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Tiburcio's Sense of Place: An Ecocritical Analysis of Rafael Muñoz's *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*

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Rafael Muñoz's 1931 *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (*Let's Go With Pancho Villa!*)[1] depicts the demise of six main characters whose livelihoods and identities are embedded in the land. These men hail from Chihuahua, Mexico, and they find that their rustic way of life is threatened by modernization, authoritarianism in Mexico, and imperialist pressure from the United States. They decide to join the Mexican Revolution to reclaim their autonomy and dignity within the place they call home. However, when they become caught up in the fighting, Muñoz's protagonists are dehumanized and exploited by dominant actors seeking power over land, people, and society. The novel ends with these characters tragically sacrificed in the war effort, culminating in a death scene that conjoins the body of Tiburcio Maya, the last surviving protagonist, to the rushing current of the Papogochic River. In this ecocritical analysis I explore how Muñoz consistently employs environmental imagery that reveals contrasting perspectives about the natural world. On one hand, we see powerful actors in the war whose goal is to gain control over people and territory. They dehumanize the main characters by treating them as dogs or cannon fodder, thus revealing an anthropocentric view that prioritizes the interests of humans over the natural world in a context where not all humans are treated equally. On the other

[1] All translations are mine. This process benefitted from consulting Ruth Donnelly Harris's 1942 thesis that includes an original translation of the novel.

hand, we see Muñoz shift the significance of the natural world by subsuming select characters into their environment through positive, forceful, and often poetic depictions of his main characters' synergies with the land and animals. I argue that Muñoz's varied uses of environmental imagery to depict his doomed characters contribute to a sharp critique of the mentality that drives people to treat the natural world (and those associated with it) as something to dominate, exploit, and even destroy. Moreover, the novel renders visible an interconnectedness with the natural world that empowers the Chihuahuan soldiers through their profound sense of place.

In a challenge to more scientifically oriented studies of ecology, Neil Evernden charts a humanistic definition for one's sense of place, which he characterizes as "a genuine intermingling of parts of the ecosystem" (93). Evernden elaborates that one's "'sense of place,' a sense of knowing and being a part of a particular place" (100) is based on profound connections between the human and natural worlds: "Instead of a detachment from the environment, we have a subtle diffusion into it" (97). Considered in this light, landscapes cannot be understood as a background to be superficially observed or as a territory to delineate, but rather as "an extension of the boundary of the self" (101). He pushes this notion of "inter-relatedness" as "the subversive tenant of Ecology" that dares to ask: "Where do you draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world…?" (95). This characterization of place can be found in Muñoz's portrayal of his characters' interconnections with the landscapes that they inhabit and embody. Through life and death, the men are depicted as upholding values associated with their relationship to the land, while simultaneously confounding or defying dominant actors who see nature, like people, as something to control and exploit.

My reading of the characters' sense of place goes against the grain, given that *¡Vámonos!* is not considered an example of environmental literature, but rather is catalogued as a novel of the 1910 Mexican revolution. Previous literary studies have convincingly examined such themes as the men's masculinity, loyalty, violence, and honor in the novel's depiction of doomed Villista troops. Likewise, Muñoz's stature as a novelist of the revolution has prompted studies highlighting his deep roots in what was Villista territory, his apparent fascination with Villa as a brutish national figure, and the merits of the journalistic style evident in his war fiction. The group of doomed soldiers in *¡Vámonos!,* tellingly nicknamed *los Leones* [the Lions], are not explicitly representative of an environmentalist worldview nor are they described as

having indigenous identities that might connote profound cultural connections to their lands. Yet, they fall into a general profile that Priscilla Ybarra characterizes as "the economically impoverished, the colonized, and the culturally marginalized" (16). Ybarra's study of Mexican-American literature and the environment finds that, while those fitting this profile of hardship might not "define or understand their actions as 'environmental,'" they are still "among the most exposed to environmental exploitation" (16).[2] By asking new questions about the author, the characters, and the abundant descriptions of nature that permeate the text, I strive to open new avenues of inquiry into this novel and its genre, while also contributing to the growing body of ecocritical studies on Latin American and Latinx literature. I aspire to promote visibility about a range of ways that the environment has been envisioned to reflect collective identities and articulate shared values during moments of profound disruption and change.

This article is divided into three sections. I first discuss Muñoz's background to consider how his own life experiences may shed light on his construction of the novel's characters and their identities that are enmeshed with the landscapes of northern Mexico. This section, titled "Muñoz: Environment, Identity, and the Novel," includes an overview of his different approach to the novel's two parts and how each part portrays the experiences of Villista soldiers in distinct phases of the fighting. The subsequent two sections explore a contrast that is of interest for ecocriticism regarding differing views about the relationships between humans and nature. This contrast refers to what Ybarra characterizes as a "Western epistemology" that can be understood as forwarding a "dichotomy between humans and nature" (15). Just as the ideas of Western modernity can be contested and rejected, so too can this constructed dichotomy be challenged (15). Indeed, Everden's conceptualization of the interdependence between human and natural realms asserts that "[t]here is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place" (103). Accordingly, in the second section, "Environmental Imagery as Dehumanization," I discuss how a dichotomy between humans and nature is constructed in the novel by focusing on examples of the main characters from Chihuahua that are associated with the land or animals by powerful characters who perceive themselves as above nature, destined to control the land and the people they

[2] Joan Martinez-Alier similarly discusses a range of "socio-political language" revealing "ecological struggles" among poor communities in history (624).

consider inferior. In the third section, "Alternative Identities," I turn to how that dichotomy is critiqued and rejected by focusing on examples of the rurally based characters projecting identities that emanate from interactions and associations with the natural spaces they inhabit and traverse. Through these contrasting uses of environmental imagery, the novel portrays the Mexican Revolution as a clash between dominant forces attempting to impose their modern values on others and people whose profound place-based identity prompts them to resist such incursions.

Muñoz: Environment, Identity, and the Novel

The characters in *¡Vámonos!* are, like Muñoz, shaped by the ravages of war, the reality of movement (deterritorialization), and an incessant connection to places in Mexico distinguished by their natural qualities (reterritorialization).[3] Muñoz (1899-1972) was born in the capital city of Chihuahua into an influential and affluent family.[4] Nevertheless, Salvador Reyes Nevares describes the profound rural influence on Muñoz's youth, particularly through time spent on the family ranch known as "El Pabellón" that was located near the U.S.-Mexico border (xi).[5] F. Rand Morton moreover explains that Muñoz's ranching education included learning to "montar a caballo, tirar al blanco, a ser hombre a la manera del norteño" ["ride a horse, shoot at a target, to be a man in the ways of the northerner"] (142). Muñoz received formal education in Chihuahua, notably at the Instituto Científico y Literario that was founded and directed by his relatives. He also studied briefly in Mexico City after Porfirio Díaz resigned the presidency and the revolutionary fighting seemed to have ended. However, his stay in the capital was cut short by the assassination of then-president Francisco Madero in 1913 that would reignite the war for years to come (Morton 142). Back in Chihuahua City between 1913 and 1915, Muñoz's adolescence was then marked by Villa's occupation of that major stronghold, a time in which

[3] See Ursula Heise's argument that deterritorialization, which "implies profound social and cultural upheaval" (53), must be understood as a function of modern, global life. Moreover, it can be seen as part of a "sense of place" that extends beyond the local to "larger networks" (55). Therefore, reterritorialization, or "a reconnection with the local" (53), is complicated by the notion that "increased connectivity" is bound to change "local places" (54), as well as people's sense of identity (54-62).

[4] See Jorge Aguilar Mora's excellent summary of the Muñoz family influence in the military, literature, law, government, and education. This legacy extends back to his great grandfather, Higinio, and includes his grandfather, Laureano, and his father, Carlos, among others (*Una muerte*… 122-124). Francisco R. Almada additionally provides detailed information about the professional accomplishments of Rafael Muñoz's relatives (350-4).

[5] Others corroborating the importance of the family ranch are Luis Leal (685) and F. Rand Morton, with the latter specifying that it was along the border with Texas (141).

Muñoz recalls seeing Villa come and go, learning about Villismo indirectly: "fui simplemente un muchacho con los ojos bien abiertos" ["I was simply a boy with his eyes wide open"] (Carballo 273). His writing career was underway when the revolutionary forces were deeply fractured, and the young Muñoz was forced into exile in the United States between 1916 and 1920 because of the family's allegiance to Alvaro Obregón's faction (Reyes Nevares xi).[6] Muñoz was finally able to fully establish his writing career in Mexico City after Obregón took power at the conclusion of the revolution, yet his experience of Chihuahua as a youth would become the backdrop for the bulk of his literary tales and historical memories.[7]

To create the various storylines that comprise *¡Vámonos!*, Muñoz searched his "memoria y la imaginación" ["memory and imagination"] (Carballo 267), which was steeped in his identity as a *chihuahuense*. He is not known as a nature writer, yet in an interview with Emmanuel Carballo, Muñoz described how his writing process involved touring the land to painstakingly reproduce for foreign and domestic readers the contours of Mexican landscapes that give meaning to his characters' unique needs, desires, and subjectivities (268).[8] His goal was to make his literary descriptions align with reality when, for example, describing rugged countryside or the look and symbolism of mesquite trees (268). For Muñoz the importance of faithfully representing the Mexican national story was partially motivated by his concern that foreign depictions tended to confuse key characteristics related to the environment.

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[6] Other sources offer different insights about the timing of his exile. For example, Fernando Tola de Habich states that many in the Muñoz family were forced to flee to the U.S. from 1911 to 1920, with Rafael Muñoz's exile merely described as briefly interrupting his journalistic career (xx-xxi). Luis Leal adds that his exile to the U.S., mostly in southern California, corresponded to the rise of Carranza over Obregón and ended in 1920 with Carranza's fall from power (685). Jorge Aguilar Mora adds that the exile to the United States was precipitated by threats to the life of Carlos Muñoz, Rafael's father (*Una muerte*… 123). F. Rand Morton specifies that during his exile he first worked harvesting tomatoes in California, but also worked in San Francisco prior to returning to Mexico (142). Curiously, in the Carballo interview, Muñoz remarks that he lived in Chihuahua City from 1910 to 1920 (271), with no mention of exile or the family ranch. He elaborated: "Casi no recuerdo, de esa época, más que actos de guerra: grandezas y crímenes" ["From that era I can almost remember nothing except acts of war: acts of greatness and crimes"] (271).

[7] Standing out in Muñoz's writing are two novels set in the north during the revolution (*¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* and *Se llevaron el cañón para Bachimba*), two biographical texts about Villa (*Memorias de Pancho Villa* and *Pancho Villa, rayo y azote*), and numerous short stories.

[8] Regarding the process he used to write his second novel, *Se llevaron el cañón para Bachimba*, Muñoz explains to Carballo that he traversed on horseback the route that his main character would take in the revolution, keeping notes on the landscape to learn "centímetro por centímetro, la geografía y la historia de la región" ["centimeter by centimeter, the geography and the history of the region"] (268).

Speaking for himself and other novelists of the revolution, he vowed to set the record straight:

> No podíamos conformarnos, de ninguna manera, con las obras escritas sobre México por extranjeros de diferentes nacionalidades. Alguno de ellos, muy buen escritor, lastimosamente confunde el maguey con el nopal, y escribe páginas preciosas en que relaciona el pulque con el emblema nacional.
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> [We could not conform ourselves, in any way, with the works written about Mexico by foreigners of different nationalities. Some of them, although very good writers, unfortunately confuse the maguey with the nopal, and write lovely pages relating pulque with the national emblem.] (280)[9]

Muñoz's desire to positively, accurately, and thoroughly represent the Mexican lived experience for readers at home and abroad prompted him to create unpretentious, representative characters who are "casi siempre, campesinos iletrados, oscura gente del pueblo" ["almost always, illiterate country folk, obscure people from the villages"] (272).[10] For example, in describing his most important literary characters, Muñoz singles out Tiburcio Maya, the main character in *¡Vámonos!,* as "un tipo muy de Chihuahua. Todo lo que le atribuyo: su lealtad y sacrificio son rigurosamente ciertos. Cualquier chihuahuense de su tiempo y circunstancia hubiese hecho lo mismo" ["a very Chihuahuan type. Everything that I attribute to him: his loyalty and sacrifice are rigorously correct. Any native Chihuahuan in his time and circumstance would have done the same"] (279). Tiburcio's character has often been analyzed in terms of his fierce loyalty to Villa.[11] Yet, his desertion of Villa's troops in the novel's first part, and his acceptance of death rather than expatriation in the novel's second part, suggest an even deeper affinity for a place-based sense of identity that is rooted in the landscapes of northern Mexico and that is under attack from the ravages of war and the pressures of U.S. imperialism.

The two-part structure of *¡Vámonos!* results from Muñoz's experience writing short stories that were published weekly in *El Universal* newspaper. He explained in the interview with Carballo that the plotline about six friends from San Pablo, Chihuahua, conformed to the demands of the weekly publication with a focus on the actions that led five of the friends to die. When the publication informed him that his

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[9] The *maguey* refers to an agave plant; the nopal is a prickly pear, and *pulque* is a fermented drink made from maguey sap.

[10] Muñoz's use of "oscura", meaning either obscure or dark, may have been designed to promote ambiguity.

[11] For example, see Max Parra's gendered analysis of "the military code of manly loyalty" (101).

weekly story would be paused to make room for another writer, Muñoz was inspired to bundle those stories as the first half of a novel. He developed the novel's second half beyond the stylistic constraints of a weekly story, allowing for greater psychological development of Tiburcio, the only survivor of the original group of friends (Carballo 265-7).

The two parts are also distinguished by their historical context. The initial stories focus on the phase of the Revolution when, in 1914, the rising Villistas fought to take control of strategic cities in the tristate area of Durango, Zacatecas, and Coahuila, culminating in the battle for Torreón, Coahuila.[12] This story arc dramatically ends with Tiburcio's desertion from the Villista troops after two years of loyalty. Muñoz takes up Tiburcio's story again in the novel's second part, with his forced return to the struggling troops during the phase of the revolution when Villa and his troops famously attack Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916. Back in Mexico after the short-lived raid, Tiburcio's loyal assistance, together with Villa's unique oneness with the terrain, help Villa elude capture by U.S. General John Pershing's Punitive Expedition. The novel's denouement features an astonishing standoff with U.S. troops in which Tiburcio, captured and tortured, rejects promises of personal enrichment and instead ensures his own death as a consequence of protecting Villa.

Environmental Imagery as Dehumanization

In Muñoz's portrayal of soldiers swept up by war, there is a consistent use of environmental imagery throughout the novel's two parts that associates the soldiers with the non-human world. The soldiers' lands are ecologically diverse with mixed levels of development and destruction during the context of war, therefore the soldiers' associations with the environment include connections to the theater of war as well as to natural elements such as land and animals. At first, the depiction of their soldierly duties references their connection to land as a priority that the war has disrupted. When the characters take a break from the fighting and return to San Pablo to bury their first deceased friend, they articulate their motives for joining the war. In each case, they point to antagonists undercutting their livelihoods, which are intrinsically linked to local landscapes. The mourners are described as a cowboy, peasants, a railroad worker, and a farmer (69). We know that the farmer's lands were

[12] Villa recalls in the novel that Tiburcio fought with his troops in broader expanses of the northern region over two years, including: San Andrés, La Laguna, Ciudad Juárez, Tierra Blanca, La Pila, and Torreón; he eventually deserted at Zacatecas (132-33).

burned, the railroad became militarized, and the farmworkers were abused by the landowners. The men's objectives for joining the national revolution are predictably to regain their lands, free themselves of "jefes politicos" ["political bosses"] and "amos" ["masters"], and avenge injustices done unto them and others (69). Exemplifying their affinity to these local ties is the desire to bury their deceased friend within the landscape that epitomizes his life and struggle: a demolished bridge that he blew up for the Villista cause. His return in death to San Pablo, with the bridge then under reconstruction, is articulated as a symbolic potential for rebirth as they bury him within "el vientre del pilar que él mismo había derribado" ["the womb of the pillar that he himself had destroyed"] (69).[13] While the men's connections with their home environment are integral to their own sense of identity, they eventually recognize that the war machine sees them, like nature, as resources to exploit.

By the end of the novel's first part, Tiburcio's enthusiasm for enlisting in Villa's army has given way to the realization that the leaders he has so loyally followed view the soldiers as expendable beasts. This is encapsulated in the scene in which the bedraggled soldiers make use of the train in support of the battle for Torreón, and Tiburcio's last remaining friend, Máximo Perea, has contracted smallpox. The Villista general in charge confronts Tiburcio regarding the need to make the sick soldier "disappear" to avoid contagion. Tiburcio retorts: "¿y qué quiere usted que se haga? ¿Vamos a dejar a Perea en mitad del llano, tirado como un perro? ¿No es un hombre como nosotros? ["and what do you want to have done? Are we going to leave Perea in the middle of the plains, thrown away like a dog?"] (107). When specifically ordered to burn his friend alive to the eliminate the threat of his sickness, Tiburcio continues to oppose the war machine's dehumanization of the soldiers "¿Es éste un ejército de hombres o una tropa de perros?" ["Is this an army of men or a troop of dogs?"] (109).[14] In a similar gesture, Tiburcio silently rebukes fellow soldiers whose obedience

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[13] Bortz and Aguila explain the importance of railroads to understanding the Mexican countryside. By the end of 1914, railroads had been militarized by a decree from Venustiano Carranza, and by 1916 it was commonplace for destroyed railroads to have altered landscapes (66). Railroads were regular military targets "because railroads were the principal means of long-distance transport, and warfare requires mobility. Each revolutionary band needed the rails to haul troops, supplies, and munitions, while at the same time denying that capacity to its enemies" (64).

[14] Other examples in this scene demonstrate how the soldiers are conflated with nature. For example, General Urbina is described in animalesque terms: "Sus orejas, rojas y deformes, parecían dos crestas de gallo pegadas a la gran cabeza redonda, y en su cuerpo robusto alentaba un alma felina y despiadada" ["His ears, red and deformed, looked like two cockscombs stuck to his big round head, and in his robust body a feline and ruthless soul breathed"] (106). Later, Tiburcio's rage is described like the earth: "su carne se puso de color

to military leaders reveals a naive unawareness of how they are being treated as expendable beasts: "Pelean como leones, arriesgan diez veces la vida, les agujerán el pellejo, y cuando no sirvan más, les darán una patada en el asiento" ["They fight like lions, they risk their life ten times over, their hides will be pierced, and when they are no longer useful, they will get kicked in the rear"] (121). Villa's arrival only stokes Tiburcio's disillusionment with the revolutionary leadership's treatment of the soldiers. He is devastated to realize that Villa views him not as a dutiful compatriot, but rather fears him as a possible source of contagion. Tiburcio's subsequent desertion marks an affirmation of his agency and humanity as he forges his own path back to his land, family, and community.

This dehumanization of the main characters continues in the novel's second part, when Tiburcio reenlists not through the allure of Villismo's promise, but instead as a victim of brute force. While Tiburcio speaks admiringly of his former leader before Villa's arrival to the ranch, it should be noted that Tiburcio flatly rejects Villa's demand for him to reenlist. This decision is formed after reflecting on the negative impact his absence would have on his family and the land. At the outset of the novel's second part, Tiburcio's choice is to remain on his ranch, which is described in utopic terms with fertile landscapes lauded for their rolling hills, bubbling creeks, fields of corn, roaming deer, productive oxen, and sunny skies (124-5). Upon Villa's arrival, Tiburcio decision to stay is centered on his concern for his family's lands. If he rejoins the war, he surmises, then his wife and daughter would be left behind, "en la senda arrasada, donde no volvería a crecer la hierba nunca" ["on the scorched trail, where the grass would never grow again"] (134). Without the ability to secure Tiburcio's loyalty through appeals to a shared military goal, Villa must resort to dominance.[15]

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de tierra…su bigote blanco parecía de cristal, y sus ojos brillaban como carbones encendidos" ["his flesh turned the color of the earth…his white mustache looked like crystal, and his eyes shone like burning embers"] (109). Moreover, wounded men arriving by train are described as being stacked "como troncos de árbol, como haces de paja" ["like tree trunks, like bundles of straw"] (118) and as having internal wounds that thrashed "como animales dentro de un saco" ["like animals inside a bag"] (120).

[15] Enrique Dussel illustrates this point in his synthesis of the concept: "A hegemonic demand…is one that manages to unify all claims—or at least those most urgent for everyone—within a broader proposal" (39). By contrast, and citing Antonio Gramsci, Dussel states that "if the 'dominant' or 'ruling' class (or the 'historical bloc in power') 'has lost consensus'—that is, it has lost *hegemony* and thereby consensus…—then it no longer 'leads'" (emphasis in original; 410). In that case, "nothing remains for the 'historic bloc in power' but political action as 'coercive force,' and as a result it shifts from being 'hegemonic'—having the consent of the *people*—to being 'dominant.' Domination as political action, which is expressed as a merely monopolistic (military or police), violent, and external force, manifests the crisis of and marks the beginning of the end for the 'historical bloc'" (emphasis in original; 41-42).

Only after Villa cruelly murders Tiburcio's wife and daughter does our protagonist find himself compelled to rejoin the revolution along with his young son, leaving behind his murdered family members and their lands condemned to ruin. Tiburcio's subsequent service as a Villista soldier, like his journey in the novel's first part, prompts his realization that he and his compatriots are again debased as expendable animals.

The most reviled culprit of this dehumanization in the novel's second half is the imperialistic posture of the United States toward its southern neighbors. This tension is relayed with environmental imagery when Villa attempts to secure his troops' support for the raid on Columbus by explaining how the U.S. treats struggling Mexicans who cross the border to work. Muñoz's narrator first relates the U.S. perspective that:

> el mexicano era útil, bestia de trabajo incansable y barata, para los talleres que trabajan día y noche fabricando productos que vender a la Europa en guerra… ¡Pero cómo! Se les desnudaba, para que sus ropas fueran fumigadas, cual si fueran de enfermos de peste. Y como todavía les podía quedar en los cuerpos algún bicho o una costra de mugre, a los hombres en un tanque, y a las mujeres en otro, desnudos, se les echaba, para ser bañados en una solución insecticida, a base de gasolina, como al ganado que ha contraído la garrapata.
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> [the Mexican was useful, a tireless and cheap work beast, for the workshops where they toiled day and night manufacturing products to sell to Europe at war… But how! They were stripped naked, so that their clothes could be fumigated, as if they were sick from the plague. And as though some bug or a crust of dirt could still remain on their bodies, with the men in one tank, and the women in another, naked, they were hurled at, bathed in an insecticidal, gasoline-based solution, just as they treat cattle that have contracted ticks.] (175)

Villa then recounts a gruesome story about a group of compatriots who were burned to death because the fumigation process resulted in a fire that Villa suspects was intentionally set (175-6).[16] His rallying cry for the attack positions the avenging soldiers as a "thorn" in the imperialistic designs of their gluttonous northern neighbor: "Los Estados Unidos quieren tragarse a México: vamos a ver si se les atora esta espina en el gaznate" ["The United States wants to swallow Mexico: let's see if this thorn gets stuck in its gullet"] (177). The novel thus contrasts the U.S. and its grotesque

[16] Friedrich Katz's biography corroborates Villa's telling of this actual occurrence, which "had taken place only two days before in El Paso" (564). Katz explains that there were twenty immigrants and they "had been arrested by the local authorities for different reasons" (564). By contrast, Muñoz's novel depicts Villa telling of dispossessed Mexicans emigrating out of desperation and allowed by the U.S. to cross as laborers (174-5).

efforts to control nature (through the example of treating Mexicans like cattle) with the soldiers' self-association with nature (identifying as thorns) from which they derive power. Villa's delineation of this tension marks a turning point for Tiburcio that is solidified when his son dies in battle in Columbus. Although Villa's dehumanizing treatment of the *Leones* had previously contributed to Tiburcio twice rejecting military service in favor of life on the ranch in San Pablo, he now comprehends that the United States' disrespect for his nationality more broadly roots his identity to the homeland he shares with his Mexican compatriots.

Back in Mexico to flee the U.S. troops that seek justice for the raid, Villa ultimately evades Pershing's Punitive Expedition by hiding in a remote cave that is embedded in the mountains and therefore impossible for an outsider to discover. In contrast to the empowerment of Villa's ability to blend with nature in this moment, those who represent the modern war machine literally entrap Tiburcio as part of their efforts to dominate Mexicans, just as they dominate land and animals. After venturing out to fetch water, Tiburcio is captured by Pershing's men in the jaws of a bear trap and then his feet are skinned like an animal as a form of torture so that he will reveal Villa's whereabouts. When he refuses to talk, the novel illustrates the conflict between those who desire to control the world around them and those who derive their self-worth from their deep connection to the environment. First, a Punitive Expedition official tries to tempt Tiburcio's cooperation by providing him medical attention in the encampment at San Antonio de los Arenales that would allow him to recover from his wounds with all the amenities of the modern hospital unit (249-50). When Tiburcio's health eventually improves, his standoff with the U.S. sergeant reveals that these adversaries simply do not comprehend the others' worldview or values.

The sergeant views his exchange with the captured Villista as a relatively straightforward transaction, particularly when Tiburcio admits to being a victim of Villa's violence. In labored Spanish he offers to purchase Tiburcio's betrayal of Villa, explaining how Mexicans in the U.S. have good jobs, nice houses, and cars (250). The reward would be handsome in a new life abroad: "Cincuenta mil dólares, cien mil dólares te daremos para que digas dónde está… Nosotros darte cuanto pidas, rancho, caballos, vacas finas" ["Fifty thousand dollars, one-hundred thousand dollars we will give you so that you tell us where he is… We give you whatever you request, ranch, horses, fine cows"] (253). However, the connection that the sergeant draws between happiness, wealth, and ownership of land and animals proves meaningless to Tiburcio (253). Juan Pablo Dabove characterizes this communication breakdown as one in

which the sergeant "vive en la comodidad y las certezas de la modernidad" ["lives in the comfort and the certainties of modernity"] while Tiburcio represents "un guerrero pre-moderno" ["a pre-modern warrior"] (187). Indeed, the novel's depiction of these two characters illustrates opposing views about how humans relate to the natural world. Tiburcio's refusal is not portrayed as stupid or irrational as the sergeant believes, but instead as a tool to disrupt and confound a system that devalues him. Tiburcio's loyalty to his own sense of identity and place ultimately demonstrates "su superioridad sobre el sargento, médicos y enfermeras, sobre los centenares de soldados que a través de los cristales de las ventanas veía vagar entre sus filas de carpas idénticas; sobre el ejército entero" ["his superiority over the sergeant, doctors and nurses, over the hundreds of soldiers who, through the glass in the windows, he saw roaming around among their rows of identical tents; over the entire army"] (252). This clash between worldviews does not prompt the sergeant to broaden his understanding of the natural world or his own sense of place, but rather fuels his desire to merely dispose of Tiburcio.

To punish Tiburcio's resistance to their presumably generous offer, the U.S. soldiers take him to territory in Chihuahua controlled by Venustiano Carranza's troops, on the outskirts of Ciudad Guerrero. Once the Carrancistas identify him as a rival Villista, they oblige Tiburcio to march toward the Papigochic River, leaving a trail of blood from his wounded feet in the process. They hang him from a branch leaning over the river, until it starts to give way: "La cuerda se fue venciendo, se inclinó la rama, y todavía sangraban los pies de Tiburcio Maya cuando los besaron las aguas sollozantes" ["The rope began giving way, the branch tilted down, and Tiburcio Maya's feet were still bleeding when the weeping waters kissed them"] (256). In this stunning conclusion, in which the personified river waters conjoin with our protagonist's body in its final resting place, we can perceive this soldier's unarticulated sense of place in which he intimately fuses with the natural world. Samuel Truett's study of the border region during the time of Villa's attack on the U.S. characterizes this region as "fugitive landscapes of subaltern power" (9). There, "ordinary people forged alternative landscapes that eluded" attempts by dominant groups to impose modern and corporate controls (9). In a parallel fashion, Tiburcio's willingness to die in his homeland rather than sell out to the U.S. points to the deep roots of his Mexican identity and environmentally grounded values. This is a posture that appears in the novel as natural to Tiburcio, yet unfathomable to those who view success as a process of commodifying land, labor, and loyalties.

This overview of Tiburcio's experience as a Villista has focused primarily on the soldiers' rejection of being objectified and commodified as an illustration of how Muñoz critiques modern mentalities that pit humans against nature. But that constructed dichotomy is not inevitable. Associations between people and the landscapes that define their homeland, when viewed from the perspective of decolonial theory, can "make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (Walsh 17). As seen in Muñoz's novel, the characters' environmentally rooted perspectives can be gleaned from their profound reliance on nature for their physical or psychological wellbeing. Cravings for water, for example, are palpable. Other more literary examples, however, reflect Evernden's position that understanding the human relation with their surroundings requires abstraction: "Metaphoric language is…an indication that the speaker has a place, feels part of a place" (101). The next section pivots to examples from *¡Vámonos!* that illustrate how Muñoz depicts the men's ways of being and thinking that stand as an alternative to the exploitative mentality of their antagonists.

Alternative Identities

In the midst of this novel's depiction of war, two chapters stand out for compactly illustrating the men's veneration of the land. Both episodes in the novel are largely overlooked in studies focused on Muñoz's depiction of soldiers at war. The ecocritical approach, by comparison, draws our gaze to these chapters' emphasis on environmental traits and values that inform the soldiers' identity. Chapter Two includes an elaborate account of Miguel Ángel del Toro whose last name means "of the Bull" and whose affectionate nickname is "Becerrillo" (Calf). His brief time with the Villista troops is marked by the need to defend his prized possession from envious officials who do not understand the young soldier's viewpoint that the value of some things cannot be monetized (59). Predictably, for wartime, the source of pride is Miguel Ángel's gun holster and cartridge belt. The set is not coveted for the power and violence that it represents, however, but instead for its adornments of silk embroidery showing extravagant and colorful nature scenes. The narrator explains that other soldiers would have had belts with simple geometric patterns and little color, whereas this young Lion's cartridge belt displays elaborate landscapes that include:

> un tren de ferrocarril con su locomotora que arrojaba el humo de azules anillos, rosas de pesados pétalos, herraduras entrelazadas, tréboles de cuatro hojas para asegurar la buena suerte… También venados de intricada cornamenta, un río plateado y un barquillo de vela con bandera tricolor en el mástil, peces dorados, conejos de largas orejas verticales, casitas de tejado rojo.
>
> [a railroad train with its locomotive that hurled up smoke in blue rings, roses with heavy petals, interlocking horseshoes, four-leaf clovers to ensure good luck… Also deer with intricate antlers, a silvery river and a sailboat with a tricolor flag on the mast, goldfish, rabbits with long vertical ears, red roofed houses.] (58-59; ellipsis in original)

Moreover, the design on the holster for his "enormous Colt" depicts:

> un ranchero montado en su caballo de redondas ancas prietas, galopaba tras un novillo, echándole un lazo de plata que le revoloteaba sobre los cuernos, como una mariposa. Y todo eso, en medio de una ancha orla de hojas de laureles.
>
> [a rancher mounted on his horse with dark round haunches, galloping after a calf, launching a silver lasso that fluttered over his horns, like a butterfly. And all that, set between a wide edging of bay leaves.] (59)

By the end of this brief chapter, Miguel Ángel is wounded and slowly bleeding to death while Tiburcio, the benevolent patriarch of the group, is wordlessly understood as the one who must put Miguel Ángel out of his misery. As the two men silently acknowledge this dire reality, Miguel Ángel struggles to remove his belt and holster, dramatically offering this prized possession to Tiburcio and "haciéndole ademán de que la conservara" ["making a gesture indicating for him to conserve it"] (64).[17] The emotional chapter fittingly ends with an elaborate description that intertwines the men, their natural surroundings, and the brutality of war:

> A lo lejos, el ruido de las ametralladoras decrecía, se hacía intermitente, y sobre el canal pasaban de cuando en cuando algunas granadas de cañón, agitando el aire con la cauda de sus ronquidos. Comenzó a soplar el viento, desbordándose de la lejana serranía oscura tras la que el sol se escondía lanzando en rojo sus últimas miradas; se agitaron las copias de los álamos, los tilos y los fresnos que se mecían al borde del zanjón, y en el azul celeste, inmaculado y sereno, las garzas pasaron muy alto volando en línea de tiradores. Llegaron fatigados y lentos, casi arrastrándose, lejanos silbidos de locomotora, y a poco rato comenzó a desprenderse en el oriente, horizonte arriba, el luto estrellado de la noche.

[17] Muñoz's use of "conservar" (perhaps better translated as "to safeguard") may reflect widespread promotion of "the ideals of nationalist conservation" that Christopher Boyer situates in the 1930s (100). Such discourse taking hold around the time *¡Vámonos!* was published does not suggest common usage of conservation discourse during the novel's historical setting.

> [In the distance, the noise of the machine guns waned, became intermittent, and some cannon grenades passed over the canal from time to time, stirring the air with the trail from their rumble. The wind began to blow, overflowing from the distant dark mountain range behind which the sun hid, throwing out its last glances in red; the canopies of poplars, lindens and ash trees swaying at the edge of the deep ditch, and in the azure blue, immaculate and serene, the herons passed very high above flying in shooting formation. Distant whistles of locomotives arrived fatigued and slow, almost crawling, and soon the starry mourning of the night began to break off in the east, above the horizon.] (64-65)

A second portrayal of the troops' keen attentiveness to the environment appears in the novel's second half, at the outset of the Villistas' journey toward the U.S.-Mexico border. A short chapter titled "Los duraznos" ["The Peach Trees"] generally depicts strife among the soldiers whose ranks have dwindled and whose morale is low (158). They are challenged to avoid threats of violence from rival groups, and tension increases when the Villistas encounter a group defending the town of Namiquipa, Chihuahua. Against this relatively uneventful backdrop, Muñoz adds a brief but dramatic confrontation involving a single peach tree. One might expect General Villa to covet the fruit tree for himself and his troops or do something to deny his rivals the tree's bounty. However, Villa's actions prioritize nature itself. The tree is located on a ranch called "El Piojo" ["The Louse"] that is occupied by men and women who are enemies of the Villistas. The narrator romanticizes the flowering tree, donning it with human like characteristics and actions:

> un árbol de durazno, solitario y alegre, abría sus ramas florecidas en un diluvio de pétalos amarillos y rosados; desnudo de hojas, perfumando y esbelto, el árbol se bañaba en la frescura de la tarde, y bajo su sombra acariciante, como mano de mujer, las viejas vieron pasar la columna.
>
> [a peach tree, solitary and happy, opened its flowering branches in a deluge of yellow and pink petals; bare of leaves, perfumed and slender, the tree bathed in the freshness of the afternoon and under its caressing shadow, like a woman's hand, the old women watched the line of troops pass by.] (166)

While the Villista troops continue by on horseback, one lone rider unexpectedly returns, prompting the ranchers to fire their weapons and encircle him. The narration keeps the rider's identity and intentions briefly in doubt until he finally reveals why he risked his life to address his enemies. First, he yells: "Tapen ese durazno, porque a la noche va a helar!... Quiero comer fruta de él en septiembre!" ["Cover that peach tree, because tonight it is going to freeze!... I want to eat fruit from it in September!"] (167; ellipsis in original). Rather than a desire to exploit the bounties of nature, this protective stance reflects the speaker's understanding of the symbiotic relationship

that people have with their environment. After bellowing those instructions, he dramatically rides off: "como un proyectil que llevara dentro su propio impulso, subió la cuesta seguido por las detonaciones, y se perdió tras la loma, hacia los suyos. Era Francisco Villa" ["like a projectile that carried its own force within, he rode up the slope followed by explosions, and vanished beyond the hill, going toward his own men. It was Francisco Villa"] (167). Underscoring the general's environmental instinctiveness, the chapter ends with his prediction of a night frost coming true (168).

In addition to those discreet examples of the soldiers' identification with nature that are encapsulated in specific chapters, the novel presents broader imagery that associates the men's identity with water among other natural elements, culminating in Tiburcio's poetic kiss of death with the Papigochic River. The opening chapter of *¡Vámonos!*, titled "El puente" ["The Bridge"], sets the stage for the novel's use of water as a key trope. The bridge passes through the protagonists' hometown of San Pablo, Chihuahua, and it allows trains to transport weapons and Federalist troops across a vast system of railways that flourished under the dictatorial reign of Porfirio Díaz (1877-1911) until the 1910 revolution precipitated his resignation. The revolutionaries seek to gain control over the bridge to help tip the balance of military and political authority over Mexico's critical northern territory away from the Federalists. When ordinary people from San Pablo organize to halt the Federalist troops from advancing across the bridge that traverses their small town, they harness the mobility and repurpose the violence of those who have oppressed them in hopes of plotting a different, freer future.

Miguel Ángel successfully blows up the bridge on behalf of the rebel cause, and his actions are portrayed as transformative for both the revolution and the river below, which is likened to the people themselves. When oppressed and demoralized, they are associated with river currents that are "morenas y turbulentas, como el pueblo" ["dark and turbulent, like the people"] (45). After the daring explosion, the river is again personified to reflect the townspeople, but this time it is described as happy and free: "las aguas seguían corriendo, precipitadamente, como más libres, como más alegres, llevándose en la cresta de sus olas trozos de durmientes destrozados" ["the waters kept running, precipitously, as if more free, more joyful, carrying pieces of shattered railway ties on the crest of their waves"] (52). This rejoicing will unfortunately prove to be fleeting for the town and for the devoted *Leones* as the war brings destruction of lands and displacement of peoples. Yet, the novel's depictions of the men's oneness with nature do not subside.

Following the bridge episode, the newly enlisted soldiers are obliged to uproot, but recurrent images of water, as well as the characters' concern when it is lacking, will continue to characterize their identities and experiences. As the soldiers predominantly traverse the landscape via train and horse, we see a consistent preoccupation for water as necessary for life. For example, when the *Leones* are captured as spies or when Villa emerges from battle, the narration is sprinkled with mentions of getting a serving of water.[18] It is not just the soldiers who are parched. The novel also mentions horses needing their water, and in one episode they drink together with the men: "Bebían las bestias y bebían los hombres, aglomerados, disputándose los huecos a empellones y palabrotas" ["The beasts drank and the men drank, agglomerated, wrangling for openings with shoves and curses"] (159). There are even references to the fact that the trains need to be watered (46, 68). In contrast to times when water comes as a relief in the arid landscapes of northern Mexico, the novel includes expressions of frustration when the water is not safe for drinking.[19]

Examples abound of Muñoz's use of water imagery to portray the soldiers as they cross landscapes bearing marks of war. A selection will illustrate the range of this trope that, through its persistence, connotes a uniqueness to the men's identity that stems from their connectivity with nature. For instance, in an early battle for our Villista protagonists, soldiers are described arriving with repetitive images of water: in "torrentes" ["torrents"] (71), as "una ola" ["a wave"] (71), "una onda y otra onda" ["a wave and another wave"] (72), and "el oleaje interminable ["the endless wave"] (72). In a subsequent episode, the troops travel by train through the summer heat, and the odor of their sweat palpably emanates in "oleajes tibios y espesos" ["warm and thick waves"] (104). Toward the end of part one, the narrator describes the sounds of a snoring soldier in a train car "como el hervir del agua: un ronquido sordo, continuo" ["like boiling water: a continuous, deaf snore"] (110). In the second part, when Villa's troops prepare to attack Columbus, the men's movement is likened to "cuando se rompe la presa" ["when the dam breaks"] (181), with the soldiers themselves akin to

[18] They comment about getting water when captured as spies (85), or retreating from the Columbus raid and needing a spot to rest near a creek for water (193). Dramatically, after the victorious battle in which Villa is injured, the narrator asks: "¿Qué será lo primero que quiere decir un jefe triunfante?" ["What will be the first thing for a triumphant leader to say?"] (214). Rather than expected platitudes, Villa exclaims: "A ver, ¿quién trae agua?" ["Let's see, who has water?"] (214).

[19] The men's feigned excuse for deserting from the Villistas includes being stuck with "agua sucia" ["dirty water"] (78). Later, concerns about the cause of the smallpox contagion include having "agua contaminada" ["polluted water"] (107).

"un caudal" ["a flow"] (181) rushing onward. Later, Villa rallies the troops against the impending Pershing Expedition, and their shouts rise "como una cascada" ["like a waterfall"] (199).

Pausing to consider larger issues related to water in northern Mexico may shed light on the novel's message about social (in)justice for individuals like the *Leones* who are caught up in the revolutionary struggle. The fighting in the novel's first part centers around Torreón, a city encompassed by the fertile area of La Laguna, which is comprised of a series of lakes in the otherwise arid landscapes between the states of Durango and Coahuila (Wolfe 2). Mikael Wolfe's historical study of agrarian reform in this region examines disputes and labor market fluctuations stemming from unequal access to La Laguna's highly coveted water supply that was necessarily to sustain inhabitants and cotton cultivation (2). Indeed, conflicts related to water access contributed to the area becoming a "bloody battleground during the military phase of the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920" (3). William Meyers echoes this characterization of La Laguna—which he describes as "a hotbed of agrarian unrest and worker protest" (93)—in his examination of environmental factors that drove people there to join rebellions. Meyers finds that "the pattern of rebellion conformed to the natural imperatives of the seasons, the flow of water, the movement of workers through the zone, and the basic organizational demands of production and survival" (70). He moreover argues that Villa's success in recruiting troops and securing popular support stems from his attentiveness to the people's need to harness the land's seasonal productivity that was dependent on water access (81). Considered in this historical context of agrarian needs and conflicts, the novel's examples of soldiers fused with water indicates more than just Muñoz's creativity with metaphors. Such portrayals of environmental connectedness symbolize a worldview that deems equitable access to natural resources as vital for wellbeing, and therefore it is incompatible with worldviews that, by contrast, privilege "property and profit" (76).

Tiburcio's journeys offer a stark portrayal of lands left wrecked and abandoned as a result of wartime fighting. Desolation is on display when the men travel north by train to their hometown to bury their deceased comrade, traversing distances marked by specific stations along the route, but also by topography: "desierto, desierto, desierto" ["desert, desert, desert"] (67). This trip additionally contributes to the novel's vision of a merging between the vast northern landscapes and the human world. For example, the train they are on is personified, emitting black smoke and sparks described as "alegres" ["happy"] (66). Additionally, "la locomotora,

arrastrando su carro de caja, echaba a retaguardia los kilómetros, como quien arroja un puño de tierra sobre el lomo" ["the locomotive, dragging its box car, threw back the kilometers, like someone throwing a fistful of earth on its back"] (67). The train is moreover likened to a snake and its movement compared to the pull of the wind: "La vía férrea, sin balaste, se movía como un cuerpo de víbora, y al paso del tren el polvo se levantaba como arrastrado por un torbellino" ["The railroad, without ballast, moved like a snake's body, and with the train's pace the dust rose up as if dragged by a whirlwind"] (67). The novel describes the travelers' sadness as they witness the war's environmental destruction from their reptilian vantage point: "Las estaciones estaban todas incendiadas, los ranchos lejanos abandonados; la guerra había pasado por allí y no ha quedado nadie para recordarla" ["the stations were all burned down, the distant ranches abandoned; the war had passed through there and nobody has remained to remember it"] (67). Relief to these barren scenes arrives with a stop for water in the Jiménez station, but their focus remains fixed on the devastation that engulfs them:

> Luego la llanura y un espejismo de montañas que, alargándose, emigran hacia el sur. Tierras que se han quedado barbechadas y en las que nadie ha puesto semilla; corrales vacíos, con tierra pisoteada y majada fresca entre sus cuatro estacadas de mezquite espinoso. Chozas de un durmiente de alto y láminas oxidadas por techo; y afuera, botes vacíos, rescoldos de algún vivac, osamentas de animales perdidos por la sequía, perros fantasmas… Ni un alma. La guerra, la guerra…
>
> [Then the plain and a mirage of mountains that, lengthening, migrate toward the south. Lands that have remained fallowed and in which no one has planted seeds; empty corrals, with the cool ground trampled and crushed between four fence posts made of prickly mesquite. Huts the height of a railroad tie with rusty metal sheets for ceilings; and outside, empty boots, embers of some campfire, bones of animals lost from the drought, ghost dogs… Not a soul. War, war…] (ellipses in original; 68)

These images of arid lands sharply contrast with the novel's second half, which begins with Tiburcio, having deserted Villa's troops, enjoying life back on his lush ranch with a sky so blue that "parecía un mar" ["it seemed like an ocean"] (125).

Tiburcio's connectivity with his home environment allows him to perceive sounds emanating from nature, and Muñoz again treats readers to an environment taking on humanlike qualities. For example, Tiburcio enjoys "la canción de los ramajes que horas y horas murmuraban un mismo tema" ["the song of the tree branches that for hours and hours murmured the same theme"] and "el reír de un hilo de agua que brincaba entre los pedruscos" ["the laughter of a trickle of water that jumped between

the boulders"] (129). Tiburcio then perceives from the land what will later be revealed as the approach of Villa and his decimated troops:

> la tierra tenía su propio sonido, como un quejido sordo y sin interrupción. Colocando la oreja contra el suelo, le pareció oír como sí el arroyo viniera en creciente, como si las aguas rodaran troncos sobre el lecho rocoso del arroyo. Era también como un rumor de molino, como un rodar de carro.
>
> [the land had its own sound, like a deaf and uninterrupted moan. Placing his ear against the earth, he thought he heard the stream as if it were rising, as if the waters were rolling logs over the rocky bed of the creek. It was also like a rumor of a watermill, like the rolling of wheels.] (129)

Staying on the idyllic ranch is sadly not an option after Villa forces Tiburcio to reenlist. Back on the march, Tiburcio describes the war as a "máquina loca" ["crazy machine"] (170), setting the stage for the novel's second half to focus on the journey toward the border city of Palomas, from where the Villistas ultimately launch the attack on Columbus, New Mexico, on March 9, 1916.

This international confrontation must be understood in the context of the environmental and political issues that are particular to this borderland region during a time when U.S. colonization was a material practice. Muñoz references this context when the Villistas approach the town of Palomas, and the narrator remarks that employees from the "Palomas Land Company" fled back to the U.S. when they learned that Villa was drawing near (173). The Villistas used this generalized fear to their advantage by leaking misinformation to the press stating that Villa decided to leave the region. This prompted locals who had been concerned about Villa's presence to let down their guard, thereby improving conditions for the Columbus attack (174). Through these maneuvers, the novel represents Villa with a dominant posture in the area, suggesting a failure of the colonial project in the borderlands. The goal of that project was for Mexican northerners to be displaced, exploited, or assimilated through foreign wealth and influence.

Actually known as the Palomas Land and Cattle Company, this company was central to colonization efforts that originated during the presidential reign of Díaz. Brandon Morgan explains that, beginning in 1888, there was a "colonization contract" between U.S. businessperson Luis Huller and the Mexican government, and the contract's goal was "to advance Porfirian colonization policies intended to modernize and industrialize the Mexican republic by settling white Europeans and Americans on tracts of government land" ("Columbus, New Mexico: The Creation of a Border Place Myth" 483). Huller gained "the right to control the Palomas tract in northern

Chihuahua in exchange for the creation of colonies there" with a stipulation that the company would need to "attract settlers—both Mexican repatriates and foreigners" (484). Mark Wasserman addresses the magnitude of this company's influence that "purchased the enormous tract of an estimated 2.5 million acres in 1907 for one million dollars. With plenty of capital and connections, the company planned to construct a series of dams, cultivate 300,000 acres, and fence the property" (102). Such control over the environment is characterized by Morgan as a form of violence that began with mapping and parceling of lands and ultimately led to ownership by monopolistic corporations. With regard to the Palomas Land and Cattle Company, this arrangement allowed U.S. owners to gain "land, water, and other resource rights" in Mexico (Morgan, "Columbus, New Mexico, and Palomas, Chihuahua" 315). The larger objective of such efforts was "for the area to become a place defined by modernity and order" (314), implying a deficiency in the identities of Mexicans originally inhabiting these borderland spaces. The Mexican people, however, were not defenseless in these top-down attempts to cultivate a colonial relationship in this borderlands region. Wasserman explains that "small landowners and villagers of northwest Chihuahua had longstanding grievances against the giant estates in that region and led the Revolution in part to recover lands they claimed the surveying companies had stolen from them" (102). Following the revolution, the Palomas Land and Cattle Company "became one of the first to become a target of the land reform" (103).

In light of these historical tensions surrounding colonial designs in the borderland region, the novel's depiction of the company's employees fleeing to the U.S. and the subsequent raid on Columbus is highly suggestive for a decolonial analysis. While Muñoz's portrayal of these borderland aggressions can certainly be analyzed in terms of the men's machismo, violence, or loyalty to Villa, it also prompts reflection about how Mexican northerners perceived their relationship to lands during complex times. Ybarra's study of Mexican-American literature and the environment draws a connection between decoloniality and the environment based on a key tension between the imposition of "modern values" and "processes that have not succumbed" to those values (15). Catherine Walsh and Walter Mignolo underscore this conflict in their characterization of decoloniality as a theoretical concept that examines "how modernity/coloniality has worked and continues to work to negate, disavow, distort and deny knowledges, subjectivities, world senses, and life visions" (4). In the context of revolutionary-era Mexico, military and legal wrangling were tools

wielded by those whose equitable access to land and vital resources like water were under attack. And, tellingly, the characters in *¡Vámonos!* reject the colonization project's premise of their inadequacy to equitably inhabit or use the national resources that surround them. Such a posture is forwarded in the metaphoric identification of the men with the land throughout the novel, as well as their defiance of various manifestations of capitalist exploitation.

This conflict between differing conceptualizations of the relationship between the human and natural worlds reaches a crescendo when the Villistas' steadfast connections with Mexican landscapes ultimately stymie the Punitive Expedition. Amid Villa's boasts about the raid in terms of winning a cockfight and other violent metaphors (188-9), Tiburcio alerts his general to the need to prepare for the inevitable U.S. response. Villa assures his men that he is impervious to Pershing's pursuit, and this stems from an intimate knowledge of Mexican nature. Villa explains: "No hay un árbol, ni una peña, ni una cerca de piedra que yo no conozca. Sé dónde hay cuevas, y de dónde sale agua buena para beber" ["There is not a tree, a rock, or even a stone fence that I do not know. I know where there are caves, and from where good drinking water springs"] (193). He goes on to claim that you could blindfold him, take him anywhere, and he would still instinctively know his exact location. Yet this intimacy is not limited to his knowledge of his surroundings. Rather, he describes nature itself as being not just the object but also the subject of their connection:

> Y así como yo conozco el campo, el campo me conoce a mí. Los árboles me hablan al paso para avisarme si corro peligro, los caminos me muestran las huellas de animal o de hombre que tienen en el lomo, la selva me da carne de caza y los manantiales me dan agua. Cuando hiela o cuando nieva, la montaña me cobija; durante el invierno, ¿me has visto temblar alguna vez?
>
> [And just as I know the countryside, the countryside knows me. The trees speak to me in passing to warn me if I am in danger, the roads show me the footprints of animals or of men they have on their backs, the jungle gives me game meat and the springs give me water. When it freezes or when it snows, the mountain shelters me; During the winter, have you ever seen me tremble?] (194)

Villa's rant continues with details about aspects of nature with which he is deeply familiar and that he can readily harness, such as herbs, weather, and stars (194). The novel's elaborate description of Villa's relationship with nature culminates with his assurances that this interconnectedness is precisely what will allow them to prevail over their U.S. adversaries. Muñoz's Villa voices a bold view in light of the historical context in which U.S. companies were actively colonizing northern Mexico; according

to C.J. Alvarez, by the outbreak of the 1910 revolution, "thirty-one American companies owned almost 16 million acres in Chihuahua alone, or around one-quarter of the largest state in Mexico" (58). Nevertheless, Villa contradicts the very concept of foreign ownership when rallying his men in anticipation of U.S. troops pursuing him on Mexican soil: "no los dejaremos estar en paz nunca. La tierra es nuestra" ["we will never let them be at peace. The land is ours"] (195).

The Villistas first seek refuge in a secluded valley where their leader is described as feeling "invisible… tan chico que parecía cráter de un volcán, cubierto de pinos, cercado por altas montañas en las que abrían sus bocas enormes cuevas donde los centenares de villistas se habían instalado con sus caballos de silla y las mulas de provisión" ["invisible… so small that he seemed like a crater of a volcano, covered with pine trees, surrounded by high mountains where huge caves opened their enormous mouths to where hundreds of Villistas had installed themselves with their saddle horses and supply mules"] (197). This ability to disappear into nature proves to be the men's most powerful weapon. After the battles ensue, Villa suffers a leg wound and goes with a few trusted men to hide in a remote cave described as fit for a bear (228). He vows to heal and continue to fight or die with his remains burned in Mexico to avoid being forced into foreign territory (229). Tiburcio would not survive to see his leader emerge from the cave after over one month in hiding without detection by his enemies. In terms of Villa's storyline, the novel ends with the remaining soldiers helping Villa get to a town where he receives the medical help necessary to continue his struggle in the revolution. However, Tiburcio's tragic demise is the finale that lingers, as readers marvel at his decision, like that of Villa, to invite death before any possibility of expatriation. Indeed, Tiburcio's poetic return to the river in death underscores a message pervading the novel regarding the centrality and perseverance of nature in imbuing meaning into the lives of northern Mexicans through their keen sense of place.

Conclusion

Muñoz's portrayal of men at war emphatically draws on the environment of northern Mexico, almost as though it were a protagonist itself. These soldiers reveal profound connections to the natural world, and this sense of interconnectedness sustains them during a crisis demanding great personal sacrifice. *¡Vámonos!* positions the *Leones* and their worldview in a fundamental opposition with those who degrade people and nature to achieve military, political, or economic goals. This opposition is

epitomized in examples that bookend the novel's winding storyline. In these examples we see Mexican soldiers who are negatively viewed like animals by their foes, but who perceive their own connectivity with the environment as empowering and affirming. In the first chapter one of the fledging revolutionaries, Miguel Ángel del Toro, is beaten by the cruel chief of the Federal troops and berated as a "perro desgraciado" ["miserable dog"] (49). Yet, when Miguel Ángel eludes the chief, the narrator describes him as triumphant and "alegre como un perro" ["happy as a dog"] (49). This type of contrast is evident throughout the novel, but it comes full circle near the conclusion when Tiburcio is captured by U.S. soldiers who use a bear trap to hunt Villistas. Tiburcio laments: "He caído como el más animal de los animales y me tienen cogido" ["I have fallen like the most animal-like of the animals and they have me captured"] (238). Nevertheless, in the same chapter Tiburcio sees himself as an animal in powerful terms. He first ponders that he is becoming a cat because he can see in the dark (236), and his spirit his likened to "un animal en acecho" ["a stalking animal"] (237). Later he muses: "Tengo ojos de gato, y si soy gato, tengo siete vidas" ["I have cat eyes, and if I am a cat, I have seven lives"] (237).

The *Leones* all ultimately perish, yet this notion of their lives extending beyond conventional human parameters is consistent with the portrayal of them throughout the novel as integrally connected to the vast nature that surrounds them. Joined with nature they are capable of rebirth, invincibility, and triumph. They defy forces of war, modernity, and capitalist exploitation that perceive them as insufficient or expendable. Moreover, they embody an identity that embraces an environmental worldview or sensibility. This interconnectedness with nature brings meaning to their lives, values, and choices whether they reside in San Pablo or if they are uprooted by conflict. In this way, Muñoz shows that Tiburcio and the other protagonists derive a powerful sense of place, not so much from a specific physical location as from both human and non-human relationships that sustain them. The novel thus conveys hope for the perseverance of the bubbling Papigochic River, blooming fruit trees, and other untamable elements of nature that they encountered and valued throughout their journeys in northern Mexico. Nature's durability symbolizes an alternative source of meaning and identity for future individuals and communities confronting forces that would exclude, exploit, or erase them from the national story.

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