Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano: Identity, Ambiguity, and Critique in Mexican-American War Narratives

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There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country. There is room only for one hundred percent Americanism.

Theodore Roosevelt

The pressing need of Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent, swift conqueror of a suffocating past, stained only by the enriching blood drawn from the hands that struggle to clear away ruins, and from the scars left upon us by our masters.

José Martí

1. Introduction: Narrative, Ideology, and Mexican-American Identity

Since the publication of Américo Paredes’s foundational 1958 study on the epic heroic corrido, With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero, war has figured prominently as a historical reference point and as a metaphor in theorizations of Mexican-American history, culture, and identity. The Texas Mexican War of 1836 and the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848, which culminated with the US annexation of one-half of Mexican national territory and the subsequent transformation of the local Mexican population into Mexican Americans, traditionally have served as touchstones for Mexican-American studies. During the evolution of Mexican-American studies as an academic discipline
in the 1970s and 1980s, other US conflicts such as World War II and the American War in Vietnam additionally were situated as central to the field. However, there are some profound limits to the ways in which these wars have been theorized. For instance, World War II often was located within a progress narrative, in which the conflict served as a benchmark for gauging Mexican-American claims to empowerment and inclusion into the American polis. On the other hand, the American War in Vietnam has been figured as a moment of hegemonic rupture and the evolution of a Mexican-American, or more precisely, Chicano culture of resistance.2

These undertheorized uses of war to celebrate ideologically diverse claims to power have been complicated by recent archival discoveries and critical scholarship on Mexican-American soldiering and citizenship. The republication of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s 1885 historical novel The Squatter and the Don in 1996, and the recent discovery and publication of Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s jointly authored romance novel Caballero (1930) are exemplary. By examining the complex negotiations of gender and power undergirding romances between Mexican-American women and Anglo men during the Texas Mexican and Mexican-American Wars, they destabilize what José E. Limón has critiqued as the masculinist “pre-1848 ‘utopian’ visions of the South Texas social sphere in Paredes’s With His Pistol in His Hand” (Introduction xv).3 New research on Mexican-American soldiering and citizenship presented at the May 2000 US Latinas and Latinos and World War II Conference at the University of Texas at Austin and, more importantly, George Mariscal’s recently published anthology, Aztlan and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War (1999), further illustrate that although US wars are always historically situated, they often accentuate and even intensify preexisting conflicts and contradictions in American society rather than resolve them.4 As Mariscal notes, “serious differences based on class, gender, and levels of assimilation produced in Chicana/o writings about the American war in Viet Nam a wide range of figures whose complex identities take shape at the intersection of contradictory and often mutually exclusive categories” (17–18). These reassessments of the variable status of war in Mexican-American history and culture reveal that US wars demand, and may even enable, broader diachronic and more complex remappings of Mexican-American identity and ideology.

Significantly, Ramón Saldivar foregrounds this remapping of Mexican-American soldiering and citizenship in an expanded discussion of a Hegelian and Derridean inflected model of “Chicano difference” in his critical introduction to Paredes’s collected short stories, The Hammon and the Beans and Other Stories (1994).
Having lucidly proposed that some Chicana and Chicano narratives function “not so much as a representation of an ideology of difference but as a production of that ideology” in his groundbreaking work *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990), Saldivar underscores how US wars abroad pose particularly salient problems to attempts to theorize Mexican-American identity. He pays particular attention to Paredes’s short story “Ichiro Kikuchi.” This story focuses on a Mexican of Japanese heritage serving in the Imperial Japanese Army, who was captured but ultimately spared execution by a Mexican-American US Army sergeant who identifies with his enemy because of Kikuchi’s Virgin of Guadalupe medallion. In this story, Saldivar notes, the Mexican-American GI is forced to “acknowledge the extent to which he too, at home and in Japan, straddles binary oppositions as he stands in the position of the reified and objectified racial Other” (Introduction xl). By thus illuminating the historical and ontological tensions at play in literary articulations of Mexican-American identity at war, Saldivar also signals the ambiguous and complex relationship between Mexican-American literature and the established American canon. Expanding upon his earlier claim in *Chicano Narrative* that Chicano and Chicana narratives serve “as vital correctives to impoverished traditional notions of what today constitutes ‘American’ literature” (215), Saldivar further shows in his discussion of Paredes’s World War II stories how Mexican-American war narratives pressure traditional notions of “America” and “Americanness” to the point of rupture. This rupture occurs precisely because the Mexican-American GIs charged with defending and expanding the country simultaneously stand inside and outside the hegemonic narrative of nation.

In this essay, I propose to expand upon Saldivar’s interrogation of the complexities of Mexican-American identity and culture as they are inflicted and illuminated through war. Following Mariscal’s adaptations of Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling” and “structures of experience” to read Mexican-American war literature as displaced ideological “soundings” (rather than unmediated representations of fact) that variably destabilize hegemonic figurations of US wars and American identity in general (25–26), I will examine both the oppositional and ideological functions of Mexican-American war narratives. Specifically, I will survey an expanded corpus of war narratives by Mexican-American authors from the Texas Mexican War to the more recent Persian Gulf War, including memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, novels, and testimonial fiction. I am particularly interested in examining how Mexican-American soldier-authors deploy form to negotiate the Althusserian notion of an all-encompassing ideology in
ways that ultimately destabilize hegemonic categories such as “American” and “Mexican American,” and even counterhegemonic categories such as “Chicano.” I will show, for example, how the combat and related writing activities of some Mexican-American soldier-authors such as J. Luz Saenz, Raul Morin, and Roy P. Benavidez simultaneously lay claim to their US American heritage while also inadvertently reinforcing the xenophobic models of “America” and “Americananness” proposed by former President Theodore Roosevelt in his infamous 1918 Kansas City Star editorial promoting US participation in World War I. Other Mexican-American soldier-authors such as Juan Seguin, Elena Rodriguez, and José Zúñiga introduce alternative recognition scenes that further illustrate the radical insufficiency of a claim to inclusion based upon a celebration of US minority status. Significantly, the distinctly racialized and gendered “different” Mexican-American characters in this body of narratives paradoxically but inevitably facilitate their own partial containment precisely at the moment of their resistance and claim to power.

The presence of yet another cadre of Mexican-American soldier-authors such as Joe Rodriguez, Daniel Cano, and Alejandro Murguía, who recast their overdetermined ambiguity as Mexican Americans into an incipient subaltern internationalism in their novels and testimonial fiction, demands an even broader assessment of Mexican-American literature that must account for alternative genealogies outside the (US) American literary canon. In their narratives, the term Chicano does not merely signify a resistance to the hegemonic US American containment of minority difference as ideological sameness evidenced in other Mexican-American war narratives. Rather, the term is transformed into a claim to hegemonic status in and of itself that at once buttresses and pressures José Martí’s Pan-Americanist paradigm of subaltern subjectivity proposed in his polemical 1891 essay “Our America.” Expanding upon José David Saldivar’s adaptation of Martí’s paradigm in The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History (1991), I submit that these Mexican-American soldier-authors not only reconfigure “Americanness” by relocating America outside the ideological discourses encompassing the US American literary canon, but they even expand these categories beyond the parameters of Martí’s América. I thus conclude that, when read together, all these soldier-authors reveal the many varied ways in which Mexican-American identity at war is radically unfixed even as it always already is historically grounded. As such, they both demand and enable a broader and more complex assessment of American identity as
well as Mexican-American and Chicano cultural and political agency in the world at large.

2. Soldiering and Citizenship in Mexican-American War
Memoir, Autobiography, and Biography

Any discussion of Mexican-American war narratives must account for the early-nineteenth-century Texas Mexican (Tejano) criollo rancher, Juan Nepomuceno Seguin. As Jesús F. de la Teja notes in his 1991 critical introduction to his translation of Seguin’s 1858 memoirs, *A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguin*, this nineteenth-century Tejano warrior is both revered and renounced by Mexicans, Anglo Americans, and Mexican Americans alike. He is especially infamous for having fought alongside the Anglo-Texan and Tejano insurrectionists against Mexico in the 1836 Texas Mexican War—alternately referred to by various groups as the “Texas War of Independence” and “La Traición” (“The Betrayal”). Seguin is denigrated similarly for siding with the Mexican Army of General Santa Anna in its fight against the invading US military ten years later during the Mexican-American War. Significantly, despite the rebukes he endured from both sides of the newly redrawn border, and despite the many betrayals by his former white allies who attempted to dispossess and even murder him and other Tejanos, Seguin, in his new capacity as the first mayor of San Antonio de Bejar (San Antonio, Texas), vainly attempted to build cross-cultural alliances after Texas seceded from Mexico. His efforts included, for instance, incessant attempts to have official Texas Republic business and legislation conducted and published bilingually in English and Spanish. He failed miserably.

These failures notwithstanding, Seguin is most significant to Mexican-American history not only because of his rejection of the emerging Anglo-American hegemony, but also because he refused to identify solely as Mexican, presenting instead a much more complex performance of soldiering and citizenship that involves enemies and allies who are alternately Mexican and Anglo. Whereas Genaro Padilla pathologizes Seguin’s memoirs by claiming that “Seguin’s *Personal Memoirs* is in many of its details the prefigurative narrative of the forms of personal and cultural schizophrenia witnessed in succeeding Mexican-American autobiographical narratives” (161), I maintain that Seguin always privileged his Tejano identity over the Mexican or the American, even when this involved immense and traumatic personal loss.
When Seguín defiantly proclaims in his memoirs that even though "[I was] compelled to fight my own [Tejano and Anglo-Texan] countrymen" in the Mexican-American War after being captured by Santa Anna, "I served Mexico [and] served her loyally and faithfully," he is not expressing schizophrenia (74–75). On the contrary, he is rejecting binary or even dialectical models of identity predicated upon a claim to minority status. Instead, he is introducing a Tejanocentrism whose ideological clarity—however elitist, chauvinistic, and myopic it may have been—will not be approximated for generations to come. But for Seguín and his contemporaries, this regional paradigm was nonetheless radically insufficient.

Moreover, by thus proclaiming the centrality of his criollo Tejano identity against pressure from both sides of the increasingly racialized border, Seguín further overdetermines his ambiguity as an American and even as a Mexican, foregrounding a dilemma that will follow him even after his death. Labeled by Anglo Texans and Anglo Americans as a "Mexican Benedict Arnold," and similarly shunned by Mexicans, Seguín's apparently shifting loyalties and seemingly ambiguous notions of identity and citizenship were subsequently played out in a macabre spectacle of rejection and recognition upon his death in 1890. According to De la Teja, after Seguín initially was buried in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, where he had fled into "involuntary exile" after the Mexican-American War, his remains later were disinterred in 1974 and reburied in Texas on 4 July 1976 as part of the US Bicentennial Celebrations in the city that now bears his name. As such, Seguín becomes the paradigmatic Mexican-American soldier despite his claims to the contrary: as a Mexican citizen born and raised in a region subsequently absorbed into the United States of America, he is repeatedly forced to take sides against family, friends, and the warring peoples to whom he feels equal amounts of filiation and antipathy. They in turn show him similarly contradictory emotions that are resolved only after his death—and I would add by his death!

Even more broadly, the morbid recognition scene in which the Tejano-cum-Mexican-American soldier is embraced as a legitimate American hero only after he is safely dead has become part of the ideological apparatus into which subsequent generations of Mexican Americans and other ethnic and racial minorities simultaneously are interpellated and effaced through service in the US military. This topos is underscored in Morin's 1963 collective biography, Among the Valiant: Mexican Americans in WWII and Korea, which was underwritten by the patriotic Mexican-American veterans organization the American G.I. Forum.9 In his
tribute to Mexican-American “heroism” performed on battlefields throughout the world, Morin rejects the complicated ideological legacy bequeathed by Seguin and other nineteenth-century Mexican-American “turncoats” such as Rafael Chacón and Santiago Tafolla, who fought on opposite sides in the American Civil War before deserting.10 Following J. Luz Saenz’s 1933 Spanish-language tribute to Mexican-American World War I veterans, Mexican Americans in the Great War: And Their Contingent in Support of Democracy, Humanity, and Justice, Morin attempts to revise the lingering notion that Mexican-American soldiers cannot be trusted. He does so, ironically, by paralleling Seguin’s militancy for bilingualism. A highly decorated combat veteran himself, Morin suggests that because Mexican Americans expressed their enthusiasm for accepting the “man’s calling” to join the World War II war effort in “an exciting half-English, half-Spanish language that sounded twice as alarming to the stranger,” they were able to perform doubly patriotic acts of bravery (14). In this way, Morin invokes the popular bicultural refrain often recited by Mexican-American veterans—Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano—which roughly translates as “though our blood be Mexican, our heart is American.”11

Rather than serving as a marker of bicultural affirmation, however, this troping of the Mexican-American GI—or, Government Issue—body actually functions as a lethal ritual of effacement that is consummated by the countless battlefield deaths (often the result of suicide missions) of Mexican-American soldiers who heeded this racist and immanently masculinist prescription for Mexican-American citizenship. Following the partial self-effacement encoded in the American G.I. Forum’s distinct use of hegemonic nomenclature—which deliberately and noticeably is absent of any racial signifiers—Morin’s claim to inclusion ironically rests upon the physical erasure of thousands of Mexican-American war “heroes.” Among the Valiant pays particular attention to Mexican-American Medal of Honor awardees. After recounting the oft-stated statistic that Mexican Americans have been awarded more Medals of Honor per capita than any other group, Morin cites directly from their official award citation notices. These Mexican-American soldiers are praised for “gallantry and intrepidity on a seemingly suicidal mission” (167), “complete disregard for his personal safety” (144), “willing self-sacrifice” (198), and most troubling, “gallantly [giving] his life for his country” (261). Although Morin’s list of self-effacing accolades is exemplary of Medal of Honor recipients in general, the tributes in Among the Valiant have a particularly racialized resonance given Seguin’s legacy, which prefigures Mexican Americans as potential
enemies whose loyalty—and nationality—cannot be determined until they have made the ultimate sacrifice. Like various cinematic treatments of Mexican Americans in World War II as well as the US Department of Defense’s propaganda publication, *Hispanics in America’s Defense* (1990), which similarly praises past “Hispanic” veterans, Morin’s tributes to Mexican-American war heroes also revolve around a disproportionately large number of Mexican-American GIs who were killed in action and only *posthumously* decorated for their battlefield “heroism.” As such, *Among the Valiant* paradoxically undermines Morin’s attempts to resolve the cultural and ideological bifurcation mapped onto Mexican-American soldiers since Seguin’s battles. Indeed, his tribute to this lethal model of Mexican-American citizenship ultimately proposes the *Mexican* as incompatible with the *American* even as it suggests hybridity. Although the World War II military is lauded by some for integrating its ranks at a time when racial minorities were grossly discriminated against in the civilian sector, Morin inadvertently reveals that the price for full citizenship for Mexican-Americans is not multicultural fluency, but self-sacrifice, self-effacement, and ultimately *Mexican-American* blood.12

In his 1986 autobiography (jointly authored with Oscar Griffin), *The Three Wars of Roy Benavidez*, which revolves around the author’s service as a Special Forces commando in the US intervention into the Vietnamese civil war, Benavidez further underscores the limits—and even fallacies—of a model of identity that pairs minority difference with a claim to ideological sameness and inclusion through military service. Like Morin, Benavidez reinforces the binary *Mexican-versus-American* even as he proposes to collapse it through several recognition scenes that mimic the Franklinian autobiographical celebration of the rise of the proto-capitalist American hero.13 In a scene that illustrates Susan Jeffords’s claim that American “representations of the Vietnam War can be used as an emblem for . . . the ‘remasculinization’ of American culture” as well as the emasculated Vietnam veteran in the aftermath of the only US military defeat (*Remasculinization* xi), Benavidez opens his autobiography by recounting how he earned his first award for “valor” as a young boy—a quarter—in exchange for pulling a bull’s testicles at the behest of Anglo ranch hands in his hometown of El Campo, Texas. He then rehearses this masculinist and immanently racist recognition scene while in Vietnam in pursuit of a different type of metal currency, the Medal of Honor, by recalling how he is repeatedly wounded by rifle fire, fragmentation grenades, and even a bayonet after volunteering for a daring suicidal mission to rescue his fellow Green Berets in the midst of being annihilated by North Vietnamese troops.14 Despite
his wounds, Benavides nonetheless is successful in rescuing his Anglo-American colleagues, hurling them into the US Army helicopter along with three wounded North Vietnamese soldiers, whom he mistakes as Americans due to the chaos of battle, though perhaps for other reasons as well. As the wounded and dead are being unloaded from the helicopter, Benavidez also lays on the ground near death, barely able to breathe and unable to speak as he chokes on his own blood. To his horror, he finds himself being zipped up in a body bag by an Anglo-American army medic who mistakes his Yaqui Indian features for those of a "gook" [sic]. Benavidez writes:

I waited, eyes closed, and listened as men clambered into the chopper and began handing the wounded out the door.

"Hey look," someone called. "These three ain't ours. Somebody was throwing NVAs on too."

I struggled to look toward the voices. Two soldiers were standing near the dwindling cache of bodies. One pointed at three remaining corpses.

"Must not have had time to check I.D.'s," the other said as he tugged at an arm.

I retreated to the darkness behind my eyelids. Soon, I felt arms lifting me and sensed the sunlight fall across my face as they handed me through the doorway.

"Just put him over here with the other three on the ground," said the voice belonging to the arms holding my legs.

The other three? "Oh, Christ, No!" my mind cried as realization dawned. Half of the blood I had just dumped over Southeast Asia belonged to the Yaqui Indian nation. More than once my native American features had been mistaken for Oriental. Now, by God, they were going to get me dumped with the enemy dead. (4)

In perhaps the most dramatic case of mistaken identity in all of Mexican-American literature, Benavidez is (mis)recognized as an enemy soldier because of his racial markings, specifically his brown skin and "Oriental" facial features. And it is only after he spits up his own blood into the Anglo-American's face—grotesquely signaling that though his blood be Mexican, his heart is American—that he is recognized as "The Bean Bandit," or "Tango Mike Mike" (the phonetic acronym for "The Mean Mexican"), which are the epithets his fellow soldiers use with equal amounts of derision and affection. This scene, in fact, can be read
as exemplary of the socially symbolic resonance of US minority literature, which Saldivar, Fredric Jameson, and others note is embedded with profound historical and social conflict. That is, Benavides is literally identified by the Mexican blood he spits up, which marks him as familiar yet different: even as he is embraced as American he is recognized as Other. Hence, whereas Morin proposes an ideologically ambiguous model of soldiering and citizenship that revolves around the sacrifice of the differentiated body as a claim to sameness, Benavidez reveals that his racialized “Americanness” is always already—and always insufficiently—different despite his battlefield claims to ideological sameness. And this racialized difference, or Sangre Mexicana, is antithetical to ideological sameness, or the Corazón Americano.

3. The Gender of Ideology in the US Army

Significantly, Mexican-American veterans Elena Rodriguez and José Zuñiga occupy the breach created by Morin’s and Benavidez’s performative contradictions with alternative syntheses of Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano that reclaim difference from its overdetermined ambiguity. Through the form of a feminist bildungsroman and a gay coming-out memoir, respectively, Rodriguez and Zuñiga map out the counterhegemonic potential, and potential limits, of political resistance and cultural affirmation from within the ideological parameters of the US military. In so doing, they demand, and partly enable, an alternative reading of Mexican-American literature that relocates this corpus outside the hegemonic models of “America” and “Americanness” promulgated by Roosevelt and rehearsed by Mexican-American soldiers such as Morin and Benavidez, among others.

Rodriguez opens her fictionalized autobiographical coming-of-age story, Peacetime: Spirit of the Eagle (1997), by underscoring how her alter ego Private Medrano, along with the other primarily working-class minority women in her all-female platoon, are under constant assault by male GIs during boot camp training in the 1980s. During a time when the US officially was at peace, the female recruits are repeatedly called “bitch,” “cunt,” “pussy wimp thing,” and “stupid empty headed bitch” (92, 165–66), and taunted with shouts of “COME to me baby. COME! I know what all you horny bitches want!” (146). Rodriguez’s narrative also echoes the infamous sex exploitation scandals at the Aberdeen Proving Ground Army Base: she dramatizes how the female GIs in Medrano’s platoon are instructed in the proper maintenance of the M16 alongside their instruction in the proper way to apply
makeup and cover their bodies during sleep by the very same male drill sergeants who try to coerce them into sex!

Instead of pursuing the self-effacing mimesis and potentially lethal claims to inclusion modeled by the aforementioned male soldier-authors, Rodriguez’s characters attempt to resist US Army indoctrination from within the ideological parameters of the military itself. As the sexual assaults become more pronounced and threatening, the entire platoon of women, who previously had engaged in a variety of race-based and petty personal conflicts, are forced to coalesce and recast their female GI bodies into an army in and of itself. This is necessary if they are to resist the interpelling force of boot camp and the males who rule there. For instance, after the notorious predator Drill Sergeant Grimes orders a female recruit to report to his tent so he can “cram some brains” into her after she purportedly committed some unknown offense, the platoon breaks with Army protocol (165). Led by Private Medrano, the female GIs decide to form a defensive perimeter around themselves for their own protection instead of occupying their assigned foxholes that would have formed a perimeter around their male drill sergeants, who propose to occupy the center. Rodriguez describes the scene as follows: “[Private Medrano] walked back to the foxhole. As she snuggled in, she noticed Peck was at the end, next to Dekan sleeping like a baby. It struck Medrano how funny they looked all in one hole. Heads were coming out of all sides of the foxhole since no one was sleeping in the same position. Medrano had her feet on both sides” (182). This grimly humorous scene is further enhanced as Rodriguez notes that each recruit is sleeping with her gas mask on to protect herself from the invisible yet ever-present threat: like the C₂ gas of the gas chamber training exercise, the male drill sergeants always are lurking nearby, unseen, but potentially lethal. With the female GIs’ faces and bodies obscured yet adjoined into a cohesive fighting force—their limbs extending out in all directions like M16 muzzles pointed out toward the enemy—these women resist the pornographic gaze and attendant sexual violence mapped onto their bodies by their fellow heterosexual male GIs. By thus representing this collective rebellion and reappropriation of the female GI body, Rodriguez undermines the phallic poetics that are regularly troped through male narratives of soldiering and sexuality.¹⁶ Instead, she invokes the Mexican soldadera archetype that has served as a touchstone for Chicana feminism, thereby proposing a collectivist, multiracial subaltern female subject-in-struggle.¹⁷ Epitomized by Private Medrano, this subaltern subject defiantly attempts to redefine, and even transcend, the ambiguous and violent interstitial space between Sangre Mexicana
and *Corazón Americano* into which she has been consigned as a *Mexican-American female GI-cum-soldadera*.

Yet Rodriguez’s narrative also demonstrates that even by subversively coalescing into a collective body of *soldaderas*, the women in *Peacetime* ironically may be facilitating their own containment within the US Army, since the convergence of their individual identities into one body—the GI unit—is the very objective of boot camp. These overlapping and competing claims to this collective female GI body are underscored by the problematic “compliment” Drill Sergeant Acosta gives to his marching platoon of women: “I’ll tell you something, Third Platoon, males cannot march better than females. . . . When a group of females walk somewhere together, they march on the same foot without even knowing it. Sergeant Washington and I have been watching you. You’re the best marchers we’ve ever had” (194). Sergeant Acosta’s remark underscores the fact that even as the women resist the racist and masculinist military establishment by appropriating boot camp as a feminist consciousness-raising experience, they still are potentially contained within it, almost by rote, precisely at the point of their resistance. Thus, by appropriating and recasting the male warrior hero into the US Army *soldadera*, Rodriguez inadvertently preserves the ambiguity foregrounded in male tropings of the Mexican-American GI body from Seguín to the present. Reflecting this unresolved tension between containment and resistance, the text concludes with a “Jody Call,” a cadence song used to keep time while marching, in which the women sing:

Standing tall and looking good now,  
Your left wo-oh your left now  
Ought to be in Hollywood now  
Your left wo-oh your left now. (231)

Hence, even as they claim autonomy from the army by “standing tall” and feeling secure about their agency as women and combat-ready soldiers, the army also claims ownership of them by compelling them to march forward into the next military base that will attempt to rehouse these women as GIs, or *Government Issue material*.

Unlike Rodriguez, who in real life received a medical discharge after boot camp by strategically invoking her male drill sergeant’s sexist views that women are too feeble for military service, Zuñiga, a highly decorated combat veteran of the Persian Gulf War, was discharged from the army for emphatically dispelling prejudices about gays in the military.18 As such, he similarly reveals—and more explicitly challenges—the limits of a paradigm
of Mexican-American identity that inadvertently deploys racial difference as a strategic claim to ideological sameness and inclusion within the parameters of a racist, masculinist, and decidedly homophobic society. Zuñiga’s 1994 coming-out memoir, Soldier of the Year: The Story of a Gay American Patriot, maps out the process by which his initial claim that his difference as a gay Mexican American is compatible with the US military and the American mainstream in general, presages his forced discharge and subsequent banishment from the US Army—the paragon of Americana—which deems homosexuality to be incompatible with military service. It is this predetermined exclusion, however, that ultimately enables Zuñiga to build upon Rodriguez’s narrative interrogations and personal negotiations of soldiering, sexuality, and citizenship to propose a completely different model of identity outside the hegemonic model of “Americanness” buttressed in large part by the US Army.19

Whereas Michael Bronski has aptly critiqued gay American soldiers memoirs, including Zuñiga’s, for ostensibly promoting the “notion that gay people deserve equal rights because homosexuality is an insignificant ‘difference’ and that gay people are capable of being as brave, loyal, and patriotic as any ‘good American’” (12), I maintain that Zuñiga’s memoir proposes a much more complex discourse. Zuñiga deliberately illuminates the homoerotic dimension of military service in general, especially the life of the frontline grunt where the mandatory homosocial bonding is intensified by combat during which blood, sweat, tears and other bodily fluids are discharged and exchanged. He also openly discusses the homosexual bonds that exist among the large underground cadre of closeted lesbian and gay soldiers. That is, he refuses to sacrifice the counterhegemonic salience of his difference in order to claim inclusion in a homophobic society, and instead privileges an alternative pledge of allegiance to a broader cadre of subaltern subjects fighting for human and not just civil rights. In so doing, Zuñiga relocates Mexican-American war literature outside straight Anglo-American male hegemonic claims to “America” and “Americanness,” and also outside the aforementioned Mexican-American war narratives that figure counterhegemonic difference as akin to hegemonic sameness.

Zuñiga’s revision of American patriotism revolves around yet another distinct troping of the Mexican-American GI body, namely, his own. Inverting the homophobic masculinism that led to his forced discharge from the army and that undergirds the Pentagon’s overall doubts about the loyalties and capacities of gay soldiers, Zuñiga begins his retort by first critiquing President Clinton for having no “balls” for his refusal to lift completely the ban on

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gays in the military (179). Using his prestige as the 1993 “Soldier of the Year,” Zuñiga follows former sailor Keith Meinhold’s patented use of a jacket fashioned out of the American flag and similarly adorns himself. But unlike Meinhold, Zuñiga endows his flag-draped body with a distinctly racialized, sexualized, and even collectivist significance. His newly reconstructed identity as a different type of male warrior-hero is predicated upon a simultaneous evocation of his Mexican revolutionary ancestor—the paternal grandfather who bequeathed a “lionesque warrior’s glory” (16–17)—as well as his bisexual lovers, Dave and Laurie. He consolidates his new subjectivity in a chapter significantly titled “Operation Coming Out,” in which he discusses his nationwide coming out during the 1993 Gay and Lesbian Rights March on Washington in terms of a military operation. Zuñiga recalls: “This was meeting No. 5, or maybe No. 6, in preparation for D.C. It seemed that all we did lately was think, plan, strategize, drill, and rehearse. Robert [the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force media coordinator] had warned us the media could be a double-edged sword. If we played our cards right, it was a vehicle with which to raise public awareness and knowledge” (191). Further developing the military metaphor, he adds: “I was truly fortunate. Louis XIII had Cardinal Richelieu. The Medicis had Machiavelli. I had Dave and Laurie to advise me and help prepare me for a required metamorphosis” (192). Through his persistent claims to “Old Glory,” Zuñiga further revises the Mexican-American GI body: what heretofore had been figured as an individualist yet self-effacing sacrifice of blood and body in exchange for legitimacy in some of the other Mexican-American war narratives discussed above, becomes for Zuñiga a refusal to deny his racialized queer identity. He proclaims to be gay, Mexican and, above all else, an American patriot precisely because he is a gay Mexican American.

More importantly, Zuñiga’s nationwide coming-out becomes a demand for inclusion based on an entirely different claim to sameness. As such, soldiering begins to assume a metaphorical resonance that effectively removes his text outside the ideologically ambiguous call for inclusion of gays in the military by some mainstream gay activists. In a move that distinguishes Soldier of the Year from politically conservative gay soldiers’ assimilation narratives such as Joseph Steffan’s Honor Bound: A Gay Naval Midshipman Fights to Serve His Country (1992), or Margarethe Cammermeyer’s Serving in Silence (1994), Zuñiga relocates his gay Mexican-American body onto a new poetic and political topography. Having evolved from a self-proclaimed conservative Hispanic Republican who admits that he once freely denigrated Susan Faludi as a “bitch,” into a gay activist who travels the na-
tion militating for gay and other minority rights beyond an ideologically ambiguous call for inclusion of them in the US military, Zuñiga ultimately comes to identify with an ever-expanding cadre of subordinated groups, whom he calls the “Rainbow People.” Expanding on an important symbol of gay rights activists, Zuñiga’s Rainbow People includes everyone from AIDS patients and activists to victims of domestic exploitation and abuse, as well as international victims of the US imperialist wars in which he once served. Significantly, Zuñiga does not reject America; rather, he reconfigures it as subaltern and even transnational. Determined to “reap the rewards of my evolving existence, and fight for what I still believe to be just and right” (299), Zuñiga thus queers Sangre Mexicana while further racializing and expanding Corazón Americano. In so doing, he introduces an alternative vocabulary—a claim to subaltern sameness as opposed to dialectical difference—that other Mexican-American soldier-authors further elaborate upon in their own attempts to resituate Mexican-American literature, identity, and ideology outside the US capitalist state and, by extension, the US American literary heritage.

4. Race, War, and Race Wars in Mexican-American Fiction about the American War in Vietnam

The complexly gendered, cross-cultural, and transnational Mexican-American subject introduced by Rodriguez and Zuñiga is further developed by Mexican-American soldier-authors in their fiction about the American War in Vietnam. Following Mariscal’s thesis that Mexican-American literature and art about America’s longest war inevitably destabilizes hegemonic figurations of the war and its warriors while also expanding the range of possibilities for the performance of Mexican-American identity, I add that soldier-authors such as Charlie Trujillo, Michael Rodriguez, Alfredo Véa, Joe Rodriguez, and Daniel Cano, among others, introduce provocative recognition scenes that force us to consider how Mexican-American identity simultaneously is a complex First World and Third World phenomenon. Trujillo’s novel Dogs from Illusion (1994), for instance, focuses on the in-group bonding formed between frontline Mexican-American troops from the same hometown, whereas former Marine Michael Rodriguez’s collection of short stories Humidity Moon (1998), explores cross-cultural allegiances between front-line Marine enlisted men of all races. Joe Rodriguez’s 1989 novella, Oddsplayer, sounds out yet other possible allegiances by focusing on the race- and class-based conflicts and consciousness-raising combat expe-
riences among racial minority combat troops, or grunts, that lead to several “fraggings,” or deliberate killings of their white noncommissioned officers. The perpetrators of these fraggings are a squad of Marines whom the narrator notes are variously identified as “stupid spic,” “dumb Mexican,” “nigger,” “two-faced yellow kike,” and “half-breed Indian” by the same white soldiers who referred to their Vietnamese allies and enemies alike as “gooks, slant-eyes, yellow meat, [and] yaller niggers” (63). These ethnic and racial minority Marines, however, defiantly and collectively reclaim their reified difference by referring to themselves as “Rainbows.” Significantly, their violent act of retribution is radically different from the symbolic significance of fraggings in conventional Anglo-American representations of the Vietnamese civil war, in which the murder of an American officer serves as the climax of the downtrodden grunt’s claim to agency while simultaneously dehistoricizing and depoliticizing the war by personalizing or allegorizing it. Rather, Rodriguez deploys this violent act of insubordination by the Rainbows to revise conventional meanings of “Mexican American,” “Chicano,” and even “American” in terms of a subaltern internationalism.

Acting on the challenge by Johnson, a black Rainbow who decries, “Why should we Rainbows fight among ourselves and do the Man’s work for him?” (62), Private Perez, a Mexican-American draftee from rural California, decides to participate in the fragging of his superiors, Sergeants Talbot and Dibbs. These white sergeants are notorious for sending minority troops on an inordinate amount of dangerous night guard duty, demoralizing body recovery detail, and unnecessary “suicide” patrols—which the sergeants themselves are rumored to have ambushed! In this context, Private Perez’s battlefield epiphany, in which he realizes that “the color of skin fixed the enemy” (63), is presaged by a rather cliché but significant soliloquy addressed to Maria, his absent Chicana activist friend from college. Reflecting on the series of historically salient events that led him to this point, Private Perez muses:

I quit college and found work to pay father’s medical bills. You, compañera, realized I would be drafted. Both of us knew many families with sangre in uniform and there were KIAs [Killed in Action]. The odds were clear. Chicanos from the university and the barrios protested.

The day for induction came. I went through the routine in dread. I felt like an Indio watching the Spaniards burn sacred books. I saw racks of skulls. The pioneers were drawing the wagons in a circle. (71–72)
Through these invocations of the traumas of Mexican-American history—specifically, Spanish genocide and the equally violent Anglo-American settler colonialism that ensued—Rodriguez synthesizes the trope *Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano* yet again. What was heretofore understood by other Mexican-American soldiers as a claim to citizenship and inclusion in the US now signifies a bloody, brutal, and tragic contradiction: like the other Rainbows, Private Perez ultimately realizes he is in the wrong army, fighting the wrong war, against the wrong enemy.

Moreover, not only does Private Perez figuratively claim allegiance to the indigenous identity that is framed as a liability in Benavidez’s narrative, but Rodriguez’s Mexican-American soldier even goes so far as to intimate allegiance to the Vietnamese communists against whom he is drafted to fight precisely because of his identification with his Native American heritage. While the filiation between Mexican Americans and Native Americans has been wrought with essentialist conceits and problematically ahistorical appropriations in much of Chicano literature and historiography, Rodriguez’s use of this dream sequence nonetheless illuminates Private Perez’s complex relationship with both classical and internal colonialism. As a Mexican American, Private Perez’s genetic code and subsequent reification as a racially different subject is determined in large part by the Spanish colonial conquest and attendant *mestizaje* just as his emergent Rainbow identity is imbricated with contradictions arising from yet another imperialist venture in which he is both its agent and its object. That is, Rodriguez’s Private Perez is gesturing toward a subaltern identity that not only is produced in the clash between the First World and the Third World, but also spans the divide between these two sites.

After the fragging, Private Perez consequently proclaims himself to be a Chicano in direct opposition to the interpellated Mexican-American GI he once was. Indeed, Rodriguez’s depiction of Private Perez comes to identify the connection between US racism and imperialism that stateside Chicano artists and intellectuals—sometimes in collaboration with North Vietnamese and other Third and First World artists and intellectuals—had been performing through their art, scholarship, and related political mobilizations.23 That is, just as the moniker Rainbow ultimately comes to include a racialized Third World enemy of US capitalist imperialism, so too is the term *Chicano* transformed. Although *Chicano* refers at one level to a dialectical subject born in the clash between two economic orders that Américo Paredes, Ramón Saldívar, Mario Barrera, and others outline, it also comes to signify a burgeoning yet still inchoate internationalism in which difference no longer simply signifies a counterhegemonic claim to
minority status, but the complete opposite—the majority. Similar to Paredes’s aforementioned World War II stories and, more precisely, comparable to Alfredo Véa’s treatment of mutual identification between Chicano and North Vietnamese communist troops in *Gods Go Begging* (1999), Rodriguez’s main protagonist, Private Perez, is distinguished by his negotiations of combat and consciousness, which simultaneously situate him both inside and outside the geopolitical borders of the US. As such, Rodriguez inevitably forces and enables us to consider alternative genealogies for Mexican-American identity and culture.

In his 1995 novel, *Shifting Loyalties*, Daniel Cano extends this discourse on internal resistance and subaltern affirmation to its logical conclusion by relocating the Chicano subject on a completely different ideological terrain that further complicates the previously discussed literary articulations of Mexican-American soldiering and citizenship. In this novel, the many subplots in which both Mexican-American and Anglo-American characters negotiate power and identity all arise from the combat experiences of a group of Mexican-American soldiers. These experiences, which occur in the ambiguous geopolitical space “somewhere outside Duc Pho” during the US intervention in the Vietnamese civil war, signify radically different things for all involved.24 The nucleus of the drama, however, is centered on the life of a Mexican-American GI, Jesse Peña, a Mexican-American private in the US Army who officially is listed as missing in action, but who is rumored to be leading Viet Cong patrols in combat against US troops and military installations. Similar to Rolando Hinojosa, who represents Mexican-American GIs in the Korean civil war as simultaneously allies and enemies in his autobiographical fictional memoir, *The Useless Servants* (1993), and Teatro Campesino’s Vietnam trilogy, which makes filial associations between Mexican-American campesinos and Vietnamese peasants, Cano converts the Mexican-American hero renowned for self-sacrificing bravery into a *Mexican-American defector-cum-Asian Communist enemy*.25 This narrative of “shifting loyalties,” which Mariscal has identified as a prominent topos in literary representations of this and other US wars for which “the empirical evidence of GIs crossing over to fight alongside the enemy is slight” (42), nonetheless is recast in Cano’s novel as a Mexican-American saga with antecedents as far back in the history of the Americas as Seguin.26 And like Seguin, Cano inverts the discourse of loyalty: the burden of proof is now shifted to the nation suspected of being disloyal to its own citizens by forcing them to fight in an unjust war against people who might actually be their allies.

This critical gaze revolves around Peña’s disappearance and
the repeated reports of sightings of him at the head of Viet Cong patrols. Peña’s radical self-effacement, which goes against the grain of conventional expectations of self-sacrifice placed upon minority troops by the US military discussed above, creates profound dissonance and leads to heated arguments among the troops, especially the Mexican-American GIs in Peña’s former squad, all of whom identify themselves as Chicanos. No one can agree on the significance of the rumors, much less the meaning of the roles they all play as Mexican-American GIs in this global drama. Although some refute the sightings as “a bunch of bullshit” by a “bunch of fuckin’ racist grunts” (81), other Mexican-American GIs believe that the trauma of seeing his Mexican-American friends’ “bodies tore up into [a] thousand pieces” during combat led Peña to the point of no return—defection (86). Together, these Mexican-American GIs attempt to verify these rumors and understand what it may mean that their friend is a Chicano and a suspected communist, and especially a Chicano Communist.

Following Elena Rodriguez’s, Zuñiga’s, and Joe Rodriguez’s piecemeal transformations of the racist and masculinist recognition scenes introduced by Morin and Benavidez, Cano synthesizes Sangre Mexicanal/Corazón Americano by removing his characters’ Chicano identity—and by extension, his narrative—outside the geopoetic parameters of Roosevelt’s nativist model of America. The climax of this troubling inquiry into the significance of Peña’s actions occurs when the Mexican-American troops interview an Anglo-American infantryman who claims to have been confronted, and spared, by Peña while on an ambush patrol. Even though the white GI derisively recalls that he saw Peña “squatting, like gooks do,” the Mexican-American GIs become convinced of the veracity of the sighting when the soldier, who had never before seen Peña, accurately describes Peña’s prominent dimples and ever present smile (92–93). That is, Peña’s simultaneous assimilation of enemy characteristics and cultural practices (he wears black pajamas and sandals and uses a distinctive squat), and his continued filiation to the perennially downtrodden GI grunts he refuses to shoot even as he leads the “enemy” in combat against them, accordingly convinces Peña’s Mexican-American GI colleagues that their friend had become the enemy, and vice versa.

Inevitably, the debates over the veracity of the rumors of and the rationale for Peña’s defection become more incisive political ruminations. Hector, a new replacement soldier who joined the unit after Peña’s disappearance, is the first to synthesize the collective visceral dissonance into political critique: “The dude’s got balls. I don’t know how, but this guy Peña understands that every-
thing here means nothing. It's all fantasy, a joke, a big fuckin' lie, man. I ain't never met the guy, but I been thinking about him a lot. I heard the stories. I heard that Peña lived in San Antonio, in some rat hole that he couldn't afford to buy because the bank wouldn't lend him the money. I heard that in the summer when it hits a hundred, him and his neighbors fried like goddamn chickens because they couldn't afford air conditioning. So now they send him here to fight for his country, for his land! Wow, what a joke, man” (98). Similar to Elena Rodriguez and Zuñiga, Cano disarticulates the linkage of violent masculinity and citizenship promulgated by the US military and assimilated by Mexican-American GIs such as Benavidez and others into masculinist, bloody, and simultaneously self-effacing acts of “bravery.” Slowly but steadily, the Mexican-American GIs in Cano’s autobiographical novel realize that it takes even more “balls” to refuse to fight in the US military than it takes to serve blindly in an Anglo-American imperialist war. This is especially so given the degree to which Mexican Americans like Peña are systematically forced to live in the same kind of conditions that demarcate the Third World countries whose citizens Mexican Americans are drafted to fight and kill. Accordingly, they are forced to question the viability of the male-warrior ethos that figures so prominently in Mexican and Mexican-American culture. More importantly, they come to recognize that whether or not they decide to continue their potentially lethal service as Mexican-American GIs, or as Chicano communists, their status as Americans is always already under erasure.

Following the persistent association of Mexican-American GIs with a racialized Third World enemy depicted in Mexican-American war literature, Cano obfuscates battle lines even further.27 He undermines the binary construction of allies and enemies by showing why and how Peña’s (former) Mexican-American GI colleagues are forced to rethink hegemonic discourses on nation and nationality as well as American citizenship and identity. Like Peña, they not only must decide on which side to fight, but must determine whether or not there are such things as sides in a war fought by poor people against poor people whom many claim bear a striking resemblance to each other. Peña makes some of these Mexican-American GIs realize that in some cases enemies and allies really are one and the same person. By thus staging this recognition scene, already radically distinct from similar scenes in Morin’s and Benavidez’s narratives, Cano challenges the model of counterhegemonic agency performed in Joe Rodriguez’s text: in Cano’s Shifting Loyalties, Private Jesse Peña—the Mexican American-cum-Chicano-cum-Communist ally/enemy—not only fights against US capitalist imperialism, but fights for a nationalist
and ultimately a communist revolution. That is, Cano’s Chicano subject refuses to be contained within an assimilationist model of difference that ultimately preserves US hegemonic claims to “America” and “Americanness” as well as US imperialist designs on the Third World. Here, the category “Chicano” is situated outside hegemonic (white) American ideology and comes to signify a burgeoning multiracial and subaltern internationalism that profoundly challenges the ideological limits of a progress narrative and a resistance culture paradigm. By thus marking his characters’ profoundly different understandings and performances of their Chicano identities, Cano’s narrative reveals that this identity and, by extension, American culture in general simultaneously are situated within and without the geopolitical and geopoetic parameters of the US.

5. Battlefield as Text/Text as Battlefield: Chicano War Testimonials

In the context of this revised and expanded model of American literature and identity, Mexican-American war testimonials—part of a growing body of US Latina and Latino testimonial narratives—more conclusively situate Mexican-American subjects within an alternative genealogy that raises even more complicated possibilities for remapping Mexican-American literature and identity. Similar to Trujillo’s anthology of first-person testimonials, Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam (1990), Murguía’s 1990 collection of testimonial fiction, Southern Front, is particularly significant for a remapping of Mexican-American soldiering and citizenship because it expands upon Gustavo Pérez-Firmat’s provocative question, “Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?” (1990). Modeled on his personal war experiences as an internationalist volunteer in the Sandinista Revolution, Murguía’s Southern Front resituates Chicano literature by paralleling the praxis-theory-praxis teleology that animates foundational Latin American guerrilla testimonials such as Che Guevara’s Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956–1958 (1959), Omar Cabezas’s Fire from the Mountain (1983), and Mario Payera’s Days of the Jungle: The Testimony of a Guatemalan Guerilla, 1972–1976 (1980). In the case of Murguía’s Southern Front, the performative and extraliterary imperative of guerrilla testimonial, which Juan Duchesne Winter notes always gestures toward the development of a pragmatic theory of revolutionary praxis (82), enables a new poetic and political topography for Mexican-American literary agency and revolutionary identity.28 Thus resituated, this literary
topography is at once “American” in the expanded figurative sense proposed by Pérez-Firmat and further articulated by Jose David Saldívar in *The Dialectics of Our America*, and also very much an anti-imperialist Third World and internationalist space simultaneously situated inside and outside the ideological and geographic parameters of the US. More precisely, the various interconnected testimonial stories that make up *Southern Front* propose to deconstruct the masculinist poetics that have heretofore distinguished the corpus of both Mexican-American and Latin American war narratives, while simultaneously reconstructing a nonracist, nonsexist, nonhomophobic, and potentially revolutionary transnational *Americano* identity. That is, Murguía performatively invokes the complex subject undergirding subaltern postcolonial studies.

In “To the Front,” one of the first stories in *Southern Front*, Murguía glosses conventional masculinist poetics and politics of war ultimately to dismantle them. He first describes how Ulises, Murguía’s thinly veiled alter ego, problematically displaces a fetish for his lost girlfriend onto his newly issued assault weapon, which he names after her. In an attempt metonymically to model a new Mexican-American subject, Murguía devotes the balance of *Southern Front* to narrating Ulises’s *concientización*, or ideological transformation, as an internationalist revolutionary and immanent feminist. In the final story, “The Dead Who Never Die,” Ulises’s final transformation revolves around his attempted seduction of a female Sandinista comrade, whose smiles of solidarity he mistakes for sexual overtures. Invoking the problematic depiction of women as recreational “diversions” from war that undergird most conventional heterosexual male war narratives—including Mexican-American war narratives such as *The Useless Servants, Shifting Loyalties, Oddsplayer*, and *Dogs from Illusion*—Murguía presents Ulises as the quintessential male warrior-hero who attempts to claim his “prize” during a lull in the fighting. However, Venancia, the object of Ulises’s desire, tactfully refuses to accept the carved deer bone rose earrings Ulises offers her as a token of affection. She does so in part because she is still mourning the death of her husband, another Sandinista soldier recently killed in battle, but more so because she simply is not interested in him as a sexual partner. Instead, she informs him that she can only accept them “as a compañera from a compañero” (116), thus clearly reconfiguring this scene that in other contexts—contexts that the Sandinista revolution purportedly sought to transform—traditionally would function as barter in a homosocial exchange of women.

Venancia’s didactic rejection enables Ulises to recognize the
contradiction between his attempt to seduce a fellow female soldier and his Panamericanist and international socialist motives for joining the Sandinista National Liberation Front. When he retreats to his own sleeping quarters, he experiences a postcombat, postcome-on epiphany as he realizes that “she didn’t need all the bullshit” (117). Feeling foolish for not having known before about Venancia’s dead husband, this scene also foregrounds Ulises’s realization that his attempted seduction was wrong for other reasons as well. As he “awakens” from his sleep the next morning, he is greeted by a drizzle that introduces an entirely new type of recognition scene. He imagines to himself: “The same rain that once washed down the asphalt streets, palm trees, and con safos-sprayed walls of his barrio was now falling softly over the hand-nailed crosses in the cemetery behind the warehouse, dripping down the barrels of the silent cannons, and gathering in puddles before the barracks where Venancia slept” (118). The borderless rain signals to him that the struggle in Nicaragua is inevitably about the struggle to recast human relations throughout the region and the world at large—including the US and his own barrio, the Mission District, in San Francisco, California. Ulises realizes that the countless deaths of his compañeras and compañeros demand that he withdraw his own erect weapon and reconsider his gender politics along with his geopolitics. Having situated himself within a complex revolutionary movement in which women combatants played a profound role and whose subsequent national anthem figures the US as “the enemy of humanity,” Ulises relocates his Chicano barrio onto Nicaragua, and by extension, the Americas at large, and vice versa.

As a result of this experience, then, Ulises rejects the lethal, masculinist, and decidedly hegemonic model of citizenship that determined his uncle’s service in World War II, his brother’s fighting in Vietnam, and other Mexican-American GI’s roles in US imperialist wars. He simultaneously questions the viability of the male warrior-hero, which recent scandals involving Sandinista guerrilla leaders cast into further relief.31 This second epiphany, Murguía suggests, ultimately enables Ulises to transform himself from the quintessentially masculinist Mexican-American subject—the barrio Cholo or Pachuco warrior-hero—into an integral member of the bloodied and scarred subaltern cadre of Americanos invoked in José Martí’s anti-imperialist construction of Nuestra América—Indians, descendants of African slaves, mestizos, mulattos, peasants, workers, and especially women. Significantly, Ulises’s Sandinista claim to sameness as a subaltern, multiracial Americano subject is radically different from the self-effacing models of soldiering and citizenship presented by the
aforementioned Mexican-American soldier-authors. Murguía re-locates Mexican-American subjectivity within the Sandinista revolu-
tion, which aligned itself with Third World nations as well as First World peoples struggling against the legacy of US and Eu-
ropean imperialism. In so doing, he pushes the boundaries of Mexican-American, Chicano, and US Latino identity beyond Seguin’s myopic Tejano nationalism, Morin’s and Benavidez’s self-effacing assimilationist discourses, and even well beyond mul-tiethnic narratives celebrating American “difference” that, to varying degrees, fall short of actualizing an autonomous anti-hegemonic model of Mexican-American identity. Through his combat and corresponding writing activities, Murguía thus militates for the centrality of his hemispheric status as a Chicano. Accordingly, for Murguía, the term Chicano does not simply signify a different type of US American; rather, it enables him to refor-
mulate a different America no longer bound by the ideological and geographic boundaries of the US and its historical antecedents. Like one of the Rainbows in Joe Rodriguez’s Odd-
splayer, who proclaims that “after this war I ain’t going back” (63), Murguía consciously, deliberately, and defiantly brings the war home to America—Our América—not as a dialectical Other distin-
tinguished by his US American difference, but by his collectivist claim to sameness as a member of a hemispheric majority: he is a Chicano, a Sandinista, and a Pan-American, or rather, a Third World and even global Americano.

6. Conclusion: Remapping Mexican-American Literature
and Identity

Although the aforementioned Mexican-American soldier-authors occupy very different positions in the emerging canons of Mexican-American, American, and world literatures, their war narratives nonetheless destabilize and pressure conventional no-
tions of Mexican-American, and by extension, US American identity and culture. They collectively expose the conceits and contradictions inherent in a progress narrative and a resistance paradigm by illustrating how Mexican-American soldiers have occupied, and continue to occupy, complex social locations both inside and outside the geopoetic and geopolitical borders of the US. For these soldier-authors, many of whom forged their own liter-
ary voices and personal identities on battlefields throughout the US and the world at large, Mexican-American identity always has been both a First World and a Third World phenomenon that in-
volves a plethora of more or less coherent subjects negotiating cul-

de
ture, history, and power in complex ways. For some, Mexican-American identity is incompletely actualized within the parameters of the US, while for a significant cadre of other soldier-authors, who also continue to publish works other than war literature, Mexican-American identity is not so much about a claim to difference as minority Americans as it is a claim to sameness with a broader cadre of subaltern subjects throughout the world at large. These include working-class and racial minority feminists, gay activists, black nationalists, North Vietnamese communists, and Sandinistas, among others. Rather than completely relativizing Mexican-American identity, however, this wide range of subject positions signals Mexican-American identity to be historically contingent even as it revolves around “blood” as a unifying metaphor across time and space.

In a partial response to Pérez-Firmat’s provocative question, “Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?” the aforementioned autobiographies, memoirs, novellas, novels, and testimonials thus reveal that Mexican-American literature may be functioning simultaneously within different genealogies throughout the Americas and the world at large. As such, they performatively illustrate yet also pressure what Cyrus R. K. Patell has identified as an increasingly pronounced shift in American studies toward Comparative American, Pan-Americanist, and Borderlands paradigms. Although this emerging paradigm shift inevitably renews the genealogical tensions framed by José Enrique Rodó’s Ariel (1900) and Roberto Fernandez Retamar’s “Calibán” (1971), it nonetheless expands our options for theorizing American literature and identity outside US hegemony. Indeed, like the aforementioned Mexican-American soldier-authors, these critical attempts to collapse the North-South and periphery-center binaries introduce a profound synthesis of the trope of “intervention” by destabilizing conventional figurations of American literary history. America, and América, it seems, are becoming increasingly larger and larger. In this context, the aforementioned Mexican-American soldier-authors, who simultaneously demand and enable a remapping of Sangre Mexicanal/Corazón Americano, thus make significant contributions to this broader project of remapping America and América.

Notes

Many people provided feedback on earlier drafts of this study. I am especially grateful to George Mariscal for providing a disciplinary framework and, more
importantly, for his compassionate solidarity in helping me to overcome earlier errors related to this research. Un abrazo.


4. These critical reassessments of Mexican-American class mobility and empowerment during World War II included conference presentations by Emilio Zamora and Rodolfo Rosales.

5. I examine other cultural forms such as poetry, theater, and film in my forthcoming manuscript, *Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano: Identity, Ambiguity, and Critique in Mexican American War Literature, Art, and Film*.

6. Roosevelt was specifically directing his xenophobic diatribe against the German-American population, but made similar remarks regarding the patriotism of other ethnic and racial minority groups in other writings and speeches. See Thomas Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (1980), for a critical examination of Roosevelt’s views on race and American identity.

7. *Criollo*, which is a false cognate of “Creole,” refers to elite white European, and especially Spanish, persons born and raised in the Americas, particularly between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.

8. All subsequent references are from the De la Teja translation.


11. Plaques with this motto adorn the walls of many American Legion Halls in which the majority membership is Mexican-American.


17. *Soldaderas* were women who fought in the 1910 Mexican Revolution. See Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (1990) and also Norma Alarcón, “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of
Chicana Feminism” (1989), for analyses of the conflicted yet complex status of the soldadera in Mexican and Mexican-American literature, popular culture, and theory.


20. Petty Officer Keith Meinhold, who is white, was discharged after announcing his homosexuality on ABC’s World News Tonight in May 1992. He filed suit in federal court, resulting in a historic decision reinstating him to active duty in Jan. 1993. See Shilts for further discussion.


22. This conventional representation of fraggings is illustrated in Oliver Stone’s feature film Platoon (1987).


25. Hinojosa underscores how Mexican-American GIs were figured as an internal enemy by including in his text an official US Army communiqué from General Walker, the commanding officer of all US forces in Korea, which reads in part: “We should not expect the Chinese Communists to be committed in force. After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas” (87). This linkage is further articulated in Teatro Campesino’s agit prop play, Vietnam Campesino (1971). See also Teatro Campesino’s Soldado Razo (1971) and Dark Root of a Scream (1973).

26. Wallace Terry, ed., Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans (1991), and also Stanley Goff, Robert Sanders, and Clark Smith, eds., Brothers: Black Soldiers in the Nam (1986), offer examples of African-American war testimonials that address this issue in regard to black GIs. See also Mariscal for an insightful critical review of this topos in Mexican-American war literature and American war literature in general.

27. Jorge Huerta, Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms (1982), provides other examples of this topos as it is inflected in Chicano theater.


30. For a discussion of testimonial discourse and concientización, or “political awakening,” see George Yúdice, “Testimonio y concientización” (1992).

31. Former Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, for instance, has been accused by his stepdaughter of subjecting her to years of sexual abuse.

32. See also Pérez Firmat and José David Saldívar.


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