is informed by Hill Collins' notion of the "outsider within" discussed in the Introduction. I find that the alienation experienced by many minority ethnic soldiers often prompts them to begin to contest the systemic racism present in the American military institution. I explore this alienation as it is reflected in the work of Díaz Valcárcel later in this chapter. As Jameson recognizes, as a form of expression and interpretation, literature is inherently political. As discussed in the Introduction, the form of a literary text can be seen as the key to understanding the politics of that text (Jameson 38). The importance of literary genre can therefore not be overlooked, and indeed that discussion is the necessary starting point for the textual interpretation I perform later in this chapter.

The structural form of a text is critical to the manner in which an author's message is conveyed to and perceived by the reader. Within the—albeit limiting—category of "war literature," different textual forms accomplish different tasks. As mentioned earlier, a wide cross-section of the autobiographical or testimonial texts that have been written by active soldiers or veterans of the U.S. military has primarily addressed issues concerning national pride and belonging or the virility and honor of servicemen. In his article "Vietnam: A Watershed in War Writing," Richard Hills reflects on this tradition specifically in literature written about the two world wars, which he claims "tapped into a sense of cultural identity, masculinity and individual heroism to

describe the American response as heroic and victorious and promote an idea of a ‘good war’ in which national interests are ultimately restored” (Hills 1). While autobiographical war literature would often reinforce these national ideals even after World War II, it might also address individual experiences of death, dismemberment, physical or emotional pain, worries or mistreatment. However, the *individual* nature of these texts generally avoids the drawing of larger connections or the identification of broader, more overarching issues within the institution of the military itself—one man’s story is not representative of the experience of the majority. Furthermore, in order to respect the integrity and esteem of the armed forces, there are certain issues that current or former military personnel would be more than hesitant to share in an autobiographical context, especially such phenomena as murder, rape, fragging,¹²⁸ or the purposeful devaluation and sacrifice of soldiers’ lives. While there are always exceptions, and some Vietnam and Korean War literature is certainly exemplary of these exceptions,¹²⁹ it is clear that within literary expression, fiction allows for a much more liberating, nuanced and profound reflection on sensitive issues including those listed above.

It is this liberation in one’s literary expression that is so apparent in Emilio Díaz Valcárcel’s writing on the experience of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War. As Carlos I. Hernández Hernández has suggested, Díaz Valcárcel’s literary construction is a vehicle through which the author unloads the contents of his bitter war experience (87). Within

¹²⁸ The act of deliberately killing another member of one’s own military. This phenomenon is discussed further later in this chapter.

¹²⁹ I enter into a more in-depth review of literature on the Vietnam War in Chapter Four of this dissertation. However, some of the most caustic, condemning literary explorations of Vietnam were published as oral histories and memoirs, including Tim O’Brien’s now classic *The Things They Carried* (1990); as well as *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War* (1987), edited by Kim Willenson; *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-Three American Soldiers Who Fought It* (1981), edited by Al Santoli; and *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War, by Black Veterans* (1984), edited by Wallace Terry.

the realm of fiction, three literary forms in particular enable the author to communicate his experience in the most impactful way: the short story, the long-form narrative and the screenplay. Díaz Valcárcel's writing in these three forms are the focus of my discussion in the following sections. This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I reflect on the implications of writing experiential fiction versus non-fiction or autobiography through a discussion of Díaz Valcárcel's short story collection *Proceso en diciembre* that is based on his experience in the Korean War. In the second section, I enter into an in-depth analysis of the collection's title story "Proceso en diciembre." Finally, I examine Díaz Valcárcel's screenplay "Una sola puerta hacia la muerte" in the third section to further reflect on the thematic centrality of the Korean War within the author's larger body of work.

A Veteran's Experience, Fictionalized: The Work of Emilio Díaz Valcárcel

Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's contributions to the documentation of Puerto Rican soldiers' experience during the Korean War cannot be overlooked. As previously mentioned, Díaz Valcárcel is a Puerto Rican writer as well as a veteran of the Korean War. The youngest member of the Generation of 1950, Díaz Valcárcel was drafted into the U.S military in 1951 and sent directly to Korea, where he served until 1953. He was first drafted into the Headquarters Company of the 65th Infantry early in 1951, and joined Company D—also of the 65th—shortly thereafter (Díaz Valcárcel, "Re: Interés"). During his time in Korea, Díaz Valcárcel's service mainly entailed standing guard, although his platoon did participate in some missions in pursuit of the enemy and they found themselves under fire on several occasions. Díaz Valcárcel's writing about the Korean War is of particular interest to this study due to the fact that he was the only Puerto Rican

intellectual during that period (1950-1953) to publish literature that was openly critical of both the Korean War, and of Puerto Rico's involvement in the war (Santiago 82-85). As Awilda Rosa Santiago has noted, Puerto Rican politicians, newspapers and media networks, as well as many other public figures, projected a completely positive and patriotic vision of Puerto Rican participation in Korea. "The media expressed their solidarity with the Puerto Rican soldiers participating in the Korean War. There was very little questioning of the human cost of this sacrifice" (Santiago 85). Santiago notes, however, "Díaz Valcárcel, who was pro-independence, exhibited a crude, sadly heartbreaking vision that corresponded more to reality" (85). His short stories and long form narratives convey a strong criticism of the U.S. military and the U.S. imperialist project, of which the Korean War was a particularly powerful and personal example for Díaz Valcárcel.

The time that Díaz Valcárcel spent in the Korean War serving the U.S. military was formative for the author, both personally and ideologically. Much of his early writing has war as its central theme, the majority of these narratives taking place during the Korean War. Díaz Valcárcel, already a strong proponent of Puerto Rican independence from a young age and thus decidedly anti-imperialist, received the news of his conscription into the U.S. military with a heavy heart since the war violated many of his own personal and political beliefs, but he had no alternative than to comply with the draft notice. "Sin ser consultado, me reclutó el Ejército de los Estados Unidos. ¡Claro que protesté pero, como es fácil imaginar, fue inútil! Tuve que marchar a Corea a defender

los intereses de la nación dominadora” (Díaz Valcárcel, *Autobiografía* 238).¹³⁰ Díaz Valcárcel has published little autobiographical information about his military service in Korea—his few statements on the subject are limited to brief comments in interviews and correspondence, and a few references in *En el mejor de los mundos*—but it is clear that it was a painful and difficult experience that would mark him for the rest of his life.¹³¹ Díaz Valcárcel recalls, “Fui testigo de la más estúpida de las guerras, lo que habría de recrudescer en mí un fuerte sentimiento de rebeldía” (Díaz Valcárcel, *Autobiografía* 238).¹³² His perspective on the hegemonic role of the U.S. on a global scale, and on the unequal relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. was directly impacted by what he witnessed during his military service. In a 1980 interview, Díaz Valcárcel reflected on the impact that the war had on his writing:

No es raro que en mi producción aparezca el tema de la guerra: eso es explicable; fui enviado a combatir con millares de mis compatriotas a la guerra de Corea. El reclutamiento de tantos miles de puertorriqueños por el ejército norteamericano levantó las serias críticas de una porción consciente de nuestro pueblo... El tema de la guerra no tenía que darse *necesariamente* en mí, puesto que la literatura no es un reflejo inmediato, automático, de hechos reales, pero la vivencia fue tan traumática que me impulsó a ‘registrarla’ como un hecho que englobaba la situación política del país. (Panico 166, emphasis in the original)¹³³

¹³⁰ “Without being consulted, the United States Army recruited me. Of course I protested, but as you can imagine, it was in vain! I had to go off to Korea to defend the interests of the dominant nation.”

¹³¹ It is difficult to ascertain the specific reason behind Díaz Valcárcel’s lack of non-fictional writing on his military experiences, but it is possible that translating his experiences into fictional narratives enabled the author to personally distance himself from such a difficult time in his life. Through correspondence with this author, when asked to comment on his experience in the U.S. military overall, Díaz Valcárcel limited his response to the following statement: “Tengo sentimientos encontrados, soy pacifista pero en aquella época obedecí la ley del Ejército” [I have mixed feelings, I am a pacifist but during that period, I obeyed the laws of the army] (“Re: Interes”). It is clear that for Díaz Valcárcel, his military service continues to be a difficult subject for him to speak about to this day.

¹³² “I was witness to the stupidest of wars, which would intensify a strong feeling of rebellion within me.”

¹³³ “It isn’t strange that the theme of the war appears in my literary production: that is explainable; I was sent to fight with thousands of my compatriots in the Korean War. The recruitment of so many thousands of Puerto Ricans by the North American army raised serious criticism from a conscious portion of our community... The theme of the war didn’t have to be generated *necessarily* within me, since literature is

The author's traumatic experience in Korea echoes the story that has been reconstructed by the few extant historiographies on the subject to this date, which was explored in Chapter One. It is Díaz Valcárcel's traumatic experience of war that differentiates his writing on the Korean War from that of civilian authors, like José Luis González, who never served in the military. I assert that this first-hand experience lends a more overtly critical tone to Díaz Valcárcel's work than that of González. While both authors accomplish severe condemnations of the phenomenon of war through their narratives, the specificity and complexity of the Korean War comes through much more clearly and directly in Díaz Valcárcel's narrative voice. Moreover, Díaz Valcárcel has a much more prolific body of work on the Korean War than González, whose war-themed writing encompasses other wars and does not emphasize the Korean War more than World War II or the Spanish-American War, for example. The subtlety of González's writing in "El arbusto en llamas" and his use of absence as a critical tool contrasts completely with Díaz Valcárcel's straightforward, candid portrayal of the Puerto Rican soldier's experience.

It is not a coincidence that Díaz Valcárcel never attempted to write an autobiographical account or a novel on the subject of the Korean War. As discussed earlier, fiction writing grants any author addressing delicate issues related to war and the U.S. military with much more freedom of expression, and affords him/her with the creative tools to examine the sensitive and complex nature of war in a profound and openly critical manner. The literary parameters offered by the short story form in particular provide the ideal framework for the central anti-imperialist, anti-war message

not an immediate, automatic reflection of actual events, but the experience was so traumatic that it drove me to 'register' it as a phenomenon that involved the political situation of the country."

that Díaz Valcárcel sought to convey. In the diverse texts addressing the poetics of the short story that have been written over the years, such greats as Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Bosch, and Horacio Quiroga, among many others, seem to concur on certain key elements necessary for an effective short story. While I do not wish to enter into an exhaustive review of these extensive and diverse ideas, I will briefly examine the unique nature of the short story form in order to enlighten my later analysis of the short narratives written by Díaz Valcárcel.

While one might think that a poetics of the short story should begin with the issue of brevity, most scholars of this textual form would caution anyone from assigning it with exact page limits. In spite of the numerous divergences in theories on the short story form, the majority of theorists agree on at least three main characteristics: the short story must be concise, it must focus on one main theme or issue, and it must elicit a strong reaction from the reader. Luis Barrera Linares describes this last element as “the very specific intention (on the part of the author) to elicit a momentary and impactful impression or effect from the addressee (reader)” (Linares 4). It is not necessarily the brevity of a narrative that defines it, but the intensity conveyed by this compact, self-contained literary form. A text’s self-containment – what Linares terms “semantic autonomy” – is rooted in the single main issue that it addresses. The main theme around which the narrative centers must be, in the words of Cortázar, “a real or invented occurrence that possesses that mysterious property of radiating something that extends beyond itself,” and that functions as a commentary on “a certain human condition, or as a scathing symbol of a social or historical order” (Cortázar 4). While this theme must be significant in its own right and must be able to stand on its own, Cortázar explains that it

needs to have the ability to bring about a sort of rupture or explosion that reveals a much broader reality to the audience.

Although Jameson views any type of text or cultural artifact as having the capacity to invent “imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (Jameson 79), for many theorists the condensed, tense nature of the short story demands the immediacy of a resolution between lived experience and narrative that is not as urgent in a longer narrative such as a nouvelle or novel. Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories on the underlying cultural and political tensions informing the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War are a reflection of just such a connection between narrative and lived reality, texts which expertly illuminate and interrogate unresolvable social contradictions. By affirming a singular concrete idea or thought in a brief, concise narrative, short stories like those of Díaz Valcárcel engage actively with lived experience—be it that of the author, reader, or something in between.

Díaz Valcárcel’s direct engagement with the lived experience of himself and Puerto Ricans during the period when he was writing did not necessarily require the involvement of the reader in the text’s production of meaning, however. If we were to consider the work of Díaz Valcárcel and many other writers of his generation through the lens of Roland Barthes, one could label their form of realist literature *readerly*. Whereas the non-linear, more experimental approach to narrative associated with much modern literature generates *writerly* texts that involve the reader in the production of knowledge, according to Barthes, earlier literature that portrays a situation or narrative in a direct, linear manner presents knowledge to a passive reader, leaving he/she disengaged from the actual production process. Barthes describes a readerly text as a “divorce which the

literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user... between its author and its reader” (4). With a readerly text, the act of “reading is nothing more than a *referendum*” (4; emphasis in original). Barthes places readerly texts in direct opposition to writerly texts, which he argues fulfill the true goal of literature; that is, “to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (4).

While Barthes clearly privileges writerly texts that are productive and challenging to a reader, lumping all linear narratives into one homogeneous category of “readerly texts”—a category he aligns with classic literature—fails to take into account the specific historical, political and cultural circumstances out of which each of these texts was created. While certain texts may not make a reader *work* to decipher their message, or participate actively in the production process, both readerly and writerly texts have the ability to engage readers in other ways—not through literary production, but through political awareness and social change, for example. By raising political or social issues that are not being openly examined or discussed by the public or major media outlets, a very direct, frank readerly text can have an important impact on readers, motivating them to become better informed or to advocate for a certain cause. The short story, with its blunt urgency and brevity, further enhances the potential for evoking political engagement from a reader. In the words of Ángel Zapata, “the short story is not pure, undamaged, virtuous art, but rather points to that crossroads where art and life meet: it is where an art of living germinates, it is where the ebb and flow of life melds into art” (Zapata 65). For Díaz Valcárcel, this crossroads is the confluence of a traumatic lived experience of the Korean War with art, that is, with narratives that attempt to decipher that experience in a safe, productive environment. While Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories,

in general, share the main formal elements characteristic of this genre that were noted earlier, each brief narrative is unique and applies these elements in different ways. Nevertheless, the author himself has described the composition of the short story as requiring a special type of rigor, characterizing his own stories as “tense and tight,” with no room for the existentially rich details permitted in a novel (quoted in Panico, 171). As I demonstrate later in this chapter, Díaz Valcárcel’s stories provide the reader with just enough information to visualize and contemplate the Puerto Rican soldier’s experience in the Korean War, but not enough to offer closure or facilitate comprehension of a reality that to him was both reprehensible and incomprehensible.

What is unique about Díaz Valcárcel’s situation in comparison to many other Puerto Rican veterans is his intellectual and political background that enabled him to not only question and criticize the atrocities and injustice he was witnessing, but also to translate his lived experience into writing in a way that captured the soldier’s experience in all of its rawness, and that also situated that experience within the political context of the moment. In a 1979 interview, Díaz Valcárcel explained, “Desde luego, Corea fue otra cosa... Que yo sepa, el poderoso Partido Independentista de entonces pasó por alto el crudo hecho del reclutamiento obligatorio de nuestros jóvenes... Es decir, no existía gran conciencia, salvo en un sector muy reducido... La guerra de Corea fue ‘admisible’” (Acosta-Belen 10).¹³⁴ Díaz Valcárcel’s indignation and criticism was not solely directed at the U.S. imperialist system but also at the apathy and complicity of a large sector of the Puerto Rican population, and at the self-serving attitude and actions of many politicians

¹³⁴ “Of course, Korea was something else... For all I know, the powerful Independence Party of that time completely ignored the ugly truth of the obligatory recruitment of our youth... That is, there wasn’t a big conscience, except for in a very small sector... The Korean War was ‘admissible.’”

during the period. This indignation at Puerto Rican society comes through in his war narratives that take place on the island in the aftermath of the Korean War, as is discussed later in this chapter. It is extremely interesting that Díaz Valcárcel singles out the Independence Party in the above quote, since he was politically aligned with this party and its main objective of gaining complete autonomy from the U.S. Díaz Valcárcel's statement demonstrates the fact that for him, the question of Puerto Ricans' involvement in the Korean War should have been one of the main issues against which the Independence party was protesting.¹³⁵ For Díaz Valcárcel, the active participation of Puerto Rican soldiers on the front lines of Korea is an issue that is at once deeply political and deeply human, the loss of so many Puerto Rican citizens' lives pointing to the true human cost of warfare.

Díaz Valcárcel published his first short story collection, titled *El asedio y otros cuentos* in 1958, which won an award from the Institute of Puerto Rican Literature. Ramón Luis Acevedo identifies “a background of social protest and denunciation of poverty and exploitation” at the heart of the stories presented in *El asedio* (xxii). The collection includes the first short story published by Díaz Valcárcel to address the Korean War and its consequences on Puerto Ricans, “El sapo en el espejo.” The brief narrative conveys the internalized disgust and shame of a Puerto Rican soldier who lost his legs in

¹³⁵ As we recall from earlier chapters, the culmination of the Puerto Rican Independence Party's revolutionary acts was the October Uprisings of 1950 that were led by Albizu Campos. The attention of party leaders was therefore focused primarily on the revolutionary activities occurring on the island and did not take a great interest in the tragedy that was Korea for Puerto Rican soldiers. The drawn-out congressional debate surrounding the island's new constitution and the clarification of its political status as a Commonwealth, or free associated state, also took place during the Korean War period, primarily between 1950 and 1952, which held the attention of many pro-independence politicians who were opposed to the changes.

the Korean War and can no longer satisfy his wife sexually.¹³⁶ Olga Casanova-Sánchez has noted the attention that Díaz Valcárcel gives to the tragedy of contemporary man in his early narratives, which is representative of the fatalistic vision of many authors who began to write in the aftermath of World War II (Casanova-Sanchez 243). This postwar writing, both in the Americas and Europe, was generally characterized by an existentialist fatalism and interest in the anguish of modern man, and is characteristic of the writing of many of the authors belonging to the Generation of 1950, as we saw in Chapter One, particularly in the writing of González.¹³⁷ Especially in their early work, Díaz Valcárcel and González share a similar narrative approach that encompasses “an oblique, decentered vision, from the margin, of the contemporary world... the protagonists tend to be outsiders... as a result of finding themselves in alien environments, which are sometimes hostile and absurd” (Acevedo xix). This narrative approach is particularly apparent in Díaz Valcárcel’s narratives on the Korean War.

The work of Díaz Valcárcel has been recognized, and sometimes criticized, for its pessimistic or negative representation of reality. This negative vision has been identified in the work of many writers of the Generation of 1950, a literary approach that Díaz Valcárcel calls “la pintura de la realidad colonial” (quoted in Panico 168).¹³⁸ Díaz Valcárcel’s reference to colonialism is notable in its implication that Puerto Rico is still a colony; this perspective is reflective of the author’s pro-independence politics that regard

¹³⁶ Seeing himself as a repulsive figure in the eyes of his wife, the nameless veteran reduces himself to the image of a toad, an amphibian into which he appears to convert in a fantastical twist at the conclusion of the story. The author’s entrance into the mind of the traumatized, wounded war veteran reflects a deep understanding of the psychological consequences of war, which Díaz Valcárcel is able to convey to the reader in a powerful and deeply moving way.

¹³⁷ For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon in Puerto Rican literature, see Babin or Casanova-Sanchez.

¹³⁸ “the painting of colonial reality.”

the island as being perpetually colonized by the United States to this day. This political stance is clearly present in the author's second collection of short stories, *Proceso en diciembre*, published in 1963, which is especially relevant to this study due to its sole focus on the Puerto Rican experience in the Korean War. While Díaz Valcárcel had already published individual texts addressing this subject during the 1950s, including "El sapo en el espejo" and "Una sola puerta hacia la muerte," *Proceso en diciembre* is significant in that it is the first book-length fictional work to be published by any Puerto Rican author that takes up this issue as its central theme.¹³⁹ It is important to note, however, that the majority of the short stories compiled in *Proceso* were actually written in the early and mid-1950s, many years prior to its publication in 1963 (Acevedo xxv).¹⁴⁰ *Proceso en diciembre* received an overwhelmingly positive reception from Puerto Rican critics and intellectuals upon its release, although it is unlikely that the book reached a very wide cross-section of the mainstream public since its first and only printing was quite limited.

There is a distinctly political undertone to all of the short stories in *Proceso en diciembre*, which Acevedo describes as being "profoundly anti-war and antimilitarist," reflecting Díaz Valcárcel's pro-independence politics discussed earlier (Acevedo xxv).

The collection includes nine stories that all have the Korean War as their central theme. Six of the nine stories are actually set on Korean soil during the war ("Proceso en

¹³⁹ While Pedro Juan Soto wrote *Los perros anónimos* years earlier in 1950, it remains unpublished.

¹⁴⁰ Díaz Valcárcel had completed a very similar collection of short stories in 1955—containing most of the same narratives that would later be included in *Proceso*—that addressed the theme of the Korean War under the title *La sangre inútil*, but was unable to get it published at that time (Marqués 241). Díaz Valcárcel's inability to find a publisher willing to print his manuscript speaks to the caution and/or unwillingness of mainstream publishing houses to align themselves with Díaz Valcárcel's pacifist, anti-imperialist perspective that is made clear in these narratives. The fact that the collection of stories was ultimately published outside of Puerto Rico (Taurus ediciones, Madrid, Spain) under a new title is also telling of the continual caution exercised by local publishers regarding any subject that could be seen as politically controversial.

diciembre,” “El soldado Damián Sánchez,” “El asalto,” “Andrés,” “La sangre inútil,” “La evasión”), while the last three narratives (“El hijo,” “Los héroes,” and “El regreso”) take place back home in Puerto Rico and address the consequences of the Korean War on the families of soldiers. Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories in *Proceso* comment not only on the Puerto Rican soldiers’ experience at war but also on Puerto Rican society’s reception of them upon their return and the issues they struggle with when trying to reinsert themselves into civilian life. These narratives function as a commentary both on larger society’s inability or unwillingness to empathize with or try to understand the experiences of a war veteran, and on the Puerto Rican government’s—represented in that era primarily by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín—unwillingness to intervene on behalf of its soldiers regarding their mandatory conscription, the mistreatment and discrimination they suffered during their military service, and the lack of adequate medical benefits and treatment upon their return.

Díaz Valcárcel’s early body of work, including his first two published collections, *El asalto* and *Proceso en diciembre*, as well as the numerous short stories he published in various literary journals and magazines during the 1950s and 60s, has received very little scholarly attention. The majority of the scholarship available on the work of Díaz Valcárcel focuses on his novels, with an emphasis on *Figuraciones en el mes de marzo* (1972) and *Harlem todos los días* (1978), and more recently, *Laguna y asociados* (1995). The little critical attention Díaz Valcárcel’s early work has received is almost exclusively from Latin American critics and scholars since the author’s writing did not gain international acclaim until the publication of *Figuraciones* in 1972. While a handful of doctoral and master’s theses have addressed Díaz Valcárcel’s early work—the most

notable among these being Olga Casanova-Sánchez's 1977 doctoral dissertation, *La novela puertorriqueña contemporánea: Pedro Juan Soto y Emilio Díaz Valcárcel*¹⁴¹—the extant scholarship specifically on *Proceso* is limited to a book review published by José Emilio González in *Asomante* in 1964, a 2009 article by Juan Carlos Rodríguez that briefly addresses several of Díaz Valcárcel's stories on the Korean War, and Ramón Luis Acevedo's prologue to *Cuentos completos de Emilio Díaz Valcárcel*, published in 2002. To date, Emilio González's analysis of the various stories in *Proceso* is the most accomplished, analytically insightful criticism published on the text as a whole. The detailed analysis of a single short story from the collection—the story “Proceso en diciembre”—is performed by Carlos Rodríguez, with which I will engage directly in my own close reading that follows. Nevertheless, Rodríguez's analysis of “Proceso” is less than four pages long and therefore does not accomplish a thorough, in-depth examination of the text. Similarly, Acevedo's remarks on the book are brief, and consequently do not allow for an in-depth criticism of the book as a whole. María Teresa Babín presents limited commentary on selected stories from *Proceso*, including “El soldado Damián Sánchez,” in her 1967 book *Jornadas literarias (temas de Puerto Rico)*. Brief references

¹⁴¹ Of the various theses addressing Díaz Valcárcel's early work, the doctoral work of Casanova-Sánchez is the most well-developed and extensively researched study to specifically address the theme of the Korean War in his writing. Two master's theses that provide some analysis of *Proceso*, although not as extensive, are: *Un ciclo en la narrativa puertorriqueña: los cuentos de la Guerra de Corea de Emilio Díaz Valcárcel* by Marilú Hernández (1980) and *Puerto Rico en la Guerra de Corea: Alcances y consecuencias de un conflicto: 1950-53* by Awilda Rosa Santiago (1991). Unfortunately, both theses are solely available at the Universidad de Puerto Rico due to severe restrictions on reproducing or distributing them outside of the university. Santiago's examination of Díaz Valcárcel's work on the Korean War in comparison to other war-related commentary (newspapers, magazines, political speeches, etc.) on the island during the 1950s is helpful in determining its political and cultural significance. Hernández's analysis of *Proceso* is not as successful in that it is limited almost exclusively to a repetition of the review published by Emilio González in 1964. While Norman González-Ferreira's 1991 doctoral dissertation, *The Puerto Rican experience on the mainland: A thematic study of the fiction of Rene Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel (1951-1979)*, addresses Díaz Valcárcel's work from the same era, it focuses solely on his writing about the Puerto Rican experience on the mainland, and is thus not of direct relevance to the current study.

to *Proceso* are also made in several interviews of Díaz Valcárcel cited in this chapter, as well as the author's own memoir, *En el mejor de los mundos*, which is also quoted here. As such, there is no available in-depth analysis of the short stories in *Proceso*, or of any other narrative by Díaz Valcárcel addressing the Korean War, that exceeds more than a few pages. This lack of scholarship on Díaz Valcárcel's Korean War literature once again points to the limits of U.S. scholarship in that such a minimally distributed and publicized text as *Proceso en diciembre* has slipped through the cracks, so to speak, of the U.S. academy. This reality also speaks to the fact that the experiences of small minority groups like Puerto Ricans, as they are depicted in different forms of cultural representation, still remain at the limits or margins of the scholarly archive. The discussion that follows therefore contributes new scholarly material to the field about an extremely understudied body of work, and aims to broaden the reception of this work beyond the strict confines of the academy. The close reading of several short stories from *Proceso en diciembre* presented in the following sections are thus the first of their kind.

In a 1964 review of the collection, José Emilio González writes, "I believe that *Proceso en diciembre* is one of the best volumes of stories written by a Puerto Rican... Each of the stories marks a crisis or series of crises in the soul of the Puerto Rican soldier in Korea" (57). Critics have noted, above all, Díaz Valcárcel's ability to translate the intimately personal emotional and psychological experiences of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War into a narrative form that makes said experiences palpable for his audience. Acevedo describes Díaz Valcárcel's writing style in both *El asedio* and *Proceso* as, "a profound exploration in the depths of tortured and conflicted souls, an acute psychological perception and the ability to project the existential angst of his

characters through a wise use of language and experimental resources that promote introspection” (Acevedo xxii-xxiii). The author’s focus on the psyche of the soldier is central in most of the narratives, with a few focusing on the psyche of those family members who were left behind. Casanova-Sánchez remarks, “Díaz Valcárcel has been able to capture the crisis of the Puerto Rican soldier who is not only forced to confront a war that mutilates him spiritually and physically but also to confront the dilemma arising from the confrontation between American culture and the culture of Puerto Rico” (250). The author achieves this effect through a straightforward narrative style that relies almost completely on detailed description of events and extensive use of dialogue to relay the Puerto Rican soldiers’ harrowing stories.

The straightforward and precise nature of Díaz Valcárcel’s short narratives is consistent with the type of streamlined writing that theorists associate with the literary form of a short story. Linares explains, “the brief phrase, the suggestion, the allusion to things without directly expressing them, appear to be inherent requirements to the language [of the short story]... the short story should show, not say too much or explain things” (5). The author also employs flashbacks and interior monologue to construct his narratives, relying on colloquial Puerto Rican language that many critics have praised for its extraordinary richness and expressivity. Emilio González notes, “The author has expertly employed expressions, phrases, and words from popular language. The speech of the Puerto Rican appears everywhere” (61). Nevertheless, each word or phrase serves a specific function within the narrative, reflecting the necessary sparseness yet preciseness that characterizes a successful short story. Díaz Valcárcel’s objective therefore is—as Linares claims any short story should be—“to disturb the reader with a particular

proposition in mind that, in the dimension of the author, is semantically unambiguous” (Linares 6). The single-minded nature of such a text enables the intense, concentrated representation of one single issue, which in the case of Díaz Valcárcel is that of the Puerto Rican’s experience in the Korean War.

Most scholars have highlighted the title story and “El soldado Damián Sánchez” as the most well developed and literarily successful of the narratives in *Proceso*. Of “El soldado Damián Sánchez,” Babín writes, “It is an excellent story that shows the destructive influence of the hostility created by prejudice—in this case North Americans against Puerto Ricans and Koreans... It is without doubt one of the best stories in the collection” (*Jornadas* 250). The story narrates the violent end to the friendship between Puerto Rican soldier Damián and a South Korean man, Kim Wam, which ends up crumbling when Damián perceives Kim Wam as siding with the North American soldiers who ridicule the Puerto Rican for being different. The narrative’s more complex structure invites the reader into the inner thoughts of the protagonist through a series of events and interior monologues that travel backwards in time in the mind of Damián. The protagonist recalls how things changed in the 65th with the arrival of a new coronel, “Pero al nuevo coronel de narizota granulosa no le gustó de ningún modo el color de los boricuas ni el bigote de los boricuas y menos aún el hablar de los boricuas” (Díaz Valcárcel, “El soldado Damián” 129-130).¹⁴² The very presence of these inferior racial “others” bothered the new Caucasian officer. The narrator explains how the 65th was

¹⁴² “But the new colonel with the big pimply nose did not like by any means the color of the Puerto Ricans or the mustache of the Puerto Ricans, let alone the talk of Puerto Ricans.”

reconfigured and he was shipped off to a different platoon full of North American (Caucasian) soldiers.

Díaz Valcárcel's decision to set the story in the aftermath of the battle at Jackson Heights and the mass court martials reflects the author's intimate knowledge of the 65th Regiment and its history in the war, providing insight that a civilian author would unlikely possess. By setting the story during this period, which was the spring of 1953 (when the 65th was reconstituted into a fully integrated regiment no longer solely made up of Puerto Rican soldiers), Díaz Valcárcel is able to further emphasize the high tensions between North Americans and Puerto Ricans after the regiment's perceived failure at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights in the winter of 1952. It is important to note that the author clearly writes for a Puerto Rican audience who is likely to be at least vaguely aware of the circumstances surrounding the 65th, otherwise the story's brief reference to the regiment's reconfiguration would be lost on the reader. Similar to the work of José Luis González then, Díaz Valcárcel writes primarily for an insular Puerto Rican readership, relying on their prior knowledge to make the connections he insinuates within his narrative. As we saw with "El arbusto en llamas," while this narrative approach may enrich "El soldado Damián Sánchez" for a reader that has the necessary cultural capital, it also risks the underlying social and political commentary being lost on an uninformed reader unable to make those connections for him or herself.

In the story, Damián's only companion was Kim Wam, who had been in his previous unit, and to his good fortune, was moved to the same new unit as Damián upon the regiment's reconstitution. The narrative highlights what Emilio González has recognized as, "another way for Puerto Ricans to emphasize their separation from North

Americans... feeling sympathy for other people in similar situations” (59). Díaz Valcárcel’s portrayal of the relationships established between Puerto Rican soldiers and South Korean men and women during the war in many of the narratives in *Proceso* is reflective of the phenomenon explored in Chapter One, which Jorge Mariscal refers to as “the structure of recognition.”¹⁴³ Like José Luis González did in “El arbusto en llamas,” Díaz Valcárcel similarly references this identification of the self in the “other” on the part of the minority ethnic (Puerto Rican) soldier in the U.S. military through the attention given to the humanity and daily reality of the South Korean individual who is also affected by the war. “El soldado Damián Sánchez” reveals the complexity of these relations in the destruction of the friendship between a Puerto Rican and South Korean soldier. In an encounter with the North American soldiers of their platoon, the men ridiculed the Puerto Rican food that Damián was eating, asking Kim Wan what it was. “*Don’t know... It... it looks like shit. Damián vio ultrajado su hogar y su tierra y a Diana y a su raza y no vio más. Cayó sobre el coreano, golpeándole el rostro con la lata, sollozando enloquecido*” (132).¹⁴⁴ Caught in the middle of the animosity between North Americans and Puerto Ricans, Kim Wan takes a misstep that results in the loss of a good friend and the further alienation of both ethnic outsiders within the Caucasian-dominated unit. Acevedo notes, “the tension produced by one’s contempt of their own marginal identity turns against that individual who ironically represents another marginality, Korean, a subaltern that has more in common with the Puerto Rican than the North American soldiers” (xxv). Damián unloads his anger on his South Korean friend—

¹⁴³ See especially pp. 45-46 in Chapter one for more on the “structure of recognition.”

¹⁴⁴ “Damián saw his home insulted, and his land, and Diana, and his race, and he saw nothing else. He fell on the Korean, hitting his face with the can, sobbing crazedly.”

equally marginalized and subordinated under the hegemony of the U.S. military—when his irritation is actually with the North American soldiers.

The suggested solidarity or commonality between Puerto Ricans and South Koreans as equally marginalized groups is further addressed in “Andrés” in the same collection, which focuses on the amorous relationship between a Puerto Rican soldier, Andrés, and a South Korean woman, known both as “Taina” and “Chon,” whom the rest of the soldiers consider to be a prostitute. Andrés finds comfort in Taina and seeks solace from the harshness of war in his relationship with her, but as a consequence he must face taunts and mockery from the other soldiers in his unit. The story reveals the complexity of such relationships because it is not made clear that Andrés’ fellow soldiers are North Americans—it appears as if some of them are Puerto Ricans themselves—thus demonstrating the range of attitudes of different Puerto Rican soldiers towards the South Korean population.

Several stories in the collection address the question of U.S. military officers’ discriminatory treatment of Puerto Rican soldiers. Through these narratives, Díaz Valcárcel insinuates time and again that the dangerous, almost suicidal nature of many of their missions, and the decisions of the army officials, are directly related to the perceived inferiority of the Puerto Rican soldier from the perspective of the Caucasian-dominated military institution. This situation is portrayed powerfully in the stories “El asalto,” “La sangre inútil,” and “La evasión.” “El asalto” is one of the longer stories in *Proceso*, and is divided structurally into four sections. Due to its length, this text would most likely fall into the category of a long form narrative—a narrative with more development than a short story but less than a full-fledged novel. Narrated from a third person limited

perspective, the reader experiences the long hours on guard alongside Puerto Rican soldier Jenaro Peña, whose sheltered, devoutly Christian background immediately situates him as somewhat out of place in the violent, deadly combat zone of Korea. In the first paragraph, Peña recalls the tropical warmth of his island with nostalgia, contrasting it with the bitter cold of the Korean winter as the narrator explains that he had never seen snow before his arrival in the war zone, stressing the fact that, “él jamás había salido de su pueblito natal” [he had never before left his home town] (“El asalto” 134). The protagonist’s devout Protestantism is revealed in his continual flashbacks to experiences at the local church, as well as his daydreams about returning to his religious community. “Entonces, dijo para sí, irguiéndose ante el grupo que lo observaba en silencio: ‘Hermanos, roguemos al Señor por la paz del mundo.’ Repitió las palabras, dirigiendo la mirada hacia cada uno de aquellos rostros. Le sonaban bien y el ministro... le demostraría su reconocimiento con unas palmaditas en la espalda” (135).¹⁴⁵ The weaving of Peña’s flashbacks and daydreams into his experience in the present reveals the psychological impact of the war on the soldier. Standing guard with the rest of his platoon without moving for hours on end, not having slept for several days, Peña’s mind wanders to the life he left behind, revealing his delusional, sleep-deprived state as he confuses the voice of his sergeant with that of his minister in Puerto Rico.

It soon becomes apparent to the reader and to Peña that his unit is under attack, as gunfire increases in frequency and he hears signs of approaching soldiers. Without orders to retreat, Peña and his fellow soldiers are basically sitting ducks as they are unable to

¹⁴⁵ “Then, he said to himself, rising up in front of the group that observed him in silence: ‘Brothers, let us pray to God for world peace.’ He repeated the words, directing his gaze towards each of those faces. They sounded good and the minister... would demonstrate his approval with a few pats on the back.”

fend off the rapidly approaching enemy. Yet the author makes it clear that combat is not Peña's calling. Instead of drawing his weapon and firing in defense, the soldier resigns himself to prayer, "¡Oh, Señor!... Que sea lo que Tú dispongas" [Dear God... Let your will be done] (140). When his sergeant returns—who he has little respect or admiration for—Peña soon discovers that his superior is gravely wounded. "Por un momento, mientras le aplicaba la primera ayuda, se sintió feliz... Había rechazado un puesto abrigado y bien comido en la cocina con el objeto de hacer de enfermero y ayudar en esta forma a quien fuese necesario ayudar" (142).¹⁴⁶ The Puerto Rican soldier's logic reveals his naivety and emphasizes his idealism in the face of a war that does not discriminate between the do-gooders and the perpetrators of "evil."

Casanova-Sánchez notes the humble background of the protagonists in both "El asalto" and "La sangre inútil," describing them as "farmers" and "ignorant beings who do not know why nor against whom they are fighting" (257, 262). While this characterization reads as condescending, it does point to the way that Díaz Valcárcel's intricate portrait of the rural Puerto Rican eloquently captures their strong community ties and their deep respect for the earth. The characters' reactions to the severing of these ties resulting from their enforced participation in Korea illustrate the intense culture shock experienced by these rural youth when they arrive in a foreign land to fight in a foreign war in a hostile climate and terrain. The author captures the moment Peña received his draft notice, writing, "La orden del enrolamiento lo sorprendió (¿de dónde venía aquello, qué había que hacer?) con las manos espolvoreadas de harina, amasando el trigo con

¹⁴⁶ "For a brief moment, as he applied first aid, he felt happy... He had rejected a warm, well-fed post in the kitchen with the goal of serving as a nurse and helping in this way whoever needed his help."

aquel sensual movimiento de manos en el fondo de la panadería” (“El asalto” 134).¹⁴⁷ Reacting to the mandatory conscription experienced by his fellow Puerto Ricans as well as himself, he characterizes the move made against them by the U.S. military as “ser enganchados por el ejército” [being ensnared by the army], emphasizing the forceful, involuntary nature of their presence in Korea (134). The words that come from the mouth of Peña mirror those uttered by Díaz Valcárcel on numerous occasions, reflecting the author’s autobiographical influence on the narrative. Díaz Valcárcel’s characters reiterate his personal frustration with the U.S. military and indignation at being drafted into a war that does not involve them.

By the third of four sections in “El asalto,” Díaz Valcárcel has clearly established the differences between Peña and his sergeant: each is painfully aware of the impossibly difficult and possibly unjust nature of their unit’s position at that moment, yet they confront the situation in markedly different ways. While his sergeant tries to remain active and make himself useful through his overbearing form of leadership, vociferating continuously about the unfortunate situation he and his men have found themselves in as part of the 65th, Peña finds comfort only in a mental escape to a time and place that is secure and familiar to him. Yet their common experience as Puerto Ricans in a segregated unit in the U.S. military during the Korean War unites sergeant and soldier in a pivotal way. As he lies there wounded, the sergeant reprimands Peña, “—Coja el rifle— insistió el sargento—. ¿Qué clase de hombres tiene este regimiento? Primero la Kelly Hill... ‘Sí, pensó, *desde* la Kelly Hill.’—La Prensa nos puso por el piso—dijo el

¹⁴⁷ “The order to enlist surprised him (where did it come from, what needed to be done?) with his hands dusted with flour, kneading the wheat with that sensual hand movement in the back of the bakery.”

sargento.—¿No entiende? No podemos hacer otro pachó” (143).¹⁴⁸ Even as he lies there mortally wounded, the sergeant continues to struggle with the tarnished legacy of the 65th Regiment since the battle at Kelly Hill.¹⁴⁹ The official blames the lack of replacements and the dangerous missions on the negative reputation that the Puerto Rican soldiers who abandoned their assigned mission earned for their entire regiment. Yet he is aware of the discrimination at play in the court martials, recalling, “—Ellos habían corrido primero que nosotros... —Los mismos americanos—dijo el sargento, como si adivinara el pensamiento del otro—. Abrieron a correr. Pero los periódicos nos jorbaron a nosotros... Hay que demostrarles que...” (143).¹⁵⁰ The sergeant is convinced that the only way to redeem their regiment is to do better, to prove themselves all over again.

For Peña and his sergeant, however, it is too late. Peña becomes injured also, hit by a projectile in the face that leaves blood streaming down his cheek. The story ends with the sergeant silenced (dying or dead—the author leaves it ambiguous), and Peña

¹⁴⁸ “—Grab the rifle—insisted the sergeant.—What type of men does this regiment have? First Kelly Hill... ‘Yes, he thought, *since* Kelly Hill.’—The press wiped the floor with us—said the sergeant—. Don’t you understand? We cannot screw up again.”

¹⁴⁹ Here, the story echoes Díaz Valcárcel’s perspective once again. Commenting on Kelly Hill, the author recalls, “la Batalla de Kelly Hill estremeció y ofendió la dignidad de los puertorriqueños incluyendo no sólo a los soldados sino al pueblo de Puerto Rico. Se llevaron a Corte Marcial a los que se habían negado a seguir siendo carne de cañón” [the Battle at Kelly Hill shocked and offended the dignity of Puerto Ricans, including not just the soldiers but rather the entire Puerto Rican community. They court martialed those who had refused to continue being used as cannon fodder] (“Re: interés”). Díaz Valcárcel’s personal indignation comes through in the perspective of the sergeant, condemning the continual mistreatment and discrimination endured by him and his fellow Puerto Rican soldiers during the war. Remembering his own experience during the same period, Díaz Valcárcel continues, “Después me tocó servir de buscaminas. En esos días dos compañeros del pelotón perdieron las extremidades al pisar minas. En esos días ocurrió la masacre de Kelly Hill” [Later I had to serve as a minesweeper. In those days two soldiers in my platoon lost their extremities when they stepped on live mines. The massacre of Kelly Hill occurred during this period] (“Re: interés”). As a veteran who witnessed the war personally, Díaz Valcárcel uses the battle at Kelly Hill to exemplify all of the other instances when the lives of Puerto Rican soldiers were sacrificed mercilessly for the U.S. military. He draws on that particular instance because it is the most publicized atrocity of the war for Puerto Ricans, yet the reality is that Puerto Rican soldiers were sent on similar deadly missions—like serving as minesweepers—on a daily basis.

¹⁵⁰ “—They ran before we did... --The Americans themselves—said the sergeant, as if he guessed the other’s thoughts—They took off running. But the newspapers blamed/ruined us... We have to show them that...”

anticipating his impending death, “Las explosiones se acercaban ahora a la guarida vecina. ¿Mi turno?, pensó él. Pasos apresurados llegaban desde el norte. Un lenguaje extraño invadía los destacamentos” (145).¹⁵¹ The demise of the narrative’s protagonists contributes two more counts to the rapidly growing death toll of the 65th regiment, further reaffirming the sergeant’s earlier denunciation of, “la injusticia de los de ‘arriba’ al escamotearle refuerzos al regimiento... mientras otras unidades engordaban con gente fresca, el 65 se iba diluyendo de escaramuza en escaramuza” (136).¹⁵² The sergeant interprets the actions of the Caucasian officials as their form of retribution for the Puerto Ricans’ perceived disloyalty. By drawing on the court martial and military trial that took place back home, Díaz Valcárcel makes it clear that this injustice is present not just in the military during war time, but also on the home front in the mistreatment and discrimination Puerto Ricans suffered from American media and the mainstream American public. In this sense, “El asalto” is one of the most political stories in the collection.

“El asalto” is the first of two stories in *Proceso* to directly name the battle at Kelly Hill—the other is “El regreso”¹⁵³ which presents Kelly Hill as the battle where the

¹⁵¹ “The explosions came close now to the neighboring shelter. My turn? Hurried steps arrived from the north. A strange language invaded their stations.”

¹⁵² “injustice of those from ‘above’ by stealing reinforcements from the regiment... while other units swelled with new arrivals, the 65th was disappearing from skirmish to skirmish.”

¹⁵³ One of the three stories set in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of the Korean War, “El regreso” explores the psychological consequences of the war on a Puerto Rican veteran as a result of a battle casualty in the battle at Kelly Hill that wounded him in his genitals. As in many of the stories in *Proceso*, the protagonist is never named, and his anonymity stands in for the experience of all soldiers wounded in the war who are forced to deal with the long-term consequences of their injury in civilian life. The narrative centers around the veteran’s preoccupation over seeing his girlfriend Catalina for the first time since his return and informing her of his injury—an injury that will prevent them from ever consummating their relationship. By centering on the subject of sex, Díaz Valcárcel raises a variety of issues related to Puerto Rican culture and its conception of masculinity and gender. In the end, the protagonist cannot bring himself to confront Catalina and after knocking on her door, he flees before she has a chance to open it. “El regreso” can be read as a critique of the Korean War in its reference to Kelly Hill and the specific examination of its impact on Puerto Rican society, yet it can also be read on a broader level as a critique

protagonist was seriously wounded—although it is alluded to without being named in the majority of the stories in the collection. Santiago notes that “El asalto,” “presents the undeniable fact of the alarming number of Puerto Rican losses suffered in the Unit to which he belonged, the 65th Regiment” (83). As Santiago and other critics have noted, there are many similarities between “El asalto” and “La sangre inútil,” another narrative that laments the incredibly high numbers of Puerto Rican deaths in the Korean War. “La sangre inútil” is the only other narrative in the collection that ends with the death of its protagonist, although soldiers’ deaths are also insinuated in “La evasión”¹⁵⁴ and “El hijo.”¹⁵⁵ Casanova-Sánchez states, “the narrative approach lies with the pain and anguish it means to die fighting far from home. In both stories the action ends with death, the

of the phenomenon of war. As has been discussed earlier, all of Díaz Valcárcel’s writing on the theme of war represents his pacifist perspective, and can be read as an anti-war commentary in general.

¹⁵⁴ In “La evasión,” a group of Puerto Rican soldiers is on a reconnaissance night mission awaiting orders to return to camp before sunrise so as not to reveal their position to the enemy. The reader follows the exchange between a soldier and his lieutenant about when they will receive the order to return. The entire unit complains about the negligence of the (Caucasian) Company Commander, insinuating that his unwillingness to give the order to bring them back to camp is a result of his sense of superiority and his discrimination against the unit, who he views as inferior. The imagined routine of the soldier’s wife and son back in Puerto Rico is directly contrasted with his experience at that moment in Korea, moving from one space to another within the same paragraph. The story ends with the image of the soldier (who is never named) succumbing to his exhaustion and falling asleep on duty as he dreams of his wife back home. This act is presented as the soldier’s defeat, in a sense, giving up on the harsh reality surrounding him to seek comfort in his dreams. While the soldier is not physically defeated by the enemy, he is emotionally and psychologically defeated by his experience of the war, and the ambiguous ending could be interpreted as suggesting the soldier’s imminent demise, especially due to the vulnerable state in which the author leaves the protagonist.

¹⁵⁵ Another story set in Puerto Rico during the Korean War, “El hijo” explores the consequences of war on a soldier’s parents. Antero and Chana saw their son Luciano drafted and sent away to war, and have maintained steady contact with him throughout his service until his letters stopped coming two weeks ago. The narrative takes place in the span of one night as the heat and the incessant barking of the dog keep Chana, and then Antero awake. As they lie listening to the dog, it sounds as if he is crying, not barking, and both parents immediately connect the dog’s perceived grief with the death of their son. “Aquel aullido no era otra cosa que llanto... ¿Y SI LLORA POR LUCIANO?” [That howl was nothing other than crying... WHAT IF HE CRIES FOR LUCIANO?] (“El hijo” 171). In the brutal final scene of the story, Antero kills the dog with a cutlass, unable to tolerate its cries any longer. One of the most chilling narratives in the collection, it painfully portrays the intense anguish and loneliness of parents awaiting the return of their son from war (Casanova-Sanchez 260).

author strongly contrasting the cold and pain of the war with the nostalgia and beauty of the native island” (Casanova-Sánchez 258).

While Peña and the sergeant die on the battlefield, the anonymous narrator in “La sangre inútil” succumbs to his wounds in the hospital after having described his horrific experience in what he characterizes as a senseless battle over a hill, “Lo que no entraba en mí era por qué tenía que morir tanta gente por una bendita jalda que ni siquiera sirve para la siembra... ¿por qué tenían que abonar la colina con sangre nuestra?” (“La sangre inútil” 158).¹⁵⁶ The haunting story that the protagonist tells of crawling slowly up the hill unprotected, all the while witnessing the slaughter of his fellow soldiers, and then seeing his corporal lose his mind, just to capture one hill from the enemy, echoes the experience at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights discussed in Chapter One, a story which is also told by many veterans in the documentary *The Borinqueneers*. Although Díaz Valcárcel does not state the name of the battle or the hill in this particular story, anyone familiar with the history of the 65th in Korea would know the reference. Here, the author relies once again on the cultural capital of his readership to interpret the story. This literary technique is critically important for any short story since its formal constraints do not permit long-winded contextualization. As García Márquez explains, it is the reader’s task to work out the broader background and context for the story, so that “when one finishes reading a short story, he can imagine what happened before and after the narrative, and all of that will continue to be part of the material and magic of what he/she read” (García Márquez 1). Stories by Díaz Valcárcel like “La sangre inútil” *suggest* certain information, but do

¹⁵⁶ “What I could not comprehend was why so many people had to die for a blessed rock that cannot even be used for planting... Why did they have to fertilize the hill with our blood?”

not *contain* them, as a novel would. In this story, the wounded veteran ultimately dies in the hospital, asking for the Red Cross to write to his parents for him moments before he passes away. Díaz Valcárcel truly captures the senselessness of war in these two narratives, conveying the despair of those Puerto Rican soldiers who survived some of the bloodiest battles in Korea, the devastation and rage of those family members who lost a loved one, and the anguish of the Puerto Rican community in general, who lost more than 700 of their countrymen to this war.

Although Díaz Valcárcel's later writing addresses a diverse range of themes other than war, and most of his later work is in the form of novels instead of the short story, the author has published several additional narratives incorporating similar themes to those manifested in *Proceso*. Among these are "Napalm,"¹⁵⁷ published in a collection of the same title in 1971 during his time living in Spain, which addresses the Vietnam War. Two other narratives that address war-related themes are "La culpa,"¹⁵⁸ originally

¹⁵⁷ In "Napalm," a Puerto Rican soldier stands sentry on the side of a road in Vietnam, observing the endless line of U.S. troops marching by him in retreat. His replacement, a Caucasian named Smith who spends most of his time drunk, arrives hours late and shows little respect for the unnamed Puerto Rican guard who interprets his disrespect as discriminatory treatment due to his race. After being relieved, the Puerto Rican protagonist walks aimlessly into the woods, past local Vietnamese villages, contemplating the hopelessness and senselessness of the war. The narrative concludes with the Puerto Rican soldier returning along the same path he had come, throwing his ammunition at the feet of a pair of young Vietnamese men, and holding out his brand new modern rifle to them with his arms extended. This ambiguous ending leads one to conclude that the protagonist has given up on the war and, unable to fight for a cause in which he does not believe, has given away his supplies to the locals since he sees it as their war to fight. There is much similarity in the protagonist's resignation in "Napalm" to the resignation of the soldier who falls asleep on the battlefield in "La evasión."

¹⁵⁸ "La culpa" focuses on the psychological effects that killing have on a soldier when the supposed enemy turns out to be unarmed or innocent. Vicente is a Puerto Rican man who served in the military for many years, mainly on the military base in Puerto Rico. A veteran, his psychological battle scars come from an incident that occurred on Puerto Rican soil when he was standing guard over a wood pile on base. Ordered to defend military property by his coronel, Vicente reacts quickly when he sees a man holding what appears to be a weapon approach the wood pile in the dead of night. After ordering him to stop, Vicente shoots and kills the individual, who turns out to be an unarmed, old Puerto Rican man who was only carrying a piece of wood in his hands. While he is acquitted of any wrongdoing by the military and awarded for defending U.S. property, Vicente is regarded as a cold-blooded killer by the Puerto Rican public, and years after the man's death he continues to be haunted by feelings of guilt at having killed one of his own countrymen.

published in Díaz Valcárcel's book *El hombre que trabajó el lunes* (1966), and “La prueba,”¹⁵⁹ written in 1966 and published in his 1971 collection *Panorama*. While the central themes in Díaz Valcárcel's body of work are constantly evolving and expanding, in his more recent work, the author continues to demonstrate a deep preoccupation with the marginalized and subordinated individual as well as with the effects of modernity on the human psyche—issues which, as we have seen, are also present in his narratives on the Korean War.

A Close Reading of “Proceso en diciembre”

“Proceso en diciembre” is the longest and most structurally complex story in Díaz Valcárcel's collection of the same title. As discussed previously, many critics have highlighted “Proceso en diciembre” and “El soldado Damián Sánchez” as the two most successful stories of the book. Emilio González notes, “‘Proceso en diciembre,’ the most intricate of all, unfolds scene by scene in a dramatic crescendo” (57). Therefore, just as

This has contributed to his mounting paranoia and his deteriorating relationship with his wife, Julia, who has stayed with him but secretly regards him as a murderer, along with the rest of the Puerto Rican public. The narrative does not reflect specifically on war, but rather on the devastating consequences that U.S. military intervention has had on Puerto Rican society, and on the traumatic effects of violence in general. In Vicente's justification of his actions, we see the use of the same excuse employed time and again by members of the military who are accused of committing crimes during wartime—the fact that they were merely “following orders.” This phenomenon raises questions related to the inner workings of the military hierarchy and the level of agency an individual soldier has when forming part of the greater military institution. This “following orders” justification has been applied more frequently in recent years by American soldiers accused of committing crimes against civilians during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁵⁹ Although Díaz Valcárcel uses the military draft as the premise for the story “La prueba,” its central theme is actually gender relations and the effect of patriarchal values on marital relations in Puerto Rico. When the son of María's best friend Luisa dies in battle after being drafted into the war (which is never named, but the circumstances lead one to believe it is Vietnam) by the U.S. military, the women in the community begin to organize to discuss how they can respond to the government's mandatory conscription of their sons. María's husband Rafael immediately forbids her to attend the meetings, worried that her involvement in so-called “subversive” activities will tarnish his reputation. The husband's autocratic attitude towards his wife puts into doubt all of the democratic ideals that he had espoused in the past during his involvement in community meetings about other political issues. While there is clearly a political undertone to the narrative in its reference to the U.S. military sending Puerto Rican youth to die, “La prueba” reflects more centrally on the changing roles of women and men in contemporary Puerto Rican society and the ways in which these new roles challenge traditional patriarchal values.

with “Damián,” we must therefore interpret “Proceso” as a long-form narrative rather than an actual short story. The story narrates a Puerto Rican soldier’s (Eduardo Rodríguez) refusal to comply with an order to shave his mustache, and the consequences of his defiance. The narrative is of particular interest to this study because of the critical attention it draws to the sharp cultural dissonances between North Americans and Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military during the Korean War, and its portrayal of how this cultural conflict leads to Puerto Rican soldiers’ experiences of discrimination and subordination within the military institution. The narrative also accomplishes a biting critique of U.S. imperialism that reflects Díaz Valcárcel’s personal anti-imperialist philosophy. Through the story, Díaz Valcárcel constructs an atmosphere that conveys the minute details of the war zone and demonstrates the complexities of U.S. military bureaucracy, the chain of command, and internal relations. Díaz Valcárcel knows these complexities well, and wrote “Proceso” based on the experience of a fellow soldier from his Regiment with whom he served in Korea:

[Roberto y yo] habíamos compartido muchas experiencias y tuvimos en común haber estado en Corea para la misma época; tenía fama de terco y si no me equivoco, cuando el coronel americano ordenó que todos los soldados del Regimiento 65 de Infantería—compuesto de boricuas—se afeitaran el bigote, él fue uno de los pocos que desató el mandato y corrió el riesgo de encarar un consejo militar (ignoro en qué terminó el asunto, que me dio pie para una narración). (*Los mundos* 92)¹⁶⁰

Díaz Valcárcel’s statement evidences his unique positionality as both a Korean war veteran and a writer, combining his personal experience with the intricacies of fictional

¹⁶⁰ “[Robert and I] had shared many experiences and we had in common being in Korea during the same period; he had a reputation for being stubborn and if I remember correctly, when the American colonel ordered all soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment—composed of Puerto Rican—to shave their mustache, he was one of the few who defied the mandate and ran the risk of facing a military council (I do not know how the matter ended, which gave me inspiration for a story).”

narrative that allowed him the freedom to experiment with the resolution of the conflict over the mustache. The long-form narrative, similar to a short story with its relatively concise and thus more impactful structure (rather than a lengthy novel), allowed him to incorporate just enough detail to reveal the implications of the cultural dissonance between North Americans and Puerto Ricans on soldiers of the 65th like Rodríguez and the rest of his platoon.

While the specific time period is not made clear in the story, it can be deduced that the “process” took place in the fall of 1952. This is noted in *Honor and Fidelity* where Villahermosa documents the order for all members of the 65th to shave their mustaches as being issued on October 13, 1952 by the regiment’s newly assigned commander, Col. Chester B. De Gavre, following the disastrous performance of said regiment at Kelly Hill (239).¹⁶¹ However, Díaz Valcárcel takes artistic license with the exact date, insinuating through the story’s title that the process took place in December of that year. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this narrative is based on historical fact. As Villahermosa notes, “the troops were... prohibited from wearing mustaches ‘until such a time as they gave proof of their manhood’” (239). According to Col. De Gavre—the officer who gave the command—the Puerto Rican troops had lost their manhood because of their supposedly “unmanly” or cowardly actions at Kelly Hill. He never clarified, however, *how* they could prove their manhood; essentially, as a result of Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights, the rapport of the 65th Infantry was permanently in

¹⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter One, the Battle at Kelly Hill had an extremely high mortality and casualty rate because it was an unprotected hill with nowhere to dig trenches, thus the soldiers were vulnerable and exposed to enemy fire the entire time. As a result of this slaughter of their fellow soldiers and miscommunication of commands, many members of the 65th turned back and abandoned the mission. As a result of this and a similar battle at Jackson Heights, nearly 100 Puerto Rican servicemen from the 65th were court martialed and brought to trial.

doubt. Many soldiers objected to the order, including Lt. Col. Carlos Betances-Ramírez, the 2nd Battalion commander, who stated, “placing in doubt a soldier’s manhood was, in my opinion, the ultimate insult” (Villahermosa 240). The historically accurate nature of the story, combined with Díaz Valcárcel’s intimate familiarity with the tense atmosphere endured by Puerto Rican soldiers in Korea, makes “Proceso” all the more powerful and politically charged.

The protagonist of “Proceso,” Puerto Rican soldier Rodríguez, decides to defy the order from the high command to shave his mustache upon his return to his unit in the 65th Regiment after a five-day rest period in Japan. Divided into three parts, the narrative encompasses the events of a single day and follows Rodríguez as he goes through the “process” of military review, trekking from one officer to another to be interrogated and threatened. What begins as a simple protest gains almost ridiculous proportions as this one soldier’s refusal to comply with a basic order travels up the chain of command for disciplinary action to be rendered. Ultimately, in a meeting with all of the military officials that is presided over by the colonel of the regiment, Rodríguez is pressured into shaving off his mustache in the colonel’s personal bathroom, resigning himself to defeat far too easily. The protagonist returns to his platoon’s barracks dejected and disillusioned, only to be met with the profound disappointment of his fellow soldiers upon seeing his shaven face. Díaz Valcárcel accomplishes an incredibly nuanced, layered narrative here that goes far beyond the seemingly superficial issue of a soldier shaving his mustache. This scenario serves as a pretext for a profound exploration into the psychology of the clash between North Americans and Puerto Ricans, illuminating expertly the lack of cultural understanding through what at times appears to be an absurd anecdote.

The overarching theme in the text, as Díaz Valcárcel himself notes, is the castrating effect of (neo)colonialism on the Puerto Rican people. In a 1984 interview the author notes, “Creo que en este relato [‘Proceso en diciembre’] es donde más nítidamente se registra el ángulo castrante del colonialismo, manifestado a través del reclutamiento militar de los puertorriqueños” (quoted in Panico 173-4).¹⁶² As with any instance of war, masculinity comes to the forefront as a critical element of a soldier’s identity—for the ethnic minority soldier in particular it is at once an opportunity to prove one’s manhood as well as a unique occasion to assert the resolve and integrity of one’s community in general. In his discussion of “Proceso en diciembre,” Juan Carlos Rodríguez recognizes the central presence of colonialism and its effects on the colonized in the text. He notes the appearance of a “figuration of the Puerto Rican national identity as a masculinity that, having been wounded and castrated during the colonial processes, needs to regain its virility at all costs, no matter what the price” (1159). In the case of the protagonist Rodríguez, that price is the threat of potential military sanctions for not shaving his mustache, and the potential retaliation he could face for the “punishment” he has planned for his North American wife upon his return from Korea (the role of Rodríguez’s wife is explored later in this section).

In the sections that follow, I will explore several central themes addressed in the narrative, all of which are related to the overarching subject of castration and colonization. The themes discussed below include the effects of imperialism/neo-colonialism on underdeveloped countries as it is reflected through the antagonism

¹⁶² “I believe that it is in this story [‘Proceso en diciembre’] that the castrating angle of colonialism is registered most clearly, manifested through the military recruitment of Puerto Ricans.”

between North American and Puerto Rican soldiers; the metaphorical significance of Rodríguez's marriage to a North American woman; the expendability of Puerto Rican soldiers in the eyes of the North American military leadership, and the suggested response of camaraderie and solidarity amongst Puerto Rican troops; the metaphorical significance of Rodríguez's final act of shaving his mustache; and the role of patriarchy in the structure of recognition. An in-depth discussion of each of these issues allows for a deeper analysis and understanding of "Proceso en diciembre."

Mirroring the Effects of Imperialism through the Antagonistic Relations between U.S. and Puerto Rican Soldiers

In "Proceso," Díaz Valcárcel establishes a parallel between Puerto Rico and Korea's shared experience of colonization and imperialism, and the emasculation experienced by Puerto Rican soldiers during the war—which is largely a result of their discriminatory treatment by North American officials. As such, it is important to interpret the narrative as a larger critique of the U.S. imperialist project in general, and a denunciation of the United States' interventionist policies that led to the global superpower's repressive presence in numerous underdeveloped countries throughout the world. As Greg Grandin notes in *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (2006), the region of Latin America "has long served as a workshop of empire, the place where the United States elaborated tactics of extraterritorial administration and acquired its conception of itself as an empire like no other before it" (2). Grandin identifies two main discourses surrounding U.S. intervention in Latin American countries like Puerto Rico, which include both "a dire view of a crisis-ridden world that justifies the use of unilateral and brutal American military power," and

a “utopian vision of the same world made whole and happy by that power [the U.S.]” (2). It is this same political ideology that was employed by the U.S. during the Cold War era to justify its interventions in countries like Korea and Vietnam that were said to be heading in the direction of communism, which from the United States’ hegemonic capitalist perspective was a direct threat to their international economic and political designs. In the same breath, the U.S. claimed to be bettering the living conditions of Koreans and Vietnamese by imposing the ideals of liberty and democracy on them—and thus establishing a supposedly “happier” world.

In “Proceso en diciembre,” Díaz Valcárcel takes up the cases of Puerto Rico and Korea as specific examples of this forced political and economic subordination to the interests of the United States. A related issue addressed in the narrative is the theme of emasculation—or castration, in Díaz Valcárcel’s words—which is manifested in several ways throughout the text. While this theme is embodied in the story’s central anecdote of the Puerto Rican soldiers’ forced shaving of their mustache—a quintessential symbol of masculinity within Puerto Rico’s patriarchal society (Acevedo xxv; Casanova-Sánchez 252)—the text also establishes a parallel between the soldiers’ emasculation and the political and economic emasculation experienced by the state of Puerto Rico as a United States Commonwealth. Specifically, Díaz Valcárcel establishes a connection between the discrimination and mistreatment carried out by North American soldiers against Puerto Rican soldiers, and their homeland’s socio-political subordination to the U.S. as a result of imperialism. Through the fictional freedom afforded him by the long-form narrative, Díaz Valcárcel is able to intersect these two forms of subordination or castration in order to unpack the deeper implications of these contradictions in the “real world.” Cortázar

explains this type of narrative as “moving in that human plane where life and the written expression of that life wage a fraternal battle, if you permit me this term; and the result of that battle is... a living synthesis at the same time as a synthesized life, something like shaking water in a glass, fleetingness within permanence” (3). The narrative engages actively with life in order to shake humans from their passivity and reveal to them the significant tensions and issues in their lived world.

In the same 1984 interview referenced above, Díaz Valcárcel reminds his audience of Puerto Rico’s past and present: “fuimos colonia durante el tiempo de España, y la llegada de los norteamericanos a nuestro suelo se ha caracterizado por una planificada intención de asimilarnos, corromper nuestra cultura y destruir nuestra personalidad de pueblo para explotarnos sin que oponamos mayor resistencia” (quoted in Panico 172).¹⁶³ For Díaz Valcárcel, the mandatory military conscription of a colonized people like the Puerto Rican community is the basest form of exploitation possible. Díaz Valcárcel’s anti-imperialist critique is reinforced through the rhetoric employed by the North American military officials who claim to speak on behalf of a supposedly benevolent imperialist nation that has come to the aid of a people in need solely out of the kindness of its heart. Rodríguez encounters such rhetoric during an appointment with the lieutenant colonel:

Advirtió que pertenecíamos al ejército que defendía la Democracia y la Justicia. Aquí noté un detalle curioso: los hombres de trincheras rara vez pronunciaban palabras de la categoría de Democracia, Comunismo, Justicia. Para ellos, eran vagos conceptos sin significación alguna. Sólo

¹⁶³ “we were a colony during Spain’s time, and the North Americans’ arrival on our soil has been characterized by a planned attempt to assimilate us, corrupt our culture and destroy our personality as a people in order to exploit us, while avoiding even the most minor form of resistance from us Puerto Ricans.”

existía el ladrido de los fusiles, los asaltos y la sangre. Andaban demasiado ocupados en el juego con la muerte. (43)¹⁶⁴

Rodríguez finds the North American official's use of this vague, ideological language to be ridiculous and inappropriate in light of the life-threatening situation in which they all find themselves. The official's rhetoric embodies the anti-communist discourse employed by the U.S. during the Cold War era, which placed the characteristically North American ideals of "Democracy" and "Justice"—with a capital 'D' and 'J' respectively—in direct opposition with the ominous threat of "Communism." By opposing communism with democracy and justice, the lieutenant colonel aligns these utopic values with the capitalist interests of the U.S.—interests that seem to underlie every action taken by the U.S. military during the war. It is this superficially benevolent rhetoric that is present in the speech of the Caucasian officials throughout the narrative. As it becomes clear later in the story, Rodríguez regards the official's ideological discourse above as irrelevant to the reality of war experienced by him and his compatriots, insinuating that the U.S. military is shamelessly discarding innocent lives as its leadership sits back and debates the philosophical significance behind every battle and military maneuver.

The haughty, disinterested attitude of the North American soldiers that surround Rodríguez in the military also reflects their narrow ethnocentric viewpoint that privileges North America over anything different or unknown. In his final appointment of the day with the colonel of the Regiment—the highest-ranked official in the combat zone, and the official who gave the original order for soldiers to shave their mustaches—Rodríguez

¹⁶⁴ "He warned me that we belonged to the army that defended Democracy and Justice. I noticed something peculiar: men in the trenches rarely uttered words of the category of Democracy, Communism, Justice. For them, these were vague concepts without significance. There was only the barking of the guns, the assaults and the blood. They were too occupied by the game of death."

listens to his speech with mounting indignation. “Añadió que debía de sentirme orgulloso de que mi pequeñísimo y superpoblado país, que era ‘parte integrante’ del suyo, gozara de los beneficios y libertades de un sistema democrático del, para y por el pueblo, añadiendo que era esa una lección aprendida del pueblo norteamericano, al que yo pertenecía por razones ‘harto conocidas’” (52).¹⁶⁵ All of the North American officers in the narrative share an equally condescending tone in their interactions and dialogue with Rodríguez, projecting an obvious air of superiority that belittles the Puerto Rican soldier. Emilio González notes, “the Americans, meanwhile, emphasize the distance between them and the Puerto Ricans, as is clearly demonstrated in Rodríguez’s interviews with the officers. They sometimes adopt patronizing attitudes, like that of the colonel toward Rodríguez” (59). Yet the attitude of the colonel goes beyond patronizing, employing the rhetoric of a benevolent imperialist nation in a way that emphasizes Rodríguez’s inferiority as a resident of the “tiny, overpopulated country” of Puerto Rico, which needed the United States’ protection for obvious reasons—in order to save it from itself. In other words, he should shut up, stop complaining, and be grateful for the opportunities he has been given.

The difference between the predominantly North American officers and the infantrymen—particularly the Puerto Ricans—is a recurring theme in “Proceso,” each encounter with the sterile world of the North American officials only further strengthening Díaz Valcárcel’s message regarding the unequal treatment of minority ethnic soldiers within the armed forces. Observing the extreme level of order and

¹⁶⁵ “He added that I should feel proud that my tiny, overpopulated country, which was ‘an integral part’ of his, enjoyed the benefits and freedoms of a democratic system of, for and by the people, adding that it was a lesson learned by the American people, to which I belonged for ‘well known’ reasons.”

cleanliness in the lieutenant colonel's camp, Rodríguez reflects that these minute details, "eran en mi concepto... capaces de ser tomados en cuenta sólo por hombres que se mantenían a toda costa alejados de las trincheras" (37).¹⁶⁶ Just as he was unable to relate to the lieutenant colonel's ideological rhetoric about democracy and justice, Rodríguez is incapable of identifying with the rectitude and extreme obedience of these soldiers whose realities are so foreign to his own. He continues, "los hombres de aquel campamento habían engordado y detrás de sus rápidos gestos de militar alerta se adivinaba la pereza que nacía de una vida segura y bien comida, donde no había espacio para los sobresaltos de trinchera. En silencio, con los puños apretados dentro de los guantes, los mandé a todos al infierno" (37).¹⁶⁷ The main concern for Rodríguez and his fellow countrymen was staying alive and as such, the officers' overindulgent lifestyle was completely foreign and superfluous in the protagonist's eyes. Confronted with this scene of the military leaders' camp evokes anger in Rodríguez—anger at the blatant inequality he has witnessed, and at the harsh reality of Puerto Rican soldiers who seem to be continuously assigned the most dangerous missions, and whose lives are not perceived to be of equal value as the lives of North American (white) soldiers. With tightened fists, he curses them all, knowing his life will never be as pampered and secure as theirs.

As Rodríguez's observations indicate, he was very conscious of the stark difference in the enforcement of military protocol between the secure confines of the officers' camp and the chaotic, dangerous atmosphere of the trenches. Like all soldiers,

¹⁶⁶ "were in my mind... capable of being taken seriously only by men who remained removed from the trenches at all costs."

¹⁶⁷ "The men in that camp had gained weight and behind their rapid gestures of an alert military officer, the laziness born of a life of security and ample food was apparent, a life that had no room for the frights of the trenches. With my fists clenched inside my gloves, I silently told them all to go to hell."

he was well aware that the rules of the military get thrown out the window during hand-to-hand combat. “En las trincheras no había protocolo y podía uno gastarse el lujo de detener con un tiro a un oficial (no era fácil, pero era una posibilidad tan considerable como la muerte en manos de los comunistas),”¹⁶⁸ he states, cementing the great divide between him and his fellow infantrymen, and the distant, oftentimes out-of-touch military leadership (37-8). In his world of the trenches, there was not as much of a distinction made between soldiers and officers since they all faced the threat of death on a daily basis, and the military officials on the battlefield were also painfully aware of the very real possibility of receiving “accidental” friendly fire from disgruntled subordinates.¹⁶⁹ As Emilio González observes, “the recourses of social restraint crumble in the critical situation of war, causing latent conflicts to rise to the surface” (58). The latent conflict here is the deep-rooted tension between the colonizer and the colonized, and the animosity evoked by the othering of one ethnic group—Puerto Ricans—by another that perceives itself as superior—(Caucasian) North Americans. While these conflicts could be played out on the battlefield without much difficulty, in the “elegante mundo que subsistía aún en la guerra”¹⁷⁰ in which the high ranking officers moved (“Proceso,” 38),

¹⁶⁸ “There was no protocol in the trenches and one could risk stopping an official with a gunshot (it wasn’t easy, but it was as real of a possibility as that of death in the hands of the communists).”

¹⁶⁹ This phenomenon is now widely referred to as “fragging”—the act of deliberately killing another member of one’s own military. This act became a widespread occurrence during the Vietnam War, particularly with soldiers assassinating overly aggressive officers in their own unit. The term “fragging” is thought to have been coined by a newspaper journalist in early 1971, specifically referencing the fragmentation grenade employed as the murder weapon in many of these instances. In “The Hard Truth About Fragging,” Peter Brush notes, “there were reported instances of American soldiers assaulting their superiors using grenades in World War I, World War II and the Korean War” (Brush 1). Thus, we can see that fragging was already a known reality during the Korean War. Contemporarily, there have been some assertions of fragging taking place in both the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars among American troops, but the military has consistently denied those claims and sufficient evidence has yet to be found to substantiate such assertions.

¹⁷⁰ “Elegant world that survived even in wartime”

Rodríguez and his sergeant—who continues to act like a fish out of water in each successive interaction with the high command—must follow military protocol exactly in order to avoid sanctions and maintain a clean military record. Once again, we see the direct implications of the animosity between North Americans and Puerto Ricans manifested in the lived experience of Rodríguez and his compatriots.

It is this same experience of subordination and mistreatment by North Americans that links the lives of Puerto Ricans and Koreans in the text. Díaz Valcárcel establishes a strong parallel between different ethnic others throughout “Proceso,” including Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Turks and Greeks,¹⁷¹ and Japanese. But the strongest and most impactful parallel is drawn between the Puerto Rican and Korean people, which illuminates Korea and Puerto Rico’s shared history of subordination to other world powers. “El [idioma] coreano sonaba dulzón y por alguna razón me parecía el idioma natural a una raza humillada no pocas veces a lo largo de su historia. Y una idea me vino de golpe: la mansedumbre de los coreanos (o al menos la que creía ver en ellos) era del mismo tipo que la de los puertorriqueños” (29).¹⁷² Rodríguez saw the same submissiveness in the Korean people as he saw in his own people—not because they were inherently weak, but because of the centuries of colonization and oppression by world powers that conditioned their people into this supposedly passive, submissive condition (although this was a condition that was perceived from outside, and did not necessarily reflect the true identity or experience of the entire Korean population). Frantz

¹⁷¹ Turkish and Greek troops served as part of the UN forces that fought alongside the North Americans in the war.

¹⁷² “The Korean [language] sounded sweet and for some reason it seemed to me the most natural language for a race that had been humiliated more than a few times throughout their history. And I had a sudden realization: the meekness of the Koreans (or at least that which I thought I saw in them) was of the same type as that of the Puerto Ricans.”

Fanon refers to this phenomenon as “the psychology of the colonized” in his 1952 foundational text *Black Skin, White Masks*.

According to Fanon, years of colonial oppression lead to a type of inferiority complex experienced by the ethnic/racial other, leading the oppressed to view their oppressors as inherently superior to themselves.¹⁷³ Díaz Valcárcel poignantly captures this psychological subordination through the docility he recognizes in the speech and mannerisms of the Korean people, which he associates with his own Puerto Rican community. As Hernández Hernández recognizes, “Díaz Valcárcel accomplishes a faithful and exact portrait of the psychological hybridity of the colonized [in ‘Proceso en diciembre’]. It is what Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon... call the subordination of the colonized to the world of the colonizer” (86). Both Puerto Rico and Korea have a past marked by the invasion and oppression of colonial and imperial powers—Puerto Rico dominated by Spain and then the U.S., and Korea invaded by Japan and later, the U.S. By drawing this parallel, Díaz Valcárcel conveys a strong anti-imperialist stance, directing his criticism not only at the United States’ intervention in Korea, but also at the destructive power of imperialism in general—specifically its devastating effects on the psyche of a colonized people. As a minority ethnic soldier, Rodríguez’s identification with the local residents also resonates with Jorge Mariscal’s concept of the structure of recognition (introduced in Chapter One), a phenomenon that will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

¹⁷³ This phenomenon is evident in many former Spanish colonies in Latin America where a colonized individual’s sense of inferiority is intimately tied to race. For many formerly colonized communities, including Mexico, whiteness is associated with the oppressor but is simultaneously desired.

Feeling Trapped: Cross-Cultural Gender Relations in a Marriage Based on False Pretenses

A character who is central to the narrative and whose presence in Rodríguez's life furthers Díaz Valcárcel's anti-imperialist message is his North American wife Marjorie. The reader is introduced to Marjorie—as well as to his Puerto Rican mother, another important woman in his life—through memories and flashbacks narrated in the first person. We discover that Rodríguez is married early in the story when a letter arrives for him from his mother in Puerto Rico that he receives with notable annoyance, in contrast with the excitement of his fellow soldiers who await their letters with anticipation. “Sentí miedo de mirar la letra, su punto de partida... con un estilo directo que había dejado de sorprenderme, hablaba de *ella*. Nunca la llamaba por su nombre: Marjorie” (19).¹⁷⁴ An extreme level of frustration is present both in Rodríguez's reaction upon receiving the letter, and in his mother's complaints about Marjorie in her frequent correspondence with her son, as well as her unwillingness to mention her daughter-in-law by name. Through a flashback, Rodríguez recalls meeting Marjorie during a night of drunken debauchery when he was stationed in South Carolina before being sent to Korea. Rodríguez remembers his first glimpse of this blond haired, blue eyed Caucasian woman from the American south—one of the many women brought in buses to the Soldier's Club to “entertain” the servicemen, as the protagonist explains—“Allí, con el codo en el mostrador, el pelo dorado sobre un hombre, sonriéndome con picardía que entonces me

¹⁷⁴ “Just looking at the handwriting, at her point of entry, made me afraid... she spoke of *her* in a direct style that no longer surprised me. She never called her by her name: Marjorie.”

pareció ingenua, estaba ella” (19).¹⁷⁵ Rodríguez’s first impression of Marjorie leaves him intrigued and strangely drawn to her.

Already upon their initial meeting, Marjorie’s attitude towards Rodríguez’s ethnic otherness reveals her ignorance and her condescending perception of him. The protagonist remembers one of the few comments made by her that night, “hubo uno hacia mi color oscuro, y rió extrañamente, entre burlona e irónica, cuando pasó sus dedos de goma rojiza sobre mi bigote” (19).¹⁷⁶ Even as she tries to seduce him, Marjorie cannot hide her feeling of superiority towards him, viewing his dark skin and mustache as othering traits that render him different, and therefore inferior, in her eyes. The attention given to his mustache as a mockery rather than a sign of his manhood also reflects the difference in the cultural significance of this physical attribute that functions as such an important symbol of masculinity in Puerto Rico, versus its perception in the U.S. where it only makes Rodríguez and his compatriots look more foreign—and perhaps even menacing—in the eyes of North Americans. Later in the story Rodríguez mentions how much his wife hates his mustache, reinforcing her level of discomfort with any physical attribute that rendered her husband different, and therefore other.

In his inebriated state on the night when they first meet, Rodríguez is unable to recognize the brazen, sly air that accompanies the look that Marjorie gives him, interpreting the glance rather as a sincere expression of her interest and maybe even her naiveté. It is ultimately the protagonist’s own naiveté that Marjorie manipulates to her benefit that night. Taking advantage of his intoxicated state, she ends up imposing

¹⁷⁵ “There she was, with her elbow on the bar, golden hair draped over her shoulder, smiling at me with a brazenness that at the time I interpreted as naiveté.”

¹⁷⁶ “there was one about my dark skin color, and she laughed in a strange manner, somewhere between mockery and irony, as she stroked my mustache with her red, rubbery fingers.”

marriage on Rodríguez with the sole goal of gaining spousal benefits. Awakening hung over and disoriented the next morning, Rodríguez sees Marjorie and vaguely recalls the events of the previous night. When he tries to embrace her, Marjorie immediately rejects him, displaying a coldness incompatible with the vibrant personality of the woman he had met the night before:

Metiendo los dedos bajo su brassiere de encajes extrajo un papel doblado que me extendió con la más alegre de [las] sonrisas... era un certificado de matrimonio y, antes de que pudiera yo articular palabra alguna, me explicó que, como podía ver, era mi esposa; que debía yo informarle lo antes posible a la administración de mi compañía porque, naturalmente, debía recibir cuanto antes su correspondiente pensión. (20)¹⁷⁷

Rodríguez carries with him the feelings of humiliation and indignation evoked by Marjorie's charade when he ships off to Korea, his only consolation being that she will be under the vigilance of his mother since he has sent his North American wife to the island to live with his family while he is away at war. "Al fin y al cabo, concluí que por lo pronto era mi mujer y que si recibía un sueldo por ello, lo más natural era que me obedeciera" (20).¹⁷⁸ The patriarchal value system clearly reigns in the protagonist's mentality and actions, as he attempts to control Marjorie in the traditional role of a husband whose duty it is to protect his wife and maintain control over her every move. Rodríguez's attempt at reasserting his masculinity and dominance over Marjorie fails miserably, however, since she begins gallivanting around town with the North American

¹⁷⁷ "Slipping her fingers under her lacy brassiere, she pulled out a folded piece of paper that she handed me with the happiest of smiles... it was a marriage certificate and, before I could utter a word, she explained to me that, as I could see, she was my wife; that I should inform the administration of my company as soon as possible because, naturally, she should receive her corresponding pension as quickly as possible."

¹⁷⁸ "At the end of the day, I concluded that for now she was my wife and that if she received a salary for it, it seemed natural for her to obey me."

servicemen and rich foreign investors residing on the island, blatantly violating her marriage vows for everyone in the neighborhood to see.

As his wife continues to take advantage of him from afar, using the military bureaucracy to her full benefit, the name Marjorie becomes synonymous in Rodríguez's mind with everything that North America stands for. Marjorie and the North American institutions of the Red Cross and the U.S. military become common enemies in the protagonist's eyes. I suggest that through the character of Marjorie, Díaz Valcárcel develops a profound metaphor for the self-interested intervention of the U.S. in Puerto Rico and in other underdeveloped nations like Korea and Vietnam. As I asserted previously, the narrative becomes not just a commentary on Puerto Rican-North American relations, but on U.S. imperialism and its negative consequences throughout the world.

Reading his mother's latest letter evokes disgust in Rodríguez for everything North American:

De pronto sentí hastío de mi país, de sus grandes hoteles turísticos, de sus campos de golf por donde esparcía la fauna extranjera de ojos azules... Marjorie parecía cubrir mi tierra con su cuerpo largo y ascético, con sus ojos blancos que no entendían nada: el castellano, el invierno sin nieve, el arroz con habichuelas, las peleas de gallos, el catolicismo de los míos.
(21)¹⁷⁹

Rodríguez's hatred and resentment for the U.S. government is embodied in his resentment for his wife, his repugnance at her cold eyes, her promiscuity and disloyalty, and her unwillingness to try to understand him and his culture. Marjorie's white body

¹⁷⁹ "Suddenly I felt weary of my country, of its large tourist hotels, its golf courses where blue eyed foreign fauna were scattered about... Marjorie seemed to cover my land with her long ascetic body and her white eyes that did not understand anything: Spanish, snowless winters, rice and beans, cockfighting, the Catholicism of my people."

morphs into the representative of the United States' imposing presence that is smothering his island and ruining everything that is native to it: the Spanish language, the beautiful natural spaces that are rapidly being replaced by golf courses and large hotels for Caucasian tourists—the blue-eyed foreign fauna “native” to those spaces—and even the typical Puerto Rican food that he loves. Marjorie's cold expression communicated through her look is synonymous with the looks that North American soldiers direct at him in Korea. As Casanova-Sánchez notes, “the indifferent and detached conduct of the light-skinned soldiers is reflected through the coldness of their eyes which creates a marked symbolism of their feelings” (252).

At another point in the story, Rodríguez recalls the headache his wife's infidelity has caused him during his time in Korea, “La Cruz Roja tomó cartas en el asunto, pero le hice notar que aquél era un problema que sólo concernía a mi persona y me negué a colaborar con ella. Además, la Cruz Roja hablaba el mismo idioma que Marjorie. Una ira sin nombre me invadía” (24).¹⁸⁰ Rodríguez draws attention to language here when he asserts that the Red Cross spoke the same language as Marjorie, which can be interpreted in two different ways. First, both the Red Cross and Marjorie spoke English, but taking it a step further, his wife and the North American institution spoke the same *rhetoric*—the shared bureaucratic language of a capitalist system that evaluates everything based on statistics and profit margins. This language is equally as ambiguous and irrelevant to the protagonist as is the officers' political ideology of democracy and justice.

¹⁸⁰ “The Red Cross took up the matter, but I pointed out that this was a problem that concerned only me and I refused to cooperate with them. Plus, the Red Cross spoke the same language as Marjorie. A nameless anger overcame me.”

For Rodríguez, the disconnect he feels with both Marjorie and the Red Cross is not just about a linguistic gap, but about his inability to identify with the North American discourses of capitalism and politics that are so foreign and superficial to him. The fact that he is not able to communicate in or comprehend these discourses translates into a feeling of impotence for the protagonist, which elicits a reaction of rage from him. This issue of language recalls Fanon's theory regarding the pressure for a colonized people to adopt the mother tongue and culture of the colonizer. "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards," Fanon asserted, implying that if one did not adopt those dominant cultural standards, it only further reinforced the colonized individual's sense of inferiority and alienation (18). By resisting the foreign North American discourses, language, and culture instead of resigning himself to them, Rodríguez invokes the animosity and retaliation of members of the dominant society, including the North American military officers, as well as entire bureaucratic institutions like the Red Cross.

In a 2009 article on literature addressing the North American military presence in Puerto Rico, Juan Carlos Rodríguez interprets the protagonist Rodríguez's relationship with Marjorie in "Proceso" as aggressive and misogynist. This analysis is largely based on the passage towards the end of the narrative when the protagonist imagines what he will do upon his return to Puerto Rico: "habría ya cumplido el tiempo necesario para exigir el divorcio sin la intervención de la Cruz Roja, entonces despediría a Marjorie tal vez con una zurra" (58).¹⁸¹ The critic takes this concluding fantasy in the narrative

¹⁸¹ "the necessary time to be able to demand a divorce without the intervention of the Red Cross would have already lapsed, and I would potentially say goodbye to Marjorie with a beating."

literally, interpreting Rodríguez's imagined punishment of his wife as synonymous with domestic violence or spousal abuse. "The narrator's 'machista' fantasy... consists in unleashing his hatred for the invading forces of the military against his wife, forces that he himself had been unable to resist and in front of which he feels impotent" (1159-1160). It is clear, however, that Díaz Valcárcel envisioned the character of Marjorie in the narrative on a figurative or metaphorical level. Even the *suggested* beating of a spouse should never be condoned. Nevertheless, in this case the protagonist's fantasy functions on a more figurative level to further illuminate his rage towards the U.S. military. An interview with Díaz Valcárcel highlights the figurative level at which Marjorie's character operates. The author describes the metaphorical significance of the different characters in the text: "El procedimiento en *Proceso en diciembre...* se realiza sólo de manera indirecta, mediante un par de símbolos: Marjorie, que significa, si se quiere, el choque de la cultura USA con la boricua, y el coronel que humilla a nuestros soldados, representante de la fuerza de las armas y el poder político contra nuestro país" (173-4).¹⁸² This female antagonist in "Proceso"—Marjorie—must therefore be interpreted as a figurative embodiment of the animosity and tension between the North Americans and Puerto Ricans, and Rodríguez's imagined beating of her as a manifestation of his rage against the entire North American system and culture. While there is no denying that this narrative construction reflects the patriarchal culture dominant in Puerto Rico during that period in an uncritical and potentially problematic

¹⁸² "the procedure in *Proceso en diciembre...* is carried out in an indirect manner, through a couple of symbols: Marjorie, who represents, if you will, the clash of U.S. culture with that of Puerto Rico, and the colonel who humiliates our soldiers, representing the force of weaponry and the political power wielded against our country."

manner, one must keep in mind that “machismo”¹⁸³ and misogyny are not the central themes of this particular text. Díaz Valcárcel does address the issue of gender inequality and the dominance of patriarchal norms in Puerto Rican society in some of his later writing. A specific narrative that is reflective of this critical representation of gender roles is “La prueba” (1966), mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Carlos Rodríguez recognizes the metaphorical significance of Marjorie’s character in his analysis of “Proceso”: “The Puerto Rican soldier... transforms his wounded and castrated masculinity into an aggressive impulse, an impulse that he directs at his North American wife, who comes to embody the invading forces of the military upon his return to the island” (1159-1160). The protagonist’s rage—or “aggressive impulse”—towards his wife is translated into his rage towards the entire U.S. governmental system that enabled such a crock of a marriage to be honored, and his resentment towards that same system for being sent off to fight in a war that had nothing to do with him or his homeland. Contemplating the time left in his tour of duty after returning from his rest period in Japan, Rodríguez thinks, “los meses que me esperaban semejaban algo así como los primeros meses transcurridos en el infierno” (15).¹⁸⁴ First Marjorie had turned his life into hell, and then the military had gone and made it even

¹⁸³ Jered Pigeon explains, “machismo is a group of attitudes that allows the male to overly assert his presence on women, but also around other men (as in the case of excessive alcohol abuse)” (3). Pigeon also notes that in Latin American culture, “being born a male is of high prestige and valued more than if one was born female. Women are raised that one day they will marry a man and he will be in charge the family, and the family must obey him” (2). While Pigeon focuses primarily on the phenomenon of “machismo” in the Mexican culture, his discussion is also relevant to other Latin American cultures like Puerto Rico whose dominant value systems are also rooted in Catholicism, as is the case with Mexico. Hernández Hernández refers to what Pigeon terms “negative machismo,” which includes, “aspects of violence [against] women and other males, alcoholism, and [taking] other sexual partners besides one’s wife” (3). The element of domestic violence in “machismo” is particularly relevant to Hernández Hernández’s interpretation of “Proceso.”

¹⁸⁴ “The months that awaited me resembled something like the first months in hell.”

worse. Just as his wife disdains Rodríguez and regards him as inferior, the military views his life as less valuable than that of North American—Caucasian—soldiers, rendering him expendable.

**Life Devalued: Puerto Rican Soldiers' Tenuous Solidarity when Confronting their
Treatment as Expendable Bodies**

In various moments throughout the text, Rodríguez reflects on the inequality he experiences within the ranks of the military, gesturing to potential discrimination on the part of the U.S. officers towards the Puerto Rican soldiers. More than just a cultural conflict causing tension and condescension on the part of North Americans towards Puerto Ricans in Korea, this discrimination comes in the form of the military's devaluation of the life of Puerto Rican soldiers. This devaluation is reflected primarily by the fact that these minority ethnic soldiers were assigned the most dangerous operations much more frequently than their North American counterparts—the battles at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights discussed earlier are a case in point. As filmmaker Conor Timmis discovered while interviewing Puerto Rican veteran Celestino Córdova as part of his research for a documentary on the Korean War, the 65th infantry division in which Córdova and his comrades fought was “used as cannon fodder,” their value as soldiers and human beings going “unrecognized at the time because of prejudice” (quoted in Michalewicz 1). This perception of Puerto Rican soldiers as expendable bodies that could be sacrificed for the “greater good”—i.e. protecting democracy and justice—without larger consequences was the most shocking and disillusioning aspect of the Korean War for many troops and for families back home on the island. What kept many of these soldiers going and inspired resilience and strength in them in the face of this devaluation

and dehumanization by the larger military institution was the camaraderie and solidarity—although tenuous at times—among Puerto Rican troops in Korea. In a world where one is viewed as other and inferior and frequently ostracized by dominant North American cultural norms, the shared culture, language and traditions of minority ethnic soldiers like Puerto Ricans was critical not only to their survival but also in order to maintain their sanity. It is this comradeship that Díaz Valcárcel portrays in “Proceso” as the soldiers’ response to the discriminatory treatment received by the U.S. military—although the author is careful to note the potential divisions and tensions that can threaten to break the ties that bond these soldiers.

While walking from the tent of one officer toward that of another superior officer, the protagonist hears the sound of (North American) helicopters flying overhead, and looks up at the compartments that potentially carried more soldiers headed for the front lines. “Miré las cápsulas. Podían ser compatriotas, clasificados por números en algún archivo atendido por jóvenes militares de grandes nalgas en las cercanías de Seúl, a saludable distancia de los corrales donde vegetaban cientos de prostitutas” (34).¹⁸⁵ Rodríguez’s reference to “large buttocks” establishes a parallel with his earlier descriptions of several of the Caucasian officers with whom he had met about defying the order to shave his mustache. Thus, we can deduce that this reference to the overweight physique of young military men is meant to represent North American officers rather than Puerto Ricans. The fact that only numbers in some military personnel file would identify these potential compatriots of his alludes to the dehumanization of the minority

¹⁸⁵ “I looked at the capsules. They could be my countrymen, classified by number in some archive attended by young military men with large buttocks in the outskirts of Seoul, at a healthy distance from the corrals where hundreds of prostitutes vegetated.”

ethnic soldier, their individual names and identities essentially stripped from these individuals upon their entrance into the military. While this phenomenon is, at a certain level, the reality for any individual who enters the military, it is clear after considering the testimonials and lived experiences of surviving Puerto Rican veterans that their cultural and ethnic otherness compounded this process of dehumanization and devaluation—a process that was far from that experienced by North American Caucasian soldiers in the same war. Puerto Ricans and other ethnic minority soldiers like African Americans are reduced to bodies that are North American military property and are expected to do nothing else than obey orders and not ask questions; a status that the colonel in the story makes painfully clear in a lecture he gives Rodríguez later in the narrative, which will be discussed in the next section.

The above phrase referring to the officer's oversized bottom also alludes to the U.S. culture of overconsumption and excess that extends into the military through the officers' overindulgence and gluttony—attitudes that are directly contradictory to the morose atmosphere of the troops fighting in the trenches, who face ammunition and food ration shortages on a consistent basis, not to mention living with the very real and constant threat of death. The lives of pampered Caucasian officers like the owners of the large buttocks are clearly privileged over the lives of those ethnic minority or working class soldiers who make up the grunts within the infantry that carry out the actual dirty work. This is further confirmed by the fact that Rodríguez assumes that it is his countrymen who are inside the helicopters—not Caucasian soldiers—being sent to dangerous combat zones instead of sitting securely in a comfortable office job thousands of miles from the war front.

Earlier in the narrative, Rodríguez describes his interaction with his fellow soldiers the evening of his return from Japan: “Por la noche los muchachos me rodearon arrebujados al pie de la estufa (diciembre dolía en el tuétano), sentados en las esquinas de los catres, fumando cigarrillo tras cigarrillo... Los muchachos se golpeaban la rodilla con la mano abierta, se tocaban los codos y lanzaban la carcajada” (16).¹⁸⁶ Stuck in the same situation, the soldiers lend each other warmth and entertainment during the cold winter nights; in this case, Rodríguez shares stories from his rest period to lighten the mood in the tent. While this camaraderie exists among troops of all races and cultural backgrounds within the military, these soldiers’ shared Puerto Rican origins as well as their common experience of racial discrimination within this North American institution renders a sense of unity among Puerto Rican infantry all the more important. The circumstances surrounding the forced shaving of their mustaches, while subjecting them to discriminatory treatment, simultaneously enable the soldiers of the 65th to strengthen their solidarity through this shared experience. During his meeting with the infantry’s Sergeant Major, such solidarity is formed nonverbally between Rodríguez and a fellow soldier who happens to be in the tent typing up notes: “el soldado me miraba francamente. En sus ojos hundidos y oscuros me pareció adivinar un amago de solidaridad” (39).¹⁸⁷ This forged solidarity functions as a form of resistance, or even subtle defiance, against the repressive system that the minority soldiers feel is operating against them.

¹⁸⁶ “That night the guys surrounded me all bundled up at the foot of the stove (the December cold hurt in the bones, literally “in the marrow”), sitting on the corners of cots, smoking cigarette after cigarette... They slapped their knees with the palms of their hands, nudged each other with their elbows and let out a laugh.”

¹⁸⁷ “the soldier looked at me frankly. In his sunken, dark eyes I thought I recognized a sign of solidarity.”

While this solidarity serves its purpose for a time, Rodríguez is painfully conscious of the tensions and divisions within his platoon, and in the 65th infantry in general. One of the main causes of discord was the conflict between the innocent enthusiasm of recently arrived Puerto Ricans and the cynicism and wariness of their countrymen who had already been in Korea for a significant amount of time. While new arrivals from the island share a strong sense of pride in their Puerto Rican identity, celebrating their culture and heritage almost constantly in the initial weeks following their arrival, Rodríguez and other more senior members of the unit, in contrast, are much more resigned and do not care to draw any more attention to themselves than is necessary. “Dos reclutas golpeaban con ritmo sobre una cacerola... *Yo tenía un gallo espuelérico / para jugárselo al de Américo...* Llenaban todos los espacios con algo que les recordara la lejana Antilla” (22).¹⁸⁸ While the protagonist identifies with these familiar cultural references—especially the popular song about the beloved pastime of cock fighting, here in the traditional form of a “décima”¹⁸⁹—he consciously distances himself from them, contemplating the scene passively from his cot as if he were not associated with his proud, naïve countrymen. Other divisions that existed amongst Puerto Rican troops included tensions between volunteers, who tended to be highly patriotic and dedicated to the military, and draftees, who oftentimes resented their forced participation

¹⁸⁸ “Two recruits slapped a pot rhythmically... *I had a gamecock / to fight against Américo's bird...* They filled all of the spaces with something that reminded them of the distant Antilles.”

¹⁸⁹ A “décima” generally refers to a style of poetry or song in the Hispanic tradition that is octosyllabic and has 10 lines to a stanza. This particular “décima” is a popular Puerto Rican song called “El gallo espuelérico” originally sung by Mon Rivera. The song relays the story of Américo, the owner of a gamecock about which he brags proudly as he carries it to a fight. Américo’s bird, however, is killed shortly after the fight begins. His friends tease him, saying that his gamecock would have served him better if it were part of a chicken rice soup.

in the war. These tensions are explored more clearly in Díaz Valcárcel's screenplay "Una sola puerta hacia la muerte," discussed later in this chapter.

Recalling the capsules in the helicopters that transported soldiers to the combat zone, the protagonist reiterates his cynicism at the military's devaluation of Puerto Rican lives. "Poco importaba la muerte de una docena de hombres. Sólo habría que tachar una docena de cifras, despachar una docena de cablegramas, una docena de cajitas de plomo y una docena de cheques" (34-5).¹⁹⁰ Just as in other stories from this collection, Díaz Valcárcel emphasizes the little value that the lives of minority ethnic soldiers—in this case, Puerto Ricans—have in the eyes of the all-powerful U.S. military institution. Casanova-Sánchez remarks on the "heartrending tragedy of the Puerto Rican soldier in the Korean War where he suffers not only abandonment, nostalgia and prejudice, but also where his race and his culture are depreciated and rejected" (256-7). For the young Caucasian officers sitting somewhere far from the war, removing the names of a dozen men of color from their database and dispatching the necessary messages and death benefits to a dozen families is just another day at the office—the loss of the young lives of Puerto Rican soldiers who have a family and dreams for the future means nothing to them.

The protagonist's feeling of anger and powerlessness at the military's sacrifice of so many of his compatriots is echoed in other stories in Díaz Valcárcel's collection, specifically "La sangre inútil," as mentioned previously, where the dying Puerto Rican veteran wonders why so many of his comrades had to die defending a worthless hill

¹⁹⁰ "The death of a dozen men mattered little. One would just have to cross out a dozen numbers, send out a dozen telegrams, a dozen lead boxes and a dozen checks."

(referring to Kelly Hill). The disproportionate loss of Puerto Rican lives in the Korean War that is represented in *Proceso* is not exaggerated by the author, but is truly reflective of the lived experiences of these soldiers. In the aforementioned documentary *The Borinqueneers*, an unnamed Korean War veteran from the 65th infantry recalls the day of the Battle at Kelly Hill, “Nos estaban llevando a una masacre. Y por eso yo me negué.”¹⁹¹ These soldiers were painfully aware that they were, in effect, being led to the slaughter. Even the Puerto Rican Congress, which had been wholeheartedly supportive of Puerto Ricans’ contributions to the war during the first two years of the conflict, demanded an investigation into what they called the “unfair, abusive and discriminatory practices” of which Puerto Rican troops in Korea had been victims (cited in Figueuroa-Soulet 3). Addressed to the Governor of Puerto Rico and dated January 27, 1953, this joint congressional declaration published in *El Mundo* condemned the U.S. military for practices including forcing Puerto Rican soldiers to remain “at the front lines, without relief, for a longer period than required by military regulations,” as well as for assigning them “the most dangerous missions and a higher number of combat missions than assigned to other units, with the result that the Puerto Rican casualties exceed in proportion to the 48 States of the Union” (cited in Figueuroa-Soulet 3). The perception of Puerto Rican bodies as less valuable and thus expendable is inextricably linked to the anecdote of the order for all those of the 65th to shave their mustaches. As already stated, the new commander rendered Puerto Rican soldiers as less than men by giving this order, commanding them to essentially prove their worth as soldiers and human beings in order to *earn* their manhood.

¹⁹¹ “They were leading us into a massacre. That is why I refused.”

A Metaphorical Castration: Loss of Mustache Equals Loss of Manhood

As has been demonstrated above, “Proceso” is a complex text with multiple levels of meaning that can be interpreted in diverse ways. The main anecdote of the story, however, remains the focal point of the narrative, and Rodríguez’s decision to finally shave off his mustache brings the story to a close. Immediately upon Rodríguez’s return from Japan where he had met his lover Katzuko—a character who is in direct contrast with Marjorie’s antagonistic role—he is ordered to shave off his mustache. Rodríguez had worn the mustache—which most everyone in his unit, and in the entire regiment, had worn as a source of masculine pride and a sign of Puerto Rican identity—since his adolescence, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. In the story, Rodríguez recalls his grandfather: “Había sido un tratante de ganado toda su vida y mamá contaba que fue hombre recto y de palabra, que un pelo de su bigote entregado por él para cerrar un compromiso, valía más que uno de esos contratos de hoy con sellos y firmas de abogados” (33).¹⁹² Rodríguez’s objection to shaving his mustache begins as a matter of principle and pride, as his attempt to uphold a tradition that symbolized the honor and rectitude of his family name. Yet his defiance also becomes a form of resistance to the hegemony of the U.S. military and to the phenomenon of U.S. imperialism. This resistance does not last long, however, and it quickly turns into resignation and defeat by the end of the narrative.

Yet, the protagonist’s ultimate submission to the colonel’s order to shave his mustache is not that simple. By the time his appointment with the highest in command

¹⁹² “He had been a livestock dealer all of his life and mom used to say that he was an honorable man, a man of his word, that a hair of his mustache delivered by him to close an agreement was more valuable than one of those contracts today with stamps and lawyer’s signatures.”

comes around at 2pm in the afternoon, Rodríguez is physically ill from the salmon he ate at lunch—a food that never sits well with him. As he stands in front of his regiment’s entire chain of command and is reprimanded by the colonel, the protagonist is barely able to remain upright, and the issue of the mustache is no longer his primary concern. “La pieza daba vueltas ante mis ojos, y un golpe de náusea me subió a la garganta... Las rodillas me flaqueaban como si hubiesen sido de goma” (53).¹⁹³ He maintains his composure for a few moments longer however, responding defensively to the officer’s question about his lack of cooperation with the Red Cross regarding his wife’s improper actions back home. Rodríguez thinks to himself, “sin duda el ejército era una organización eficiente, con un sistema de información perfectamente ajustado a sus necesidades” (53).¹⁹⁴ In this concluding scene, the protagonist finally begins to see the military institution as a finely oiled machine ruthless in nature that only performs the actions that meet its needs at a certain moment, with no attention to the effect it has on the grunts working for the system.

This dehumanization of the soldier to a mere possession of the armed forces is reinforced by the colonel’s statement to Rodríguez that as a soldier, “era una unidad militar que pertenecía a una unidad llamada escuadra, la que pertenecía... al ejército norteamericano. Lo personal, concluyó fríamente, quedaba de este modo abolido” (53).¹⁹⁵ He has no will, the colonel concludes, because he is no longer an individual, but rather a mere cog within this all-powerful North American institution. Rodríguez’s mental

¹⁹³ “The room spun in front of my eyes, and a feeling of nausea crept up my throat... My knees were giving way on me as if they were made of rubber.”

¹⁹⁴ “the army was without a doubt an efficient organization, with an information system perfectly adjusted to its needs.”

¹⁹⁵ “was a military unit that belonged to a body known as a platoon, which belonged to... the North American army. The personal, he concluded coldly, was therefore completely abolished.”

processing of the official's patronizing words follows the reader's mental process as he/she connects the dots along with the protagonist, and here we see once again not just a criticism of the discrimination against Puerto Ricans in the war, but a denunciation of the military institution and the ideology of imperialism in general.

As Rodríguez's defiance of the commander's order is dragged out and his determination seems to strengthen, he grows in stature in the eyes of his fellow countrymen. By the afternoon of the day of the process, he has been hailed as a sort of champion by the Puerto Rican troops. "En general, los muchachos se portaron muy amables conmigo, y me cedieron un puesto avanzado en la fila... Me sentí importante, y sé que para muchos era yo una especie de atormentado héroe" (46).¹⁹⁶ The figure of the tortured hero, or afflicted individual, is a characteristic trope of much of Díaz Valcárcel's writing, as he himself recognizes. The author describes the protagonists in many of his works—including *Proceso*—as "personajes torturados, problemáticos"¹⁹⁷ who he sees as "la expresión de estructuras de pensamiento propias de la sociedad colonizada" (quoted in *Panico* 173).¹⁹⁸ Thus, while Rodríguez might assume the role of the hero temporarily in the narrative, he cannot escape the tormented nature of his heroism—by deliberately defying military orders, he embodies the perpetually subordinated figure of the colonized stepping out in opposition of the colonizer. There is no avoiding this affliction—this "psychology of the colonized," to quote Fanon—it is a mindset that has become engrained in his psyche. Tortured or not, his countrymen—so eager for some sort of role model to give them renewed hope—now look up to him, and in order to maintain that

¹⁹⁶ "In general, the guys were very nice to me, and [at lunchtime] they let me cut to get towards the front of the line... I felt important, I know that for many of them, I was a sort of troubled hero."

¹⁹⁷ "tortured, problematic characters."

¹⁹⁸ "The expression of the very structures of thought of a colonized society."

heroic status he must continue in his resistance of the commander's order. Thus, Rodríguez's final actions in the story lead to the disillusionment of his Puerto Rican comrades, causing his fall from grace in their eyes.

As the colonel holds out his own shaving knife to Rodríguez, he finally takes it, "sin tener apenas conciencia de [sus] actos" (54).¹⁹⁹ Ushered into the high commander's private bathroom, the protagonist contemplates himself in the mirror out of a weakened stupor, imagining that his Japanese lover Katzuko is there giving him a kiss on the cheek and calling him "borracho" [drunk]. Describing the process, Rodríguez recalls, "De un golpe eché abajo un lado del bigote... Concluí la operación lo mejor que pude, y cuando me contemplé para ver el resultado final, la vergüenza me golpeó el rostro como un puño. Dejé la navaja sobre el lavamanos, entre un montón de pelos donde se iba mi orgullo, y regresé con paso inseguro al despacho" (55).²⁰⁰ The shame upon surrendering his pride to the will of the military seizes the protagonist immediately. As he walks back to his tent, Rodríguez collapses on all fours and vomits onto the snow-covered ground. While it is unclear whether it was more his sickness or a lack of resolve that caused him to submit to the order, in the end the reason does not matter, it is the action itself that is important. Clearly, the shaving of Rodríguez's mustache is a symbolic act, and Emilio González sees the protagonist's ensuing nausea and vomiting as "revealing his interior repugnance" at himself (61). But the protagonist's lowest moment comes upon his return to his platoon wearing a clean-shaven face. Tumbling onto his cot, he is initially unable to confront the men who had held him in such esteem, but when he opens his eyes and gives them a

¹⁹⁹ "barely conscious of his actions."

²⁰⁰ "With one movement, I shaved off one side of the mustache... I finished the operation as best as I could, and when I contemplated myself to see the final result, the shame hit my face like a fist. I left the blade on the sink, among a pile of hairs together with my pride, and returned with unsteady steps to the office."

timid smile, Rodríguez recalls, “no encontré solidaridad en aquellos rostros” (“Proceso” 57).²⁰¹ Not only has he let himself down, but he has also disappointed his fellow countrymen who had seen in him a spark of individuality, and a man representative of the pride and virility of Puerto Rican men.

It is clear that on the emotional level, there are two conflicting stances being portrayed in the narrative: resistance and resignation. While Hernández Hernández identifies a *binomial* of resistance and resignation in “Proceso,” I view the relationship more as a *dichotomy* between these two opposing concepts, both of which are embodied in the protagonist’s contradictory actions in the text. Although his initial resistance to the order to shave his mustache makes him a hero in the eyes of his fellow soldiers, Rodríguez’s ultimate resignation reflects that of the Puerto Rican people—and indeed of any colonized people—towards the seemingly unstoppable force of U.S. imperialism. Díaz Valcárcel sees this submission embodied in the patriotism towards the United States that is manifested by a large sector of the Puerto Rican population. “Si usted hubiera visto la celebración en Puerto Rico del bicentenario de la independencia de Estados Unidos... vimos por la televisión muchos jibaritos disfrazados de *Minutemen* tropicales, sudando bajo el sol caribe” (quoted in Panico 173).²⁰² This unabashed emulation of the North American revolutionaries virtually negates Puerto Rico’s entire history of colonization by the U.S., completely ignoring, or covering up, the fact that a little more than a century after the American Revolution, it was members of that same militia (whose uniforms the *jibaros* wore at the celebration) that invaded the island of Puerto Rico. As Fanon

²⁰¹ “I did not find solidarity in those faces.”

²⁰² “If you had only seen the celebration of the Bicentennial of U.S. independence in Puerto Rico... we watched it on television and saw so many *jibaritos* (rural, working-class Puerto Ricans) dressed up as tropical minutemen, sweating beneath the Caribbean sun.”

explains, many colonized people find it easier to embrace the dominant culture and assimilate into it than to actively resist it. While the reasons behind Rodríguez's ultimate resignation are perhaps much more pragmatic, likely aimed at saving face in the military in order to return to his family a free man rather than getting locked up or dishonorably discharged, there is no doubt that the protagonist embodies the conflicted reality of the colonized Puerto Rican people.

Rodríguez's character draws perhaps even more empathy from the reader than other protagonists in the collection *Proceso* because of his positioning as a fallen hero in the eyes of his fellow countrymen. While the castration of the protagonist in "El regreso" may be literal, Rodríguez's metaphorical castration is compounded by the profound disillusionment and deception of his fellow soldiers when he returns to his platoon. His internal disgust manifested earlier in the story through his physical sickness and vomiting is reflected in the revulsion painted on the face of a member of his platoon as he violently kicks the cot upon which Rodríguez rests before running out of the tent, appearing to sob as he exits. As the story concludes, an idea comes to the protagonist suddenly, "era como un hombre castrado; como yo, todos aquellos muchachos habían sido castrados" (57).²⁰³ If the mustache is a symbol for virility, then shaving off the mustache is the equivalent of castration. Emilio González posits that in "Proceso," the "mustache becomes a powerful symbol of a man's integrity," both physically and morally, relating it to the heightened sense of masculinity that reigns during wartime (58). "By exalting manly courage as a core value, war makes men very conscious of their virility," acknowledges Emilio González, explaining that manliness is frequently threatened on the battlefield (58). As

²⁰³ "I was like a castrated man; like me, all of those guys had been castrated."

such, he continues, “The fear of impotence, which translates to cowardice in the theater of war, plagues the soldier. One must prove that he has balls. The castrated individual stops being a man” (59-60). Thus, it appears that in the end, the 65th Infantry commander achieved his goal of rendering the Puerto Rican soldiers—even those like Rodríguez who originally resisted the order—less than men, infantilizing them as inferior to the North American troops alongside whom they fought. This group of minority ethnic soldiers, shamed by the U.S. military after the tragedies of Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights, are figuratively castrated—just like the island of Puerto Rico was rendered impotent first by Spain and then by the United States—by taking away that which is most valuable to them: their freedom.

The Role of Patriarchy in the Structure of Recognition

In “Proceso” and several other stories from the same collection, Díaz Valcárcel presents the structure of recognition—a minority ethnic soldier’s recognition of their own culture and circumstances in that of the local community—as inextricably tied to patriarchy. The role of gender within this phenomenon has yet to be explored by other scholars, and it is indeed possible that this connection is unique to the writing of Díaz Valcárcel.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, it warrants further exploration, particularly because of how the performance of traditional gender roles through the structure of recognition in these narratives reinforces the masculinity of the very men whose own virility is threatened by a castrating (neo)colonial power. This phenomenon is most apparent in “Proceso” and the aforementioned story from the same collection, “Andrés.” Through Díaz Valcárcel’s

²⁰⁴ While I did discuss the structure of recognition in my analysis of José Luis González’s “El arbusto en llamas” in Chapter One, I did not relate it specifically to patriarchal gender roles, since in that case the recognition was between men.

careful construction of the relationships between Puerto Rican and East Asian female characters, the author subtly suggests that female gender facilitates the expression of identification across cultures, especially in the theater of war. For the protagonists of the two aforementioned stories, this identification is formed through their relationship with an Asian lover. Since both Asian women are at least tangentially associated with prostitution, the relationship between the local “loose” woman and the foreign soldier (regardless of ethnicity or race) is already unequal. The soldier has the money and thus the power, while the Asian woman is supposedly “indebted” to the male figure for his financial assistance. This positions the characters of Andrés and Rodríguez in the role of man as protector. It becomes clear upon an analysis of this phenomenon in both narratives that patriarchal gender norms complicate the solidarity suggested by the concept of the structure of recognition, often doing so in contradictory and problematic ways.

In “Proceso,” Rodríguez’s relationship with the elusive character of Katzuko is reflective of this reaffirmation of patriarchal gender roles. The reader is never fully privy to the details of the protagonist’s relationship with Katzuko—her story comes to us in bits and pieces through Rodríguez’s fragmented memories and dreams that conjure up her presence throughout the narrative. The little concrete information provided to the reader is that Katzuko is a Japanese woman who was Rodríguez’s lover for at least a short period of time, of whom he has fond memories and for whom he truly seems to care. It is insinuated that the two met during his time on leave in Osaka, Japan, and that Katzuko may have been a prostitute. Similar to the story “Andrés,” the protagonist of “Proceso” seems to have fallen for a young attractive local woman who makes a living by

“entertaining” the military men who visit her hometown. In “Proceso,” Rodríguez develops deeper feelings for Katzuko, and while he may have his suspicions, he is unwilling to entertain the idea that his lover may be seeing other men simultaneously. For the most part, Rodríguez is content with the fond memories he has of the time they shared together, and these recollections help him get through the hardships of life in the trenches. As Emilio González explains, “the [soldier’s] hunger for love continues, and whether in the trenches or in camp, it can only be satisfied vicariously through evocation or fantasy” (60). For Rodríguez, memories of his time with Katzuko seem to suffice during the cold solitary nights in his platoon’s tent. In addition to memories, the protagonist has held onto several keepsakes, including “los retratos en que aparecía Katzuko en una mesa detrás de una soda, o ante un jardincito con un puente de escala, o junto a una canasta de crisantemos con un dedo en la mejilla,”²⁰⁵ but he still worries, “que a esa hora me habría encontrado sustituto” (“Proceso” 15).²⁰⁶ This hint of suspicion or jealousy in Rodríguez’s comment alludes to his self-perception as Katzuko’s protector.

Rodríguez’s infatuation with Katzuko evokes a feeling of tenderness that is compounded by her small physical stature. “Me asombró su cuerpecito de fina loza oriental, su extraordinaria ternura y el mágico ritmo de sus caderas” (47).²⁰⁷ The protagonist’s emotional infatuation with and sexual attraction to his lover seem inextricably intertwined here, yet it is the emotive that ultimately wins out over carnal desire, hence Rodríguez’s wish to take care of Katzuko not just in the moment, but also in

²⁰⁵ “portraits where Katzuko appeared at a table behind a soda, or in front of a little garden with a bridge of the same size, or next to a basket of chrysanthemums with a finger on her cheek.”

²⁰⁶ “that by now she might have already found a substitute for me.”

²⁰⁷ “Her fragile body of fine china astounded me, her extraordinary tenderness and the magical rhythm of her hips.”

the future. He recalls the conversation he had with her towards the end of his stay in Osaka: “‘Tengo que volver a la maldita guerra, Katzuko. Espérame. De aquí a seis meses...’” (47).²⁰⁸ Díaz Valcárcel’s use of ellipses implies silence and things that are left unsaid: in sixth months’ time he would be sent home from Korea, and maybe then they could have a real relationship. Yet the ellipses also imply the impossibility of those unspoken thoughts—it was possible that Katzuko would no longer be interested in him, that they would not feel the same way about each other by the time sixth months had passed, or that she would have already found someone else. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s desire to take care of Katzuko in the long term reflects the traditional role of the male patriarch whose duty it is to watch over the supposedly weak, vulnerable woman—be it his wife, lover, sister or mother.

Both “Proceso” and “Andrés” clearly raise the issue of women’s position in the war, gesturing to the central role that prostitution plays in a war zone. Patriarchal gender norms are reinforced time and again by the age-old relationship between male client and female prostitute—the dominant man who takes out his sexual urges on the supposedly inferior sex worker, a woman who is regarded as more of a sexual object than a human being. While Rodríguez and Andrés do not completely play into this stereotypical dynamic, those around them are quick to reassert their manhood by ridiculing the local prostitutes. Andrés’ comrades poke fun at him constantly for falling in love with a prostitute: “No molesten, muchachos... se la lleva a ‘Puertorro.’ –Se la llevará –dijo el primero que había hablado—. Allá sabrá lo que es putear” (“Andrés” 153).²⁰⁹ While

²⁰⁸ “I have to go back to the damn war, Katzuko. Wait for me. Sixth months from now...”

²⁰⁹ “Don’t bother him, guys... he’s taking her to ‘Puertorro’ [Puerto Rico]. –He’ll take her there all right – said the one who had spoken first—. Over there she’ll really learn what it means to be a whore.”

Andrés is willing to overlook what Taina has had to do to survive economically, the others in his unit are quick to condemn her for being “una puta” [a whore].

In the narrative “Andrés,” language further strengthens the bond between Taina and the protagonist. Díaz Valcárcel’s inclusion of Korean words and phrases throughout the story also reveals another reality of being at war in a foreign land: soldiers often become familiar with the native language, at least learning certain phrases in order to communicate with locals. With Andrés, his ability to translate some of his ideas into Korean helps to solidify his relationship with Taina, enabling them to understand each other more clearly, and even to joke and sing songs together. While many soldiers may have discarded the South Korean culture as inferior, the protagonist in this narrative demonstrates a certain level of cultural appreciation and understanding that deepens his bond with another marginalized individual, Taina.

In another scene in “Andrés,” the protagonist explains his racial makeup to his lover, stating that his father was white and his mother was black. In reply, Taina shrugs her shoulders and states, “—*Tayobo. Black, White, the same,*” to which Andrés replies, “—*Your country, my country, the same... Your People, my people, the same*” (“Andrés” 150). The two characters privilege their commonalities over their differences, and Taina makes it clear that for her, race is not an issue. Yet, Díaz Valcárcel’s direct reference to race is not casual—more than just illustrating the structure of recognition, Andrés’ awareness of his racial difference highlights the process of racial othering he experiences within the U.S. military. While race may not be the main theme in the collection, it is

always subtly present,²¹⁰ just as that racial difference is always in the back of the mind of every Puerto Rican soldier—an outsider within the ranks of the U.S. military—whose racial and cultural otherness is constantly thrown in his face by Caucasian soldiers and officers. Both Andrés and Rodríguez’s strong cultural understanding of the local people in East Asia stems from a shared experience of colonization, and their ability to recognize in the other the same attitude of resignation and submissiveness they identify in themselves as colonized people.

Dominant patriarchal norms are immediately apparent in Andrés’ identification with Taina, coming across in a more direct manner than in “Proceso.” It is clear that Andrés is more overtly overprotective of Taina than Rodríguez is of Katzuko. Andrés makes it clear that as his lover/girlfriend, Taina is essentially his property. “Tú –dijo él–. ¿Con quién? –La muchacha sacudió la cabeza. –Nadie –respondió, bajando la vista. Andrés le alzó la barbilla. –¿Nadie? –preguntó–. ¿*You sure?* –Con la vista baja volvió a sacudir la cabeza. –Nadie– repitió” (Andrés 149).²¹¹ While the protagonist and his lover may identify with each other on certain levels, Andrés makes it crystal clear that he is the one in charge, clearly intimidating Taina with his jealous distrusting behavior. Thus the patriarchal element in the structure of recognition plays out in seemingly contradictory ways in Díaz Valcárcel’s short story collection, sometimes reflecting a more benevolent tenderness and concern for the local female as we see in “Proceso,” while at other times

²¹⁰ In “Proceso en diciembre,” the protagonist’s Caucasian wife makes jokes at his expense about his skin color and his mustache. The soldiers in “La evasión” joke about what the Chinese do to black soldiers that they capture alive, insinuating that those with darker skin receive more cruel treatment than do white soldiers. Díaz Valcárcel’s sensitivity to the mixed racial background of Puerto Ricans reflects an understanding of the complexities of race that is also present in the work of José Luis González.

²¹¹ “You –he said–. With who? –The girl shook her head. –No one– —she replied, lowering her eyes. Andrés tilted her chin up. –No one? –he asked–. *You sure?* –With her eyes cast downward she shook her head again. –No one –she repeated.”

exhibiting a controlling form of subordination that could in some ways be interpreted as parallel to the subordination experienced by Andrés and other Puerto Rican soldiers in the U.S. military. This male impulse to unload one's own sense of shame and impotence at being belittled and mistreated onto someone else is played out in "Proceso" not against the Asian lover, but rather against Rodríguez's antagonistic wife Marjorie, as discussed previously.

Rodríguez's memories of his lover in "Proceso" allow him to escape—however briefly—from the hell of both war and marriage. It is clear that for Rodríguez, Katzuko is the counterpoint to Marjorie's negative presence in his life, and he treasures the difference between the two women greatly. "Por un momento una carita achatada se enfrentó al rostro blanquísimo de Marjorie, y tuve que hacer un esfuerzo para no establecer comparaciones. No quería manchar el recuerdo de Katzuko" (22).²¹² The image of Katzuko's face appears in contrast to Marjorie's white face in the protagonist's mind, muddling the strong contradicting emotions he has for each woman. The opposition established between the characters of Katzuko and Marjorie in the text appears to serve the narrative purpose of further emphasizing the antagonistic relationship between Rodríguez and Marjorie, which is figuratively representative of Puerto Rico-U.S. relations. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that, as a prostitute (most likely), Katzuko sought to gain something from her relationship with the protagonist—money, perhaps a more secure future—just as Marjorie did, both women playing similar roles of entertaining servicemen; the only difference being the location and the culture

²¹² "For a moment a small flattened face confronted Marjorie's extremely white face, and I had to make a big effort not to make any comparisons. I did not want to tarnish my memory of Katzuko."

within which that entertainment takes place. While the reader may be aware of this coincidence, however, Rodríguez is blind to it. It is through his relationship with Katzuko that the protagonist realizes that there are better alternatives that interest him more than perpetuating a marriage founded on greed and animosity. The relationship between a Puerto Rican man and a Japanese woman could also stand in for another solidarity-based connection between “colonized” people due to the fact that Japan has been largely subordinated to North American influence since the end of World War II. Reading the text in this way, Díaz Valcárcel appears to allude to the similar experiences of colonization and imperialism experienced by all three states—Korea, Puerto Rico and Japan. The bloody history of Japan’s invasion of Korea complicates this parallel, however, since Japan can be seen as an imperial power in its own right. This complication, and the complex representation of Katzuko as the object of Rodríguez’s affection but also as a sex worker (potentially) benefitting economically from her relationship with the protagonist, illustrates the fact that nothing is as simple as it seems in this narrative, or in the theater of war in general.

After establishing the connection between Puerto Ricans and Koreans early in “Proceso” when the protagonist realizes their shared character of meekness and resignation, Rodríguez experiences a sense of solidarity with other Korean locals. “Saludé en solidaridad a la viejecita que cruzaba a mi lado con una enorme canasta sobre las espaldas” (29-30).²¹³ The scene of an old woman laboring away with her enormous basket evokes a tender sense of recognition in the protagonist, as if that woman could be his mother or grandmother. Once again, the almost instinctual desire to protect the local

²¹³ “I greeted with solidarity the little old woman who crossed next to me with a huge basket on her back.”

women with whom the Puerto Rican soldiers identify exemplifies the perpetuation of the patriarchal gender roles upon which Puerto Rico's dominant Catholic society is founded. Yet on another level, Rodríguez's protective instinct can be interpreted as his urge to protect the vulnerable members (the elderly, women) of a marginalized community from the U.S.'s oppressive imperialist power. Whether that oppression is carried out against the people of Puerto Rico or Korea, Rodríguez's resentment against the imperialist system is equally vehement. The cross-cultural solidarity exemplified by Rodríguez and Andrés translates into another subtle form of resistance that they each carry out within the U.S. military. For Rodríguez in particular, the small decisions he makes—like greeting a local or defying orders to shave a mustache—may seem insignificant and even ridiculous to a North American military officer, but for Rodríguez they help him maintain his sanity, sense of identity and pride throughout his time in Korea.

Conclusion

As the most complex and well-developed narrative in the book, "Proceso" goes beyond a critique of the experience of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War to convey a strong anti-imperialist message that comes through loud and clear throughout the text. The story accentuates Díaz Valcárcel's pacifist, anti-imperialist ideology, reiterating it for the reader in case it had not been made clear already in the other narratives. The author's decision to focus on the anecdote of the order for soldiers to shave their mustaches remains the focal point throughout the text. As Cortázar notes, in fictional narrative, "a good theme attracts an entire system of connected relations, and a countless number of notions, visions, feelings and even ideas that float virtually in their memory or sensibility are brought together by the author, and later by the reader" (5). These connected relations

include the issues of castration (and manliness), neo-colonialism, antagonistic relations between Puerto Rican and North American servicemen, the metaphorical significance of the protagonist's marriage, and the role of patriarchy in the structure of recognition.

Like the rest of the stories in the collection, "Proceso" ends on a negative note, conveying a profound sense of disillusionment and perhaps also despair at the future of a people who continue to be subjected to the oppressive power of imperialism. The issues examined in *Proceso* are not resolved because Díaz Valcárcel sees no immediate resolution for them; just as there is no closure for the protagonists of his stories, there is little closure for the reader either. As Jameson recognizes, a literary text does not function to *resolve* situations or contradictions, but rather to *embody* them in order to draw attention to a reality or history that would otherwise be inaccessible or invisible to the reader. Thus:

The literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction... One does not have to argue the reality of history... [it] is *not* a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form. (Jameson 41, emphasis in the original)

By representing the historical reality of the Puerto Rican's experience in the Korean War, Díaz Valcárcel makes that experience accessible to his readers, eliciting a reaction from them at the same time that the text is reacting to that phenomenon of oppression and discrimination. Thus, the text and the reader perform the work *simultaneously* to generate a more profound awareness of the problematic issues and tensions that exist in the real world—issues like the historical discrimination against minority ethnic soldiers in the U.S. military. As the protagonist of "Proceso" states in the last line, "sabía que esa noche

no podría dormir” (58).²¹⁴ The protagonist, the author, and the reader are all left sleepless and preoccupied with the grim conclusions of such a poignant and heart-wrenching text as “Proceso en diciembre.”

A Closer Look at the Screenplay “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte”

In this section, I examine Díaz Valcárcel’s screenplay “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte” to further reflect on the thematic centrality of the Korean War within the author’s larger body of work. After a brief period of study at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) following his release from the military and return to the island in 1953, Díaz Valcárcel returned to his writing with renewed vigor, encouraged by Jose Luis González and other UPR professors of literature (Marqués 241).²¹⁵ As he returned to his own literary production, Díaz Valcárcel was also forced (for financial reasons) to seek employment with many other artists and writers of his generation in the Division of Community Education in Puerto Rico’s Department of Education, where he worked alongside intellectuals including Pedro Juan Soto and René Marqués from 1955 to 1969 (Casanova-Sánchez 239).²¹⁶ Part of Díaz Valcárcel’s job at the Division of Community Education was to write screenplays for short films, produced by another division in the Department

²¹⁴ “I knew that I would not be able to sleep that night.”

²¹⁵ Díaz Valcárcel spent the year of 1954 studying literature at UPR. He saw his entrance into the university as the best opportunity to rectify the U.S. army’s affront at sending him to a war that violated his personal beliefs (See p. 17 of his memoir *Los mundos* for a more detailed discussion of this period in his life). However, his first encounter with academia proved frustrating and disillusioning to a young Díaz Valcárcel who was turned off by the United States’ strong influence on the university and its politics, and he thus abandoned his studies shortly thereafter. The author would complete his undergraduate studies decades later upon his return to the island in the mid 1970s, and he went on to become a respected Professor of Language and Literature at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), where he taught for nearly twenty years until his retirement from the university in 1995.

²¹⁶ In his memoir, the author recalls, “Era un ambiente abierto a la efervescencia de la creatividad, al diálogo con frecuencia de quienes buscan un modo de expresión” [It was an environment open to the effervescence of creativity, and to frequent dialogue with those who are in search of a way to express themselves]²¹⁶ (*Los mundos* 32). Through interviews and his own reflections in his memoir, the author has made it clear that this period of coexistence with his contemporaries had a significant impact on him and that it contributed directly to his growth as a writer.

of Education, and broadcast on the local government television network, WIPR-TV.²¹⁷ “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte” is one of the screenplays that Díaz Valcárcel wrote for a made-for-television movie during his state employment. The short film was directed by Angel F. Rivera and aired on the Puerto Rican national television network in 1958. To my knowledge, there is no extant critical scholarship on the screenplay; it is generally listed as part of Díaz Valcárcel’s bibliography, but there is yet to be an in-depth analysis focusing on the work. The screenplay did gain the attention of the Puerto Rican public, however, earning local acclaim following the film’s initial television broadcast on the island.²¹⁸ The goal of this section, therefore, is to examine the screenplay in detail and place it in dialogue with the author’s other work on the experience of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War, thus contributing new scholarship to the existing literature on the work of Díaz Valcárcel.

“Una sola puerta hacia la muerte”²¹⁹ is significant because it is the only work of this genre written by Díaz Valcárcel that remains available to the public to this day.

While the author wrote other screenplays during his time working for the Division of Community Education, it appears that “Una sola puerta” is the only one to have made it into the archive.²²⁰ The text differs from Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories on the war in the fact that it was written as an “educational” film with the express purpose of further

²¹⁷ Not all of his screenplays saw the light of day, however, as many ended up being rejected by those in charge of television content. They often found the screenplays written by Díaz Valcárcel and his colleagues to be inappropriate or irrelevant to the general Puerto Rican public.²¹⁷ It is noteworthy, therefore, that Díaz Valcárcel’s 1957 screenplay “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte” made it through production—under the direction of Ángel F. Rivera—and was broadcast in 1958.

²¹⁸ In his biography of Díaz Valcárcel, J. R. Fernández de Cano writes, “*Una sola puerta hacia la muerte* [is] a drama that captivated the Puerto Rican critics and public, especially after its broadcast on national television screens” (Fernández de Cano 1).

²¹⁹ From here forward, I will refer to the text as “Una sola puerta.”

²²⁰ The original written screenplay is available online through the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Plata Humanities’ Department website.

informing the Puerto Rican public about the boricua soldier's reality in Korea—of which the general Puerto Rican public was already well aware due to the mass court martial of soldiers of the 65th that occurred in late 1952 and which received extensive media coverage on the island. The screenplay genre also allowed Díaz Valcárcel to bring to life a specific encounter between Puerto Rican soldiers in the combat zone in Korea through staging, the actors' gestures and delivery of lines, and the interaction between the characters. The unique contribution of this alternative form of cultural production to Díaz Valcárcel's larger body of fictional work on Puerto Ricans in the Korean War enables us to arrive at a deeper understanding of the author's positionality in relation to his writing on the war. This text also contributes to the further expansion of the scholarly archive on U.S. Latino military participation in this war, given that it currently lies at the margins of the archive and has not received attention outside of the island of Puerto Rico.

Thinking about “Una sola puerta” in the context of the screenplay or theater genre, what immediately comes to mind is Bertolt Brecht's later conception of “dialectical theater” (which marked a transformation from his earlier notion of “epic theater”). By moving away from the notion of epic narratives, Brecht's aesthetic proposed “an unorthodox, anti-idealist dialectic, presenting incitement and provocation instead of positive social models” (Carney 153). His later dramaturgy held as its objective “to awaken and stimulate awareness of contradiction” (154). This dialectical approach to theater clearly speaks to Jameson's concept of the socially symbolic act, yet it examines this act within the specific realm of theater. A central component of this dramaturgical approach hinges on the self-reflective text—a drama or performance that makes the audience aware that what they are watching is a *representation*, thus actively engaging

the spectator and motivating him or her to *think* about what is being represented to them. To this end, as Jameson explains, Brecht insisted on “showing the audience that any number of other versions of... gestures and reactions might have been possible in other frames and other situations” (“Persistencies of the Dialectic,” 128). By presenting a perhaps more controversial take on an issue or incident, the playwright is alluding to a “what if?” The representation of the unconventional automatically prompts the audience to think about the conventional representations of an issue, and thus to consider phenomena from more than one angle.

This unconventional form of representation is related to Victor Shklovsky’s notion of defamiliarization, a literary approach through which writers employ a rhetorical device in a new, unexpected way. Uri Margolin explains, “with defamiliarization come both the slowing down and the increased difficulty (impeding) of the process of reading and comprehending and an awareness of the artistic procedures (devices) causing them” (815). This awareness on the part of the audience/reader of the devices at work in a cultural text and of the process of representation in progress is thus a necessary component of Brecht’s “dialectical theater.” In the case of Díaz Valcárcel’s screenplay, the medium of television is employed to represent the experience of war in a disruptive manner that challenges the discourses of heroism and patriotism that have traditionally been linked to cultural representations of war or battle. Referring to the “order” of familiar literary devices typically employed by authors, Shklovsky explains how defamiliarization necessitates a disruption of said order, “because we are dealing here not so much with a more complex rhythm as with a disruption of rhythm itself, a violation, we may add, that can never be predicted” (Shklovsky 14). If we interpret the “rhythm”

described here as the expected and normalized approaches to literary and artistic representation, then the disruption would be something that deviates from that familiar order. It is the unpredictability of this disruption that renders the defamiliarizing effect. “The conventionality of our perceptions is put into question,” writes Alan Wall, “We see the world afresh” (Wall 20). This approach, whether through theater or written prose, motivates an audience to wonder: What if the event were represented in another way instead? Brecht’s concept of a theater aimed at generating awareness and transformation through transparency could consequently be interpreted as a theatrical form of defamiliarization, an artistic process that can clearly be identified in Díaz Valcárcel’s screenplay.

My analysis of “Una sola puerta” draws from two different sources: Díaz Valcárcel’s written script for the television performance, and a recording of the short film that was aired on Puerto Rican national television. The actual film was directed by Angel Rivera, and thus the decisions regarding staging, interaction between actors and different cinematographic techniques will be attributed to Rivera instead of Díaz Valcárcel. There are four main characters in the narrative, all Puerto Rican soldiers who are members of the same platoon, and the entire plot takes place within the space of the military barracks, which in the case of the Korean War, was a tent. The narrative is set in 1954, on the eve of the reconstitution of the 65th Infantry as a result of the mass court martials related to Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights in late 1952. Upon reading the script or watching the film, it quickly becomes apparent that there was a specific purpose behind the chosen date. Setting the narrative in 1954 enables Díaz Valcárcel to reference Kelly Hill and the court martials directly, which strengthens his anti-imperialist and anti-U.S. military

message in the text. This particular date also illuminates the latent tensions and conflicts underlying the interactions between Puerto Rican soldiers in the war zone that are brought to the surface by the chaos, frustration and disillusionment generated by the tragic demise of the 65th Infantry. As such, the central theme of the screenplay is the internal divisions within the Puerto Rican community, and the fact that the United States' imperialist presence has generated the majority of these divisions. Thus, as the single setting for the play, the military tent functions as a microcosm for the Puerto Rican state in general, and the broad effects of U.S. imperialism on this colonized population.

The incident narrated in "Una sola puerta" is almost completely devoid of the elements that are usually present in a war movie. We do not see actual combat, we never get a glimpse of the enemy, we do not witness any scenes of death or dismemberment, nor is there any heroic action performed within the film. Those cliché elements are unnecessary and indeed superfluous for the self-contained microcosm constructed by the author in the screenplay. The four main characters, who are known only by their last name (as is typical in the military), include Orellana, a young father who was drafted into the war; Ortiz, another draftee, who is scheduled to return home the next day, having already completed his mandatory twelve-month rotation; Sánchez, a former National Guard who still has many months to serve in Korea; and Acosta, the only volunteer enlistee of the group, who plans on re-enlisting after the end of his first rotation. There is a fifth cot in the platoon's tent, and the audience discovers through allusions made by the characters later in the narrative that it belongs to a fallen comrade of theirs, who has already been dead for several months. The soldiers view the empty cot as a constant reminder of the very real threat of death that they must face every day. As Ortiz explains,

“durante semanas he estado presenciando ese catre como se presencia un ataúd... Ese catre me recuerda que aún soy joven, que tengo derecho a vivir una vida que ése no pudo vivir” (“Una sola puerta” 16).²²¹

The plot of the 28-minute short film revolves around the interactions and dialogue between the four protagonists, through which the numerous issues confronting Puerto Rican soldiers serving in the Korean War are illuminated. The setting is a sparse one, reflecting an attempt to portray the military tent in a war zone in an authentic manner through staging. There are five cots on a dirt floor, with clothes and blankets piled on the cots, and each soldier’s rifle resting near him. A small, stunted tree with naked branches lies in the foreground of the camera and serves to frame several different shots throughout the film. In black-and-white, the film presents a series of sequences that follow the interactions and movements of each soldier, adjusting the camera distance, angle and focus in a way that emphasizes the emotions that are playing out on the screen. The director, Rivera, employed frequent close-ups to convey intense moments in the interactions between the characters, as well as framing to direct the eye of the spectator to a certain image on the screen. These cinematographic elements, combined with the gestures, dialogue and facial expressions of the character, embody Díaz Valcárcel’s script visually, occasionally relying on improvisation and ad-libbing in order to represent the plot in the most natural and realistic manner.

The scene takes place in the evening time during a rest period for the platoon before they go on patrol duty that night. The majority of the film portrays the constant

²²¹ “For weeks I have witnessed that cot as one witnesses a coffin... That cot reminds me that I am still young, that I have the right to live a life that he could not live.”

bickering and animosity between the four soldiers, drawing attention to the issues that divide them, including social class and level of economic stability, opposing political views—essentially anti-U.S. or pro-U.S.—and their different methods of entry into the war, be it through mandatory conscription or volunteer enlistment. Halfway through the film, an unnamed soldier enters the tent to inform the men to be ready for duty in half an hour. All the soldiers except for Ortiz are expected to go – due to the fact that he is to go home the following day, it is standard military protocol that he will not be required to perform patrol duty the night prior to his departure. The climax of the film comes when the platoon’s sergeant enters the tent and commands Ortiz to prepare for duty also since they are short on personnel and need him to fill in, even though it goes against standard military procedure. Upon hearing the sergeant’s order, the other three soldiers are quick to put aside their differences and come to the aid of Ortiz, protesting the unjust nature of the officer’s command. “[Ortiz]—Pero sargento, usted sabe que hay un reglamento que... [Orellana]—Usted lo sabe sargento. Está prohibido mandar al frente a uno que se va de rotación” (17).²²² The sergeant’s response exemplifies the state of exception in place during wartime: “Estamos en la guerra, muchachos. Los reglamentos se siguen al pie de la letra sólo en tiempos de paz” (17).²²³

All four soldiers respond with antipathy to the sergeant’s comment, and do not back down very easily. Their protests and accusations reveal the level of frustration, exhaustion and deception of the platoon members. Responding to another statement by the sergeant suggesting that they needed to make an effort to show the others (it is

²²² “[Ortiz]—But sergeant, you know that there is a rule that... [Orellana]—You know, sergeant. It is prohibited to send a man to the front who is due to go on rotation.”

²²³ “We are at war, guys. The rules are followed to the ‘t’ only in peacetime.”

insinuated that he is referring to the North Americans in particular) that they can still fight hard, the soldiers recall Kelly Hill/Jackson Heights. “[Sanchez]—¿Pelear duro? ¿Para qué? Ya estamos desacreditados, sargento. De nada ha valido el esfuerzo del 65, de nada” (18).²²⁴ As if in defense of the 65th in response to Sanchez’s comment, Orellana interjects, “Estaban cansados. Los puertorriqueños estamos cansados. Muertes, muertes, y más muertes sin lograr nada, porque la gloria que ganamos es una gloria a medias” (18).²²⁵

It is clear through the soldiers’ statements that they are painfully aware both of the tragic fate of the companies of the 65th Infantry who fought at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights, and of the discriminatory treatment they have received as a result of that tragedy—an incident that only exacerbated the already subordinated position of Puerto Ricans within the U.S. military during that period. Orellana’s allusion to the countless deaths reflects his knowledge of the high number of Puerto Rican deaths and casualties in Korea, and his realization that his people are not gaining anything from their sacrifices. This awareness is also reflected in Díaz Valcárcel’s short stories “La sangre inútil” and “El asalto,” both of which were analyzed earlier in this chapter. The sergeant in “Una sola puerta” finally backs down under the pressure of the soldiers, agreeing to let Ortiz stay behind. The narrative ends with a reaffirmation of Puerto Rican solidarity when Ortiz decides that, in spite of his exemption from duty, he will join his comrades after all, in the ultimate gesture of camaraderie. His final action says more than any words could, and conveys a strong suggestion of the potential for community solidarity to overcome

²²⁴ “Fight hard? For what? We are already discredited, sergeant. The efforts of the 65th were worth nothing.”

²²⁵ “They were tired. Us Puerto Ricans are tired. Deaths, deaths, and more deaths without achieving anything, because the glory we gain is only partial.”

internal divisions and conflict. Thus, at heart, the narrative is about resolving the fraternal tensions within Puerto Rico—tensions that Díaz Valcárcel suggests are primarily caused by the imperialist influence of the U.S.

The unique impact of “Una sola puerta” is in its self-reflective nature as a theatrical production that forces the audience to work and think about the issues that are being played out so poignantly on their television screen. The mode of delivery of Díaz Valcárcel’s screenplay through television rather than within a theater provides one more level of removal between the actors and the spectators—or, in other words, between the gesture and the receptor. This spatial and temporal distance from the actors’ original performance of the screenplay thus further emphasizes the *representational* nature of the film, making the audience fully aware of their role as spectator and prompting them to reflect on the implications of the visual narrative on their reality and understanding of their community’s social and political circumstances. As Jameson explains, channeling Brecht: “mediation is thus not some strange and fluid event in the world: it characterizes the way our spectatorship and our praxis alike construct portions of the world with a view toward changing them” (“Persistencies of the Dialectic,” 130). Theater’s mediation between fiction and reality is reflective of the role of both the creator and spectator in the interrogation and potential transformation of their socio-political circumstances. While Díaz Valcárcel may not have had as an objective anything as radical as the elimination of the draft of Puerto Rican soldiers or a widespread protest of U.S. imperialism, his screenplay clearly had the motive of stimulating consciousness and prompting his audience to engage critically with the issues addressed in his text. As Brecht believed, drama or theater should be at the very least “an affirmation of perpetual change,” a

challenge to both spectator and creator to promote a productive transformation of their world (Carney 154). “Una sola puerta hacia la muerte” does just that.

Conclusion

Díaz Valcárcel’s extensive production on the Korean War explored in this chapter amounts to a condemning look at the reality of the Puerto Rican soldier – an outsider within, continuously stigmatized and oppressed as a minority in the military – and a powerful commentary on the larger destructive effects of U.S. imperialism, as well as the horrific nature of war in general. Hence, through my analysis presented here, we are able to perceive both the pacifist and anti-imperialist politics of the author coming through in his various texts, be they short stories, long-form narratives, autobiographies/memoirs, or screenplays. Díaz Valcárcel’s unique positionality as a Korean War veteran and intellectual enabled him to reflect critically and in very concrete ways on the particularity of the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. military. In some ways, his work echoes González’s own anti-imperialist stances, but Díaz Valcárcel furthers that anti-imperialist viewpoint in profound and provocative ways in his exploration of themes like gender, emasculation, and the complexity of inter-ethnic relations between minority ethnic soldiers and the local civilian community on the war front.

In Chapters Three and Four that follow, I enter into an in-depth examination of both the Korean and Vietnam War eras and the effect these military conflicts had on minority ethnic soldiers of diverse backgrounds, as well as their family members. This examination allows for the expansion of my analysis of the experience of minority ethnic soldiers in the U.S. military, which has focused solely on Puerto Rican soldiers up to this point, to include the experience of Chicano soldiers. This broader framework facilitates a

critical reflection on the heterogeneous experiences of minority ethnic soldiers, acknowledging the convergences and divergences, as well as the unique cultural and historical circumstances underlying the stories of Puerto Ricans, Chicanos and other Latinos who served in the U.S. Wars of East Asia.

CHAPTER THREE

“Cannon fodder is just good old Army chow”²²⁶: Problematizing the Chicano and Latino Experience in the Korean War

The notion of soldiers in the U.S. army as cannon fodder or “useless servants” is a recurring theme in much of the literature emerging from minority ethnic communities on the Korean War – the work of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in particular. While the death of soldiers is synonymous with war, there is a notable trend in the work of these authors to draw larger connections between the deaths of minority and working-class soldiers in the United States’ imperialist wars and other inequalities or oppressive forces at work in our increasingly globalized modern world as a product of neocolonialism, transnational corporations, and the institutionalized racism that seems ever-present within our society and U.S. government structure. Yet, some literary and artistic production on minorities in the Korean War falls outside of this critical perspective, assuming a point of view that instead reifies notions of U.S. nationalism and benevolence through rhetoric of military heroism and sacrifice. In the interest of capturing the range of perspectives on the experience and participation of minority ethnic soldiers in the Korean War, this chapter addresses film and literary works that assume varying stances on this theme.

In the following sections, I continue to push the limits of the scholarly archive by incorporating texts that have received very little scholarly attention – like the poetry of José Montoya – and other types of cultural representation that have yet to be analyzed at

²²⁶ Line from the poem “Boston John McReedy Drinks with Certain Lewd Men of the Baser Sort,” in *KLS* (24).

all, like Connor Timmis's documentary *Finnigan's War*. While Rolando Hinojosa's literature – also discussed in this chapter – has been the focus of some critical attention, in contrast, I posit that it is equally important to place his work in dialogue with that of other Chicana/o and Puerto Rican authors on the wars in East Asia, in order to continue broadening the scope of the fluid and ever-expanding archive on U.S. Latina/o military participation to which this dissertation strives to contribute. The discussion that follows therefore touches specifically on the literature and cultural production portraying the experience of Puerto Rican and Chicano soldiers in the Korean War. While these two groups are distinct and their backgrounds and circumstances vary widely, there are several significant points of commonality in the experiences they had within the Korean War (as well as the Vietnam War, which I discuss in Chapter Four). While discrimination/racism was one common experience for both Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, other equally significant phenomena were the sense of identification with the culture of the local civilian population, as well as a cultural pride that was bound up with ties that stretched beyond the boundaries of the United States.

Although much of the existing literature addressing the experience of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War has been examined in Chapters One and Two, there is surprisingly little literature depicting the Chicano soldier's experience in this war. Nevertheless, there are several notable exceptions to the lack of literary and artistic production by Chicanas/os addressing the Korean War experience. Among these is the prolific work of Mexicano-Chicano author and Korean War veteran Rolando Hinojosa who has published two books set in the Korean War, as well as the diverse production of the late Chicano poet José Montoya, a Korean War veteran who dedicated his life to

documenting the Chicano daily experience and penned several poems and a short story addressing his war experiences.²²⁷ The literature of these Chicano authors is discussed below. This chapter opens with a brief discussion of the single documentary to date that addresses the experience of different minority ethnic soldiers in the Korean War, *Finnigan's War* (2013). Following that analysis are two sections that address the literary representation of the Chicano experience in the Korean War, analyzing the work of Rolando Hinojosa and José Montoya, respectively. To enter into a more direct comparison of Puerto Rican and Chicano experience in this war, my analysis of these Chicano texts is placed in dialogue with the Puerto Rican works that were introduced in Chapters One and Two.

“Equal” Sacrifice and Heroism in *Finnigan’s War*: Connor Timmis’s Take on the Korean War

Despite the differing levels of each community’s criticism of the U.S. military’s discrimination of their soldiers at varying moments in history, the fact remains that both

²²⁷ José Cruz González’s short play “Salt and Pepper” (published in *Nine Plays by José Cruz González*, 2008) incorporates the death of a Chicano son in the Korean War into the plot, addressing the loss and grief felt by his family in this multi-generational drama written for young adults. Patricia Preciado Martin also published a short story titled “Amor de Madre: Mother’s Love” (2000) that, through letters, narrative, and prayer, addresses the horrors of the Korean War as witnessed by Chicano soldiers, as well as the war’s impact on the mothers of Chicano soldiers away fighting at war. Other Chicano and Mexican texts reference the Korean War in passing or have it as a backdrop to the central narrative. Among these are Tomas Rivera’s *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* which alludes to the Korean War as part of 1950s era (1971), *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (1996) by Arturo Islas, whose protagonist Louis Mendoza is a Korean War veteran; *The Hammon and the Beans* (1994) by Américo Paredes, which includes some stories set in the beginning days of the Korean War. Luis Valdez’s early Chicano theater includes at least one character who is a Chicano Korean War veteran. Beatriz de la Garza’s young adult novel *Pillars of Gold and Silver* (1997) features the plight of a Mexican American family after their husband and father is killed in the Korean War. A somewhat anomalous narrative written by a Mexican author about the Chicano experience is *Los motivos de Caín* by José Revueltas (1957), a novel that relates, among other themes, a Mexican American soldier’s experience as a prisoner of war during the Korean War and the unlikely friendship he develops with one of the North Korean guards. For an analysis of Revueltas’ novel in the context of the Chicano experience of the Korean War, see Jungwon Park’s 2012 “Korea, the Wandering Signifier in Foundational Chicano Narratives,” in *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-to-South Intercultural Dialogues between the Luso-Hispanic World and ‘the Orient,’* edited by López-Calvo.

Puerto Ricans and Chicanos shared unique experiences of fighting for the U.S. military that differed widely from the experience of Anglo/North American soldiers during the Korean War period. While there is cultural and literary production focusing on each individual group's experience, there is surprisingly little production that addresses the shared experience of these communities. One growing genre of production on the experience of minority ethnic soldiers is film, including both documentaries and feature films. While there are several documentaries on the Chicano soldier's experience in the U.S. military,²²⁸ there is only one existing documentary that focuses specifically on the experience of Puerto Ricans as part of this American institution, *Los borinqueños/The Borinqueneers* (2007).²²⁹ There are even fewer films that place the experience of these two groups in direct dialogue, however. The first to do so is the brief 2013 documentary *Finnigan's War*, written, directed and produced by Conor Timmis, the grandson of a Korean War "hero." Timmis's film is the first to address the specific experience of U.S. minority soldiers in the Korean War. In the opening frame of the documentary, Timmis explains to the audience that he created the documentary in an attempt to "make veterans of the Korean War feel appreciated," and to pay "tribute to the forgotten heroes of a forgotten war" (Timmis, 2013). By focusing on what some would perceive as the empty

²²⁸ The most widely distributed of these are *As Long as I Remember: American Veterans* (produced by Laura Varela, 2009), and the PBS series *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam* (produced by Charley Trujillo and Sonya Rhee, 2003), based on Charley Trujillo's book of the same title. Lesser known documentaries include the History Channel's 2008 *Unsung Heroes: Hispanics and the Medal of Honor*, which encompasses Mexican Americans and other individuals of Hispanic descent. An early film on the experience of the Mexican American in the U.S. military is Haskell Wexler's *Latino* (1985), depicting the experience of a Chicano soldier fighting secretly in Nicaragua. Barbara Korte's 2008 article, "Haskell Wexler's war film *Latino* and the Chicano warrior in the U.S. national body," published in *Jump Cut*, presents a thought-provoking analysis of the film. A little-known documentary on the contributions of Central American soldiers is *The Short Life of José Antonio Gutiérrez* (Cinema Guild, 2007), which depicts the story of Guatemalan "green-card soldier" José Antonio Gutiérrez, who was the first American soldier to die in the Iraq War.

²²⁹ *The Borinqueneers* was discussed in detail in Chapter One.

symbolic act of “paying tribute” to war heroes, however, the documentary succeeds only in reifying dominant discourses of military heroism and valor that overlook long-standing practices of marginalization and exclusion of racial, cultural, and gendered “others” within this powerful American institution. In fact, the vast majority of war films and documentaries are unable to escape from the deep-rooted, constructed narratives of U.S. hegemony and benevolence, privileging discourses of masculine valor and sacrifice that remain engrained in the mainstream North American consciousness.²³⁰

Finnigan’s War features the experiences of African American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Chinese, and Irish American soldiers who all fought in the Korean War. While Timmis succeeds in drawing attention to the important contributions of soldiers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the documentary fails to critically engage with the more complex, problematic reality of the war and the inherent contradictions that lie in the participation of historically oppressed people of color in the very military that continues to perpetrate forms of racialized violence and oppression to protect its capitalist interests worldwide. On the contrary, *Finnigan’s War* remains rooted within a dominant Korean War discourse that reifies the U.S. military’s contributions as a benevolent protector of the South Korean people, failing to venture any further than a romanticized tribute to the heroism of the quintessential American soldier, and simultaneously flattening the cultural and ethnic differences of those who fought for the U.S.

One of the few African American soldiers given a voice in Finnigan’s documentary is a member of the Second Rangers – the only all-black ranger company in

²³⁰ Take, for example, the 2012 Hollywood film *Red Tails*, which portrays its African American heroes (of the WWII Tuskegee Airmen) as flat, one-dimensional characters who work hard to prove themselves to Anglo America and earn the begrudging recognition of white military leaders, all without rocking the boat enough to challenge the status quo of an institution rooted in white supremacy.

U.S. military history – who affirms of his experience, “When the bullets are flying— everybody is the same color... take my word for it” (Timmis, 2013). Not only is the quote not contextualized within the larger conversation of Timmis’s interview with the veteran, but it is also hard to comprehend the man’s message, especially knowing that he formed part of a unit segregated on the basis of race. What does he mean by that statement, and how does that experience influence his feelings about fighting in a segregated unit – if at all? The seemingly strategic incorporation of this quote into the larger narrative constructed in *Finnigan’s War* suggests the film’s participation in a broader project of national myth-making that blankets over the unique experiences and adversities of different minority ethnic or cultural group participants in the war to construct what Lisa Yoneyama calls an “imperialist myth of liberation and rehabilitation” (59). Not only does such a myth function to justify violent and self-interested U.S. interventions into foreign nations, but it also relies on “nationalizing forces that, through domesticating and assimilating excess knowledge, threaten to produce a seamless narrative of national self-affirmation and innocence” (82). Encompassed within the same paradigm of modern warfare, then, is the presence of “colonial diasporic peoples” seeking redress for crimes perpetrated against them by U.S. imperialism (Yoneyama 69), as well as the presence of *other* groups of colonial diasporic peoples – including Puerto Ricans and Chicanos – who have, at some level, already been nationalized into the imperialist institution through their participation in the U.S. military.

Instead of broaching the challenges of being a minority in the military, or the varying experiences of different soldiers from different units, Timmis interviews a somewhat disparate and disjointed group of soldiers without establishing a cohesive

narrative through his film. Moreover, the documentary reinforces official U.S. military discourse by recognizing the contributions of different military members solely on the basis of the awards and commendations they received as part of that larger military institution, failing to recognize each soldier or officer as an individual human being independent from the military machine. As it is presented, the project seems to have been more of a personal journey of tribute for the filmmaker rather than an effort to truly educate the public on the reality of the Korean War or the differing experiences of different communities of soldiers that participated in the war.

The failure of *Finnigan's War* to provide a more substantial context and discussion of minority soldiers' experience of the Korean War is unfortunately a common trend within much of the existing literary and cultural production on the Korean War – a trend which has been exacerbated by the academy's lack of interest or attention to this particular reality. Given that the limits of existing historiography to address the participation of Puerto Ricans in the war has already been addressed in Chapter One, and current literature depicting these soldiers' experiences is reviewed in Chapter Two, the remainder of this chapter consequently focuses on forms of literary production that strive to represent the specific experience of the Chicano soldier in this war.

Rolando Hinojosa's Re-creation of the Korean War

A notable exception to the scarcity of Chicana/o literature on the Korean War is the prolific work of Texan-Mexicano author and Korean War veteran Rolando Hinojosa. Hinojosa is the only writer to date to have published a full-length book of poetry on the Korean War (Jason 300), entitled *Korean Love Songs From Klail City Death Trip* (1978), and he is likely the only author to have published two books of fiction – *The Useless*

Servants is the second – that are set in the Korean War (Jason 298). Hinojosa is also likely the only Chicana/o author to have published a book-length narrative on the Korean War; the scattering of other Chicana/o literature on Korea is limited to individual short stories, poems, and short plays. Aside from standing out among Chicana/o authors – and authors in general – for his choice of setting and subjects in his work, Hinojosa has created the imaginative space of Belkin County (el condado de Belken) and Klail City in south Texas through which he explores issues of racism, oppression, marginalization, Anglo-Mexicano relations, national belonging, and a plethora of other themes pertinent to the Chicano community. Hinojosa has accomplished all this through the *Klail City Death Trip Series* (KCDT) “macrotext,”²³¹ one narrative strand that is delivered to the reader in multiple volumes. KCDT now amounts to a total of 15 volumes,²³² and while two of them are set entirely in the Korean War, two other volumes, *Mi querido Rafa* (1981) and *Rites and Witnesses* (1982), also include scenes and recollections from the war. The author’s macrotext has been the focus of a growing body of scholarship, much of which addresses Hinojosa’s depiction of the reality of Anglo-Mexicano relations in south Texas and the deep, complex history of the Mexicano community in the valley.²³³ Hinojosa’s representation of the Korean War specifically has received much less critical

²³¹ Rosaura Sánchez first applied this term to KCDT in her 1984 article “From Heterogeneity to Contradiction: Hinojosa’s Novel,” an analysis which she elaborated on in her 2004 entry on Rolando Hinojosa in *Latino and Latina Writers*, edited by Alan West-Durán.

²³² The series includes *Estampas del valle y otras obras* (1973), *Klail City y sus alrededores* (1976), *Generaciones y semblanzas* (1977), *Korean Love Songs* (1978), *Mi querido Rafa* (1981), *Rites and Witnesses* (1982), *The Valley* (English version of *Estampas*, 1983), *Dear Rafa* (English version of *Mi querido Rafa*, 1985), *Partners in Crime: A Rafe Buenrostro Mystery* (1985), *Claros varones de Belken* (1986), *Klail City* (English version of *Generaciones y semblanzas*, 1987), *Becky and her Friends* (English, 1990) – *Los amigos de Becky* (Spanish, 1991), *The Useless Servants* (1993), *Ask a Policeman: A Rafe Buenrostro Mystery* (1998), and *We Happy Few* (2006).

²³³ In addition to Rosaura Sánchez’s work, see in particular: *The Rolando Hinojosa Reader* (1984), edited by José D. Saldívar; the various articles on KCDT published by Manuel M. Martín Rodríguez; and *Rolando Hinojosa’s Klail City Death Trip Series: A Retrospective, New Directions* (2013).

attention; although more scholars have analyzed *Korean Love Songs* alone, there have only been two article-length analyses published thus far that place *Korean Love Songs* (*KLS*) and *The Useless Servants* in direct dialogue.²³⁴

KLS differs greatly from the other Korean War literature that I have discussed so far in this dissertation. This is due not only to its prose poetry form, which distinguishes it from the narratives of González and Díaz Valcárcel discussed in chapters 1 and 2, but also stems from its participation in a larger narrative project and its intertextual dialogue with other volumes in the KCDT series. Hinojosa's text takes up many of the same themes found in the Puerto Rican literature – and in much of war literature in general – including the senseless nature of warfare, the trauma of combat, notions of loss, fear of death and violence, interpersonal relationships with other soldiers and superiors, and nostalgia for home, among other topics. In the following discussion, I consider several salient themes present in Hinojosa's depiction of the Korean War through an analysis of *KLS* in dialogue with passages from *The Useless Servants* and *Rites and Witnesses*.

KLS is a 53-page collection of prose poetry set in Korea and Japan during the protagonist, Rafa Buenrostro's, military service – the major part of it spent in the Korean War – between December 1949 and March 1952. Based in the tradition of British World War I poetry (J. Saldívar 47), while also influenced by the early twentieth century Mexican American *corrido* tradition – as Ramón Saldívar suggests²³⁵ – *KLS* conjures up

²³⁴ The first is Park's aforementioned article, "Korea, the Wandering Signifier in Foundational Chicano Narratives. The second is Mahon Ellison's 2012 "Easier Said Than Done: Masculinity on the Front Line in Rolando Hinojosa's *The Useless Servants* and *Korean Love Songs*," in *Confluencia*, vol. 28. This does not include the unpublished dissertations that also address one or both of these texts.

²³⁵ In his article in *The Rolando Hinojosa Reader* titled "*Korean Love Songs*: A Border Ballad and its Heroes," Ramón Saldívar reads *KLS* as a mid-twentieth century type of *corrido*, or border ballad, harkening back to a deep folkloric tradition in Mexican American culture. Saldívar writes, "Like their *corrido* folk art

idyllic notions of the self-sacrificing war hero and the romanticized myth of the “just” war only to cut down this dominant war ideology with tragically surreal reflections on the horror of the war in Korea and the incomprehensibility of the scenes witnessed by soldiers like Rafa and his fellow military members from the valley. *KLS* echoes some of the same experiences as those included in *The Useless Servants*, which serves as a narrative counterpart to the earlier collection of prose poems. Published in 1993, fifteen years after the first edition of *KLS*, *The Useless Servants* covers about the same time span as *KLS* – that is, the entirety of Rafa’s service in the Korean War. Whereas *KLS* provides the reader with fragmented glimpses of a nightmarish reality through a series of non-linear poems, *The Useless Servants* presents a combat journal with a combination of daily and weekly entries that record the minutiae of life on the front lines. Often written in abbreviated form and recording the protagonist’s conversations with other men in his unit, including his superiors, the narrative documents the details of battle, from the duration of the fighting and number of rounds fired, to details of the death and dismemberment of both “friendly” and “enemy” soldiers, as well as atrocities committed against troops and civilians alike. The journal also records the more mundane details of Rafa’s daily life, including entries on writing letters, chow time, personal hygiene (or lack thereof), sleep, the inclement weather, sharing beer with his buddies, and so on. *The Useless Servants* serves as a welcome counterpart to *KLS*, filling in certain gaps left by

base, Rolando Hinojosa’s ‘songs’ thus align themselves with the most ideologically vital art forms of Mexican American culture. The songs serve to highlight and hold off dissolving and fragmenting effects of contemporary American life while attempting to represent the conditions necessary for the retention of organic community life” (156). Saldívar sees this drive to retain Chicano community life in Rafa’s decision to return to and confront the harsh reality of South Texas. Saldívar’s interpretation is insightful and draws many interesting connections between Mexican American folkloric culture and *KLS*, but perhaps reads too much into Rafa’s return to his hometown. As I discuss later in this chapter, Rafa’s decisions in subsequent KCDT volumes point to his full assimilation into the U.S. nation, particularly through his later career as a policeman and detective.

the fragmented prose poetry form of the first volume. The other two volumes, *Mi querido Rafa* and *Rites and Witnesses* in the *KLS* sub-series within KCDT, also help to fill in details regarding certain chapters of Rafa's time in Korea.²³⁶

As I have suggested earlier, the specific perspective of Chicana/o and Puerto Rican authors has the potential of lending a more critical and reflective eye to their portrayal of the reality of the Korean War. This critical point of view comes through in Hinojosa's depiction of racial tensions between Anglo and Chicano soldiers and officers in the military – tensions that recall racial strife between Mexicanos and Anglos back home in Texas, as well as the text's reflection on the soldier as an expendable body being exploited for capitalist ends, and the disproportionate presence of minority ethnic soldiers and working class whites in the military. The text also explores the specter of death in several different figurations as a constant reminder of the horrors of war. Moreover, *KLS* addresses the theme of ethnic and class solidarity as part of a broader reflection on the dynamics at play in the war, the military, and back home in Texas.

Troubling Transnational Racism: From Belkin County to Korea, and Back

In *KLS* and Hinojosa's later supplementary volumes, the reader is taken along with the protagonist Rafa through the early stages in a process of political realization that begins for him while on the front lines in Korea. Yet, while the text gestures to the

²³⁶ *Mi querido Rafa* encompasses the time that Rafa is away at war, presenting his cousin Jehú's letters to him in part I, and the anthropological/ethnographical findings of P. Galindo on local Klail City residents in part II, as well as some afterthoughts in part III. Jehú refers to some details of Rafa's war experience in his correspondence with him, although it is one-sided, meaning the reader is not privy to Rafa's reply letters to Jehú. *Rites and Witnesses*, published a year later, is similarly divided into parts, with part I including the "rites" – that is, alternating chapters that depict the daily "rites" of Klail City residents on one hand, and those of Rafa and his buddies in Korea, on the other. Part II, the "witnesses," presents the testimonies of Klail City residents as recorded by P. Galindo regarding their opinions on the local Mexican Americans, with alternating chapters continuing to present scenes from the war. The chapters set in Korea add even more depth to the material on Rafa's experience in the war.

protagonist's growing awareness of the struggles and adversities faced by the larger Chicana/o community – not just locally, but nationally and *transnationally* – Rafa does not undergo a complete process of politicization in the text; his social and political awareness is still in its beginning stages. This nascent political awakening allows space for the text to problematize the Korean War and its implications more deeply and to explore aspects of the Chicano soldier's experience that do not fit neatly into the dominant U.S. narrative on the conflict. These problematic aspects of the Chicano experience in Korea include the ethnic and cultural hostility that Rafa and his fellow Mexicanos face from certain Anglo officials in the army, a hostility that is symptomatic of the underlying structural racism engrained in the U.S. military institution. This institutionalized racism, Rafa soon discovers, crosses international borders and is applied to a myriad of cultural and ethnic "others," including the Korean and Japanese "gooks" – whether civilian or "enemy combatants" – along with the Mexicanos, Blacks, Jews, and working-class white immigrants fighting for the U.S. army who do not fit into the cookie-cutter mold of Anglo American identity. Rafa's recollections of and reflections on different racially-charged incidents during his time in combat function to both draw attention to the existence of such racism and to trouble over the different forces at play that allow it to persist.

As Rafa realizes early on during his time in Korea, this racist mindset reaches into the highest levels of U.S. military leadership. The protagonist recalls an anti-Mexican statement made by General Walker during the initial months of war in 1950, "We should not assume that (the) / Chinese Communists are committed in force. / After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas" (*KLS* 11). Reflecting on the general's ignorant and offensive

comparison of what he considers to be the “unobtrusive” Mexican presence in Texas with the Chinese presence in Korea, Rafa writes:

And yet, the 219th
 Creating history by protecting the world from Communism
 Brought up the rear, protected the guns, continued the mission,
 And many of us there
 Were again reminded who we were
 Thousands of miles from home. (11)

Rafa quickly realizes that he and his Mexicano companions’ second-class status follows them wherever they go; the cultural barriers and stereotypes are not left behind with the Anglos in Texas. The line “thousands of miles from home” emphasizes the transnational nature of the structural forces of oppression and exploitation that are reinforced and embodied by agents of the U.S. military institution like Walker – forces that Rafa continues to bring to the fore and trouble over through similar critical reflections throughout the text. In this light, the second line of the verse must be read as biting sarcasm, reflecting Rafa’s growing disillusionment with and questioning of the larger military apparatus through his allusion to the national myth-making process at work through the dominant discourse of the benevolent global superpower whose duty it is to protect the world from the supposed threat of Communism. Rafa’s burgeoning criticism of the U.S. imperialist-capitalist project is explored further in the next section. He begins to understand that the racial hostility he endures as a minority ethnic soldier is only one arm of an oppressive system with multiple branches of racial and socioeconomic control.

One phenomenon that facilitates Rafa’s realization of the transnational nature of racism is his exposure to North American soldiers’ use of the racial epithet “gook” to refer to the local ethnic “other” where they’re stationed – South Koreans, North Koreans,

Chinese, and Japanese alike. The fact that many military members employ this pejorative label to refer to the local population reflects a typical North American ethnocentric perspective that lumps all “Orientals” into one category; they’re all just “gooks” to these ignorant Anglo soldiers and officials. Hinojosa highlights this orientalizing of the racial and cultural “other” in a later scene when Rafa goes to visit his AWOL friend Sonny who is living in Japan and seems to have fully assimilated into Japanese culture. As Sonny passes by two Military Police (M.P.s) on the street, he goes undetected, easily mistaken instead for a local Japanese man in his kimono and straw hat. “One of them [M.P.s] grunts and says: / ‘Pipe the gook and them flowers, there. / Damndest place I’ve ever seen’” (45). This is a pivotal moment in the text, as Hinojosa establishes a clear parallel between the othering of the imperially colonized Asian and the internally colonized Mexican American, since the Anglo M.P.s are unable to tell the difference. This moment in the text gestures towards the structure of recognition that is so prevalent in the Puerto Rican literature on the Korean War. Indeed, the closest KCDT comes to the minority ethnic soldier’s identification with the local community is through Rafa and his friends’ interaction with the Japanese civilians during their leave time in the country – the majority of which is with prostitutes in the brothels they frequent.²³⁷ Although “gook” was an incredibly common racial slur used by North American military members during

²³⁷ Ramón Saldívar examines the role that Japan and the Japanese people play for the Chicano characters in *KLS*, comparing in particular Rafa’s clear awareness of the “historical differences between Anglo-Americans and Japanese, Chicanos and Japanese” to his friend Sonny’s “view that filters out the real historical differences between Mexican American and Japanese life,” allowing him to perceive a cultural affinity into which he can assimilate completely (151). Japan’s positioning as an oppressive imperialist power within Asia, especially its violent past oppression of the Korean people, complicates any attempts at drawing simple parallels between Chicanos and Japanese, or between Koreans and Japanese. As such, it does not seem that the structure of recognition is as readily applicable to the soldiers’ interactions with Japanese as they are portrayed by Hinojosa in *KCDT*. In contrast with the work of Díaz Valcárcel, Hinojosa does not explore any interactions or friendships between Chicano and South Korean soldiers, or even between South Korean women and Chicano soldiers.

this and other U.S. wars, Rafa and his Mexicano friends refrain from using the term. This narrative decision on the part of Hinojosa is telling; the fact that Rafa doesn't utter the slur but never directly addresses his feelings regarding the term is more powerful than if he had informed the reader outright about how uncomfortable the word made him feel. Instead, Hinojosa puts the word in the mouths of ignorant Anglo officers and soldiers, further highlighting the widespread bigotry in the military during that era *and* differentiating Rafa and the other Mexicano troops from their Anglo counterparts.

Perhaps the most prominent character in Hinojosa's text that embodies the anti-Mexican sentiment first demonstrated by Walker in the above passage is Capt. Bracken, whose ignorance and superiority complex continue to irritate and enrage Rafa throughout the various volumes of KCDT. After his friends and fellow artillery battery members are killed and he is seriously wounded from a rocket attack, it is Capt. Bracken, ironically, who continues to come and visit Rafa in the hospital. These later exchanges between Bracken and Rafa leading up to Rafa's discharge from the service appear in *Rites and Witnesses*, which alternates chapters between scenes from the war and scenes from Belkin County. Even in his veiled attempt to do the right thing, Bracken is unable to maintain a respectful dialogue with Rafa without revealing his deeply engrained racial prejudices. Feigning concern, Bracken asks him how the hospital food is. Rafa replies, "It's all right, sir... It's Army chow, sir," to which the captain unthinkingly responds, "You miss your own food, right? I mean, ah, you, ah, miss that good Mexican food, eh?" (*Rites and Witnesses* 79-80). Slipping up in his allusion to Rafa as a cultural and ethnic "other" with his "own food," Bracken quickly revises his statement to say "that good

Mexican food,” trying unsuccessfully to generalize the reference and cover up its racist undertones.

Rafa later learns that Bracken had actually wanted him court-martialed for his actions in the rocket attack that landed him in the hospital, and that it was only after being set straight by his fellow officers that Bracken changed his tune. A lieutenant from his unit explained, “Well, when you turned up... Bracken blew his stack again... he said that the Battery’s position was zeroed in... that we were goners—that’s what he said—and then, that it was your *fault*. Every bit of it” (84). Afraid for his own life, Bracken quickly blames the imminent danger he finds himself in on the one individual towards whom he had already directed animosity in the past, hinting at another rash, racially motivated act on Bracken’s part. Instead of interpreting Rafa’s selfless actions trying to save his fallen comrade during the attack as deserving of a commendation – which is the conclusion of the other officers – Bracken instead sees them as grounds for a court-martial. “Bill Waller said he was recommending you for the Bronze Star,” the lieutenant continued, “This on top of Bracken making an ass of himself. That took the wind right out of [him]” (84). With things not having gone his way, then, Bracken’s unexplained visits to Rafa suddenly make sense as the captain’s awkward way of trying to smooth things over for the unjustified punishment he had tried to shoulder Rafa with, now that he knows that he will have to continue working alongside him. This attempt to criminalize or castigate the ethnic “other” based solely on his culturally marginalized status is nothing new for minority ethnic soldiers within the U.S. military, as other authors discussed in this dissertation, including González, Díaz Valcárcel, and Montoya – examined later in this chapter – make clear.

It is difficult not to draw parallels here between the court-martials of the Puerto Rican members of the 65th Regiment and the attempted court-martial of Rafa by an officer in his unit. The case of the Puerto Rican soldiers is true; one that has been meticulously documented and which was the focus of much media scrutiny at the time, as was discussed in Chapter One. Although fictional, Rafa's narrative is based on the experiences of countless Chicano soldiers who – like Hinojosa himself – endured numerous racist encounters with soldiers and officers alike during their time serving in the military.²³⁸ There is no question that minority ethnic soldiers were subjected to overly critical and at times unwarranted scrutiny and punishment during their service – the degrading order by Col. Chester B. De Gavre of all members of the 65th to shave their mustache for failing to prove their manhood in battle is a case in point.²³⁹ Montoya's poem "El Louie," discussed later, points to the punishment that awaited Chicano soldiers in the military who showed too much pride in their heritage. For those soldiers, Montoya suggests, their destiny was both "Heroism and the stockade" – highlighting the contradictory nature of minority soldiers' experiences in the military ("El Louie"). This parallel in the theme of undeserved punishment between Puerto Rican and Chicano literature on the Korean War points to the greater hypocrisy of the U.S. military institution and the unreliable nature of the myth-based narrative that it weaves. The selective court-martial of Puerto Rican soldiers at Kelly Hill when countless Anglo

²³⁸ Hinojosa enlisted in the army voluntarily and served for nearly five years. Three of those years were in active duty, and two were in the reserves. In a recent 2013 interview, Hinojosa remarked about his time in Korea, "I saw actions of bravery, actions showing heart, and amongst "la raza" I never saw anyone who ran away like many Anglos did during the retreat of 1950, with a cold that you felt in your bones and the North Koreans and their allies, the Chinese, pursuing us. During that long battle (I was a sergeant) they promoted me to a sub-lieutenant. I saw all types of cruel acts committed by both sides, nothing strange nor newsworthy in those cases" (Rekondo 1).

²³⁹ See Villahermosa, page 239.

soldiers and officers also disobeyed orders during that battle is twisted to read as a story of the good-intentioned Anglo officers who, try as they might, were unable to get their Puerto Rican subordinates to obey them, and as a result, the “disobedient” soldiers ended up putting everyone’s lives at risk. Rafa is keenly aware that similar false narratives will be written about his participation in the war, pegging him a hero when his own captain wanted to dismiss him with a court-martial.

Why, then, when recognitions and punishments are so arbitrary – and the deaths of loved ones so senseless – more beholden to the institution’s image than the value of one or two soldiers’ lives and freedom – would soldiers aware of these contradictions be anything more than ambivalent to such empty symbols? In several volumes of KCDT, Rafa’s reaction to the various medals he receives speaks to this very ambivalence. After learning of Bracken’s intention of getting him court-martialed for trying to rescue Bromley, Rafa channels his anger towards the medal they plan to award him, “That... that son-of-a-bitch... I don’t *want* his goddam medal,” Rafa warns, more concerned with the well being of his other comrades than with the Bronze Star his actions have earned him (*Rites and Witnesses* 84). Rafa reacts with similar ambivalence upon being awarded a Purple Heart for an earlier injury he sustained during combat, at which time he reflects, “What a trade: I get a Purple Heart for that piece of shit, and a family at home gets the medal for someone who’s not coming back” (*The Useless Servants* 91). Like his friends from the valley Joey Vielma and Sonny Ruiz, Rafa has no respect or appreciation for the pomp and ceremony of a capitalist military machine that regards them as little more than cannon fodder. Perhaps the most cynical words are recorded in one of the few pages that are missing in the original version of *The Useless Servants* published by Arte Público

Press.²⁴⁰ On this page are Rafa's final notes from the journal his psychiatrist asked him to keep while he was at the hospital. In it, Rafa addresses the doctor, "A Purple Heart. Words. A Bronze Star with a V for valor. Ha! You know what valor is, Doctor? It's facing the day, everyday. *That's* valor, Doctor" (Mejía 62, quoting *The Useless Servants*). In the larger passage this quote is taken from, Rafa reflects on the insignificance of words and the unspeakable nature of the atrocities he has witnessed. To him, these medals – like words – are insignificant, empty symbols, symbols that are incapable of expressing or assuaging the inexpressible pain and horror he witnessed in battle, on the front lines.

Part of Hinojosa's broader message in the KCDT macrotext is the reality that the experience of war, like any other type of atrocity or trauma experienced by an individual, is not finite. For Rafa, the "chapter" on the Korean War does not just end the day he is discharged, nor can his experience be packaged up into one neat package to be stored away and forgotten. Rather, for Rafa – and Hinojosa suggests, for the Chicano soldier in general – the memories, the losses, the trauma, persist beyond the abstract end date put down in the history books as the day the Korean War was over. The non-linear, macrotextual structure of Hinojosa's work on the Korean War speaks to this refusal to put the war to rest, and suggests a larger awareness of the fact that, for Korea, the war is still ongoing. This positioning of Hinojosa's text points to its participation in the second thread I identify in this dissertation. While not directly anti-imperialist, the KCDT volumes on the Korean War clearly grapple with the contradictions and complexities of

²⁴⁰ In a fall 1993 article in *Southwestern American Literature*, Jaime Armin Mejía explains that Arte Público Press made a number of errors in its initial hard cover printing of Hinojosa's *The Useless Servants*, including the omission of several critical pages in the second half of the book. With Hinojosa's permission, Mejía published those missing pages as part of his 1993 article, "Breaking the Silence: The Missing Pages in Rolando Hinojosa's *The Useless Servants*." While the missing and repeated pages were supposedly corrected in the later paperback edition of the text, these errors remain in the hard cover version.

modernity, including the senselessness of war – a phenomenon upon which our modern lives are at least partially founded. Although a larger awareness is *suggested*, however, Rafa's character appears ready to move on upon receiving his discharge papers. "I'm leaving; through, finished and done with," he writes in the final poem of *KLS* (53). There is a slight tension here between what the text *says* through its content and what it *does* structurally. The protagonist *says* the war is over with for him. But the structure of the macrotext suggests otherwise; instead of being a closed chapter in Rafa's life, it is a moment that continues to be revisited with the passage of time; each volume in *KCDT* seems to circle back, however fleetingly, to Korea, to the valley boys lost there, to Rafa's military service.

Yet, as a character, Rafa's project is a different one than we as readers might have expected of him. Instead of deciding to give up on the country that continues to oppress his people and other marginalized groups like his at home and abroad, Rafa is determined to go home. In the oft-cited concluding verse to *KLS*, Rafa's next step is laid out loud and clear, "It's back to Klail, / And home. Home to Texas, our Texas, / That slice of hell, heaven, / Purgatory and land of our Fathers" (53). Acknowledging the faults of his homeland and the persisting tensions and contradictions in the Texas valley, Rafa still wishes to return home, to the land of his Chicana/o community. In spite of his burgeoning political awareness, then, Rafa's national identity only becomes further entrenched by his experiences in the war, as Ramón Saldívar has suggested (155-6). Saldívar explains that Rafa does not find resolution for the war from assimilating into a foreign culture like his friend Sonny Ruiz does in Japan (who goes AWOL and escapes to Japan, where he settles down there with a local woman, undetected by M.P.s), but rather from a drive to

“return to the contradictory, but familiar” culture of south Texas and the resolution to fight for the survival and preservation of his Mexicano community there (R. Saldívar 156). While it is clear that Rafa’s allegiances lie in the contradictory and imperfect world of Belkin County, Texas, Saldívar’s interpretation is perhaps overly idealistic in his reading of Rafe’s “ideological commitment to collective solidarity” (156). Although Rafa clearly gains awareness of the broader oppressive forces at work in Texas and Korea and the institutions that link those forces, Rafa’s politicization is never completely realized in the text. Indeed, his decision to return home and reimmerse himself in the problematic Anglo-Mexicano dynamics without taking steps to actively challenge the persisting structural inequalities in Klail City and the larger Belkin County point to this unrealized political awakening. The reinforcement of national belonging is not the only effect of Rafa’s experience in the war, however. The broader political and ideological connections suggested by Hinojosa in the text still convey an important message regarding the intersection of race and class in the structural inequalities that are at the root of the U.S. capitalist-imperialist project.

Comprehending the Intersection of Race and Class through the U.S. Military Machine

Although Rafa may not break with his sense of U.S. national belonging upon his return home after the war, he does return with a completely altered understanding of the dynamics of race and class in mid-twentieth century America. Not only is he more aware of the widespread nature of his own community’s oppression – there are Mexicanos across the country facing racism just like his own Chicana/o community in south Texas – but also of the dehumanizing effects of U.S. imperialism. Moreover, Rafa begins to

understand that the larger (anti-Communist) interests of capitalist institutions directly reinforce America's imperialist project. As Hinojosa portrays it, the strength of this project rests at least partly on the exploitation of the socioeconomically underprivileged peoples of the world. Whereas before his primary focus was his Mexicano culture and ethnicity, Rafa's experience in Korea reveals to him that class is an equally powerful determining factor in the structural inequalities of America's governmental institutions, including the military. As a result, Rafa's understanding of Anglo-Mexicano relations is forever altered. It is in the military that he comes into contact with a more diverse cross-section of the American population, and becomes aware of the scores of poor working-class whites who fight shoulder-to-shoulder with him in the war. These are not the rich, entitled Texan Anglos of Belkin County with whom he is trading stories and foodstuffs. Instead, they are the "Boston John McCreedy[s], descendant(s) of whalers and traders," (*KLS* 25), and the Lt. Phil Brodkeys – a "kind, calm, precise" friend who just happened to be a Philadelphia Jew and who cracked in the end, taking his own life from inside his "forward ob. hole" (30).

Rafa's political awareness is broadened to include the notion of class strife in addition to the racial/ethnic strife faced by him and his fellow Mexicano comrades. Moreover, he develops an awareness of the vast cultural diversity within the U.S., swapping songs and stories with American soldiers of Polish and Lithuanian descent who cross his path temporarily, and facing similar harassment from intolerant Anglos who give them a hard time for speaking their native language. He records in his journal, "The Polish guy, Bernard Pavlovsky, was teaching me a song in Polish, and I then gave him a Spanish translation. Doyle busted in saying, 'And what Army you guys with?'" (*The*

Useless Servants 51). Rafa slowly comes to the realization that many of the adversities faced by working-class whites – many of who also identify with another cultural and linguistic heritage – are not that different from those confronted by Mexicanos in south Texas. One working-class Anglo who he gets to know relatively well is Ben “Rusty” Pardue, a young Cajun (of French Canadian descent) man from Louisiana. Rafa’s exchanges with Rusty appear interspersed throughout *Rites and Witnesses*.

A straggler left behind by his unit, Rusty hooks up with Rafa’s battery and accompanies him on forward observation duty. As they share parts of their life stories with each other, Rafa learns that Rusty is from a working-class family and that, much like Rafa, he speaks a language other than English at home – French. “A Cajun; that’s what I am, what we all are down there; a coonie. You know, Coonass” (*Rites and Witnesses* 14). Interestingly, many Cajuns regard the term “Coonass” as an offensive racial epithet.²⁴¹ However, Rusty likely employs the term here out of ignorance over the term’s negative history, reflecting an internalization of the discrimination that his community has confronted for so long. His family’s lack of education and his naiveté regarding many other subjects that are touched on through his dialogue with Rafa support this interpretation. “Well, I didn’t finish high school... We had a good school there in Elton. Elton, Louisiana, yessir... I went as far as the tenth grade; well, *up* to the tenth grade... that’s pretty good, right?” (99). In comparison with Rusty, Rafa is much more educated, having graduated high school and completed one year of college – and planning to finish college after he gets out of the military. Aware of the young man’s lack of worldly

²⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the history of the term “Coonass” and the current controversy surrounding the word’s popular usage, see Shana Walton’s chapter “Louisiana’s Coonasses: Choosing Race and Class over Ethnicity,” in *Signifying Serpents and Mardi Gras Runners: Representing Identity in Selected Souths* (2003).

experience, Rafa befriends Rusty and takes him under his wing. As Rusty shares more about his family, Rafa discovers that his father is disabled and illiterate, and that it's Rusty's pay checks that keep him afloat.

The protagonist is exposed to the language and background of other cultural minorities in the U.S., like the Cajun community to which Rusty belongs, but he also learns that class lines only go so far, and that in many cases, the racial division between whites and other races still remains. When Rusty discovers that Rafa's family cultivates cotton, he immediately asks, "Who picks your cotton?... You hire niggers for that?" (*Rites and Witnesses* 15). Through his response to Rusty's question, Rafa subtly suggests a change in terminology from the racial epithet "nigger" to "Colored" or "Negro," but he is clearly caught off guard by Rusty's nonchalant usage of the word (15). Part of this racism, however, stems from ignorance – a lack of education about and interaction with people of other races and cultures. Just as Rusty employs an offensive term to refer to African Americans, he initially labels Rafa as "Spanish" instead of Mexican, but he changes his terminology once Rafa patiently explains his background to him. Rafa's interactions with Rusty, along with other military members during his service, open his eyes to the regional differences in race relations and culture, including the heightened anti-Black racism in the South. Yet, at the same time, Rafa is also exposed to a more tolerant cross-section of white working-class people, like Hook Frazier and Frank Hatalski, two of the Anglo "Old Guys" (meaning they served in WWII) in his unit who are ultimately killed in the rocket attack in which Rafa was seriously wounded. Hook shares with Rafa that he was married to a Puerto Rican woman, and he acknowledges the racism that Puerto Ricans on the island endured from American GIs stationed there, who

called them “gooks” just like they do to the Koreans and Chinese (*The Useless Servants* 39). Although Hook’s wife died and they had no children, he still keeps in touch with his in-laws on the island. Through his marriage to a Puerto Rican, he explains, he is also familiar with the English-Spanish code switching that Rafa and Joey engage in on occasion, which he says “drove him crazy” when his wife switched between languages like that (72). Although Hinojosa doesn’t include additional commentary on Rafa’s part about Hook’s intercultural and interethnic marriage, it is notable that he mentions it twice in *The Useless Servants*, a reference which points to a phenomenon – interracial/ethnic marriage – that was still relatively rare in the 1950s. In fact, anti-miscegenation laws that prevented whites from marrying blacks, Asians, Indians, Native Americans, and other non-white groups (the specific groups identified in legislation varied by state) were still in effect in many states across the country through the early 1960s.²⁴²

Another realization that complicates Rafa’s understanding of intercultural and interracial relations in the U.S. comes when he learns of the different ways in which people of Mexican descent from other states regard themselves. In *The Useless Servants*, Rafa and his Mexicano friends come across several Mexican American soldiers who identify themselves differently than they do. In one passage, Rafa writes:

Saw one guy I thought was a Texas Mexican. Turned out to be a Coloradan; called himself Donald Trujillo. Says his people came from Spain, and then Charlie and Joey asked him if those were the Spaniards that landed in Virginia and then trekked across the South until delivered safely and soundly to the Promised Land. This is the third Coloradan we’ve run across, and they all claim to be Spanish. Well, that’s the first Mexican of any kind I’ve ever met named Donald. We spoke Spanish to him, but he answered in English. (41)

²⁴² The remaining sixteen states with anti-miscegenation laws in 1967 were overturned by the landmark Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia* that outlawed all anti-miscegenation legislation.

Rafa and his friends aren't about to be fooled by the romanticized narrative claiming that Colorado "Hispanics" are direct descendants of Spaniards. Their sarcastic historical question alludes to the utter failure of the Spanish missionaries who arrived in Virginia in the sixteenth century and attempted to settle there, only to be killed by a local Native American tribe. As Rafa, Charlie and Joey are well aware, the Spaniards' attempts to settle in the eastern region of the area now known as the continental U.S. were short-lived and ultimately failed. In their eyes, no matter what Donald called himself, he was still Mexican. The decision of many Mexican Americans in Colorado to self-identify as Spanish also reveals the destructive effects of internalized anti-Mexican racism – along the same lines as Rusty's pejorative self-reference as a "Coonass" – that compels many Mexican Americans – and individuals from other minority groups – to reject their own cultural and ethnic background.

Karen D. Pyke defines internalized racism as, "the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one's racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one's race and/or oneself" (553). Thus the self-deprecation revealed in Rusty or Donald Trujillo's attitudes about their own identity uncovers the White supremacist underpinnings of dominant U.S. society that are engrained in residents in this country – whether foreign-born or native-born – regardless of their cultural, racial or ethnic background. One implication of internalized racism is the resulting divisions that it often causes within a specific minority community. Referencing Anzaldúa's earlier work, Pyke explains, "Intra-ethnic othering also occurs at the collective level with the construction of

derogatory sub-ethnic identities that are widely recognized and broadly used within the group, fomenting internal group tensions and divides” (558). Donald Trujillo’s disidentification with the Mexican identity of Rafa, Joey and Charlie and his preference to claim a white Hispanic identity can therefore be seen as one example of the phenomenon of intra-ethnic othering at work. Other literary references to this phenomenon include José Montoya’s poetry and short stories discussed in the next section.

Just as Rafa discovers that anti-Mexican discrimination is an inter-ethnic as well as transatlantic phenomenon, the protagonist also realizes that the same White supremacist, ethnocentric racial attitudes of many Anglo soldiers and officers are projected onto the local South Korean population, in spite of the fact that they are supposedly the U.S.’s allies in the war. That racist attitude is countered, however, by a faction of military leaders who model a more accepting attitude towards the South Koreans, including the Republic of Korea (ROK) army, which fights alongside the U.S. and UN troops in the war. Like many of the Old Guys, Hook Frazier and Frank Hatalski included, who are more tolerant of ethnic and cultural differences, certain officers project a similarly tolerant perspective. “ROK have a tougher battle than we do because they have no organic tanks... And, also that ROK have little artillery; that too makes it tough for them... Said ROKs fought well with what they had. He knew of grumbling coming mostly from First Cav guys” (*The Useless Servants* 39). The officer speaking, a white WWII veteran, lectures the troops on the challenges faced by the South Korean army, insinuating that the North American soldiers should be more tolerant of the ROK’s precarious situation. Joey recognizes this denigrating demeanor, explaining, “it was

racism on First Cav's part and that we, as Texas Mexicans, know that attitude well. How true" (39). The diversity in the backgrounds and attitudes of the different people Rafa meets while at war are as wide-ranging and contradictory as the complex circumstances surrounding the deep-rooted racial relations present on the home front during the Korean War era. One thing that is clear, however, is the predominance of soldiers from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as the overwhelming number of working-class Anglos in the military. Coming to this realization of the complex intersections of race and class and the common adversities the Mexican American community shares with the poor White population in the U.S. facilitates Rafa's growing understanding of the economic motivations behind many of the military's actions and decisions, which are informed by the U.S. government's capitalist, anti-Communist ideology.

Rafa consequently becomes increasingly wary of the policies and procedures of the U.S. military, and the ironies of the way things are run are not lost on him – just as they weren't lost on the Puerto Rican soldier Rodríguez in "Proceso en diciembre." As the title of this chapter reads, "Cannon fodder is just good old Army chow" (*KLS* 24). A line from a poem in *KLS* addressed in second person to Charlie Villalón, Rafa's good friend from the valley who was killed in combat, it points to the U.S. military's utter devaluation of the individual soldier, who is ultimately reduced to food for the enemy guns – cannon fodder. Hinojosa plays with the semantic meaning of the phrase "cannon fodder," derived from the word "fodder," meaning food for livestock. In other words, Charlie, along with Rafa's many other fallen comrades, was just the "good old Army chow" that the U.S. military fed to the enemy troops to keep them coming back for more. Statements of this cynical nature are present throughout *KLS* and its accompanying

Korean War volumes, critically referencing the U.S. military's devaluation of the soldier to a mere tool for its larger tactical objectives. In a scene from *Rites and Witnesses*, Rafa talks with Hook as they "babysit" the troops on burial detail who are tasked with collecting the dead bodies of their fallen comrades who were killed in combat. Referring to Louie Dodge, a former member of their unit who had been transferred out because he had been mentally unstable, Rafa asks Hook, "You think they kicked his ass out?" to which Hook replies, "Rafe, the goddamn Army's not about to waste anything... He's doing something somewhere" (*Rites and Witnesses* 91). Here, Hook insinuates the Army's exploitation of mentally ill or otherwise emotionally unstable soldiers who, instead of being discharged, are assigned to some sort of menial labor in order to get the most out of the military's investment in them.

In a related poem in *KLS* titled "Night Burial Details," the speaker breaks the task of collecting the dead down to a cold science, depicting it in the impersonal tone of the Army, "This is just a work detail that needs to be done, / And done not your way, nor mine, nor anyone else's, save one: / The Army Way: tag and count, tie the bag, the wallets go in that pile there, / And for Chrissakes watch what you're doing!" (21). Once again, the lost souls of the dead are reduced to lifeless facts and numbers – to statistics on a spreadsheet. Hinojosa poignantly captures the emotional toll that witnessing these scenes and participating in burial detail takes on the individual soldier. Each one responds in his/her own way to the destruction they are forced to confront, some breaking down immediately and others somehow enduring the horrific carnage they are forced to sort through. After collecting the bodies of countless soldiers – several of whom Rafa and Joey knew, they, "told Graves Reg guys we'd ride in the truck with the dead from the

arty unit, and was told this was not necessary, but we insisted. Joey nodded, and he also refused to ride in the cab. ‘We’ll go with the guys in the back,’ is what we said. I’ll never get use to any of this” (*The Useless Servants* 135). Regardless of the military’s dehumanizing policies, Rafa and Joey still see the bodies of the dead as their friends and comrades, and are prepared to accompany them and hold vigil over them at least for the short ride to the mass grave where they’ll likely be buried.

In the concluding poem of *KLS* entitled “Vale,” Rafa refers cynically to the death count and other military statistics devoid of any emotion or humanity. “In time, the U.S. Army will tell us how many men / It lost here; for now / I’ll tell you how many friends I lost: / Chale Villalón and Pepe Vielma, / Cayo Díaz and a kid named Balderas; / Frank Hatalski and Hook Frazier” (53). In Rafa’s eyes, the Army’s numbers are meaningless; they don’t reveal the heart and individual identity behind each statistic listed in its reports. Instead, Rafa lists the names of each of his fallen comrades one by one, restoring some sense of individuality and humanity to them through this act. Hinojosa’s list of the names of Rafa’s friends who died in combat functions as a sort of alternative record and history that challenges the dominant narrative recorded by the Army. This act, then, attempts to counter the erasure effect of national myth-making that silences certain truths or experiences over time. Hinojosa addresses this effect in the poem “South to Nara” when Rafa’s female companion counts the pits on his face left over from the rocket shrapnel when he was wounded. “She counts twelve [pits], but only three are of consequence; / The rest will be erased in time, Much like this war / And those it took” (48).

Perhaps the most powerful denunciation of the dehumanizing effects of the U.S. military as a capitalist institution comes in the poem “A Matter of Supplies.” The poem opens:

It comes down to this: we’re pieces of equipment
To be counted and signed for.
On occasion some of us break down,
And those parts which can’t be salvaged
Are replaced with other GI parts, that’s all. (*KLS* 50)

The poem proceeds to narrate the process of exchanging supplies and dumping “replaceable parts,” describing the soldiers’ exchange with the Chaplain, who vociferates scripture devoid of all context and meaning (50). The last verse concludes, “Our guild furnishes the bodies; / And his, the prayers. Division of labor it’s called. / But why the long face, Man of the Cloth? / Truthfully now, aside from us, / Who cares?” (51). Hinojosa’s use of the term “Division of labor” must be interpreted as a deliberate reference to the Marxist critique of capitalism. As Marx wrote in chapter 14, “The Division of Labor and Manufacture” in volume 1 of *Capital*, as a result of the division of labor stemming from manufacturing, “the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him” (482). Thus, the individual worker loses some of his/her identity to fit his/her assigned job, becoming an appendage of the larger machine that wields power over him/her.

As Ramón Saldívar has argued in his analysis of *KLS*, this division of Army members into “guilds” as described in the above poem serves to mold individuals into “efficiently controllable instrumentalities” that are commodified for the power of their labor (154). Following this logic, each should be solely concerned with his purpose – prayer for chaplains and killing and being killed for soldiers; in this reality, then, the

chaplain should not be concerned for the destiny of the soldier, and vice versa. The concluding line, “Who cares?” hangs bluntly – almost defiantly – at the end of the poem, likely directed at the military institution itself, which brought about this devaluation of the soldier in the first place. If the military doesn’t care, the poem insinuates, then the American people won’t care either, since the national myth-making process will silence this reality before the mainstream American public ever learns of it. The diction employed throughout the two verses cited above emphasizes the commodification of the North American soldiers through words like “supplies,” “parts,” and “equipment,” highlighting the U.S. military’s exploitation of the “useless servants” on the front lines who are sacrificed for the “greater good” of the imperialist-capitalist machine with little regard for the value of human life. This theme of the dehumanization of the soldier, while gesturing towards an anti-imperialist stance, also constructs a larger critical commentary on the phenomenon of war itself and the horror and tragedy that it generates.

The Specter of Death as a Permanent Residue of War

Overshadowing all references to discrimination or hypocritical military procedure in *KLS* (and *The Useless Servants*) is the ever-present specter of death. Death assumes a protagonistic role in the poems, at times becoming personified, and at others remaining a mysterious, foreboding presence. The hand-drawn illustrations by René Castro that accompany some of the pages in *KLS* further personify death. Extending this personification into the text, Hinojosa chooses to capitalize the term occasionally as if it were a given name. We see this in the poem “Rookies under stress acting tough,” which expounds on the dangers of being too cocky as a rookie soldier. The penultimate verse reads, “Nothing new here: just some month-old rookies who think Death is not for them”

(6). On the opposite page, a black and white hand-drawn illustration shows two artillerymen who assume the role of the grim reaper, carrying out the tragedy that unfolds in the poem “Friendly Fire” as they deliver the deadly blast that kills their own men, sowing death in their wake. The decision to illustrate all soldiers in the illustrations throughout the text as skeletons yields a powerful and strikingly symbolic visual image – they are at once the grim reaper, doling out death with their army-approved tactics and weapons, but at the same time they are bodies in limbo, closer to death than life, so many of them already destined to die with their blood soaking into the dry Korean soil, many of their bodies never to be recovered.

A later poem is devoted entirely to the figure of Death:

Death is alive and well in our zone;
 Older, somewhat tired, yet up and around...
 We're really laying it on now,
 And Death, dragging ass,
 Is being pushed to the limit. (9-10)

Death is again personified here, this time through the text's description of a grim reaper type figure who collects the lost souls scattered across the battlefield, hastening to keep up with the incessant machine gun fire that continues to mow down soldier after soldier. Hinojosa's word play in this verse is powerful, juxtaposing the words “death” and “alive” in a contradictory image of death personified as a figure that is “alive and well.” The verse draws on at least five different idiomatic expressions as part of its word play (“alive and well,” “up and around,” “laying it on,” “dragging ass,” and “pushed to the limit”), imposing informal slang onto an utterly serious and horrific situation, which lends a “tragic surrealism” to parts of the text, as José David Saldívar has suggested (55). This rhetorical technique draws attention to the extraordinary situation of war – for Hinojosa

at least, the destruction of humanity is indescribable in strictly realist terms here. Thus, the extreme abnormality of the phenomenon of war is captured through Hinojosa's surreal personification of death in this verse as someone who can barely keep up with the number of dead that is accumulating on the battlefield.

It is made clear throughout both *KLS* and *The Useless Servants*, however, that "Death" is not the one in charge in this situation; he is not determining whose turn it is to die, he is only trying to clean up the mess left behind by the ruthlessness of humankind. It is human-made technology and greed that propels the wave of death forward. As Hinojosa depicts so frankly, a battle that is supposedly a fight for the "freedom and democracy" of the Korean people quickly regresses into a bloodlust driven frenzy, the soldiers spurred to kill by the "salty sweet sweat produced by work and hot steel" (*KLS* 8), by the commander yelling, "'Kill 'em, men. Kill 'em. Fire, fire'" (*The Useless Servants* 121). The sense of triumph and the physical sensation of satisfaction after a battle won, when, "On the last click / Of the high trajectory gun, / [they] sit exhausted and high-strung / As unsatisfied bitches in Death Valley heat" (*KLS* 8). As Hinojosa demonstrates, however, the base animalistic pleasure derived from combat fades quickly, overshadowed by the looming specter of death. This, now, is not the grim reaper figure of Death, but rather the understanding of death as an irreversible phenomenon that translates to loss and shock for those still left standing. This figuration of death functions as a specter in the text on at least two levels. First, the constant threat of death for a soldier on the battlefield functions as a specter, the knowledge that your life could end at any moment gnawing at you incessantly. Second, the loss of those friends and comrades who have already been claimed by death constitutes a spectral presence that many soldiers

carry with them. Hinojosa expresses this haunting by suggesting a dislocation in time and space through Rafa's statement, "As for Hat, Hook, and Joey, / I knew they were dead; known it for years" (38). Rafa makes this assertion from the hospital where he's recovering from the wounds inflicted on him by the same rocket attack that killed his three friends, an attack that had only occurred a couple months prior. Yet, the inevitability of his friends' death feels to Rafa as if he had always known those three men were destined to die – hence his claim that he's "known it for years" (38).

For those minority ethnic soldiers like Rafa who somehow survive the war, death's presence is especially haunting because of the knowledge that the harsh reality of the adversity and injustice within the military that he and his now fallen comrades endured together "will be erased in time" by the U.S. imperialist myth (48). Moreover, Rafa understands that the individual lives taken by the war, including those of his friends, and the military's exploitation of these soldiers as useless servants for the larger cause of "protecting the world from Communism" will never be made known, and that he, as one replaceable "GI part" in the eyes of this all-powerful institution, can do nothing to change that fact. Thus, while the specter of death begins as a haunting presence on the battlefield, it remains as a permanent residue of war, especially for those participants in the war who have been marginalized or silenced by the U.S. master narrative on the war – whether they are Chicano, Puerto Rican, or other minority ethnic soldiers, or (South or North) Korean civilians, refugees or soldiers. In the lives of those individuals for whom the war will never truly be over, the specter of death functions as a "form of social figuration that treats as a major problem the reduction of individuals 'to a mere sequence of instantaneous experiences which leave no trace, or rather whose trace is hated as

irrational, superfluous and ‘overtaken’ (Gordon 20). For Chicano soldiers like Rafa who saw the lives of so many Mexican American men from their community sacrificed as cannon fodder, the loss of those who were deemed “superfluous” by the U.S. military institution will forever haunt their individual and collective conscience.²⁴³ The Chicana/o community’s collective awareness of their sons’/fathers’/husbands’/brothers’ participation in the Korean War and the trials and adversities faced by these community members within the military is part of the artistic and literary project of another Chicano Korean War veteran, José Montoya, whose work I explore below.

Preserving Chicana/o History through Orality: José Montoya as Artist, Activist, and

Korean War Veteran

The late José Montoya, one of the most celebrated and well-known Chicana/o poets of the twentieth century²⁴⁴, dedicated his art to depicting the resilience of a culture and community perpetually oppressed by the destructive forces of U.S. imperialism. Best known for capturing the *pachuco* lifestyle of the mid-twentieth century Chicano in his oft-anthologized poem “El Louie,” Montoya has produced a large body of artistic and literary work that embodies both his penchant for linguistic play and a staunch anti-imperialist politics. Montoya’s overt political stance – openly critical to the U.S. nation-state’s history of military interventionist acts in third world countries worldwide – gains even more power through its mode of delivery via linguistically complex wordplay

²⁴³ In the words of Avery Gordon, a case of a ghost is “a case of modernity’s violence and wounds, and a case of the haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live” (24-5). The specter of death that remains as a residue of the Korean War therefore persists not only as a reminder of the wounds that have yet to be healed but also as an embodiment of the complex and unequal social relations that are alive and well in modernity – relations which continue to be informed by the markers of race, ethnicity, culture, and class (among others).

²⁴⁴ While Montoya is a famed Chicano poet, outside of the academic community, his work is best known among the California Chicana/o community. Much of Hinojosa’s Tejano/Mexicano readership is likely unfamiliar with Montoya’s work.

whose message is best conveyed through the medium of orality, not simply reading the words on the page. Indeed, “El Louie” is relayed with the most ease through Montoya’s rhythmic, lyrical reading of it – a reading that is thankfully immortalized in several recorded versions from performances he gave over the years. Part of the prolific body of work Montoya composed throughout his lifetime are several poems and a short story that address the Chicano soldier’s experience in the Korean War while also exploring the larger implications of Chicana/o participation in the U.S. military. This portion of Montoya’s literary production has received very little critical attention up to this point – indeed, Montoya’s literature in general has been the subject of surprisingly limited scholarship.²⁴⁵ Montoya’s work on this topic is thus deserving of further discussion, especially in dialogue with the literature of fellow Chicana/o and minority authors whose literature reflects on similar issues. To that end, the following analysis encompasses two of Montoya’s poems, “El marinero mariguano” and “El Louie,”²⁴⁶ as well as his short story “The Bully,” in an effort to examine the artist’s anti-imperialist stance as it is conveyed through his portrayal of the Korean War. In particular, I will examine how Montoya draws on the oral tradition to incorporate this message into the Chicana/o

²⁴⁵ This lack of scholarship could also be partially due to the limited reception of oral work like Montoya’s. Although his entire body of work was published in 1992 (*In Formation: 20 years of joda*), prior to that point Montoya was primarily known through word of mouth and his public performances and readings. The existing critical work available on Montoya’s writing is limited to a few analyses of “El Louie” and two more general biographies of Montoya, including an article-length discussion of his entire body of work. These include Ignacio Orlando Trujillo’s analysis of “El Louie” in “Linguistic Structures in José Montoya’s ‘El Louie’” (in *Modern Chicano Writers*, 1979) and Joy Landeira’s 2010 comparative analysis of “El Louie” to J.L. Navarro’s “To a Dead Lowrider” in *Confluencia*. The most extensive discussion of Montoya’s body of poetic work is Guillermo Hernández’s 1991 analysis “José Montoya: From the RCAF to the Trio Casindio,” in *Chicano Satire: A Study in Literary Culture*. There is a broader body of criticism on Montoya’s work as part of the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) art collective, which was most active in the 1970s and 80s. Juan D. Bruce-Novoa’s interview of Montoya in his 1980 *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview* is also quite informative.

²⁴⁶ All citations from both “El marinero mariguano” and “El Louie” are taken from the versions of each poem published in Montoya’s anthology *In Formation*.

community's collective history, specifically emphasizing the themes of Chicano criminalization in the military, intra-ethnic othering and internalized racism within the Mexican American community, and Anglo-Chicano racial tensions as the embodiment of greater oppressive structures within the U.S. national framework.

Positioning himself as a public artist, Montoya's principal objective throughout his career was "to place art and literature at the service of the people. For him, the function of art is social, and therefore it should be used to help the people and to vindicate their history and their cultural values" (Leal 1). To this end, popular art that drew on the long-standing tradition of orality within the Mexican American community²⁴⁷ was an essential part of Montoya's cultural production. As Bruce-Novoa characterizes it, Montoya's "poetry flows like spontaneous speech," demonstrating his mastery of interlingualism²⁴⁸ by utilizing "the two languages as smoothly as if they were

²⁴⁷ As Naomi Helena Quiñonez explains, "the oral significance of Chicano poetry has its roots in an indigenous Mexican tradition" of *flor y canto*, which functioned in pre-Columbian society "as a public presentation of dramatic poetry accompanied by music" (Quiñonez 132-3). Moreover, the Mexican American community's history of exploitation and marginalization from public services like education in the U.S. meant that, through at least the mid-twentieth century, Chicanas/os had "limited access to the written word and to its forms of distribution [and thus] primarily expressed themselves through forms of oral and popular culture" (M. E. Sánchez 12). The collective nature of orality is fundamental to its preservation over time, José Saldívar recognizes. "In Chicano communities the transmission of history, for example, frequently happens verbally and in groups through the communal singing of *corridos*, or through the voice of an elder's recollection" (J. Saldívar 113). It is this collective, public nature of the oral tradition that Montoya drew upon and preserved through his various forms of cultural production. Nevertheless, it is also important to recognize that, in comparison with a written tradition, the reception of work within an oral tradition is quite limited. While the technological advancements of social media and the Internet are slowly changing this (there are countless videos available online of Montoya reading "El Louie," for example), the oral nature of Montoya's work is likely another reason why it has been so understudied.

²⁴⁸ Bruce-Novoa posits, "Chicanos do not function as constantly choice-making speakers; their language is a blend, a synthesis of the two into a third. Thus they are interlingual, not bilingual. The codes are not separate, but intrinsically fused... Chicano speech expands both the connotative and the denotative range of words in both languages, creating not a binary phenomenon, but a new phenomenon unfamiliar to the bilingual" (29). On interlingualism, see also Lilia De Katzew, "Interlingualism: The Language of Chicanos/as" in *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference Proceedings* (2004), as well as Rosaura Sánchez's 2001 article "Chicano Spanish: Variety, Styles and Functions" in *Chicano Studies: Survey and Analysis* for a broader discussion of the linguistic variations employed in Chicana/o speech.

one” (117). While the complex interlingual nature of Montoya’s poetry – some would characterize it as *caló*²⁴⁹ –makes it largely inaccessible to an English monolingual audience,²⁵⁰ that is as Montoya wanted it; his message was primarily directed at the Chicana/o community (G. Hernández 73, 75). This is likely one of the reasons why there isn’t more scholarship on Montoya’s poetry within the North American academy today.

As in all of his work, Montoya maintained a critical stance on Anglo American society and the U.S. nation throughout his production on the topic of the Korean War. Montoya engaged with the Chicano experience in the Korean War with a similar attention to the complexity of the situation as does Hinojosa, although his body of work on the subject is not nearly as extensive as Hinojosa’s Korean War literature. Moreover, the concise, oral nature of Montoya’s production prevents a treatment of the subject as extensive as that afforded to Hinojosa by the four volumes he dedicated to the subject. Nevertheless, the measured, precise nature of Montoya’s poetry in particular embodies it with a more direct urgency that speaks with immediacy to his Chicana/o audience. This immediacy is readily apparent in the poem “El marinero mariguano” (literal English translation: “the pot-smoking sailor”) in which a Chicano sailor tells the story of his

²⁴⁹ According to Lilia De Katzew, “‘Caló,’ like interlingualism, was a defiant sociolinguistic vernacular expression that emerged from the socially oppressed in Spain, and includes a diversity of influences such as the language of the Andalusian gypsies which had absorbed characteristics of other languages, including Arabic and Hebrew” (68). *Caló* has since adapted to the linguistic diversity of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, and expanded to incorporate the hybridity of the evolving Spanish language and its incorporation of English influences (De Katzew 68). Moreover, Ignacio Orlando Trujillo notes that *caló* “has been extended to signify the syntax and vocabulary of *pachuco* jargon” (151). Perhaps most notably, *caló* is associated with the use of words and phrases that are pure inventions of its speakers (De Katzew 68). For a more detailed discussion of *caló* in the Chicano context, see Adolfo Ortega’s *Caló Tapestry* (1980), Rafael J. González, “Pachuco: The Birth Of A Creole Language” (1967) in *Arizona Quarterly*, Mauricio Mazón’s *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (1984), and Leodoro Hernández, “The Language of the Chicano” (1979).

²⁵⁰ Bruce-Novoa’s explanation of the linguistic complexity of Montoya’s work is relevant here: “Decoding [Montoya’s] language in all its riches will be possible only for the interlingual reader, though the bilingual can come to ‘understand’ his poems; the monolingual, of course, will be lost” (30).

nonconformist participation in the U.S. Navy (G. Hernández 61). The poem can be seen as loosely autobiographical since, like the poem's speaker, Montoya served on a U.S. Navy minesweeper during the Korean War. Like much of Montoya's poetry, the poem has a comedic element that functions to offset the serious nature of the difficulties of Chicana/o life that are alluded to in its lines.

From the outset of the poem, the speaker's disrespect for the navy is readily apparent: "Cuando estaba en la marina / me pasaba pa' Tijuana... a conseguir mariguana" [When I was in the navy / I would cross over to Tijuana... to get marijuana] ("El marinero mariguano," 1-4). Caught and punished by the naval authorities, the speaker is assigned to a minesweeping unit destined to Korea. As G. Hernández asserts, instead of condemning nonconformity, truancy, or other forms of delinquency, Montoya's "poetic voice places emphasis on the negative role played by diverse representatives of American institutions," assessing the Chicana/o individual's actions according to Chicana/o community values rather than those of mainstream American society (60). As we see later in "El marinero mariguano," the speaker goes on to condemn the U.S. Navy as one of those negative American institutions. Seemingly unaffected by his time in the stockade and his assignment to the most dangerous detail in the military, the Chicano sailor entertains himself by rolling a joint in order to pass the time on the boat, "pa' no aburrirme en el viaje / rolé una lata de frajos" [in order to avoid boredom on the journey / I rolled a stack of joints] (11-12). Throughout the poem, Montoya draws on Chicano colloquialisms and slang, privileging a form of interlingual speech that is stigmatized by mainstream U.S. society – a speech that, ironically, is also inaccessible to the monolingual Anglo speakers that enforce that stigmatization. The poem's orality is also

notable in the rhyming that is present in many of the verses, although the rhyming scheme is by no means standardized. The third verse alludes to the dangerous nature of the detail to which the speaker has been assigned: “El barco era de esos chicos / que les dicen barreminas / son los primeros al frente / y tienen fama en la marina” [The boat was for those guys / that are called minesweepers / they are the first to the front / and they’re well-known in the navy] (13-16). The loose rhyming can be seen in the second and fourth lines, which end in “barreminas” and “marina,” respectively. This poetic technique provides a more rhythmic quality to the poem as a whole.

As anyone familiar with the military would understand, the minesweepers’ “fame” comes from this group’s reputation as one of the most deadly assignments in the military, with minesweepers often serving as cannon fodder due to the fact that they form the first wave of any combat mission. The reference “son los primeros al frente” thus alludes to the danger of being among the first wave of attackers in war. The verse continues, “lástima que el de nosotros / nunca tuvo disciplina” [what a shame that those on our boat / was never well-trained] (17-18). Through the information supplied to the audience in the poem’s first three verses, we have been informed of a troubling reality: nonconformists in the military (many of whom, the poem suggests, are Chicanos) are punished by being assigned the most dangerous missions; and moreover, those saddled with the minesweeping detail are mostly untrained, ill-prepared young men whose lives are devalued by the U.S. military.

The later verses in “El marinero mariguano” assume a more indicting tone, first condemning the U.S. for its interventionist politics that justify its disruption into the conflicts of other countries that are not its concern, “Yo nunca he tenido pleito / con los

Koreanos del Norte / el gobierno entremetido / se mete aunque no le importe” [I’ve never had anything against / the North Koreans / the nosy government / gets involved where it doesn’t belong] (37-40). Here, Montoya’s anti-imperialist stance rings clear, echoing Díaz Valcárcel’s voice from his autobiography when he laments being forced to fight in a war that he didn’t believe in, “Tuve que marchar a Corea a defender los intereses de la nación dominadora” [I had to go off to Korea to defend the interests of the dominant nation] (*Autobiografía* 238). In this verse, Montoya personifies the U.S. government as a nosy busybody who doesn’t mind his/her own business, thus communicating his frustration at the U.S.’s imperialist, interventionist politics through a metaphor with which the larger Chicana/o community can readily identify. The penultimate verse in the poem indirectly addresses the audience, cautioning the Chicano to think twice about enlisting in the military:

Ya no se anden enlistando
 les digo yo a mis carnales
 de que sirven las medallas
 si nos ven como animals
 ahí les dejo sus bisteques
 yo prefiero mis nopales (41-6)²⁵¹

The reference to “mis carnales” interpellates the male Chicano spectator/listener, serving as a warning of the type of oppression and racism that awaits him in the military. The stereotypical foodstuffs of Anglos (“bisteques”) and Chicanas/os (“nopales”) reinforces the cultural barrier between the two communities, while also sarcastically mirroring Anglo society’s tendency to generalize about the Chicana/o people with stereotypical symbols like “cactus.” By critically mimicking the speech and perspective of the Anglo

²⁵¹ English translation: “Don’t enlist anymore / I urge my brothers / what’s the use of medals / if they see us as animals / You can have your steaks / I prefer my nopales.”

community here and in other poems and short stories, Montoya effectively undermines the superior, self-righteous perspective of this dominant group.

This same mimicry is also present in one of the Korean War references in Montoya's celebrated poem "El Louie." Due to its extended length and linguistic complexity, I will not analyze the poem in its entirety here, but rather focus on certain verses that are key to a broader understanding of Montoya's anti-imperialist stance related to Chicana/o participation in the U.S. Military.²⁵² "El Louie" is an elegy for Louie Rodríguez who embodies the everyday working-class Chicano/Pachuco man, praising his flawed life as a reflection of the urban reality of mid-twentieth century Chicano life (Ladeira 113). In the poem, Montoya thus presents Louie as at once a tragically flawed human being and an ironic hero in the Chicana/o community (113). It isn't until more than halfway through the poem that the audience learns that Louie is a Korean War veteran. Louie's performance in the military mirrors his warrior-like status on the streets with his fellow Pachucos (G. Hernández 80) – with one exception: his rebellious, nonconformist nature isn't tolerated by the Anglo-dominated U.S. institution:

Y en Korea fue soldado de	[In Korea he was a draftee ²⁵³]
Levita con huevos and all the	[with balls (courageous) and all the]
Paradoxes del soldado raso –	[Paradoxes of the foot soldier]
Heroism and the stockade!	
And on leave, jump boots	
Shainadas and ribbons, cocky	[shined]
From the war, strutting to	
Early mass on Sunday morning ("El Louie" 70-77)	

The speaker's characterization of Louie in the military highlights the paradoxes in his presence there. On the one hand, he was a proud, brave soldier, living up to his reputation

²⁵² For a detailed analysis of "El Louie," see the aforementioned articles by Ignacio Orlando Trujillo and Joy Ladeira.

²⁵³ Translation of this line taken from Trujillo (156).

back home. Yet his forced participation in the dominant Anglo institution of the military (he was a draftee, after all) provokes his rebellious nature and he does not submit quietly, as is expected, to the army's strict protocols. His courage is therefore in direct opposition of the punishment he receives for failing to follow orders – hence the “paradoxes” of his experience, and the juxtaposition of the terms “heroism” and “the stockade.” Montoya’s employment of the term “soldado raso” is also significant in that it refers to the lowest-ranked foot soldier. In his analysis of “El Louie,” Trujillo examines the linguistic roots of the word “raso,” derived from the verb “rasar” which means “to level off, graze, skim, clear” (157). Taking this semantic origin into account, we can therefore read Louie’s positioning as a lowly foot soldier in direct relation to the punishment he receives as the army’s attempt to diminish his nonconformist nature – to level off his rebelliousness. G. Hernández reads Louie’s character in the poem as adopting “an in-group [Chicano] perspective that provides an implicit rejection of those norms imposed externally and which have customarily served to judge Chicanos in negative terms” (53). Louie’s adoption of this perspective is reflected in his “cocky” attitude and the strut with which he walks to church; in spite of the shame of being subjected to the stockade, the Pachuco retains his pride. This persistent pride implies Louie’s rejection of the oppressive military structure, which is subsequently celebrated by the poem’s speaker, the paradox of his heroism in combination with the shame of the stockade serving to depict the military institution in a negative light as trying to emasculate or psychologically castrate him, as Trujillo has suggested (156-7).

A subsequent verse in “El Louie” which I believe has been misread by some critics describes how he hocked his Bronze Star for money to pay for his vice-ridden

lifestyle, which is described in several of the poem's other verses (drugs, gambling and alcohol are among the vices listed): "Afterward he and fat Richard / Would hock their Bronze Stars / For pisto en el Jardin Canales [For drink/booze in the Jardin Canales]" (81-3). Both G. Hernández and Landeira interpret Louie's decision to hock his military decoration solely in terms of his decline into a life of drug addiction. While this act, taken in combination with Louie's later decision to also pawn his barber supplies, is clearly one aspect of his declining lifestyle, it is important to consider the social and political implications of pawning a Bronze Star. Placing these lines in dialogue with the verse in "El marinero mariguano" that refers to military decorations received by Chicanos as devoid of meaning, I interpret this part of "El Louie" as a reference also to the character's growing disillusionment with symbols associated with Anglo society.

The harsh reality of the impoverished circumstances in which Louie finds the Mexican American community upon his return home after the war takes its toll on him, converts Louie into a tragic fallen hero who no longer sees the Bronze Star he received as a symbol of military honor of which to be proud, but instead views it as a reminder of the oppressive effects of the "dominant nation" on him and his community. I therefore contest Landeira's analysis of these lines as simply meaning "that they gave up their one claim to fame as war heroes," as well as the essentialist racialization of Louie's brown Chicano body as a "Bronze Star" because, as a mestizo, he belongs to a "bronze people with a bronze culture" (Landeira 114). The military medal does not signify the Chicano culture, but rather the dominant White supremacist culture that is perpetually reinforced by the U.S. military institution. The meaninglessness of these military medals is foregrounded in both Montoya's and Hinojosa's work. Like Rafa's problematization of

the medals he receives from the military in Hinojosa's KCDT, Louie's decision to pawn his medal, on some level, signifies his rejection of this empty cultural symbol of the dominant nation.

The penultimate verse of "El Louie" makes up part of the poem's conclusion and also includes the last reference to the Korean War. Finally arriving at the subject of his death, the speaker asserts, "His death was an insult / Porque no murio en accion-/ Ni lo mataron los vatos, / Ni los gooks en Korea" (101-4).²⁵⁴ Instead of dying a hero in combat, whether on the home front or away at war on Korean soil, Louie died alone in a motel room. The Pachuco figure's tragic demise, however, does not undermine his good qualities and the exalted days of his youth. Signified here is the Chicano discourse discussed previously of warrior masculinity – a romanticized ideology within Chicana/o culture that expects bravery and stalwartness from Chicano men and sees any sign of weakness or emotion as a failure or an insult to that culture. While Montoya does interrogate U.S. master narratives of imperialism and other problematic divisions and ideologies in contemporary U.S. society, his poetry does not broach the subject of gender relations within the Chicana/o community.²⁵⁵

Montoya's decision to use the word "gook" in this poem is an interesting political act. As I discussed in my analysis of Hinojosa's Korean War literature, none of the Chicano characters in his macrotext utter the word "gook" – we only ever hear it come from the mouths of Anglo soldiers and officers. Just like Hinojosa's conscious decision

²⁵⁴ "His death was an insult / Because he didn't die in action / The Chicano gangsters didn't kill him / And neither did the enemy in Korea."

²⁵⁵ The absence of the themes of gender relations and inequality in Chicano poetry of the 1970s and 80s was taken up by a later generation of Chicana poets who approached the poetic genre from a feminine positionality that challenged many of the masculinist tropes present in the work of Montoya and others of his generation. Among these Chicanas are Lorna Dee Cervantes, Gloria Velásquez, and Alma Villanueva.

not to use the term is a political act, Montoya's usage of this racial epithet is equally political. The function of "gook" in the closing verses of "El Louie" does not necessarily reinforce White supremacist racist paradigms, but rather – as Trujillo has argued – points to a significant irony in the Pachuco's life (158). "The use of 'gooks' by Montoya conveys a stark and lucid irony: one excluded group, the *pachucos*, an alienated internal colony of the larger Anglo society, finds another group to discriminate against" (158). Montoya's deliberate usage of the term then represents his appropriation of the dominant Anglo group's slang in a way that "reflects and judges the attitudes of Anglo-American society" (158). This move is also reflective of the orality of Montoya's work, which is constantly drawing on the speech patterns of both Chicanos, Pachucos, and Anglos, often in an attempt to subvert or undermine persisting stereotypes or ideologies that he signals as problematic.

Problematizing Anglo-Chicano Racial Tensions and Internalized Racism in "The Bully"

"The Bully" is a short story by Montoya published electronically by Red Wings Press in 2001. No criticism has been written on the text to date. Interestingly, in the initial publication notes, Montoya writes that the story will be included in his forthcoming book *How I Came to America*, which, among other materials, would include "poems and stories about Chicanos in the Korean War" (Montoya, "The Bully" i). Unfortunately, this book was not published prior to Montoya's passing in 2013.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, "The Bully" is a powerful narrative in itself that reinforces several themes that are present in

²⁵⁶ Inquiries to Chusma House Publications, the publisher Montoya listed in this note, revealed that Montoya never submitted materials for this book. The publisher did indicate, however, that there was a possibility of a posthumous publication of any of Montoya's writings that may be submitted by his family at a later date (Trujillo, "Re: Inquiry").

Montoya's earlier poetry addressing the Chicano experience in the U.S. military. A brief, six-page narrative, "The Bully" relates the events that unfold for a group of Chicano sailors in a single night aboard a U.S. Navy minesweeper during the Korean War. Narrated from the first-person perspective of one of the Chicano sailors who goes unnamed, the story describes how he and his comrades retaliate against the racist bullying of an Anglo sailor named Hardy by tricking him into eating a whole jalapeño that they lead him to believe is a pickle.

"The Bully" reinforces the low esteem in which the armed forces holds minesweepers that was suggested in Montoya's poem "El marinero mariguano" by characterizing them as "the dregs of the U.S. Navy" ("The Bully," 2). The narrator also alludes to the disproportionate presence of Chicanos in this extremely dangerous role in his reference to the groups of "vatos from other sweeps" from which he and his friends heard rumors that the Navy was passing around a movie reel of the film *Viva Zapata* which they all longed to watch (3). The reference to Chicano sailors' communication with sailors of Mexican descent ("vatos") from other ships also reinforces the theme of ethnic solidarity in the narrative. Moreover, the popular culture reference to *Viva Zapata*, a 1952 Marlon Brando flick, also serves to reinforce the narrative's Korean War setting while simultaneously alluding to the identity politics associated with the casting of primarily non-Mexican, Anglo actors in a film about the Mexican revolution.²⁵⁷ This subtle reference points to other forms of institutionalized racism present in 1950s

²⁵⁷ This type of Anglo-centric casting was unfortunately the norm in 1950s Hollywood. Moreover, issues surrounding identity politics in cinema did not emerge until several decades later. Charles Ramírez Berg addresses the issue of typecasting and ethnic stereotypes in U.S. film in his 2002 book *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*. Berg notes that one of the ways that Hollywood has historically essentialized ethnic characters is by casting Anglos in ethnic and racial roles (Berg 120).

America, including the marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o actors in Hollywood films. Here, Montoya reinforces the continuity between racial discrimination in the military and discrimination on the home front in mainstream American society – a continuity that Hinojosa also gestures to in KCDT.

Like Montoya's anti-imperialist poetry, "The Bully" is openly critical of the U.S. intervention in Korea, as is evidenced in the narrator's description of the night in question as, "a lull in the police action they refused to call a real war" (1). By addressing the U.S. government's labeling of the war in Korea as a mere "police action," Montoya once again criticizes the American institution's deceitful approach to national myth-making. Disdainfully referring to the Navy minesweeper as an "old bucket" and describing his group of Chicano comrades perched on its "fantail," the narrator recalls, "in our fantasies, we were each respectively back home—at the Coronet theater in Logan Heights, at the Calcetin in El Paso, La Mesa in Albuquerque—en el mono back home, ese" (5). The narrator's cynical tone reveals the nonconformist attitude – similar to that evidenced in "El marinero mariguano" – of he and his friends and their ambivalence toward the minesweeper's wartime duties. Moreover, the Chicano sailors' collective fantasy of being back home in their respective barrios in San Diego (Logan Heights), El Paso (Calcetin), and Albuquerque (La Mesa), suggests an ethnic solidarity among Mexican American sailors who, regardless of their hometown, endure common adversities as ethnic minorities in the military.

After setting the stage for the ship's movie screening (which, alas, was not *Viva Zapata*), the narrator describes the elaborate meal they had prepared with the jalapeños in oil his friend Lopez's family had sent him, which they are just getting ready to enjoy as

they watch the movie. Right then, however, they're interrupted by the southern twang of the bully Hardy, "'Whatcha got there, Pancho?' ... 'What you Pachucos eating? Gi'me some!'" (5). Montoya's usage of the ethnic slurs "Pancho" and "Pachuco" – which becomes derogatory in the way that Hardy uses it – to highlight the Anglo sailor's anti-Mexican racism make the hostility palpable. At first, the narrator and his comrades react in fear, worried that Hardy will ruin their meal for them. However, a solution quickly presents itself once Hardy indicates his hunger. They reply that they're eating pickles, and one of the Chicano sailors quickly shoves "the fattest, juiciest and oiliest jalapeno... into Hardy's gaping maw" before he realizes what's going on (6). Not comprehending what had just happened, Hardy "was on fire, choking, gasping and clawing at his face and neck" in such desperation that he gets carted off to the sick bay for treatment (7). Already privy to Hardy's antagonistic nature, the reader is inclined to cheer on the narrator and his friends rather than commiserate with the victim of this spontaneous prank.

In the first lines of the story, we learn, "Besides being a bully, Hardy was a glutton, and when he coordinated these two vices—which he delighted in doing especially to Blacks, Pinoys and Chicanos—he became a total asshole" (1). The Anglo sailor directs his racial hostility at any and all ethnic "others," including African Americans and Filipinos, as well as Chicanos, the narrator explains. Hardy's racist attitude in the text echoes the racism experienced by Rafa in *KCDT* as well as that endured by Puerto Rican characters like Rodríguez in Díaz Valcárcel's work. Hardy in particular is presented as an ignorant bully with "a small cavity where the brain goes" who appears to take particular pleasure in the misery of others (1). As such, the notable

glee with which the narrator recreates the vengeance he and his fellow Chicanos reap on the sailor seems well warranted.

Revenge complete, the Chicano sailors head down to the sick bay to survey the damage, and run into “Doc” Trujillo. It is through this Mexican American character that Montoya examines the effects of internalized racism on Chicanos, much like Hinojosa did with the character of Donald Trujillo in *The Useless Servants*. The narrator characterizes the doctor as “Raza but he didn't much care for Chicanos. He was a Mexican-American, he would remind us, not some suitzooter marijuano! We kidded him about being a Mexican-bolillo, but we knew he was a little ashamed of us” (9). His fellow Chicano sailors are well aware that Doc Trujillo purposely tries to distance himself from them, and they consequently label him a “Mexican-bolillo,” which is a slang term for Anglos (because their light skin resembles the inside of the bread roll with the same name). While the narrator appears to make light of the doctor’s shame towards his Chicano identity, Doc Trujillo clearly stands in here for those Mexican Americans in the community who prefer to downplay or reject their heritage outright, which as I discussed earlier is a sign of the effects of internalized racism. The fact that he does recognize his Mexican origins, however, differentiates Doc Trujillo from Hinojosa’s Coloradan character, who claims to be of Spanish descent through and through.

In Doc Trujillo’s case in “The Bully,” he plays along with the Chicano sailors’ prank and doesn’t report it to his superiors. The narrator concludes, “Doc was o.k., just a little too assimilated for the rest of us rascuachis” (9). The doctor’s ultimate decision to cover up for his comrades suggests that he does perhaps feel some sense of solidarity with the other Chicanos, despite disassociating himself from their “rascuachi,”

“marijuano” ways. The word “rascuachi” is however a negative term that is generally used in Spanish to refer to someone or something that is worthless or of very little value. The narrator’s word usage in this line therefore indicates a perceived level of condescension coming from Doc Trujillo. The complex relationship between Doc Trujillo and the other Chicano sailors in “The Bully” could thus be interpreted as standing in for the complex intra-ethnic ties and divisions within the larger Mexican American community. As we have learned through both Hinojosa and Montoya’s texts, nothing is as simple or clear-cut as it may first appear.

While Montoya’s body of work on the Korean War may not be as extensive as Hinojosa’s literary production on the subject, Montoya’s wielding of tongue-in-cheek wordplay constructs a more assertive, unveiled criticism of the U.S. as an imperialist dominant nation. In “The Bully,” Montoya persists in his cynical portrayal of the U.S. military institution as a negative force that contributes to the deceitful, oppressive project of U.S. national myth-making which he also openly criticizes in several of the poems discussed in this chapter. Whereas Hinojosa’s protagonist has been incorporated into the folds of the U.S. nation through his sense of belonging to his Texas homeland – Rafa in fact becomes a cop and detective later in the KCDT series – Montoya’s speakers and characters, on the other hand, adopt a resolutely anti-imperialist politics that distances and dis-identifies them from Anglo America.

Critical Differences in the Puerto Rican and Chicano Experience of the Korean War

The open discontent evidenced in Hinojosa’s Korean War literature, as well as the staunchly anti-imperialist stance of Montoya’s poetry and narrative, represent a cross-section of the limited literary and cultural production addressing the war that has come

out of the Chicana/o community. While the specific perspective and literary project of each text and author is unique, they have certain themes in common. Many of the themes present in the work of both Hinojosa and Montoya are also explored in varying ways by the Puerto Rican authors discussed in Chapters One and Two. In order to reflect on the intersection between the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o experience in the Korean War, here I briefly consider the parallels and differences in the experiences of these two communities of minority ethnic soldiers in this war.

While parallels can be seen in the racial and cultural tensions between whites and Puerto Ricans and the discrimination between whites and Chicanos/Mexicanos in the U.S. military, the historical roots of those divisions differ greatly, and the resulting reactions from the characters in the Puerto Rican and Chicano texts on the war are just as distinct as their histories. In Hinojosa's text, the racist anti-Mexican slurs Rafa and his comrades receive from the likes of Anglo Capt. Bracken reinforce the continuity of Anglo-Mexicano racial tensions within the military and the racial strife they experience back home in Belkin County, Texas. Similarly, in Montoya's short story "The Bully," the racist Anglo sailor named Hardy embodies the engrained White supremacist ideology within national institutions like the military. Moreover, the Chicano/Mexicano protagonists in "The Bully" and KCDT dominate the English language just as well, if not better, than their Anglo counterparts, and they have no problem responding to and defending themselves from any insults they receive. The experience of Puerto Rican troops in the 65th as both González and Díaz Valcárcel represented it, in comparison, differed due to two main factors.

The first difference between the Chicano and Puerto Rican experience is seen in the fact that the Puerto Ricans belonged to a segregated infantry. Due to the unit's segregation, the only Anglo military personnel in the 65th were officers, which immediately placed the Puerto Rican soldiers at a disadvantage due to their subordinate level to their Anglo superiors, and also made it easier for the officers to abuse their power against troops who were not only of a lower rank, but who some Anglos viewed as culturally and ethnically inferior. Second, while the majority of the Mexican American protagonists in Montoya and Hinojosa's text can defend themselves just as well in Spanish *and* English, a large number of the Puerto Rican recruits barely spoke a word of English when they arrived on Korean soil. This reality is reflected in the work of both Puerto Rican authors, and can be specifically identified in Díaz Valcárcel's short story "Proceso en diciembre," where Rodríguez has a difficult time following the monotone English speech of the officers that interrogate him.

For Puerto Ricans, then, the language barrier proved a significant impediment to communication and can be seen as affecting their safety and the safety of the men around them. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, the poor English skills of many new recruits is reflective of more widespread administrative oversights and failures within the U.S. military that have since been documented by many Korean War historians.²⁵⁸ As Hinojosa depicts in *The Useless Servants*, unlike Puerto Rican soldiers of the 65th who were often outranked by the officers who mistreated them, many Chicano soldiers like Rafa were in positions that enabled them to stand up for themselves and speak out against

²⁵⁸ Villahermosa specifically discusses the language issues that new arrivals struggled with on pages 202-3; he addresses the broader shortcomings of U.S. military leadership on pages 18-19. In *The Korean War*, Cumings addresses many of the military's missteps during the war as well.

those who tried to belittle or ostracize them. The protagonist recalls how, when they spoke Spanish, several Anglo soldiers used to tell him and a buddy “‘to speak English, goddammit’ . . . but that Charlie told them where to get off, just like he did first to Maguire and then to Doyle” (*The Useless Servants* 80). Along similar lines, in Montoya’s short story, Lopez and his fellow Chicano sailors find strength in numbers to confront and “punish” the bully Hardy.

While in *KLS* and *The Useless Servants*, Rafa and his buddies already have a sense of national belonging to the U.S. in spite of the discrimination to which they’re subjected, the characters in Montoya’s poems and narrative demonstrate a fiercer pride in their Chicana/o culture that they view as independent from the American nation – this is one of the main divergences between Hinojosa and Montoya’s work. Like Montoya’s Chicano protagonists, the Puerto Rican characters in the texts discussed in Chapters One and Two also possess a fierce patriotism for Puerto Rico, but are in large part ambivalent about and/or completely unfamiliar with U.S. nationalism. Puerto Rican draftees’ incomprehension of and resistance to the U.S. imperialist project during their military service²⁵⁹ is mirrored in the ambivalence and nonconformism of Montoya’s protagonists, whose attitude represents that of a significant portion of Chicano military members who were forcefully conscripted into the armed forces. While many of Hinojosa’s characters

²⁵⁹ As discussed in Chapter One, although many Puerto Ricans were drafted to serve in the Korean War, particularly as replacements during the latter half of the conflict, there was also a significant group of volunteer enlistees in the initial ranks of the 65th infantry. The majority of the characters in the work of Díaz Valcárcel and González, however, were draftees.

were also conscripted²⁶⁰, his protagonist Rafa differs notably from Montoya's characters in that he possesses a Chicano pride reflective of his U.S. national belonging.

In sum, the literary representation of the experiences of these different minority ethnic soldiers in the Korean War have multiple convergences and divergences, and the implications of those experiences are depicted from different political stances and with different literary projects in mind. By placing these marginalized texts into direct dialogue, my analysis in this chapter considers a much broader range of literary and cultural production by Chicanas/os on the Korean War than has been pursued by previous scholars, continuing the work of opening this scholarly conversation up to more diverse texts and audiences. While the broader trends of open discontent in the work of Hinojosa, and staunch anti-imperialism in the work of González, Díaz Valcárcel, and Montoya, respectively can be identified in these texts, it is important not to discount the multiplicity and complexity of the experiences presented by these and other authors on this subject. Another significant positionality on the minority ethnic soldier is explored in the final chapter of this dissertation that follows, which addresses the Chicana author's portrayal of the Chicana/o community's experience of the Vietnam War.

²⁶⁰ Although Rafa technically reenlisted voluntarily, his decision was informed by the knowledge that he would eventually be called up anyways. Since he had already begun his military service several years earlier, he was obligated to finish it, and knew that he would be among the first to be called back to duty when conscription began.

CHAPTER FOUR

(Re)presenting the Vietnam War era through the Chicana Perspective: The Fragmented Chicana/o Family and Crises in Female Identity

In an effort to continue the analysis of Puerto Rican and Chicana/o production on the U.S. military experience presented in the previous chapters, this chapter transitions into a discussion of the Chicana/o experience of the Vietnam War era. While the texts examined up to this point stem primarily from male authors and artists – with the exception of the female writers and directors of *The Borinqueneers* documentary – women have also written about the minority war experience. Unfortunately, the bulk of this production focuses on more contemporary military mobilization, especially in light of the increased female presence in military combat in recent decades. However, beginning with the Vietnam War, a growing group of female authors and artists from all backgrounds have begun to reflect on issues surrounding the U.S. military, combat experiences, and the impacts of war on the home front. While much less has been written on the Vietnam War by female Puerto Rican authors than by Chicana authors, the insular Puerto Rican texts by male authors have begun to incorporate female characters more prominently into their narratives, and to reflect on the broader consequences of war outside of the battlefield. Chicana authors, on the other hand, have produced significant cultural production on this theme since the early 2000s, initiating a new wave of contemporary literature that reflects on the historical impact of the Vietnam War and its related anti-Vietnam war movements on the larger Chicana/o community. This new wave of cultural representation also considers the ways in which the cultural and social

developments stemming from that era inform the contemporary reality of Chicanas/os in the U.S.

Striving to initiate a more direct dialogue between Puerto Rican and Chicana/o literary and cultural production on minority military participation, this chapter begins with a short discussion of the experience of the Puerto Rican soldier in the U.S. military following the Korean War, and briefly explores the limited literary production on the Puerto Rican soldier's Vietnam War experience. Moreover, the first section presents several previously undiscovered, unpublished documents on the subject that were found in Puerto Rican archives at the University of Puerto Rico and the Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín. This discussion gestures to the need for further research and gathering of texts and informal knowledge on Puerto Ricans' Vietnam War experience, particularly within additional archives and document collections that unfortunately fell outside the scope of this dissertation. Moreover, the marked lack of Puerto Rican women's writings on the Vietnam War era presents a significant divergence between the literature emerging from these two minority groups in relation to the second war in East Asia. The reasons behind this divergence are briefly considered here. The second section of this chapter examines the unique historical circumstances of the Chicana/o community during the Vietnam War, as well as the existing literature that has explored this reality. This examination reveals the striking lack of Chicana writing on the subject prior to this new wave of female literary production in the early 2000s, and presents the current scholarship on the subject as heavily dominated by the Chicano male experience. In an effort to insert a consideration of the female experience into the male-dominated literature and scholarship on this subject, the final three sections of this chapter present in-depth readings of Stella

Pope Duarte's *Let Their Spirits Dance* (2002), Patricia Santana's *Motorcycle Ride on a Sea of Tranquility* (2002), and Gloria Velásquez's unpublished novella *Toy Soldiers and Dolls*.

How Can We Move On? Puerto Rico's Military Presence in the Aftermath of the Korean War

This chapter's discussion of Chicana production is directly related to the notable lack of such production emerging from the female Puerto Rican community. Looking back to the immediate aftermath of the Korean War, I briefly discuss here the literary and cultural production that followed the work of González and Díaz Valcárcel, particularly texts that addressed the Vietnam War. Puerto Ricans continued to be drafted following the Korean War and the desegregation of the 65th Infantry Regiment in 1953, and in the early 1960s they began to be inducted into battalions going to Vietnam. The U.S. Congress estimates that over 48,000 Puerto Ricans served in the armed forces during the Vietnam War, approximately 430 of whom died in combat, and over 3,000 more who were wounded (Fortuño 1). The circumstances surrounding the military service of Puerto Ricans in the Vietnam War, however, differed greatly from the Korean War. The main difference was the fact that Puerto Rican servicemen were no longer assigned to an all-Puerto Rican infantry (the 65th Infantry was desegregated shortly after the 1953 court martial), but rather were incorporated into the general military population. This meant that Puerto Rican soldiers often served in units dominated by North American servicemen, rendering their "foreign" cultural and linguistic background more apparent, and many times resulting in discriminatory treatment from their North American comrades.

Several texts have been written that explore the Vietnam War period in Puerto Rico's military history, including Ángel Matos Torres' autobiographical account of his experience in Vietnam (and Korea), *Corea/Vietnam: dos guerras que quise olvidar* (2010),²⁶¹ as well as the short story "La madona de Vietnam (Crónica de guerra)"²⁶² by Puerto Rican author Edwin Figueroa Berríos.²⁶³ Although written by a male author, "La madona de Vietnam" does consider the effect of Puerto Rican men's military participation on women by emphasizing the experience of the protagonist's mother after her son returned home from Vietnam suffering from PTSD. This attention to the broader impact of the war on the Puerto Rican community, particularly female family members,

²⁶¹ Torres' book combines autobiographical accounts of his experience as an active serviceman during the Korean and Vietnam Wars with historical background, statistics and documents that provide the reader with a more general understanding of Puerto Rico's involvement in these two wars. The portion of the book dedicated to Vietnam is much shorter than the Korean War section, most likely because Torres served in active combat in Korea, while he worked as military intelligence during Vietnam and never saw direct combat during the war, although he did travel to Vietnam several times for intelligence missions. Matos Torres employs a frank and open tone throughout the text, sharing his opinions and judgments on both wars. Regarding Vietnam he wrote, "The big problem with this war was that it did not matter where you were, you were still on the war front and it was possible that a shot would come at you from any corner, or that you would be the target of a grenade or a crazed person with explosives strapped to their body in order to have them explode where it would cause the most damage" (160, my translation).

²⁶² Berríos' compelling and structurally complex narrative tells the story of Jorge Ramirez, a Puerto Rican who grew up in the Bronx and a Vietnam War veteran suffering from PTSD, and his widowed mother Matilde. Through flashbacks, Berríos narrates their lives before, during and after the war in order to reveal how Jorge's experience in the war changed their lives permanently. The main source of Jorge's trauma is having witnessed the violent death of his best friend during a surprise attack in Vietnam. The story is divided into sections and told from multiple narrative perspectives, alternating between the voice of Jorge, Matilde, and the war chronicles of a journalist who was stationed with Jorge's unit in Vietnam. The story also incorporates letters written by Jorge to his mother during his time in Vietnam. In contrast with Díaz Valcárcel's short stories, Berríos' narrative comments on the experience of Nuyoricans in the U.S. military, alluding subtly to the discrimination they were confronted with both within the ranks of the armed forces, and within North American society back home. Berríos also addresses the debilitating psychological effect of the war on soldiers like Jorge, poignantly portraying the difficulty of civilian life for veterans suffering from PTSS. The title of the story (The Madonna of Vietnam) refers to a Vietnamese woman who was the sole survivor of a massacre of her village. After pretending to cradle a baby swaddled in a blanket in her arms in order to draw out Jorge's platoon, she begins shooting at them with the machine gun they had mistaken for a baby. Prior to the ambush, the protagonist recalls, "The truth is that in that unhappy woman I saw for an instant the figure of death; I saw in her how destruction, pain, hate and the degrading misery that had dragged us into this war could be embodied in a human being" (35-6, my translation).

²⁶³ Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I will not enter into a detailed discussion of Puerto Rican literature addressing the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, this is an issue that warrants further elaboration and which I plan to address in later research.

is also seen in the Chicana narratives on Vietnam discussed later in this chapter. A novel that depicts the experience of two Puerto Rican enlistees in the military shortly after the end of the Vietnam War in a tragicomic manner is Josean Ramos's *Antes de la Guerra* (2005), which was briefly discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. News articles and letters from that period also provide insight into the response of Puerto Rican soldiers and civilians to the island's involvement in the Vietnam War.

The male dominance of Puerto Rican cultural production on the subject of the Vietnam War is interesting and warrants further consideration and discussion. Given that the Chicana population only recently began to reflect more prominently on the Vietnam War era, it is possible that such reflections by Puerto Rican female writers will also begin to emerge from the island as new generations of authors arise. Moreover, beginning with the Vietnam War era, there was a substantial growth in Puerto Rican diasporic production emerging out of the "Nuyorican" experience, and it is therefore likely that more work by continental Latinas/os of Puerto Rican descent touches on the Vietnam War experience. One such instance of Nuyorican writing on Vietnam is the work of Vietnam Veteran and Nuyorican poet and playwright Pedro Pietri.²⁶⁴

In contrast to their one-sided, pro-U.S. coverage of the Korean War, the Puerto Rican media's news coverage of the experience of their compatriots in the Vietnam War was at least a little more nuanced and less praising of the U.S. government and military.

²⁶⁴ One poem of particular interest by Pietri is "Para la madre de Angel Luna," dedicated to the mother of a young Puerto Rican man in the Bronx who wanted to go AWOL when he found out he had been drafted to go to Vietnam, but he did not because he did not want to bring shame to his mother when the military police came and arrested him. The poem contains a very strong anti-imperialist tone, clearly insinuating that the U.S. military was "el enemigo verdadero [the real enemy]" in the eyes of the poem's protagonist. While there is a significant body of scholarship that discusses the work of Pietri in dialogue with other writers of the Puerto Rican diaspora, there has yet to be an in-depth study of Pietri's work alone. Furthermore, to my knowledge, there is yet to be a discussion of Pietri's writing in relation to the Vietnam War. I plan to take up this project as part of my post-doctoral work.

News articles like the one published in *El Mundo* on March 30, 1968 carrying the headline “No Ve Fin Guerra: Denuncian Discriminación Contra Boricuas Vietnam,”²⁶⁵ addressed the difficulties faced by Puerto Rican soldiers during the war, including instances of racism and discrimination that they endured.²⁶⁶ This particular article quoted Vietnam War veteran William Rodríguez Fernández, who had recently returned to the island after sustaining a battle injury: “La moral del soldado puertorriqueño en Vietnam as baja... le dan más trabajo que a los otros y, al igual que los de color, son los que siempre resultan enviados al frente de cualquier misión” (“Denuncia Discriminación” 4).²⁶⁷ Rodríguez Fernández went on to add, “los militares puertorriqueños también son perjudicados porque no entienden el idioma inglés” (4).²⁶⁸ Thus it is clear that in spite of the desegregation of the 65th and the integration of Puerto Rican soldiers into a wide range of units throughout the military by the beginning of the Vietnam War, Puerto Ricans continued to face discrimination within the armed forces based on their ethnic and/or cultural background.

Based on the perceptions of Rodríguez Fernández, moreover, it is possible that, as occurred in the case of the 65th Infantry during the Korean War, the lives of Puerto Rican soldiers in Vietnam continued to be devalued as they were assigned to dangerous combat missions. This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Booth and Gimbel (1996), discussed in the Introduction, revealing that cultural and racial minorities including

²⁶⁵ “War Has No End in Sight: Discrimination Revealed Against Puerto Ricans in Vietnam.”

²⁶⁶ This article, as well as others cited in this dissertation, was accessed at the University of Puerto Rico’s Colección Puertorriqueña, thanks to the generous financial support of the UCSD Institute for International, Comparative and Area Studies (IICAS) and the Department of Literature.

²⁶⁷ “The morale of the Puerto Rican soldier in Vietnam is low... they give him more work than the others and, just as they do with the soldiers of color, the Puerto Ricans are always sent to the front lines of any mission.”

²⁶⁸ “Puerto Rican servicemen are also disadvantaged because they do not understand the English language.”

Latinos and African Americans were overrepresented in high risk combat missions due to their low aptitude (AFQT) scores (1138, 1152). The work of Villa et al. (2010) and Mariscal (*Aztlán and Viet Nam*) also points to structural issues that punished enlistees for poor English skills and limited educational opportunities: “Many men whose first language was Spanish did not score well on the military qualification test, which placed them in the ranks of the new standards men” who were considered mentally deficient and were therefore assigned to infantry units that saw high combat levels (Mariscal 20-1). Josean Ramos’s autobiographically based novel also points, with a heavy dose of irony, to discriminatory treatment based on language skills against Puerto Rican soldiers within the ranks of the armed forces. One of the novel’s protagonists recalls: “Cuando le dijimos al Sargento McCalip que no sabíamos inglés... empezó a preguntarnos sobresaltado quiénes éramos y de dónde veníamos, si éramos espías y de quiénes, cómo y con qué propósito habíamos logrado infiltrarnos sin hablar inglés” (Ramos 91).²⁶⁹ The two Puerto Rican soldiers in the novel undergo a series of interrogations and humiliations during the initial days of boot camp once their superiors are made aware that they don’t speak English. The boys themselves are punished for their lack of English language proficiency and face threats of court martials before finally being relieved of duty and sent home. At no point throughout the process do the military officials admit any administrative errors or claim bureaucratic responsibility for allowing these two earnest enlistees to slip through the cracks despite being unable to speak any English. The prevalence of the theme of communication difficulties based on poor language skills in Puerto Rican and

²⁶⁹ “When we told Sergeant McCalip that we didn’t know English... startled, he began to ask us who we were and where we came from, if we were spies and whose, how and with what intentions we had infiltrated the system without speaking English.”

Chicana/o texts on both wars clearly demonstrates the failure of U.S. military protocol to adequately address and resolve these issues and the discrimination that resulted, as well as the tragic consequence of minority soldiers' increased loss of life (resulting from combat assignments based on low aptitude scores).

In addition to the Puerto Rican media's more critical coverage of the Vietnam War compared to that of the Korean War, there was also a marked difference in the attitudes of the general Puerto Rican public regarding the mandatory draft of their people. Whereas widespread public criticism of and dissent on the island towards the presence of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War did not take form until after the mass court martials in late 1952 and early 1953, islanders were more widely critical of the Puerto Rican presence in the Vietnam War from a much earlier date. In twenty-one letters with the same message addressed to Puerto Rican Governor Roberto Sánchez Vilella in March of 1968, Puerto Rican natives demanded him to stop the draft of Puerto Ricans. "It is wrong to draft our young men to kill and be killed in the illegal and immoral war in Vietnam. Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico do not have a vote for President or Congress in the United States... Those who don't want to volunteer should not be forced to" (FLMM Archives, file 1324).²⁷⁰ The existence of twenty-one form letters with the same message indicates that there were organized campaigns within the Puerto Rican community that opposed the presence of their compatriots in the Vietnam War, denounced their mistreatment, and worked to stop the draft on the island.

²⁷⁰ These letters, as well as other documents cited in this dissertation, were accessed at the Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín in Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico, thanks to funding from UCSD IICAS and the Department of Literature.

It is likely that, like in the continental U.S., some of the dissent towards the Vietnam War was a result of the unprecedented media coverage and widespread controversy on the U.S. mainland regarding the war itself. The humiliation and shame of the earlier court martials of members of the 65th also left a negative impression on the general Puerto Rican community regarding the U.S. military's treatment of their compatriots. This disillusionment with the U.S. military was seen in the ongoing Vietnam War protests and demonstrations by University of Puerto Rico students throughout the years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, as was discussed in the Introduction. Further research is needed to collect informal and unpublished documents on these student demonstrations in order to expand the archive on Puerto Rican responses to U.S. military mobilization of members of their community. Regardless of the reason behind the Puerto Rican community's heightened awareness of the plight of the Puerto Rican soldier in the U.S. military by the Vietnam War era, it clearly marks a decisive shift in the island's sentiment from the Korean War era. A similar shift in attitude and increased politicization of the minority ethnic community can also be seen in relation to the Chicana/o population's experience of the Vietnam War era, as is discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Centering the Female Perspective: The Chicana/o Experience of the Vietnam War Era

In this section, I turn to a discussion of the experience of the Chicana/o community during the Vietnam War era. I take a different approach from the majority of the scholars who have written critical works on Chicanos and the Vietnam War from a male perspective by focusing solely on its literary representation from a female

perspective. In the three sections that follow, I examine the representation of the Vietnam War era in texts written specifically by Chicana female authors through an analysis of narratives by Stella Pope Duarte, Patricia Santana, and Gloria Velásquez. By putting these three contemporary Chicana works into dialogue, I identify a commonality in the approach of Duarte, Santana, and Velásquez to examine the Vietnam War not so much in terms of the historical circumstances surrounding the war, but rather in terms of the war's impact on the Chicana/o family unit. I explore how all three texts use the Vietnam War era as the context to reflect on their community's history and on the numerous forces that have led to the fragmentation, deterioration and marginalization of the Chicana/o community, and more specifically, the Chicana/o family, today. While these three authors present war as an important force in this process, their narratives emphasize that it is by far *not* the only battle at home.

Some of the issues addressed in the Chicana novels discussed in this chapter relate to the lives of the family members and loved ones left behind by Chicano soldiers during the Vietnam War that were impacted in the long-term and suffered fragmentation as a result. The destructive consequences that this traumatic moment in the Chicana/o community's collective history has had on individuals, families, and larger collectives are central to these novels. This moment does not just encompass the Vietnam War but also the Chicano Moratorium, the Brown Berets, and the Chicano Movement as a whole. Most importantly, the narratives by Duarte, Santana and Velásquez emphasize the gritty reality of life growing up as a Chicana/o in the 1960s and 70s, constantly facing discrimination, unequal access to public resources, economic and political oppression, as well as criminalization and police brutality. Taking a similar approach as in my previous

chapters, I examine the unique positioning of these authors as marginalized individuals who adopt a critical perspective on the adversities being faced by their communities, and their ability as intellectuals to use their somewhat privileged position from *within* the academy and/or the literary or cultural sphere – unlike Santana and Velásquez, Duarte is not a professor – to draw more widespread attention to these issues. While this positioning implies the potential for assuming a critical stance, not all authors do so to the same extent, and different authors choose to direct their criticism at different issues or phenomena related to the subject of the minority ethnic military population in the U.S.

The authors whose work is discussed in this chapter engage with this subject on varying levels and depict the reality of the Vietnam War era through different lenses. Before entering into a close reading of these texts, I briefly consider the literary circumstances out of which the work of Duarte, Velásquez, and Santana emerges.

Contextualizing Chicana/o Late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Century War Literature

Jorge Mariscal explored the literary representation of Chicano soldiers in the Vietnam War extensively in *Aztlán and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War*, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. More recently, Benjamin Olguin and William Arce have taken up this subject, adding new voices to a field that remains incredibly narrow. However, not surprisingly, the existing scholarship on this topic comes almost exclusively from male Chicano authors, their work focusing primarily on the role of Chicano soldiers in Vietnam. The lack of attention – within or outside of the academy – that Chicana (re)presentations of the Vietnam War experience have received thus far (with the notable exception of Mariscal’s aforementioned book) demonstrates the

need for further investigation and research in order to identify and dialogue with the informal, undiscovered, or unpublished texts that almost certainly exist on this subject (Velásquez's unpublished novella, discussed later in this chapter, is one such example). The analysis presented in this chapter thus begins the project of recognizing several existing Chicana texts and incorporating them into the larger conversation within Chicana/o cultural production on the Vietnam War era in order to expand upon and push the limits of the archive on U.S. minority participation in the military.

In response to the exclusionary tendency of Chicano scholarship and literature, Chicana writers have begun in recent years to confront the exclusion of their voices from the traditionally Chicano literary tradition (Madsen 17-18). To this end, Chicana authors have simultaneously carved out a presence within a formerly male-dominated Chicano literary tradition and inserted contestatory voices representative of the entire Chicana/o community into dominant U.S. historical narratives. Chicana writers' participation in this project of (re)presenting the Chicana/o Vietnam War era experience therefore challenges the traditional subordination they have experienced under the male population by the dominant patriarchal structures engrained in Latino/Latin American culture. Thus, as Chicana women, Duarte, Santana and Velásquez write from a marginalized position within the patriarchal Chicano community, and as Chicana writers, they write from the margins of the American literary arena – as outsiders within, much like African American feminist scholars (Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 12) – loudly asserting their voices to be heard from the center of both of these potentially oppressive spaces. Experiencing what some would characterize as triple forms of oppression based on race, class, and sex (T. Martínez 115), Chicanas approach historical moments and

circumstances with a fresh perspective and unique stance that often differs from that of their Chicano counterparts, as is evidenced by the texts analyzed in this chapter.

One example of Chicana writers' unique stance is their emphasis of the experience of Chicana/o family members at home during the Vietnam War, which is a theme that has been left largely unexplored, especially the impact that the (temporary or permanent) loss of a close relative had on the female members of the household. *Let Their Spirits Dance* was the first novel to give voice to the female experience of losing a Chicano brother and son to the Vietnam War, and the long-term impact that this loss had on the stability of the family left behind. As Joan Boyd recognizes in her interview with Duarte, *Let Their Spirits Dance* was the first novel to be written by a Chicana on the Vietnam War (Boyd 1). While other Chicana authors including Helena María Viramontes (*Their Dogs Came with Them*), Lucha Corpi (*Delia's Song*) and Norma Elia Cantú (*Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*) have incorporated the war and anti-war movement in the background of their narratives, Duarte's text was the first to feature the Vietnam War and its effects prominently.²⁷¹ It is important to acknowledge that there is a wealth of Chicana poetry written on the subject, much of which was compiled by Mariscal in *Aztlán and Viet Nam*, in addition to earlier poetry published by Gloria Velásquez and Sandra Cisneros.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Viramontes' recent novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* addresses the Vietnam War era in East Los Angeles, portraying one of the female protagonist's struggle to overcome the loss of her brother as part of a larger reflection on the destructive and marginalizing effects of urban redevelopment on the Chicano barrio. Three of Lucha Corpi's novels address the Vietnam War and Chicano Moratorium tangentially, including *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, *Cactus Blood*, and *Delia's Song*, the first two novels belonging to the Gloria Damasco mystery series.

²⁷² Much of Sandra Cisneros' early poetry focused on the theme of the Vietnam War as well, although her later, better-known narratives deal with other issues. See her 1994 collection of poem's titled *Loose Woman*. Gloria Velásquez, who lost her brother in Vietnam, has written numerous poems on the war and its effects. See especially her anthology titled *I Used to be a Superwoman: Superwoman Chicana*.

Only a few months following the release of Duarte's novel, Patricia Santana published the second Chicana novel on Vietnam, *Motorcycle Ride On the Sea of Tranquility*, which was followed six years later with another, *Ghosts of El Grullo*, that picked up where her first novel left off. Rather than focusing on the effects of a Chicano soldier's death on his family, Santana's first novel examines the repercussions of the return of a surviving Chicano veteran to his family and the demons they grapple with alongside the returning soldier. The novel also explores the emotional turmoil of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) through the eyes of the soldier's younger adolescent sister. Gloria Velásquez's forthcoming autobiographical novel based on her brother's death in Vietnam entitled *Toy Soldiers and Dolls*, explore similar issues from a more intimate perspective. Velásquez's narrative combines a series of intersecting vignettes into a larger reflection on the female narrator's life and the psychologically fragmenting effects of losing her brother in Vietnam, as well as the extreme poverty and adversity endured by her and her family. Each of the aforementioned novels written by these three Chicana authors represent the perspective of the female family members left behind during the Vietnam War, while also filling in the gaps regarding other issues that Chicana women and their families endured in spite of, or in addition to, the consequences of the war. In different ways, these recent Chicana narratives address the contemporary phenomenon of the fractured Chicana/o family and the numerous issues that have led to this fragmentation of the family unit—the Vietnam War being only one of them. These texts also share a preoccupation with the rigidity of identity and gender constructs within both Anglo and Chicana/o culture.

In a 1996 article on Chicana literature, Rosaura Sánchez recognizes the trend within Chicana/o cultural production to reject “essentialist notions of subjectivity, and the concomitant perception of the contingency of all constructs of identity” in a moment when the restructuring of late capitalist society and the resulting “multiplicity of social spaces and social practices has brought with it not only uncertainty but a crisis in our capacity, as Jameson puts it, to map our position in the world” (53). In the case of the Chicano Vietnam veteran, his position in the world is particularly unstable since his ethnicity and cultural otherness alienate him from mainstream Anglo society while his presence in the military has the potential to simultaneously distance him from his own family and the larger Chicana/o community. The work of the Chicana authors explored in this chapter—Santana and Velásquez in particular—embodies the defiance and rejection of essentialist understandings of subjectivity described by Sánchez, reflecting a heightened awareness of and allowance for the fluidity of identity in Chicana literature of the twenty-first century. Whether it is a rejection of patriarchal constructs of femininity, as is exemplified in all three texts, or a rupture with essentialist notions of masculine stoicism as seen in Santana’s narrative, these authors are constantly interrogating and disrupting the rigid forms of subjectivity that dominate mainstream U.S. society. This commitment to interrogating different marginalizing constructs and ideologies within American culture is far from foreign to Chicana/o cultural production, whose roots are embedded in the civil rights movements of the 1960s. As discussed earlier, the Chicana/o community in general has been historically marginalized by dominant discourses of ethnic and cultural inferiority reinforced by a nation-state apparatus that has institutionalized this discrimination through legislation against undocumented immigrants

but also against Latinas/os in general (as mentioned earlier, California Props 187 and 227 and the Arizona law SB-1070). Additionally, the mainstream media, U.S. history books and the U.S. government itself have continually ignored the voices of Chicanas/os. This is also the case with the history of the Vietnam War, where mainstream cultural representations of the war have marginalized or completely silenced the experience of the Chicano soldier (Arce 28).

The texts published by Chicanas in recent decades have begun to speak back to this silencing and marginalization of their communities (Madsen 17-18). It is important to acknowledge that the cultural project and politics of each Chicana writer is unique, and that their production varies across a wide spectrum of stances and positionalities. As Ben Olguin posits: “reassessments of the variable status of war in Mexican-American history and culture reveal that US wars demand, and may even enable, broader diachronic and more complex remappings of Mexican-American identity and ideology” (Olguin 84). Along this vein of remapping, while certain Chicana authors gesture towards the construction of some sort of alternative or counter memory that challenges U.S. master narratives on the minority Chicana/o experience, other Chicana writers also reinforce more traditional notions of U.S. nationalism and multiculturalism, literary utterances which may be interpreted as assimilationist.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections in which I present close readings of each of the three aforementioned novels. In the first section, I analyze *Let Their Spirits Dance*, paying specific attention to the trope of national belonging as it relates to Chicano military service in the narrative. In the second section, I discuss *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility*, examining Santana’s depiction of PTSD and

how it affects the entire Chicana/o family. Lastly, I consider the long-term consequences of loss as they are portrayed in *Toy Soldiers and Dolls*, particularly through the themes of grief and guilt. Placing these texts in dialogue enables me to explore the shared motif of the fragmented Chicana/o family in these narratives as one of the main consequences of the Vietnam War on the larger Chicana/o community.

¿Darles voz?:²⁷³ Chicana Narrative as Reaffirming National Belonging in Stella

Pope Duarte's *Let Their Spirits Dance*

“We’re pilgrims of Aztlán, heading east, following the rising sun, on our own quest, una manda, searching out an invisible trek in a maze of voices calling, prayers, magical words, singsong chants of the ancient world, good wishes, broken promises, pain, traveling through the whiteness of Aztlán. My mother, the beginning of it all, is blind to all she’s done. We’re pilgrims on a journey to America’s wailing wall. Only our faith will get us there.”

–Stella Pope Duarte, *Let Their Spirits Dance*²⁷⁴

The Vietnam War Memorial was surrounded by controversy when the design was first revealed, some calling it a “black gash of shame and sorrow,” a “degrading ditch” or a “tombstone” in reaction to the unconventional nature of the site (Sturken 51). The appearance of the two black walls, sunken low into the ground and meeting in the middle, functioned as a visual opposition to the phallic monuments constructed out of white stone that dominated the Washington Mall already, and was seen by some critics as a degrading or shameful form of honoring those whose lives were lost in the war. For many Americans, the black wall etched with the names of fallen soldiers who fought in a failed and unwanted war embodies the same despair and loss associated with the mourners at Jerusalem’s Wailing Wall. Just as Jews go to this site to mourn and bemoan the

²⁷³ “Giving them voice?”

²⁷⁴ Duarte, Stella Pope. *Let Their Spirits Dance*. New York: Rayo, 2002, p. 157. Print.

destruction of the sacredness of the temple, Americans journey to the Vietnam War Memorial to heal old wounds, and mourn not only the death of so many soldiers, but also the social stigmatization endured by veterans of that war. Marita Sturken explains, “the memorial has tapped into a reservoir of need to express in public the pain of this war, a desire to transfer private memories into a collective experience” (76). The war memorial is not just about honoring the dead; this approach to figuring loss materially also functions as a sign of inclusion into America’s national narrative, a symbol for national belonging for which Chicanas/os have fought so hard—and continue to do so to this day. For many minority ethnic soldiers, ironically, this recognition only occurs when they are no longer alive to witness it.

Chicana author Stella Pope Duarte’s novel *Let Their Spirits Dance* (hereafter referred to as *Their Spirits*) (2002) sets out to underscore these minority ethnic casualties in this national place of mourning. *Their Spirits* follows a broken Chicana/o family, never fully recovered from the death of their son and brother in Vietnam, on a path towards healing and reconciliation. This process is manifested in a physical pilgrimage from their hometown of Phoenix, Arizona to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., the very action alluding to the religious and/or spiritual significance that such a journey has for the family. The text explores the significance of America’s Wailing Wall for those whose lives were affected by the Vietnam War, highlighting a sense of national collectivity and multicultural solidarity that often covers up the specificity of the Chicana/o community’s experience. Duarte also gives voice to the female experience of losing a Chicano brother and son to the Vietnam War and its long-term effects on the stability of the family left behind. In this section, I examine how *Their Spirits* revisits the

Vietnam War era and its impact on the Chicana/o community from a feminine perspective, lending a new voice to the extant body of Chicano narratives on Vietnam. I question whether the text succeeds in “darles voz” – giving voice – in a faithful and critical manner to both the Chicano and Latino soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War, and to their family members whose lives were also forever changed.

Their Spirits tells the story of the Ramirezes, a Chicana/o working-class family in Phoenix, Arizona, and the long-term effects of the loss of their son Jesse in the Vietnam War. The female narrator Teresa, Jesse’s sister, describes how her family is still broken thirty years after the death of her family’s first-born son. She alternates between a narration of the present-day events in the 1990s, and a series of flashbacks and memories of different moments from her childhood and adolescence leading up to her brother’s departure for Vietnam in the mid-1960s. When her dying mother Alicia hears her son’s voice calling to her one night, Teresa and her family embark on a physical and emotional journey in search of closure, traveling to the Vietnam Wall to touch Jesse’s name. The pilgrimage is motivated by “una manda”²⁷⁵ that Alicia receives from the spirit of her dead son. The funds for the trip appear almost miraculously in the form of a government check repaying the Ramirez family for the half of Jesse’s death benefit payment that had been mistakenly sent to the wrong family nearly twenty years earlier. With interest, the total amounted to more than ninety thousand dollars (Duarte 112). The fact that the government voluntarily offered up such a large sum of money to the Ramirez family is clearly far-fetched, yet the check serves the purpose of the narrative by providing the means for their pilgrimage. The family’s journey to Washington, D.C. encompasses the

²⁷⁵ “Una manda” is best described as a promise someone makes to God or a saint, a sort of mandate that they vow to carry out.

second half of the novel, and becomes a unifying collective pilgrimage as they welcome fellow travelers from diverse backgrounds along the way.

I interpret *Their Spirits* as portraying an inclusive multicultural consciousness that ultimately participates in and contributes to a U.S. nationalist discourse of unity and belonging across specific minority experiences. While Duarte gestures to the war and its consequences on the family members and other loved ones left behind, war is not the central issue addressed in the novel. I assert that the war ultimately ends up serving as the backdrop to the narrative's focus on the incorporation of Chicanas/os into the national narrative, thus reaffirming national belonging for the community in general, and for Chicano and Latino soldiers and veterans in particular. Interestingly, this project of seeking recognition evidences a tension with the work of other Chicana/o and Puerto Rican authors explored in this dissertation who have been quick to condemn or interrogate such "assimilationist" pursuits, in the words of Olguin. Regardless of its political underpinnings however, Duarte's novel gives voice to the experiences of the marginalized Chicana women whose lives were impacted (and continue to be affected to this day) by the Vietnam War, drawing attention to a little-known reality in mainstream American consciousness. It is important to mention that Duarte's novel is one of the books that was targeted by the Tucson Unified School District's book ban in 2012. The district removed *Their Spirits* from the curriculum for seventh and eighth grade English classes. Tucson Unified justified its banning of books by asserting that the books targeted, including Duarte's novel, promote racial resentment and/or anti-government

sentiment (Efe 1). This phenomenon is yet another example of the persistent silencing of Chicana/o voices and the marginalization of the community's history in the U.S.²⁷⁶

Similar to many other Chicana/o texts that have been banned by Tucson Unified, Duarte's novel focuses not solely on the Vietnam War, but also on the anti-war movement that was being championed by a large sector of the Chicana/o community during the Vietnam era and which emerged alongside the Chicano Movement in the southwest. In one scene, the protagonist recalls her brief experience with the Brown Berets and the Chicano Moratorium in 1968, and the personal conflict she felt protesting a war in which her own brother was fighting (Duarte 167-182). While the novel's two chapters focusing on these movements are only a few pages in length, Duarte's text still succeeds in reflecting the tension between the patriotism and desire for national belonging that motivated some Chicanos to enlist in the military, and the condemnation of U.S. imperialism and direct opposition to the war that was carried out by another faction of the Chicana/o community. The narrator makes this social instability clear within the first fifty pages of the novel, "By 1968, we were all drowning. La raza was submerged by mainstream America, a submarine drifting under a sea of politics, prejudice and racism" (56). Duarte's approach is similar to many other texts on the experience of Chicanos and Latinos in the Vietnam War (many of which have also been banned by Tucson Unified) in that it presents what William Arce refers to as a "binary of

²⁷⁶ Duarte, a native Arizonian, responded to the banning of her novel by saying, "What we are experiencing is racism. The people who are in control of this kind of racism and discrimination have a lot of fear" (Efe 1). She also emphasized the positive, unifying nature of *Their Spirits*, calling it "a story of familial love" (1). For more information on the Tucson book banning, see "Hide it from the Kids" by Jeffrey Di Leo and "Cutting Class:

Why Arizona's Ethnic Studies Ban Won't Ban Ethnic Studies" by Nicholas Lundholm. NACCS also filed an Amicus Curiae Brief in support of Tucson's Ethnic Studies case which can be accessed from their website.

resistance and assimilation” (Arce 24). For the female protagonist in *Their Spirits* and her family, the assimilationist approach is an easier, less conflictive option, given their brother and son’s participation in the very war that so many of their friends are protesting.

The need for some sort of spiritual ritual that one could physically perform as a means of finding closure and healing old wounds associated with the war is what ultimately motivates the protagonists in Duarte’s novel to embark on their trip to the memorial in Washington, D.C. Yet, beyond the religious significance of the characters’ journey lies a more personal motivation: to become a family again, to reunite the fragmented pieces of the close-knit family unit that they had formed before the loss of their son and brother Jesse in Vietnam. In this way, the consequences of the Vietnam War intersect at the individual, familial, and national levels to portray the complex aftermath of such a scorned and shameful war for the American people. *Their Spirits* combines Catholic religious influences with Mexican indigenous beliefs, harkening the mythical *mexica* homeland of Aztlán, and relating the historical pilgrimage of the *mexica* people to the contemporary pilgrimage of a Chicana/o family to the nation’s capitol. The text’s incorporation of religious and spiritual symbols, while at times seeming essentialized, adds another cultural dimension to the novel by exploring the historic role of religion as a source of strength and support for the Mexican and Mexican American communities, particularly in the figure of the *Guadalupana*. Alicia, as well as her best friend Irene, are both devoted *Guadalupanas* who dedicate their lives to venerating the Virgen de Guadalupe, and pray to her daily.²⁷⁷ The women rely heavily on the saintly virgin’s will

²⁷⁷ Duarte defines the *Guadalupana* identity as a permanent lifestyle, describing it as “a comadrazgo, a sisterhood bound together by spiritual ties to the Church and to La Virgen de Guadalupe” (88). In the

and guidance to make decisions in their lives, and it is indeed the virgin's guidance that sparks the family's pilgrimage in the first place.

While Duarte's text is situated squarely in the initial moment of the Chicano movement, the journey of Teresa and her family to the Vietnam War Memorial that takes place in the present moment of the text in the 1990s²⁷⁸ gestures toward an idealized form of multicultural collective awareness. In the text, this racially and culturally diverse collectivity encompasses a multiplicity of ethnic minorities, as well as individuals who are otherwise marginalized from mainstream American society, namely Vietnam veterans, be they black, brown or white. Unlike more openly anti-imperialist texts like Díaz Valcárcel's "Proceso en diciembre" or Montoya's "El marinero mariguano" that present protagonists who openly contest or disrupt the nation-state apparatus, the collectivity formed in *Their Spirits* strives to be seen as *part* of that nation, and to be accepted completely into the American national identity. It is this aspiration that motivates the veterans to journey to the Vietnam War Memorial—to finally receive that recognition and appreciation and to be incorporated into the protective folds of America. In this way, *Their Spirits* gestures towards a form of multiculturalism that rejects the homogeneity of a monoculture "in favour of diversity. Embedded within this positive endorsement of multiculturalism are various liberal concepts such as tolerance, pluralism

novel, the *Guadalupanas* are portrayed as a close-knit sisterhood of women of Mexican origin who dress a certain way, wear a gold Virgen de Guadalupe medallion, and participate in processions in the virgin's honor. When Alicia dies at the end of the novel, a fellow *Guadalupana* "guardia" (guard) accompanies her body until it is buried, according to tradition (302-303).

²⁷⁸ The novel's non-linear structure and incorporation of different literary forms including letters and news articles reflects a trend in contemporary Chicana literature for authors to experiment with hybridity in their writing. As Deborah Madsen recognizes, "contemporary Hispanic women's writing is highly innovative, producing literary styles that are hybrid and provisional, using an associative logic in place of coherent linear narrative" (Madsen 37). Teresa's first person narration abounds with flashbacks and spatial and temporal displacement as a result of associative logic, moving from one anecdote to another in a seemingly illogical manner, but one that nevertheless works in the end.

and the protection of minority rights from the tyranny of the majority” (Bloor 272).

While Duarte’s novel embraces notions of cultural diversity and tolerance through its celebration of a shared experience across cultures and races, the specificity of the Chicana/o experience is partially lost as a result of this process. By emphasizing the commonalities amongst the diverse group of travelers, the differences are cast aside and rendered insignificant despite the fact that it is these differences that continue to serve as the basis for discriminatory and xenophobic treatment of U.S. minority ethnic communities like the Chicana/o population.

Alliances between groups of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds often have a clear political motivation, the unification coming about because of a common goal, such as protecting the civil rights of marginalized minority communities. Yet in *Their Spirits* there is no common political objective; the goal is rather that of a social collective which is organized around the common experience of the Vietnam War shared by each member of the group. Every individual making the journey has his or her own, very personal motivations for making the trip to the wall, yet they do not share any concrete political aspiration. Political change is not the objective of the travelers—visiting the Vietnam War Memorial is primarily a gesture of affect and reconciliation, although clearly multiethnic in spirit. Yen Le Espiritu explains that Latina/o, Chicana/o, Native American and Asian American groups “have at times united to protect and advance their civic engagement... despite their distinct histories and separate identities,” suggesting that grassroots community movements can be more effective when they organize across cultural and ethnic barriers (Espiritu 119). Yet once again, the organizing in Duarte’s text is not around a specific political cause, but is rather focused on arriving at a destination,

and revolves around a trip that each individual is taking for his or her own personal reasons.

There is no doubt that an increasingly public, collective identity is forming among the group of travelers as Teresa and Alicia's caravan drives across country. "Two men have joined Willy, Gates, and Yellowhair at their table. They may be Vietnam veterans, or the brothers, cousins, and friends of somebody who served there" (Duarte 238). The collectivity forms around the common experience of Vietnam, resulting in the "flattening out," so to speak, of the specific individual backgrounds and experiences of the men sitting at the table. This homogenizing process is exacerbated by the online publicity that the group's trip receives from the website that one of Teresa's nephews created to track their journey. The online audience comes to perceive the Ramírez family's story as their own, ignoring their specific circumstances in favor of seeing their experience as part of the broader American narrative, in which the memory of the Vietnam War has always been a shameful period.

While Willy, Gates, and Yellowhair's shared experience of Vietnam may not be glorified or patriotic, neither is it anti-imperialist in nature, as are the experiences of protagonists in other works like Rodríguez in "Proceso en diciembre" or Montoya's El Louie. Instead, the travelers in *Their Spirits*, both men and women, share an emotional sense of individual and communal loss as well as a sense of deception and mourning at the circumstances surrounding the war, how it was handled, and how Vietnam veterans have been treated. While they are not happy with the nature of the war in itself, they do not distance themselves far enough from their immediate experience to be able to contemplate larger connections between Mexican American and East Asian peoples'

similar experiences of colonization and imperialism. Indeed, a broader scope is not provided for Duarte's protagonists; the issues of interest are instead those associated with the home front in the struggle for equality and recognition of the Mexican American community as an equal contributor to and actor in the American nation.

In an earlier scene in the novel during the planning stages of the trip, Gates, a childhood African American friend of Jesse's, now a Vietnam veteran, is invited to join the Ramirezes on their trip. Teresa seeks him out at Alicia's request as her mother wants to reunite all of her son's surviving friends.²⁷⁹ When Teresa finds him in his dive bar hangout, he responds emotionally to her invitation.

Look at me, Teresa. Do you think I want to get to that Wall? I got brothers on that Wall, Black, Brown, and White! God, girl, look at me, I'm a fuck-up! I never got it together, Teresa. I can't let them see me like this... All the medals and shit they gave us, for what? Last of all they build the Wall, like they were saying, There, now shut up! I saw my buddies shot over there like dogs. (143-144)

Gates' experience of racial discrimination is presented here as a way of establishing parallel lines between the racism and discrimination faced by Black and Chicano soldiers. The Black veteran's experience of the war was just as racialized as was Jesse's or that of any other ethnic minority soldier, he asserts. It is this common experience that unites them. But it is also this commonality that erases the specificity of each community's experience of oppression and marginalization. Gates shares the experience of being traumatized as a result of exposure to such atrocious violence during the war, but his experience is universalized through his emphasis of "Black, Brown, and White." Reading between the lines, it is as if Gates is really saying that "we" (everyone who lived through Vietnam) are all victims at an equal level, no one suffered or was discriminated against

²⁷⁹ The majority of Jesse's friends in the town were drafted into or enlisted in the Vietnam War; Jesse was not the only one who didn't make it back.

more than the next person. The main sentiment that Gates seems to be expressing here is disgust with the atrocity of war in and of itself and with a military system that attempted to cover up its errors with empty symbolic gestures like medals and memorials. Gates' cynical mention of "medals and shit" recalls the attitude of both Rafa in Hinojosa's KCDT and Louie and other speakers in Montoya's Korean War poetry. While Gates does not necessarily point to targeted discrimination against Mexican Americans here like Rafa and Montoya's speakers do, he does point to a flawed military system that wasted people's lives uselessly for what he regards as a pointless war. Later in the novel, Gates ultimately ends up conceding and making the journey with Teresa and her family, along with other friends of Jesse's. Like that of Teresa and other family members, his decision revolves around a desire to heal personal wounds.

Another of Jessie's friends to accompany the family on their trip is Willy Wong, a Chinese American boy from the neighborhood who scandalized the local Chinese community by enlisting in the Marines and going off to fight in a war where, he was informed, the Chinese had already been "and nothing good had come of it" (67). Because of his parents' national origins, Willy is interpellated as "Chinese," immediately being associated with the Communist Chinese troops who fought against the U.S. in the war. For Willy, his decision to join the Marines reflects his yearning for that sense of belonging, not only as an American, but as "one of the vatos from El Cielito" where he had grown up with Jesse and the other Chicano neighborhood boys (67). Fighting in the war and returning as a veteran was his way of proving himself, and as he joins the journey to the capital, Willy is already viewed as a full-fledged citizen, both by his childhood friends, and by the U.S. government. Then there is Chris, another friend from

the neighborhood, and his friend Yellowhair, a Zuñi Indian who joins the pilgrimage with his mother Sarah, whose other son was killed in Vietnam in 1970 (219). The inclusion of a Native American character is especially interesting due to the connection that Duarte draws in the text between the Chicana/o identity and the Mexican American community's indigenous roots from Mexico. Here the author alludes the indigenous roots of America, recalling another brutal conquest; not that of the Spanish in Mexico and Latin America, but that of the British-turned-Americans in North America. One cannot miss the irony in the participation of a Native American soldier fighting in a U.S. war that only seeks to further extend its global domination. Nevertheless, through his identity as a military veteran and his participation in this journey of national recognition, Yellowhair is also folded into the U.S. nation-state along with the rest of his comrades.

While the journey of the Ramirezzes and their fellow travelers becomes at once a demand for public recognition of the destructive effects that the Vietnam War had on the Chicana/o community as well as a journey of personal healing for each individual, it is important to note the idealized and somewhat unrealistic nature of this trip. The joining together of individuals who are representative of all sectors of the U.S. nation-state to make this trek gestures to a patriotic pilgrimage that reaffirms the travelers' sense of national belonging as well as their U.S. citizenship. Duarte's novel is thus positioned as a text that reinforces notions of U.S. national belonging, falling within the third literary thread discussed in this dissertation. While *Their Spirits* does bring attention to certain adversities faced by Chicanas/os like the U.S. military's targeting and recruitment of working class minority males and their continually disproportionate presence on the frontlines (Booth and Gimbel 1139, 1152), the text does not attempt to concretely address

the circumstances surrounding the historic marginalization that members of the Chicana/o community have constantly endured. Ultimately the protagonists in *Their Spirits* achieve the national and governmental recognition they sought for their fallen comrade Jesse and all other Latino soldiers who fought in Vietnam through the group's participation in this official ritual of remembrance that reaffirms the U.S. national narrative. Thirty years later, protesting the war itself and the imperialist motivations that prompted it is not part of the text's project, but the focus is instead on recognizing the sacrifice of Teresa's brother and relating it to the sacrifice made by so many others. Ultimately, the novel emphasizes the minority soldier's dedication to his country as proof of his national belonging.

The reinforcement of dominant narratives seen in the novel's romanticized portrayal of the group's pilgrimage is furthered by Duarte's inclusion of mass media in the novel. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the presence of new forms of technology (in the context of the 1990s) like the internet are featured in *Their Spirits*—avenues of communication to which not everyone has access, especially the working class community. "Michael's got his laptop computer in a leather case. He slings it over his shoulder. 'This,' he says, 'is what's gonna keep us in touch with America. I made a website for Nana.' He points to the web site address pasted on the inside of the van window, www.jramirez68.com" (Duarte 153). Michael, Alicia's highly intelligent and tech savvy teenage grandson, starts a website to publicize his family's trip which allows people to follow them on their journey across the country. Yet, the "America" Michael will be keeping in touch with is a limited sector of the U.S. population, especially in the '90s when internet access was still relatively restricted.

Interestingly, the majority of the people who recognize the Ramirezes from the news or internet and approach them appear to be Caucasian. When the caravan stops at a store in Raton, New Mexico, two of the “package boys” recognize Teresa and her family from their website, and share their experience regarding Vietnam with her (the father of one of the boys, Jeffrey, is a Vietnam veteran), then ask to meet her mom. “I introduce Jeffrey and Scott to the Guadalupanas. At first, the boys are surprised to see two old Doñas. I don’t know what they were expecting... They are two blond, blue-eyed boys making contact with two matriarchs from another world. ‘God bless you both,’ my mother says” (225). Through these encounters during the protagonists’ journey, Duarte emphasizes the unifying ability of shared experiences and their capacity to bridge different types of gaps, be they generational, cultural, or ethnic. Jeffrey and Scott are linked to Alicia and Teresa because of the common bond of having a loved one who fought in Vietnam. This commonality, the text appears to communicate, is enough to overcome even the most marked of differences.

Often, the ethnic identity of the people the family comes across is left ambiguous, once again reflecting the “flattening out” nature of the text that presents Americans primarily through their commonalities, not their differences. As their journey wears on, it becomes a national news story, spurred on by Michael’s active online presence and constant engagement with the public via social media. Yet the news networks report the story in their own way, deciding which parts to include and which to leave out. After Alicia was interviewed about the money they received from the government that allowed them to make the trip to the memorial, only half of the story is included on the evening news. “On the six o’clock news that night, we saw a head shot of Mom and the redhead

[reporter]... We heard the part about the money, nothing about la manda or El Santo Niño. No surprise to me” (117-118). The supernatural aspects of the Chicana matriarch’s story – namely Jesse’s voice speaking to her and her “manda,” or promise to God – are conveniently eliminated from the story to make it more comprehensible for the mainstream American public. While Michael tries to control the media’s reporting on his family’s journey, he is unable to influence the reporting decisions made by mainstream media sources, whose sole interest is in keeping ratings up, not telling the real story of a Chicano veteran’s family and the injustice they suffered at the hands of the U.S. government. The Ramirezes’ story becomes yet another narrative of national belonging, where the government rights its wrongs and through this process, recognizes the Ramírez family as “true” American citizens.

In a later scene, when Teresa finally reaches the wall carrying out her mother’s “manda” as her last promise to her before she dies, the narrator gives voice to the complex, shared sentiment of shame, mourning, and outrage felt by many of the individuals who had made the pilgrimage with her. “This is a massacre, a travesty. Each name is alive. I turn to the crowd, hundreds standing on the cobblestone walkway, on the lawns, under the trees, and by the waters of the Potomac River in the distance. ‘Why did we let this happen?’ There is silence” (309). Teresa communicates a collective tone of disillusionment and impotence; she is weighed down both by the fact that it is too late for anything to be done to bring back the lives of the fallen soldiers, but also by the thought that she and everyone there standing in the crowd is complicit in what happened, in letting the war go on, in not working harder to put a stop to it. The narrator begins to list all the Latino/Hispanic surnames spread across the wall, directly signaling the tragedy of

the destruction of an entire generation of Chicana/o and Latina/o youth for the imperialist interests of the power-hungry U.S. “Oh, my Christ... look at all the Spanish names! They cleaned out the barrios for this war! I cry out the words. A reporter puts them down on paper” (308). This is one of the few moments in the text where the unique identity that differentiates Chicanas/os and Latinas/os from the rest of Americans is clearly highlighted. The emotional intensity of Teresa’s words communicates the deep sense of loss felt by her and the Chicana/o and Latina/o community for whom she speaks. Ironically, Teresa calls this out in the middle of an official U.S. Army ceremony organized around the Ramirezes’ visit to the wall, supposedly to pay tribute to the Hispanic soldiers who served in Vietnam. While her words may condemn this military apparatus that has targeted underrepresented and undereducated minorities for decades, her very presence at the ceremony sends another message—one of acknowledgement, if not acceptance, of her national belonging to the U.S. and all that it represents.

The last lines of *Their Spirits* fall back on the idealized notion of multicultural unity that has been repeated throughout the text. “Chris, Gates, Willy, Manuel, Tennessee, and the kids touch Jesse’s name. All around me everyone else is touching their man’s name. The Wall is reflecting our faces like a mirror. We’ve journeyed through Aztlán to the place where our warriors are immortalized in stone” (309). The collective “we,” and the wall’s reflection of a multiplicity of faces achieve the effect of blending together these unique individuals’ experiences into a common collective consciousness, affirming solidarity and unity over any type of difference or adversity. In this sense, one could conclude that the novel ends on a conformist or assimilationist note—Teresa and her family assume their roles as full-fledged American citizens and

conform to the nation's form of remembrance by venerating the official memorial and participating in the U.S. military's patriotic ceremony.

As Marita Sturken recognizes, the wall represents the assimilation of soldiers of all backgrounds into one homogenous American identity, much as Duarte's text achieves a flattening of cultural and ethnic differences that minimizes the specificity of each minority community's unique background. While Duarte does acknowledge the historical contributions of the Chicana/o community to the American military, an issue that is often ignored by dominant master narratives in the U.S., she emphasizes their contributions from *within* the national narrative, a decision which distances her project from that of earlier Chicano authors of war literature discussed in previous chapters. *Their Spirits* emphasizes multicultural solidarity as a central element in the process of coming to terms with and attempting to move beyond the systemic discrimination against ethnic minorities in the military and other governmental institutions. The text ultimately conforms to the homogenized national identity represented by the Vietnam War Memorial.

Returning to the journey itself, one scene particularly exemplifies the nationalist values embodied in *Their Spirits*. In the middle of their journey, Teresa looks back on the caravan as they drive and sees:

The U.S. flags and Mexican flags on our vans are flapping in the wind... I turn around and look out through the rear window and see the two vehicles in single file. Paul, Donna, Priscilla and the boys, Willy and Susie with the News Channel 5 Van trailing us, shooting its last footage. By the time we drive onto Central Avenue, other cars have joined us... Without knowing it, we have made our own procession. (157)

The vision of both Mexican and U.S. flags flapping side-by-side on the Ramirez family van is an iconic image of assimilation into the American way of life. As they join the

vehicles on the city's main avenue, it is as if the cars in the caravan fade into the mass of automobiles on this typical American street, merging with the diverse, multicultural U.S. population in the most American of all processions—the road trip. Their accompaniment by the news van signals once again the ever-present influence of mass media, selling their manipulated narrative to the eager consumers ready to swallow whatever they are fed. Duarte's culturally specific description of her protagonists as "pilgrims of Aztlán" in the epigraph to this article does not change the true nature of their journey. For Teresa, Gates, Willy and all the rest, their arrival at America's wailing wall comes down to: recognition, acceptance and *belonging*.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the (Non)return in Patricia Santana's

Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility

Instead of addressing the effects of the tragic death of a Chicano soldier in the Vietnam War as portrayed by Duarte, Patricia Santana takes a different approach in her representation of the fragmentation of the Chicana/o family as a result of the war. Written from the first-person perspective of the adolescent Yolanda, the seventh of nine children in the working-class Sahagún family from south San Diego, Santana's 2002 novel *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* (hereafter referred to as *Motorcycle*) depicts the struggles of the young narrator and her family to make sense of their changed son and brother, Chuy, upon his return home from the Vietnam War in 1969. In this section, I argue that, through Chuy's character, Santana constructs a more complex, nuanced representation of mental illness that breaks with essentialist representations of the mentally ill as feminized or emasculated (Méndez García 43). Santana's work—in both her first and second novels—points to the potential of Chicana writing to continue to

broaden the horizons of Chicana/o cultural production and interrogate essentialist representations of subjects like the mentally ill or disabled who have traditionally been stigmatized or regarded as taboo by the dominant patriarchal Chicano culture.²⁸⁰ This nuanced approach to the representation of mental illness, particularly on the part of Santana, functions to reject the essentialist masculine subjectivity that positions a male's mental illness as taboo and emasculating (Méndez García 39, 43). Such rupture also contributes to the further fragmentation of the traditional Chicana/o family unit in *Motorcycle*, which is already strained by the family members' anguish over Chuy's altered state and the Sahagún sisters' defiance of their father's repressive patriarchal beliefs.

Santana's novel opens in April of 1969 with Yolanda's (known to everyone as Yoli) narration of her older brother Chuy's welcome home party upon his arrival at the family's San Diego home after being away in Vietnam. As soon as he enters the scene, it is clear to the reader that something isn't right. As Yolanda's fourteen-year-old mind

²⁸⁰ The work of Helena María Viramontes furthers Santana's project, as is particularly evident in her short story "The Cariboo Café," and her 2007 novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*, which explores the mental illness of a teenage boy and that of an unnamed homeless woman in a thoughtful and insightful manner. "The Cariboo Café," a short story published by Viramontes in the collection *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985) tells the story of a young boy and girl in L.A. who are kidnapped by a traumatized, mentally ill Central American woman—an immigrant whose legal status is unclear who has moved to the city after having lost her own young son when he was forcefully taken as a child soldier to fight in her country's civil war. The woman mistakes this young Chicano boy for her long-lost son, and takes him and his sister to live with her, thinking she has finally been reunited with her child. Through the character of the unnamed Central American woman, the story explores the relationship between trauma, loss, and mental illness. In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, one of the 4 central female protagonists, Ana, struggles to care for and keep track of her mentally ill younger brother Ben throughout the text. It is suggested that a fifth, unnamed female character in the novel is actually Ben and Ana's mother—a homeless woman who suffers from mental illness, much like the psychological trappings with which Ben himself struggles. As Cutler writes of Viramontes' construction of the mentally ill woman's character, the author's point was not for the reader "to understand what it means to feel what the woman feels, but rather... to feel for her—to feel in her direction" (Cutler, "On Recent Chicano Literature", 166). In his review of the novel, Michael Sedano notes, "Viramontes' treatment of Ben's mental illness is sickeningly accurate and so deeply disturbing that readers with friends or family suffering mental illness will find a few pages almost unbearable" (1). Viramontes clearly strives to bring the peripheral figure of the mentally ill individual into the center to refocus society's attention on those bodies that are generally rendered invisible by mainstream society.

perceives it, “Yes, that was it: he was tired. . . He was tired, for God’s sake, couldn’t everyone see that?” (Santana 13). Yet, even her adolescent mind she knew that it was something more, that something was truly wrong. Watching her mother from across the yard, Yolanda imagines her maternal thoughts as she contemplates her son who has been spared from a violent death at war, “Her pobre hijo looked lost and distant, as if he had misplaced his soul, and now stood eternally confused. . . Mamá was no fool. I was sure she knew something was wrong with Chuy in the first months he was in Vietnam” (14). The painful truth had been hanging unspoken between the family members ever since Chuy’s letters stopped coming, ever since he became “silent in Vietnam” (15). Yet it isn’t until he physically returns that the Sahagún family is forced to grapple with the truth behind Chuy’s silence. For their son and brother, Vietnam isn’t truly over; he relives it in his mind, and his anger, pain and guilt push him far away from his favorite sister Yolanda and the rest of his family.

Chuy’s experience upon returning is represented metaphorically by his aimless wandering on his newly purchased Harley Davidson, and by his conscious defiance of societal norms and the family traditions that the “old,” pre-Vietnam Chuy had followed so faithfully. The “new” Chuy no longer adheres to the strict rules that have guided the upbringing of all nine children in the Sahagún household, including respect for elders, caring for younger siblings, treating women respectfully, and upholding the honor and reputation of one’s family. Chuy’s rage and confusion are delivered in fits of verbal and physical violence over which he has no control—violence that instills fear in the people he loves the most. Through this poignant portrayal of the dark reality of PTSD, Santana complicates and interrogates notions of heroism and patriotism traditionally associated

with age-old myths of the noble soldier and the just war. John Alba Cutler calls this celebration of authentic manhood through aggression “warrior masculinity” (“Disappeared Men,” 584)—a concept related to Mariscal’s notion of “warrior patriotism” within Chicano culture, which he describes as “[t]he idea that masculine behavior must include a readiness to die for ‘la patria’” (Mariscal, *Aztlan and Viet Nam*, 27).²⁸¹ By exploring the unheroic, anguish-ridden details of PTSD—which Yolanda and his family recognize despite the fact that Chuy had not received an official diagnosis²⁸²—and the destructive effects it has on the individual, the family, and the larger community, Santana effectively disrupts these master narratives.

Furthermore, Santana’s decision to position Chuy as one of the protagonists in the novel makes visible the figure of a Chicano Vietnam veteran—a rare presence in Chicano Vietnam War literature. The centrality of Chuy’s character in *Motorcycle* effectively reinscribes the experience of this minority ethnic soldier into the mainstream literature and historiography on Vietnam, in which Chicano soldiers are notably marginalized, or altogether absent (Cutler, “Disappeared Men,” 583-4; Arce 28). As Cutler notes, “despite the fact that Chicano soldiers died in disproportionate numbers in Viet Nam, Chicanos do not figure significantly in dominant American accounts of the war” (583-4). Thus, the mere decision to create a Chicano Vietnam veteran as a literary character is a political act

²⁸¹ While these narratives may be relatively dominant in Chicana/o culture, their prevalence does not preclude the existence of other realities. It is likely that many Chicanos did not buy into narratives of warrior masculinity, but the cultural norm was dominant enough that it has been directly addressed by the Chicana texts examined in this chapter, and therefore warrants theoretical consideration as part of this analysis.

²⁸² Santana presents Chuy’s formal diagnosis in her second novel, *Ghosts of El Grullo*; I discuss this scene in more detail later in the chapter. The main reason these technicalities are not addressed in *Motorcycles* is primarily due to the fact that the diagnosis of PTSD did not yet exist in the late 1960s when Chuy and so many of his compatriots returned from war psychologically wounded. During the Vietnam War era, this type of mental disturbance stemming from a soldier’s war experience was simply referred to as being “shell-shocked” or having “battle fatigue.”

on the part of the author, pointing to “an unsurprising blind spot in canonical accounts of the war,” and consequently functioning as a corrective to the dominant U.S. discourse surrounding the Vietnam War (584). In this sense, Santana’s positioning as an outsider—a Chicana minority writer—within North American mainstream culture affords her a similar ability to view dominant U.S. society through a critical lens—just as the minority ethnic soldier’s marginalized position within the U.S. military affords him a potentially critical viewpoint, as discussed in earlier chapters.²⁸³ As I will demonstrate in the following analysis, Santana’s critical perspective plays out in *Motorcycle* on multiple levels.

On yet another narrative plane, Santana employs the familiar “road trip” trope in the text as a metaphor for Chuy’s feelings of alienation and displacement from civilian society. While the characterization of his yearning for the freedom of the open road is clearly a simplification of the troubled psychological trappings Chuy struggles with upon his reentry into civilian life, the motif fittingly reflects the young narrator’s limited understanding of her brother’s troubled reality. As Yolanda realizes upon Chuy’s return home after months of traveling the country on motorcycle, “he wasn’t really with us that July 20th sharing in the excitement and incredulity of a man on the moon. No, Chuy was somewhere else, doing his own traveling, on a road all his own” (Santana 123). The figure of the road plays a significant role in Yolanda’s understanding of the reality that surrounds her, informed primarily by her Catholic roots which divide the world into the “right” versus the “wrong” road. The narrator recalls viewing the illustrations in her mother’s old catechism book, noting that “the two juxtaposed etchings—the road to hell

²⁸³ This assertion expands upon Patricia Hill Collins’ notion of the “outsider within,” as is discussed in detail in the Introduction.

and the road to heaven—instituted in me deep religious anguish. What if I accidentally took the wrong road?” (125).

Yolanda is preoccupied not only with her own path, but also with her brother's. The siblings' Catholic upbringing informs her anxieties about Chuy's lack of direction in life as she wonders whether he is capable of doing bad, which some of his strange actions upon his return from Vietnam seem to suggest. Yolanda's worries that her brother has gone down the “wrong” path are reflected in Chuy's own guilt over the atrocities that he has witnessed and perhaps participated in during the war. Although he never shares details of his combat experience, Chuy makes it crystal clear in a conversation with Yolanda and their younger sister Luz that he in no way considers himself a “war hero” (128). The preoccupation and guilt evoked by the Catholic values engrained in both Chuy and Yolanda thus exacerbate the already tenuous family ties, leading to further fragmentation in the Sahagún household as Chuy flees in order to avoid facing those who care about him most and Yolanda finds shelter behind a mask of anger. Her anger and lack of understanding of her brother's problems are the narrator's two constant companions during the transitional period of her adolescence. It is thus important to note that Santana's narrative does not revolve solely around the Chicano Vietnam veteran, but instead focuses on Yolanda, the young female narrator. Consequently, *Motorcycle* is as much a young woman's coming-of-age story and an examination of working-class Chicana/o life in the 1960s as it is a reflection on the effects of Vietnam.

Throughout the narrative, Yolanda struggles with the typical angst that accompanies adolescence and raging hormones, including confusion regarding her sexual urges, unrequited love for her classmate Francisco, clashes with older siblings and

parents over household rules and societal norms, and a rocky relationship with her best friend Lydia. Yet on top of all of the usual teenage anxiety is Yolanda's concern for and anger regarding her brother Chuy. Her young emotions struggle to grasp what is happening to her favorite older brother—eight years her elder—who has returned a different person than the mischievous, caring, romantic boy she worshipped before his departure to Vietnam. “Something's not right here. It's Chuy, we need to help Chuy. Maybe we need to examine this more closely,” she thinks to herself, desperate to find a way to help him (123). The young narrator's naïve perspective effectively communicates the confusion, desperation, grief and anger that so many families experienced upon greeting an entirely different person from the young, healthy soldier they had originally sent off to war. Society did not know how to handle the distraught, traumatized young men like Chuy who were returning to the home front during the initial years of the Vietnam War, and there was no system in place to provide them with treatment or counseling, nor an adequate medical diagnosis for the psychological trauma they had suffered.²⁸⁴ At that time, support networks for families of veterans were nonexistent, as were resources to help prepare military families or veterans for readjustment into civilian society. What we now understand as a crippling mental illness, Yolanda and the Sahagún family were not equipped to understand or handle; it is this anguish of incomprehension and helplessness that the narrator's first-person perspective voices so poignantly.

²⁸⁴ As Sally Bachner has documented, “It was not until the publication of DSM-III in 1980 that [the diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia with depression among soldiers] was redressed in the form of the newly coined term Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, which synthesized, regularized, narrativized, and institutionalized a heterogeneous set of symptoms and ailments that had under previous diagnostic regimens been known as shell shock, combat fatigue, gross stress reaction, and Post-Vietnam syndrome” (89).

The narrator's naiveté embodies the general public's lack of understanding of veterans who came back from war with "something" wrong with them that dominated mainstream society and science during the Vietnam War era. Santana's decision to avoid using the term PTSD, or to offer any official diagnosis of Chuy's condition, accomplishes a realistic representation of the time period in which the novel is set. Moreover, the fact that the text is semi-autobiographical, based on Santana's own experience as a young girl whose older brother Sergio had just returned from war with similar psychological issues, reinforces the realism of this depiction.²⁸⁵ Making visible this misunderstood, socially taboo reaction to the trauma of war on the part of the supposedly noble soldier interrogates the historically gendered association that links trauma and mourning with the feminine (Méndez García 43), dismantling the traditional "'male' code of honor that emphasizes stoical silence as one of the major virtues of the soldier" (41). Chuy breaks that "stoical silence" and ruptures with such a rigid masculine code when he alludes to his horrific, unheroic experience of war in a brief exchange with Yolanda (128). At the same time, Chuy carries out visible acts of mourning uncharacteristic of the supposedly unemotional male. In a particularly pivotal scene, Chuy takes Yolanda on a ride on his motorcycle, only to end up in front of his ex-girlfriend's old house, where he begins to howl. "His howl was long and eerie and piercing," she recalls, "And I thought he must be howling for all the men in his infantry who cried a thousand tears in wet, gloomy, putrid tents in a dark, labyrinthine country they knew nothing about" (144). Chuy's pain and anguish are conveyed more powerfully through his animalistic howls in this scene than he is ever able to express through words to any of his friends or family. While Santana's

²⁸⁵ *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* is dedicated to Santana's brother, "In memory of my brother. Sergio Luis Santana: 1947-1996" (v).

description of Chuy's behavior as animal-like in several scenes in the novel could be viewed as problematic for its potentially dehumanizing effect, this narrative strategy functions to emphasize the inhumanity of war and the trauma that he experienced as a soldier—a reality that seems to be incomprehensible to civilians who have not witnessed its horrors firsthand.

Santana's attention in *Motorcycle* to essentialist constructs of gender and subjectivity on multiple levels embodies the larger Chicana feminist project of constructing a counter memory that challenges the rigidity of notions of identity within Anglo and Chicana/o culture—notions that impose limited, confining roles on individuals based on dominant social norms. In particular, Santana accomplishes a rejection of an essentialist masculine subjectivity through her portrayal of the unresolved mental turmoil in which Chuy is engulfed throughout the novel. The reader follows the veteran's post-combat journey as he returns to his family home in April 1969 only to take off abruptly the next morning, embarking on an aimless trip across the U.S.—throughout which he remains completely silent, maintaining no direct communication with his family.²⁸⁶ Upon his second return home four months later in July, his residence in the Sahagún household is tumultuous and unpredictable, his parents and siblings opting to leave him alone once their attempts at engaging him fail utterly. The only person who maintains some connection with Chuy during this dark time is Yolanda, who helps him polish the chrome on his motorcycle every day. It is Yolanda who maintains her faith in her brother even after hearing the terrible stories about him molesting girls in front of the schoolyard when

²⁸⁶ While Chuy never calls or writes during this time, different pieces of mail do arrive at the Sahagún house addressed to Chuy, which indicate the trajectory of his journey to his family. For example, a postcard arrives for Chuy from a lover in Philadelphia, as well as a coupon for a free oil change from an auto shop in Mankato, Minnesota (41).

classes let out, even after the cops start coming around looking for him. “Chuy’s not that way,” she tried to convince herself (146). As readers, we struggle along with the narrator to comprehend her unyielding trust and belief in Chuy as his anger and hostility only seem to increase over time. The only explanation Yolanda gives for this unyielding loyalty is the incredibly close bond that she and her brother shared throughout her childhood—somehow they understood each other better than any of their other siblings did, and she continues to hold out hope that that bond can be repaired between them.

The climax of Chuy’s mental despair comes one October night during a neighborhood game of hide-and-seek. An annual tradition on their block, all of the kids, young and old, come out to play, including the solitary Chuy who by now has become so alienated that he has no friends or confidantes other than his loyal younger sister Yolanda. The light-hearted game quickly turns dangerous as the night sky is pierced by the scared screams of a young woman—the Sahagún’s neighbor Marisa who has just been sexually assaulted and beaten up by Chuy. “She was almost unrecognizable, her face a bloody pulp... ‘I felt sorry for him,’ she said between gasps of breaths, sobs. ‘Nobody wanted to pair off with him, so I did’” (186). Her brother’s war-induced trauma had erupted into this final pathological display of destruction and violence. In Yolanda’s eyes, the event transformed Chuy into “a horrible monster terrifying the neighborhood—a werewolf, a blood-sucking vampire, a Frankenstein—a monster created by what?” (188). What had caused this terrible, irrevocable change in her brother? What force had been capable of creating such a monster? This was the question that everyone sought the answer to but that no one could put his/her finger on. To the modern reader it perhaps seems obvious that Chuy’s monstrous actions stem from the trauma of his war

experience, but since the reality of war trauma was not yet a widely known reality in the late 1960s, Chuy's sudden transformation is inexplicable and incomprehensible to his family and friends. In this scene, Yolanda—albeit naïvely— identifies the change in her brother as something outside of himself, and is only able to make some sense of it by perceiving that a monster has inhabited him, which enables her to articulate the larger powers of institutional violence manifesting themselves in her brother in a way that others do not readily identify.

While society's lack of recognition of the mental trauma Chuy has faced is addressed poignantly here, there is perhaps an undeveloped parallel suggested in the novel between the monster of war and its destruction of those involved in it, and war's capacity to create monsters that perpetrate the violence and horrors upon which the notion of war is founded. Although Santana does not directly address Chuy's guilt at the acts he committed while in Vietnam, nor describe those acts in any detail, his internal conflict is suggested in his unwillingness to accept the family's allusions to his war heroism, as I discuss below. The fact that Santana chooses not to elaborate upon this potential parallel or to consider the experiences of other groups affected by the war – namely the Vietnamese people – points to the novel's participation in the third literary thread I have identified as part of the production on the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o military experiences during this era. That is, Santana focuses on the contributions of the Chicano minority community to the war efforts, restricting her representation to the U.S. military side rather than considering its effects on the “enemy” and the countless innocent civilians in Vietnam who were affected by the war. Whereas Hinojosa or Montoya's texts, as well as the Puerto Rican literature on the Korean War, engage more directly with

the effects of the war on the local East Asian population, Santana – as well as Duarte – foreground the American minority experience and perspective over larger considerations of U.S. imperialism and its effects on foreign peoples.

In her repeated attempts to understand Chuy, to support him and try to help him, Yolanda seeks other reasons for his strange behavior. Her limited understanding of war didn't allow her to comprehend the fact that his experience in Vietnam could be the sole culprit of her brother's troubles. After finding some weird pills in a box in Chuy's nightstand, she is convinced that she has discovered the cause—that she finally knows how to help him. “‘This is the reason he's been acting so weird,’ I said. ‘So if you and I can figure out how to get him to stop taking this stuff, maybe drug rehabilitation or something like that... It's gotta be the drugs making him act all weird’” (180). It is her brother's former best friend, El Chango, who tries to put it into words for her. “‘There's an anger, or rage, or something in his actions that goes deeper than drugs, Yoli... All I can think of is there must've been some pretty horrible shit going down when he was in Vietnam’” (180-1). The inability for anyone to explain exactly what happened to Chuy in Vietnam that had such a traumatic impact on him is reflective of the soldier's own inability to express his experience. As Carmen Méndez García explains, for soldiers in Vietnam, “failure at understanding, elaborating, and telling, either to oneself or to others, and their desirable outcome, mourning, are denied to... combatants, since mourning itself is seen as feminine” (43). The failure to understand and put into words one's own experience automatically renders comprehension by loved ones or society impossible—all as a result of essentialist notions of masculine subjectivity that dominate American culture.

The closest that Chuy comes to expressing his war experience is in one of the few lucid moments of communication that occur between Chuy and Yolanda after his return from war. In an effort to justify his dismissive response to his young sister Luz's inquiry whether he killed "a bunch of commies" at war, Chuy addresses Yolanda, "What am I supposed to tell her? Should I give her some war hero shit so that when she grows up and has boyfriends she'll remember some fantasy story her brother cooked up when she was little, and she'll be happy to send her boyfriend off to the war?" (Santana 128). Chuy continues, "It was a war with a lot of shit and no heroes, should I tell her that?" (129). This is the clearest, most straightforward statement that Chuy makes regarding his war experience in the entire novel. The fact that the soldier himself acknowledges that it was a war with *no* heroes completes Santana's dismantling of the myth of warrior masculinity, amounting to a direct rejection of the heroism of war. *Motorcycle* instead suggests that "Chicano masculine assimilation can be traumatic," given that, ultimately, Chuy's "assimilationist enlistment in the military leads to personal injury and familial disruption" (Cutler, "Disappeared Men," 601).

While Chicano assimilation into the folds of U.S. nationalism is hinted at in Santana's text, it is complicated by the different characters' responses to its symbols. In an early scene in the novel, the trappings of assimilation are embodied in the Mexican and American flags that are mounted side-by-side on the Sahagún garage wall as part of the decorations for Chuy's homecoming celebration. The sheet cake, on the buffet table below the flags, "was decorated with two miniature toothpick flags—Mexican and American—and red and blue writing said 'Welcome home, CHUY!'" (Santana 8-9). The guests who join the family to welcome their son and brother back to the community also

play into this assimilationist discourse, one old man asking proudly to see “our soldier boy,” as if he were a credit to his race for having successfully served the American military (13). Yet Chuy himself is quick to reject any nationalist pride, silently shredding the American and Mexican flags into shorn strips and leaving them out in the open in a pile of scraps for everyone in the house to see in a loud message of disidentification with the false values for which the flags supposedly stood. The family discovers the pile the morning following the party, after Chuy has already made his hasty escape on his motorcycle. Yolanda is the only person that is able to face the product of her brother’s destruction.

Nobody entered the patio, though we all immediately spotted the two mountains of cut strips on the table and began to understand where Chuy stood in this strange world of ours. Without a word, then, as if I were disposing of simple party litter, I did for Chuy what no one else could bear to do: I dumped his shredded Mexican and American flags into the garbage can. (22)

Yolanda’s action not only signifies solidarity with her brother, but also with his rejection of nationalist values of masculinity and the heroism of war. Cutler asserts: “Yoli’s action here foreshadows her eventual role as Chuy’s savior, a role she fulfills by rejecting what the novel views as arbitrary national communities and mythologies,” such as Chicano patriarchy and warrior masculinity (“Disappeared Men,” 602). However, by drawing on problematic notions of “savior” and “victim,” it seems as if Cutler himself is perpetuating restrictive ideological binaries that continue to privilege concepts of heroism that underpin mainstream U.S. consciousness. Although Cutler interprets Yoli’s alternative embodiment of the role of “savior” due to her brother’s psychological inability to play that role any longer, which inverts traditional Chicana/o gender roles, Yoli’s act of

commiseration or solidarity with her brother has little to do with heroism, but is instead likely related to the strong emotional ties between brother and sister.

Santana's exploration not only of the presence of the Chicano soldier in Vietnam, but of the difficult experience of the Chicano Vietnam veteran upon his return to civilian life points to yet another little known reality regarding Chicano soldiers in Vietnam; that is, the high rates of PTSD suffered by Hispanic and other minority ethnic Vietnam veterans including African Americans and American Indians (Loo 1). Multiple studies of ethnic minority Vietnam veterans have revealed their disproportionate levels of PTSD in comparison to Caucasian Vietnam veterans, including the research of Chalsa Loo (2007), Walter Penk and Irving Allen (1991), Jennifer Price (2007), and Ruef, Litz, and William Schlenger (2000), among others. As of 1990, current PTSD rates for Vietnam veterans were, "28% among Hispanics, 21% among African Americans, and 14% among Whites" (Loo 1). Loo reports that the higher incidence levels of PTSD in minority ethnic Vietnam veterans are likely due to two main factors: "psychological conflicts related to identification with the Vietnamese," and "higher exposure to war zone stressors [combat exposure]" (1). These findings not only reinforce the disproportionate numbers of Chicano soldiers—in particular—in Vietnam, but also emphasize the devastating psychological effects of the aforementioned structure of recognition (Mariscal, *Aztlán and* corroborate the fact that Chicano soldiers saw more intense combat than did their Caucasian counterparts (Villa et al. 1139, 1152)—as was also the case for Puerto Ricans in the Korean War (*Aztlán and Viet Nam 20-1*)—which led to increased war stresses resulting in higher levels of long-term trauma.

Motorcycle Ride thus grapples with multiple complex circumstances surrounding the experience of Chicano soldiers in the Vietnam War, and the long-term implications of that experience on Chicano veterans and their loved ones. The specific focus on the war's effects on the Chicana/o community brings to light a different reality than that experienced by Caucasian families in the U.S., an experience of loss and trauma compounded by the marginalization of the Chicana/o community within mainstream American society. The larger nation's negation of Chuy's alternative origins and culture as a Chicano male renders him an "other," a "gook," in the eyes of his Caucasian counterparts. Incapable of expressing his hurt in any other way, Chuy communicates this othering—racism that he experienced and internalized during his time in Vietnam—in a destructive manner towards his own loved ones upon his return home. "Damn wetbacks, all of you, he muttered. 'Goddamn gooks is what you are. Go back to Vietnam and kill yourself some commies, you fucking wetbacks,'" Chuy mutters to his mother, Yolanda, and the other women gathered outside his house as he heads to his motorcycle one day (Santana 149). The women are shocked by his words, and while his mother reprimands her son, her scolding doesn't seem to register with him.

The racial epithets that emerge from Chuy's mouth in this scene reproduce the insults that he himself was subjected to during his service in Vietnam. To the Caucasian soldier or officer, a Mexican "wetback" was the same as a Vietnamese "gook." Unable to cope with the physical and verbal violence he witnessed and endured, Chuy transfers this racist hatred to his own people, meanwhile negating his Chicano identity. Yolanda recalls him calling out to their mother, "'Hey, Lady... My name isn't Jesús Manuel Sahagún. No fucking way,' he said. 'It's Jesse Mitchell Sahaygun, so don't forget that, OK?'" (149-

150). He speeds off so fast that he doesn't even give her a chance to respond to his angry outburst. In this scene, Chuy adopts the North American identity that has been imposed upon him, a name that has been adjusted to the monolingual tongues of his superiors who, incapable of correctly pronouncing "Jesús" or "Sahagún," call him "Jesse Sahaygun" instead.

Santana's characters are quick to clarify that there are many others in their community who suffer from similar psychological wounds as those endured by Chuy. The neighborhood gossip, Socorro, fulfills a pivotal role in the novel, informing Dolores—Yolanda's mother—of the more widespread effects the war was having on the general Chicana community. "Socorrito, next door, was quick to document case after case of these kinds of situations," explaining that war veterans, "our muchachos... could come back like this, a little lost and confused" (133). The next-door *chismosa* (gossip) also reinforces the statistics that have already been mentioned here, the disproportionate numbers of Chicanos dying in Vietnam. "'You are one of the lucky ones,' Socorrito said to my mother, coming up to stand next to her at the screen door. 'Look at the poor Vásquez family. Their oldest son—killed to pieces just a week before his tour of duty was over,'" noting the terrible effect it had on his mother (15). Socorrito continued, "'The Conroys lost their boy, too... Pobrecito, killed in Vietnam just like Ricky'" (15). Socorro's commentary throughout the novel, combined with Chuy's condition itself, function as "a criticism of not only the Vietnam War but more importantly of the disproportionate numbers of Chicanos that served in it" (Avendaño 72). Santana's criticism goes beyond mere statistics, however, delving deeper into the patriarchal gender constructs that essentialize the female versus male experience within Chicana/o culture.

This commentary is embodied in Yolanda's adolescent experience delivered through her first-person narration of the fragmentation she witnesses in her family as a result of her brother's psychological trauma.

The Sahagún family's fragmentation begins as the result of their son's conscription to serve in Vietnam. In the opening pages of the novel, Yolanda channels her mother's thoughts as she surveys her prized garden, "The quince tree. She was sure this fall the membrillos would be as big and tart as they had been two years ago. Maybe now that the family would all be together again the tree would fare better, she must have been thinking as she stepped back into the shadows of the kitchen. Our Chuy was coming home, gracias a Dios" (Santana 9-10). Yet the family is not made whole again simply by Chuy's return, despite Yolanda's repetition of the refrain, "Our Chuy had come home, thanks be to God" as if their soldier son being back home automatically returned everything to normal (11). Although her brother had physically survived the war, unlike many Chicano sons and brothers in the community, Chuy's mental trauma and distance from his loved ones was made even more acute following his physical return to civilian life.

In relation to Chuy's mental distancing in the text, Cutler posits that *Motorcycle* functions similarly to several other Chicano war narratives that "pivot in some way on the *absence* of male characters... men who *are disappeared* (echoing the Spanish usage) on one level as ciphers in a text but also on another level as material bodies in a hostile nation" ("Disappeared Men," 586). According to Cutler, this psychological pain functions essentially as a mental *disappearance* perpetrated by the U.S. government against an ethnic minority soldier whose life has been deliberately undervalued since his

initial conscription into the military. Cutler's use of the word "disappear" within the context of Latin American *disappearings* common in many authoritarian dictatorships like that of Augusto Pinochet in Chile or the military junta's "Dirty War" in Argentina, where individuals perceived as subversive or threatening to the state are kidnapped and often killed or tortured and held unlawfully for extended periods of time, is problematic here. While there were clearly unjust structural forces at work in the overrepresentation of Chicanos in combat assignments during the Vietnam War as I discussed in my introduction and earlier chapters, the U.S. military did not perpetrate political kidnappings and assassinations of these Chicano soldiers, or of soldiers from other racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, whose time on the front lines left them mentally and emotionally scarred upon their return to civilian life. However traumatic, the effects of war on the human psyche cannot be likened to very overt forms of state-instituted violence like *disappearings* in Latin America (and elsewhere).

Despite the clear divergence between the Latin American context and the experience of minority ethnic soldiers in the U.S. military, Chuy's family does experience firsthand the lack of accountability and the inadequate nature of the health services being afforded their son upon his admittance into the local Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital. Yolanda's father observes angrily in Santana's second novel, *Ghosts of El Grullo*, after being asked by the VA doctors whether there is a history of schizophrenia in the Sahagún family, "You people have a lot of nerve. He serves this country, comes back mentally damaged, and you want to put the blame on his lineage? *Pues bien*, fine, say what you want to say, just remember, he wasn't like this before he went to Vietnam" (41). Unwilling to acknowledge the government's central role in Chuy's mental illness,

the doctors instead revert to typical psychological inquiry into the patient's family history of mental health in search of an answer. The doctors' attitude is clearly reflective of the lack of accountability on the part of the state's role in the trauma of Chuy and other war veterans. Such a simplified clinical approach belies the clear truth behind Chuy's sickness—it was Chuy's war experiences, stemming from the combat assignments he received directly from the U.S. military, which forever changed the Chuy that his family had once known and loved.

Whether it is the death of a loved one while away at war, as was the case in Duarte's novel, or the psychological trauma of a loved one returned from war, as is depicted in Santana's work, these different types of violent experiences endured by the Chicano soldier have a similar effect in their splintering or fragmenting of the Chicana/o family. As Juan Carlos Trejo documents specifically in relation to Chicano veterans, "for many Chicanos... the degree of violence and degradation that they experienced in Vietnam did have drastic effects on how they perceived and related to family members" (Trejo 12). Trejo elaborated, "PTSD became a problem that affected how many Chicanos held relationships with family members, friends, and people of the outside world" (44). In the Sahagún family, the struggle to understand their son and brother's demons alienates the family members, causing them to sink deeper into themselves rather than seek the support of loved ones. The traditions and pastimes that united the family were now abandoned, Yolanda's mother and father paralyzed in their despair. "Things were that bad. After Mamá planted the sweet peas, she stopped working in her garden altogether, while Papá stopped watching TV, even *Bonanza*" (200). Upon Chuy's disappearance,

both parents retreat into their own thoughts, incapable of comprehending the changes in their son.

Chuy's inability to seek solace in the family, his family's inability to help him, rips their close-knit home open at the seams. "We all stopped living normal lives; this was a kind of *day the earth stood still* for the Sahagún family" (201). As Yolanda takes out her rage on her best friend and "goddamned junior high school teachers—fuck them all" (201), Tony takes out his anger directly on Chuy, attacking him and beating him up after his assault on Marisa. "'You fucking loony, what did you do to her?' he screamed... 'You're so fucked up. Why don't you just get out of our lives, you fucking crazy'" (188). Even the normal consensus between mother and father over their parenting of their children begins to crack, as they disagree over how to handle Chuy. "'Leave him alone,' 'leave him alone,' you all say,' [Papá] was shouting at Mamá. 'But look at him, Dolores. Our son is making us the laughingstock of the neighborhood... Wait till I get my hands on him'" (153).

As the traditional structure of the patriarchal Chicana/o family begins to crumble under the despair caused by Chuy's mental illness, other issues that contribute to this fragmentation of the family unit also emerge. Rosaura Sánchez notes, "the one social space that is typically scrutinized and deconstructed in the literature of Chicanas is that of the patriarchal family, which positions women in subordinate and marginal spheres" (54). Adding onto the already weakened family structure as the result of the war's traumatic effect on Chuy, Santana constructs a deeper criticism of Chicano patriarchy and the traditional family unit. Unlike *Their Spirits*, where the family fragmentation is much more destructive and does not entail an awareness or assertion of Chicana subjectivity on

the part of the female protagonists, *Motorcycle* accomplishes a critical interrogation of the traditional Chicano family structure. Santana therefore follows the trend in much Chicana literature, as identified by Sánchez, of “dismantl[ing] the traditional construct of women within patriarchal spaces” through the “construct or notion of family fragmentation with a reordering of spheres and roles” (54).

Simultaneous with Chuy’s crisis, the eldest Sahagún daughter Carolina stands up to her father, defying his rule banning his daughters from dating by bringing her boyfriend—an Anglo man named Tom whom she later marries—to the family home to properly introduce him to her parents. Inciting his rage at first, Carolina’s defiant act ultimately leads to her boyfriend’s acceptance into the family. During this same period, Yolanda and her sister Ana María stand up to their brother Octavio’s attempts at controlling their lives after Yolanda witnesses his sexual assault on a girl he was dating. The narrator faces him with steely courage, accusing him of his hypocrisy at taking advantage of young girls while all the while trying to protect his sisters from the same fate. Her older sister then yells, “Leave all women the fuck alone unless you’re going to treat them with respect—the way you’d like to have your sisters be treated” (235). Cutler asserts that *Motorcycle* “demonstrates the centrality of the war for a rising generation of Chicana activists... lay[ing] bare the gender dynamics of Mexican family life” (“Disappeared Men,” 585). Thus, as the Sahagún women begin to assert their agency from within the confines of the Chicano patriarchal structure, the dynamics within the family start to shift slightly—a shift that is made more apparent in Santana’s subsequent novel, *Ghosts of El Grullo*, which warrants further discussion at a later time. As the

narrator and sibling most closely connected to Chuy, Yolanda's role in the defiance of this patriarchy and the shifting gender dynamics within the Sahagún family is pivotal.

For Yolanda, Chuy's return is effectively a non-return; her brother is just as absent after returning from Vietnam as when he was away at war. That absence is even further compounded by the narrator's need for his guidance during this transitional time in her life. Yolanda's womanhood unfolds messily across the pages of the book, occurring simultaneously with her brother's failed attempts at making sense of the civilian world he returns to upon his release from military duty. In this way, Chuy and Yolanda's emotional struggles are inextricably intertwined, as the younger sister looks to the older brother to fulfill the quintessential savior role he had played in her life prior to the war, and he ultimately seeks in her the solace and support in a hostile world that he no longer comprehends. Yolanda's narration is thus the crucial tool used by Santana to dismantle the constructs of traditional Chicano masculinity, and of the patriarchal gender norms that dominated—and to a certain extent, continue to dominate—Chicana/o culture. Through the young woman's interrogation of the different treatment she and her sisters receive from her father and brothers, through her troubled musings over the meaning behind her sexual urges, Santana constructs a larger criticism of traditional Chicano patriarchy. Yolanda "begins to understand her nascent sexuality via modes of oppression that are unquestioned traditions in her home"—modes that she unfortunately sees reflected in the destructive actions of her traumatized veteran brother when he sexually assaults Marisa that night of hide and seek (Cutler 602-3).

Yolanda's sexual awakening is colored by the violent underpinnings of Chicano masculinity that she witnesses in her own home. As she struggles to determine "how far

was going too far” with a boy, and when a girl’s actions “cross[ed] the line into dangerous territory” (Santana 37), our young narrator is forced to confront head-on in her own brother Octavio the type of sexual violence and degradation that she has been taught to fear and against which she has been taught to protect herself. Stuck hiding in her brothers’ closet as he rapes a young woman just feet away from her on the bed, Yolanda is petrified, consumed by “a sick feeling of something being wrong, ugly wrong,” as she wishes she could “run out of there, disappear into the air or just die and be swallowed up by the earth, be anywhere but here, hearing those sounds” (168-9). In the aftermath of the assault, the young woman’s words pierce Yolanda’s heart as if it were her who had just been violated, “‘I didn’t want to go all the way,’ she said. ‘You knew that. It hurt me, I told you you were hurting me...’” (169). Octavio’s cruel response shocks Yolanda, “‘Hey, don’t give me that bullshit,’ Octavio said. I’d never heard him sound that rough and ugly. ‘You know you wanted it as much as I did’” (169-170). Yolanda is incapable of erasing the traumatic rape scene from her mind, nor of ignoring the clear hypocrisy in the way her brothers and fathers control her and her sisters in an attempt to protect them from the dangerous Chicano masculinity that they themselves embody. Yolanda’s first direct exposure to the sexual act—through witnessing her brother’s rape of another Chicana woman—consequently serves to spark a process of realization for the protagonist regarding the contradictory and irrational nature of traditional Chicano patriarchy. For Yolanda, this harsh realization process ultimately informs “an initiation into knowledge about herself as a sexual object in [Chicana/o] society who has been manipulated by a framework of cultural myths” grounded in a restrictive patriarchal culture that regards Chicanas as inferior to their Chicano counterparts (Avendaño 71).

As her older sister Ana María explains to Yolanda following a botched back alley abortion that leaves her dangerously ill from excessive blood loss, ““You know Papá and the guys and how they guard us like we’re part of their harem, like we’re their prized horses or something”” (Santana 215). Ana María’s fear of the oppressive tendencies of the men in her family is stronger than her own desire to keep the child conceived out of a loving relationship with her boyfriend, or to protect herself from the life-threatening risks of an illegal abortion. “But Ana María’s words, her explanation for doing this, made me understand that stronger than her love for Tito and a love child was her fear of our father and brothers. I wasn’t sure why this thought made me angry, but it did” (219). Through a series of eye-opening moments like the rape scene, her own sexual harassment by a drunk outside a bar when she is looking for El Chango, Chuy’s assault on her neighbor Marisa, Ana María’s abortion, and her own blossoming relationship with her first boyfriend, Yolanda gains an awareness that enables her “to assert and arrive at a self-circumscribed identity” that escapes from the limitations of Chicano patriarchy (Avendaño 67).

Yolanda’s personal resolution of Chuy’s assault on Marisa is perhaps the most emotionally disturbing and significant moment in the novel. On Halloween night, just a few days following the hide and seek game, Yolanda and her best friend Lydia ride their bikes in costume to the nearby cemetery. There, Yolanda abandons Lydia, consumed by her rage at the world, at whoever or whatever messed up her brother so badly, at the cops and everyone who was trying to criminalize him. The protagonist’s personal reality has been altered so violently for her upon her brother’s return from Vietnam that she is only capable of pursuing destructive, individual acts of anger that demonstrate her desperate search for resolution and/or revenge. Yolanda comes close to seriously injuring her best

friend as a result of her desperation: “I charged her, running with all my might, screaming a scream to rival all witches’ screams... With both hands, I raised the rock, still running toward her, aimed to bash her brains in” (199). Yet, in the end, she cannot go through with it, yelling at Lydia to go home, and collapsing to the ground, cold and terrified. It becomes clear that Yolanda’s perhaps unintentional attempts at immersing herself in the pathology of her brother’s trauma do little to aid her comprehension of the depths of Chuy’s psychological wounds stemming from Vietnam.

When the narrator finally finds Chuy after he has been hiding out for nearly a month since assaulting Marisa, he is huddled in the culvert near the freeway, completely out of touch from reality in a psychotic state. Overcoming her fear and her urge to flee from her troubled brother, Yolanda instead inches closer, wading cautiously into his disturbed world. “He screamed the scream of a demented witch, a ghoul. I froze. His cries were wails of a ghostly past, a past I could not fathom. Not knowing exactly in words what his darkness was, I became enveloped in it; it wrapped itself around me and claimed me for its own” (249). As she is enveloped in his darkness, she moves closer to comprehending and to saving her beloved brother.

My whole being was reverberating, and I thought I could hear myself wince or whimper, a small cry being crushed by the grating noises in my head... I was drowning, drowning, and so I did the only thing I could think of to do in that moment of chaos and death: I came up behind Chuy and cautiously, slowly, wrapped my thin, trembling arms as best I could around his own trembling body, hugging my brother... ‘Mi’jo,’ I whispered to Chuy, ‘it’s going to be all right now. Sí, mi’jo, shhhh...’ (249-250)

By confronting whatever experiences of chaos and death were drowning her brother, whatever atrocities he had been forced to commit on the battlefield in the name of U.S. imperialism, Yolanda is able to get through to the vulnerable boy who lies beneath the

rage, fear, and psychosis. However ironic it may be, in the moment that she embraces him, Yolanda embodies a maternal figure, playing the traditional role of caregiver and mother that women in her family have been instructed to fulfill. Yet in this moment, what is important to Yolanda is supporting her brother in the only way she knows how, through the physical comfort of an embrace and soothing words in an attempt to bring him back to reality. It is by allowing the narrator to delve into the depths of Chuy's trauma that Santana succeeds in drawing a "connection between the global designs of imperialist violence and the local history of patriarchy experienced by her protagonist, Yolanda" (Cutler, "Disappeared Men," 585). Despite the violence she has seen her brother perpetrate against Marisa, Yolanda begins to understand that there are broader, more powerful forces at play that have established this link between military, imperialist violence, and male patriarchal ideologies that often play out in the manifestation of fierce forms of masculinity.

For Yolanda, Octavio's rape of the girl in his bedroom, Chuy's violent experiences in Vietnam, and his assault of Marisa, seem inextricably connected to the aggressive warrior masculinity that is engrained in parts of Chicano culture. It is important to recognize that not all Chicano soldiers necessarily bought into this fierce warrior masculinity during or after their military service – indeed, many young Chicano men remained overwhelmed by fear and guilt and never developed the high levels of aggression that the military attempts to condition into its troops. Nevertheless, regardless of the individual reality or personality of Chicano soldiers, one cannot deny the dominance of such ideologies of military honor and heroism within traditional Chicano culture – ideologies which persist in many ways today (Cutler 585, 601). We can

therefore interpret this final scene between Yolanda and Chuy as Yolanda's attempt to challenge and defy the patriarchal values of warrior masculinity through the emotional, maternal comfort she provides her brother. It is only in this way that the protagonist is able to reconcile the deep love she feels for her brother with her nascent self-identity as an individual Chicana woman capable of asserting her own agency independent of that imposed upon her by the men in her family.

Yolanda acknowledges Chuy's sickness and seeks help for him—he had been missing for several weeks, and she is the one to finally find him, after which she immediately informs her parents who call the police. It isn't until things get this serious with Chuy that he is finally taken to the VA hospital. Through her actions, Yolanda effectively dismantles the heroic soldier masculinity that had been imposed on her brother upon his conscription in the military. In the aftermath of his rescue from the culvert by the authorities, Yolanda stands in church and prays, "please dear God, let Chuy be my old Chuy again and be let out of the VA hospital and back to us" (252). It is in this, one of the final scenes of the novel, that Santana emphasizes the fact that Chuy's psychological issues are part of a more widespread issue among war veterans. "We were assured by the VA that they were taking care of him, taking tests and giving him the proper medication. It seemed Chuy wasn't the only Vietnam vet that had come back that way, truly messed up" (252). While the novel does not entirely fulfill the reader's desire for closure in regards to Chuy's PTSD, it suggests that positive progress has been made, leaving the narrative on a hopeful note for the future of this Chicano Vietnam veteran.

A Chicana's Guernica: Reliving a Life-altering Loss through Autobiographical-based Fiction in Gloria Velásquez's *Toy Soldiers and Dolls*

Like the autobiographically-inspired novels of Patricia Santana, the work of Gloria Velásquez is intimately personal, particularly her writing on the Vietnam War—a war to which she lost her beloved brother, Lance Corporal John Robert Velásquez. A well-known Chicana activist since the Chicano Moratorium and Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s, Velásquez's literature is rooted in a desire to inspire social change. While she has gained welcome commercial success, particularly as a result of her incredibly popular Roosevelt High Series of young adult novels, Velásquez writes primarily to raise awareness of social inequalities and bring about social transformation. In an interview with a reporter at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where she teaches, Velásquez explained that her writing is “not literature to analyze or sell or for any theoretical reason... It's to inspire social change” (Reyes 1). Velásquez continued, explaining that to her, art and writing is “a link to community: art not simply to express creativity but also to inspire social change... I think you have to be a product of the '60s to really understand that” (1). Despite Velásquez's strong commitment to social activism and to the power of literature to bring about social transformation, her unpublished novella *Toy Soldiers and Dolls*, which I briefly analyze in this section, diverges notably from her other cultural production on the Vietnam War in its strong emphasis of the personal and mental impact the war had on its protagonist. Moreover, Velásquez's writing establishes a much darker, more emotionally charged mood than that found in Santana and Duarte's novels. Despite its intensely personal nature, *Toy Soldiers* conveys a strong criticism of the U.S. government and the Vietnam War in general, as well as an awareness of the

disproportionate presence of Chicano men who fought and died in the war—a consciousness revolving around recognition that is similar to that delivered by both Duarte and Santana in their novels.

Made up of sixteen intertwined vignettes, *Toy Soldiers* delivers a fragmented narrative that presents the life of the Chicana protagonist, Esperanza, through the jagged narrative pieces that remain after her world was shattered years earlier by her brother's death at war, and from which she has never completely recovered. The protagonist, Esperanza Martínez, is clearly based on the autobiographical experiences of Velásquez herself—as she has confirmed through email correspondence with myself (“Re: Interest in your novella *Toy Soldiers* and *Dolls*”). Similarly, the protagonist's brother who dies in Vietnam, Antonio Martínez, is based on the experiences of Velásquez's own brother, John Robert Velásquez. Mirroring the protagonist's grief-stricken mind, the narrative structure is frequently disrupted, switching unexpectedly from first to third person perspective within a single narrative strand, or changing from one character's first person point of view to the first-person perspective of a different character. The complex, non-linear structure and frequent use of flashbacks captures the depressive, lost state in which the protagonist is immersed throughout *Toy Soldiers*. The protagonist's name Esperanza, or “Hope” in English, is ironic given that her character is basically hopeless throughout the narrative, having lost all sense of hope upon her brother's death in Vietnam. The text's characters—Esperanza's family members, friends, and lovers—all battle against different social conditions including poverty, domestic abuse, or discrimination based on ethnicity or sexual orientation. They cope with these conditions in varying ways, some through alcoholism or addiction, others through grief, and others are incapable of coping,

evidencing different forms of mental illness. A mournful text, it is a painful and poignant reconstruction of the disintegration of a Chicana/o family as a result of grief and loss, and the oppressive trappings of Chicano patriarchy. In this sense, *Toy Soldiers* echoes Santana's novel in its criticism of the restrictive gender roles imposed on women by the dominant Chicano culture, but the criticism is conveyed through a much darker tone.

The worst demons against which Esperanza battles are those of grief and guilt associated with the death of her brother—a loss over which she has never been able to gain true closure. Although the crippling absence of her brother pervades the entire text, the vignettes that address Antonio's death the most directly are "The Green Boxcar," "Guernica" and "El Louie." What differentiates *Toy Soldiers* most clearly from the literature of other Chicana writers on the Vietnam War era is the fact that Velásquez's novella transports its readers back to the battlefield, reconstructing the horror and violence of war through numerous scenes on the ground in Vietnam. This is accomplished through memories recalled by Antonio's fellow soldiers who survived the war—including his dear Uncle Louie with whom he was stationed for several months—as well as through Esperanza's own nightmares, and the first-person narration of the specter of Antonio himself, who recalls in his own voice the moments leading up to the devastating injury that led to his death.

One of the longer vignettes in the book, "The Green Boxcar," narrates the protagonist's return to her hometown, which she characterizes as a Mexican *colonia*. This visit brings her face-to-face with the crumbled remains of her past, including her brother Antonio. Staring through the windows of the old green boxcar that used to be her home—now an abandoned shell of a trailer, she remembers how her life changed when Antonio

went off to war. There was the added element of her brother's voluntary conscription into the military—a decision that both Esperanza and her mother didn't understand. For Antonio, joining the service seemed like a better option than remaining in their small town and following in the footsteps of their father, "Yeah, sure, work like an animal in the fields like everyone else. Or rot away in the sugar factory like *Apá*... Not me, Esperanza. That's not for me" ("The Green Boxcar," 5). Like many working-class young men, her brother saw the army as an opportunity for upward social mobility, for improving the life of his family, "in the Marines I can study, do something with my life... this way I can get a good job some day, buy mom the house she's always dreamed about" (5). Antonio's plans point at least partially to the structure of experience identified by Mariscal and other Chicana@ scholars as an avenue of assimilation into U.S. nationalism (*Aztlán and Viet Nam*, 26-7). By participating actively in the nation through his service, Antonio seeks upward mobility through pursuing an education paid for by the U.S. government and thus gaining a higher-paying job that will lead to a better situation for his family.

This assimilationist tendency that Antonio initially pursued upon joining the Marines is completely dismantled by the narrative of *Toy Soldiers*. Velásquez narrates the violent destruction of the minority ethnic soldier, embodied in the green plastic toy soldiers that Antonio used to play with as a young boy, which Esperanza later takes and smashes at the end of "The Green Boxcar." The protagonist recalls in a flashback, "I watched sadly as the little toy soldiers were suspended in the air for a brief moment before they came falling onto the ground. Then I reached out for the rock nearest me..." ("The Green Boxcar," 28). Esperanza obliterates these fragile soldier boys just as her

own soldier brother had been obliterated, 90 percent of his body burned by an explosion that left him on the brink of death—a death to which he finally succumbed a few days later. In several scenes throughout the novella, Esperanza embodies Antonio himself, as if her body were joined with his in its endless suffering. Thus, in the destruction of the toy soldiers, Esperanza sees her own destruction, feeling the impact of the rock as if it were hitting her own body, “I felt the first blows and I saw myself lying at their side, crushed and forgotten on the cold earth” (28). It is her body, like her brother’s that she envisions lying on the battlefield in Vietnam, which is abandoned and forgotten. This final scene of her brother’s destruction is replayed time and again in Esperanza’s thoughts and nightmares, each time taking a slightly different course but always leading to her brother’s death.

In the last section of the vignette titled “El Louie,” the specter of Antonio speaks, remembering the moment prior to the explosion:

I glanced at the letter on the table addressed to Esperanza. For an instant, I imagined myself far away with Mom and Dad on the other side of the field hoeing beets, Mom’s soft brown hair hidden beneath the red bandana. I felt a sudden terror then. I heard the explosion and I felt my skin begin to burn. I screamed, ‘Mom, Mom,’ and ran out of the bunker and started rolling in the white sand. It was then that I heard her calling me, ‘Antonio, Antonio, it’s me, Esperanza.’ (“El Louie,” 11)

The paragraph ends with Esperanza’s voice calling out to her injured brother, almost as if she were an angel—an image reinforced by the fact that she sprouts wings later in the dream—come to heal him. The following paragraph begins with a voice in first-person, but we quickly realize that it is now Esperanza who speaks. “I felt my body burning with Antonio’s as I moved closer to the water. The screams of the dying men kept getting louder as the waves continued to get stronger” (11). This shift in narrative voice is

purposefully disconcerting to the reader, blurring the lines between Antonio and Esperanza's individual voices and identities. As she takes up her brother's voice, it is as if she were dying alongside him. Esperanza's morbid thoughts are suddenly interrupted by her aunt's piercing voice as she arrives home. Yet even this disruption does not stop the nightmare that unfolds in her mind. "As I opened the door to leave, I heard the roar of the sea. I saw the mutilated bodies, pieces of arms, legs, floating in the water... It was then that I saw Antonio's charred body and my own floating face down" (12). Much like Yolanda immerses herself in her brother Chuy's tormented mind while trying to rescue him in the culvert in *Motorcycle*, Esperanza floats, burned and battered, alongside her brother's mortally wounded body. The parallels here, however, are very different. Whereas Yolanda had her brother in flesh and blood, Esperanza instead had to recreate the pain, perhaps in an attempt to comprehend or come to terms with the devastating violence he suffered. The fact that she sees her own body next to Antonio gestures to the part of herself that she lost when her brother died.

As Avery Gordon so eloquently puts it, haunting performs particular functions in literature, as well as other realms. In *Toy Soldiers* specifically, Antonio's memory haunts Esperanza, preventing her from finding peace in the present moment. For Gordon, haunting is "a story about what happens when we admit the ghost—that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present... into the making of our accounts of the world. It is a case of the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish" (Gordon 24). In *Toy Soldiers*, the marginal aspect being made present is the dead minority ethnic soldiers in Vietnam, their tragically high numbers that have been overlooked or ignored

in dominant U.S. historiography. Haunting here thus functions as a tool to reveal “modernity’s violence and wounds,” serving as a “haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live” (Gordon 24-5). George Dutton reinforces the function of ghosts as a reminder of past errors, asserting that “it is these ghosts, of soldiers and civilians killed in needless wars, that should most torment us” (117). The different treatment received by minority ethnic soldiers, including Chicanos, is part of these complex social relations identified by Velásquez. The author emphasizes the disproportionate loss of Chicano lives in the Vietnam War near the end of “The Green Boxcar.” As Antonio’s body is laid to rest, a third person omniscient narrator explains, “another young soldier’s name was added to the official list from the Pentagon: Acosta, Aguilar, Alvarez, Aragón, Ayala, Barreras... Trujillo, Valenzuela, Velardo, Velásquez...” (“The Green Boxcar,” 28). The narrator lists line after line of Hispanic surnames in alphabetical order. Interestingly, Antonio’s surname, Martínez, is not listed, but the author’s surname, Velásquez, is. This passage demonstrates how the autobiographical element of *Toy Soldiers* pervades the text, at times overtaking the fictional narrative.

The listing of Hispanic surnames recalls *Their Spirits* when Teresa lists the countless Hispanic names on the Vietnam Wall memorial at the conclusion of the novel. While Velásquez does not try to make sense of the list of names for the reader, the very fact that she ends the list with an ellipsis and that the narrative continues to advance forward, points to the cyclical nature of such deaths. With each consecutive war, the ellipses suggest, more names will be added to that list, both Anglo and Hispanic. In her Acknowledgments at the beginning of *Toy Soldiers*, Velásquez points to the Iraq War as

the impetus for finally publishing the novella. “It wasn’t until this past year, with the continued horror and tragedy of the Iraqi War, that I decided to finish Fini’s story” (*Toy Soldiers and Dolls*, iii). Thus, as with the other Chicana novels I have examined in this chapter, this book presents a criticism of the phenomenon of war in general, as well as a denunciation of the Vietnam War in particular.

In the brief vignette entitled “Guernica,” the reader is given a glimpse into the mental anguish in which the protagonist finds herself. Lost in her grief and guilt, Esperanza’s mind seems to blur the lines between reality and the dream world, which for her is a hellish place filled with nightmares of her brother’s death. In this altered state, the protagonist cohabitates with rats, who take over her home, crawling over and around her, digging their claws into her skin. By the end, she is too distraught, too far beyond caring to muster the energy to fight them off. The three-page vignette is broken into two long paragraphs, recreating a stream of consciousness form as Esperanza’s narration rambles organically, confusingly, moving in and out of reality. “I let them climb on everything, on my clothes, on the small table at my bedside. The only thing I haven’t let them touch is the small green box where I keep Antonio’s letters... I wanted to make them understand that *I* was the only one who could go inside that small box” (3). Even in her troubled state, Esperanza continues to watch over her brother in the only way she can, protecting his box of letters as if it were his actual body, preserving them from the invading rats in an attempt to honor Antonio’s life. “I let them climb all over my body and I talk to them about Antonio... They smile as if they themselves had once felt his tender caresses” (3). Velásquez immerses her protagonist in a world of depression and mental illness similar to the troubling descriptions of Chuy’s psychotic episodes in Santana’s *Motorcycle*. Indeed,

Esperanza herself appears to be suffering from some form of PTSD, as if she too had endured the horrors of war first-hand. Here, however, those horrors are primarily imagined and the violence is self-inflicted as Esperanza neglects her own well-being, exposing herself to the diseases carried by the vermin that have invaded her space, as well as the mental violence of the warfront that plays over and over in her mind. “The bad thing is that I dreamt I was over there again, surrounded by the exploding bombs, the sound of helicopters, and that smell of burnt skin, trunks without feet, arms without fingers hanging from machine guns... Not even the sound of gunfire or the moans of the dying men held me back. I had to find Antonio” (2). Esperanza continues to reenact her failed rescue of her brother, to mourn his loss—a loss that merges with so many other losses, other traumas in her life.

In the final vignette of the book, “Blackbirds,” we learn of two additional traumas that haunt Esperanza. We see her lying in the hospital bed after she has gotten an abortion, ridding herself of the child she had conceived with a man who abandoned her. As she drifts in and out of consciousness, she dreams of a young Esperanza, an innocent girl who used to play with her brother on the *patron*’s ranch. A young girl whose innocence is robbed from her upon being raped repeatedly by a stranger, so many times that she transforms herself into one of the “passive, innocent dolls” that she used to play with each time he violated her body (“Blackbirds,” 169). “Twenty-five years later when Esperanza would happen across one of her old dolls, naked, covered with cobwebs at the bottom of an old trunk, she would yearn for the innocence that had been stolen from her” (169). These personal traumas, inextricably linked to Esperanza’s unstable and desperate family life resulting from the circumstances of poverty and racial oppression throughout

her life, appear to be the underlying cause of her PTSD, a form of mental illness that is only further exacerbated by her brother's violent wartime death. It is only at the end of "Blackbirds," after having relived all of the losses and traumas in her life, after being emptied of everything that mattered to her so that there were "only dark, empty spaces" left, that Antonio's ghostly voice calls out to Esperanza, lifting her up from her despair (170).

When Antonio calls out to her, he utters similar words to those Esperanza imagined herself uttering to him when he lay dying in Vietnam, "'Esperanza. Don't be afraid. You're not alone'" (170). These whispered words from the ghost who continues to watch over her appear to inspire the protagonist. "Leaning against the open window, I felt my wings sprout as I reached out for Antonio, and I saw myself soar high above the ocean waves" (171). The novella ends with this line; the protagonist once again embracing her brother's specter, seeking in him her own rescue. Perhaps that is what her nightmares were really about the entire time—seeking out the memory of her dying brother not to save him, but rather to save herself. The seemingly hopeful conclusion of a soaring Esperanza comes somewhat abruptly, however, suggesting that the protagonist has somehow risen above all of the adversity and darkness that has weighed her down throughout the entire narrative. In this sense, the optimistic ending is not as believable as the hopeful note that Santana's novel ends on, which suggests some collective healing within the family.

In *Toy Soldiers*, on the other hand, it is hard to determine whether Esperanza's flight high above the waves is true liberation, or whether it is just another temporary escape from a distressed family life and the trappings of mental illness, both of which she

has yet to truly confront. While its intensely personal nature circumscribes much of the text's political commentary, Velásquez presents a more reflective project in her depiction of the injustices surrounding the Chicano soldier's Vietnam War experience. Ultimately, we can interpret the critique set forward in *Toy Soldiers* as functioning on the level of the destruction of Chicano bodies as part of war and the U.S. military system, demonstrating a concern with the larger structural issues at play in the minority ethnic soldier's overrepresentation in Vietnam, and thus falling within the second literary thread alongside Hinojosa's KCDT series.

Conclusion

Toy Soldiers shares several narrative features with *Their Spirits* and *Motorcycle*. Each text addresses the narrative of nationalist assimilation that accompanied the conscription of Chicano, and other minority ethnic soldiers, into the U.S. military. To some extent, in their drive to draw recognition to the oftentimes unjust experiences and contributions of the Chicano soldier during the Vietnam War, all three texts ultimately reinforce this nationalist narrative. While each text presents its own level of complexity and layered understanding of what it really means to be a Chicano in the U.S. military, in their emphasis on the fragmentation of the Chicana/o family – in Duarte's case, the collective national family, and in the case of Velásquez and Santana, the individual family unit – all three narratives focus on the consequences of the war on others, particularly on the women left behind. Through this focus on the home front, there is a criticism of Chicano patriarchy that comes through in all three texts, but most prominently in *Toy Soldiers* and *Motorcycle*. The Chicana authors suggest that Chicano men can be controlling and abusive—rape is a constant reality that Chicana women must

come to terms with. For Teresa, Esperanza, and Yolanda, the loss or illness of a brother compounds the holes already left by other losses and traumas, by a rapist brother or an abusive ex, and by a culture that oppresses women into subservient sexual objects.

The fragmentation of the family brought about by the separation of family members from their sons and brothers is exacerbated by the myth of Chicano warrior masculinity, by the desire of young Chicano men to prove their masculinity through aggression—rape, military service, or both. As all three novels demonstrate, the fragmenting impact of the war is irreversible on a certain level—the loss of a Chicano son can never be made right. Velásquez in particular accomplishes a critique that extends beyond the home front into the battlefield, depicting the horrific nature and senselessness of war and simultaneously criticizing the disproportionately high numbers of Latino soldiers dying in the war. This approach gestures towards the second literary thread that I have identified in this dissertation as Velásquez grapples with larger structural issues within mainstream modern America. Yet, unlike the work of González, Díaz Valcárcel, and Montoya, the protagonist in Velásquez's novel is unable to distance herself enough from the personal grief and loss she feels in order to grasp or interrogate the imperialist nature of the war in which her brother died.

In turn, Santana and Duarte's protagonists remain rooted in the reality of their local community and family home, focusing on the broader consequences of wartime on the Chicana/o community and on themselves. Thus, in their characters' search for resolution of their own issues – be they grief at the loss of a brother, as is the case of Teresa, or anguish at the confusion of coming of age within a repressive patriarchal environment, as Yolanda experiences – both Duarte and Santana's novels gesture in

different ways towards a participation in U.S. nationalism, aligning these texts with the third literary thread identified in this dissertation. Ultimately, Santana's text suggests that it is only through autonomy and agency that Chicana women can begin to confront the unstable patriarchy that is left behind following the war, to begin to dismantle the myths and gender constructs that sent so many Chicano men to die in the first place. Teresa (*Their Spirits*) and Esperanza (*Toy Soldiers*) have yet to find that autonomy—the first distracted by narratives of national belonging, and the second still too immersed in the specters of her past to move forward. Thus, while *Motorcycle* brings its protagonist the farthest in terms of a feminist consciousness, all three texts contribute at least partially to a larger Chicana feminist project of constructing an alternative narrative that challenges the rigidity of notions of identity and subjectivity surrounding gender.

As noted earlier, this discussion of gender, patriarchy, and the family is notably missing in the Puerto Rican literature on the Vietnam War. The divergence in the literature of these two minority groups surrounding this era is likely due to the fact that there is very little Puerto Rican cultural production by women that addresses this time period. However, an examination of contemporary Puerto Rican war literature, particularly from the turn of the twenty-first century forward, may reveal the presence of similar themes as those evidenced in the work of Duarte, Santana, and Velásquez. Future research is needed to consider these possibilities and to continue the investigating, gathering, and analyzing process of informal and formal texts on minority participation in the U.S. military.

EPILOGUE

“Strange but this place where we are at is unreal almost”²⁸⁷: Exploring Latina/o and Chicana/o Military Participation in the post-9/11 Era

While my interest in the representation of the Puerto Rican and Chicano soldier's experience in the U.S. military began with the specific moments of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the conversation that I have entered into as part of this dissertation expands much further, into the present moment. As I learned more about the recent literature emerging on this subject, it came to my attention that many of these twenty-first century authors were reflecting back on earlier periods of U.S. Latina/o and Chicana/o military mobilization in an attempt to consider their community's involvement in the contemporary wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as their soldiers' deployment to other U.S. military bases around the world, as part of a longer historical trajectory of Latina/o and Chicana/o participation in the U.S. Armed Forces. In particular, the work of Chicana authors Velásquez and Duarte speaks to this concern over the continuity in their community's military involvement in U.S. wars past and present. A vocal anti-war activist, Velásquez sees many parallels between the horrors and losses experienced by

²⁸⁷ September 9, 2006 MySpace blog post by Army Specialist Daniel E. Gómez, killed in action in Iraq (cited in Alvarez and Lehren 12). Gómez's MySpace entry speaks to the seemingly "unreal" nature of the U.S.'s "War On Terror" and his own personal attempts at simultaneously comprehending that strange reality and surviving it, both physically and mentally. His entry continues: "I hope I come back mentally in shape. lol." Like so many soldiers in war, he fears for his mental stability in the face of so many horrors. Gómez's surname suggests a Mexican American background, and the news article in which these entries were published describes him as: "Texan to the core" and "enamored of the military" (12). The MySpace entry speaks to two phenomena: the evolving nature of war coverage and literature with the advent of the Internet, and the growing rates of Latinas/os in the military, as I have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Gómez's characterization of the space of Iraq as "unreal almost" could be applied to the altered reality of post-9/11 America – where things we thought we understood quickly and unexpectedly turned strange and unreal.

Chicanas/os in Iraq and Afghanistan today and those experienced by minority soldiers in earlier wars like her brother who served and died in Vietnam. Velasquez's drive to finally publish *Toy Soldiers and Dolls* in response to this context of increased military mobilization speaks to the author's preoccupation over these trends.²⁸⁸

Stella Pope Duarte's work evidences similar concerns, although she has not spoken publicly about such continuities. In particular, Duarte's poem entitled "I'm Not the Enemy," presented at a 2009 Cultural Arts coalition event in Phoenix, Arizona, deals with issues of Chicana/o military participation and the historic discrimination their community has faced, and calls for recognition of their contributions to the American nation. The poem's Chicana speaker declares: "I'm not the enemy you seek / on the hills of Afghanistan, / or Pakistan, Iran, or Iraq. / I got nothing to do with those places. / They're not the enemy either" (lines 1-5).²⁸⁹ This listing of the 4 countries in which we have maintained a strong military presence since the attacks of September 11, 2001, at once establishes continuity among the perceived Middle Eastern "enemy" targeted by the U.S. military in those countries and the Chicana speaker, whose people have also been regarded as a type of "enemy" of the U.S. Anglo population during certain periods of American history. The speaker proceeds to contextualize the history of her people in the U.S., examining the imperialist effects of "Manifest Destiny" on the Mexican people, and the discrimination faced by her ancestors (line 26). She continues by emphasizing her community's contributions to the nation:

²⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter Four, Velásquez has been writing her novella since 1977, but the "continued horror and tragedy of the Iraqi War" prompted her to revisit it and seriously prepare it for publication (*Toy Soldiers and Dolls* iii).

²⁸⁹ Duarte's poem remains unpublished, but it was reproduced in Butzine and Ohm's online article about this event. All of my citations of this poem therefore draw from this reproduced version.

We saluted the flag, we sent our kids to school, we served
bravely in every war, and we claimed
Yes, America, the Land
of the Free, was ours too.
I've known no other.
When you tell me to go home, my ears
hear you, but my heart doesn't understand...
I too, am American. (lines 36-41, 51)

By choosing the phrase of “America, the Land of the Free,” Duarte establishes a parallel with the national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner.” She also draws upon the patriotic symbol of the American flag, and the symbolic acts of saluting that flag and serving “bravely” in every war to convey her message of Chicana/o national belonging. The poem’s emphasis on *every* war functions to further cement Mexican Americans’ belonging in the U.S. by conveying that their military service is not just limited to a specific moment but rather spans across the community’s deeply entrenched history in the nation. Moreover, the speaker’s use of the word “home” pushes back against those (Anglo) Americans who claim her ancestors’ home is not the U.S., turning to history to explain how deep the roots of her people go in this land. As a semantic gesture to the perhaps overused word “homeland” in mainstream American society today, Duarte’s poem emphasizes a nation united by a shared past. “Homeland... conveys a different relation to history, not a nation of futurity, but a reliance on a shared mythic past engrained in the land itself” (Kaplan 8). It becomes clear, then, that like Duarte’s novel *Their Spirits* (analyzed in Chapter Four), her poem takes up themes of national belonging and recognition that seem to fall in line with recent trends surrounding the official gestures of national appreciation toward the contributions of minority military members in recent years.

Whose Homeland? Targeted Recruitment and Non-Citizen Soldiers

Duarte's approach in both *Their Spirits* and "I'm Not the Enemy" seems intertwined with a shift in nationalist discourse that has taken place in the aftermath of 9/11, as Amy Kaplan, former president of the American Studies Association, observed in her October 17, 2003 Presidential Address. This discourse, Kaplan notes, is rooted in notions of both America as a homeland and America as empire. "The notion of empire recuperates a consensus vision of America as a unitary whole, threatened only by terrorists, but no longer contested and constituted by divisions of race, class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality" (8). While the notion of empire may have a homogenizing effect in certain applications – when the empire sees fit to use the labor of minorities as part of the "greater good," for example – John D. Blanco reminds us that equally entrenched American discourses surrounding race and civil war reinforce the reality of a police state domestically. "The experience of U.S. modernity [was] brought about by the blurring of distinctions between the exercise of state violence 'at home' and abroad," Blanco writes, noting how rhetoric surrounding the "war on terror" conflates police and military functions and identifies the "*domestic criminal as an international enemy with the question of life and death at stake*" (113, emphasis in original).

It is important to keep in mind that, in the strange and permanent state of exception we find ourselves in following 9/11, there are no absolutes. Therefore, while the Chicana/o or Latina/o individual may easily be accepted into the folds of U.S. nationalism, he or she can just as easily be labelled a terrorist and either deported (assuming they are first generation immigrants) or sent to a detention facility, where their rights as citizens are suspended and their fate may remain in limbo for years, if not

decades. José Limón, in his response to Kaplan's 2003 remarks, emphasizes the fact that "when translated into local specificities, the very ideas of U.S. empire, U.S. violence, and U.S. minorities as well as the U.S. military become complicated sites with multivalent social and moral meanings and outcomes" (31). Thus, while some Chicana texts may participate in nationalist discourses, it is important to keep in mind that these discourses and identities are never stable. Those minorities who receive military recognition and honors today may be suffering the consequences of scapegoating or court martials tomorrow.

In a certain way, Duarte's poem "I'm Not the Enemy" acknowledges the particularly precarious positioning of the Chicana/o community in American society today. By distancing the speaker from the identity marker of "enemy," Duarte recognizes him or her instead as *local*, as someone who *belongs* within the U.S. nation. Thus, this move to emphasize the Chicana/o community's shared, unifying qualities of patriotism and dedication to the nation can be seen as an attempt to seek more stable ground for a group whose future appears to be more uncertain today than ever.

Ironically, the unifying side of this nationalist discourse that seems to have emerged in the post-9/11 era – alongside the growing dominance of a police state and state of emergency that suspends citizens' rights at the drop of a hat – falls closely in line with the "consensus" nature of Cold War ideology and discourse, which I discussed in the Introduction. As Bielakowski has noted, the consensus rhetoric surrounding America's collective history during that era "posited an American ideological homogeneity that effectively obscured conflict and difference" within the nation, focusing on the "threat" from outside (xviii). It is difficult not to draw parallels between

the consensus rhetoric employed forty to fifty years ago and the unifying nationalist discourse that has reemerged in certain discourses within mainstream American society today. The U.S. military's discourse on minority contributions to the nation is one such example. Denise Ferreira da Silva explains this new approach by U.S. authorities as part of their efforts to redefine America's allies, or the U.S.'s "new friends of freedom" (130). This approach draws on "signifiers of raciality, the racial and the cultural [to] produce subjects of evil in a world without racial (geographical and bodily) boundaries," locating the enemy specifically in the Middle East, South Asia, East Africa, and the Pacific Islands – places that are depicted as regions where "freedom" is a foreign concept (da Silva 131). This phenomenon relates directly to the privileging of a selectively inclusive form of American citizenship that privileges certain racial and cultural bodies and identities over others. Latinas/os and Chicanas/os, it would seem, appear to fall under the category of America's "new friends of freedom," at least for the time being.

An example of this new process of privileging certain minority groups as "friends of freedom" is the U.S. government's award of 24 Medals of Honor to former military members – primarily racial/ethnic and religious minorities – who had previously been denied such recognition (Smith 1). The award ceremony, held at the White House on March 18, 2014, was the result of an internal military review of the records of "Jewish and Hispanic service members who had received the Distinguished Service Cross for their heroics in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars to determine whether they had been passed over for the Medal of Honor because of their race, religion or ethnicity" (1). Among those recognized were seventeen "Hispanic," one African American, and five white soldiers, including one Jewish American. Of the seventeen

Latinos recognized, four were born in Puerto Rico, and two were born in Mexico (“Valor 24: Medal of Honor” 1). Army Master Sergeant Juan E. Negrón was among the 21 posthumous recipients, and he became the first Puerto Rican soldier who served in the 65th Infantry to receive the nation’s highest military honor (Brown 1).

There is no denying the significance of the acts of selflessness performed by these 24 men who have finally received recognition decades later, and this tribute has undoubtedly been very meaningful to the families and communities of those recipients. Yet, while awarding medals is one way to honor the fallen and attempt to make up for the wrongdoings of a nation with a history of deep-seated racial discrimination and violence, it is an act that once again seems to fall back on symbolism, which some might interpret as amounting to an empty gesture. I cannot help but recall the words of José Montoya in “El Louie” (discussed in Chapter Three): “de qué sirven las medallas / si nos ven como animales [what's the use of medals / if they see us as animals]” (43-4). The U.S. military’s dehumanizing and emasculating treatment of Louie in the poem makes him feel as if he and his fellow Chicano soldiers are regarded as animals – as disposable cannon fodder – by a military institution that deems them less valuable than their Anglo counterparts.

While recognition of minority ethnic soldiers through military medals and awards may be regarded as an important step – indeed, this seems to be a major goal for many Chicana/o and Latina/o authors today – interrogating and attempting to address the structural racism that sent so many racial and ethnic minorities to the front lines in the first place would take that recognition a step further. Moreover, it seems necessary to question the motives that underlie authorities’ divisive, seemingly strategic approach of

recognizing and embracing certain minority groups over others. While in recent years, Latinas/os and African Americans often receive governmental awards, Americans of Middle Eastern descent continue to receive very little positive recognition within mainstream America, and are instead often held at arm's length from official honors that would function to reinforce their already tenuous American citizenship or sense of national belonging.

Richard Simon's observation in his article on the so-called "Valor 24" Medal of Honor recipients points to a reticence among officials to take the next step of interrogating the structural underpinnings of racism in the military: "The Pentagon has not released the findings of its review or specified which Medal of Honor recipients were denied the medal because of discrimination" (Simon 1). In fact, despite the widespread media coverage of this occasion, most reporters seem to downplay the accusations of discrimination and prejudice that brought about the military's review in the first place. And while President Obama may acknowledge the inequality in our nation's recent past, in his remarks at the ceremony he did not directly address the circumstances or factors at play that led to this injustice within the U.S. military institution. Obama recognized: "No nation is perfect, but here in America, we confront our imperfections and face a sometimes painful past, including the truth that some of these soldiers fought and died for a country that did not always see them as equal" (Smith 1). The president does acknowledge the existence of inequality in his remarks, but no other gesture to military accountability or the need for further investigation is made, let alone any attention to the current injustices that play out within our police state on a daily and hourly basis. Secretary of the Army John McHugh's speech to commemorate the awards is perhaps

more representative of the Armed Forces' official standpoint on the issue of discrimination within its institution: "At this point in time, we hope, we believe we have at last righted *all* our wrongs, regardless of the cause or motivations" (my emphasis, McHugh 1). McHugh essentially uses the occasion of the Valor 24 medal ceremony to pardon the military of *all* past or present wrongdoings when it comes to discrimination or injustice; a broad claim that makes it difficult not to regard this instance of military recognition as an empty symbolic act.

McHugh's direct reference to contemporary military recruitment in his Valor 24 speech reveals the politics tied to any mention of race and the military in light of today's circumstances of decreased voluntary enlistment: "As we continue to ask America's sons and daughters to join and to fight together, as one, to struggle for a better and more secure future, we should... never, never separat[e] those who serve by any means -- not by skin color, not by race, not by belief" (1). The reality of the military today, however, directly contradicts McHugh's statement. Formal military recruitment strategies in recent years are directly focused on targeting the specific, "separate" group of Latinas/os within the larger U.S. population. Villa and colleagues, whose study I discussed in detail in the Introduction, document countless cases of military recruitment initiatives directly targeting Latina/o youth. The researchers note that, in spite of the Latina/o population's current overrepresentation in the Armed Forces, "the DOD [Department of Defense] has made recruitment of Latinos into the military one of its national priorities... reports issued by the DOD October 2002 and September 2003 discuss the importance of utilizing events that recognize Hispanic Heritage Month to recruit Latinos/Hispanics into the military" (Villa et al. 124). The strategic utilization of such cultural events to fulfill

recruitment quotas is just one of the many unfortunate consequences of the U.S.'s attempts to maintain and strengthen its hegemonic imperialist presence worldwide. Moreover, if the DOD is utilizing events related to Hispanic Heritage Month opportunistically, that begs the question as to whether military honors like those awarded to the Valor 24 may also be used strategically as a means to other ends.

Villa and colleagues' study notes, moreover, that the audiences for the events targeted by DOD recruiters included Latina/o youth as young as middle school age (12-5), indicating the military's long-term recruitment tactics that present the Armed Forces as a viable alternative to college for Latinas/os beginning from a very young age. A 2001 article in *The Army Times* newspaper further illustrates the overzealous attitude of military recruiters when targeting Latina/o youth. The article quotes Army Brigadier General Bernardo C. Negrete's remark: "we've made significant improvement by going after Hispanics in a manner we've never done before," referring to high quotas assigned to recruiters in order to meet Hispanic recruitment goals (Kagan 1). Clearly, while military officials may claim not to separate soldiers by race, skin color, or belief during their active-duty service, the tactics employed to get them *into* the military in the first place appear not to be subject to the same policy.

The issue of non-citizen participation in the U.S. military also raises questions regarding the groups that the DOD is actively recruiting and targeting for combat duty. Often called "green card soldiers," these non-citizen or non-resident individuals who enlist in the military in hopes of obtaining citizenship more easily are entitled to expedited naturalization proceedings as part of the U.S. government's "War On Terror," per a July 2002 Executive Order to that effect signed by President George W. Bush

(USCIS 4-5). While normal naturalization applications often take years for approval, the expedited naturalization process through the USCIS is purported to take only about 6 months (Gooder 1). However, many family members of non-citizen soldiers killed in action before their naturalization process was complete report it taking much longer, citing misleading DOD recruitment materials designed at enticing these individuals to join first and learn the restrictions associated with expedited naturalization second (Alvord 1).

The story of Francisco Martínez Flores is one example of the “false advertisement,” so to speak, being carried out by the DOD. A Mexican native, Martínez Flores applied for citizenship at the same time as his mother and sister, but for some reason his application got delayed, and he was not yet naturalized when he was killed in combat in Iraq. His sister, Nayeli Martínez, remarked: “If my brother hadn't gone over there, he would have been a citizen by now... Ours got processed faster than his. He had taken his citizenship test, and the only thing left was to take the oath in a formal ceremony. Before he could do that, he shipped out” (cited in Alvord 1). Instead of pursuing the opportunities afforded him by citizenship, Nayeli’s brother’s life was cut short, with no visible benefits gained from his sacrifice.

Although the process for posthumous citizenship for non-citizen soldiers is in place, the processing of the paperwork generally takes too long to allow the deceased soldiers to be buried as U.S. citizens. Moreover, despite the existence of this option, no financial benefits are available for surviving relatives (Alvord 1), a harsh reality that often leaves the family members of non-citizen personnel in a worse position than before their enlistment. The formal DOD publicity materials and rhetoric surrounding the

expedited naturalization option belies this tragic reality, however. In a July 2006 statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Emilio T. González, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director at the time, remarked: “It is quickly understood that those immigrants who volunteer to serve in our armed forces are more easily integrated into our Nation, foster a greater attachment to our national and political institutions, and are transformed into committed and loyal Americans who voluntarily accept the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship” (USCIS 4). González’s statement perpetuates the unifying discourse surrounding the notion of American “homeland” and the “war on terror” that identifies Latinas/os as “friendly” minorities. Essentially, this discourse contributes to the perception that military service equips loyal non-citizens with the quintessentially American values that every good U.S. citizen must possess, while simultaneously overlooking their cultural, linguistic, ethnic/racial, or religious background.

In the same hearing, González reported that between September 11, 2001 and July 2006, the USCIS naturalized over 26,000 military service members who were formerly non-citizen soldiers (USCIS 6). There are tens of thousands more non-citizen soldiers actively participating in the military who have yet to become naturalized (Kagan 1).²⁹⁰ The DOD also reported that non-citizen service members made up about 2 percent of the military’s active-duty personnel in 2003, with one-third of those soldiers coming from Mexico or other Latin American countries (Alvord 1).²⁹¹ The significant number of non-

²⁹⁰ As of 2003, the DOD reported 35,000 non-citizen active Armed Forces members, with 15,000 eligible for expedited naturalization.

²⁹¹ That percentage has since decreased to approximately 1.4 percent of the enlisted armed force as of June 2010 (CNA 39). The large presence of ethnic minority and Latina/o non-citizens has continued, however,

citizen soldiers deployed as part of the “War On Terror” who do not claim English as their first language points to potential communication issues among units and during operations (Gooder 1), as well as the possibility of low aptitude (AFQT) scores among these service members, which would automatically designate these individuals for high combat assignments (Booth and Gimbel 1139). These factors recall very similar circumstances surrounding the performance of the 65th Infantry in the latter half of the Korean War – factors that the DOD later blamed for the tragedy at Kelly Hill where over 300 Puerto Rican infantry members were severely injured or killed in a single operation (Villahermosa 231). These continuities between past and present minority military participation, combined with the rapid growth in non-citizen military enlistment since 2001, point to potentially alarming consequences if trends continue in this direction.

Expanding the Archive

The dark reality painted through the different textual sources I have gathered as part of this epilogue once again points to the critical nature of the project of archival investigation and recovery that I have initiated as part of this dissertation. Much remains to be done. While some of the texts I analyze in the previous chapters have received more attention and recognition than others, taken together, the story that they tell reveals the need for a broader study of these subjects that will bring more visibility to the issue of minority military participation in the U.S. Armed Forces and will continue to place these invaluable forms of cultural production into dialogue with each other. Only by considering these texts in conversation will the larger patterns emerge, patterns that are

with 56 percent of enlisted non-citizens being non-white in 2010, compared to 20.7 percent non-white citizen service members the same year.

significant and concerning enough that they deserve to be brought to the attention not only of the academy, but also of the wider public. The broader implications of the perpetuated effects of structural racism that persist today within the military institution and the overarching socioeconomic structure of American society demonstrate the need, more than ever, for a more accessible and transparent archive than the restricted scholarly archive many of us in the academy limit our work to today. While the new era of Open Access publication and professional social networks, as well as digital archival projects and online collections, are a step in the right direction, there remains an air of exclusivity even within these more readily accessible digital spheres.

Although my dissertation does not purport to offer a straightforward or simple solution to the issues – raised in the previous chapters – of accessibility, legitimation, exclusion, and valorization surrounding the scholarly archive as it exists in its current form, it does call for further interrogation of and reflection on these exclusionary practices. I hope, however, that the extensive research and compilation of diverse texts and forms of cultural production, as well as the primary source archival work I have done as part of this project, gestures to the type of physical and virtual information gathering and synthesis that is required for the successful construction of a broader, more accessible and less exclusive archive on minority military mobilization in the U.S.

Conclusion

Borrowing again from the words of Amy Kaplan, this dissertation has been in part an attempt to determine: “How [we can] draw on our knowledge of the past to bring a sense of contingency to this idea of empire, to show that imperialism is an interconnected network of power relations... riddled with instability, tension, and disorder” (7). While

the circumstances and public image of American imperialism may have changed – now publicly encompassing and recognizing its diverse “multicultural” military personnel (note the strong minority presence in contemporary U.S. military television ads) – the underlying factors that perpetuate structural racism persist. A new generation of literary and cultural production is emerging out of this post-9/11 context that must be incorporated into the larger conversation on the experience of minority groups in the U.S. military, to which this dissertation lends its voice. This new production must be explored in order to grasp the implications of contemporary discourses of homeland, empire, the “war on terror,” race, nationalism, and citizenship, among other equally broad and inherently contradictory concepts that are employed in literary and cultural studies today.

Ultimately, the analysis I have presented in the previous chapters reveals that the perspective of each of these texts varies depending on what is at stake for the community in question. I have gestured to three salient threads among the texts discussed in this dissertation, while avoiding a neat categorization of this diverse and complex production into mutually exclusive groups. These threads include texts that participate in an openly anti-imperialist project, which best encompass the work of José Luis González, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and José Montoya; texts that display discontent with larger structural issues within U.S. society and grapple with the complexities of modern, “multicultural” America, within which the production of Gloria Velásquez and Rolando Hinojosa falls most closely; and texts that reinforce U.S. nationalist projects by foregrounding their community’s contribution to the American nation, which are best exemplified in the writing of Patricia Santana and Stella Pope Duarte.

In my discussion of Chicana/o cultural production, I have demonstrated that the majority of Chicana/o texts – including those that depict both the Korean and Vietnam War eras – do not participate in, nor do they purport to participate in, an anti-imperialist project. José Montoya's work is the most openly, and dare I say radically, anti-imperialist in nature, positioning his Chicana/o subject *outside of* the folds of the U.S. nation and oftentimes *in direct opposition of* the American imperialist project. The other Chicana/o text that gestures most heavily towards an anti-imperialist project is that put forward by Rolando Hinojosa, suggested through the intertextuality of the four texts in the KCDT series that are set in or recall moments of the Korean War. Yet, even Hinojosa does not formulate a clear political project in his text, but rather portrays the complexity of intercultural and interracial relations in mid-twentieth century America, and depicts how different members of the Chicana/o community grapple with this complexity. Rafa and his family and friends do not actively participate in a radical political movement, but rather seek to make their individual interventions against injustice from within the established structure of the U.S. nation-state.

Gloria Velásquez's novella is similarly individualist and personal in nature. While her other work (her poetry and protest songs in particular) may gesture to a more collective anti-war movement or positionality, the issues grappled with in *Toy Soldiers and Dolls* play out in a very private, fiercely emotional and personal manner that does not allow room for considering broader connections or parallels outside of the immediate reality of the narrative's protagonist. What Velásquez, as well as Duarte and Santana, all speak to is the fragmenting effect that the Vietnam War era had on the traditional Chicana/o family unit. The crisis in Chicano patriarchy and masculinity generated by the

trauma, pain, grief, and loss of war, and the fierce internal tensions between pro-military and anti-war Chicanas/os during the period, somehow precipitated a burgeoning Chicana identity that was perceived independently from the traditionally domineering Chicano presence in their lives. It seems that, for these authors, this shift in gender relations was perhaps the most transformative and political change of the time, rather than the emergence of any critical stance on U.S. empire or sense of recognition or empathy with the oppressed people of Vietnam.

The stakes and interventions of the Puerto Rican texts discussed in this dissertation, most notably the work of González and Díaz Valcárcel, differ in many ways from the Chicana/o production that I discuss here. This difference primarily stems from the unique historical, political, and cultural circumstances from which the Puerto Rican authors were writing during that era. Their physical positioning as writers from *outside* the U.S. mainland and as Puerto Rican residents excluded from full-fledged U.S. citizenship informed these authors' openly critical representation of U.S. military mobilization of Puerto Rican youths who had no claim to or investment in an imperialist project that closely mirrored the military intervention that their own island had experienced only fifty years earlier. Moreover, González and Díaz Valcárcel were writing during an earlier period than any of the Chicana/o authors analyzed here, given that even Hinojosa did not begin writing KCDT until well into the 1960s. The participation of these Puerto Rican authors in the Generation of 1950 on the island demonstrates their concerns over growing industrialization and urbanization and the myriad – and oftentimes negative – effects of these forces, viewing many of them as a direct result of U.S. political and economic influences. As such, González and Díaz Valcárcel interrogate the phenomenon

of Puerto Rican military participation during the mid-twentieth century as one of these complex and problematic effects. These concerns were strongly tied to the specific era and context within which they were written.

Since the era of the Generation of 1950, Puerto Rican literary and cultural production on and off the island has evolved in significant ways, becoming more diverse in the subjects and themes it addresses and the ways in which these authors and artists position themselves and their texts. While some literature has been written by Puerto Ricans on the Vietnam War, as discussed in Chapter Four, much of it emerged out of the Puerto Rican diaspora, including the poetry of Nuyorican acclaimed poet and playwright Pedro Pietri. At least some of the Puerto Rican diasporic cultural production evidenced preoccupations with issues of national belonging and recognition that closely aligned with the interests of Chicana/o authors at the time.

Indeed, the majority of these Chicana/o texts addressing the Vietnam War era seem to participate in and at times reinforce U.S. nationalist projects that, like the Valor 24 Medal of Honor awards, foreground the Chicana/o community's contribution to the American nation. This type of literary and cultural production functions – for at least some of these authors – to insert the Chicana/o community's story into the dominant master narratives within which U.S. history textbooks and mainstream historiography is rooted. Recent production emerging out of the Puerto Rican diaspora – notably, the 2007 play *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue* by Puerto Rican-American playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes²⁹² – demonstrates similar preoccupations with American identity and national

²⁹² Quiara Alegría Hudes, a renowned playwright of Puerto Rican and Jewish descent, focuses on the impact of twentieth century Puerto Rican military participation on one family in the Puerto Rican diaspora in this brief play. Taking its structure from the musical genre of the fugue, the play is at once formally

belonging for those Puerto Rican islanders who continue to fall under the category of “limited citizens,” as I discussed at length in earlier chapters. With the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican communities’ deep history rooted in and intertwined with U.S. nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century reality, some of these authors seem to suggest, what is at stake here is claiming and seeking recognition for their community’s commitment to and sacrifice for the nation, particularly the dedication of their loved ones as part of the U.S. military.

Yet, no matter the specific positionality or project of a given author or text discussed in this dissertation, the contradictions, inconsistencies, injustices, and discrimination experienced by the minority ethnic soldiers depicted in this cultural and literary production persist today. These contradictions are what led each author and artist to trouble over and grapple with histories and wars that will never truly be finished – hellish experiences that can never be contained by finite linear narratives that attempt to smooth over the ripped and battered lives of those they destroyed along the way.

The many histories and texts not discussed in these pages remain scattered and, in many cases, undiscovered. As such, this is a project that will never truly be finished. Its beginnings are laid out in the pages of this dissertation, but I plan to carry on with this process of gathering and synthesizing the vast wealth of texts that exist on the subject of

complex and poignant in its reflection on the toll that the experience of war has on a minority ethnic soldier and his family. The text’s protagonist is Elliot, a Puerto Rican man from Philadelphia who has just returned, wounded, from one tour of duty in Iraq and is considering reenlisting for a second tour. Through Elliot’s interactions with family members, we learn that his grandfather served in the 65th Infantry in the Korean War, his father served in the Vietnam War, and his mother served in the Army Nurse Corps, also in Vietnam. The text reflects in part on the universal nature of war, while also alluding to the divergences in the historical circumstances surrounding each war in which a member of Elliot’s family participated. A short but nuanced text, it is rich with social and political commentary and numerous themes that share parallels with some of the texts discussed in this dissertation.

U.S. minority military participation.²⁹³ Part of this continued work entails pushing the limits of the scholarly archive to make it more accessible and open to a broader audience, so that the stories of the Latina/o men and women collected here will have a greater impact within American consciousness.

²⁹³ In addition to continuing my discussion of Latina/o cultural representation of military participation in the post-9/11 era, I am also interested in considering texts on women's experiences in the military (as another type of minority) – particularly in light of the alarmingly frequent instances of female military members being raped by male counterparts or superiors – and the experiences of modern-day conscientious objectors in the military. Specific texts I plan to incorporate into future analyses include Hudes' *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*; the poetry and plays of Pedro Pietri; the work of Aidan Delgado related to Abu Ghraib *The Sutras of Abu Ghraib: Notes from a Conscientious Objector in Iraq* (2007); the collection of texts and essays *Stop the Next War Now: Effective Responses to Violence and Terrorism* (2005) edited by Medea Benjamin and Jodie Evans; as well as the following films: the documentary *The Short Life of José Antonio Gutierrez* (2006) directed by Heidi Specogna; the feature film *G.I. Jesus* (2006) directed by Carl Colpaert; and the Mexican film *Saving Private Pérez* (2011) directed by Beto Gomez. Another cultural text of interest is Gregory Nava's 2002-2004 PBS television series "American Family," which explores many contemporary issues, including the Iraq War and the Latino reality in post-9/11 America. There are likely other relevant texts available on these subjects, but further investigation is needed to find them.

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