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Troubled Affinities: Feminist Reading of Intercolonial Relations in Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's Puerto Rican Narratives of the Korean War

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Abstract

This article examines the representation of intercolonial relations between Puerto Rican soldiers and Koreans during the Korean War in Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's "Andrés" (1956) and "El soldado Damián Sánchez" (1955) from a feminist perspective. Moving beyond interpretations that frame Puerto Rican military participation in the Korean War solely as a reconfiguration of colonial relations between Puerto Rico and the U.S., it considers the war as an intercolonial space where Puerto Ricans and Koreans, differently colonized peoples under U.S. militarism, encounter each other. Focusing on the militarized sexual dynamics of occupied Korea, the article demonstrates how intercolonial relations in Díaz Valcárcel's stories emerge as troubled affinities that, despite interpersonal and geopolitical resonances among the colonized under transnational U.S. militarism, ultimately reproduce imperial sexual violence toward women from occupied territories. Through an intercolonial and feminist approach that attends to multiple power dynamics within an imperial enterprise, the article highlights the complex positionality of colonized soldiers within the intersecting racist and patriarchal structures of imperial power.

Keywords: Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, The Korean War, Puerto Rico, Intercolonial, Feminist Critiques of Militarism

During the Cold War–era reconfiguration of the U.S. empire, the Korean War became an unlikely point of convergence between two distant places: Korea and Puerto Rico. The end of World War II led to the consolidation of anti-colonialism and self-determination as dominant geopolitical norms (Medovoi 172-77). In response, the U.S. adapted its exercise of power through "neoimperial forms of political, economic, military, and cultural domination that stop short of territorial annexation" (Jodi Kim 18). After the defeat of the Japanese Empire, the U.S. and the Soviet Union swiftly occupied and divided the Korean peninsula through military governance, creating a Cold War fault line that culminated in war in 1950. Across the ocean, the shockwaves from East Asia triggered the first large-scale mobilization of Puerto Ricans, marking a biopolitical shift in the U.S. military interests on the island (Rodríguez 1141). This incorporation of Puerto Rican soldiers further entrenched the island's ongoing colonial reconfiguration into Estado Libre Asociado—an unconventional polity that, while framed in the language of consent and formal independence, legitimizes continued U.S. sovereign domination over Puerto Rico. The Korean War thus became an intercolonial space where two

differently colonized nations converged within the vortex of U.S. imperial refashioning: Koreans as occupied natives and Puerto Ricans as colonized soldiers.

This Asian-Caribbean entanglement aligns with scholarly efforts to reframe the Korean War as a transnational nexus where the distinct colonial trajectories of multiple racial and national groups intersect, generating relational dimensions of Cold War imperial history (D. Kim; Joo Ok Kim).[1] Puerto Rican writer Emilio Díaz Valcárcel offers a Spanish-language Caribbean lens that situates the war as an intimate episode in Puerto Rican history, inflecting the transnational archive of the Korean War with further racial, linguistic, and political complexity. One of the more than 61,000 Puerto Rican soldiers mobilized for the conflict (Franqui-Rivera 186), Díaz Valcárcel began his literary career shortly after discharge, writing stories that trace the breadth of military experience and its reverberations on the island. Among these works, "Andrés" and "El soldado Damián Sánchez" stage the intercolonial dynamics in Korea through human drama: distressed Puerto Rican soldiers turn to local Koreans, forging intimate yet fraught bonds amid the harsh realities of war. In examining the representation of intercolonial encounters, this essay foregrounds the gendered and sexualized dimensions of these interactions, drawing on feminist scholarship attentive to militarism. It reads Puerto Rican-Korean relations in "Andrés" and "El soldado Damián Sánchez" as troubled affinities that, while articulating interpersonal, racial, and geopolitical resonances among the colonized, reproduce imperial violence against women in occupied territories.

Díaz Valcárcel is among writers of the Generation of 1950, along with Pedro Juan Soto, José Luis González, and Edwin Figueroa (González-Jiménez, "Del resentimiento" 99), who produced some of the earliest pieces of war literature in Puerto Rico, inspired by the experience of the Korean War (91).[2] Together, they contributed to "a vast body of Puerto Rican cultural production devoted to the experience of being a (volunteer or drafted) soldier" (Sierra-Rivera 208). As the war unfolded amid rapid changes in the island's relationship with the U.S., Puerto Rican discourses on the Korean War have been mainly read as parallel commentaries on these transformations. In line with the Generation of 1950s' nationalist stance critical of U.S. influence, scholarship on Díaz Valcárcel's Korean War stories generally interprets them as counterhegemonic texts that challenge the pro-U.S. portrayal of the war by then-ruling Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) as political progress, framing it instead as an evolving form of colonial subjugation (González-Jiménez, "Del resentimiento"; González-Jiménez, *Soldados*; Lugo-Ortiz; Mariátegui; Oko-Odoi; Rodríguez).

Building on this critical scholarship, this essay brings the understudied representation of the intercolonial relationship in Díaz Valcárcel's work into conversation, showing that his commentary

on imperialism extends beyond the Puerto Rican colonial condition by casting intercolonial dynamics as integral to imperial processes. "Andrés" and "El soldado Damián Sánchez" feature Korean language, people, culture, and landscape as central elements, signaling the author's engagement with a colonial reality beyond his own. In this light, the literary space of the Korean War in Díaz Valcárcel's work is not merely "a space of alienation and absurdity for Puerto Ricans" (Mariátegui 31) under U.S. colonial violence; rather it become a generative site for reconceiving Puerto Rican colonial experience as relational—a position within a network of distinct yet overlapping colonial formations that generates what Lisa Lowe terms "intimacies" among "variously colonized peoples beyond the metropolitan national center" (19). Taking Díaz Valcárcel's gesture toward Korea as an interpretive point of departure, this essay interweaves the racialized and gendered colonial conditions of Puerto Rico and Korea—contexts rarely examined in relation to one another—as critical frameworks for analysis.

An intercolonial approach to Díaz Valcárcel's work recalibrates Puerto Rican masculinity within a transnational frame. Scholars have noted a masculinist impulse in nationalist discourses that casts colonization as particularly detrimental to Puerto Rican manhood, enacting remasculinization through the reinforcement of patriarchal order at the expense of Puerto Rican women (Gelpí; Lugo-Ortiz; Negrón-Muntaner). Taking this gender analysis beyond the confines of national politics, I examine how wounded Puerto Rican masculinity operates within the broader gendered and sexualized geography of U.S. militarism. At the center of this analysis of colonized masculinity within a transnational military context is the sexual exploitation of women resulting from military occupation—particularly through systems of military prostitution, as extensively examined by feminist scholars. I foreground the unequal power dynamics between masculine occupying forces and occupied women as a crucial condition shared by Puerto Rico and (South) Korea as occupied territories, and as a lens through which to understand the complex contours of their militarized intercolonial connection.[3]

A growing body of literary scholarship has examined the complex positionality of racialized soldiers within militarized hierarchies of race and gender during imperial wars, challenging frameworks that reduce them to mere victims of racial violence or war heroes worthy of recognition.[4] Building on these insights, I start from the premise that Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War occupied a deeply contradictory position. My intention here is not to override the real and serious consequences of discrimination against Puerto Rican soldiers, which include disproportionately high death tolls and racial, cultural humiliation under the White-supremacist U.S. military. Instead, I aim to highlight the overlaps between various colonial relations in an imperial war. Within militarized hierarchies of race

and gender—entangled with geopolitical and class dynamics—Puerto Rican soldiers were simultaneously colonized men whose masculinity was undermined by the U.S. and agents of an occupying force that shaped Korea's colonial dynamics. By examining these multifaceted positionalities in tension through Díaz Valcárcel's work, this essay engages both fictional and intellectual failures to acknowledge the contradictions and ironies of colonized masculinity, which, even in its opposition to empire, remains complicit in hegemonic patriarchal power structures. Attending to such omissions underscores the need for intercolonial and feminist perspectives to illuminate the multiple, relational forms of oppression at work in imperial contexts beyond a male-centered colonizer–colonized binary.

Soldiers and Sex Workers across the Pacific in "Andrés"

In "Andrés," the titular Puerto Rican soldier stationed in a village in South Korea forms an affinity with a local female sex worker. The Korean woman, whom the protagonist calls by the Spanish name Taina, becomes a refuge for the discontented soldier in a foreign land.[5] Andrés's unease is not simply a reaction to the hostile reality of the war but also a manifestation of resentment from his multiple subordinate positions as a colonized and low-ranking soldier. The story expresses the colonial humiliation that Puerto Rican soldiers endured under the U.S. military. Yet it is also about the remasculinization of the protagonist through his intercolonial and intergender relationship with Taina. This interplay of humiliation and remasculinization effectively illustrates how military efforts to retain Korea within the capitalist bloc situate the Puerto Rican soldier within complex power dynamics of race, gender, and nation under transnational U.S. militarism.

In a scene in which Andrés waits for his lover in a brothel, a third-person omniscient narrator reveals an exchange between the protagonist and a Belgian soldier from the past,

> En ciertos momentos, cuando se sentía acorralado, no podía evitar reaccionar con violencia. Como la vez que un soldado belga le había preguntado, en Chorwon, si él era americano. Andrés respondió en la negativa. Entonces el otro quiso saber por qué llevaba aquel uniforme. Andrés no pudo contestarle y arrojó el fusil contra el suelo. (148-49)

Andrés is likely a draftee, like Díaz Valcárcel himself, as he appears unwillingly clad in the American uniform. Since most soldiers in the 65th Infantry, the all-Puerto Rican regiment, were volunteers (Franqui-Rivera 182-83), Díaz Valcárcel intentionally presents an oblique perspective—situated on the margins not only in relation to the United States but also within Puerto Rican society—to recount the

Korean War.[6] Andrés refuses to identify as American, yet he also refuses to disclose his nationality to the Belgian soldier. His silence, followed by a violent reaction, underscores the colonial wound, shame, and frustration resulting from Puerto Rican soldiers' military experience.

To escape an unsatisfying reality, Andrés seeks solace in Taina. She offers him a fleeting refuge in a comforting world where his masculinity is temporarily restored. Before entering the brothel, he deceitfully pins on a lieutenant's insignia to conceal his actual low rank: "Antes de que alguien pudiera verle se prendió las insignias de teniente. Se sintió mejor" (146). Cast as a carnivalesque space in the Bakhtinian sense, where social hierarchies are subverted through disguise, the brothel enables Andrés to shed the constraints of military hierarchy and colonial humiliation and to assume the role of a respected and powerful man among the local Koreans who serve him.

As Andrés enters the brothel, a woman bows and, in her recently learned English, informs him that Taina has not returned. While Andrés wanders through the house during his wait, the narrator provides a detailed description of the brothel's structure, its objects, and its inhabitants. Lighting a match in the kitchen, Andrés notices various items: "un gran cántaro de barro cocido, tazones de porcelana, y un fogón donde parpadeaba una brasa" (146). These kitchen objects create a multisensory experience. "El olor a yerbas, a pescado reseco y a mugre" (146) is so strong it becomes palpable in his throat. Curious, Andrés engages with the space through touch, browsing through "los tallos y tubérculos amontonados en una pequeña y rústica alacena" (146). His attention then shifts to the inhabitants. Quiet women lie in "los cuartos bajos y cerrados, olorosos a cosméticos baratos y a sudor" (147), and he attempts to break through their inscrutable expressions with a quick, witty remark. Passing into another room, he encounters a lean old man who grunts as he adjusts a piece of wood under his head, prompting Andrés's playful comment: "Vaya almohada… Por eso tienes el coco tan duro" (147).

The brothel is depicted as a culturally exotic space; however, it does not come across as intimidating; rather, it presents a strangely peaceful environment that stands in sharp contrast to the war-torn reality outside. Its inhabitants appear oddly idyllic, even lethargic, underscoring the brothel's apparent detachment from reality. The meticulous cataloging of objects, alongside Andrés's casual, witty remarks toward those inside, signals a shift: he is no longer a distressed soldier but an explorer of a marvelous yet approachable world. In this way, the brothel enables the soldier to take on aspects of a tourist: both soldier and tourist encounter the Other in a distant land, made possible by the rupture of everyday life.[7]

Most importantly, the brothel functions as a space for affective restoration. Andrés defines his relationship with Taina as mutually loving. Their relationship has been interpreted as an expression of solidarity among the colonized, given the respective histories of Puerto Rico and Korea. Both Katrina Haugsness Oko-Odoi (193) and Rubén González-Jiménez (*Soldados* 55) suggest that Andrés's affinity for Taina is grounded in their shared experience of colonization. Indeed, Andrés and Taina offer a glimpse of mutual understanding that transcends the cultural logic of colonialism, which imposes hierarchical distinctions among cultures and peoples.

Later that night, during their conversation in a mix of English, Korean, and Spanish, Andrés insists that Taina should move with him to Puerto Rico. When she refuses to go to a distant foreign land, Andrés shows her photos of his family, as if to familiarize her with the people on the island.

> Extrajo un par de retratos de entre unos papeles que guardaba en el bolsillo de la camisa y se puso a mostrárselos.
>
> — *Papasán* — le mostró a un vejete en el retrato; al lado, había una mujerona mulata —. *This, mamasán.*
>
> Taina señaló la mujerona.
>
> — *¿Mamasán? No look like you.*
>
> — *Papasán* blanco — le explicó el —, *semo semo* yo. *Mamasán* prieta, *black, you know. Tayobo.*
>
> Ella, que se le había quedado mirando a los labios mientras él hablaba, se encogió de hombros y dijo:
>
> — *Tayobo, Black, white, the same.*
>
> — *Your country, my country, the same* — juntó los dos índices —. *Your people, my people, the same.* (150)

Taina is surprised to see that light-skinned Andrés has a dark-skinned mom. But then she dismisses racial division by saying "*Black, white, the same,*" as if to reject the process of racialization that both Taina and Andrés experience under the Japanese Empire and/or the U.S. Their mutual recognition is sealed through their shared identification: "*your country, my country, the same … your people, my people, the same*" (150). González-Jiménez interprets that Andrés's identification with the Korean people diminishes the exoticism that his Korean lover might evoke. This identification leads him to address her as "Taina," a name referring to the indigenous people of the Borinquen island. By doing so, Andrés frames her as part of another indigenous group that has suffered colonialism, comparable to the Taíno people (*Soldados* 54).

However, it is important to acknowledge that while Andrés and Taina's seemingly affectionate relationship offers clues of solidarity among the colonized and a possibility for an alternative space void of colonial hierarchy, it also functions as a means to restore Andrés's wounded masculinity through the intercolonial and intergender power dynamics imposed by the U.S. colonial power—ironically, the very authority Andrés is critical of. To describe Andrés's relationship with Taina as innocuous is to be complicit in sexual violence implicated in the conditions that enabled their union and the commodification of Taina's sexualized labor.

Andrés's seemingly innocuous perspective on his sexual relationship with Taina is reified throughout the story. In a flashback, the third-person narrator recounts how Taina became a sex worker at Andrés's request,

> Él la vio pasar arrastrando la cabra; era la primera ocasión en que la veía y le tuvo ganas. Pero no se atrevió a decirle nada porque las demás mujeres dijeron que ella no lo hacía. Y sucedió que una noche él había bebido más de lo acostumbrado y se había atrevido a hacerle la propuesta. Ella dijo que no, pero luego accedió a llevarlo hasta aquella casa. (150)

The narration frames Andrés's approach to Taina as the genuine gesture of a timid young man, whose advance becomes possible only through the courage afforded by alcohol. His sexual desire is depicted as natural and harmless, with the word *propuesta* emphasizing the consensual nature of the exchange. Yet this framing erases the coercive dynamics at play, rooted in the asymmetrical power relations between U.S. soldiers and Korean women.

The brothel, the destination of Andrés's desire, is depicted as a limited time-space that provides him with a recreational escape from harsh reality. However, this recreational space is not exceptional within war-ridden Korea but constitutes a fundamental part of its social structure. In Korea, the presence of the U.S. military since 1945—following liberation from Japan and the subsequent Korean War—fostered military prostitution. During the war, the dire circumstances compelled millions of young orphans and widows to congregate near UN or U.S. military stations, relying on the forces' economic power to survive (Moon 28). This proliferated a transnational pattern under "militarized colonial or neocolonial occupation," in which women "either resorted to prostitution as the only means of survival or were subjected to a more systematized mobilization for military prostitution" (Lee 4), for the sake of reproducing the military workforce. Although Andrés emphasizes identification between Korean and Puerto Rican peoples based on their shared experiences of colonialism and racialization, he remains unaware of the power dynamics embedded in

his commercialized sexual encounter with Taina. What he experiences as playful and recreational conceals and reproduces transnational hierarchies of class, gender, and race, which enforce the subjection of occupied women to sexualized forms of labor (Lee 10). Therefore, the carnivalesque quality of the brothel does not denote its disconnection from the real world, but rather its dependency on its hierarchical structure. The only way in which the brothel differs from reality at large is that Andrés can exploit his relatively superior position within its microcosm.

When Andrés returns to his barrack, the reader learns about brothels on the other side of the globe. His colleagues greet him with ironic exclamations: "Aquí está el dandy" (152), and continue to mock him, claiming that the enamored man intends to bring a sex worker to Puerto Rico, adding, "Allá sabrá lo que es putear" (153). Their mockery can be read as masculine and misogynistic mischief that diminishes both Andrés's unmanly affection for Taina and the Korean female sex workers. At the same time, their remarks suggest that prostitution is even more widespread in Puerto Rico than in war-torn Korea.

Prostitution has unfolded in close relation to militarism in Puerto Rico since the U.S. invasion of 1898. The establishment of major military bases, such as Borinquen (later Ramey) Field and Roosevelt Roads, in the 1930s–40s led to its proliferation (González Morales 281-282; Piñero Cádiz 301-302). Luis A. López Rojas notes that the PPD's promotion of tourism from the mid-1940s, through developmentalist policies, contributed to the expansion of the sex trade via U.S. investment in conjunction with the further militarization of Puerto Rico. Brothels proliferated near military bases to cater to American soldiers who, despite their official deployment, consumed the Caribbean through its sexualized exotic image as if they were reckless tourists (15-23, 26-30).

In this sense, while the soldiers' comments reveal emotional distance from military sex workers, they attest to an affinity between the changes occurring in both Puerto Rico and Korea across borders driven by transnational militarism. Their mockery underscores the parallel relationships between Andrés and Taina, and American soldiers and military sex workers in Puerto Rico, emphasizing the power dynamics in which Andrés is complicit, despite his disdain for the American uniform. Andrés wishes to return home with Taina as a patriarch, but his colleagues remind him that Puerto Rico is not a refuge for native patriarchs, but rather a brothel for American soldiers.

Ignoring their mockery, Andrés clings to his moments of comfort with Taina. As he stands night watch at the end of the story, the narrator says "la guardia duraría sólo cuatro horas. Y Taina, o Chon, o como realmente se llamara, lo esperaría mañana en la misma estera donde esa noche habían estado juntos" (154). The omniscient narrator's indifference to Taina's real name mirrors Andrés's

unwillingness to recognize the gendered form of the militarized predicament that Taina faces. Instead, he reduces her to a mere placeholder of femininity that serves to console and restore his wounded masculinity.

Transnational Sub-homosociality and Traffic in Women in "El soldado Damián Sánchez"

"El Soldado Damián Sánchez" is set in the aftermath of the dissolution of the 65th Regiment as a result of the disastrous defeats of the infantry at Kelly Hill and Jackson Heights, and the consequent redistribution of its soldiers to continental units. Similar to "Andrés," "El Soldado Damián Sánchez" explores a Puerto Rican-Korean intercolonial relationship. However, in this story, the bond is homosocial, formed between Damián Sánchez and a Korean soldier, rather than the heterosexual relationship depicted in the previous story. In examining the friendship between these two colonized soldiers, I first revisit the scene that marks the abrupt and lamentable end of their relationship, a focal point of much literary criticism on "El Soldado Damián Sánchez." I then analyze the vivid presence of intercolonial and intergender dynamics in the story, elements often overlooked due to the predominant male-centered approach.

The protagonist, Damián Sánchez, who previously enjoyed the company of his fellow countrymen in the 65th, now belongs to a new military unit. The story unfolds as the third-person omniscient narrator describes Damián's thoughts while he digs a trench under the scorching heat of a Korean summer. His thoughts shift between feelings of alienation as the only non-Anglo soldier in his unit and his longing for Kim Wan, a South Korean soldier who was his only friend there. Damián's affective memories of their friendship sharply contrast with the hostile, hierarchical relations he has with Anglo soldiers. As his recollection continues, the reader learns that Kim's spectral presence is a consequence of Damián's most regretful and humiliating act—he beat his only friend out of anger towards Anglo soldiers, only to be left alone.

Damián's flashback takes the reader through the course of their friendship, beginning during their time in the 65th Regiment before its disbandment. Kim Wan is likely part of KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army), a program established during the war to deploy South Korean soldiers to supplement U.S. Army units as cultural and strategic liaisons, symbolizing the military alliance. Assigned to the 65th Infantry, Kim learns Spanish and forms bonds with Puerto Rican soldiers. Following the unfortunate disbandment, Kim requests a transfer to Damián's unit, so that he can remain with his close friend in the hostile environment of a predominantly Anglo unit. Surrounded by monolingual Anglo soldiers, the friends communicate in a mix of Korean, English,

and Spanish, confusing and frustrating their Anglo peers. Unlike Damián, who speaks little English, Kim is fluent but opts to speak Spanish, even when the Anglo soldiers complain. Kim's choice to speak Spanish highlights his solidarity with Damián, showing a special connection between those occupying a subordinate role in the racial and national hierarchy within the U.S. military, while distancing himself from the Anglo soldiers.

Their friendship comes to an abrupt end one Saturday night during leisure hours. The two sit together, a little tipsy, apart from the roughhousing Anglo soldiers who shout, throw darts, and jostle one another. As Damián and Kim share a can of *pastel criollo*—a traditional Puerto Rican dish sent from home by Damián's mother—the boisterous soldiers suddenly fix their attention on them.

> Los demás hombres se habían dejado de juegos y miraban ahora en silencio a los dos amigos. Estaban cuadrados en el fondo de la caseta con aires de cierta resignación, como si tuviesen que soportar por la fuerza alguna majadería.
>
> — *Look at'em* — dijo al fin uno —. *They look like a damn couple of lovers.*
>
> El coreano supo que la broma iba por ellos y se sonrió conturbado. Damián creyó entender. Y percibió el enjambre de ojos clavados sobre su cuerpo, y sus movimientos fueron torpes como los de un niño ante una maestra exigente. (131)

Confronted by the homophobic ridicule and the othering gaze of the Anglo soldiers, who greatly outnumber them, the anxiety of two friends manifests physically. In an attempt to ease the tension, Kim Wan asks his friend if the cake is good. In silence, Damián pours half of the can into a mess kit and hands it to Kim. Then, someone from the hostile crowd, who has moved even closer to the friends, shouts, "Jesus! What the hell is this?" (132). Damián ignores what he heard and continues to eat from the can, staring directly at each of the laughing faces. Then, a soldier approaches the South Korean soldier and escalates the bullying.

> — *Tell me, porky, what the hell is this*?
>
> Kim Wan temblaba. Pensó hacer un chiste, tal vez para ablandar la expresión de los intrusos, y dijo, en un inglés balbuceante:
>
> — *Don't know… It.. looks like shit*.
>
> Damián vio ultrajado su hogar y su tierra y a Diana y a su raza y no vio más. Cayó sobre el coreano, golpeándole el rostro con la lata, sollozando enloquecido. Se irguió como un torbellino y dio patadas y mordió brazos y recibió golpes en todo el cuerpo. Antes de quedar sin sentido, logró gritar, fuera de sí:
>
> —¡Gringos maricones mierda son ustedes! (132)

The separation between the object of the beating and the object of the homophobic slur shows that although Damián is triggered by the word "shit" coming from Kim's mouth, he actually releases all the resentment he harbors toward American colonial power through Kim's body, treating him as a scapegoat. After the attack, Kim Wan is hospitalized, and Damián feels lonelier than ever. Sitting on the edge of the foxhole he is digging, Damián mutters to himself: "Yo no debí tirarle a Kim" (132).

This violent and absurd end of the friendship has been a focal point of literary criticism. In his essay "El puertorriqueño dócil" originally published in 1961, René Marqués argues that "El soldado Damián Sánchez" is a work that reflects not the myth of heroism of the 65th —an image propagated by the PPD and the mainstream press of the time—but rather the psychology of the weak and docile man, anti-heroic par excellence (159). For Marqués, Puerto Rican docility is a distorted psychology of the colonized that avoids any rational and logical attempt to solve humiliation and frustration produced by colonial situations. With this concept, Marqués not only criticizes the lack of resistance on the part of Puerto Ricans but also underscores the victimization of Puerto Rican virility by colonial power. He further contends that the Korean War intensified colonial humiliation, and consequently, Damián's violent action against Kim constitutes his final means of defending his humanity (159-60). In a similar vein, Ramón Luis Acevedo underscores Damián's distorted response to Kim as a consequence of Puerto Rican victimization in the Korean War. He observes that the tension generated by contempt for one's own marginal identity is ironically redirected against the Korean soldier, who embodies another form of marginality and, in fact, shares more with the Boricua than the American soldiers (xxv).

While these literary critiques probe the tormented psychology of colonized men and its lamentable consequences for solidarity among the colonized, they overlook the intergender dynamic in the story, which I will address shortly. This masculine-centered tendency—underscored by male critics' focus on relations among men—reveals how homosociality shapes both the literary production and criticism of the Generation of 1950, as Agnes Lugo-Ortiz demonstrates. Drawing on the feminist notion of the homosocial as the consolidation of male dominance maintained through the mutual traffic in women, [8] Lugo-Ortiz argues that the nationalist, anticolonial discourses of the Generation of 1950 operate through homosocial relations characterized by masculinist alliances at both literary and meta-literary levels, employing the instrumentalization and marginalization of Puerto Rican women as a strategy of empowerment against colonization. Her feminist insights, though situated within national power dynamics, can be productively extended to reconsider the bond between Kim Wan and Damián

Sánchez, as well as the implications of its homosocial literary framing within the transnational, intercolonial, and intergender dynamics at play.

Beyond the shared experience of colonial humiliation, what most forcefully binds the Puerto Rican and South Korean soldiers is the figure of *yangarbó*—literally "Western whore" in the Korean language—a derogatory term for female sex workers who cater to foreign men. This figure lies at the center of the intergender dynamics mediating their friendship, as the two men repeatedly engage in both real and imagined transnational traffic in sex workers as the two men repeatedly engage in both real and imagined transnational traffic in sex workers as a strategy for empowering their subaltern masculinity.

Damián remembers Kim as "such a good guy" because the Korean man once arranged a sex worker for him at a cheap price:

> ...Tan bueno era que una vez le consiguió una prima a bajo precio a Damián. Se fueron ambos por los caminos altos y duros que cruzaban los arrozales, el nativo al frente, Damián dando tropezones o resbalando en la escarcha prematura de noviembre. Kim Wan le dijo:
>
> — *Chon, buena yangarbó, dos dólar*.
>
> Y se escurrieron dentro del primer ranchón de arcilla y paja. Al entrar, Damián advirtió el grato calorcillo que nacía bajo el piso de gruesas maderas. Unas mujercitas graciosísimas le sonreían con todo el rostro, oblicuando aún más sus ojillos negros. Lo demás fue fácil. La diminuta habitación de muñeca, la estera en el piso, el cuerpo modelado en porcelana fina, la fiebre de un hombrote que hace seis meses duerme entre soldados y pestes y maldiciones. (128-29)

Kim Wan's "goodness" thus lies in his ability to ease his friend's hardship after six grueling months in the harsh conditions of war, far from home. The South Korean man appears untroubled by the idea of procuring a Korean woman for his foreign companion. Yet, considering the implications of the word *yangarbó*, his behavior is somewhat unusual. The term *yangarbó* refers to the Korean word "양갈보," romanized as *yanggalbo*, which emerged during the U.S. military occupation of Korea in 1945. A neologism formed by combining *yang* (양), meaning "Western," and *galbo* (갈보), meaning "whore," it carries a strong note of reproach toward sex workers, who were regarded as undermining both the ideal of female sexual purity and the cohesion of the Korean ethnonational community by engaging with foreign men for money. Given the patriarchal judgment embedded in the term, a Korean man such as Kim Wan would ostensibly be expected to "protect" Korean women from

foreign men; instead, he actively facilitates the commercialized sex between Korean women and foreign soldiers in the name of friendship.

The two men's homosocial relationship through sex workers is not unilateral but reciprocal. While working alongside Puerto Rican soldiers in the 65th Infantry, Kim War often joked that "quería ir a 'Puertorro' a quitarles las mujeres a los puertorriqueños" (128). Far from being taken as an insult, his remark was met with laughter, signaling his acceptance among the Puerto Rican soldiers: "En el 65 todos le reían las gracias porque un coreano es un ser humano como los demás y, además, había caído en gracia con los muchachos" (128).

After being reassigned, the two friends continue to engage in this kind of imagined, reciprocal exchange,

> — *¿Tú dice Puerto Rico, tagzan yangarbó?*
>
> — *Many, many.*
>
> — *Semo semo Córea?*
>
> — *No. Más, más...tagzán, ¿te fijas? Y como las que aparecen en películas. ¿Las has visto?*
>
> — *¿Qué?*
>
> — *Las yangarbó de las películas.*
>
> — *Yo ir Puerto Rico, ¿okey?* (130)

In this conversation, Kim's literal offering of South Korean women to his Puerto Rican friend is compensated by his imaginary claim on Puerto Rican women. The term *yangarbó*, rooted in Korea's colonial history, acquires a transnational dimension as it extends to Puerto Rican sex workers. Women from both occupied territories are homogenized into sexual commodities under the shared shadow of U.S. military expansion. Their differentiation lies only in the racialized terms of their sexualization: if Korean women are valued through the Orientalist trope of "porcelain," Puerto Rican women are cast through hypersexualized femininity within the Western visual economy of Caribbean exoticism.

This exchange destabilizes Damián's position as a national patriarch, just as Kim's behavior undermines his presumed loyalty to Korean ethnopatriarchy. Like Kim, Damián displays indifference toward his friend's interest in Puerto Rican women, a stance that runs counter to the patriarchal ideology often associated with Díaz Valcárcel's work and the Generation of 1950. Marqués, for instance, advocates for the restoration of machismo as a legitimate cultural paradigm rooted in Hispanic and Roman traditions, framing it as a response to U.S. colonization, which emasculates Puerto Rican men by distorting cultural values (175). Since reclaiming control over Puerto Rican

women is central to this nationalist project, Damián's permissiveness ultimately contradicts the conventional role of protector within the ethnopatriarchal community.

Their friendship, mediated through such exchanges, calls for a critical examination of homosociality in transnational, subaltern encounters. Their bonding is subaltern, or what I term "sub-homosocial," as it constitutes an interdependence between racialized, colonized men for remasculinization in reaction to imperial masculine power—a form of White supremacist homosociality that reproduces dominance through the hierarchical differentiation of racialized masculinities, as the Anglo soldiers do in the story. Judith Sierra-Rivera frames friendship as a site of resistance in Puerto Rican war narratives because of its capacity to undo one's prior identity for and toward the Other, thereby conjuring new communities that contest the colonial, nationalized logic of war (213). The intimacy between Damián and Kim certainly destabilizes the constraints of nation and race in defiance of the colonial logic of divide and conquer. However, their transnational, subaltern masculine allegiance does not produce a decolonizing effect; rather, as we have seen, it intensifies the oppression of colonized women. The transnational aspect of their collaboration does not merely refer to the friends' distinct national origins and the extensive reach of U.S. militarism. Rather, it signals a reorientation of both men's ethnocentric patriarchies onto a shared plane of masculinity that transcends national and racial borders through militarized, sexualized access to occupied women. In this way, a racialized reaction to White masculinity ironically expands into joint participation in the colonial apparatus of gendered and sexual oppression.

Revisiting the literary criticism of the story makes its disregard for intergender dynamics even clearer. Marqués's portrayal of Damián as a weak and docile man, anti-heroic par excellence, rests on his inability to resist American oppression—an interpretation that shames him yet ultimately recuperates him as a victim of colonialism (159). This view situates his actions solely in relation to hegemonic or fellow subaltern men, leaving unexamined the further degradation of colonized women through colonized men's sexual complicity with U.S. power. Similarly, Acevedo's lament over Damián's rupture with Kim Wan—a fellow subaltern depicted as sharing much with Puerto Ricans—frames their friendship as harmless while eliding the structural conditions that sustain such bonds. This neglect of intergender relations obscures colonized men's intersectional positionality and reiterates what Lugones identifies as "the indifference that... men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color" (188).

The friendship between Damián and Kim clearly shows that the undoing of national affiliations through collaboration between subaltern men only engenders a transnational cult of

masculinity when oppressive gender structure remains intact. Their sub-homosocial bonding becomes a platform where the patriarchies of each society collude through commercial sex intensified by U.S. militarism. In this way, their reassertion of masculinity draws on the very imperial power structures that subordinate them. The mutual—real and imagined—exchange of women in occupied territories illustrates that, despite their national and racial disenfranchisement, colonized soldiers derive a form of sexual empowerment from the transnational infrastructure of militarized commercial sex.

Conclusion

Likely shaped by his lived experience in Korea, Díaz Valcárcel's incorporation of Korean people, culture, and language into integral parts of "Andrés" and "El soldado Damián Sanchéz" offers an original historiographical perspective for reframing the Korean War: it emerges as an intercolonial space, beyond a dyadic framework that situates it solely within the colonial reconfiguration between Puerto Rico and the U.S. Approached from a feminist perspective, Díaz Valcárcel's depiction of encounters between differently colonized peoples in an imperial war reveals troubled affinities that defy expectations of cathartic solidarity. While resonances grounded in shared experiences of subjugation hover on this intercolonial horizon, the Puerto Rican–Korean relations depicted in his stories ultimately enact and sustain the militarized sexual violence of empire against women in occupied territories.

Within this intercolonial and feminist frame, colonized masculinity discloses nuanced dimensions often overlooked in scholarship focused on masculine subaltern experience. The figure of the colonized soldier not only serves as a site of critique of imperialism and potential resistance but also operates through—rather than against—transnational militarized hierarchies of gender and sexuality. The contradictory and multifaceted positionalities of colonized masculinity within U.S. militarism underscore the need for a relational feminist analysis that foregrounds multiple, intersecting forms of oppression beyond the masculinist parameters of anti-colonial critique.

The temporality of militarized intercolonial connections between Puerto Rico and Korea is not confined to the past but pulses into the present, as both regions remain embedded within the U.S. military empire. Far from mere coexistence within a shared network, these sites are dynamically linked through ongoing military strategy, the circulation of human bodies via deployment, and the enduring memories of the Korean War. As long as Puerto Rico's colonial experience is intertwined with and enacted through other subjugated constituents of empire, its historical and ongoing colonial condition demands an intercolonial analysis—one that interrogates how imperial power is reconfigured,

contested, and reproduced among differently colonized peoples, inseparably bound up with violent dynamics of gender and sexuality.

Notes

[1] The respective works of Daniel Y. Kim and Joo Ok Kim rescue the Korean War from its status as "the forgotten war," highlighting its profound cultural impact across multiple racial groups in both U.S. domestic and global contexts through a relational approach. In *The Intimacies of Conflict* (2020), Daniel Y. Kim employs the concept of intimacy to illuminate the affective registers of transnational encounters and the interlocking colonial trajectories and processes of racialization. In *Warring Genealogies* (2022), Joo Ok Kim mobilizes kinship as an epistemologically charged framework emerging from the discourse of the Korean War, presenting Asian and Mexican American cultural productions as a critique of the imperial and white supremacist notions of kinship that continue to shape knowledge production about the conflict.

[2] The Generation of 1950 (sometimes referred to as the Generation of 1940 or 1945) refers to writers who emerged in response to the social, political, and cultural changes brought about by the expansion of American influence in Puerto Rico during the 1940s and 1950s.

[3] Among the foundational texts that examine the relationship between war, militarism, and sex work are Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* and Kathleen Barry's *The Prostitution of Sexuality*.

[4] Literary scholarship on South Korean participation in the Vietnam War and the formation of masculinity has been highly instructive to this essay. For a representative study, see Jin-Kyung Lee's "Surrogate Military, Subempire, and Masculinity" included in her book *Service Economies*. In Latinx studies, Jayson Gonzales Sae-Saue addresses the representation of Mexican American masculinity during the Vietnam War in his chapter "Conquest and Desire: Interracial Sex in Daniel Cano's *Shifting Loyalties* and Alfredo Véa's *Gods Go Begging*" in *Southwest Asia*.

[5] The original text omits the accent mark, using "Taina" rather than the correct Spanish spelling "Taína," which is used for the woman's name and the feminine version of the Indigenous term.

[6] Harry Franqui-Rivera notes that even though the Korean War relied on a draft system, around 91% of the soldiers in the 65th Infantry were volunteers. This was largely a result of the island's difficult economic conditions and a hero cult promoted by PPD leader Luis Muñoz Marín, other political elites, and the press (186).

[7] Scholars such as Andrew Buchanan and Murat Yolun examine the similarities between soldiering and tourism, focusing on soldiers' non-combat experiences with local communities and the recreational exploration of their deployment sites.

[8] For discussions of the interdependence among men sustained through their mutual trafficking of women, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, and Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex."

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