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Testimonies of War during Cuba's Fight for Independence (1868-1898)

Jorge Camacho

Abstract

In October 1868, a group of Cuban rebels from the Province of Bayamo took arms against the Spanish regime starting a war that lasted 10 years, at which point the Spanish government and the rebels reached a pact that put an end to the hostilities. As a result of this pact, Cubans were allowed to form new political parties, create newspapers that supported their “autonomistas” political views, and in 1886 the Spanish government finally abolished slavery in its entirety, putting an end to an institution that was already widely criticized. During this time of peace, due to the shortage of men caused by the war in the labor market, Cuban women started occupying positions in factories, published in newspapers, and were able to attend middle and higher education, which raised their educational levels considerably. In this article I will analyze some testimonios of the Cuban War of Independence, some literary and some written by participants, that show how by the middle of 1880s Cubans had started reflecting on the war itself, the different groups that had intervened in the conflict, and what, if any, purpose the conflict had served.

Keywords: Cuba, war, independence, testimonies, woman

Even though the Cuban War of Independence lasted 10 years and brought considerable pain to thousands of people in the island, very little attention has been paid to the memoirs, *testimonios*, and gendered narratives that came from it. Two noticeable literary examples in this regard are the short stories published by Manuel Serafín Pichardo (1863-1937) and Pedro Molina in Cuba's literary journal *La Habana Elegante*. These two short stories are based on historical facts that happened during the war, but they are works of fiction that do not go as far as articles published in the United States such as Lila Waring de Luaces' (1871) “Atrocities in Cuba,” which painted with gruesome details the violence perpetrated by Spanish soldiers against Cuban civilians. These other narrations, while milder in their criticism of the Spanish regime, nonetheless represent a break from the censorship that was imposed in the island.

Manuel Pichardo's story “*Un cuento que pica en historia*” is based in an anecdote from 1871, the year that Cuban poet Juan Clemente Zenea and a group of medical students were killed by the Spanish government. It takes place during a party when four friends, all of them of Spanish descent, gather to pray for the poet

who at that same moment was being killed by firing squad in Havana's prison. Ironically, after this moment of sympathy for the Cuban poet who had sided with the rebels, Pichardo jumps to the present moment (Havana, 1887) to tell the reader how their stories had evolved through the years. In contrast, Molina's (2014) story, "*Las tres cruces*," narrates the more immediate conflict between two brothers who choose opposing sides of the war. One brother becomes a captain in the Spanish army, and the other an insurgent in *la manigua*. Sadly, at the end of the tale both brothers die when the Spanish captain realizes he has killed his brother and commits suicide: "cayó con el cráneo destrozado sobre el cadáver de su hermano" ("fell with the shattered skull on the corpse of his brother") (Molina, 2014, p. 164).

If Pichardo's story is concerned with changing attitudes and the difficulties of keeping promises made during the war, then Molina's narration is an allegory of a nation divided, where brothers choose to fight in opposing camps, bringing despair and ultimately death to their mother, Cuba. In other words, these stories recount in fiction the drama that many Cubans experienced in real life. They retell the stories of families divided for political reasons, and of fathers and sons fighting in opposing armies. Pichardo describes his literary piece as, "*un cuento que pica en historia*," (a story that becomes history) because "*de igual manera podría titular este artículo historia que parece cuento*" ("in the same way I could title this article history that becomes a story") (Pichardo, 2014, p. 69). According to Pichardo the reason for this blurring of history and fiction was that his story was based on "accurate data" (p. 69) clothed with other fictional accounts. It recounts the lives of people that experienced the war, although as a writer it was inevitable that he wrapped this memory with "fantastique touches" that give this narration a more somber, enigmatic, and symbolic tone. No wonder then that when the young characters in the story recite one of Juan Clemente Zenea's (1832-1871) poems, a flame goes out, thus creating an almost supernatural experience among them. Through these strategies of representation, Pichardo accentuates the difference between life and death, pleasure and suffering, and good and evil, which divided the Cuban population and created different realities for participants in both sides of the war.

Pichardo was born in 1863, and so he was only five years old when the war started. For that reason, he could not have been one of the young students to meet at the party on August 25, 1871, to pay tribute to Zenea. Nor does he claim to be one of them. He only argues that he found the data in which he based his story in a dead man's suitcase (Pichardo, 2014, p. 69). Consequently, Pichardo's short story ends with a sad note as well, a reminder that the drama that they lived through continues to the present. When Pichardo transports the story to the present, he tells readers that after 16 years passed from the original events, the four men at the party took very different paths. One of them, a poet, "who loved Cuba and his children," dies, though he does not say how. The other one, a republican, continues to fight "in the defense of our liberties," but the lives of the other two take a turn for the worse (Pichardo, 1887, p. 74). "X" is charged with murder that same year in the terrible events of November 27, when a group of medical students is shot to death for desecrating the tomb of a well-known Spanish journalist and military volunteer, Gonzalo de Castañón (1834-1870). "X," says Pichardo, "*ha arrastrado una vida de*

odios; después ha querido vindicarse, y hoy ... está casi perdonado en la conciencia de muchos” (“he has carried a life of hatred; later he wanted to vindicate himself and today ... is almost forgiven in the conscience of many”) (Pichardo, 2014, p. 74). The other party-goer, on the other hand, who recites Zenea’s verses by heart, and is a generous, noble, and firm republican in the past, enters into politics and reaches a high status in Cuba “becoming monarchical and reactionary” (Pichardo, 1887, p. 74).

Notice here, how Pichardo leaves for the end the two darker characters in the story, who despite the fact they had criticized the shooting of the poet, drastically change their attitudes, especially the one who abandons his republican ideals and embraces the monarchy, and by doing so, the colonial power ruling the island. His short story is the first to be published in Cuba during this period, one that tries to preserve a special type of knowledge, as Bruce James Smith (1985) writes in *Politics & Remembrance*, “the knowledge of the free people” (p. 21) who fought for the Revolution.

For Pichardo (2014), even though he was living in a period of “peace” and still under Spanish rule, he speaks with the consciousness of those who believed in “the defense of our liberties” (p. 74). He establishes a “we” versus “they” in his story, which is precisely what leads him to condemn the attitude of one of the young individuals in the party. His short story is not a testimony of the war, but nonetheless it tries to convince its readers of the importance of preserving memory and of working through the trauma that it leaves behind. He accomplishes it by accentuating the “veracity” of the story, through his own connection with the dead poet, one of the original participants in the ceremony.

By the end of that same decade of 1880s another two *testimonios* would appear in Cuba, both written by former soldiers in the Cuban liberation Army: Ramón Roa and Melchor Molet de Mola. Contrary to Pichardo’s and Molina’s narrations they will not take the shape of fictive narrative but of memoirs of their experience in war. Roa and Loret de Mola had lived through the war but when it finished, they returned to their homes with different experiences. In his book, *A pie y descalzo*, Roa argues that Cuban fighters lost the war because they were not prepared for it. They were scattered, hungry, and ill equipped, and their only strategy was to hide in the mountains. Ramón Roa had been aide-de-camp and personal secretary of Ignacio Agramonte, the young hero whose family Josephine helped at the beginning of her flight from Puerto Príncipe. His status as veteran meant that he had the moral authority to speak the truth. De Mola, on the other hand, who was just a child when his family was murdered, later became a soldier in the revolutionary army and had to live with that trauma of that event.

No wonder then that when Roa published his book in 1890, it created a bitter controversy among Cuban revolutionaries. Among them was José Martí, who lived in the United States at the time, and General Enrique Collazo (1848–1921), who was a friend of Roa. The controversy broke out when Martí accused Roa, during one of his political speeches, of writing this book with the sole purpose of persuading Cubans to not return to the fight for freedom. Roa, on the other hand, asked Cubans not listen to political leaders like Martí in the United States, who according to Roa, created a false idea of the war while hiding safely off the island. The controversy

almost ended up in a duel between Martí and Collazo in 1892, although three years later, when the war restarted, they both collaborated and fought against Spain in Cuba, and subsequently Roa left the country for the Spanish Canary Islands and did not return to the island until independence was achieved.

In his narration, Roa uses humor as a strategy to criticize the war efforts. Loret de Mola, on the other hand, uses a much more somber tone to describe the events that his family endured, which became well-known at the time, and put the Spanish authorities in an uncomfortable position. In *Episodio de la guerra de Cuba: El 6 de enero de 1871* (1893), De Mola remembers that his family was living in Caonao, a zone northeast of Puerto Principe, where his father was a “prefect,” someone responsible for the people in his region. He was living with his parents, three brothers, one sister, and his aunt and four cousins. One day the Spanish troops took them by surprise, and in the middle of their desperate situation, his father escaped into the forest. The Spanish soldiers then took the women and children prisoners, ransacked their house, hacked everyone in the room with machetes, including children, and set fire to the house. De Mola, according to his own account, was able to survive the carnage because his dead brother and his mother fell on him, making it appear that he was dead. When his father returned the next morning, he could not believe what had happened and, according to Melchor, the suffering drove him insane. The tragedy, however, did not stop there because, 10 years after of publishing his book in 1903, Loret de Mola committed suicide.

In his book De Mola (1893) calls himself “*un superviviente de la hecatombe*” or “survivor of the carnage,” which he paints in detail and documents for posterity, calling out some of the people involved in this tragedy by their names (p. 25). In fact, when De Mola (1893) writes his testimony, he points out that the slaughter of his family and the execution of the medical students in 1871 both served as “*un recuerdo ignominioso*” (“ignominious memory”) of the war, one that every separatist could use to criticize the Spanish regime (p. 2). In both cases, collective and individual memory served as a repository of past deeds against the Cuban people, memories to be used as a weapon in their fight for freedom. His family’s murder was “*el argumento contundente encajado como señal de fuego en los escritos sediciosos, en los discursos, folletos y episodios sensacionales de los propagandistas revolucionarios cubanos*” (“the blunt argument embedded as a signal of fire in the seditious writings, in the speeches, pamphlets and sensational episodes of the Cuban revolutionary propagandists”) (De Mola, 1893, p. 2).

The De Mola family slaughter was a cruel strategy used by the colonial regime to scare Cubans and forced them into submissions. Cuba’s Captain General, Count de Valmaseda, allowed for this type of behavior to occur, condoning the killing of all prisoners that fell into their hands including women and children. Loret de Mola not only condemns his family’s death in his book, but he emphasizes the importance of telling the story again, “*aquí en Cuba*” (“here in Cuba”) where censorship imposed by the colonial regimen had impeded any criticism (De Mola, 1893, p. iv).

It is important to highlight here that this massacre took place in Camagüey, on January 6, 1871, which puts Melchor’s testimony at around the time when three women that also went to war and sided with the revolutionaries, wrote their

memoirs in the same province. These women were Eliza Waring de Luaces, Josephine del Risco, and Eva Adán de Rodríguez. The first two were married to Cuban doctors in New York and were living comfortably on the island when the war broke out. Josephine had married Don Justo del Risco and Eliza had married Emilio Lorenzo Luaces (1842-1910), a sugar landowner, who reached the rank of Colonel in the Cuban army.

After fleeing Cuba, Eliza published her testimony in *The New York Tribune* where she included De Mola's story to condemn the Spanish government. Afterwards, José Martí, translated Eliza Waring de Luaces' article during the time that he was organizing the war in the United States, and in his translation, he puts emphasis on the horror of the war, sometimes adding poetic images and epithets that describe the cruelty of the soldiers as it happens with the passage of the death of the De Mola family. Thus, De Mola's text should be read as a testimony of a gruesome murder, and as an effort by several independentists to have the past inform the future and to recuperate the horrors of war that had been hidden to the general public by the Spanish government in the island.

According to Melchor, this is the reason that he disagreed with his friends when they tried to persuade him to not publish the story on the island, because "*hechos de esa naturaleza no podían publicarse en Cuba*" ("facts of this nature could not be published in Cuba") (De Mola, 1893, p. iv). To this, he argued that it was better [to publish] in Cuba than anywhere else. He wrote, "*Por doloroso que sean para unos y desagradables para otros; porque constituyen la historia del pasado, y el pasado es la realidad, y las realidades que impresionan la memoria y los sentidos sirven de lección para el porvenir ...*" ("as painful they can be for some, and uncomfortable for others; because they constitute the history of the past, and the past is reality, and realities impressed in sentiments and memory serve as a lesson for the future") (De Mola, 1893, p. iv). It was not only the crime itself but the value of memory that was important to underline. The value of history is in the past as repository of truth, something a new generation of Cubans could use to make decisions and guide themselves. Something similar had motivated Ramón Roa to write his memoirs, but to serve the opposite purpose. And a similar motivation drove Josephine to write down her own experiences, for as she says, "Thinking that it would be pleasant in afterlife, for my children to know all they had passed through in their early childhood during the insurrection in Cuba, I thought I would take down a few notes as far as I can remember of what occurred at that time" (Del Risco, 2019, p. 79). In all cases, memory of the insurrection in any way or form (memoirs, short stories, or novels) is what needed to be saved, written down, and stored so their descendants could someday know what really happened during these years.

Loret de Mola's testimony reveals the need to remember the calamities Cuban families like his had to go through during the conflict like no other narrative that was produced during the Cuba's war of independence. At the same time, it reveals the inadequacy of language to recount any traumatic story. Being a witness to the massacre, and a direct victim of the brutality of the war, there are parts in his narration where the reader is left to imagine the anger and pain that he felt. Not because he couldn't remember, but because no words could describe the monstrosity of such an act. This is why in describing Alicia Partnoy's experiences

in military camps in Argentina, Amy K. Kaminsky (1993) argues that “for the victim to put the experience of disappearance and torture into language is to exercise a form of control over that experience” (p. 56). Thus, in Loret de Mola’s narrative the demonstrative discourse appears intertwined with his thoughts and feelings, with the sufferings and pain that he felt at the moment of the crime, and even years after when he recalls what happened. This attribute of language in the form of metaphors and ironies that enter into the narration with the purpose of emphasizing the pain he felt and appealing to the reader are also found in the fictional accounts described earlier in this article and in other texts that speak about this gruesome murder.

Similar to Eliza Waring de Luaces’ and Loret de Mola’s narrations, Josephine del Risco’s memoirs recount very difficult moments during the war. She writes her testimony down in 1889, but never published it. It centers on her family and the domestic life behind the frontline, showing more of her private life and emotions in her book than male counterparts when they speak of *la manigua*. Josephine’s intended audience is her children, who went through this experience with her when they were young but may have forgotten. She talks about her everyday life in their hideouts, her servants, and her friends. Sometimes, she even talks about the objects that reminded her of the United States, as when she talks about the earrings that she made out of two U.S. Army buttons with the American eagle that “in a moment of patriotism” her friend Eliza de Luaces sent “to the jeweler to have gold hooks put on them so we could wear them” (Del Risco, 2019, p. 90). Josephine eventually loses the earrings, but this connection to the object creates a link with her identity as an American living her life in the midst of a terrible war on the island.

Male authors such as Ramón Roa or even José Martí are more concerned with politics, combat, and the general logistic of war than with what is happening in the kitchen, the hospitals, or factories behind the frontline. This clearly shows the division of labor and gender roles assigned to men and women in the battlefield or in these refugee houses where women and young adolescents such as Eva Adán de Rodríguez, help nurses in healing the wounded in the rebel camps.

These narrations are far from being musings of a lost life, nor they belong to the stream of testimonial novels that became so popular in Latin America in the 1960s such as Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (1966). There are not intermediaries in Josephine del Risco’s, Eva Adán de Rodríguez’s, or Eliza de Luaces’ narrations. Josephine’s story is an exceptional firsthand, realistic account of the people that were displaced by the conflict and endured all kind of hardships in order to survive it. While Eva Adán’s memories are fragmented and limited, due to her young age at the time, and the years that passed until she put them in writing, Josephine del Risco’s narration is devoted entirely to her experience during the conflict’s first three years. It is the most complete, accurate and personal account that we have. It is an intimate portrayal of the necessities, fears, and pains that she and her family felt during this time and also mirrors the experiences that people like her had to go through. She recounts her story in the first person, always in fear of being caught, she says,

The next day fearing the Spaniards might have ascertained our whereabouts and in to follow us, Esquivel proposed our going still farther into the woods, so taking the lead, we with the rest of the families followed in, taking care not to break a bough or leave any trace of our footsteps. Having walked a mile or two through thick woods, we came to a place where there was a cluster of palm trees, and where we concluded to remain until we should hear the troops had left that part of the country and it should be safe to venture out of the woods. (Del Risco, 2019, p. 101)

Contrary to Melchor's family history, Josephine and Don Justo are able to avoid all contact with the Spanish troops that were scourging the land, looking for rebel sympathizers and their supporters. Josephine and family move constantly from one place to another in order to avoid being surprised. They flee from one cattle ranch to another *potrero*, from one friend's house to another friend's house, deeper into the forest, zigzagging through the *sabana*—wandering to an extent that, at the end of the narration, they have absolutely nothing to eat, nowhere to go, and no one who can help them. They are totally isolated from the rest of the world. They believe that the deeper they go into the forest, the more chances they have to avoid surprises because Spanish troops do not like venturing that deep into forests. With time and especially after 1871, however, as De Mola says, Spanish troops feel more comfortable in lost trails, given that the Cuban army has fewer weapons and considerably fewer troops (1893).

Judging then by Josephine's narration, this must have been very difficult for her family, considering Josephine was an American, who knew very little of the land and Don Justo had lived in the United States since he was young. This means that they could easily get lost in the jungle, which happens several times during the narration. They do have, however, several advantages over other Cuban families they meet on their flight. Don Justo is a very well-known doctor-surgeon in Puerto Principe, Camagüey's main city. The Riscos are able to run away with some money. They have friends willing to shelter them, and they have "former" slaves, such as "[their] faithful negro," Ramón, who helped them throughout the ordeal (Del Risco, 2019, p. 102). Last but not least, Josephine is an American citizen who has as a last resource the chance to appeal to the American consulate on the island or to Washington for help, which she eventually did and so that is how they are able to leave Cuba.

What was the place that former slaves played in the rebel camps or in families such as Josephine that were on the run? According to De Mola's and Josephine's narratives, slaves continued to serve the families, doing the chores and finding food in the forest long after they were supposed to be "free." That is why these recently emancipated slaves have a complicated and often ambiguous role in these narrations. Why was this so if the Cuban independentist had declared them free? Let's remember that even though one of the central tenets of the Cuban Revolution of 1868 was to free the slaves in the early years of the uprising, there was considerable disagreements among Cuban separatists of what to do with them. Many wanted to continue producing sugar through slave labor, an important reason why the revolution was not as popular in the eastern provinces as it was in the

western part of the island, where slave labor was not as essential to production, including Camagüey where the sugar industry was beginning to take off. The Del Riscos' opposition to Spanish rule does not appear to be predicated on support for the abolitionist movement.

Even though Del Risco's sugar mill, La Josefa, does not appear in Carlos Rebello's 1860 survey *Estados relativos a la producción azucarera de la Isla de Cuba* (2005) nor does he mention Don Justo's name, however, they apparently did own some slaves at the time of the war because historian César Rodríguez Expósito, says that they owned "many black and Chinese slaves to whom he gave their freedom before joining the revolution" (Rodríguez, 1968, p. 483). They also owned a house in the city, which was confiscated by the government on July 8, 1869. And according to the same historian Don Justo's name appeared in a document titled "*Relación de vecinos de Puerto Príncipe y su jurisdicción que tomaron parte en la guerra de los Diez Años,*" sent to Cuba's Captain General, with the names of all neighbors in the same city "that had joined the insurrection of this Island against the Mother Land" (Rodríguez, 1968, p. 483). This initial accusation is what starts Josephine and Don Justo's journey trying to escape from the authorities. When the conflict broke out, they first went to La Josefina where they planned to build a bigger house and were in the process of installing a steam engine they had brought from the United States. We also learn that La Josefina is located near a railroad where the first insurgents meet. Josephine, however, never speaks of the slaves that she owns or is planning to have at the plantation. Josephine only speaks in her narration of the domestic servants that accompany her when they flee for safety. She knows that Cuban separatists had made them free, and at one point in the narration cannot help but notice, probably with discomfort, that they are singing while they cook, unaware of the suffering that white people like herself (their former masters) are enduring. She knows that it would be much harder for her family to survive this whole experience without them and this is why she becomes so upset when another white family, the Bernal, living with them in the forest, stole her slaves and groceries, writing,

as having no servants of their own they determined to steal ours by making offers of land and money when Cuba should be free. Fortunately we had other servants left us, so we called Guadalupe to cook our breakfast when upon going to get the meat, there was none to be found and upon looking still farther, we found the Bernal had taken all the meat, bananas, casave and lard and left us without anything to eat. (Del Risco, 2019, p. 88)

In addition, halfway through the narration, it is remarkable to learn that after José del Carmen, one of her former slaves, leaves the Del Risco family, they are able to convince General Manuel de Quesada y Loynaz (1833-1884), second in command during the Revolution, to locate and bring back Del Carmen, who served at that moment in the rebel army. All of that tell us of the tenuous position that former slaves played during this conflict and the power that former masters continued to hold during the Revolution. This prompts the question: were they really free after

the start of the uprising or were they forced to continue serving their white masters? This was one of the main issues that Cuban rebels had to face but could not agree upon, and eventually contributed to the failure of their cause. It is an issue that is even present as a contradiction in the rebel's Constitution of 1869, Article 24 that reads, "all the people of the Republic are totally free" ("*todos los habitantes de la República son enteramente libres*"), but this statement is followed by another that reads, "all the citizens of the Republic are considered soldiers of the Liberation Army" ("*todos los ciudadanos de la República se consideraran soldados del Ejército Libertador*") (Bonilla, 1989, p. 107). As Raúl Cepero Bonilla (1989) and others have argued, this meant that slavery was not abolished in Cuba at the time (p. 107), and slaves were forced to do any labor that their previous masters or their military superiors demanded of them.

It is no surprise then that Josephine and Don Justo del Risco, needing help, convinced General Manuel de Quesada y Loynaz, who was also a native of Camagüey, to intervene in the matter, and ask her "faithful" José del Carmen to return. Don Justo goes as far as picking José del Carmen up from where he was, and according to Josephine, the former slave is happy to return to their house. He soon becomes key to their survival, making shoes for everyone and hunting in the forest with her kids, while the women sew or mend the torn clothes. In this regard, Josephine's narration characterizes blacks no differently from other writers who after their liberation continue to see their slaves as their own, as servants willing to do for them what they could not do, nor wanted to do, slaves without any agency, patriotic motive, or ideology to rebel against Spain.

Josephine's story also allows us to see the everyday life of Cuban women and children during the war, while they are waiting for their rebel husbands and sons hidden in *la manigua*: the food that they eat, store, buy, and the products they make to survive. These families, who joined the rebel troops in the forests, lived for long periods of time in complete seclusion with no newspapers or magazines to read, therefore their interaction with the news and people was minimal. Furthermore, whatever news that came from the opposing camp was received with suspicion, and any alarm or distant noise became a threat to their lives. Thus, rumor is also an important component or leitmotif in Josephine's narration. At the beginning of it, her husband hears that he is going to be apprehended again by the Spanish government and that is what makes them leave their house in a hurry and find refuge in the forest where they stay almost three years. Luckily for the family, most of them survived the ordeal and were able to embark for Key West, and later on for New York in April 1871. Josephine's youngest daughter, who was born in the jungle, died of a terrible illness and did not survive. It must have been a dreadful experience to give birth to a child in such circumstances, and even more, to lose her immediately afterwards.

It can be argued that Josephine del Risco's extraordinary story of survival has its counterpart in the autobiographies written by women in the United States that speaks of equally remarkable circumstances, such as dressing as men to join the army, retelling their Indian captivity, narrating their experiences in slavery, or helping their comrades in the Civil War. These narratives were very popular in the United States during the 19th century, when women gained wider access to

education and became more comfortable writing intimate stories about their life experiences. Thus, according to Estelle C. Jelinek (1986) in *The Tradition of Woman's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*, after the Civil War in the United States (1861-1865) several Northern white women wrote autobiographies where they recount their experiences as nurses in hospitals. They were published in the late 1880s and early 20th century, the same period in which Josephine started writing down her war memoirs. In general, according to Jelinek, these women project in their autobiographies a sense of achievement in the face of extraordinary circumstances. They portray an epoch and the evils of a system, in the case of slavery, that justify their actions, and makes the personal inextricably bound with the political (Jelinek, 1986, p. 88).

After almost three years on the run, Josephine del Risco and her family give themselves up to the Spanish authorities, who let them embark for the United States. They travel first to Key West and during the spring they continued their journey to New York, where Josephine's mother lived. In New York there were nearly 3,000 Cuban refugees that had recently arrived due to the war (Pérez, 2018, p. 158). After the Pact of Zanjón in 1878, however, Josephine and Don Justo were able to return to Cuba, because in May 1878, Don Justo, now an American citizen, requested an American passport. Two years after Don Justo died in Cuba, Josephine T. del Risco died in Brooklyn, New York. She was survived by her daughter, who was named after her, Josephine del Risco, whom the family called "Chicha" in the story. Chicha was only two years old when the war started.

With this essay on Cuba's war testimonies, my focus has been to emphasize the importance that memory and personal testimonies played in Cuba at the time. Josephine's and Eliza's narration, as I have argued, should be included and studied alongside other stories in Cuba written by men, that were published with the goal of reflecting on the conditions their authors experienced during the conflict, and of drawing lessons for the future of the island. Through these narratives Cubans tried to preserve the memory of their suffering, and the injustices they received at the hands of the Spanish colonial system. They cannot be considered "autobiographies" because the duration of time that they reflect upon do not extend beyond their participation in the war. They are neither the type of testimony that we have come to associate this genre with in the second half of the 20th century. They were not written by women that belonged to a marginalized class or by runaway slaves. Their narratives are not mediated either by journalists or professional writers which invariably would introduce different perspectives in their narrations. Still, they are political documents, testaments to their beliefs on the cause of the Cuban Revolution which denunciate the violence perpetrated against civilians by the Colonial regimen and speaking with a voice that stands up against the traditional limitations patriarchal regimes have imposed on women.

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