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“Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o
Latine Communities”

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of

Philosophy

in

Literature

with Specialization in

Critical Gender Studies

by

Marisol Cuong

Committee in charge:

Professor Gloria Chacón, Committee Chair

Professor John Blanco

Professor Yen Lê Espiritu

Professor Roy Perez

Professor Rosaura Sánchez

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University of California San Diego
2024

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Vita

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Abstract of the Dissertation

“Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o
Latine Communities”

by

Marisol Cuong

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature
with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Gloria Chacón, Committee Chair

This dissertation anchors an interdisciplinary approach to magnify relationalities through narratives in urban communities from 1960 to 2022. I draw on Chicana/o and Latine ¹cultural productions to underscore a fragmented reality that centers community *critical witnessing* as a contestation to systemic violence targeted at and disproportionately impacting communities of color. “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o

¹ The term Chicano is known to mean Mexican American or that of Mexican descent in other words “self-assigned and politically charged identities in use since the 1960s” (Sanchez, Pita 95). The term Latino is known to come into frequent use since the 20th century. By adding Latina and Latinx my intent is to be as inclusive as possible to all the identities that are to be considered when referring to all (Afro Latino as well) Latin American descendants that are now living within the United States. Latine refers to the most recent modification to the Latina/o communities with the aim of gender inclusivity.

Latine Communities,” proves that contrary to being bystanders to the systemic deaths that surround the Chicana/o Latine communities, Chicana/o Latine’s *critical witnessing* actively negates the normalization of violence. I rely on the different narrative aesthetics (e.g. novel, episodes, art, memoir) to showcase the act of bearing witness as a refusal to hide away from systemic violence and instead confront it at its core. In what follows, I illustrate marginalized communities’ interconnected and relational experiences, to examine their common threads of militarization, displacement, and sexualization while showcasing resilience in narratives. Chapter one, “Settler Colonialism the Militarization and the Militarized” examines Alfredo Véa Jr.’s novel *Gods Go Begging* (1999), which addresses settler colonialism through the militarization of Chicanos during the VietNam War (1954-1975). Through the *critical witnessing* of a Chicano soldier, this chapter draws attention to the 80,000 Mexican Americans being drafted and placed on the frontlines, returning to face more discrimination, displacement, and death. Chapter two, “Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency,” juxtaposes an episode of a TV series *Chicago PD* “Promise” and a mural “Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural [Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural]” as exemplary narratives that engage in critical witnessing of Latinas’ deaths. I problematize common narrations that link the Latina body as a marker for exploitation and overt sexualization. Read as cultural productions, these texts make it evident that violence against women relies on the interrelated processes of racialization, exploitation, sexualization, and militarization. In chapter three, “(Memoir)alizing” I take the memoir *The Undocumented Americans* (2020) by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio and popular media such as, “The Power of the Vote,” an episode from the Netflix series *Immigration Nation*, to examine the contradictory value placed on undocumented Chicana/o Latine bodies within the United States. One of my contributions is to highlight undocumented people’s

narratives in life and posthumously after having served as first responders in times of crisis following the events of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan. This chapter's *critically witnessing* reveals the flaws in granting citizenship and, through memoir, highlights the deaths and bodies of undocumented displaced communities as beyond "living death" and or "social death." Instead, it seeks to honor the Chicana/o Latine undocumented community as creators of resilient epistemologies that fail to normalize violence.

Introduction

On February 25, 2024, the United States witnessed the self-immolation of Air Force member Aaron Bushnell. Bushnell's final words denounced his participation in the genocide carried out by Israel and backed by the United States against Palestine. The martyrdom of Bushnell, tragic in nature, exposes the scope of imperialism by the U.S. military, and its willingness to endorse the murder of the Palestinian people. While Aaron Bushnell's self-immolation represents a selfless act of protest, it is not an isolated incident. On June 11, 1963, Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese monk, carried out self-immolation in protest of President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. His action aimed to stop the violence against innocent civilians and to demand an end to religious persecution. The self-immolations by these two martyrs in different historical contexts, sixty-one years apart, demonstrate an ongoing refusal to stand with violence. Through these two self-immolations as acts of protest, I draw on the importance of *critically witnessing* death. This does not mean that death, murder, and killings should be normalized or necessary; however, marginalized groups are often victims of violence that results in community death. This is especially true about the mass death of the Palestinian and Vietnamese communities, which Bushnell, Duc, and many others protested through their acts of sacrifice.

When these violent acts occur, it is crucial for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to *critically witness* these imposed deaths and call attention to injustice. Both acts of self-immolation by Duc and Bushnell took place in a public space² with the intent to be witnessed. Aaron Bushnell's act took place in front of the Israel embassy in Washington D.C. and Duc's was on a busy Saigon intersection in VietNam. Public protests like these provoke

² When referring to public space I draw on David Harvey's concept of "urban commons" as inclusive spaces where communities of all backgrounds can interact with the space and each other. Public in all senses means accessible.

strong emotional reactions, but for marginalized communities of color, witnessing these actions enacts a deeper sense of recognition and reflection. This response, in turn, manifests into the “communal kinships” discussed later.

Such acts of courage can be misrepresented in media and other discourses that intentionally aim to tarnish the credibility of the act of self-immolation. For example, social media outlets are debating whether Aaron Bushnell's choice to self-immolation was a heroic act or simply a result of mental illness. The debate remains despite Bushnell's meticulous positioning of his live stream in front of the Israel Embassy in Washington D.C., his public letter explaining the purpose of his act, and his final words expressing solidarity with Palestine. One example of this public debate is YouTube entrepreneur Bedros Keulian, who refers to Aaron Bushnell's act as an “easy way out,” labeling it as “chicken shit,” and disregards the immense pain, sacrifice, and difficulty involved in taking one's own life in such a selfless manner. Keulian's argument disregards Bushnell's political reasoning, blaming Bushnell for being an unstable coward. As if self-immolation is an easy way to take one's life while being live-streamed.

Additionally news reports by the Los Angeles Times, MSNBC, and the Huffington Post leaned more toward understanding this self-immolation through the perspective of suicide; however, Maha Hilal's article “War on Gaza: Why Aaron Bushnell's death was a call to action,” states, “the inclusion of this information (suicide prevention resources) without the appropriate context represents nothing less than a deliberate attempt to pathologize Bushnell while also expressly ignoring how suicide by self-immolation is a distinct and intentional political act rooted in challenging collective injustice, particularly in case of asymmetrical warfare” (Hilal, 2024). Moreover, in VietNam in 1963, shortly after Duc's protest the Diem regime responded by

arresting the Buddhist monks for praying and for standing in between Duc and a firetruck, honoring his will. In addition to the arrest, family members of President Ngo Dinh Diem spoke negatively about the self-immolation, even inciting more self-immolations and deaths to Buddhist monks.

In both cases, the men died in public, recited their political message, and executed their demonstration in a heavily populated area where their self-immolation would be witnessed and greatly felt—through photography and the civilians in the Saigon intersection in 1963 VietNam, and Bushnell’s live stream in 2024 U.S. Despite efforts to downplay their significance, the nationally witnessed death of Bushnell and Duc have sparked widespread movements that challenge power structures and resist silencing, as Dr. Maha Hilal states in her article “Bushnell’s call could not be clearer or more urgent.” In addition to news articles, Aaron Bushnell’s self-immolation of was commemorated in Yemen with a billboard reading, “Martyr for Refusing the American Genocide.” The billboard depicts Bushnell in his army attire as his body is engulfed in flames. Similarly, Michael Brown captured Duc’s self-immolation in 1963, widely circulating the image throughout the United States. The reproduction of these images commemorated the valiant sacrifice, while highlighting the shocking measures both Bushnell and Duc were willing to exert calling for peace. In both cases, efforts to silence, diminish, and erase their political message came from those who perpetuate the violence projected upon the Vietnamese and Palestinians communities, whom they selflessly gave their lives to protect.

Critical Witnessing

“Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities” takes *critical witnessing* as a methodological approach, magnifying the intertwined relationalities among disparate individuals brought into proximity due to

militarization and immigration, resulting in displacement. Like the genre of “testimonios,” *critical witnessing* addresses issues that require urgency and attention like that of femicide and deportation as conveyed in chapters two and three. The *testimonio* in its finality, as a literary work and the materialized oral retelling does serve as a *critical witnessing* as it aims to center marginalized communities and actively engages, and values memories and narratives shared. In contrast to the “testimonio,” *critical witnessing* does not necessarily happen in a first-person account, nor does it solely carry out the story of one singular person’s life and or trajectory, and lastly it does not require “tape-recording and then transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist” (Beverley, 525).

Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism Occupied (2023), Jennifer Lyn Kelly argues that witnessing can be understood as providing an alibi. An alibi in the legal sense offers evidence by presenting facts. Understanding the limitations of defining witnessing as equating to alibi places value on the witnessing. In other words, creating a dynamic where the community being witnessed or the witnesses themselves need validation. Often, validation stems from privileged witnessing sanctioned by the state. Lyn Kelly draws on how Palestinians sought an end to injustices and often had to “invite tourists to witness” firsthand maltreatment of Palestinians by Israel’s occupation. Lyn Kelly “argues that solidarity tourism is a fraught anticolonial strategy in Palestine that follows a series of conventions” inviting tourists to witness draws attention to the violence Palestinians are confronting in a non-violent matter (2). Palestinians created a system where tourists are welcomed and then held accountable for relaying the message of injustice to the Palestinian community transnationally. In the context of Palestine, this “anticolonial strategy” might be effective; however, I would argue that this witnessing is predicated on a savior complex, attributing power to outsiders who perceive themselves as saviors. As the status

of tourist is one of privilege as tourism is enjoyed by those who can afford leisure and engage in charitable activities. A tourist can always go back to their home country, even when the country they are returning to is one that is complicit to Israel's genocide. Despite the task of conveying what they witnessed in Palestine, there remains a detachment from violence inflicted upon the Palestinian people. The distance allows tourists to perceive the situation as merely 'sad to see'. However, witnessing in this manner falls short, as it upholds power dynamics and values. Inviting others to witness and relying on their accounts, as described by Lyn Kelly, serves as an alibi, presenting facts and evidence in another country, thereby maintaining a value system antithetical to *critical witnessing*. Hence my use of 'privilege witnessing', embodying a perspective rooted in colonization, whiteness, cis-heteronormativity, patriarchal, wealthy perspective.

Critical witnessing in this dissertation does not seek validation for others to speak on behalf of the Chicana/o Latine community but rather showcases power in counter discursive acts found in Chicana/o Latine narratives. *Critical witnessing* diverges from the tendency toward fetishization, pornotroping³, trauma porn, and observations that heightens harm against these communities (Spiller, Chadha, Sontag). Instead, *critical witnessing* differs from just bearing witness or a "privileged witness," which more than often is adopted by both ordinary bystanders and colonizers as seen through the groups of people entertaining the discourse of mental health surrounding Bushnell, and the dehumanization of Buddhist monks like the Diem Regime. *Critical witnessing* refers to communities that understand they live in unjust conditions and are prompted to create communal kinship to protest death and destruction by violent institutions.

³ Pornotroping "as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning" (Spiller, 67).

The act of witnessing can be traced down to whose perception is more valuable/respected than others. In Suzanne de Diétrich's article, "You are my Witnesses: A study of the Church's Witness," she states:

The original meaning is that of a witness in a law court; namely, someone who has direct and personal experience of events in which he took part, or of persons he met, and who certifies in court as to what he has seen or heard. But in ancient Greek usage and already in the time of Plato the words *martus*, *marturein*, and *marturia* were also used in a wider sense, as an expression of personal conviction without these convictions being necessarily based on factual evidence. The witness testifies to a truth in which he believes (1)

De Diétrich's definitions showcasing the etymology of the act of witnessing highlight two major aspects: 1) witnessing occurs in relation to an institution—in her article, the judicial and religious—and 2) witnessing is gendered masculine. For example, the Monarchy once upon a time led many to believe that only royalty (the king) could witness God, therefore granting the king universal control over subjects. Thomas Hobbes conceptualized sovereignty as being vested in the monarchy, in other words, the monarchy was the only one that could institute the laws by which subjects are meant to be governed. A clear example of how the church and the state intertwine in dominating discourse surrounding the value placed on narratives is evident in the sovereign's role. The monarch dictates what is to be considered true or false, and good or evil, with any opinion contrary to his imposed rules potentially leading to punishment. This positionality highlights the overlap between church and state, particularly concerning the value placed on bearing witness— or more precisely, who has the privilege to bear witness. De Diétrich understands that while witnessing technically means "someone who has direct and personal experience of events" the value of such witnessing is always tied to a validation process. Those who have the privilege to witness are considered the bearers of truth, in contrast to those who do

not. Here it is also important to address the following cultural productions based on real-life events, such as cases of feminicide, where numerous systems have failed the victims. However, viewing it this way reinforces a validation system that aligns truth with power structures, rather than acknowledging that communities can and do engage in critical witnessing.

A “privileged witnessing” can also manage to exist within people of color due to processes of assimilation, and or internalized racism, class, and sexism. At the same time someone with a “privileged witness” can also critically witness all communities if they intend to move away from reproducing power dynamics. For instance, Bushnell, a white male soldier, a “privileged witness” to the Palestinian genocide due to his position in the US military. Aware of this privilege, he contests the power dynamics by taking his own life. As an enlisted soldier, Bushnell is a militarized subject who must follow orders, even those leading to death and killing. Deployed to Israel, he knew he would be asked to kill. Although aware of this possibility, he refused deployment to Palestine because he saw it as genocide, not war. In other words, Bushnell’s fear of being complicit to genocide, more than fear of death, demonstrates how someone in a “privileged” position can recognize injustice and engage in *critical witnessing*.

The Force of Witness: Contra Feminicide (2023), Rosa-Linda Fregoso contextualizes the importance of bearing witness to combat feminicide within the context of Mexico. Fregoso writes, “[a]s a countervailing force to the destruction of life, to witness involves an embodied form of resistance and refusal to the disciplining, symbolic, and material annihilation, and objectifying logic of the feminicide machine,” in this dissertation militarized and displaced Latines (4). Like Fregoso, this dissertation intends to understand witnessing simply as an individualistic act and focus on collectivity, understanding that embodiments of *critical*

witnessing affect different levels of one person's life. That is to say that through one *critical witness* (one fragment) can lead to the conceptualization of a larger (collective) witnessing.

Critical witnessing involves recognizing and valuing someone's death, leading the witness to recognize the deceased as both physically and socially dead. This recognition causes emotions that can come across as sadness, discomfort, passion, and rage which can lead the person witnessing to a critical approach. A critical perspective is not about feeling sorry for a person, but rather draws attention to power dynamics. For instance, reading empathy as a gendered action, normalizes violence for those who tend to be distant (very much a privileged witness) from the violence. Leading to understanding *critical witnessing* through the etymology of critical meaning vital and analytical toward how Chicana/o Latine individuals' asymmetrical relationships to work in the United States involvement in foreign wars and urban cities' war on poverty⁴. The active stance that results from *critical witnessing* is phase 3. "Communal kinships" where the individual, Chicana/o Latine subject has *critically witnessed* and actively refuses a privileged witness approach and instead participates in the creation of spaces both physical and intangible that contest the death critically witnessed through collective life practices. In chapter one is through the legal counsel of a Chicano veteran lawyer who is defending a black adolescent who is wrongfully being accused of a double homicide; chapter two is through a political movement, mural, and a college essay expressing the power in Chicana Latine women; and lastly in chapter three it is through the first-person accounts of undocumented subjects who continue to memorialize and fight for undocumented communities who have selflessly placed their bodies on the frontlines of danger for democracy in the United States. State sanctioned violence is therefore

⁴ 1964 President B. Johnson implemented federally funded programs to address national poverty within BIPOC communities; however, it did not necessarily target structural issues for example those proposed by the civil rights movements

always witnessed. *Critical witness* disallows the normalization of these conditions (militarized, displaced, criminalized, racialized, feminicide) as both the deceased as well as the witness are in proximity to each other. *Critical witness* accounts for the condition being witness to each other's conditions akin histories because they share the same conditions of displacement and violence.

Defining Violence

In *State-Sanctioned Violence: Advancing a Social Work Social Justice Agenda*, Melvin Delgado states, “State violence is predicated on the use of power to shape desired behaviors and outcomes” (17). For Delgado these desires and outcomes correlate to a white heteropatriarchal society such as the United States. Agreeing with Delgado I also think it is extremely important to acknowledge both fast violence, slow violence and violence as beyond physically “bodily wounds or fatalities” (17). To further understand violence within the context of this dissertation I also draw from Belinda Rincon’s definition of war, as she states, “war does not precede patriarchy; rather, it is ‘an eruption’ of systems already at work in patriarchal structures. War perpetuates male dominance over women and the feminine, which can and often does include the feminization of other men” (11). It is through this understanding of power and dominance imposed by violence a means to control “desires behaviors and outcomes” that the deaths analyzed within this dissertation address the conditions of displacement, militarization, and immigration as state sanctioned violence. Delgado also argues that “[w]hen labels criminalize it makes it easier for the state to punish. Labeling those who are authorized as illegals, for example, speaks to this process, facilitating the state perpetrating violence and violating rights, even when they are citizens' ” (15). Delgado’s *State-Sanctioned Violence* and Rincon’s definition of war both examine how the United States projects violence onto Black, Indigenous, and communities of color, as well as gender-based violence. This violence is used to enforce “desired behaviors and

outcomes” that serve the interest of the military and neoliberalism (and their intrinsic connection). Additionally, *critical witnessing* places value of narratives on BIPOC communities who historically have not had the right to witness even when and if they were constantly critically witnessing within smaller “communal kinships” to survive. An example is Black communities that have been enslaved and Indigenous communities that have been displaced because their bodies were simply considered “flesh” for labor or not human. It is because these negative assumptions rooted in power dynamics intended to justify oppression *critically witnessing* did indeed inform communal kinships such as the songs used to communicate directions to freedom and or organizing. The validation process when it comes to Black community witnessing still tends to be questioned as we will analyze further in chapter one with Calvin Thibault.

Critical witnessing, as a praxis of analysis, provides a vital means of scrutinizing and contesting the status quo. It involves individuals or groups (BIPOC) calling attention to injustices at the hands of normalized institutions such as the judiciary, military, and immigration, which are often institutions sustained through violence. The materials presented in these chapters showcase how *critical witnessing* unfolds within relationships, where the act of witnessing runs deeper than empathy with the deceased. Contrary to witnessing murder of BIPOC in a passive manner, *critical witnessing* creates a space of haunting and reckoning by refusing to turn away. *Critical witnessing*, rather than solely blaming individuals for their imminent death, serves to reinforce collective relationships by articulating institutional injustice that disproportionately harms BIPOC communities, often leading to their demise.

Chicana/o Latine Soldier

In defining the Chicana/o Latine Soldier, I turn to Simeon Man's definition of soldiers, "soldiers' refers to those individuals who participated in the conventional armed forces as well as a proliferating category of people whose labor and lives became entwined with the military" (10). From the VietNam War onwards, Chicana/o Latine individuals have been involved in conflicts in Central America, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, where the United States has relied on Chicana/o Latine labor in exchange for a chance at citizenship. In each of these readings the Chicana/o Latine Soldier carries a historical legacy of displacement transnationally as well as domestically. As they repeatedly must "prove" their allegiance to the United States despite being citizens. Their parents or they have been reallocated multiple times through borders, cities, and racialization processes resettling their positionality within the United States because of state sanctioned violence placing them in a militarized and labored geopolitical space. Displacement here is understood as transnational as well as internal. Patricia Tuit refers to an internally displaced migrant who even as a "citizen" remains "outside of belonging". Therefore, someone can be removed from their home by violent acts forcing relocations domestically with US institutional power structures limiting access to certain rights, spaces, and resources. Displacement within this dissertation "operates through intersectional nodes of power" understanding that militarization in foreign countries and within the United States has forced Chicana/o Latine people to exist within inner cities in the United States (Espiritu and Duong 590). All Chicana/o Latine Soldiers within these chapters illustrate a form of displacement that magnifies how each narrative has arrived at each space at a particular time. It is also important to redirect the notions of displacement to the person being forced to move from certain conditions

only to understand that undocumented people for instance also are bound to be displaced on multiple occasions as their legal status places them to confront numerous obstacles.

Starting with VietNam of the late 60s to the war of racialized bodies in the United States, in 2022 this dissertation tackles the notion of “surplus human labor,” which makes visible the entangled relationship between border policing, militarism, and imperialism. Belinda Rincon states, “From a neo liberalist perspective, one of the state’s primary purposes is to establish and maintain institutional structures that use military force, if necessary, to protect private property rights and unfettered markets” (15). It is this shift in historical, political, and economic context that enhances the disproportionate and normalized rate of death experienced among Chicana/o Latine communities historically and in the contemporary moment. Critical witnessing of state-sanctioned deaths concerning militarized/ controlled institutions that have displaced these individuals and or trained these individuals to further displace other communities in the case of chapter one.

“Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” focuses on the *critical witnessing* of Chicana/o Latine communities to public death⁵ as a lens to examine displacement via processes of racialization, militarization, and gendered violence in Chicana/o Latine narratives. It is common for the death of Chicana/o Latine to be framed as distant, for them to be depicted as “criminals,” or even fetishized (Chavez, Dávila). These portrayals function to discursively normalize their death. I highlight the resilience in relations before, during, and post-death by recognizing this collective resilience we can understand Chicana/o Latine communities beyond the notions of “living dead.” Achille Mbembe describes the ‘living dead’ as a status that is placed on populations subjected to violent life

⁵ Public death as seen by many, broadcasted, but also outside of the United States control to maintain “in house” so to speak.

conditions that ultimately predispose them to situations of death, such as murder. I go against the grain in conceptualizing these communities as beyond “social death” and or “living dead” to encompass autonomy in collective coping, memorializing, and continuous contestation (Mbembe, Patterson, Holland, Castronovo, Agamben, Cacho). The Chicana/o Latine cultural productions analyzed dismantle a set of normative U.S. colonial binaries: soldier/enemy, U.S./Third World, black/white, hetero/queer, Indigenous/civilized among others. This undoing happens when displaced communities' relationality is *critically witnessed* as collective efforts rather than normalized silos. In fact, when Chicana/o Latine critically engage with death, it fosters communal kinships.

Arriving at Communal kinship

Building on gender studies, critical refugee studies, Latina/o studies, migration and transmigration studies, and critical race theory, I weave distinct mediums novels, personal narratives, stories, visual representations, and theoretical frameworks, drawing inspiration from feminist scholars Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's “theory in the flesh,” I propose that “our bodies are the embodiment of lived experiences and knowledge.” My research demonstrates that ‘communal kinships’ found in Chicana/o Latine cultural productions are writing to dismantle entrenched narratives of xenophobia, criminalization, and exploitation. Making use of TJ Tallie’s theorization of queer theory where a “queer reading, then can offer an exploration of how lines of assumed order are skewed by ideas, actions, or formation” (7), and Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley’s Creole term “*mati*”⁶ (referring to the bond between two individuals undergoing

⁶ “I began to learn this black Atlantic when I was studying relationships between women in Suriname and delved into the etymology of the word *mati*. This is the word Creole women use for their female lovers: figuratively *mi mati* is “my girl,” but literally it means mate, as in shipmate — she who survived the Middle Passage with me. Sedimented layers of experience lodge in this small word” (Tinsley, 192).

trauma), I argue that a critical act of bearing witness⁷ to death in urban collectivities unearths deeper connections to historical and ingrained violence resulting in “communal kinships.” Throughout the chapter, “communal kinships” are defined as the production of a shared space—both physical and intangible—created out of necessity, encouraging collective organizing against the normalization of death. My project introduces the concept, defining “communal kinships” as spaces where individuals with a history of displacement and militarization come together through daily practices such as food, oral histories, and art to cope and further understand their asymmetrical connections to the United States, both abroad and within its cities. In essence, the deceased by state-sanctioned violence act as reminders, highlighting the ongoing influence of colonial power dynamics that are decoded through the act of *critical witness* by people of color. I argue that the Chicana/o Latine cultural productions provide moments of *communal kinship* through character and literary medium pairings which challenge heteropatriarchal societal norms by producing eroticism through love, companionship, and most importantly *critical witnessing*. These chapters focus on the narratives’ approximations of death to demonstrate that there is resilience in relations before, during, and post-death that, when accounted for, allow us to see these communities beyond living dead⁸. My research examines the intricate connections within Chicana/o Latine communities through *critical witnessing* to death, foregrounding epistemologies that uphold the power of collectivity.

⁷ Witness n. A person who sees something happen and can describe it to other people
Idiom - bear/give witness (to something) to provide evidence of the truth of something or to see something take place Oxford English Dictionary
"Bearing witness to oneself or to one's inner self is not a solo act but is constituted through interconnected and social relatedness. There is, first of all, a relationship between the witness -survivor of gender violence and her interlocutor-witness who may be a therapist, a rights advocate, an attorney, or an expert witness"(Fregoso,10).

⁸ Mbembe, Achille.

Hence, my project, “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” explores Chicana/o and Latina/o narratives of *critically witnessing* sanctioned death at the hands of the United States. Each chapter addresses aspects of militarism, immigration, and corporate influence, illustrating how these forces displace and marginalize Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. The reader will find that each chapter treats an aspect of communal kinship as both a condition and consequence of critical witnessing. These conditions and established “communal kinships” reveal historical relationalities, as seen in chapter one, “Settler Colonialism the Militarization and the Militarized.” This chapter examines how Chicanos drafted for the VietNam War (1954-1975) were placed in VietNam alongside other displaced subjects, such as the Indigenous Chám. Through the experiences of the main protagonist, Jesse Pasadobles, we witness his ontological transformation. Initially, Jesse is a U.S. soldier expected to further displace Vietnamese communities without questioning the injustice and violence. Later, as a veteran lawyer in the U.S. living with post-traumatic stress and alcoholism, Jesse is determined to prove the innocence of Calvin Thibault, a Black adolescent. Jesse having witnessed unjust death numerous times; he refuses to succumb to state-sanctioned violence once again.

In chapter two, “Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency,” in addition to the militarism sanctioning feminicide within a military base alongside a capitalistic corporation sanctioning the devaluing and exploitation of undocumented women. Rather than simply perceiving Chicana/o and Latine as “living dead” I rely on the praxis of *critical witnessing* to argue that even when death is a reality to these marginalized communities the relationships and spaces created reign stronger than the negative nuances of “living dead.” *Critical witnessing* necessitates an outlet for expression that is where communal kinship arises. ‘Communal kinship’

can be understood as a proactive creation stemming from relationalities' that are understood through *critical witnessing*.

I examine various narrative forms— from novels and episodic content to art and memoirs—to underscore how these are connected by *critical witnessing* to counter the unnatural death. This project starts with the militarization of more than 80,000 Mexican American soldiers in the 1960s during the VietNam War to present deaths and repatriation of both documented and undocumented military members (e.g., Vanessa Guillen and Deported Veterans Advocacy Project). Starting with Chicanos in the VietNam War, I aim to highlight what historian Simeon Man refers to “[a]s these emergent political struggles coalesced around the VietNam War, they revived memories of the multiple, convergent histories of colonialism in Asia and the Pacific not yet ended, the very conditions of possibility for the colonial present” (13-14). Additionally, Belinda Rincon’s *Bodies at War: Genealogies of Militarism in Chicana Literature and Culture* (2017) notes “From the end of the U.S. war in Viet Nam to the interminable war on terror, neoliberal militarism has relied on racialized and gendered bodies to function effectively and efficiently” (7). In sum, the VietNam war exposes a crucial political, social, and cultural shift to neoliberalism. Hence, in chapter one “*Gods Go Begging: Settler Colonialism, Militarization and the Militarized*,” I analyze Alfredo Vea Jr.’s novel *God Go Begging* (1999), illuminating displacement, settler colonialism, and militarization in both VietNam and the United States through an examination of character dynamics via *critical witnessing*. The characters portray how institutions such as the military and law enforcement embody and perpetuate violent narratives toward marginalized identities— a Chàm North Vietnamese Soldier in the Pacific and a Black adolescent in San Francisco California— all *witnessed* through the perspective of a marginalized Chicano soldier. In this literary analysis, the “convergent histories” as described by

Man establish a connection between Vietnamese military subjects during the VietNam War to Mexican American Chicano subjects in the novel's portrayal of the "colonial present" during the 1990s San Francisco. Chapter two: "Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency," discusses the operation of power and gender and juxtaposes a mural titled *Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural* [Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural] with an episode of Chicago PD's "Promise" a popular TV series to highlight feminicide⁹ backed by corporations and military institutions through transmedia narratives engaging in *critical witnessing* of Latinas' deaths, one highlighting that of Vanessa Guillen. The *critical witnessing* of her tragic death underscored the power and resilience of community witnessing. Vanessa Guillen's disappearance magnified on social platforms sparked a narrative driven by her family, the #IamVanessaGuillen movement, and the public murals dedicated to her honor. Furthermore, "Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency," also accounts for the fictional death of an undocumented Central American woman to critique the intrinsic ties within military (INS), police, and corporate institutions. These institutions are complicit in racializing and sexualizing Latinas, reflecting the patterns seen in real-life events. These community narratives move away from the discourse of disenfranchised communities as perpetual victims to underscore their livelihood through community coping. In both cases, it is *critical witnessing* that gives these women a sense of justice when the institutions claiming to protect them have failed. The juxtaposition of cultural productions in this chapter— a mural alongside tv series— magnifies the power of representation through visual activism, while also addressing the problematic reproduction of stereotypes for mainstream television audiences.

⁹ feminicidio- translated into feminicide instead of femicide to articulate a difference between a gender death and drawing attention to social, cultural, and political norms that lead to this death. This intentionally calls attention to why women and girls are targets for violence that more than often leads to their death. Marcela Lagarde 2006

Chapter three “(Memoir)alizing in *The Undocumented Americans* and ‘The Power of the Vote’,” similarly engages Karla Cornejo Villavicencio’s memoir *The Undocumented Americans* to account for undocumented day laborers and or first responders who organized rescue efforts during catastrophic events like Hurricane Katrina and 9/11. As a result, their lives were put at risk, and many died shortly after due to health conditions. Cornejo Villavicencio *critically witnesses* these deaths through community testimonies, which serve as counter-narratives opposing the rhetoric of white heteropatriarchal structures that seek to criminalize and devalue the undocumented day laborers in the U.S. Cornejo Villavicencio’s rendition of these recovered stories breathes life into the departed, while collecting memories from those close to the deceased enacts a process of closure and coping, forming an intangible “communal kinship”. Analyzing Cornejo Villavicencio’s memoir with Netflix docu-series *Immigration Nation*’s episode “The Power of the Vote,” I impose on yet another failure on behalf of the U.S. as numerous undocumented Veterans have been exploited and deported despite serving the United States colonial legacy. This concluding chapter aims to expose the paradox of granting citizenship posthumously to veterans. I argue that alongside the rhetoric of white-supremacy and erratic behavior, which is more detrimental to the United States than the so-called “issue” of immigration. The erratic behavior can be noted through white nationalist who prey on migrants crossing or white supremacist taking on the capital or white youth being the primary perpetrator when it comes to mass shootings. In addition to these important discussions regarding mix status communities’ relationship to the United States, chapter three intends to highlight how *critical witnessing* can result in a positive literary rendition of BIPOC communities. Hence the term, “(Memoir)alizing,” takes the memoir as a genre within BIPOC communities as a literal example of *critical witnessing* through both oral recollections and visual memory in the form of

docuseries. Both cultural productions provide visibility through *critical witnessing* of the death of undocumented first-responders and veterans. Cornejo Villavíencio states, “[w]hen you are an undocumented immigrant with undocumented family, writing about undocumented immigrants—and I can only speak for myself and my ghost— it feels unethical to put on the drag of a journalist” (xvi) she further continues in a later chapter “I was scared for all immigrants and felt guilty about myself as a so-called DREAMer. I was on DACA, and I was afraid there’d be a raid. I was afraid that in any situation where there were large groups of undocumented people congregating, there could be a raid” (8-9). Cornejo Villavíencio's memory in tune with the recognition with the community she was able to build relationships with allowed her to be able to communicate and create a memoir that reflected something she had never seen before. Similarly, César Lopez, a deported Marine Veteran also acknowledges the fears and risks of daily activities such as driving and being featured in this docuseries as part of his daily memory recalling his complex positionality within the United States. Both of these individuals, despite this fear, use their *critical witnessing* of those around them in addition to their positionalities, voices, and platforms to magnify how the United States government has failed the undocumented community, more specifically in their witnessed experience of first-responders and veterans who have provided labor to the United States selflessly. Showcasing this memoir alongside a docuseries the intent remains the same, to magnify the narratives of Chicana/o Latine to the point of memorializing those who have received death in the United States, yet whose death is not in vain. At its core, my work centers on *critical witnessing* death as a catalyst for community grief and organization to combat processes of racialization and criminalization that normalize death within Chicana/o Latine communities.

Overture

In retrospect “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities” is an embodiment of my own multifaceted identities as the materials selected acutely communicate a point in time in my personal and professional life. It is not until now that the ideas sit on paper that the realization becomes evident. For example, as a first generation Vietnamese Mexican American growing up in Los Angeles California, where I *critically witnessed* the displacement and death of my childhood friends due to the continuous failure of social institutions dehumanizing and further criminalizing brown youth. My interest in VietNam stems from the continuous questioning and curiosities of my Vietnamese heritage which constantly lingers as a shadow, but it shapes how and where I was born and the adversities I have encountered. Unfortunately, when writing about themes such as displacement and immigration you cannot dismiss militarization as it is the main reason for sanctioned violence, racism, sexism, and xenophobia to exist in the first place. My interest in militarization and immigration unconsciously draws from my parents meeting in the 1960s in Los Angeles from two completely different countries Mexico and VietNam. Yet consciously, it comes to fruition years later when unlocking a memory of me sitting at 1325 Front Street in the USCIS building for an immigration interview feeling depleted. Being told that the only way to mediate my mixed status household was for my unborn child to enlist in the United States Military. Although at the time the poor choice of words or the delivery on behalf of the immigration (INS) representative was a straight jab into the paradox of what the United States immigration system is, a systemic exchange that takes more than it can repay. “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” praxis of *critical witnessing* is an attempt to read between fear and curiosity, moving away from militarization and

displacement to value life events, “communal kinships” that work collectively towards community empowerment and being.

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Chapter One

Gods Go Begging: “Settler Colonialism, Militarization and the Militarized”

Death is common in battlefields, casualties are expected in war, but in Alfredo Véa Jr.’s *Gods Go Begging* (1999), the war and the corpse¹⁰ count extend to urban areas inhabited by people of color¹¹. Between 1954 and 1975, the VietNam War saw the participation of around 80,000 Mexican Americans, with the majority being drafted and deployed to the frontlines. During the 1960s and 1970s, Chicana/o and Latine cultural productions did not shy away from documenting the historical significance of Chicana/o and Latine adolescents, who accounted for a large portion of those 80,000 individuals expected to serve. For example, Luis Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit* (1978) showcases the intertwining of personal struggles with the broader context of the VietNam War and its impact on communities of color through the protagonist Henry Reyna. Henry has been drafted and the day of his last celebration unfortunately was also the day he was accused of murder.

In the 1981 Broadway musical of Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit*, a journalist critiques the mistreatment of brown adolescents in the United States, stating “we’re [press] complying in the interest of the war” and noting, “the zoot suit crime wave is beginning to push the war news off the front page.” This encounter between Zoot Suiter “El Pachuco,” played by Edward James Olmos and a journalist highlights how propaganda in the United States scapegoat’s Chicana/o

¹⁰ When using the terms corpse and body I am thinking through Hortense J. Spillers definition of body and flesh in the sense that the body has intricate ties to social constructions while flesh exists throughout this process. Corpse through this approach falls into the definition of flesh as a physical material whose corporeal existence still maintains physical and social presence. “The captive body, then, brings into focus a gathering of social realities as well as a metaphor for value so thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases that distinctions between them are virtually useless” (Spillers 68).

¹¹ When I use people of color, I refer to all marginalized communities who are non-white subjects acknowledging the privilege of lighter skin complexions that at times grant individuals certain exceptions but not the equivalent to white subjects.

Latine youth deflecting the violence of the VietNam War, further criminalizing Chicana/o Latine communities even as they are expected to serve on the frontlines. Similarly, Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973), a retelling of the 1970 Chicano Moratorium, an antiwar event organized by and for Chicana/o Latine that was discontent with the militarization of their communities during the VietNam War advocating for an end to the war state both in VietNam and in urban cities.

Similarly, literary scholars and cultural critics like George Mariscal, Lorena Orzopeda, Juan David Coronado, Ben V. Olguin, and Luis Alvarez have contributed extensively to the understanding of Chicana/o Latine experiences during the VietNam War. Unlike historical recollections of the VietNam War these Latine scholars do not solely focus on the quantity of soldiers who identified as Chicana/o Latine they instead highlight the violent entanglement faced by Chicana/o Latine soldiers both abroad and upon their return to the United States. Each of these scholars has had different approximations to the VietNam War whether it be as veterans of the VietNam War themselves and/or having access to those who were Chicana/o Latine veterans. Additionally, each scholar has covered a plethora of testimonials, perspectives, and narratives in a span of years post-VietNam War allowing more voices to come forward to speak on the VietNam experience. Both time and positionality allow a denser approach to addressing these narratives as interwoven parts of history that have been overlooked. Although this literary analysis builds on previous scholarly focus on Chicana/o Latine VietNam War narratives, specifically those that scrutinize the asymmetrical relationship between Chicana/o Latine as militarized subjects in the United States military, I employ *critical witnessing* to explore the complexities of relationalities forged within violent war spaces abroad and within the US as depicted in *Gods Go Begging* (1999).

Critical witnessing occurs when Chicana/o Latine individuals or groups refuse to ignore sanctioned violence, despite pressures from entrenched privileges such as white-heteropatriarchy, wealth, education, masculinity, able-bodiedness, and colonial structures. These privileges often compel BIPOC to passively witness atrocities while also being victims of these violent actions. Essentially, *critical witnessing* involves someone (a militarized/ racialized subject) close to the atrocity—often death—experiencing a deep sense of empathy, recognition, and identification. This allows for a critical examination of relationships within the Chicana/o Latine experiences. As Rosa-Linda Fregoso asserts, “The force of witness represents a collectivity that counters this death force with life, with the vitality of a life force of human and multispecies existence, and with the demands for life” (4). The demand for life is how critical witnessing actively serves to destabilize power structures and the status quo. While witnessing is commonly associated with power structures like the judicial system and the church, often understood by narratives of power and wealth whose witnessing holds value, it has for centuries excluded marginalized witnessing such as those considered in this literary analysis.

This chapter exemplifies the act of *critical witnessing* through Vía Jr.’s critique of the United States colonial agenda in VietNam; through a Chicano veteran, Hong Trac, and Calvin Thibault who represent settler colonialism¹² because of indigeneity, displacement, and criminalization. Most importantly, the author draws a parallel between the war on poverty within the U.S. and the war in VietNam. As a Chicano writer, and a veteran himself, Vía Jr. does not reproduce “gross stereotypes” about Mexican American soldiers intimated by works such as

¹² “...settler colonialism is not one-dimensional; instead, we begin from the position that it is intrinsically shaped by and shaping interactive relations of coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism, and ableism. This multi-dimensional understanding of settler colonialism enables specificity in the ways to which place, culture, and relations of power are approached; reflects the ways in which the State has governed subjects differently; and emphasizes that the disruption of settler colonialism necessitates the disruption of intersecting forces of power such as colonialism, heteropatriarchy and capitalism” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Cornthassel 2)

George Mariscal who states, “in literary works by non-Latino writers, Latino characters are relatively rare, and the few Chicano characters who do appear tend to be either gross stereotypes or unrecognizably assimilated” (7). Instead, Vea Jr.’s novel provides insights into Mexican American participation in the VietNam War through the character Jesse Pasadobles. The character of Jesse Pasadobles represents the Chicana/o Latine narratives by highlighting the transformation process many endured to survive and understand their positionality within the oppressive and violent structure of the military in the VietNam War. Jesse’s *critical witnesses* first occur in VietNam and then in San Francisco, offering insight into the issues of displacement, militarization, and racialization practices in both locations due to the United States’ violent imperial tactics.

Synopsis of Novel

Alfredo Vea Jr.’s *Gods Go Begging* (1999) deals with the murder of Persephone Flyer and Mai Adrong in Potrero Hill, San Francisco, through the perspective of Jesse Pasadobles, a former soldier in the VietNam War who after the war becomes a lawyer in San Francisco. Persephone and Mai, displaced during the VietNam War, find refuge in San Francisco, where they were murdered by Reggie Harp, a local gang leader who flees the scene, leaving Calvin Thibault behind. Calvin Thibault is wrongfully accused of double homicide simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time as a Black adolescent in an urban city.

The novel is composed of fourteen chapters, primarily narrated in third person, except for the first-person dialogs in between characters. Initially, while Jesse serves as a soldier in the VietNam War, he *critically witnesses* the murder of Hong Trac, an Indigenous North Vietnamese Army (NVA) prisoner of war. Jesse develops a relationship with Hong Trac, whom he later finds dead among other NVAs. Despite initially believing that Hong Trac would remain safe as a

prisoner of war, Hong Trac's fears about his fate as an Indigenous person are tragically realized. Shortly after, Jesse is placed in combat with a unit of soldiers who predominantly are men of color one being Amos Flyer, a creole soldier from Louisiana that becomes Jesse's close friend. While on deployment Jesse's unit is placed by the Laos border, a couple soldiers from the unit including Amos Flyer are tasked to set up an installation on a Laos hill, where they are ambushed and blown away by a suicide bomber, we later find out is Trin Adrong, Mai's husband. Jesse, finds out through the chaplain that the men sent to the hill "were a decoy, padre? Cornelius and Sarge and Roosky were fucking decoys? The Indians were a decoy" (137)? Infuriated, Jesse is yet again confronted by the injustice of racialized military men of color whose bodies are placed on the front lines to endure death.

Jesse's critical witnessing in VietNam and his understanding of state-sanctioned killings by the United States resonate deeply when he becomes a lawyer in San Francisco. He is assigned to "The Amazon Luncheonette case," defending Calvin Thibault (also known as Biscuit Boy), who is accused of the double homicide of Persephone Flyer and Mai Adrong (Véa, 44). The novel reveals a deeper connection between the events in VietNam and those in San Francisco, highlighting how the violent legacies of the VietNam War reverberate thirty years later in Potrero Hill. The narrative shifts between past and present, illustrating how historical events and personal relationships intersect. Jesse's journey demonstrates how the pervasive undertones of white supremacy, militarization, and criminalization manifest in violence within the United States decades after the VietNam War. His proximity to death, both as a soldier and as a lawyer, profoundly transformed him. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* Avery Gordon writes, "[b]eing haunted draws us effectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as

cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). Through the murders of Hong Trac, Amos Flyer, Persephone Flyer, and Mai Adrong, Jesse confronts not just the specter of death but the state-sanctioned violence that led to their death.

Jesse’s understanding of the urban war on poverty, implicated in race, and class differentials, reveals how eighteen-year-old Calvin Thibault, as a non-white subject, is targeted by state-sanctioned violence like Indigenous Hong Trac’s experience in VietNam. The interconnectedness between the past and present, and between different forms of violence, underscores the novel’s exploration of *critical witnessing* and “communal kinship”. Jesse’s role as a *critical witness* to these intertwined lives reflect the ongoing impact of historical injustice on contemporary society. Jesse after his closing remarks on Calvin’s case takes time to communicate to Carolina his girlfriend,

Believe me, it happened. I am a living witness. It happened here in this city, on Potrero Hill, and on a hill near the eastern edge of Laos. I was there, at both places. Carolina, almost three decades after that enemy sapper ran up that hill in Vietnam, at the very same instant in time that his body flew toward its own doom, Persephone Flyer looked up to see two boys standing in front of the glass door of the Amazon Luncheonette (283).

Amos Flyer’s remains on the Laos hill next to Trin Adrongs’ in 1960s VietNam once again resurface as Jesse *critical witnesses* through photographs and Calvin’s testimony of the murder of Persephone Flyer and Mai Adrong in San Francisco. The soldiers’ wives coexisting and dying alongside each other in different circumstances inadvertently reflects Jesse and Hong Trac’s relationship in VietNam. Jesse as a living witness can attest to the relationships stemming from displacement and militarization. Now in 1990 Potrero Hill, one of the boys being Calvin Thibault is being accused of double homicide even as an innocent bystander, Jesse as his defense attorney refuses to let him be the next victim to

sanctioned violence. Jesse's approach to Calvin Thibault's case is how "communal kinship" comes to exist within this chapter.

The VietNam War

This section situates the VietNam War (1965-1973) with the United States and Chicana/o Latine involvement. Drawing on scholar Juan David Coronado who writes, "The American support of France's imperial influence in VietNam" then "The U.S. poured endless amount of money into support of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime that was committed to the American agenda of a Communist-free South VietNam" at some point (3-4). Diem was no longer seen as an asset by the CIA and South VietNam ambassadors, leading his assassination alongside his brother. This act resulted in "North Vietnamese aggression and ordered military retaliation," untimely contributing to the VietNam War. However, before this coup, in the late 1950s and early 1960s under President John F. Kennedy— and even as far back as the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman— the United States was financially and militarily entrenched within VietNam. An attempt to control Indochina by imperial power regardless of VietNam independence from France (post-war 1946-1954) caused the U.S. to become heavily involved. The false claim for democracy, rapidly unraveled both in VietNam as well as in anti-war protests in the United States as the VietNam War caused "approximately 20 percent of U.S. casualties in VietNam, although they made up only 10 percent of this country's population at the time" (Lea Ybarra 5). A large portion of these death tolls reflected the draft of brown adolescents and those who volunteered to prove they belonged to the United States, a conversation that will be explored further in chapter three.

Jesse's First Critical Witnessing of Indigeneity During the VietNam War

"If civilian life presented

challenges for Latinos
seeking equality and the benefits
of wartime democracy,
so too did life in the military”
-Luis Alvarez

What is the connection between indigeneity, race, and war? According to Jodi Byrd, “racialization¹³ replaces colonization as the site of critique, and the structuring logics of dispossession are displaced onto settlers and arrivants¹⁴ who substitute for and as Indigenous to consolidate control and borders at that site of differentiation” (221). In the novel’s chapter “French Lessons,” the narrative unfolds in Da Nang, VietNam, where soldiers arrange dead bodies along the road. As the corpse lay in the heat, dogs, flies, and “war correspondents” approach the bodies. Two of which are a man from *Stars and Stripes* newspaper and a “slender woman” from *Paris Match* who similarly to the others move “up and down the row of the dead like careful browsers at a weekend garage sale” (75). Susan Sontag writes, “Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen” (13). As the war correspondents shop for their perfect shot of the atrocities of the VietNam War, a sergeant is caught examining a corpse by the French photojournalist working for *Paris Match*. She asks, first in French then in English “Do you know this soldier?” The question moves the narration back to recall the soldier’s memory, one of him a week prior waiting on an assignment to the Laotian border (77). The memory clarifies that the Sergeant is

¹³ racialization- “... to reframe colonization as a racialization at the site of radical critique risks leaving those very colonial structures intact on the one hand and allowing all experiences of oppression within settler colonialism to step forward as colonized on the other” (Byrd 54).

¹⁴ “[A]rrivants... signif[y] those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe... deep settler and arrivant colonialisms continued unabated within the post- and neocolonial geographies of the global South” (Byrd xix).

Jesse Pasadobles who was in the compound of Da Nang, awaiting transport to Dong Ha. In Da Nang Jesse was encouraged by a staff sergeant to “get [him] self some real food, and maybe even catch a movie” to finally learn more about Vietnamese culture (77). Sergeant Jesse Pasadobles as instructed explores the city of Da Nang leading him toward a secured prison yard, encountering Hong Trac whom he develops a relationship with as he awaits deployment.

Through Jesse Pasadobles’s relationship with Hong Trac, this novel examines the underlying dynamics of warfare as cyclical exertion of power over first Indigenous Peoples abroad in VietNam then minority groups domestically, such as in San Francisco. The stated order of these communities is important to note when understanding how racial categorization exacerbates the erasure of Indigenous Peoples by the United States within the context of VietNam. This section aims to demonstrate that Jesse and Hong Trac establish a “communal kinship” in Da Nang that unearths the United States' intentions during the VietNam War, to confirm that “terrible things do happen” Moon-Ho Jung explains, “The United States was accordingly an empire, but seemingly an exceptional empire, supposedly in search of markets, not territorial conquest” (10). In the novel, the relationship between Jesse Pasadobles and Hong Trac allows the unraveling of a false narrative on behalf of the U.S. to become evident through the characters' positions as non-white individuals in the backdrop of war. Instead, it suggests that war is a tool of control to maintain white-structured systems, through punitive measures toward communities of color further represented by Jesse and Hong.

Jesse, as a foreigner in VietNam, grapples with the concept of “othering” recognizing own displacement within this geopolitical landscape attributed to war. As an arrivant^{15[6]}, his hand in settler colonialism can be understood by the invasion of soldiers (represented by Jesse’s

¹⁵ “settler of color” Haunani-Kay Trask

body) within the context of VietNam. Although on a broader scale, Jesse does represent the United States of America by being an American soldier, Jesse's body represents a colonial history (tied to Spanish conquest and mestizaje) and an asymmetrical relationship between Mexico and the United States. In "The Right to Bear Arms: Enlisting Chicanos in the U.S. Military, 1940-1980," Steven Rosales writes, "They hoped their military service was the first step toward the acquisition of many things: pride, first-class citizenship, monetary gain, and health care amenities" (231). As hinted by Rosales, Mexican American soldiers, despite many of them having legal status in the United States, often felt the need to prove their loyalty to the United States because of their Mexican heritage. In the novel, the intricacies of citizenship¹⁶ rooted in whiteness also become evident in the U.S. military tactics for example after Hong Trac's death Jesse is deployed into combat, he learns through the chaplain that their hill installation was a decoy for the NVA to attack, Jesse reacts by saying, "I suppose what I really want is some justice, padre. Fuck all these lifers and their fucking war" (137). In the novel, Jesse's journey illuminates the complexities of citizenship, particularly racism tied to whiteness and militarization within the U.S. military as he too falls victim to discrimination within his peers. Most of his squadron is positioned to be killed, his unit was made up of predominantly men of color Creole, Native American, Hawaiian, Middle eastern, Chicano Latine, and just one white soldier. Citizenship as seen by Rosales will be further explored in chapter three that accounts for deported veterans.

Settler Colonialism in the VietNam War as an Indigenous North Vietnamese Army Soldier

¹⁶ According to Nicholas De Genova *citizenship* "is always and inherently exclusionary and divisive framework for the production of various degrees of non-citizenship and thus, legal non- personhood"; he later continues that citizenship "through the Naturalization Act of 1790, in which no immigrant would be permitted to become a citizen unless he were 'a free, white person' (37).

A week before the bodies are lined up outside the military compound in Da Nang Jesse comes across a prison yard where he observes a prisoner (who we now know is Hong Trac) right in the middle of that yard under direct sunlight. Intrigued by what he sees, Jesse moves toward “the Cyclone fence” and is stopped by a guard in the tower who warns him to disengage and stop (78). Despite these threats, Jesse continues and tries to remain nearby, responding to the guard, “I’ve never seen an NVA this close and alive,” (78). The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) were soldiers alluded to being ruthless and who did not allow enemy capture. The pretense of curiosity allows Jesse to move closer, the guard mocks Jesse by saying, “Go ahead, look at gooks¹⁷ all you want, sarge, but don’t touch the wire. Touching the fucking wire is number ten, you bic” (78). Subjugation and dominance are established using racial slurs. Although, the guard’s ethnicity is unclear, by calling Jesse a racial slur of bic (can be spic¹⁸ referencing his Mexican American identity or a bic¹⁹ French racial slur) and Hong Trac a gook, the guard’s position high above in the guard tower presumes a position of power where bodies below can be surveilled and controlled (Foucault²⁰, 1975). The encounter is representative of the military as a predominantly white, patriarchal institution with roots in colonial dominance. As a Mexican American U.S. soldier, Jesse faces derision from the guard for his curiosity about the NVA and his own cultural identity.

¹⁷ Gook often refers to a foreigner from East of Southeast Asian descent (Merriam-Webster).

¹⁸ Spic racial slur toward Mexican Americans in the United States used in Chicana/o literary productions one being Luis Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit* (1979) (1981).

¹⁹ Bic racial slur toward the French who are considered to have a lot of hair.

²⁰ “The Panopticon, then, is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.” (Page 200) “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribed in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.” (Page 202)

Jesse is not the epitome of a White American soldier (since he is Mexican American), but his initial response to Hong, still carries a perception of White America. The guard's mocking tone relays more than a joke; it is a sublimated reality of the fetishization of human bodies.

Tiffany Lethabo King's article, "Off Littorality (Shoal 1.0): Black Study Off the Shores of 'the black body,'" states, "the captive body becomes an othered kind of object (not the self) and therefore a form of captured sexuality" (King 45). While for King and Spillers, the focus is on the captive Black body, in the case of Vía Jr. it is about indigeneity via Hong Trac. The next day Jesse comes back saying "I can talk to him for one hour a day for the next three days" informing the Private First Class (PFC) of his granted permission (80). The PFC guard responds: "whatever turns you on sarge"; he then continues "personally, I'd rather visit the bar girls on China Beach. I love that Saigon tea" (80). The comparison between visiting an Indigenous prisoner and going to a bar with girls highlights two issues: 1. The conquest and objectification of Indigenous women, and 2. The eroticization and perceived inferiority of Indigenous men's bodies compared to Western notions of manhood.

An American: Brothel Sex and Diplomacy During the VietNam War (2022), Amanda Boczar states, "Americans adopted a European colonial perception of Southeast Asian women as exotic or erotic, but also viewed them as a potential threat that needed to be controlled" (23). Vietnamese women like Indigenous Chàm communities in a colonial sense were classified as subhuman in need of control, while at the same time othered. Vietnamese men were categorized as homosexuals for cultural practices that differed from those of the United States. This colonial mindset of conquering led to "[a]n estimated 8,000 to 15,000 Amerasian children born from American troops stationed in VietNam" (Ybarra, 4). The misconduct of American troops concerning cases of rape and sexual assault highlight the connection between the sexual exploitation and territorial colonization.

The guard, however, further problematizes this encounter as he cannot fathom any relationality other than a sexualized othering. Hong Trac as an Indigenous captive places him, as Spillers states, “as a category of ‘otherness,’ the captive body translates into potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning” (Spiller, 67). Additionally, Chris Finley theorizes that “...Native men are feminized and queered when put in the care of white heteropatriarchal nation-state”; he continues by stating “all sexualization of Native peoples constructs them as incapable of self-governance without a heteropatriarchal influence that Native people do not ‘naturally’ possess” (35). Sexualization, of these meetings more specifically of Hong Trac being compared to a gendered Vietnamese sex worker, parallels colonization where narratives were created to justify colonizers taking control over large populations. Sexual abuse as well as gender rhetoric were (and are) tools the military as an institution does not shy from, as we will explore later (in chapter two with Private First-Class Vanessa Guillen). Despite the PFC guards' ignorant comparison to sex workers, Jesse contests this sexualization by maintaining a reciprocal relationship established with respect. Jesse's purpose for interaction shifts from being curious and/or simply enemies to a friendship that would have not taken place if it were not for their intersectional positioning in the Vietnam War. Jesse's intrigued demeanor was influenced by prejudice on NVA's subject. As Jesse gets closer and learns more about Hong Trac, the proximity dispels the misconceptions of a NVA through a more elaborate historical approach as Jesse learns that Hong Trac is not only NVA but also Indigenous Chàm. The encounter between these two men is a form of *critical witnessing* since Hong Trac is socially dead as he is a prisoner of war demonstrating that their relationality could

be understood as more than a fetish. Since both individuals react a level of recognition to each other's proximity and positionality.

Hong Trac

VietNam was first established in the 19th century by Emperor Gia Long. Before this the Champa Empire was constantly fighting the Vietnamese people who were taking their land and evoking a genocide against the Indigenous Chám. The Champa also known as Chám are an indigenous population that controlled a large portion of land within the region of what is now Da Nang VietNam to the port of Cattigara falling along Laos' southern border. They expanded and fought against Khmer, VietNam, and the Hun in different historical periods. Their rivalry with VietNam resulted in the 1471 King Le Thanh Tong invasion of Champa in response to the Cham raid, resulting in 60,000 killings (Chapuis, 46). History books attribute this invasion as the last final erasure of the Champa people, and many historians recognize this antagonist relationship as genocidal. Despite the attempt to erase and absorb the Chàm by the Vietnamese there were numerous North Vietnamese Army Soldiers who served both sides of the VietNam War hoping to regain their connection to their land and their people as we will learn to understand through the character Hong Trac.

Hong Trac's position within the prison when Jesse first encounters him illuminates where the indigenous Chàm community stands in the VietNam War, as displaced people. Hong Trac states, "Centuries ago we were conquered and then subjugated by the Vietnamese. Since that time, we have never had an equal place in this country." Then continues "Because I am Chàm, I must sit alone in this yard" (81). Although Hong Trac's ancestors were native to the land because of settler colonialism they have been discriminated against for more than a century. His indigenous identity is targeted by not only the American soldiers who read him as a NVA, but

also among Vietnamese soldiers who see him as Chàm, indigenous, and “other.” At first, Jesse's preconceived notions of NVAs are fueled by U.S. conceptualizations of ‘otherings’ leading him toward the prison yard.

Here was the man with the better mythology: Americans are sent here to fight against an evil and undefinable thing called Communism; to fight for blue jeans and convertibles and full-color foldouts of big breasted blondes. This man was sent here to die— expel the Japanese, the French, the Americans from the soil of his ancestors. His mythology contained less myth (79).

Hong Trac was the man the United States had to deem evil to justify control and invasion. As this narration takes place in Jesse's thoughts, it can be understood that Jesse at first falls victim to misconceptions fabricated by imperial ideologies about the NVAs. However, after days of long conversations between both soldiers, Jesse comes to understand that Hong represents something worth fighting. Contrary to the United States, the pursuit of ideals and materialistic riches is through the exploitation and violence of displaced people. The truth of Hong's story is his community's displacement which was initially uprooted by Vietnamese settlers, then later France and the United States all of whom sought control of their land. Hong Trac's lived experience provides Jesse with a valuable perspective to becoming critical of the United States' involvement in the VietNam War.

‘You same-same me,’

“The Chàm people
had dark complexions,
protruding noses,
deep eye sockets
and curly hair” (40).
-Oscar Chapus

As for Hong Trac realizing that someone is aware of his presence he sees Jesse, “You same-same me” and “[h]e released his hair, then ran his fingers over the brown skin of his cheek, then over his brown, sunburned forearm. You same-same me, he repeated” (79). Hong Trac

recognized Jesse's characteristics and questioned Jesse's ethnicity, telling him they are the same because of the color of their skin. For Hong Trac seeing Jesse who in return saw him meant a possible escape not so much in a physical sense but more so in an enduring or spiritual sense, where through someone else's relationality empathy, Hong Trac (Indigenous Chàm) will live on and be remembered.

To a certain extent, they are the same, both soldiers now in "foreign land"; for Jesse, VietNam is not his country, and for Hong Trac, his ancestral land has become unrecognizable. Moreover, Jesse as a Mexican American also faces uncertainty due to racism even within the United States as a non-white subject. Hong Trac as Chàm in comparison to Jesse, faces another level of oppression, one that is usually silenced and, in this novel, is represented by Hong Trac taken prisoner on his land. Further ostracizing even within the carceral state by other NVAs Hong also says, "không đen, không trắng; no negro, ni blanco. You Español?" (80) accounting for the multifaceted identities within the context of space caused by war, imperialism, and colonization. The "not" black nor white carries the racial binary of the United States to the context of VietNam: "understand[ing] colonial discourse not only as vertical impositions between colonizer and colonized but also as horizontal interrelations between different colonized peoples within the same geopolitical space" (Byrd 63). Breaking apart the assumptions that the United States only houses black and white people allows space for the indigenous subjects to exist. This reaction of self-identification on behalf of the NVA allows a possibility of representation through Jesse, while at the same time echoes that like the indigenous Chàm peoples, Mexican Americans within the context of the United States are both the subjects of violence and in this military geopolitical space can be perpetrators of violence. This is not to say by any means that Chicanos within the United States represent an indigenous body but rather that

the military allows some minority groups to achieve upward mobility making the experience a double-edged sword. While there are “accomplishments” or “opportunities,” racial biases persist, often linked to skin color. Jesse for example is still ridiculed and ostracized by U.S. soldiers, even though he is supposed to fight alongside them (for them).

Hong Trac historicizes his position during the VietNam War. When first confronted by Jesse he is desperate to be seen/ read as human because deep down he understands the world is moving toward the removal of his existence, in other words he is socially dead as his body is being racialized in captivity. Jesse sees himself in the prisoner Hong Trac, he too, gets treated differently by his own U.S. counterparts because of who he is (Mexican American). Regardless of the initial motivation, Jesse's intent thereafter creates a “communal kinship”, as both share a legacy of displacement that has, at that point in time, placed them within this geopolitical space to coexist. The men’s relationship proves to be more than an observation, as they learn more about the war through their identity. Hong Trac asks:

I am sorry to ask this question, *mon ami*, but I must. I know that we will never meet again, and I believe you to be an honest man. So, I must ask. In the north of my country, the children are told in school that all the people of color in the United States live in a separate country (81).

Jesse confirms these interpretations of the United States because he, himself, is one of the people of color who lives in a separate country in the United States based on his socioeconomic class and racial identity. This “separate country” does not necessarily refer to an entirely distinct geographical area or nation. Instead, it can be manifested through enclaves and or segregated communities within the United States. For instance, consider the case of Brown vs Board of Education, which was implemented in 1954 to eliminate school segregation. Despite the ruling, access to good education continues to be a challenge for disenfranchised communities because of

racism, socioeconomic disparities, and gender. Hong Trac tries to understand why it is that a person like Jesse (an arrivant²¹ in VietNam) is fighting for the U.S. if within the confines of the U.S. Jesse is also ostracized for being different. Jesse's phenotypical and cultural difference does not align with a "White-America". Contrary to Jesse, Hong Trac is fighting for his land, not necessarily his country (now known as VietNam). Hong Trac's moral compass is not fueled by a fictional narrative of "othering" like the narratives constructed by the United States justifying war and death in VietNam. Hong's questioning allows for a deeper interpretation of the systemic violence in the United States via racialization.

Fully cognizant that this would be their final meeting, Hong Trac is intentional with his questioning as it dives deeper into democracy as a paradox. Jesse exemplifies a person of color who, during the VietNam War, belonged to one of the primary groups drafted to serve on the front lines. While in service, Jesse is perceived as a second-class citizen, and upon Jesse's return, he struggles since his experience is downplayed. Thus, Jesse's experience of "democracy" differs from that of "White-America". He can defend it but cannot fully partake in its benefits, even as a veteran. *Critical witnessing* of Hong Trac's social death, and later his physical death, allows a window into Jesse's ontological transformation, revealing that he and Hong Trac are very much alike; they both are, "you same-same me".

Edification

Initially, the lined-up corpses were intended to publicly evoke fear against communism and anything opposing the United States. When Jesse Pasadobles recognizes Hong Trac's murdered body, he undergoes a process of edification; however, it instills not fear but rage, as he

²¹ "[A]rrivants... signif[y] those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe... deep settler and arrivant colonialisms continued unabated within the post- and neocolonial geographies of the global South" (Byrd xix).

realizes the inherent injustice of death in the VietNam War. However, this process does not instill fear but rage toward the United States' involvement in VietNam. Vía Jr. writes:

After staring downward at the corpse for a long moment, the buck sergeant stepped forward. He inspected the pants and the sandals, then he knelt down and carefully began to undo the buttons on the man's tunic. There were two entry holes in the man's chest but there was no blood, not on his skin or on his shirt. The soldier moved his face to within mere inches of the other's. He noticed that there were deep wrinkles on the forehead and about the open eyes of the dead man. These signs of severe distress were new (76).

Jesse "without hesitation" moves directly toward the end of the line where Hong Trac's corpse is laid. He examines the corpse carefully, realizing that the bullet holes in the man's chest happened after death since there is no blood on his skin or shirt. The "wrinkles on the forehead" further prove that Hong Trac was in distress and after turning Hong's corpse and seeing "something" Jesse's reaction was "shiver and sigh". Aside from Jesse's meticulous examination of the deceased body, Vía Jr. also narrates the photojournalists' witnessing of Jesse and the deceased. They recall:

Could that be sadness in his eyes? *C'était impossible*. The dead man was the enemy. Did this soldier kill the other? Could they have known each other? Should they interview him? He had a name tag but neither had caught his name. The photographers watched him as he walked past them, then suddenly, becoming aware of each other and of their own confusion at what they had just witnessed, they clumsily glanced downward to check their shutter speeds. Squinting to consider the fading light, they quickly stooped to adjust and readjust their f-stops until the moment of awkwardness had passed (76-77).

The collective discomfort of photojournalists and the overwhelming emotions Jesse experienced while examining Hong Trac's deceased body were so unsettling that the photojournalist described it as a "moment of awkwardness." As a result, they opted not to interact with the soldier until they had come to terms with their distressing emotions. Before seeing Jesse's examination of the corpse, the photojournalists simply see dead bodies ("shopping for a perfect

shot”); however, when they see Jesse’s reaction to the corpse, the once normalized violence of war, becomes a discomfort. Belinda Linn Rincón states:

From the perspective of the state, this management is critical because if grief is artificially inflamed or prolonged, or if the expected conclusion is never satisfactorily achieved, it can move from causing chaos with the family or intimate social circle to causing instability within the larger society (48).

Jesse’s grief and anger are conveyed by his physical reaction as a “shiver.” In an emotional trance, Jesse remembers Hong’s feared death: “[i]t is said that they have a very special way of torturing prisoners. They use a *tournevis*²². It is just a rumor; no one can say for sure because no one ever comes back from an interrogation” alive (84). Breaking away from this trance Jesse asks the French photojournalists what *tournevis* means after examining the corpse, the journalist translates by saying screwdriver. Hong endured exactly what he had confessed to Jesse. Hong’s bullet wounds had no blood spots which meant that Hong was shot after being dead to create the illusion he had been killed in the bush. The bush, according to Jesse, was the only place where Vietnamese soldiers were killed. Examining the body alongside the translated word *tournevis*, Jesse witnesses an unjust murder at the hands of American soldiers, recognizing that Hong Trac’s lifeless body on the side of the road did not result from combat. Rosa Linda Fregoso states, “the women murdered and disappeared may have been annihilated as witnesses; however, their mothers and advocates took their place” (8). Alfredo Vía Jr. Jesse serves as this advocate, critically witnessing the death through the presence of the corpse. Unlike the women Fregoso refers to, it is the Indigenous man, Hong Trac, who is murdered. Hong Trac’s murder by torture proves that Jesse’s initial perception of the institutions perpetuating colonization by the United

²² French word for screwdriver

States appears unjust, even considering policies like the 1954 Geneva Convention²³ being fully implemented during the VietNam War.

After Jesse asks the photojournalist to translate, the journalist feels more at ease to ask Jesse if he knows that corpse. Jesse, remembering his relationship to Hong, screams as a response to the photojournalist: “[t]he one on the end, his name is Hong Trac!” (85). The anger expressed in this reaction shows that witnessing Hong Trac’s corpse did indeed serve the function of edification for Jesse. Hong Trac’s corpse taught Jesse that the VietNam War was unjust which is why he exclaims that “[he] just want[s] some justice” (137). Contrary to the photojournalist witnessing, Jesse’s critical witnessing is deepened by the intimate relationship grounded on recognition, geopolitical positionality, and a common historical legacy of displacement to white colonial structures.

The “communal kinship” created by both men who are placed in a position to coexist and critically witness each other’s positionality by being willing to communicate with each other despite being “enemies” in a war intentionally placing them in opposition to each other, allows a witnessing of a mere casualty to some (photojournalist), to Jesse a critical one that provides insight into indigeneity in VietNam in a time of war. Hong Trac’s murder was not a result of “communism”; it was, however, because he was an indigenous subject who stood in the way of the U.S.

Jesse’s Critical Witness: Reflection on the War on Poverty in the United States

The Paris Peace Accord of 1973 declared an end to the U.S. military involvement in the VietNam War. Yet it was the fall of Saigon in 1975 that ended the VietNam War itself and

²³ In the 1954 Geneva convention article 12 section C it is stated that: All prisoners of war and civilians’ internees held by either party shall be surrendered to the appropriate authorities of the other party, who shall give them all possible assistance in proceeding to their country of origin, place of habitual residence, or zone of their choice (Haven 42).

where many South Vietnamese communities were evacuated as refugees into the United States. As a VietNam Veteran, Jesse resettles to San Francisco after the war as a changed man. In the United States, he is confronted once again by death and an unjust United States this time through the legal system. Jesse Pasadobles became a lawyer upon returning from the VietNam War. His professional career post-war alludes to the GI Bill which granted many returning veterans access to a funded education.

As a public defense lawyer Jesse becomes a “witness to the trauma witness[ed]”²⁴ to Calvin Thibault’s double homicide case of Persephone Flyer and Mai Adrong. As Jesse learns more about his client’s case he is once again confronted with the VietNam War not only through his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but by the realization that Persephone Flyer was Amos Flyer's wife. Amos Flyer was Jesse’s close friend in VietNam while serving. After having witnessed Hong Trac’s murder he was deployed to the hill of Da Nang where he discovered Amos Flyer’s dog tags only to mean that Sergeant Flyer had also died on a hill. Amos Flyer and Trin Adrong (Persephone and Mai’s husbands) died on a Vietnamese hill during active combat as enemies. Contrary to their death, their wives Mai Adrong and Persephone Flyer were murdered on a San Francisco hill as displaced subjects as companions. What seems like a past, seeps into Jesse’s present as he yet again is connected to the lives lost in VietNam through the atrocities of the violent murder of Persephone Flyer and Mai Adrong in the United States. In the United States as a lawyer, he is haunted by a failed legal system that aims to target his client, Calvin Thibault.

Calvin Thibault vs Potrero Hill

²⁴ Rosa Linda Fregoso argues that those women who are dead cannot “testify from inside death”; however, one can bear witness to individual and collective trauma, as ‘witness to the trauma witness’ as is the case of Jesse (8).

Historically, marginalized communities within the United States are positioned within proximity to each other as something that is known as an “enclave,” a cultural pocket where people live due to cultural similarities; however, an enclave is both created and maintained. According to Peter Marcuse (2002), an enclave is a voluntary congregation as a means of protecting and enhancing their social mobility and cultural development. However, an enclave can come into existence as both a positive (by choice) and a negative (by force); typically enclaves tend to reflect maintained power structures. For instance, minority groups cannot leave enclaves due to the cost of living as well as housing policies²⁵ which limits movement into better equipped neighborhoods. Potrero Hill represents an enclave housing minority group who are segregated to make sure they fail in life, such as Calvin Thibault. Hong Trac referred to this enclave creation as a “separate country” when he asked Jesse if it was true that people of color in the United States lived segregated Potrero Hill, San Francisco is a “separate country” (enclave) that houses violence in response to the lack of resources such as financial stability that leads many adolescents to partake in illicit markets, and/or be surrounded by “illicit” activities as a means to survive. As critic Dennis López explains, Calvin, “[b]orn and raised in ‘one of the poorest places in the city,’ is found guilty at birth. The racism and extreme inequality endemic to neoliberalism stigmatize entire social spaces as deficient, inadequate, dangerous, and thus dispensable” (61). Calvin’s social indictment for witnessing the murder as a Black person is part of the domestic war Jesse is confronted by in the urban landscape.

Calvin Thibault (aka Biscuit Boy), a Black 18-year-old adolescent, grievously recalls the day of the murder. He remembers the women (Persephone and Mai) were done selling meat

²⁵ Redlining refers to segregation and or discriminatory practices that maintain minority populations away from rich white neighborhoods through practices controlling the sale of real estate backed by the Federal Housing Administration and Home Loan Corporations in addition to individual group racist and classist ideologies.

sauce when he and Little Reggie (the neighborhood gang leader) knocked on the door. Persephone was trying to communicate that there was no more food when she slightly opened the door and was confronted by Reggie who forced himself inside. Calvin recognizes that he agreed to go with Reggie to the restaurant because it meant he would get to see Mai, a beautiful Vietnamese woman he admired. Calvin states that he was unaware of Reggie's intention to violently intrude. Reggie forces himself into the restaurant with a gun in hand. Despite Calvin's first-hand witnessing of the incident, due to many people placing him at the scene, as a Black racialized subject [often pathologized as criminal], he becomes the primary murder suspect in the case he witnessed, deeming him not credible.

For an analysis of Calvin, I continue to draw on López who argues that: “[r]acist discourse of criminality and ‘personal responsibility’ allow the victims of neoliberal violence to be (un)seen as the perpetrators, rather than the targets, and thus as culpable for the condition of their own oppression” (61). López continues by saying: “Véa Jr. aims to problematize the underlying racism behind the neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility and social expendability that so effortlessly chalk up the mounting deaths of Black and Latino/children to ‘acceptable losses’ (62). López draws these claims by closely analyzing the ghetto²⁶ alongside Calvin; as López observes, Calvin being born and raised within Potrero Hill makes him a target rather than a victim because of his Black identity. I intentionally reinscribe the use of Véa Jr. 's description of Calvin as an adolescent because contrary to Reggie who unfortunately has internalized violence to the detriment of his own death, Calvin represents an adolescent who has

²⁶ Ghettos simply denote circumstances of economic scarcity and isolation. More crucially, the concept points toward the social relation, historical processes, and institutional mechanisms for the politically deliberate production of poverty and exclusion to render vulnerable populations readily exploitable. The ghetto historically operates as a ‘socio spatial device’ that facilitates the extraction of labor power and the enactment of racialized political control and social discipline” (López 53).

been enduring violence his whole life, and yet has refused to succumb to violence. Rather than allowing society to inscribe violence to him as a black subject he is fueled by wanting to be loved and seen whether it be by Mai Adrong (who he admired), Reggie, or even Jesse, people who are willing to invest in him the time and life (whether illicit or not) from which society is so invested in stripping.

Although the novel does reproduce negative stereotypes surrounding black youth (gangs, killing, rape), even black women with the alluded rape of Persephone, it makes sure not to end the novel by killing yet another Black person. By ending the novel with Calvin surviving both the double homicide ruling and being shot, V́ea Jr. speaks to an understanding of anti-blackness that in white novels frame Black subjects as undergirding the violence against other racial minorities. Cherly Harris posits “whiteness as property” to further understand that whiteness can unravel through laws and writing such as novels. As previously stated by Mariscal, Mexican Americans can be written into novels as Chicana/o Latine archetypes reproducing violence by non-Latino writers. In the same way, black communities, in the case of Calvin, can be narrated through a “white as property” social narrative. Yet, V́ea Jr.’s approach in concluding the narrative with Calvin and Jesse’s connection avoids portraying the Black community solely through the lens of criminality or property in that it critiques racist behaviors. Calvin serves as a conduit through which Black characters are portrayed with humanity illustrating the impact of being born in Potrero Hill. The novel contextualizes and deepens the understanding of how poverty, and transgenerational trauma produce violent outcomes leading toward a cyclical life of violence, limiting certain individuals’ opportunities since they fall into being “acceptable losses,” in other words living dead. The landscape of the hill as an enclave serves the purpose of a visual barrier against all the characters developed in the novel. Ending the novel with Calvin and Jesse

being able to live again showcases how death in their lives has become a catalyst for fighting toward a rightful future.

Conclusion

Despite the deep-rooted heteropatriarchal structure of state-sanctioned violence represented by the guards' attempt to hinder social interactions by singling out Hong Trac as an "other" and simultaneously casting doubt about Jesse's sexual orientation to deter him from associating with Hong Trac, Jesse's determination to interact with Hong Trac—first as a prisoner of war and later as a corpse on the street—led to a form of *critical witnessing*.

Jesse came to understand Indigenous Hong Trac as existing beyond social death (as a prisoner), even when his body was displayed to "edify" the villagers. Through their conversations, Jesse and Hong Trac analyzed the VietNam War, resulting in Jesse's ontological transformation enabling Jesse to return to the United States with the insight needed to seek justice for Calvin Thibault, who was wrongfully accused of a double homicide due to being a Black adolescent in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The deaths of Hong Trac, Persephone, and Mai occurred publicly, witnessed by many whose perceptions were often influenced by social norms, fear, and military orders, leading them to assume the role of "privileged witnesses". However, Jesse's *critical witnessing* reveals the interconnections between these deaths, starting with Hong Trac's dead body and followed by Persephone and Mai's homicides through photographs and Calvin Thibault's first-person testimony. This creates a sense of discomfort not merely because the bodies were publicly displayed, but because these deaths were a result of violence condoned by the United States. The novel allows readers to see a cyclical pattern of violence experienced by Jesse both in VietNam

and in San Francisco, highlighting the interlinking of characters through social relationships and specific spaces.

These multi-dimensional narrative challenges the notion that history and storytelling are linear. The relationships between Jesse and Hong Trac in VietNam and Jesse and Calvin in San Francisco represent intricate connections that disrupt power structures. The novel presents a rapid deterioration of life and the violent patterns resulting from the continuous oppression of displaced people. Jesse Pasadobles's character serves as a critique of the book's themes, as his positionality allows him to navigate geopolitical spaces, (VietNam and the United States) while his racial identity places him on the periphery, enabling his ontological transformation.

Jesse's critical witnessing of the women's murder and corpses through Calvin represents a different social class and another type of war, this time in a courtroom facing law enforcement. Although no longer a firsthand witness, as in the case of Hong Trac, Jesse becomes a witness to trauma inflicted by violent institutional structures, embodying trauma himself (PTSD and depression). Nevertheless, Jesse's experience in VietNam makes him more knowledgeable about Calvin's experiences in a poor US neighborhood. Jesse has learned not to believe or rely on the United States legislature, military, and police to serve the needs of Black, Indigenous and People of color.

Overall, as López states, Véa Jr. intentionally addresses the problems affecting people of color. All public deaths analyzed in this chapter share a similarity in that the victims endured torture before being killed. The three corpses—Hong Trac, Persephone, and Mai—interweave a political lesson of a failed institution that erases and displaces Indigenous people and people of color. *Critical witnessing* of these corpses reveals resilience and resistance through “communal kinships”. In *Gods Go Begging* by Alfredo Véa Jr., the partnership of Hong and Jesse, and later

Jesse and Calvin, point to the potential for collective action by marginalized subjects who must constantly fight for a home while reclaiming their identities. These identities, representing a trajectory of subjugation, continue to challenge oppressive systems through *critical witnessing*, creating a space of reckoning far removed from normalizing the violence perpetrated by the United States.

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Chapter two

Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency

In 2020, the United States faced a toll of more than 90,000 deaths due to the COVID pandemic. At the same time, the nation also confronted racialized incidents of police violence, as evidenced by the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Even the military was not immune to high-profile crimes as with the case of Vanessa Guillen, an army member who was brutally murdered by another army member in a military base. These violent cases appeared steeped in narratives rooted in racism, masculinity, hate, and white supremacy, often politically vetted by the 45th president, mirroring a longstanding history of subjugation and control through institutional structures that have disproportionately targeted marginalized communities leading to their untimely death. We witness an intensification of institutions failing Black Indigenous People of Color²⁷ (BIPOC) communities on a national scale, and the tireless efforts of these communities resisting sanctioned violence.

Chapter One analyzed Alfredo Vea Jr.'s *God Go Begging* (1999), for its illumination of displacement, settler colonialism, and militarization. The narrative highlights the murder of Hong Trac, an Indigenous North Vietnamese soldier, as *critically witnessed* by Jesse Pasadobles, a Chicano veteran. Upon returning from VietNam, Jesse is tasked with defending Calvin Thibault, a Black adolescent wrongfully accused of the double homicide of Persephone and Mai. This layered *critical witnessing* serves as an allegory for how institutions such as the military and the judicial system perpetuate violence against marginalized people. Through the perspective of Jesse, a marginalized Chicano soldier who has undergone an ontological transformation after experiencing death in VietNam, the novel portrays how these institutions target the racialized

²⁷ BIPOC- black, indigenous, and other people of color that have endured different levels of oppression.

bodies of both Hong Trac, and Calvin Thibault, subjecting them to existential threats. Chapter two, “Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency,” continues the framework of *critical witnessing* to discuss gender violence associated with three structural institutions: the military, the police, or the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and corporations. Engaging with Marcela Lagarde’s use of the term “feminicide,” as opposed to Diana Russell’s “femicide,” as “femicide” directly translates to the gendered killing of women, “feminicide” encompasses a broader perspective. Lagarde’s approach draws attention to various forms of violence against women— whether physical, institutional, verbal, or ideological— that often culminate in their death. This holistic perspective underscores the systemic nature of such violence and its pervasive impact on women’s lives. This chapter emphasizes justice for women who have been victims of violence that value men as superior in all social parameters, including sex, laws, economy, politics, and ideologies, making Lagarde’s use of “feminicide” particularly appropriate. Delving into question of gender, sexuality, militarization and documentation through Latina feminicide, this chapter engages with a popular TV series *Chicago PD* episode “Promise” and a community mural titled *Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural* [*Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural*] as transmedia narratives that engage in *critical witnessing* of Latinas’ deaths. Both visual representations are accessible to the public, facilitating everyone to “witness”. However, despite accessibility, there are crucial levels of approximation, for instance a privileged witnessing²⁸ versus a *critical witnessing*. Take for instance, the deliberate creation of episodic content in police TV series aimed at a mass audience

²⁸ As discussed in the introduction a “privileged witnessing” accounts for a person whose positionality aligns with power structures such as class, race, and gender that allow a distant view and passive response to people that are being subjected to state-sanctioned violence.

(that will be discussed in a later section). Despite this broad appeal, the nuanced portrayal of characters and perspectives within the episodes enables Latinas to engage in *critical witnessing*.

The fictional death of the character Gloria Morales, a character that stands in for Central American migrants and the real-life tragedy of Vanessa Guillen, a young army soldier brutally murdered while serving her country at Fort Hood, Texas, offers ways of addressing *critical witnessing* as a political praxis. In both instances, the act of *critical witnessing* results in the creation of *communal kinship* within the community through a teenager's empowering college essay, a mural, and the mobilization of social media campaigns such as #IamVanessaGuillen, fostering Latina empowerment that despite the intentions of the producers create other possibilities for thinking through these deaths. *Critical witnessing* in this chapter magnifies the gendered perspectives and narratives of Latinas, narrowing in the second part of the discussion on undocumented women who frequently endure violence. The chapter's intersectional approach draws these significant distinctions, revealing systemic power dynamics that could hinder justice but also provoke disruption in the fight against gender-based violence. By juxtaposing these feminicides, I challenge common narratives imposed onto the Latina subjects as either erotic and or sexual, docile, and inferior regardless of their legal status. I also acknowledge that legal status adds another crucial layer of erasure to unpack. When examined as cultural productions, both the episode and the mural underscore how violence against women is sustained through interrelated processes of racialization, exploitation, sexualization, and control (including the militarization of borders and state apparatus). With this perspective, I intentionally adopt from Marcela Lagarde y de los Rios's term "feminicide," to emphasize the power structures and ideologies that give rise to the targeted killing of women, rather than merely acknowledging that women are dying as a natural occurrence. This chapter examines visual representation from both the fictional and non-

fictional realms concerning women who have fallen victim to femicide within the United States, in Texas and Chicago. While I aim to shift focus away from violence and emphasize the importance of *critical witnessing*, it is important to comprehend the origins and perpetuation of such violent acts against Latinas.

Bear Witness to Gender As a Collective

I return to Rosa-Linda Fregoso who conceptualizes witnessing as, a “collectivity that counters this death force with life, with the vitality of a life force of human and multispecies existence, and with the demands for life” (4). She furthers this definition of witnessing to acknowledge how “Bearing witness as accompaniment is a form of entering into a relationship with the other” (8). Thus, the act of bearing witness as active participants name the violence at hand, collectively organizing from a position of recognition to confront systemic death. Although Fregoso theorizes femicide within Mexican spaces, my analysis focuses on the femicide of two Latinas within the United States. Despite the distinct geopolitical contexts, these women encounter similar challenges, evidenced by punitive actions inscribed onto their bodies. Unlike the first chapter, the juxtaposition of these women in this chapter not only underscores their shared experiences but also explores the intricate intersectional identities that are frequently wielded as colonial instruments to marginalize Latina women, depriving them of their humanity. Sexualizing and racializing the Latina body perpetuate narratives of conquest, normalizing violence against Latina women, rendering them susceptible to exploitation, rape, and disposability.

The comparison of various visual representations allows for a more nuanced understanding of Latinas, highlighting their multifaceted social positioning and avoiding oversimplified misconceptions (e.g binaries). On the one hand, the mural demonstrates a

“communal kinship” resulting from *critical witnessing* of femicide. On the other, the TV series portrays the intersectionality of common misconceptions about Latinas, created to appeal to white audiences, culminating in an ending that reinforces the racialization and criminalization of men of color. Discussing these visual representations together demonstrates that the victims are not at fault for their murder. Instead, it critiques the pervasive discourse and institutions failures to deliver justice for Latinas. Although in both cases the assailants end up dying, Vanessa Guillen’s case results in a more tangible outcome, which I argue can be attributed to citizenship, in contrast to the undocumented women represented by Gloria Morales’s femicide. For instance, the I am Vanessa Guillen Act, passed in December 2021, was significantly influenced by the Guillen’s family social media campaigns and protests outside of the Fort Hood military base. This legislation challenged the military chain of command regarding harassment and sexual assault. In contrast, Gloria Morales’s assailant does not face legal consequences; instead, a detective leaks information about his violent acts toward other victims. One victim, a cousin of a local gang leader, takes justice into his own hands, killing Morales’s assailant. The television series depiction of this gruesome murder by gang members reinforces stereotypes of criminality within Chicana/o Latine communities, normalizing violence and overshadowing the true issue: the criminal justice system’s ineffectiveness in addressing undocumented femicide.

Another crucial difference between the visual representations analyzed in this chapter is the intended audience and who is behind each visual representation’s planning/writing, directing, and funding. Nevertheless, the limits of an aesthetic appeal, designed to engage viewers, particularly within the context of the television series episode, requires a closer examination of how implicit views of Latinas as objects of perversion may become normalized when unchallenged — an issue to be addressed in a later section. The *critical witnessing* within these

visual depictions demonstrates that those closest to the deceased respond by calling for justice, thereby activating others to *critically witness* alongside them the injustices exposed by these deaths. Both women's feminicide to the privileged witness might still acknowledge the gravity of these paired deaths, despite lacking direct proximity to the victims. Those same privileged witnesses, however, tend to dismiss the violence perpetrated against Latinas as being any different from the violence against white women. In this context, proximity is not simply physical, but encompasses an understanding of Latina lived realities and conditions.

This chapter problematizes the deaths of Latina women as a marker of entrenched power dynamics that constantly place Latinas in precarious situations, ultimately enabling patriarchal structures to inflict violence upon them as a means of asserting or maintaining control. Yet, despite violent institutions like the military, police, corporations, and detention centers' tactics of controlling gendered bodies, *critical witnessing* serves as an empowering counterinsurgency to expose and challenge the underlying rhetoric that give rise to such violence. Moreover, it moves away from the notion that all men of color, alongside a white heteropatriarchal imperial system, are inherently predisposed to violence. Instead, it recognizes that such violent discourses often serve to dehumanize and criminalize Black, Indigenous, and Brown men, and draws upon theories of *Coloniality and Gender* to show how multiple identities can embody patriarchal norms of control, serving as ideological tools of coloniality that further divide communities of color through the subjugation of women of color. Maria Lugones states,

It is important for us to think about these collaborations ²⁹as we think of the question of indifference to the struggles of women in racialized communities against multiple forms of violence against them and the communities. The white colonizer constructed a powerful inside force as colonized men were coopted into patriarchal roles (10).

²⁹ "... the collaboration between some Indian men and whites in undermining the power of women" (10).

Maria Lugones speaks of “colonized men,” referring to indigenous men compelled to exert patriarchal roles alongside white colonizers, thereby subjecting indigenous women to endure “multiple forms of violence,” including rape, criminalization, and murder. Similarly, Julieta Paredes refers to “entronque patriarchal” referring to indigenous women in Latin America falling into a larger patriarchal system that values men over women. These hierarchies exist according to Paredes to maintain a divide, while her work on the other hand engages with old customs where the women from indigenous communities are centered as vital epistemologies working against colonialism. *Coloniality and Gender* alongside “entronque patriarchal” constitute technologies of gender violence that function to deem the women, particularly Latina bodies in this chapter, as exploitable and inherently threatening, subject to punishment. Gender as understood by Maria Lugones becomes an additional dimension to colonial conceptualizations of race, further dividing marginalized communities leading to further subjugation. Institutional structures within the United States tacitly endorse violence against Latina women to maintain existing hierarchies. For instance, the military normalizes and conceals sexual assault, while capitalist corporations prioritize economic gain over addressing the exploitation, rape, and murder of migrant women. The mural and the TV series critiques these failed institutions, propped up by gender norms and white supremacy, which allow perpetrators to commit heinous acts against Latina women with impunity. In essence, these perpetrators exploit the narratives inscribed onto Latina bodies to conceal their crimes, shielded by military and corporate institutions that ultimately betray these women. While the primary discussions of this chapter speak to the death of Latina women, I emphasize the communal bond that emerges posthumously to suggest that even in their demise Latinas will not be silenced, feminicide will not be in vain. In this context, *critical witnessing* highlights the articulation of a shared voice among Latinas

against violent institutions not solely to illustrate the relationality between gendered subjects but more importantly an active approach shown by the organizing and vocal outcomes of these two women.

Warfare³⁰

The military continuously recruits underrepresented youth at high schools that are underfunded, presenting itself as a “viable” option toward upward mobility. Although, in some cases Black and Brown youth do intentionally count on the process of enlisting as a way out of poverty, the military institution preys on communities of color who are surrounded by gang violence, poverty, and lack of educational resources. For Latinas, the military holds an additional “privilege”, as it provides an avenue for independence from their own patriarchal society. Joining the military for a Latina can release the societal pressure of starting a family, getting married, or staying under the control of a nuclear family. However, that understanding is a temporary illusion of independence. Although they do move away from a nuclear family, they also agree to join another family that depends heavily on control through policies and hierarchies. Belinda Rincon explains how, “[t]he military works to diminish individuality and autonomy in order to promote a central hierarchical command structure that minimizes individual choice and encourages esprit de corps, the spirit of a corporate unified body that eschews personal prerogatives for the sake of serving the state” (10). The military as an apparatus not only maintains this hierarchy within their ranks but reproduces social norms whereas women, particularly women of color, fall to the bottom of that hierarchy, reinscribing notions of the Latina body.

³⁰ The 2022 Demographics Profile of the Military Community accounts for 228, 966 (17.5%) female active soldiers 48,659 (21.3%) of the 17.5% identified as Hispanic.

On June 30, 2020, traces of Vanessa Guillen's body were found by the Leon River in Bell County, Texas. Vanessa Guillen, a Latina soldier, had gone missing on April 22, 2020 (I am Vanessa Guillen, 0:33). A clear representation of "a central hierarchical command" is how Fort Hood Texas responded to the disappearance of Private Vanessa Guillen. The military base offered no information to her family who sought answers and turned to social media to help with the search. Vanessa Guillen went "missing" from Fort Hood, where she served as a soldier. There, she faced harassment and was killed by a former soldier. Before her disappearance Vanessa Guillen communicated to her family that she was being harassed and did not feel safe at Fort Hood. Guillen's mother and sisters voiced her fears in media outlets, understanding that something had indeed happened to Vanessa Guillen—and they demanded action.

Military official's discrepancy in their response and comments as well as the lack of urgency with respect to the disappearance of Vanessa Guillen contrast usual protocol. The military claimed she was absent without official leave (AWOL) on April 24, 2020, without thoroughly considering her previous claims of sexual assault. The military also failed to collect and analyze evidence of Guillen's encounters and belongings that were still at Fort Hood throughout her disappearance. The failure of Fort Hood to proactively investigate is now simply dismissed as "errors of accountability" within the military's Criminal Investigation Command (CID). As a result, her family alongside community members protested outside of Fort Hood asking for transparency in the search. Nonetheless, the dismissive treatment of the Guillen family reveals a larger issue: a patriarchal hierarchy entrenched within the United States military, as reflected in Fort Hood's broken system that disregarded the significance of Guillen's disappearance. In order to protect a governmental institution from accountability, the U.S.

military chose to scapegoat Guillen and her family, rather than admitting that their soldiers harassed her.

In line with scholar Belinda Rincon's premises Guillen's disappearance bolsters her claim and concern "to track how neoliberal militarism disciplines, regulates, and often destroys Chicana bodies and how these disciplined bodies are used to perpetuate the enduring gender constructs that enable warfare and its ideological underpinning, constructs that include patriotic mothers and devoted sisters, feminized citizenries and feminist soldiers" (8). The military, according to Rincon, uses the Chicana body as a marker to not only promote Latinas to join but when enlisted provide a failed sense of agency since their bodies continue to be used to divide, regulate, and discipline other soldiers. While the military was confronted by the Guillen family to look into the allegations made, they failed to do so not because the military did not have the capacity to do so but because the military was complicit to uphold their male imperial institution instilling preconceived notions of Vanessa Guillen, as AWOL. Absent without official leave shifts the blame of being absent to Vanessa Guillen rather than the military taking responsibility for her disappearance.

The military's approach and lack of efficiency when dealing with Latina women soldiers reproduces racial dynamics. To return to Lugones's *Coloniality and Gender*, I read how the military³¹ stands in for "the white colonizer" and its institutions of power and male privilege while the murderer now known as Aaron Robinson stands in for the "colonized men". Multiple soldiers and friends of Vanessa Guillen provided information to place Robinson as the main suspect; however, Robinson as an embodiment upholding the patriarchal military institution allowed him to hide in plain sight. It is important to clarify that I am not inscribing Robinson to

³¹ 14 army leaders fired or suspended following Guillen's investigation

be a white subject, I am however, arguing that as a hetero-male member of the United States Military he embodies societal norms which privilege his masculinity over Guillen's autonomy. Kimberlé Crenshaw brings forth the importance of drawing on identity politics and intersectionality to address gender and race. Crenshaw recalls the trial of Clarence Thomas who was accused by his former assistant Anita Hill for sexual assault. Both defendant and prosecutor shared an African American ethnicity and careers as American Lawyers. However, the outcome of Thomas being appointed a Supreme Court Judge magnified a fraternal alliance between Thomas and the all-white Senate who voted in favor of Thomas regardless of Hill's sexual harassment accusations. Clarence Thomas aware of his identity politics strategically used words associated with his male black identity (e.g. lynching) aiming to sway the white Senate in his favor while Anita Hill was questioned without remorse on live television about personal manners. Crenshaw writes,

This dilemma could be described as the consequence of antiracism's essentializing Blackness and feminism's essentializing womanhood. But recognizing as much does not take us far enough, for the problem is not simple linguistic or philosophical in nature. It is specifically political: the narratives of gender are based on the experience of white, middle-class women and the narratives of race are based on the experience of Black men (1299).

Anita Hill's experience was disregarded in a similar vein to Vanessa Guillen's accusations because they themselves do not fall into the parameters of "white, middle-class women," therefore not protected by society. This does not by any means mean that "white, middle-class women" do not endure gender violence, but instead that women of color's experiences of gender violence are more than likely to be condoned and normalized. Such is the case of Vanessa Guillen, as the stated by Criminal Investigation Division Senior Special Agent, Damon Phelps who claimed "[t]here has been no information and we've interviewed hundreds of people to

include all acquaintances and coworkers of Miss Guillen so there is no allegation whatsoever that she was sexually assaulted or harassed,” when minutes before the press conference Scott Ekklandi Fort Hood Commander had said that “each allegation of sexual assault or sexual harassment is fully investigated” in a way promising that Vanessa Guillen’s case was going to be investigated (*I am Vanessa Guillen* 30:10). How then can a hundred people be interviewed in a matter of minute as later communicated by Damon Phelps who clearly intends to reject allegations of sexual assault. The heteronormativity managed to shift the attention away from the military (Robinson) toward Guillen as a target, not necessarily to address her disappearance but to suggest that she had left on her own terms, like Anita Hill, who was questioned about her sexual behavior, questions that had no place, yet were meant to shift the blame toward the woman of color.

Clarence Thomas and Aaron Robinson despite being guilty of sexual assault they continue to be protected because of the way they have learned to navigate a white institution as males in power who can prey on women of color. In addition to being guilty they have access to institutional protection and are fully aware they have become the institution. They justify being part of this powerful fraternity to further perpetuate violence toward women of color. They have to a certain extent internalized the social gender norms of control and power despite their black identity. Mayra Guillén states in the *I Am Vanessa Guillen* documentary that when the police CID called on all the potential individuals who could have last encountered her sister Vanessa Guillén one stood out. Mayra recalled, “One guy, he literally looked at me and laughed, and then he left” she then continued by saying, “I started questioning myself, I was like, who is he? I learned that this was Robinson” (*I am Vanessa Guillen*, 18:00). Robinson had laughed at the family members who were there with CID to ask them about Vanessa Guillen. The uncanny

encounter experienced by Mayra Guillen and Vanessa Guillen's fiancé Juan Cruz further proves Robinson's confidence in the military's protection. Robinson in multiple instances can get away from the military base and navigate freely to dispose of any evidence against him, because the military is too busy creating a narrative to dismiss Vanessa Guillen's allegations. So much so that in a press conference the military denounces the allegations of Sexual Assault claiming that Vanessa Guillen had never gotten sexually or verbally assaulted. The conclusion of no harassment was based on Vanessa Guillen never feeling safe or credible enough to report her abuser(s), as close military friends of Vanessa Guillen recall the ones responsible for the assault were higher ranking officers, therefore in fear of retaliation there was a minimal paper trail.

Gender within the military serves to maintain social hierarchies both outside and within the military institution. Rincon writes that "enduring gender constructs that enable warfare and its ideological underpinning" resonates with scholar Anna Sampaio³²'s "gender logic for war", she argues George W. Bush used gender to wage war against Afghanistan and Iraq; stating "the Bush administration embodied the benevolent patriarchal intent on saving women and children" (Sampaio 25). After the events of 9/11, the Bush administration used two narratives to justify declaration of war on Iraq and Afghanistan. One narrative centered on "othering," portraying terrorists as distinct and foreign particularly Muslim people. The other narrative was "gender logic" declaring terrorists (men) violent while claiming that women needed to be saved, a savior complex as troops were deployed to the front lines. Similarly, Chris Finley argues that in narratives of conquest, Europeans depicted Indigenous men as non-masculine and uncivilized to justify colonization. In a parallel manner, the Bush administration used First Lady Laura Welch

³²In Ana Sampaio's book *Terrorizing Latina/o Immigrants: Race, Gender, and Immigration in the Age of Security* (2015) she argues that "gender logic" narratives are constructed to justify war. In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq it was to save women from being subjugated by the Taliban, this narrative accompanied by 9/11 justified the need to invade.

Bush to propagate the gender narrative that women and children in Iraq and Afghanistan needed protection from terrorists. To the United States gender has functioned to control territory and justify violence through othering. It is made evident by Sampaio that gender as a technology of control serves imperialist ideology by implementing a false narrative to justify violence imposed on other countries for the sake of women. However, despite this gender protection narrative, the United States failed to protect Vanessa Guillen within their own domestic borders within Fort Hood Military. In a similar fashion, the United States remains silent as more than “25,000 women and children”³³ have been murdered in Gaza.

#IamVanessaGuillen

The #IamVanessaGuillen movement, cemented a national witnessing of the United States failure to protect and uphold justice for Latina women even within the confined borders of a military base, Fort Hood, Texas. The murder of Vanessa Guillen proves that the discourses of protection and safety continue to be solely for an extended few, in most cases white men and those who uphold those social parameters of institutional control. The collective movement came about when the Guillen family searched for answers in the disappearance of Vanessa Guillen. As a result of multiple attempts to gain information on Vanessa Guillen’s disappearance, the family turned to protests outside of the base during a global pandemic and through social media. They gained visibility by protesting outside of the military base. Upon the discovery of Vanessa Guillen’s remains, the online presence resonated with countless women coming forward under the hashtag #IamVanessaGuillen, openly addressing the issue of sexual assault and gender violence within military ranks (Figure 2 and 3). Much like the #metoomovement, social media fostered solidarity, encouraging multiple women to disclose their experiences, seeing themselves

³³<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/more-than-25000-women-and-children-killed-in-gaza-us-defence-secretary>

reflected in Vanessa Guillen's story. Vanessa Guillen's tragic fate served as a catalyst for many to speak against feminicides, harassment, and sexual assault within the military.

Additionally, the momentum gained from this *critical witnessing* through protest and social media equipped the Guillen sisters and Natalie Khawam, the family attorney, to pressure the Biden Administration through legislature. In December 2021, President Biden signed the I Am Vanessa Guillen Act, which guarantees protection for all military personnel reporting instances of sexual harassment or assault, free from any retaliation. Under this act, all reported cases will be investigated by an independent service member (entity). Moreover, this legislation extends prosecution authority for murder, kidnapping, domestic violence, and child abuse, ensuring all military personnel regardless of ethnicity, sex, and gender can feel safe coming forward.

Entre Todas Las Mujeres



Figure 1 Photo credit: Chris Cantoya

Mural designed and created by Adriana M. Garcia and Ana Laura Hernandez with help from

Rudy Herrera

Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural [*Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural*] is a mural painted in 1631 S. Laredo St. San Antonio TX 78207 at Chico Boys Fruit Market. This mural pays tribute to Vanessa Guillen's family while symbolizing the community's *critical witnessing* of the tragedy and injustice inflicted by the United States military, expressed collectively through visual representation as a means of coping. In contrast to other murals created to memorialize the death of Vanessa Guillen, this one includes her family's portraits. Other murals painted in her honor feature the Mexican Flag, the United States Flag, her in uniform, flowers, angel wings, and one even of her as a high school soccer player. *Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural* [*Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural*] from left to right showcases Vanessa Guillen's mother with a background of the Mexican flag hand raised showing a rosary. Her mother Gloria Guillen is wearing a Virgin Mary t-shirt, and her facial expression communicates prayer, agony, and a cry for justice from the perspective of a mother's loss. In the center, Vanessa Guillen is featured in her U.S. military uniform with a background of the United States flag on one side with monarch butterflies on the other and overlapping cacti behind each shoulder angling toward her family members. Although the monarch butterflies are on Vanessa Guillen's right side as a background there is a single butterfly that is sitting on Vanessa Guillen's left shoulder showing the fluidity between both sides. Beneath Vanessa Guillen there are candles as well as flowers (sunflowers and daisies) with a banner that reads "JUSTICE FOR VANESSA GUILLEN: daughter, sister, and friend". The candles detail the names of other fallen soldiers who have lost their lives at Fort Hood Military base drawing attention to the failed military institution. On the right side of the mural, we see Vanessa Guillen's younger sister Lupe Guillen wearing a white t-shirt with red lettering that

reads: “MISSING: Vanessa Guillen, Fort Hood Texas” with a megaphone in hand. Behind her there is a banner that reads: “I WILL BE YOUR VOICE” that resonates with Lupe Guillen’s face showing emotions of anger, empowerment, and unrest. Both Gloria and Lupe’s outcries resonate deeply with the community’s need for a physical presence in this corner market, but also nationally.

The mural presents Vanessa Guillen as a symbol of martyrdom and her mother’s weeping with the religious symbols (rosary and a Virgen de Guadalupe t-shirt) showing devotion to hope through prayer. However, this mural also provokes opposite reactions from her mother and from her sister. Deena J. Gonzalez and Ellie D. Hernandez’s chapter on “Latina/o Gender and Sexuality” explains that gender roles as well as sexuality were means to control natives in the “new world” during the process of colonization. “Sexual promiscuity is central to the virgin/whore or martyr/witch dichotomies,” they continue, by stating “mainstream culture exploits this notion in advertising in the media, underscoring Latinas hypersexuality, or availability for sex” (186). The mother and sister placement in opposite sides of Vanessa Guillen communicate this clash in dichotomies where on the one hand Latina women are meant to be religious, pious, and docile like a mother figure, while on the other, Lupe Guillen represents a more chaotic approach of being in public demanding justice verbally and physically exposing herself representing a more witch approach than a traditional approach. Regardless of their placement, I would argue that despite the mother’s religious symbols her stance is an active one failing the clear dichotomy of docility. Both Gloria and Lupe Guillens’ facial expressions convey they are actively speaking, therefore both holding space and agency within the mural. Gonzalez and Hernandez explained the dichotomy between the passive docile behavior of Guillen’s mother, who was dressed in a Virgen de Guadalupe t-shirt, and the rebellious insubordination of Guillen’s sister, who was

dressed in a protest shirt and holding a megaphone, surrounded by protest signs. In the mural, all depicted women demand justice as their facial expressions are active and Gloria Guillen and Mayra Guillen both hold objects that allude to verbal actions (a rosary for prayer and a megaphone for protest). The portraits of the women's active stance opens the binary of whore (rebel) and virgin (docile) as both family members are in opposition to Vanessa Guillen. The traditional ties as well as this binary allows space to discuss how Latina women are perceived in society. Drawing on the novel *God Go Begging* (1999) analyzed in chapter one, Vía Jr. writes, "She [Malinche] was the Indian woman who became Cortez's sugar mama. She cooked for him, gave him kids, and incidentally, helped him to betray and annihilate her own people" (116). Malinche's betrayal during conquest within Chicana/o Latine communities is understood as the first woman who betrayed her own people; however, what many fail to note is that she was forced into this position. Regardless of this omission, this narrative communicates that Indigenous women, now also encompassing Latina women, represent "sexual promiscuity" capable of betrayal. Although the community does not see Vanessa Guillen as a Latina being sexually promiscuous, the fact of the matter is that the process of colonization was still evident as the U.S. Army dismissed the Guillen family's allegations of sexual assault and ignored the femicide that took place. The military's failure to acknowledge sexual assault perpetrates a systemic hierarchy whereas Black, Indigenous, and Latina women fall to the bottom because men are protected by a patriarchal system, as will be further unpacked in the TV series analyzed later.

The mural functions as a memorial space that addresses the families' awareness of the atrocities committed by the U.S. military, evident by the Guillen women. The mural can then be understood as a layered contestation that makes visible multiple voices and collective

memorializing rather than just depicting Vanessa Guillen's public death; the symbols in the mural deconstruct religion, power, and gender through a new trilogy. This trilogy empowers women, affirming that Vanessa's death is not in vain. It declares that despite such violent narratives toward Latinas, women deserve justice, a voice, and agency to assert their rights regardless of race, class, and citizenship.

The mural was created by two Chicana muralists Adriana M. Garcia and Ana Laura Hernandez who firmly believe that through art there is activism. In a podcast interview on *¿Qué means What?* Adriana M. Garcia says that this mural is her "offering to her (Vanessa Guillen's) family and to the women in our community". The mural is a portrait of Vanessa Guillen with her U.S. Army uniform alongside her mom and sister both of whom are asking for justice for Vanessa Guillen. The muralists recall that unlike any other mural, this mural was designed and created urgently (one weekend) through collective community money, ideas, and women's labor. The nopales (cacti) are "almost like wings" a representation of the people... they are resilient; they can grow anywhere' ' and define her "mexicanidad," Adriana M. Garcia explains. It is also important to home in on the title: *Entre todas las mujeres* echos the common Hail Mary prayer within Latino communities,

Dios te salve, María, llena eres de gracia, el Señor está contigo.
Bendita tú eres entre todas las mujeres, y bendito es el fruto de tu
vientre, Jesús. Santa María, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros,
pecadores, ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte.
[Translation: Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy
womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now
and at the hour of our death.] Amen.

Entre Todas Las Mujeres: A Vanessa Guillen Mural [Among all the women: A Vanessa Guillen Mural] is a very common prayer expressing gratitude for Mary who carries Jesus within her, hence "the fruit of thy womb". Mary in a sense act selflessly through her physical body as she

became Jesus's mother. Mary because of her sacrifice is virtuous and is asked in the last part of this prayer "to pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death", as she can provide blessings for the people who are trying to live and die in peace. As previously discussed by scholars Gonzalez and Hernandez regarding Latina women's bodies, this mural heavily incorporates matriarchal Latina traditional values. The title communicates that the Guillen family is selfless, the mural depicts women as selfless, constantly striving and serving their communities. Selflessness on the one hand can be understood as "docile" or "subjugated" since you are always placed in a position of service and sacrifice; however, selflessness can also be understood as powerful in that you are strong willed, capable of controlling and establishing foundational relationalities through actions. Vanessa Guillen death is not in vain, her mother Gloria and sisters made sure of that through activism and collectivity forcing everyone to *critically witness* Vanessa Guillen's martyrdom. This mural created by women and for women, also amplifies women's empowerment through iconography of La Virgen de Guadalupe, Mary, and women solidarity in times of struggle.

Since 1555 La Virgen de Guadalupe has been an image that occupies various subject positions socially, politically, and culturally. For example, Miguel Sánchez in *Imagen de la Virgen Maria Madre de Dios Guadalupe* [Image of the Virgin Mary Mother of God Guadalupe] (1648) accounts the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe to an "Indian name Juan Diego" prior to Sanchez "evangelizers" in an effort to evangelize indigenous communities were also complicit in the creation of the Virgen de Guadalupe as an idol to stand in for the church while at the same time Tonantzin the indigenous peoples pagan beliefs (Gruzinski, 120). Regardless of the use of the image by the church, priests, and early scholars the outcome always resulted in controversy as this idol did not exist before colonization within the church. Thus, the Virgen de Guadalupe

challenged traditional notions of religion brought by the Spanish during the conquest, through the interpretations by and for the public that received the “miraculous image apparition” as something worth believing (supernatural).

Fast forward to Alma Lopez’s *Our Lady* (1999) which takes on the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe to communicate women’s empowerment, autonomy, and sexuality through a digital rendition. The use of the Virgen de Guadalupe with minimal clothing, active stance, and the angel’s nudity brought discomfort to the Catholic church and other masculine counterparts. “Alma López had to take a stand against another trinity of church fathers—an archbishop, a deacon, and a chaplain—who were all beset with the notion that a 14" × 17.5" digital collage in a museum had magically transformed itself into an irreverent apparition of La Virgen de Guadalupe” (Gaspar de Alba, 1). For Alma Lopez, the Virgen de Guadalupe represents Chicana empowerment attributed to resilience of women in Mexico as well as Mexican American descent who continue to be resilient through female empowerment. Similar to *Entre todas las mujeres*, this digital image’s public debut in the Santa Fe Museum draws attention to women finding visibility/ orality through visual representations that cause discomfort, failing to reinscribe gender notions that completely intend to control women of color. Even so, as the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe did in 1555 when it was used to evangelize Indian, mestizos, and the masses the Virgin iconography is reclaimed through community activism. As aforementioned, the prayer communicates a blessing and a burden of seeking blessings and acting selflessly for women. The mural itself can be read as a prayer to a powerful entity/ institution, urging justice for the women. Its creation, driven by women’s activism³⁴, provided support to the community through public visibility on matters of gendered violence.

³⁴ "The term activism is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism" (Sandoval, Latorre 2008).

The religious prayer, a triptych, and popular iconography also serves as a coping mechanism for community members that rely on hope and community to carry on. Regardless of the reproduction of gender roles this prayer echoes a sense of community in the sense that it argues that no one is ever alone; someone is always there to *witness* your pain and death. The importance of the mural within community spaces as not only a coping mechanism but as a life practice that as Adriana M Garcia argues allows for self-representation because in “[n]ot seeing ourselves reflected in schools, tv., ads... so we said ``let's take a wall”. Murals then, can be read as a legacy of collective movements that provide a strong form of representation that witnesses and reads the community as one's own.

Chicana/o Muralism

The mural, “Entre todas las mujeres,” created by Chicana artist Adriana M. Garcia, Ana Laura Hernandez, and the help of Rudy Herrera, pays tribute to Vanessa Guillen. The artist collaborated with the community to determine what was needed in the space at this time, which was a permanent space to hold a memorial for Guillen. Adriana M. Garcia and Ana Laura Hernandez led the mural project alongside female community organizers who understood the importance of empowering women, especially through something like a mural. Murals are often marked by male dominance; however, this mural was intended for remembrance and to showcase women's autonomy. Muralist Michelle Ruby in a podcast interview on “Creative Mind” communicated that her alias Mr. B Baby stands for Michelle Ruby Brown. Yet it also served as a strategy to introduce herself in public art since murals are often male dominated. Michelle Ruby Brown recalls “I kind of made that name because I didn’t want anyone to know that I was a girl, originally. Now that is a mistake. I am happy for people to know that I am a girl. You know it actually comes in handy, because there are not a lot of women doing it. Male dominated for

sure”. Shifra M. Goldman's article titled “Mexican Muralism: Its Social-Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States” explains that murals were sought after by the government through the New Deal era (1933-1943) by Franklin D. Roosevelt. This program was an attempt to move forward by helping poor communities through financial shift, education, and art. Murals in public spaces proposed the idea of unification like the Mexican Muralism post Mexican Revolution (1920s) which encouraged a national visualization of progress. “The *tres grandes* (Big Three) of the Mexican mural movement,” Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros all managed to showcase their Mexican Muralist skills within the United States through the creation of murals such as Diego Rivera’s *Man at the Crossroads* (1930 Rockefeller Center NY, Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City), Jose Clemente Orozco *Prometheus* (1930 Pomona California), *América Tropical* (1932) by David Alfaro Siqueiros. Siqueiros *América Tropical*, in contrast to the other two Mexican muralists, managed to be the first to depict this art form in public on an ordinary wall rather than it being a college or commercial space. What “los tres grandes” managed to do was bring forth a cultural art form to voice political concerns and ideologies for larger masses to understand despite being paid by capitalistic families like Nelson Rockefeller. Art was and is a means to inform injustices transnationally, becoming more popular in the 1960s in rural urban public spaces. Another crucial aspect at this time is the fact that those who were considered the leading Mexican muralists were indeed men, who reproduced gender norms in their art practice as well as in their personal life. Regardless of their toxic masculinity, they opened the artistic world to other brown folks. *Entre todas la mujeres* (2020 Texas) cements yet another mural dedicated to the masses as Goldman writes, “The enduring works are those reinterpreted for each society’s needs; the original context is invariably lost in a short time or across any distance. Art—except on a formal, decorative level perhaps—is neither eternal nor

universal; it functions in a time-space continuum and is assigned a new meaning in a new framework” (176). Contrary to “The *tres grandes* (Big Three)” in the 1960s during the Chicano Movement Chicano Muralism was at its peak inciting political views and Mexican American pride on public walls. In 1974 Judith F. Baca Chicana muralist brought the community together through a mural program in Los Angeles where she painted murals such as her *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1978). Baca’s collective approach deeply resonates with Adriana M. Garcia, Ana Laura Hernandez and Michelle Ruby Brown who use art as a medium to communicate heritage and community voices. The mural provides an outlet to *critical witnessing* of what the community needs. *Entre Todas Las Mujeres* addresses the community by showcasing strong women’s fight for justice through the life practice of memorials, food, gathering, and mobilizing all of which provide visibility to a failed military institution. The mural projects symbols of cultural references that rely on Vanessa Guillen’s “mexicanidad,” but also engages with voices that counter dichotomies of what women are meant to project, entail, and define. The public access to this mural place these women in conversation with recognizable binary tropes of the whore/virgin construct, and through the visual representation one can understand that those binaries are larger than oppositions, and indeed oppositions do coexist publicly. The mural is a public visual representation that serves as a form of witnessing encouraging community interaction as the faces of each of the family members evoke action and pain, yet it also allows a space to intimately witness those who might resonate more deeply with gender violence. Adriana M. Garcia recalled that this mural is her *ofrenda* (an altar) to women through the memorializing of Vanessa Guillen. The muralist recalls community and women coming together to eat and care for each other throughout the process. These life-making practices radicalize collectivity, being insurgent as they create a mural depicting a crucial atrocity committed by the U.S. military.

Rather than the mural portraying racialized, exploitable, and sexualized subjects the mural allows Latina women's narratives to be strong through the resilience in the Guillen family and the community's ability to come together to plan and execute the creation of a permanent space through the mural, nevertheless during a global pandemic.

Other Forms of Militarization

Beyond the military institution, the United States policies of Latina subjects through law enforcement and homeland security. In this section, I aim to draw on Martha D. Escobar who states “[i]n other words the role of the state in creating the conditions that not only make possible, but also probable, the violation of (im)migrant women gets erased when individuals carry out violence” and Cecilia Menjivar who argues that,

The immigration system operates on many of the same principles and deploys similar tactics that we see in other social control institutions such as prisons and other criminal justice programs (Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1961; Staples, 1991, 2014). Foucault (1977, p. 135) argued that the goal of discipline in these institutions is to create “docile bodies”— mute, obedient, and pliable individuals who have been subjected, used, and transformed through a regiment of disciplinary acts (186).

Both scholars address the state through which social control institutions such as Fort Hood military base analyzed prior, create sanctioned power dynamics rooted in the preying of “docile bodies”. In contrast to Vanessa Guillen, the *critical witnessing* provided by a television series will unravel yet another condition Latina/o women face: legal status. Undocumented women “are rendered vulnerable to violence and premature death through racialized and gendered combination of biopolitics and necropolitics” (Escobar, 100). While all the women examined in this chapter experience scrutiny, violence, and sexualization, the *critical witnessing* of undocumented women through a visual representation reveals intersecting social control mechanisms that reproduce conditions of rape, oppression, and subjugation.

Chicana/o Latine Visual Representation on TV Series

In recent years, the issues regarding immigration have become hypervisible in a digital age. Popular shows on television can be binge watched through streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, Peacock, and HBO with a monthly membership and access to the internet. Drawing parallel to society's conversation around immigration experiences, certain shows amplify the importance of these issues, yet sometimes, the focus on these narratives merely caters to audience consumption of the Latina/o subject (Dávila 2012). In a 2019 USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative report out of 1,300 films only 6.2% of the leading roles/ characters could be identified as Hispanic/ Latino descent (Halthman). The absence of visual representation for Chicana/o Latine communities in television and movies is glaring. When such representation does exist, it often falls into tropes of sexualization, criminalization, and racialization, all catering to consumption. These roles, created solely for onscreen performance, are too often perceived and internalized as mere narratives. This disconnects viewers from the complex realities of immigrant communities, especially when writers and producers fail to develop lead Chicana/o Latine characters.

This lack of representation is evident in various media portrayals. For instance, in *13 Reasons Why* (2017), (season three episode six) the character of Tony Padilla, a Latine adolescent's family, gets picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). His family is deported leaving him and his little sister Graciela behind. The only reason the protagonist Clayton Jensen the protagonist realizes that his "best friend's" family has been deported is that he becomes aware that Tony Padilla's red Mustang happens to be in the possession of the antagonist Bryce Walker. When Tony's neighbor Alejandro tells Clay Jensen "a friend that doesn't know where his friend lives," it underscores the secondary status assigned to Tony

Padilla's character. Additionally, the series inscribes the Latino character as angry and violent when some footballers label Tony as "a scary guy," "a thug," "a faggot," suggesting that he "sometimes loses it," disregarding the difficult circumstances he has had to endure as a high school student.

Another example is *Orange is the New Black* (2013) season seven episode three "Brown is the New Orange," draws on the characters of Blanca Flores and Maritza Ramos to depict the detention center's corporate connection to the prison industrial complex, particularly for women of color. The episode touches on communication barriers, lack of space and resources allocated for undocumented people in detention centers, and dehumanization practices as detainees are expected to know nothing, do nothing, and have nothing. Another crucial issue is differentiation between undocumented women that have been detained for entering the United States unlawfully and undocumented women who additionally have served in federal prison. Although they are all being detained for having no legal status within the United States, an "illegal offense," the character of Karla Córdova, a Salvadoran widow migrant who has been separated from her citizen children, still has a negative perception over Blanca Flores for being formerly unjustly imprisoned. The episodes that follow attempt to unfold these three women's story lines; however the main storyline of Piper Chapman continuously is embedded within all episodes, the constant shift back to these narratives reminds the audience that this television series is still *Orange is the New Black*, all about Piper Kerman's perspective. A white woman who in this final season is struggling to feel adrenaline after being released from prison. This juxtaposition from women facing removal (survival) without legal representation, family separations, rape, and persecution to Piper Chapman's issues of sexual self-pleasure, what to wear to charity gala, and staying sober dismisses yet again the injustices faced by Latinas. *Orange is the New Black* and *13 Reasons*

Why fail to adequately represent Chicana/o Latine experiences, as they only superficially address immigration issues, often as a trend rather than as someone's livelihood. Additionally, the main character's dilemmas may not captivate the audience as much as the first season, which tends to be the case when you prolong storylines for the final season of the series.

The *Chicago Police Department* (PD) television series was created by Dick Wolf and Matt Olmstead, first premiering on January 8, 2014. Dick Wolf is known for television series such as *Law & Order* (1990), *Chicago Fire* (2012), *Chicago Med* (2015), *FBI* (2018), and *FBI Most Wanted* (2020) all of which showcase law enforcement in the metropolitan cities of New York and Chicago whose leading characters are white men and women. As part of the Wolf Entertainment franchise, *Chicago PD* is written to engage a wide array of audiences drawn to the thriller and action genre the television series provides. Unlike *Orange is the New Black* and *13 Reasons Why*, *Chicago PD's* season 5, Episode 3, titled "Promise" written by Michael Brandt, Derek Haas, and Dick Wolf and directed by John Whitesell, it is important to recognize that white mainstream media writers have, to some extent, become proficient at portraying narratives of violence. However, even within these portrayals, we can discern various layers, particularly by analyzing them through a gendered lens. As aforementioned by Lugones "as colonized men were coopted into patriarchal roles," colonized men in this case Chicana/o Latine with certain privileges coopt patriarchal roles of punishment onto Latina women as it is condoned by the state, in this case through the metrics of access to citizenship. In this instance, the episode still provides a crucial *critical witnessing* in that the lead characters and points of view account for Antonio Dawson and his daughter Eva Dawson both of Dominican descent are rendered primary to the episode which is analyzed later in this chapter.

Another example of center women narratives and undocumented women stories is January 2024, Chicago PD's season eleven episode three "Safe Harbor" communicates the perspective of Kim Burgess who witnesses a Venezuelan refugee Raquel Bolivar get murdered in a drive-by shooting. As the investigation continues Burgess notices some discrepancies in officer Danny Alvarado, a decorated U.S. veteran who comes from a legacy of police officers. As the lead investigator, Burgess allows officer Alvarado to assist the investigation because he says that this case is personal to him, alluding to his Chicano/Latino ethnicity. The first suspect is James Pleasant a white supremacist national who claims he is "guilty of defending his nation from these parasites" while he stares at Officer Alvarado in the interrogation room. Alvarado, offended, violently grabs Pleasant, forcing Burgess to remove Alvarado from the room. Up until this point Alvarado is portrayed as empathetic to the murdered woman however as the episode continues Burgess discovers that officer Alvarado is the perpetrator that hired a local hitman to shoot Raquel Bolivar because she is expecting his child. Alvarado's strategy of helping the case is with the intention to mislead the investigation making sure he is not found guilty.

This episode discusses immigration and local authorities as complicit to larger structural issues through a gender perspective being critical to intersectionality and power dynamics that grant detective Kim Burgess authority to navigate the 'justice' system as a "total institution" or "closed institutional systems" where men at both the state and the federal levels use blindspots to violently abuse women of color. In "*Safe Harbor*", the local police officer Danny Alvarado abuses his authority and veteran status to sexually assault refugee women. It is later known that additionally to this sexual offense he forced Raquel Bolivar's friend Gabriela Baez to watch as he violently abused now deceased Raquel Bolivar. Although he intended to further intimidate these refugee women, he failed to see how these witnesses formed a *critical witnessing* coalition

that led to his demise. Both the racialized practices to communicate empathy to the refugees through culture and language characteristics further isolates himself from the power dynamics he has access to; however, fails to account for witnesses that refuse to silence his abuse of power.

“Docile Subjects”: Military, Police, and Homeland Security Same Difference

“Sexual Violence as an Occupational Hazard & Condition of Confinement in the Closed Institutional Systems of the Military and Detention” by Hannah Brenner, Kathleen Darcy, and Sheryl Kubiak draws attention to sexual assault within “closed systems” due to legal and social complicit gender behavior that normalizes and condones gender violence. They write:

Sexual violence is prevalent in closed systems in part due to the lack of external oversight, as well as the power imbalance inherent in the hierarchy of these systems, and the existence of a tightly knit protective culture. The system will assume a "state-like" role in members' lives where the internal structures and processes are the primary and initial governing body, supplanting civilian law and policy. These systems are self-governing, with a complex and often self-created set of policies and procedures, as well as a detailed and highly constraining set of informal norms that govern appropriate behavior (891).

Power imbalances in “closed systems” that normalize gender violence due to “a tightly knit protective culture” allows the criminalization and sexualization of women shifting the blame on the women, in this case Latinas more so placing them in the bottom of hierarchy structure if the women are undocumented. In *Chicago P.D.* the women were Latin American refugees that experience gender violence and femicide within the United States as an aftermath of self-governing of “closed systems” that intend to further remove and punish their gender bodies.

Promise

Chicago P.D. Season 5, Episode 3, “Promise” starts off with Antonio Dawson, a Dominican detective and his daughter Eva Dawson as they walk while discussing Eva’s college application essay. Eva says, “my counselor said I should write about being a Latina and the

obstacles,” Antonio responds “that’s a good one” Eva continues, “I think it's BS but if it helps me get into Northwestern or Brown” Antonio frustrated communicates, “Wait you don’t think there are obstacles for Latinos? Antonio takes a breath before saying, “I’m not mad I just don’t want you to forget who you are and where you come from that's it” forcing Eva to acknowledge her Latina identity. Antonio is called to a crime scene and tells his daughter to wait in the car. Antonio meets his partner a white female detective who is accompanied by Jerry, an older white male homicide detective who says, “they took the drugs out of her system, and threw out the trash”. Eva (Antonio’s daughter) overhears the white male homicide detective referring to Gloria Morales' corpse as trash. Gloria Morales was a Central American undocumented woman who was brutally found gutted in an alley. Eva *critically witnesses* this murder by seeing the corpse and overhearing the homicide detective’s negative comments. Upon realizing Eva’s witnessing, Antonio attempts to move Eva away, disgusted by the insensitive language used by the white detective, Eva confronts Antonio, by saying “you just said that it is our job to help other Latinos.” As she recalls the previous conversation where Antonio reminded Eva to not forget her Latina identity and the obstacles Latinas face. Antonio recognizes that Eva is right and chooses to take on the murder case, fully aware of the initial presumption linking Gloria’s corpse to the cartel. As the episode carries on, Antonio's superior sergeant Hank Voight looks annoyed when the case is presented back in the police station. Antonio understands the complexity of the case, murders at the hands of cartel members often present numerous obstacles. Any cartel member could be tasked with carrying out a murder, adding to the difficulty. Furthermore, the corruption cartels have managed within large institutions, driven by greed and fear, complicates matters further by jeopardizing witnesses and evidence. Despite these challenges, Antonio remains

adamant in his decision because of his daughter's critical witnessing of Gloria Morales' corpse in the alley and the subsequent comments made by the other detective.

Eva's *critical witnessing* shifts the episode from another drug related homicide to humanizing and contextualizing Gloria Morales as an undocumented woman from Guatemala. In this turn of events, the victim is treated differently, rather than just a "drug mule" as initially understood by the detectives. As the investigation unravels, the narration calls attention to the character of Gloria Morales, sister of Lucia Morales and a mother to Oscar Morales. Both Lucia and Gloria worked for the same meat packaging company on opposite schedules, allowing for each of them to look after Oscar. Looking for more evidence of who Gloria was, Antonio's Intelligence Unit seeks out a Sinaloa cartel informant. Following the informant's instructions of how drug mules are transported leads them to capture Gustavo, a member of the Sinaloa cartel picking up a young drug mule. After Gustavo is caught and detained Antonio's intelligence unit interrogates and presents him with pictures of Gloria Morales asking him if he knew who she was. As Gustavo analyzes the images, he states that she (Gloria) was too old to fit the mule profile but also that the incision inflicted on her abdomen was intended to dismember her not to remove drugs. Gustavo explains that when the cartel has to cut up women for drugs, they cut the stomach vertically to get the drugs out safely, not so much with concern for the person but for the drugs. In Gloria's case, however, her abdomen was cut horizontally and the forensic reports that Gloria was not killed by this incision but rather by strangulation after being raped. These violent acts would have been overlooked if Eva had not pressured her dad to take the case. Latina women, as the white detective stated are seen as "trash," punishable by men within the United States as previously seen with Vanessa Guillen. Scholar Eithne Luibhéid's book *Entry Denied*:

Controlling Sexuality at the Border (2002) considers the issues of gender violence when using sexual assault as a tool of control. Luibhéid writes:

Since rape is a technology for (re)producing hierarchical social relationships, it reconstructs borders. These borders are not reducible to the nation's territorial borders, however. Instead, they involve social economic, political, psychological and symbolic borders within the United States that connect to sexuality, gender, race, and class inequalities (129-130).

As Luibhéid states, rape has the effect of erasing boundaries; “national borders” or demarcated urban areas. Therefore, femicide transcends these spaces of confinement, challenging borders revealing preconceived notions about racialized gender identities that cannot be understood without power dynamics. The violence inflicted onto the Latina bodies exposes these power structures, unveiling a normalized culture of violence against women persisting within the United States. The violence extends not only to Latina women serving as U.S. soldiers but also to undocumented women. As Luibhéid articulates, gender violence seems to seep through “social economic, political, psychological and symbolic borders” and has managed to be normalized because of the negative inscriptions that feed into justifiable tactics against women for the sake of instilling fear, division, and control. The normalization of such violence is seen through the white detective's description of the violent scene of a corpse by saying “taking out the trash” a relatively daily task, and the lack of empathy toward the murdered women shows a parallel in how undocumented Latina women are seen as disposable.

Nevertheless, undocumented Latina women experience sexual assault in the workplace. “The *San Francisco Chronicle* also noted that farmworker advocates have long complained about sexual exploitation of women workers by foremen, who have broad power to hire and fire individual laborers each season” (Luibhéid 131). Gloria Morales's rape and murder show that

immigration policies reproduce a vicious cycle of exploitation, given that in the episode it is the owner, John Bukowski who 'self-reports' the crime calling in an ICE raid when he finds out that his son Michael Bukowski was romantically involved with Gloria Morales. John Bukowski's action reiterates the nuances of disposability that surround undocumented communities. He offers to pay for Gloria Morales's funeral cost to alleviate the family; however, when it comes to business and his son being a potential suspect, he shows how little empathy he actually has. Nepotism and money make him react in a capitalistic self-serving way. During this raid Lucia Morales is taken and deported back to Guatemala as a felon because she had been caught crossing the border once before, leaving Oscar her nephew to enter the system of Child Protective Services. Although Michael is not responsible for the murder of Gloria, John Bukowski voices that there are "thousands of meaningless policies" he himself can avoid through his insurance and lawyer. Mr. John Bukowski exemplifies what A. Naomi Paik states in *Bans, Wall, Raids, Sanctuary: Understanding U.S. Immigration for the Twenty First Century* (2020); "[i]ndeed, neoliberal policies [and immigration policies] exacerbate a paradoxical relationship created by the free movement of capital and the restricted movement of people" (12). U.S. capital in this case is represented by Bukowski who raids his own company caring more about profits and his son rather than justice and the people that work for him. Through the Bukowski family we can see how corporate money is viewed as more important than seeking justice for Gloria who was their employee. The case shows how undocumented women are often placed in deplorable circumstances for the well-being of a white cisgender male. If the white patriarch per se is protected, all others who can be hurt by gender violence, in this case in the form of deportation, become collateral damage. In short, the company cares more about

protecting the company, and the family name, rather than the safety or well-being of the people who make the company run daily.

In the end, the murderer is found to be “latino, fat, and bald” as Oscar (Gloria’s son) describes the man who he saw giving his mother a ride. This man is Frank Lopez, the driver of the meat packaging company who, aware of the fear undocumented people have toward police and other authorities, took advantage of numerous undocumented Latina women. Frank Lopez in his interrogation says, “I give lots of illegals rides” Antonio tells him “You were born in Mexico” and Lopez says “ I came when I was little and I did it the right way” Antonio asks “Why do you hate our people so much” Lopez responds “She/They violate our laws if she would have stayed she would still be alive.” Through this interrogation what is clear is the internalized hate Frank Lopez has projected onto undocumented people but more specifically against undocumented women. As Martha D. Escobar points out “for immigrant women, the border imprints their bodies as enemies of the nation who need to be punished, and in some cases, killed. This transformative moment obscures the lines, not only between the interpersonal and the state, but also between nation-states” (Escobar,120). Lopez by stating that Gloria violated the United States laws by coming ‘illegally’ from her nation-state (Guatemala) no longer is able to seek protection from that country, thereby, granting the United States, here represented by Lopez (taking it upon himself) as a “citizen,” the right to punish Gloria. His construction of the bad and good immigrants showcases how laws create a hierarchy which further control Chicana/o Latine communities into racialized and gendered subjects. Undocumented women’s bodies are racialized to serve as an example for other migrants who are potentially going to cross, warning them of the danger of becoming ‘bad’ immigrants, women are viewed as problematic because “immigrant women’s presence disrupts this ideal [the sojourner and exploitable migrant] since

their bodies represent reproduction and settlement” (103). As Martha D. Escobar states, it is their threat to reproduce and settle via the possibility of bearing children that poses a threat to a white hegemonic system of governing. This racialized gender assumption is what allowed the killer to get away with not only Gloria Morales’s murder but that of five other undocumented women. “These rapes serve as technologies that violently reinscribe social hierarchies of sexuality, gender, race, class, and legal status -- not only at the border but also in workplaces and homes within the United States territory” (Luibhéid,133). Vanessa Guillen and Gloria Morales both endured sexual assault before their untimely deaths, their social standing placing them within broader system of oppression. Guillen faced the institutional dynamics of the military, while Morales encountered the failures of a legislative system within a corporation, which perpetuated criminalization and sexualization of the Latina body. Aaron Robinson, Guillen’s assailant, used his position of power as Guillen’s superior to inflict violence. Similarly, Frank Lopez used a narrative of hate, xenophobia, and sexism to justify the murder of Morales. In the end, the authorities do not have sufficient evidence to charge Frank Lopez for the murder of Gloria given that the system as well as the narratives are reproduced and condoned by larger systems of a colonial understanding that gender can be used as a tool to inflict control. Frank Lopez’s understanding of the vulnerable position in which the United States places undocumented women uses it to his advantage to get away with murder and rape. Latina women are targeted due to societal narratives and stereotypes, especially undocumented women. This is evident in the case of Aaron Robinson, whom the military failed to arrest despite being the last person seen with Guillen. Robinson and Frank Lopez used their power within a hetero-patriarchal system that condones and normalizes the violence toward Latinas to ultimately get away. Although, to a certain extent Eva’s critical witnessing did lead her father to seek justice for Gloria and create a

sense of community as they finally were able to note that Frank was a serial killer that accounted for other neighborhood murders the legal system failed Gloria like Vanessa Guillen. The failure of both the military institution and the legal system to grant justice to both Latinas is not necessarily because the writers choose to make the murderer Latino to perpetuate anti-immigrant sentiment, but rather because the rhetoric valuing Latina women has been normalized by the state. *Critical witnessing* allows these layered acts of violence to become visible, for Vanessa Guillen through “communal kinships” found in organizing, for the mini-series it was Eva recognizing her identity and the other neighborhood families being able to cope because they finally had answers to what had happened.

Conclusion

This chapter homes in on visual representations to demarcate the importance of *critically witnessing* Latinas’ deaths. The femicide abroad and within the United States can no longer be normalized by institutions that blame the sexualization and criminalization of Latina women on the women. Through depictions in murals and a television episode, it becomes evident how insurgency revolves around collective efforts to challenge injustices, refuse silence, and break away from institutions to seek justice. Despite the continual restrictions imposed on Latina bodies, often characterized as docile, victimized, and vulnerable, life-affirming practices such as “communal kinships” formed as a reaction to *critical witnessing* are crucial. These practices, which focus on nourishment and advocacy for justice, are essential in dispelling the common misconception of sexualization, racialization and exploitation of Latinas. Viewing these visual representations in juxtaposition showcase how Latinas’ *critical witnessing* can be catalyzed as insurgent. Although the iconography depicted in these visual representations tends to remind us of binaries that place Latina subjects within society as marginalized. *Critical witnessing* as an

analytic demystifies the layered tropes of sexualization, traditions, citizenship, and dependance to highlight how women are intentionally working collectively to counter femicide fighting for justice and equality for all despite legal status. All visual representations draw clear that the rhetoric tied to gender violence requires a deeper scrutinizing of “closed institutions” and men of color who have become the scapegoats for reproducing these notions of violence.

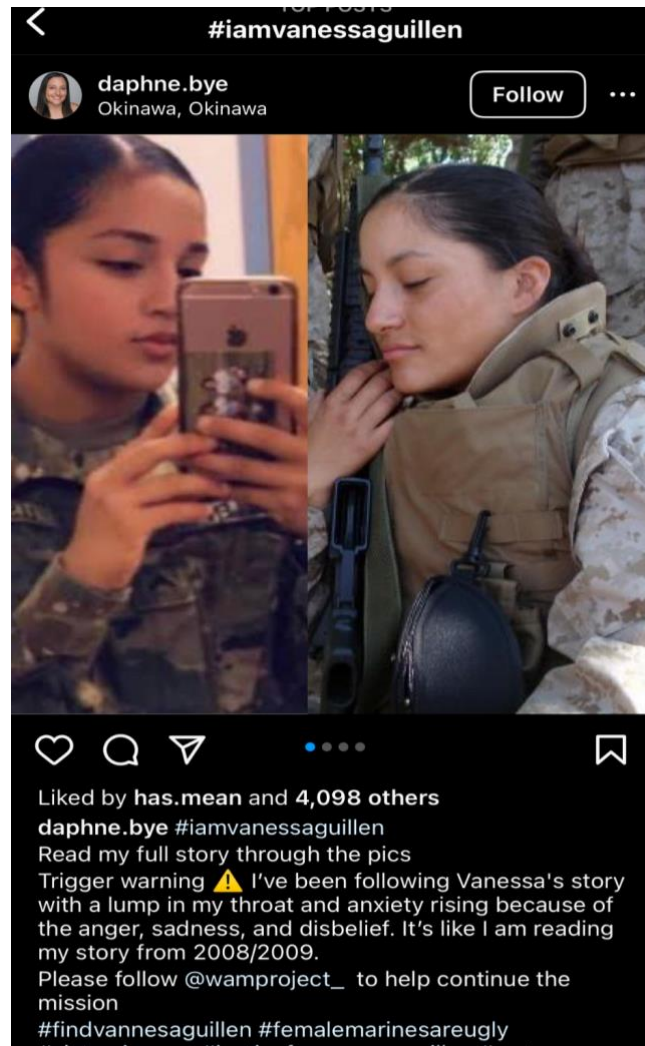


Figure 2 Daphne [@daphne.bye]. Photo of left Vanessa Guillen in uniform taking a selfie with her phone against the mirror. Right Daphne also in military uniform eyes closed holding her rifle close to her. *Instagram*, 24 June 2020.



Figure 3 Pamela Heal [@therealpamelaheal]. Photograph of left Vanessa Guillen's military portrait. Right Pamela Heal sitting in a military vehicle with her uniform smiling at the camera. *Instagram*, 24 June 2020.

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Chapter three

(Memoir)alizing

“I’m okay to die for it,
but I’m not okay to live in it,
you know? That’s kind of bullshit”
-César Lopez
Immigration Nation

Memoirs “[have] served as a site of redress, a space in which to turn the tables, to make their experiences visible (marginalized communities) and their stories heard: a passage not only into literature but into a larger acceptance” (Megan O’Grady LA Times 09/29/21). According to Megan O’Grady, the memoir’s role in redressing historical narrative is crucial for centering stories that are often forgotten. Chapter three, “(Memoir)alizing” explores Chicana/o Latine death through the lens of *critically witnessing* both physical and social death, particularly of undocumented first responders and Latine military personnel, addressing issues like displacement, citizenship, and militarization.

This chapter examines the Netflix docuseries *Immigration Nation*, particularly the episode “The Power of the Vote,” and Karla Cornejo Villavicencio’s memoir, *The Undocumented Americans* (2020). It argues that both the memoir and the episode depict “communal kinships” formed through the collected narrative of the author and the first-person testimonials of deported veterans. These narratives *critically witness* their social deaths and, at times, the physical deaths of community members who have served the U.S. as laborers. Building on these themes, chapter one delves into the story of Jesse, a Chicano soldier, who *critically witnesses* the murder of an Indigenous Chám North Vietnamese soldier displaced by settler colonialism. After returning to San Francisco, Jesse is confronted by the murder of Persephone and Mai, two widows of VietNam War soldiers, through the wrongful

criminalization of Calvin Thibault, a young Black adolescent accused of the women's double homicide. Faced with *critical witnessing* of death in San Francisco and, reminiscent of the VietNam landscape, Jesse seeks justice by defending Calvin Thibault, determined to prevent further loss at the hands of the U.S. However, contrary to 1960s VietNam with Hong Trac, Jesse no longer submits to the injustice of the U.S. as he intentionally advocates for Calvin Thibault personal and educational growth.

In chapter two, "Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency," *critical witnessing* confronts the normalization of feminicide, specifically targeting Latinas, while demonstrating the power of "communal kinships" through visual representations in an organized social movement, a mural, and a mini-series. This chapter underscores the resilience and solidarity within marginalized communities as they navigate and challenge systemic violence and erasure. The examination of the two feminicides, it is crucial to understand that state violence impacts Latinas differently based on their citizenship status, with undocumented women being targeted more intensely. As we will see in the following sections, undocumented women are often subjected to greater subjugation and are afforded fewer opportunities for justice compared to Latinas with citizenship. Despite these intersectional differences, *critical witnessing* and "communal kinships" demonstrate that the patriarchal forces of militarism, capitalism, and sexism are not as impenetrable and unchangeable as they may seem.

Unlike previous chapters, "(Memoir)alzing" shifts focus to a literary genre that embodies "communal kinships." The memoir functions as both a tangible and intangible form of "communal kinship," helping communities cope with social and physical death through the *critical witnessing* in first-person narratives. This chapter challenges the false narratives of U.S. citizenship, particularly how citizenship is wielded to maintain colonial dominance, control, and

security amidst economic chaos. It highlights the contributions of those labeled as undocumented, amplifying their contributions to the United States, despite immigrant policies that aim to render them voiceless and violent.

Chicana/o Latine narratives expressed through a memoir and a docuseries bridge the first two chapters by emphasizing first-person accounts of undocumented individuals. Moving away from fictional representations, except for Vanessa Guillen, this chapter focuses on those who have served in the United States military or as “[t]he second responders” during events like Hurricane Katrina and 9/11. These individuals, who selflessly gave their lives, skills, and labor, have since been deported despite their service, due to their undocumented status (Cornejo Villavíencio, 32). *Critical witnessing* in this chapter allows multi-faceted audiences to see undocumented people, “as more than labor, as more than sufferers or dreamers,” (Cornejo Villavíencio, xv). The narratives of the undocumented communities express the ongoing struggle to rebuild a sense of belonging and home, described by veteran Cesar Lopez as “building on quicksand.” Despite the constant hardships, these individuals demonstrate the power of collectivity in pursuing their livelihoods as they also advocate for themselves.

Historical context of militarization targeting Chicana/o Latine communities

The militarization of the Chicana/o Latine communities aligns with the United States' need for bodies on the front lines of foreign wars. In 1917, for instance, with the Jones-Shafroth Act all Puerto Ricans were given (limited) citizenship. In *Latino Crossing: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* (2003) Nicholas De Genova writes, “[t]he law’s passage on the eve of the U.S. entry into World War I, furthermore, ensured for many Puerto Ricans that the most palpable significance of their newfound citizenship status was Puerto Rican men’s eligibility to be drafted into the U.S. Military,” their second-class citizenship demonstrates

that the Jones Act was strategic to fulfill the United States' need for an army (8). Moreover, the creation of the Bracero Program in 1942 advertised and recruited work opportunities for Mexican men due to needed labor during WWII in the U.S. Concurrently, the creation of the 201 squadron better known as the Aztec Eagles and made up of Mexican Nationals, who were also recruited and trained by the United States to fight during WWII; their native Spanish language made them a crucial resource when engaging communities in Manila, Philippines. The implementation of these programs shows that Chicana/o Latine communities gain access to the United States through service and labor as possible pathways to citizenship only when the United States needs their bodies. Only then does the rhetoric surrounding the criminalization of Chicana/o Latine subjects get overlooked. For Chicana/o Latine communities, the opportunity for citizenship often means exposing themselves to harm for the benefit of the United States, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Parole in Place

To further elaborate the intrinsic relationship between military and immigration, take a TikTok trend of Chicana/o Latines joining the military to guarantee the legal status of their close family members, often their parents, spouses, or children. TikTok captions read “Joined the military to get my parent papers,” “I wanted to get my parents papers,” followed by hashtags “#immigration,” “#immigrant parents,” and “military,” depict the Parole in Place initiative that arose in 2007. At the time, Michael Chertoff, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) secretary granted Staff Sergeant Alex Jimenez’s spouse, Yaderlin Hiraldo protection from deportation. In 2004, Alex Jimenez, upon marrying Yaderlin Hiraldo, processed the legal paperwork for his spouse’s legal status within the United States. He was unaware that the intent to create a sense of safety for his wife would place a target on her back for having entered

“illegally” from the Dominican Republic in 2001. Yaderlin Hiraldo was in an unfathomable position which left her not only facing deportation, but anguish due to the disappearance of her husband Staff Sergeant Alex Jimenez, who was declared missing in action on May 12, 2007, while on mission in Iraq. In a CBS News article “Missing Soldier’s Wife Faces Deportation,” Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, in response to letters from Yaderlin Hiraldo and her lawyer stated that “Under no condition should our country ever deport the spouse of a soldier who is currently serving in uniform abroad” (CBS 2007). Despite these recent parameters “[t]he United States has deported tens of thousands of military veterans since the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. Some estimates point to at least 94,000” (Marrero 2021).

In 2010 United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) communicated that Parole in Place had been implemented for anyone who was a spouse, widow(er), parent, son, daughter of” active and or reserve military and veterans. This granted close relatives a form of legal status within the United States following the previous lead of Michael Chertoff. In more recent social trends, as Tiktok demonstrates, Chicana/o Latine military subjects are taking this initiative and granting their parents (and other family members) a pathway to legal status. The implementation of USCIS Parole in Place differed in that it incorporated “military” in the name *Military Parole in Place*, as if it was not visible or understood beforehand through the case of Yaderlin Hiraldo and Alex Jimenez. Although now a possible loophole for many Chicana/o Latine military subjects, it is crucial to recognize that Chicana/o Latine military subjects have always served within the military. Despite their service and access to the military as an institution, Chicana/o Latine military subjects continue to be racialized by the United States both within and outside of U.S. borders (as previously seen in chapter one). The mass deportation of

veterans continues, as does this TikTok trend, supported by legislation like Parole in Place, which opens a larger conversation about “corporeal” exploitation.³⁵In this context, Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), particularly undocumented Chicana/o Latine subjects, are perceived solely as laboring bodies. In *Visible Borders: Living Death in Latinx Narratives* (2022) Kristy L. Ulibarri argues that in, “US popular and political discourses, where Latinx subjects are painted as purely corporeal and racialized bodies, ‘hordes’ who are violating national resources and/or threatening the well-being of a nation” (24). Understanding the undocumented Latine experience through the lens of militarized subjects and “second responders,” highlights labor practices and flaws in immigration rhetoric, as Ulibarri discusses, challenging the preconceived notion of Chicana/o Latine communities as criminals, terrorist, and or illegal (Davis 2000, Chavez 2008). Instead, it reveals the United States' intent to maintain a colonial legacy of white supremacy. Michael Chertoff, who established the Parole in Place program, expresses a sentiment that diverges from the typical rhetoric of the United States lacking resources to accept all who want to come to the US. Instead, Chertoff suggests that exceptions can be made available if and when the United States benefits.

Additionally, on June 15, 2012, the Obama administration implemented Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, better known as DACA, which, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), was intended to grant individuals who came to the United States at an early age the opportunity to defer being removed from the United States for two years at a time. Qualifying for DACA meant a possibility to request work authorization and education. Before DACA, working, for many undocumented communities, would have been considered illegal (IRCA 1986). Although this immigration policy did not grant undocumented

³⁵ Ulibarri and Cornejo Villavicencio’s critique discusses how Chicana/o Latine subjects, particularly those who are undocumented, are viewed primarily as sources of labor.

people “legal status,” it did legalize employment for a majority of the undocumented community. Immigration policies, such as the Jones Act, Bracero Program, Parole in Place, and DACA demonstrate the ongoing asymmetrical relationship between the U.S. and Chicana/o Latine communities, which involves an exchange of physical labor. Both past and more recent immigration policies show that influential figures like Michael Chertoff and President Barack Obama can implement legislation that benefits the United States while also aiding undocumented communities, thereby breaking away from anti-immigrant sentiments. Although these immigration policies grant a layer of security to those who meet the criteria, they also perpetually reproduce a good vs. bad binary.

The first-person narratives expressed by Chicana/o Latine military subjects in personal TikTok videos take the nuances of citizenship to intimate the military’s dependency on immigration policies. Chicana/o Latine military subjects are aware of this innate relationship and inverse power structures by using the policy in their favor. Although everything on social media can be argued to be curated, this trend conveys appropriation of military tactics for navigating resources to survive. These resilient tactics are similar to the sacrifices made by the parents (in most cases) of Chicana/o Latine military subjects, who left their home countries in Latin America in search of a better life. Reflecting those ideals, their children, now citizens or residents of the United States, also strive for a better life for themselves and their loved ones. Chicana/o Latine military subjects use their military status, funding, and social platforms to showcase the benefits of joining the military while leveraging the military for their own advantage. Nevertheless, joining the military carries its own burdens, subjecting Chicana/o Latine military subjects to both physical and mental violence, as evidenced by the case of Vanessa Guillen. Despite being bound to obey their military institution, these individuals

demonstrate autonomy by using the U.S. military in a way that immigration policies tend to exploit undocumented lives through labor.

Memoir

Similar to the documentation these trends provide through visual content on TikTok, memoirs have also communicated and documented a person's life-changing events through a first-person perspective. A nonfiction narrative, the memoir can be a non-academic literary form, which at times discredits the memoir as events and narratives communicated rely on memory. However, all scholarly work and history books rely on memory, generally that of a person in power, and are never truly objective.³⁶ In contrast to historical text, the memoir allows “communal storytelling insofar as many of our stories cut across age, geography, and even gender to tell a shared story of injustice and prejudice” (Cantu 8). The memoir allows disenfranchised groups to communicate their experience through current social political space and time (like social media). Norma Cantú theorizes that the genre of the memoir falls under the category of *life writing*; she writes “I want to draw an important distinction within the life-writing genre and that if it is the person who is telling the story if that person is an author who is in some way setting the record straight or offering his or her construction of life as an author, it will invariably result in a much different narrative than if it is a non-academic, or a person not in the business of writing, as it were; this I have perceived in reading the autobiographies, memoirs, and testimonios of Latinos/as and Chicanos/as who come from the world of business or of medicine, for example, and those written by professional writers (9).” Life writing then provides a space to set the record straight by demystifying the labels imposed on the Chicana/o Latine

³⁶ See Donna Haraway, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s discussion on community knowledge production through the lens of Feminist Standpoint Theory, which addresses the relationship between power structures and epistemologies.

communities through first-hand encounters. Furthering this conversation on *life-writing*, I consider the memoir as a space that encompasses a *critical witnessing* of marginalized lives in this analysis of undocumented Latine. Cornejo Villavicencio's first-person *critical witnessing* homes in on the undocumented community narratives she encounters through collective witnessing of undocumented deaths both in the physical and social sense. Cornejo Villavicencio, within her memoir, acknowledges that even as a writer she continues to "sets the record straight" by calling attention to her positionality, "[b]ecause if you're going to write a book about undocumented immigrants in America, the story, the full story, you have to be a little crazy. And you certainly can't be enamored by America, not still. That disqualifies you" (xv). Cornejo Villavicencio's literary approach aligns with Cantu's in that, despite her education, her intention as an educated writer is to authentically represent the community she also belongs to, avoiding perpetuating romanticized notions about the U.S.

In parallel to the title of Cornejo Villavicencio memoir, "The Undocumented Americans," the title of this chapter, "(Memoir)alizing," also plays with words, implying the creations of space to memorialize individuals who are often overlooked. Cornejo Villavicencio frames the undocumented community as Americans, not necessarily because undocumented people seek adoption by the U.S. through citizenship, but because the individuals and groups she highlights served the U.S. selflessly when it needed assistance. In contrast to the demands imposed by the U.S. for undocumented people to offer their bodies for labor, the undocumented individuals within this chapter help during tragic events not for their gain but rather for the well-being of others. Cornejo Villavicencio's title also raises the question of what it means to be "American." Rather than engaging in xenophobic discourse, she allows the narratives to speak for themselves. The title may also suggest a continental perspective, drawing attention to how

Latin America is frequently overlooked as part of the Americas, the “Undocumented Americans,” then would be ironic as people from Latin America are American and therefore cannot be undocumented. Referring to this chapter’s title, Merriam-Webster defines a memorial as something that “keeps remembrance alive,” within the United States, soldiers are memorialized through statues, mementos, Memorial Day, and cemeteries once they are deceased. Regardless of whether they died in active combat, soldiers are guaranteed burial in national cemeteries alongside all their fellow servicemembers. However, as expressed by undocumented Marine veteran César Lopez, “I’m okay to die for it, but I’m not okay to live in it, you know? That’s kind of bullshit.” Many veterans that have served the US have not been memorialized. In fact, they have been undervalued, criminalized, and deported. Awaiting death outside of the US borders, as their death is the only thing that guarantees them posthumous citizenship and a return to be buried alongside their servicemembers. Cornejo Villavicencio's memoir that *critically witnesses* undocumented narratives paired with Cesar Lopez's *critical witnessing* of both the social death and physical death of undocumented Veterans, the “The Power of the Vote” shows that (memoir)als can honor all individuals who have served the United States, regardless of legal status and validation.

The Power of the Vote

What happens when those meant to die in war do not die? What happens when those who aren’t meant to be citizens (socially alive) have proven to be invaluable despite such negative barriers working against their very existence? “The Power of the Vote” is an episode from Netflix's *Immigration Nation* series that tells the story of César Lopez, a Marine Corps veteran advocating for the rights of undocumented deported veterans. In 1993, César enlisted using a green card obtained through his mother, who had become a citizen under Ronald Reagan’s 1986

Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).³⁷ When returning from deployment two years later César struggled through personal issues such as failed marriage, unreliable finances due to unsteady jobs that resulted in him possessing 50lbs of marijuana in New Mexico. Ironically, his case was dismissed, eight years later, when returning from a work trip from Costa Rica he was detained and deported. César recalls:

They said because of a previous conviction that I was a terrorist and that I wasn't allowed in the country. And I told them, 'A terrorist, I am a marine, man'. And I got deported because of that. The day I got deported we got to a point on the Mexican side where they ask if you have tattoos. So I showed him, and he was shaking his head, and he told me that he felt really bad about what the U.S government was doing to his countrymen, but he said especially to servicemen like me. And that kind of got me wondering, because I had never heard that before. That was the first time I got exposed to, 'What? Wait. Wait a minute. You mean there's more. (Immigration Nation)

After describing his deportation processing due to his immigration status, the docuseries camera zooms in on César's tattoos, which cover his fingers, his arms, and his upper torso. Symbols like the United State Marine Corps acronym, USMC, on his knuckles, that once upon a time represented security and pride. A long-lasting reminder of having served as a Marine. In the time of his processing the immigration agent felt a discomfort since the tattoos worn by César represent a larger entity of U.S military, and at this point and time even with these tattoos the U.S. system has failed him. César Lopez, like many others, are unaware that there are numerous veterans being detained and deported even after having served the United States. Thousands of veterans who have served the United States "legally" are now to remain in the outskirts of a

³⁷ Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) 1986 granted amnesty to all undocumented individuals who entered the United States prior to January 1, 1982.

country they would have died for. César Lopez's deportation magnifies his drug possession alongside his arrival to the United States as a wrongful entry labeling him a "criminal" and "terrorist." In *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (2008), Leo Chavez explains how Chicana/o Latine and "[t]heir social identit[ies] ha[ve] been plagued by the mark of illegality, which in much public discourse means that they are criminals and thus illegitimate members of society undeserving of social benefits, including citizenship" (4). When César was processed for deportation, he was also stripped of his militarized identity to only be seen as an "illegal" who had committed a crime rather than a Marine who had served. Through the lens of the Latino Threat narrative, one can understand how drugs and tattoos contribute to racialized stereotypes, automatically associating Latine with gang life or illicit activities. This perspective reads César as a racialized subject rather than acknowledging how this exact body, a couple of years back, served in the frontlines, an action that should have automatically granted him his citizenship. Instead, he is stripped of that privilege reinscribed as another socially dead Latine. In contrast to the discourse presented by former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff on the Parole in Place program, this situation involves soldiers themselves enduring both foreign and domestic wars. Upon returning, they face deportation instead of support, a possibility demonstrated by those who impose immigration policies such as the ones previously discussed.

César Lopez *critically witnesses* his social death as the U.S. sees his one choice to partake in an illicit market (transporting marijuana), as a means to financial stability granted that he could not afford livelihood with low paying jobs and a rough transition back to reality after being deployed. His drug possession and unlawful entry overshadowed his service as a Marine and his well-being. Upon returning to the United States, this shattered the conditional promise of citizenship, as he wasn't returning in a casket. Marie Cacheo writes:

Posthumous citizenship, however, only sometimes enables the latter. In fact, I would argue that posthumous citizenship has more purpose and function for the state than for family members of the dead. **For the state, noncitizen soldiers are just as valuable, perhaps even more so, in death than in life. As Sharon Holland explains, the dead are central to nation building because ‘their ‘desires’ not their ‘bodies’ are exhumed for use by the state.’ In death, the noncitizen U.S. soldier becomes the perfect naturalized U.S. citizen because ‘the dead are the ultimate docile bodies’ (109).**

Failing to die, in other words, means not exploiting their bodies to the point of death in a foreign land that no longer serves the interest of the United States. As Cacho states, “The perfect naturalized U.S. citizens” are undocumented Latine militarized subjects who return from serving the United States only in death. There were 80,000 undocumented soldiers³⁸ or as the United States military terms them, non-citizens serving within 1999 and 2010. The eligibility to enlist requires permanent legal residency (green card) or to be a United States Citizen. There are, however, multiple avenues of sponsorship as well as other countries' soldiers serving³⁹ within the United States military. For César Lopez, at the time of enlisting, he was a permanent legal resident, as his mother had petitioned for his citizenship after she was granted citizenship. In such cases, the United States can be the sponsor for employment and able to grant the non-citizens a job. The promise of citizenship or the opportunity to provide access and stability to a family leads many Chicana/o Latine to enlist. For the United States, as Cacho explains, “the dead are central to nation building because “their ‘desires’ not their ‘bodies’ are exhumed for use by the state” a bargain for increasing body counts in the military sector. The desire in these cases is

³⁸ Immigrationforum.org Between 1999 and 2010, approximately 80,000 non-citizens joined the U.S. military force.¹ Most recent data from the Department of Defense (DOD) showed that 24,000 noncitizens were on active duty in 2012, with 5,000 legal permanent residents (LPRs) enlisting into the U.S. military force each year.

³⁹ Exchange officer

citizenship and the accompanying rights upon their return to the United States after ensuring the country's security. Having this desire as an end goal, non-citizen soldiers are placed in a physicality of a militarized/ war setting with the intent of serving to their demise. Their bodies are "exhumed for the use of the state," overworked, and/or placed in the frontlines to die. Dead or at war, their needs are quite minimal in that they serve the state rather than ask for wealth, stability, and livelihood. They are just used, exploited in a place where they are not required to come back from. Their promise of citizenship relies most on posthumous citizenship that reflects an empty paper, in such a way that it provides no security for the family left behind. In essence, they receive minimal appraisal and recognition for "being good," yet no tangible solution to a larger problem of militarization and exploitation. The posthumous state demands no rights therefore it is what the United States prefers. Taking up space in the physical sense is important to recognize since, abroad, bodies are needed to present a physical dominance over those who are subordinate, enemies. Within the United States, the Chicana/o Latine physical body becomes reinscribed to that of an enemy (Latino threat and or Brown Peril) where the bodies are no longer needed. Burying the bodies in a national cemetery and granting citizenship posthumously maintains the illusion that military service guarantees citizenship, thereby attracting more recruits willing to enlist.

As for César Lopez, his physicality when returning to the United States disrupted that illusion and possibility and became living dead. His refusal to die challenges the symbolic citizenship that works for the United States with "docile" posthumous veterans. César Lopez instead is confronted by being treated once again as a "racialized criminal" that automatically can be deportable, his body can and was removed from the United States in that it wasn't serving the function of a militarized subject abroad. César Lopez, alive alongside many more non-citizen

veterans, cannot represent a “docile body” since his body is no longer controlled by the United States as a militarized subject. His livelihood also represents the failed promise of granted citizenship upon returning to the confined borders of the United States, a time before his possession of marijuana, where he was owed resources by the United States to accommodate a livable life. Citizenship that would have made him better equipped to work rather than having to resort to instability, feeling the need to possess fifty pounds of marijuana. César Lopez understood the paradox of having to die to become legalized, after being deported, he crossed yet again through the desert. As he resides within the United States after being removed, he is displaced yet again, seeking justice as an undocumented person. He has no access to work and cannot possess a driver's license yet knowing his positionality (critically witnessing his social death as well as many others), he joins the fight for justice by advocating for himself and many like him. Deported veterans, through critical witnessing and community organizing that comes to exist because of their developed “communal kinship,” demand attention to be granted clemency so they can return to the country they served before reaching a posthumous state. Within the episode, “The Power of the Vote,” César Lopez's lived experience communicates a social death that is constructed and maintained by the United States to intentionally try to dispose and control Chicana/o Latine communities. César Lopez *critically witnesses* his life being stripped of him once his deportation starts; however, the organizing he has managed to do with other veterans shows the power of “communal kinships” as these communities are organizing across borders to be heard and gain justice.

The Undocumented Americans

In *The Undocumented Americans* (2020), by Karla Cornejo Villavíencio the memoir offers a multiplicity of memories provided by the author's own *critical witnessing* alongside

community *critical witnessing* of the aftermath of events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Cornejo Villavencio writes about the people who are meant to be forgotten, destined to die. Yet, even in death, their service persists through the memoir's narratives, challenging conventions. Reading these undocumented narratives not as fictional characters or protagonists in a white, hetero-centric novel, nor as the "common" hero, nor even through criminalization. Instead, they transcend their labeled identities. It is through these spaces of narration that there is more historical context as well as relationality that sheds light on the obscure reality of the United States' continuous racialization. Acknowledging the presence of Latine subjects that are making a difference in people's daily lives in the context of death only magnifies what they do as living people, beyond disposability. The memoir commemorates collective memories and the deaths of these individuals to clearly depict the failure of the United States to grant a level of justice through processes of (memoir)alizing the Latinas/os.

For instance, Rafael Hernández, a Mexican firefighter who on the day of 9/11 went to assist a firefighter gearing up to help. Villavencio writes:

Rafael had been a firefighter in Mexico and showed his Mexican firefighter badge to the first responders, and they geared him up. **They didn't care that he was foreign.** They needed all the help they could get. As everyone else was running out of the building, Rafael ran up the North Tower. He encountered a pregnant woman whose water broke. She begged him not to leave her, and he didn't. He reportedly carried her down twenty-eight flights of stairs. Not long after they made it out, the tower fell. Rafael didn't leave Ground Zero for months, working day after day. Eventually his lungs got so fucked up he had to hooked up to a respirator to sleep (39).

Being exposed to debris and chemicals resulted in respiratory problems. Ten years later, "Rafael was declared to have died of 'natural causes,' which officials later explained actually meant 'alcoholism and obesity,' but Latinx leaders in New York have refused to accept that

pronouncement” (39). For officials to link his death to alcohol and obesity shows the racialization process toward brown bodies later supported by “... a Fox News Latino television interview taped before his death, Rafael is incorrectly introduced as ‘Juan Hernandez: Hero in His Adopted Homeland.’ The camera zooms in on his heavily inked upper arm, tattooed with a huge bald eagle, an American flag, the downtown Manhattan skyline, the Twin Towers, and his initials: “R.H.Mex.” (39). The media coverage created a false narrative about the life of Juan Hernandez. This crafted hero story, embraced by the United States, paid no attention to his real name but aimed to rebrand the country as a welcoming place for undocumented people, portraying them as worthy of adoption and, by extension, citizenship. However, if Rafael’s death was not witnessed by those who knew him, loved, and cared for him, the racialized assumption that his death was caused by ‘alcoholism and obesity,’ would have been recorded as fact, as well as an incorrect name by a news report that was idealizing the American Dream rhetoric. Cornejo Villavíencio draws in on the failure to address the undocumented individuals as human beings who were also victims the day of 9/11 and thereafter. She writes, “I learned that no matter how far away you were from New York that day, no matter how distant your connection to that day was, no matter how much lower than zero the count of the people you lost on that day was, if you were white, 9/11 happened to you personally, with blunt and scalding force. Because the antithesis of an American is an immigrant and because we could not be victims in the public eye, we became suspects. And so, September 11 changed the immigration landscape forever” (41).

Additionally, Cornejo Villavíencio accounts for the undocumented day laborers who organized search and rescue post Hurricane Sandy. “Day Laborers were among the first people on the ground to help” (25). So much so that the Colectiva Por Fin run by Chilean Pedro Ituralde relied on Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training to offer material and

skills in managing heavy machinery to create rescue plans effectively. Their familiarity with their community also allowed them to cover large areas and locate community members. In the case of Ubaldo Cruz Martínez, an undocumented individual, “Ubaldo was found floating in dirty water, and his body was repatriated to his hometown of San Jerónimo Xayacatlán” (29).

Villavíencio further describes Ubaldo Cruz Martínez as “a homeless alcoholic who drowned in a basement during Hurricane Sandy because he was probably drunk. Did they feel sorry for him? Yes. Were they embarrassed by him? Probably” (28). Noting that although he had died alone in a basement with his *compañeros* (friends), the day laborers felt deep sorrow for Ubaldo not only because he was their *compañero* but also because they could self-identify with him. This depiction magnifies the discursive violence shaping the criminalization process of bad vs good immigrants while at the time humanizing this migrant.

At the 40th Annual Conference on the First Year Experience Karla Cornejo Villavíencio explains the importance of literature portraying communities of color’s death.⁴⁰ She takes her own positionality as an author, a DACAmented dreamer who has personality disorders, to note that society racializes the corpses of people of color, even their bloodstreams, to justify the killing and murder of people of color. She contextualizes that if she were to drown during a hurricane similar to Ubaldo when her corpse undergoes autopsy, “What conclusions can they draw from that, they’re going to say that I am a bad immigrant. They are going to say the things they have said about people who have been hurt by American hetero white supremacy like Michael Brown and Mathew Sheppard ‘he was no angel’ those exact words were said about both of them, and they would have said about me” Cornejo Villavíencio communicates, “I wanted

⁴⁰ <https://youtu.be/CctxY45Wfro>

to change his story because I was a writer and I had that right so what I did is research and found out that he loved soft animals and he was squatting in a basement and I did research to make as many facts that were real present there and what I change that he did not die alone but that he died with an injured squirrel he found and I wrote the sentence no creature should have to die alone.” This literary choice ensures that the narratives showcased throughout her memoir supplant stereotyping death of people of color as normal because of racialized and criminalized justification. “Communal kinship” here resurfaces from the act of bearing witness of friends, alongside Villavíencio’s rendition of literary aesthetics causing empathy to the reader, to the author, and once again the community he belonged to.

In this memoir, Cornejo Villavíencio (memoir)alizes the “Undocumented Americans” who have died at the hands of the state, yet even after death they refuse to forget their existence, instead she seeks out community who has *critically witnessed* undocumented community members deaths to write them into historical events, where a lot of them gave their lives. It is a hybrid non-fictional memoir with a first-person approach that embraces Cornejo Villavíencio’s positionality and authority to critically witness and contest white hetero patriarchy. Cornejo Villavíencio writes “No creature should have to die alone,” communicating feelings of sympathy and witnessing within a community in this case of day laborers. She selectively chooses the word creature to create an open-ended representation blurring races, legal status, and gender to cause discomfort in the act of dying alone (29). Ubaldo that day died while his counterparts organized and maximized their effort to save those who do not value their life. Ubaldo died in a land that did not recognize him as a human being, hence this aesthetic rewrite magnifies undocumented communities' selflessness for a country that rejects their livelihood.

Cornejo Villavíencio selectively uses magical realism to provide ruptures of questioning and humanizing corpses killed to make sure their existence is not forgotten. These intentional uses of magical realism are not intended to discredit undocumented narratives nor automatically make her memoir fiction, but because, “[t]o me [Cornejo Villavíencio] magical realism is more than a genre it is the land witnessing our pain because our people know that the police and the justice system, and the judges they are not on our side, they have never been, and they never will be on our side and the question of whether God will make justice happen is open ended and so what magical realism means to me is that when impunity abounds, the land will bear witness to the pain and maybe revenge isn't always the answer but being witnessed is enough in the continents where disappearance completely wrecks generations [and] the land bearing witness is a lot.” Cornejo Villavíencio ends the chapter with:

Did this happen? / Are we gangs?/ Do we steal Social Security numbers?/ Do we traffic our own children across the borders?/ Is this book nonfiction?/ Can we imagine that he was capable of kindness, even as he was wounded?/ What if this is how, in the face of so much sacrilege and slander, we reclaim our dead? (30).

Posing the questioning reflects common headlines that are used to further criminalize and subjugate people of color upon their death. The memoir is as close to researched facts in relation to the testimonios that she has encountered and further explores the recentering of Latine peoples since it places Ubaldo not solely as a fictional character who is removed from society, but rather in relation to the day laborers witnessing him as a person. Cornejo Villavíencio’s writing opens the community collective of possibilities that reject the United States criminalization and dehumanization of folks and instead challenges this rendering to consider people beyond the legislature, beyond discursive violence. In the case of Ubaldo, did it matter much that he was drunk nor why he drank? Did he matter to many? In the end, his death was not as a martyr but

functions as a critique that demystifies the American Dream, but also allows us to “reclaim our dead” through the process I term “communal kinship,” an emergent space where displaced people come together to develop a collective understanding of their plight from their own perspective/ positionality acknowledging the United States is fault in the production of death. Rafael Hernandez’s death, compared to Ubaldo’s, aims to highlight that despite the United States failure to provide medical assistance to Rafael, or to even give Ubaldo the opportunity to get assistance for depression, the rhetoric aligns in a similar matter. In a “privileged witnessing,” they are both reduced to being seen as just drunk Latine men, a script Cornejo Villavíencio moves away from.

Cornejo Villavíencio’s *Undocumented Americans* humanizes Rafael and Ubaldo as undocumented Latine that had skills, family, and were selfless even when their character was questioned. Similarly, the non-citizen veterans like César Lopez demonstrate the United States inability to provide benefits to those that served, as the immigration system remains one-sided. Despite the labor provided by the undocumented Chicana/o Latine community, citizenship is consistently denied, and the undocumented community is racialized and criminalized, a process that undermines even the citizenship of U.S. citizens themselves. These memorializing narratives are not submissive; instead, they highlight that undocumented individuals are “more than labor, as more than sufferers or dreamers” (Cornejo Villavíencio, xv).

In *Latinos Remaking America* (2002) by Marcelo M. Suárez- Orozco and Mariela M. Páez, Latin American immigration is explained by the United States imperial involvement. Suárez- Orozco, and Páez state:

The story of the Latino population of the United States can be fully articulated only against the backdrop of the historical, political, and economic relationships between the United States and Latin America. The United States and Latin America have never been

equal partners. U.S. relations with Latin America can be characterized as an asymmetrical liaison between a dominant power and a weaker, often reluctant partner (16).

Suárez- Orozco, and Páez further explain this asymmetrical relationship by narrowing down the relationship between the United States and Latine to three themes: territory, U.S.–Latin American relationships, and lastly the process of racialization within the United States. Suárez–Orozco, and Páez argue that the U.S. cannot isolate itself from involvement when it comes to Latin American migrants. Marcelo M. Suárez- Orozco and Mariela M. Páez, in conjunction with Cacho’s initial quote, could be understood to state that the United States has created an asymmetrical relationship that depends on marginalization and the continuous regurgitation of discursive violence. Yet appreciating the memoir as an embodied witnessing allows for the possibilities of contestation through communal kinship because of these witnessed deaths. To a certain extent these deaths call on the community to cope and, in that process, reignite memorialization via memory. The memoir as a literary tool provides depth to understand the relationships that racial scripts enable by piecing together multiple witnessing’s alongside a first-person narration that also historicizes.

It is important to also understand that militarization, like criminalization, is concerned with control and disposability. This relationality is what Marcelo M. Suárez- Orozco and Mariela M. Páez consider an asymmetrical relationship where the subjugation and social death of Chicana/o Latine communities are reproduced and maintained in order to further control and fragment these communities, seeing them not as individuals but more like labor, capital, and therefore disposable. Recent memoirs ‘(memoir)alize’ the intended erased and disposable by creating spaces of ‘communal kinship’ that provide possibilities for seeing Chicana/o Latine people like Ubaldo not as criminals, not as bad immigrants. In the case of César Lopez there is a strong

community of Veterans within the United States as well as closely outside its borders in Tijuana for example the Deported Veterans Advocacy Project “40 yards from the PedWest Border Crossing, that provides services for those U.S. military veterans who have been deported or are in the deportation proceeding” as stated in the Veterans for Peace website. Many veterans like Cesar who have been removed from the United States are assisted through the Deported Veterans Advocacy Project as many of the organizers share a similar story of being forcefully displaced even when having served the United States and pledged their allegiance.

(Memoir)alizing suggests that those who *critically witness* Chicana/o Latine military subjects' selflessness and death continue to memorialize the fallen soldiers who the United States failed by telling their stories. Even upon being removed from within the United States these militarized undocumented subjects establish “communal kinships,” through recognition and relationality where they voice the injustice while empowering each other.

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Epilogue

In *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary Understanding U.S. Immigration for the Twenty-First Century* (2020), Naomi Paik concludes with a chapter titled “Sanctuary.” She states that while literally everyone is trying to imagine and envision a different world than the one, we live in longing for access to livelihood, one already exists. She writes:

Certain U.S. communities like affluent suburbs agree to pay higher local taxes in order to fund parks, libraries, and quality public education without security measures like metal detectors or police officers that criminalize children. These communities have near full employment, quality food, and health care (119).

Paik’s notion of “sanctuary” highlights the privileged spaces already existing in affluent white suburbs. Imagining a longing for such space for everyone is counterintuitive, as the real issue lies in the power structures that prevent this inclusivity. *Critical witnessing* exposes the power dynamics that create these contradictions inherent in U.S. imperialism. It highlights the resilience of social movements and relationships that directly confront settler colonialism, displacement, war, gender violence, documentation, and criminalization.

Similar to Paik, my dissertation “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” aims to prove that although in a national scale witnessing death and injustice happens on a daily basis by privileged witnesses there are also spaces of *critical witnessing* by those who fail to look away. It is within these fragments of *critical witnessing* that unveil a broader perspective on the reality shaped by state-sanctioned violence in the United States. Despite these structural oppressors, *critical witnessing*, as a praxis seen through the chapters, resist the normalization of violence and control. Instead amplifying

the issues of displacement, militarization, and racialization ultimately leading to their dissolution through the fostering of ‘communal kinships’ within community life-practices.

An attempt to mimic Paik’s rendering of sanctuaries as a conclusion, leads me to Arlene Correa Valencia’s textile art form. Arlene Correa Valencia is an undocumented Mexican artist born in Michoacan Mexico, raised in Napa Valley whose art making is rooted in magnifying immigrant experiences critiquing immigration policies targeting Chicana/o Latine communities. Correa Valencia work *critically witnesses* communities as beyond “socially dead subjects”. Her art form SEES individuals to their full extent, placing value on Chicana/o Latine individuals as centered subjects that need to be showcased with innumerable autonomy despite structures working against them. Arlene Correa Valencia’s collections provide *communal kinship* that do not necessarily result from physical ‘death’ but rather ‘social death’ through a collective way of understanding and viewing Chicana/o Latine communities, particularly undocumented in a positive light.

A gallery *En tiempo de crisis* (2017) [In time of crisis] documents essential farm workers in Napa Valley in a time of dire crisis, wildfires that ravaged the region. While the news covered the wildfires it failed to note that many essential farm workers were still placed in the frontlines exposed to health conditions and death to support their financial livelihood. In *En tiempo de crisis*, Arlene Correa Valencia not only draws attention to those that were erased but accentuates their bodies using reflective vest in the frontlines as their surrounding burn (Figure 4).



Figure 4 *Espacio Sideral* Image Courtesy of the Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery

Arleene Correa Valencia's artwork and campaigning carries the numerous political messages like that of *En tiempo de crisis* (2017) [In time of crisis] collection as well as "somos visibles [we are visible]" as she creates murals and apparel mimicking the reflective vests to amplify the presence of Chicana/o Latine communities. The art accompanied by a powerful message campaign creates spaces of *communal kinship* as communities converge against silencing and injustices. Correa Valencia first-person encounter with migrants as well as her own lived experiences projected in her artwork makes visible migrants as beyond "socially dead" and beyond reading their bodies as corporeal labor. Centering the discomforting issues of separation, exploitation, and migrant narratives she makes space for narratives whose reality goes against systemic violence and oppression faced by the undocumented communities. Her critical

witnessing of these lived experiences is expressed in her artistic approach. So much so that the use of reflective vests intends to magnify the visibility to those who are more than often racialized through militarization, immigration, and policing.



Figure 5 *Jardines del Rincon* Image Courtesy of the Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery

Arleene Correa Valencia's *Llévame Contigo, Quiero Estar Contigo* [Take me with you, I want to be with you] 2021-2022 consists of sewn silhouettes of children, parents, and siblings, in all families that represent undocumented people that have been displaced and separated by immigration legislation and processes of racialization (Figure 5). The stitched silhouettes intentionally are at different levels of "completion" some are just the outline silhouette stitching of some one's body while others are overlapped with layered fabric. All silhouettes displayed in Correa Valencia's collection are considered complete in that they communicate a holistic person that at one point in time was captured (was witnessed) through the stitching as a mediated narrative that is providing the story of a particular individual. The silhouettes that consist of

layered fabric to represent a stronger presence can be understood as those parents and/ or children that are here within the possible confinements of the United States while the others (just the outline silhouette) can represent those that are remembered and missed. Or vice versa the outline silhouette can represent those that stay behind while the silhouettes that consist of layered fabric represent those that are being forced to move away. Regardless of what each silhouette represents, what state of being it materializes, the issue of transit resulting in separation, and displacement is evident.

The play with outline silhouette representing human beings communicates a transit, a forced displacement that Correa Valencia's reimagines as an intimate encounter, an embrace, a feeling, a touch. The three groupings above represent different family ties, a father with two children, a father (a sibling) hugging a child, and a couple (siblings) holding their child hands moments that seem so rudimentary to human interaction (Figure 5). For separated families, these small encounters become crucial in that these shared moments can be the last interactions that they will have for an indefinite time. For many, it can be the last; for others it is the first touch, the first time meeting a stranger that unfortunately shares that fate of estrangement because of a larger institutional divide keeping families separated.

Correa Valencia titles the collection *Llévame Contigo, Quiero Estar Contigo* [Take me with you, I want to be with you], that expresses a hopeful pursuit of togetherness. Someone, whether it be the child, or the parent is asking for the other to come with them. For the viewer that means to *critically witness* these kinds of encounters, a contrast to the narrative imposed by the criminalization of immigrant communities. Seeing the dynamics within this image it becomes clearer to understand the title as a naive invitation that resonates to one of a child who does not

understand the complexities of not being able to be with a parent. The why to something as simple as being able to be together, is not necessarily a negative inscription of legality.

As depicted by this image both children and parents want something as simple as being together, wanting to be able to stay close together. The political message behind this title is that it states the obvious; it captures the desire of many undocumented displaced families to remain together; these images counter the common misconstrued rhetoric of undocumented folks as racialized and criminalized individuals but instead highlight them as human beings. Contrary to negative stereotypes depicted in mainstream media of undocumented people being a threat to the “nation,” Correa Valencia uses the sewn silhouette to stand in for the narratives of what is really happening to families (Chavez, 2008). The sewn silhouettes, although they have no names or faces associated with them, represent a larger body of people that are depicted in a non-threatening way showing what undocumented families are like and what is being taken from them.

This collection historically anchors the Trump-era 2018 Zero Tolerance Family Separation Policy, while also echoing a legacy of forced displacement. Rather than focusing on the large caravans broadcasted in the media in late 2018 throughout 2021 that viewed Central American with a violent criminalized rhetoric, this collection centers the intrinsic value of families. This collection does not show the violent images of caged children or placing them in an icebox as a militarized tactic to instill punitive resonance to those who are forcefully displaced. Instead *Llévame Contigo, Quiero Estar Contigo* [Take me with you, I want to be with you] challenges the reproduction of violent discourses surrounding Latine communities as illegitimate and criminals by focusing on the sentiment of being deprived of loved ones. Correa Valencia’s cultural productions provide a space of “communal kinship” in that then center

narratives of those deemed silent, dead, and exploitable that bear witness to community grief via family separations. The collection necessitates further discussions of common immigration legislation that underpins the treatment of human beings, of children as racialized criminals by creating a space of visibility in what seems at first glance simple stitch silhouettes. These silhouettes represent a broader issue affecting undocumented communities, emphasizing that individuals should not be racialized or defined by documents that fail to capture their full identity.

Although the lives of undocumented communities tend to be seen in relation to their labor and the profit they provide employers. They need to be appreciated and represented as well as first responders, as veterans, as scholars such as Cornejo Villavicencio, and as artist Arlene Correa Valencia. The literary use of novel, mural, tv series, memoirs, docuseries, and art forms become a space of “communal kinship” in that they represent a once subaltern perspective that confronts the violent assumptions imposed on the Chicana/o Latine bodies. “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” demonstrates the complex perspectives of Chicana/o Latine communities that create spaces of “communal kinship” through their narratives, challenging injustice. Life-writing, as defined by Cantu, represents an adjacent positionality, transforming memoir into a politicized act that magnifies those whom the United States often seeks to erase. Arlene Correa Valencia’s *Calexico* illustrates the Chicana/o Latine community sharing space and coexisting, not as laborers or detainees, but living, playing, and interacting despite the negative stereotypes that often define these communities (Figure 6). Similar to *Jardines del Rincón*, the silhouettes without fabric also represent children interacting with their families in transit. Part of the *Llévame Contigo, Quiero Estar Contigo* [Take me with you, I want to be with you] collection,

these works highlight family separations; however, unlike popular media outlets such as National Public Radio (NPR) and the Los Angeles Times, which portray the policy with images of children alone in cages covered in mylar and aluminum blankets or in lines next to intimidating detention centers, *Calexico* and *Jardines del Rincón* serve as politicized art forms. They depict Chicana/o Latine youth as beautiful and human, countering the dehumanizing imagery commonly seen in the news. The vibrant colors, the intrinsic stitching, and the dynamic positioning highlights the powerful resilience of Chicana/o Latine communities, especially during tumultuous times when parents strive to remain strong for their children. Additionally, the interactions woven into the textiles showcase the significance of being present with each other in simple moments, such as two little kids playing on the floor or a father in yellow about to open a water bottle for himself or his child (Figure 4). These acts are the ones that live in our memories forever.



Figure 6 *Calexico Image* Courtesy of the Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery.

Arleene Correa Valencia's collections *critically witness* the Chicana/o Latine community moving away from social death to portray the Chicana/o Latine community justice in art form.

Each silhouette represents a story *critically witnessed* by Correa Valencia which in turn she has managed to share her view Chicana/o Latine community beauty through the detailed artworks she makes alongside the campaigns and workshops she holds for Chicana/o Latine community empowerment.

In the initial chapter, the *critical witnessing* of the deaths of Hong Trac, Persephone, and Mai profoundly transforms Jesse Pasadobles. He shifts from a naive U.S. soldier who believed the military would not kill a prisoner of war or innocent people in the VietNam War to a lawyer who comprehends the societal prejudices against black adolescents. This understanding drives him to mentor and seek justice for Calvin Thibault. The mentor relationship Jesse developed with Calvin, encouraging him to read, avoid bad words, and recognize that he is now in prison rather than a juvenile hall, exemplifies Jesse's sense of "communal kinship." It is through the double homicide case; Jesse finds a way to cope with his experience from the VietNam War. In his final address to the jury, Jesse states, "I have been given a very great privilege and honor. I have been given the opportunity to defend Calvin Thibault" (272). Jesse breaks free from his dark past through Calvin's acquittal, made possible by the "communal kinship" they establish, where both characters learn from and bring out the best in each other despite their dire circumstances. Calvin's acquittal is also the first time Jesse can see justice because it is he who fights for it rather than being naive that the U.S. will be fair.

"Gendered Violence and Life-making as Insurgency" takes *critical witnessing* of two feminicides to show how community demands can result in magnifying flawed structures even when these structures are intended to feel impenetrable such as the military and corporations. As a result, 'communal kinships' in the form of organizing, murals, and collective relationalities empower and serve the community's needs to cope and demand justice for other Latinas. Chapter

three, “(Memoir)alizing,” *critically witnesses* both social and physical death of undocumented first responders and veterans through first-person narratives that are collected into “communal kinships” in the forms of memoir and docuseries. In contrast to negative stereotypes surrounding undocumented communities, this chapter challenges the rhetoric of good vs. bad when understanding the nuances of citizenship.

“Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” takes *critical witnessing* as an active approach which produces “communal kinships” as it mediates ancestral ways of navigating life through death both physical and social. As Fregoso writes, “[i]n an interconnected pluriverse, anchored in collective kinship and presumptive care for all things, witnessing is a life force inseparable from our duties, obligations, and response-ability to the community of interrelated beings. Witnessing expands our comprehension of interrelatedness” (6). Witnessing as seen prior in relation to church, religion, and state within this dissertation is being challenged to be removed from a validation process, to instead be interpreted and defined by community needs. As the community is the one to react through communal kinships, this is not to say that justice in all forms is still meant to be achieved, yet as some instances show in times where the power structures have failed the Chicana/o Latine communities to the point of death, there can still be other forms of granting community closure through collectivity.

If I had more time, I would delve deeper into the conversation of citizenship, particularly considering current social trends. It’s crucial to examine how first and second-generation Chicana/o Latine youth are revitalizing traditions and challenging notions of citizenship by granting their families citizenship. Furthermore, I would have liked to offer more insight into Arlene Correa Valencia’s artwork, as it advocates for migrants from a perspective rooted in her

once-undocumented experience. As her work amplifies visibility without explicitly depicting faces, perhaps maintaining an intimate silence within the community to safeguard their legal status. This approach reflects a nuanced stance toward the U.S., resonating with the sentiments expressed by Cornejo Villavicencio. Although *critical witnessing* and “communal kinship” arise in conditions of death by state sanctioned violence I would like to develop a more positive outlook like the approach with Correa Valencia as there are many life-practices that are being produced to encourage community epistemologies. Witnessing is complex and requires careful consideration of all facets of the Chicana/o Latine community’s beauty. Additionally, another close reading of Alfredo Véa Jr. *Gods Go Begging* (1999) he implements detail to titles, wording, ethnic groups, languages, scenarios, and use of space to say the least that I could not render justice in one chapter alone. My contribution elicits *critical witnessing* that enacts “communal kinships,” to highlight Chicana/o Latine community resilience, moving away from the violent discourse that shifts the blame of death onto marginalized communities. “Witnessing: The Fragmented Reality of Militarization and Displacement of Chicana/o Latine Communities,” concludes with undocumented narratives, showing how they continue to strive despite numerous obstacles. Each instance of critical witnessing offers a fragment of a larger society, revealing the realities of race, class, and gender in urban cities and in foreign wars.

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