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GUARDIANS OF THE GOLDEN AGE: CUSTODIANS OF AMERICAN MILITARY CULTURE AND THE FORTIFIED "HOME" IN TIME AND SPACE

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ABSTRACT The Heritage is a gated retirement community for military officers and their wives. This "defensive space" is modeled on elite Anglo-American military culture rooted in the American Revolution. The military "family" and "home" are re-envisioned in this liminal space: a military culture into which they were born, into which they chose to marry, and now, the home into which they have chosen to live until they die.

KEYWORDS: gated community, military "home," US military, gender, Anglo-American culture

My friends are everywhere. And if I haven't been someplace yesterday, I am sure to go there tomorrow. I grew up with bugle calls, and artillery salutes, and the knowledge that home is where the heart is, and the family. Mobility has been my way of life. I feel fortunate to live in a society of tradition, drawing from the past to enhance the present. Where silver baby cups announce life, and horse drawn caissons pronounce death, and the living in between is dedicated to the service of God, Man, and our Nation.

Mrs Spokesman (1995)



This quote embodies the beliefs and practices of seventeen retired officers' wives who make their present home at The Heritage, a gated military retirement community nestled in the suburbs surrounding a major metropolitan center on the East Coast of the United States. The Resident Director explains that: "The Heritage is this little island in the middle of all the activity out there in the world." For all of the women I spoke with, their safety was an important consideration for electing to live at The Heritage; a comfortable and secure "island" in which to die. But other significant descriptions of their "home" included the resemblance of this space to a luxury five-star resort or a finishing school. In addition to these understandings, most of the residents I came to know would also explain that they are in some way "pioneers," following in the footsteps of other military women who bravely set out into a new form of living arrangement on a "frontier post." The Heritage serves as the gate to the end of this life as well, as deaths are marked within the community and spirits walk the halls. As these different views illustrate, The Heritage works as a symbolic vision of space and time; a liminal space re-envisioned as the spatial representation of the military base and the associated military culture that the residents remember from their childhood and from their service in the larger military "family" as adults.¹

My discussion of this gated community is based upon the themes that emerged from my participant observation in The Heritage for over ten years and from the rich oral histories of seventeen elderly white women in their eighties whose husbands were high-ranking military officers in the US military during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam (see Frese 2003). One of my contributors refers to this time as a Golden Age of the US military, "the era of ... the big bands ... the big wars, those two kind-of go together. Back when we had Rosie the Riveter and all the people supported their country in this wartime era." The Golden Age is now a time of memory when "home" and "family" as gendered domains of power and influence were replicated in military stations around the world. Throughout

their stories, the culturally prescribed roles for military officers and their wives, and the importance of "homes" are intricately interwoven with elite Anglo-American cultural ideals of patriotism, of dedication to country, and of the importance of the family.

For these women "home" has always been a series of different stations, a mobile home that is reestablished wherever you have "family." One General's wife put it well: "Home is where the heart is, and the family. Moving around to many places in the world ... homes change. Mobility is our way of life, and we learn that wherever we are, we make it 'home.'" In this residential community, the presence of guards at the gate, the use of space within the community, the continued ties to old friends and family in everyday life, and the fictive kin relationships established with the staff work together to provide a familiar and comfortable lifestyle in the latest of "military postings" for the residents. Mrs Spokesman summed up what most women told me: "here we still are ... living with old friends from our long years in the Army who speak our language. Sometimes it feels that we've never left the Army."

The residents described their "home" in many ways: as their most recent "post" in a long line of assignments; as a secured "compound" that provides safety from the outside, somewhat foreign, world; or, as an executive suite in a "five-star world resort hotel" with gourmet dining facilities. The most frequent description of The Heritage was its resemblance to a traditional military "home" where family and friends could socialize; much like the supportive ties found in life on a military post of the past.

In this article, I explore the world views shared by my contributors of this fortified retirement community that these women have chosen as their final home. I begin with a brief overview of the growing body of literature on gated communities by scholars from urban studies, city planning, international political science, and anthropology. Whether in the United States or other countries like Japan, China, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Africa, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Britain, Italy, and Wales, most studies of gated communities argue that the growing culture of "fear" in the world at large lead to a desire for escape into a guarded haven that reflects the residents' world view in terms of class, race, religion, and sexual preference. At one level, The Heritage can certainly be explained through this perspective. But the women I came to know at The Heritage offer other ways to envision their gated home. These women chose a safe living environment modeled upon the military "home" and "family" of the past; a past merging their experiences as children and as wives and mothers on military bases around the world.

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON GATED COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

A variety of researchers have explored "gating" phenomena over the last ten years. In the USA, Blakely and Snyder helped lay the foundation for contemporary research into the subject, arguing that a new "fortress mentality" is reflected in the phenomenon of walled cities and gated communities "[i]n this era of dramatic demographic, economic and social change, there is a growing fear about the future in America. Many feel vulnerable, unsure of their place and the stability of their neighborhoods in the face of rapid change" (Blakely and Snyder 1997: 1-2). Teresa Caldeira also argues that gated communities emerge as groups feel threatened by transformations in the social order: "[these fears] are about crime, and especially violent crime. But they also incorporate racial and ethnic anxieties, class prejudices, and references to poor and marginalized groups" (Caldeira 2000:1). Caldeira suggests that this model segregates middle and upper classes in São Paulo, Brazil and around the world. Gooblar finds that "Gating a housing estate is also a way for developers to market a property as more exclusive. For some property owners, they are seen as a mechanism to protect property values from being affected by changes in the city around them" (Gooblar 2002: 321). Lutz (2002) makes similar arguments for the contemporary military base. All of these perspectives highlight the "defensive" nature of walls and gates designed to protect those within from an "outside" society that threatens the residents with alternative constructions of class, race, ethnicity, and age.

Setha Low provides an insightful understanding of other, more hidden attractions of these "defensive spaces" where the past is manipulated as well, where "in the quiet of summer twilight ... children chased fireflies. And porch swings provided easy refuge from the care of the day. The movie house showed cartoons on Saturday. The grocery store delivered. And there was one teacher who always knew you had that 'special something.' Remember that place? Perhaps from your childhood. Or maybe just from stories ... a place that takes you back to that time of innocence. A place where the biggest decision is whether to play Kick the Can or King of the Hill. A place of caramel apples and cotton candy, secret forts, and hopscotch on the streets" (Low 2003: 53). The Heritage relates to the past for its residents in similar ways. The women's stories of their lives in the military "family" and "home" are interwoven with their understandings of the roles for the military officer's wife in service to the Nation since the Revolutionary War.

THE MILITARY FAMILY, THE MILITARY HOME, AND THE MILITARY WIFE IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Ten of my contributors suggested a book for me to read that provided an appropriate, even mythical, foundation for understanding the US

military officer's wife and her responsibilities to home and family. Alt and Stone (1991) describe the original American military wives who appeared at Valley Forge in 1777 as "brave women of the Continental Army ... [they] dodged bullets, nursed the wounded, foraged for food, cooked, knitted garments for the men, and served as water and ammunition carriers. Beginning the service wives' tradition of placing the needs of the military first, they maintained some semblance of domestic life and became an essential thread in the historical tapestry of the American military system" (Alt and Stone 1991: 1, 2).

After the Revolutionary War, membership in high-ranking military culture and in the elite of Anglo-American society overlapped. Officers' wives were increasingly drawn from upper-class families, and with their husbands, formed teams to reestablish an American "aristocracy" where "most officers were graduates of West Point or Annapolis. Many carried on a family tradition of several generations of men in arms, and many had personal incomes aside from their military pay" (Alt and Stone 1991: 85). Military wives participated in the perpetuation of a military social class or "caste-like" system; for wives: "No matter what her background or schooling, if a woman married an officer, she became a part of the aristocracy which the army created and reinforced" (Alt and Stone 1991: 48). Wives were responsible for organizing balls, fancy dinners, picnics, and "amateur theatricals" (Alt and Stone 1991: 57).

The relationship between the upper class and the military continued during the late 1800s and was maintained, in part, through mutually respected and strict rules of etiquette. Many women who became officers' wives were raised within elite white society and so their roles continued their active participation as unpaid labor in the public sphere within a variety of religious and philanthropic institutions. Indeed, officers' wives were frequently involved with women's organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Junior League.

A military officer's wife has always been required to be successful in the reproduction of home, children, and the larger military family wherever her husband was stationed. All but two of the women I interviewed had read and/or owned several advice manuals published during the 1940s that provided the new military wife with the kinds of knowledge she would need to adjust to her husband's frequent absences during World War II. The authors of these books were frequently officers' wives themselves and the manuals therefore especially reflected the career military wives' perspectives. Nancy Shea's book on the Army wife (1966[1941]); Shea and Pye's volume for the Navy wife (1965[1942]); and the Army wife handbooks by Collins (1942) and Dilts (1942) provide important insights into the definitions of an ideal wife in the military and her duties. Indeed, Shea's book was still referred to thirty-five years later as an: "unofficial Bible. Many a West Point graduate

reputedly presented his bride with a copy of the publication" (Finlayson 1976: 21, see also Finlayson 1987)). Shea's manual for Army wives (1941) articulated several important dimensions to the role of a military wife that included loyalty to her family, to the Army, and to the honor of the United States. One of my contributors was a principal author of the revisions of these etiquette books during the Vietnam conflict. The new etiquette books were written for the Post-Golden Age, a time recognized by my contributors as one in which the society and culture of the US military of the World Wars had to adapt to conflicts in Vietnam and to the changing social landscape of the 1960s.

"FAMILY" AND "HOME" FOR DAUGHTERS DURING THE GOLDEN AGE

To imagine this gated community as the current residents of The Heritage speak about it, we need to understand first what "home" and "family" means to these elderly members of the mobile, military culture of the United States. Based upon my research, the concept of "family" in the military culture that is most familiar to these women is inclusive and can be envisioned as ever more encompassing layers extending outward from a woman's nuclear and extended families to a variety of fictive kin relationships. Most of the women I interviewed celebrate their ties to illustrious ancestors (male officers and their wives) who have made important contributions to US history through their service in the military and ties to elite civilian society. All were daughters raised in a military family and all married men who were active military officers. Most have children and grandchildren serving in the US military today. Because of this ancestry, the women with whom I worked maintain their fictive kin ties with other women who also belong to elite women's service organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Junior League, or the Army Daughters. In addition, many of these women attended the same convent or finishing school and/or maintain important fictive kin ties with their college classmates and/or sorority sisters from prestigious universities. And most of the wives I interviewed were married to men who continue to celebrate their membership in age grades of graduating classes from prestigious military academies. West Point and Annapolis, for example, are located near respected Eastern schools for women and prescribed cross-dating ensured that women of the educated, upper classes met and married the men who were destined to be high-ranking future officers of the US military.

When these women were children in the 1920s and 1930s and living in any part of the world, a military post was a safe, self-sufficient community secured from the outside civilian population and protected by armed military guards stationed at the gated

entrances. Mrs Cantrell's stories provide a version of a childhood spent on bases that echoes the past that most wives shared with me: "[when I was a child, t]he post where we lived was absolutely safe for children. The officer's quarters were in one long line. In front of those was the parade ground, and when it wasn't being used for a parade ground, it was a golf course. After school we children were just turned loose on it, and we ran, we played Hide and Seek, and we climbed trees. This small town living was very rewarding to a child my age." And Mrs Adams recalled: "Those were the good days. The small town atmosphere ... and the utter freedom of a small post like that. If I'd fallen off a bike, somebody looked out the window, and would say, 'Oh, there's Major Taylor's daughter and she's hurt herself. Let's do something about it.' And we didn't have to be house bound, we were perfectly safe to be out. And there [a]re not many places that you can say that."

As young girls, if their family lived off base, their homes were generally fortified in some way, especially in an overseas posting. Mrs White remembered off-base housing provided for her family when she was a child in China: "You had a machine gun platform on the roof of a great big house that sat in a very elegant, beautiful Chinese garden. The property was enclosed with a high wall, of course, and there was a gatekeeper at the gate." Six of the women I worked with were sent to convents or boarding schools at some time during their childhood; other institutions with "walls" to protect those inside.

These important fictive kin ties are continued today and serve as one of the major reasons that most of the women I interviewed chose to move to The Heritage. Mrs Smith admitted: "that was one of the biggest inducements in the military life, the camaraderie. You never needed anything at all; you always had somebody around you, even if you were miles and miles away from your own family, you always had family." Mrs Spokesman put it in a way that all of the women would agree with: "Home is where the heart is, and the family. Moving around to many places in the world ... homes change. Mobility is our way of life, and we learn that wherever we are, we make it 'home.'"

The military posts that these women called home after marriage were very similar to those of their childhoods. Shea described how a military post of the 1940s when these women were wives, was "by necessity a self-sufficient community, it might be compared to a small town... And on these posts shopping and marketing are often made convenient... There are also concessions for a beauty shop, barber shop, and a shoe repair service... A library and a hobby shop can generally be found in some niche of every post" (Shea 1966[1941]: 72, 74). Military posts contained many other forms of recreation including horseback riding, golf, swimming, tennis courts, and access to gymnasiums.

"FAMILY" AND "HOME" FOR WIVES AND MOTHERS

A military wife of the Golden Age had a rank in relationship to other military wives that paralleled that of her husband, and an officer's career was successful, in part, because of his wife's abilities and performance within the female hierarchy. After marriage, an officer's wife participated in the active reproduction of the military "home" and the extended military "family" wherever her husband was stationed. On these posts, a successful wife participated in the Officer's Wives' Clubs, in the Red Cross, and in other organizations designed to benefit members of her extended military "family," including the thrift shop and the nursery. As members of the Officers' Wives' Club, women played bridge, provided teas and receptions, and helped to provide educational and cultural programs for the larger community of women including lower-ranking US military wives and the wives of the local political and social elite. In fact, the highest-ranking officers' wives were viewed as "mothers" to the wives of the men under their husband's command. Mrs Stone explained that: "My husband had the regiment at Jackson, so I had all the ladies in the regiment to watch over. I tried to go see the new babies, and take care that somebody who was sick had everything they needed; kind-of tried to be a mother, you know, to them all. There was plenty to do."

The obligations for the women married to Commanding Generals entailed entertaining local and foreign diplomats and military leaders and in building bonds with their wives. Mrs Harris, a general's wife, explained that: "It was not an unpleasant job. Socially, we did not meet anybody but the highly educated and very wealthy. They were charming, many of them, the wives of the influential military heads. Many of them became very close friends, like sisters, and we have kept in touch." Mrs Parker, a Commanding General's wife, explained that: "I had tea with Mrs Chiang Kaishek. The place was cold and we huddled around a little fireplace, but she was very gracious. Having gone to Wellesley, she spoke perfect English . . . We were also guests of the Marcos in Manila. They were very charming. They had kids and we talked about children. Of course he had been in the army, you know it's very easy to talk to people who have been in the military. I don't care what country you are in."

The women with whom I spoke frequently envisioned a world in which their relations with domestic help took on kin-like attributes. Within the United States, enlisted men and their wives were relied upon for domestic labor. In addition to enlisted men and their families, domestic help within the United States was also drawn from members of the local or "indigenous" civilian communities and these individuals frequently included African Americans and/or members of lower social and economic classes.

When the women in my study were stationed overseas, in addition to using enlisted families as servants, indigenous domestic

help was "passed down" from other officers' wives who had been reassigned to another posting and were leaving their household staff behind. Or servants may have "come with the house" that the military officer's family was assigned overseas.

"FAMILY" AND "HOME" CULTURE AT THE HERITAGE

Like the military posts they are familiar with, this gated retirement community is a fortified home that blends their past with the present in many ways. The Manager of The Heritage explained that: "here [the residents are] known as captain, major, general, colonel and that's the common bond that brings them together ... the camaraderie that they were used to when they were in active duty ... that same atmosphere that they enjoyed for so many years ... it's their home. When people retire they like that small hometown atmosphere. They like to know Joe on the corner, or the barber down the street, or this gal who's in the country store now ... they buy into a life style that is keeping with what they are used to. Like a grand Officers' Club with all the other officers around." The Director of Human Relations added that these women, in particular, were "able to continue their roles before they left the military family; caring for people in need; treating their domestic help with loving kindness; and keeping social life going for everybody in the community; they are really great ladies ... mothers, you know, to all the ones who need help."

There is only one road into the community and it has a gate. The boundaries of The Heritage are not only real walls but also features of the modern, suburban landscape. Very busy roads border on west, south, and east. A military air strip walls the north where you can hear artillery fire and military planes taking off and landing at all hours. A lake with woods buffers the northeast. These "walls" successfully enclose a space that reflects a special time in the lives of the residents; a time during which they were active military wives; their fortified and guarded "home" protected from an increasingly foreign world. The residents I spoke with describe this as a comfortable and relaxing environment where they feel at home.

Their gated home includes a community center, cottages set around the parade grounds, and apartments for independent living; one- or two-person suites set aside for assisted living; and a Health Care Center. The residents in the Center include those who need around-the-clock medical assistance while they are recovering from a recent hospital visit; those permanent residents of the center who suffer from forms of dementia; and, finally, those who are dying. The public rooms at The Heritage are expensively furnished and reflect spaces similar to those found in a five-star hotel, complete with concierge. Paintings on the walls in the public areas celebrate illustrious military men who were heroes of the Revolutionary

and Civil Wars; men and women on horses surrounded by foxes and hounds in the countryside, and colonial mansions nestled in carefully sculpted gardens. This is a special community, modeled on a tradition proudly linked to the military and to the government of the United States. The residence buildings are named after four US Presidents who were among the founders of America: Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Washington. The public rooms at The Heritage are expensively furnished and reflect spaces similar to those found in a world-class hotel.

The weekly newsletter produced for the residents outlines many of the social and cultural events sponsored by The Heritage. These include classes and self-help workshops on various aspects of the residents' health. Residents can choose to participate in organized groups of artists, writers, and a theater guild. These groups share their work with the larger community through displays in the art gallery and in public performances. There are several weekly showings of popular movies, happy hours, sing-alongs, and dance parties. The Heritage designs special events to celebrate national holidays or community celebrations organized around particular themes like a Hawaiian luau, a German night, and a Japanese celebration. These events are especially welcomed, as many residents served in the military in those countries. The Heritage regularly offers shuttles to shopping and medical facilities and to funerals at Arlington National Cemetery where most residents are buried.

These women refer to their present home at The Heritage in a variety of ways that include references to a "sanctuary" or a military "compound," or even a "five-star hotel." All of these spaces are separated from surrounding physical and social landscapes in symbolic and physical ways. The gate is frequently guarded by "off-duty" enlisted men from a nearby military post. The gate is primarily staffed on the weekends, when families visit, or in special cases of need during the week, as when the guard calls the residents for permission to admit visitors. Security patrols regularly check the grounds and buildings of the community and respond to calls from the residents.

The gate to The Heritage provides at least the illusion of protection from dangers and irritations found outside the walls. Mrs Harris shared that: "half the time the guards at the gate only just wave. They are on duty at night. Recently I came back from going to the beach with Mary in September and my luggage didn't come with me, it came at two o'clock in the morning. The guard at the gate said, 'Don't worry. When it comes I'll be with him at the door.' See, they lock the doors here at a certain hour. He didn't want me to worry about somebody delivering baggage and coming up here, he was right here. When the chips are down they help, if they don't, anybody could come in the door. Or maybe it deters ... just the fact that they are there ... that we have a guard at the gate, it deters."

Based on the issues addressed in the existing literature on gated communities, I could argue that the residents of The Heritage hold a kind of “fear” for what lies outside the walls of their fortified home that helps to protect them from violent crime and from the busy metropolitan center’s increasingly foreign cultural constructions of race, gender, class, and age. The presence of the gate symbolically creates a buffer or “limin” between their homes and an “outside” where many of these women believe life has changed for the worse, especially in terms of the increase in violent crime, drugs, urban sprawl, and congested traffic. The Heritage can be a “haven” or an island of safety. As one woman explained: “Maybe I’m old fashioned, but I think we’re going a little too fast in many ways ... we live in an entirely different world. I like the song ‘Stop the World, I Want to Get Off.’ ‘Cause we go so fast sometimes ... that you don’t have time to ... well, smell the roses, ‘til you get to be our age and you live in a place like this!” (Mrs Welsh).

The women I interviewed chose to move to The Heritage for a number of reasons besides “fear” of what lies outside this gate. Most had decided that the maintenance of their home and yard had become difficult to manage, due to their increasing age and to the changing social environment in their neighborhood; especially in the absence of the reliable networks of women and children that once existed. But all women expressed another kind of “fear,” as represented best by one General’s wife: “It’s a place where you can live without fear—fear of being a burden to your neighbor or to your children.” Or as Mrs Adams mused: “When you get to the point where you get toward retirement, your children, basically, are grown—they have their own lives... And you should not be a burden on their minds. You ... must be able and in a position to make your own way. You’ve got to have a place that’s yours.” Mrs Gates added, “Well, [The Heritage is] like a finishing school. It’s a time in your life when you want to feel independent, that you aren’t a burden to anybody... To being responsible for yourself, and that’s the greatest gift I can give my child, I think ... here we are secure with a group of people we have known all our lives.” The Heritage provides a multifaceted space and time in military culture where these women have returned “home” to their “family.”

Fictive kin relationships of many kinds are reestablished here. Many are based upon preexisting relationships with their husbands’ age mates from military academies, with those men’s wives, and with other life-long friends of their families. Mrs Cantrell shared that:

Some of the people [who live] here ... I had known when I was young. You share so many memories, and you can always say, “Hey, I need help,” and they’re more than happy to oblige ... When my friends kept urging me to come out here,

the one thing that won their point was the fact these are the old friends I can talk to about my family. They knew my aunts; my uncles; my older cousin who was an instructor at West Point and my younger cousin, who was a cadet. I have, even to this day, fifteen wives of classmates of my husband's here, all of whom I have known a lifetime. And I thought, "That's the support system I really need" ... [so] I moved to The Heritage about a month after it opened ... I was a pioneer. The manager was an old buddy of mine and his father had been an old buddy of my husband.

Mrs Carter, like many of the wives, illustrated her continued ties to living and dead family members: "This past Sunday we picked up [our daughter] over at her house and went up to my parents' grave sites. It was Mother's birthday Sunday, and it was a beautiful day, so we went up to the cemetery—we're close enough to be able to do things like that."

The Heritage does reinvent a "gated" society and culture in which these women have lived all their lives. In addition to the resemblances the facility has to a "small town" or military base, the social hierarchies are familiar. The administrative staff are white. The General Manager at the time of my research was from an old military family and was a West Point graduate who has been awarded many distinguished medals for combat. He had preexisting ties with many of these ladies, as the men in his family were distinguished officers as well. Today, individuals of African, African American, Hispanic, Thai, and Philippine descent fill most of the domestic staff positions. Conversations with many of these individuals revealed that their current employment at The Heritage was a direct result of relationships built with members of the US military in their home countries. Many of the residents developed fictive kin ties with the employees, especially the maids. Gifts are frequently exchanged within these fictive kin networks, especially to mark the life-cycle rituals. These are the kind of "family" that who come with the place. Women also hire personal secretaries or aides to live with them and see to their needs and these women are frequently "passed on" to other community members who may need their assistance. These women are frequently referred to using fictive kin terms as well.

UNDERSTANDING MEMORIES AND STORIES IN TODAY'S GATED HOME

The visions painted here of a contemporary gated community rely on the stories told to me by women who have chosen to live at The Heritage. I worked with each woman to craft the final version of their oral histories and they approved this version as the story of their lives they wished to reproduce. I should explain how I managed to

pass through these gates into this fortified space. I am a part of the extended military "family" and this assuredly is reflected in my presentation of this material. My father is a retired Air Force officer. My mother died here in the assisted living area of the Heritage ten years ago. I return regularly to visit my father who still lives there. Without this "blood" connection I would never have been permitted through the gates. Several of these women have become "fictive" mothers to me, and we exchange gifts to honor special events throughout the year. Invariably my research is tinged with love and compassion for these members of my "extended family." I do not always agree with the views that these ladies hold, but in relying on their oral histories and on my participant observation at The Heritage, I attempt to portray their views through their words as accurately as I can.

These wives were, and remain, active guardians for this complicated form of "kin work" that underlies the reproduction of a gendered hegemonic structure wherever the US military can be found, even in retirement and old age. Military "kin work" requires that high-ranking wives become "sisters" to other officers' wives and to women who are members of the political and military elite of the country in which her husband is stationed. This is a system where, some might argue, "kinship" is used to mask a system of oppression and inequality. I do not know, for example, how the domestic workers view their relationships with these women. But my focus is on the memories of these elderly women and on their perceptions of "home" and "family" today.

The presence of the gate symbolically creates an "outside" that these women believe has changed for the worse, especially in the increase in violent crime, drugs, urban sprawl, and congested traffic. For all of the women I worked with, this undesirable social change is closely tied to the younger generations' re-envisioning of race, socioeconomic class, and family as their children and grandchildren must adapt to the need for dual income families, to the absence of full-time domestic servants, and to the mobility associated with their occupations. Indirectly of course, this means that there is no place for the elderly in their children's home unless domestic servants are hired for in-home care. My contributors chose to live independently "inside" walls, in a home with "fictive kin" situated in a special time and place that celebrates their cultural beliefs and practices.

Their homes may serve as safely sheltered havens apart from the world, but these women continue to contribute to contemporary United States society and cultures in important ways. They sit on national boards, they continue to participate in the Daughters of the American Revolution, in Army Daughters, and in many other service and philanthropic organizations. These women participate in local church activities, care for those in nursing homes and hospitals,

and actively tend the “home fires” for the community of residents at The Heritage for residents and the staff. They influence their children’s, grandchildren’s, and great-grandchildren’s understanding of the world through continued participation in family celebrations, through the passing of heirlooms, and through their stories about life.

The Heritage is, therefore, a “gate” on many levels. It marks that *limin* or threshold between symbolic spaces; between different constructions of cultures in time where gender, race, and class as they are envisioned at “home” are much different than “outside” the gates.² The Heritage as “home” is a haven of safety in which to live during the last part of life; a space “betwixt and between” the past and the future. The gate and symbolic walls of this community mark a liminal space, a symbolic gateway that mediates life and death.

The living and dead mingle here in this gated liminal space, where people can sense that there are “real” ghosts of friends and family around them. The residents shared stories about the presence of recently departed residents who died in the Health Care Center and return to their most favorite “haunts” or who may have accompanied their spouse to The Heritage after death. Perhaps a spirit is heard playing the grand piano in the ballroom late at night behind locked doors. Or the spirit of a woman is believed to leave wet footprints coming out of the swimming pool while the pool is closed to the public. Perhaps the ghost of a man walks through his wife’s apartment leaving behind a trace of his cologne on the air. Or the spirit of a man sits gently rocking in his favorite chair that is now placed in his wife’s bedroom at The Heritage. These kinds of stories are told by residents and by administrators who agree that the ghosts are simply waiting for their spouses to join them, and other deceased family members, in their final move, in death.

Certainly, the residents of The Heritage are members of an elite socioeconomic race and class who have chosen to live behind gates to protect them from a rapidly changing world. But more importantly through their eyes, the women of The Heritage have chosen to live with fictive kin who they perceive speak the same language and share the same culture; claiming a relationship with their ancestors who had important roles in founding America. Their home mediates the past as it represents their re-envisioning of those military posts where, as children, they were safe, not housebound, and where they had their “families” to care for them. This liminal space is the gateway through which they will pass, as one General’s wife told me, to the “greatest adventure, the last frontier of all.”

NOTES

1. The goal of my research is to present the shared beliefs of a group of women who have chosen to live in a community that is

not accessible to those who do not belong to this culture. As a daughter of a retired Air Force officer, I gained access through kinship ties to this community. My research spanned over ten years and consisted of participant observation, personal interviews, and personal documentation shared with me by my contributors. I have changed the names of the retirement community and of the contributors to the study at their request. I am indebted to the Henry Luce III Fund for Distinguished Scholarship for their valuable support of my research.

2. I borrow upon Victor Turner's initial work with the concept of "liminal" as a special set of conceptions about individuals temporarily associated with a ritual process. This idea of being "betwixt and between" two times or ways of being can be extended to help explain cultural beliefs about people, objects, and even places that are perceived to mediate cultural categories outside of the ritual domain.

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