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ISSN: 2278-9529



GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed Indexed Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 9, Issue-II May 2020

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A Hollywoodian Mis-Representations of the Vietnam War in *The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen: In Light of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

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Article History: Submitted-27/02/2020, Revised-20/05/2020, Accepted-27/05/2020, Published-05/06/2020.

Abstract:

The Vietnam War represents to date the biggest setback in the warring history of the United States of America. It was a war that lasted for a long time and ended up with a clear defeat undergone by Americans despite tremendous military and logistical means. Not only did it constitute a trauma for the veterans, it also equates with shame for a nation that takes pride in being the defender of Democracy. As a result, through one of America's most efficient means to write, rewrite and reshape history, the revisionist enterprise was under way with the movie industry in Hollywood that had a clear agenda, which was to restore the image and splendor of the American nation. *The Sympathizer* is a novel that critiques the distortion of the Vietnam War memory by the Hollywoodian representations *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* are three movies that embody the misrepresentations of the Vietnam War..

Keywords: Vietnam, War, Hollywood, movies, literature, revisionism, language, narrative, representation, Mis-representation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the novel *The Sympathizer* written by Viet Thanh Nguyen in 2015 won the Pulitzer Prize. Viet Thanh Nguyen was born in Vietnam at the time of the war and fled to America as a refugee at the age of four. The novel is centered on a spy, a double agent living in America and working for the Viet Minh. It mostly lays bare delicate issues raised by the war through a unique lens, which is neither the one of the American perspective, nor the one of the Vietnamese perspective. One of them is the criticism of the vicious work done by Hollywood to change the memory of the war in order to serve the agenda of the American nation. Three movies are particularly illustrative in that regard: *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola, *Platoon* by Oliver Stone and *Full Metal Jacket* by Stanley Kubrick. In this respect, this paper deals with

those three movies as case studies to examine how Viet Thanh Nguyen unravels the way with which Hollywood misrepresents the Vietnam War.

I. The representation of the Vietnam War through the American Lens

The events following the Vietnam War somehow demonstrate how resourceful the American nation is. Aware of the impact of its prevalent pop culture and soft power in the world, Americans knew that there was another war that was worth winning so as to change the memory of the War. Hence, the other fight that they knew they could still win was the battle of representation. The most striking and recurrent feature about these movies is how mute Vietnamese are.

Full Metal Jacket is a 1987 war movie directed, co-written and produced by Stanley Kubrick, based on the novel *The Short Timers* by Gustave Hasford. It is also worth noting that Michael Herr, author of *Dispatches* is the associate producer of the movie. The storyline is first about a platoon of U.S. Marines from their training in Marine Corps with the focus on two privates, Joker and Pyle, who go through harsh times along with the other trainees because of their drill instructor Sergeant Hartman, up to the platoon's Marines in Vietnamese cities of Danang and Hue during the Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War. The film is more of a representation of the American moral struggle.

Even before they left for Vietnam, Private Pyle was so worn out by the drill instructor and the bullying of his comrades that he broke down and decided to commit suicide. Once in Vietnam, it is also about the depiction of young American soldiers who went to save and free an ungrateful people that is not really aware of how blessed they are to benefit from the help of Americans. Nguyen points out the representational genius of Hollywood that is known for moving people and touching their heart, no matter how serious or untruthful the representations are:

Movies were America's way of softening the rest of the world, Hollywood relentlessly assaulting the mental defenses of audiences with the hit, the smash, the spectacle, the blockbuster, and yes, even the box office bomb. It mattered not what story these audiences watched. The point was that the American story they watched and loved, up until the day that they themselves might be bombed by the planes they had seen in American movies. (Nguyen: 166)

Apocalypse Now is a 1979 American war movie, directed, co-written and produced by Francis Ford Coppola. The narration written by Michael Herr, was loosely based on the 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. The setting was changed from late 19th-century Congo to Vietnam (1969–70). The storyline is about the river journey from South Vietnam to



Cambodia led by Captain Willard, who was secretly instructed to find and assassinate Colonel Kurtz, a Special Forces officer charged with murder and who was said to have lost his mind by his superiors.

After the fashion of Conrad who represents Africans as uncivilized, inferior and as a backward people in *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now* stages too an autochthone people that blindly and ignorantly follows a mad man into his horrible misdeeds. It puts forward in many ways the idea according to which the confusion of the war made some people go awry. The movie was deemed an unrealistic Vietnam War movie by many people since its success shows how both fiction and art can play an outstanding role in shaping the mobile script of a past event. The Artwork might even substitute in the imagery of people to the real event. It was indeed the main aim of Francis Ford Coppola who confesses in his autobiography by Peter Cowie entitled *Coppola*: “My film is not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam.” (Cowie: 131)

Platoon is a 1986 American war film written and directed by Oliver Stone, starring Tom Berenger, Willem Dafoe, Charlie Sheen, Keith David, Kevin Dillon, John C. McGinley, Forest Whitaker, and Johnny Depp. The film, based on Stone's experience from the war, follows a U.S. Army volunteer, Chris Taylor fighting in the war while his two sergeants Barnes and Elias argue over the leadership of the platoon. The infantry platoon that is supposedly led by Lieutenant Wolfe, is actually split under the control of those two sergeants, whose vision of the war and methods differ. It is a representation of the harsh division of the American nation throughout the war.

Platoon is very instrumental in the way in which American leaders want the public to see the Vietnam War. It clearly highlights the idea that Americans lost the war because they were fighting each other. Chris Taylor volunteered to go to the war, only to get trapped in the middle of an internal civil war within their own infantry. The quarrel between Sergeant Barnes and Sergeant Elias satnds for the different approaches that were extremely conflictual and that, according to the revisionists, caused alone the American defeat in Vietnam. This is exactly what Taylor says in the movie: “ I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy. We fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us.” (*Platoon*, 1:54:30)

One of the starkest things that can be noticed from the representation of the Vietnam War in those movies, is how mute and silent Vietnamese are. They are not really given voice in those movies and on the few occasions it is done, it is in a very debasing way. In *Full Metal Jacket*, the few Vietnamese that spoke are mostly prostitutes. The first one to be given voice in the

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movie, is a Vietnamese prostitute talking to two American soldiers and saying “me so horny, me so horny, me love you long time.” The next thing we know is that one of the soldiers had his camera stolen from behind by another Vietnamese man (*Full Metal Jacket*, 46:20 and 47:26)

Things are even worse in *Apocalypse Now* where we have a primitive representation of the indigenous population. To illustrate, the delusional Colonel Kurtz is blindly followed by indigenous people who blindly follow him and literally worship him. They live in a setting marked by horror, backwardness and chaos. Dead people hung on rope and beheaded corpses are all over the place. Not only are Americans content to represent themselves in a way to restore their image, they also represent the Vietnamese at their own will. As the spy in *The Sympathizer* puts it: “We cannot represent ourselves. Hollywood represents us. So we do what we can to ensure that we are represented well.” (Nguyen: 139)

As a matter of fact, the patronizing attitude of Americans towards Vietnamese also justifies the hostility the latter had against them. Europeans, especially French in Vietnam gained in strength and identity through their relations to Asia as Edward Said says it in his work *Orientalism*: “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate or even underground self” (Said 3). Americans assume that they know Vietnamese without taking seriously the time to study them, thereby taking on a condescending attitude towards them.

Indeed, most of Hollywood film-makers presume that they know Vietnamese better than they know themselves. Some of them did not take the time to study the Vietnamese character seriously before representing it. That condescending attitude is reflected through some of those movies like *Apocalypse Now*. It gives way to some unrealistic scenes that misrepresent the reality on the ground. To illustrate, One Commanding Officer in *Apocalypse Now*, sees a wounded, agonizing Viet Cong being ill-treated by ARVN soldiers and wants to give him water. Then, he is shown Johnson, a surfer from California accompanying Captain Willard and he automatically stops giving water to the agonizing soldier and heads towards the surfer because he is fond of surfing. In *The Sympathizer*, the spy, taken aback by the patronizing tone of the film-maker, decides to confront him. At some point, the latter tells the Vietnamese spy:

I researched your country, my friend. I read Joseph Buttinger and Frances Fitzgerald. Have you read Joseph Buttinger and Frances Fitzgerald. He’s the foremost historian on your little part of the world. And she won the Pulitzer Prize. She dissected your psychology. I think I know something about you.” (Nguyen: 126)



From the Auteur's point of view, the judgments of Buttinger and Fitzgerald are sufficient to know about Vietnam and the Vietnamese. The terms "little part of the world" and "dissected your psychology" are very illustrative of the patronizing demeanor of the Auteur. One of the main defaults of most Americans is their ignorance of the rest of the world. The film-maker does not deem necessary to have a better understanding of the Vietnamese culture, character and history in order to convey a more realistic representation of the latter. But once again, most of those movies were meant to serve the purpose of the American cause. After the fashion of the filmmaker, there is also the character of Dr. Hedd, who is a thinker and a writer in *The Sympathizer* and who displays the same arrogant attitude. He tells the Vietnamese spy:

If you're a student of the American character, said Dr. Hedd, signing the title page, why are you reading this book? It's more about the Asian than it is the American. He handed the book back to me, and with the weight of it in my hand, I said, it seems to me that one way to understand a person's character is to understand what he thinks of others, especially those like oneself. (Nguyen, p: 242)

Hollywood movies about the Vietnam War were not devised for being objective or fair towards Vietnamese. It is clear that each nation has different means to reinforce its image and convey the best part of it. None is as effective as Hollywood as American movies which are the most watched worldwide. They constitute a great entertainment for the rest of the world and aware of that, they also represent a terrific means to serve other purposes. The next section will explore how those movies have helped shape a different narrative of the war.

II. Changing the narrative of the War

Beyond the representation of the war, the role played by Hollywood movies is to change the narrative of the Vietnam War. The latter consists of changing a military defeat inflicted by the Viet Cong army into a setback caused by Americans who opposed the war themselves. That position was defended throughout the war and even after by many military men and decision makers. The latter tried to turn the unpopularity of the war into a sound motive for the American failure in Vietnam, thereby downgrading the merit of the victors and discharging their responsibilities. In *The Sympathizer*, the Congressman is the embodiment of those decision makers who refused to acknowledge their failure and reject the responsibility on others. He professes: "The Democrats. The media. The antiwar movement. The hippies. The college students. The radicals. America was weakened by its own internal divisions, by the defeatists and communists and traitors infesting our universities, our newsrooms, and our congress." (Nguyen 114)

The Congressman staged by Nguyen is simply a representation of the policy-makers involved in Vietnam and the beliefs they were trying to instill in the American people. Too confident to win the war at the time they got involved in it, American leaders could not admit any defeat, especially regarding their military might and the significant means deployed by its army. Unlike the argument given by the Congressman in *The Sympathizer*, backed up by the war “Hawks”, Le Ly Hayslip’s poignant autobiographical accounts of the war in her book *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* support another reason among the many causes that justified America’s and its allies’ defeat in Vietnam: “Because the Viet Cong were always low on ammunition and had to make every shot count, they seldom attacked unless they were sure of victory. Because they had so much of everything, the Republican soldiers seldom counted their shots and called most attacks a victory.” (Hayslip: 65)

Indeed, it is important to make out the past from history. While the past is about actual events that happened in a chronological order, history is more about narratives and nations understand it and use the means at their disposal to work on those narratives. Narration is more about story-telling and representation. Little wonder to see that the ideas and beliefs supported by the Congressman are pervasive in the Hollywood movies. By rendering mute the Vietnamese and giving voice to Americans, they can purposefully strive to convey those messages. In *Platoon*, Taylor is represented as a young American patriot who goes to the war to do his part: “I guess, I mean, I’ve always been sheltered and special. I just want to be anonymous like everybody else. Do my share for my country. Live up to what Grandpa did in the first war, and Dad did in the second.” (*Platoon*, 15:52)

The narrative conveyed through the main character of *Platoon* seeks to put the Vietnam War in the same spirit of the two first World Wars, whereas the motives behind the American involvement in Vietnam cannot be compared to the moral standards that prompted the nation’s noble involvement in the first two World Wars. Yet, through Hollywood’s narrative, one might be tempted to liken those different wars. Indeed, human lives are made of representations and the value we often give to the past is the one that is shaped by our own representations. Even a lie that is told and retold may turn out real in the psyche of the individual who utters it. That accounts for one of the reasons why it is difficult to cling to a reality when it comes to Vietnam since the artistic reworkings of the war have brought about a dissemination of meanings. The answer given by the veteran William Adams when he was asked whether the movie *Platoon* represented the reality of the war after the latter was released props up those difficulties caused by the numerous representations of the war:



When *Platoon* was first released, a number of people asked me, “Was the war really like that?” I never found an answer, in part because, no matter how graphic and realistic, a movie is after all a movie, and war is only like itself. But I also failed to find an answer because what ‘really’ happened is now so thoroughly mixed up in my mind with what has been said about what happened that the pure experience is no longer there...The Vietnam War is no longer a definite event so much as it is a collective” and mobile script in which we continue to scrawl, erase, rewrite our conflicting and changing views of ourselves. (Sturken: 86)

The idea of confusion conveyed in *Platoon* is further fomented in *Apocalypse Now* when the General says to Willard while giving him his assignment: “You see Willard, in this war things get confused out there” (Coppola 17:45:30). In his work entitled *Simulations and Simulacra*, Beaudrillard gives the example of Disneyland, which is a place devised to make the dreams of children come true. In that place, the fantasies of those children can be fulfilled. Still, the way the place is presented is done so as to make people believe that it is not real and that the real world is that of adults who grapple with the daily grind of life. However, the place is real and Beaudrillard sustains that the simulacra created is only meant to conceal the fact that the real is no longer real:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe the rest is not real. Thus we are drawn to Disneyland through marketing techniques which promote the ability to enter a world of fantasy. One in which the imagination come true. It is no longer a question of a question of false representation...but of concealing the fact the real is no longer real. It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe the adults are elsewhere in the ‘real’ world. (Beadrillard: 424)

Thus, by fantasizing the Vietnam War through its movies, Hollywood manages to blur the relationship between the real and the false and stages characters that draw people’s sympathy through whom they can manage to change the narrative of the war. Taylor is the embodiment of those types of characters those movies are fraught with. Such an exploitation of artistic means to serve national interests has been used by powerful nations for years on end and Americans are the masters in that domain. Thanks to the influence of their soft power, they understand that art cannot be disassociated from any enterprise of domination and they willingly make the best of that relation between art and politics through literature and movies. The spy in *The Sympathizer* reflects: “Mao said that art and literature were crucial to revolution. Conversely, he warned, art and literature could also be tools of domination. Art could not be separated from politics, and politics needed art in order to reach the people where they lived, through entertaining them.” (Nguyen: 167)

This is exactly what has been achieving American movies since the Vietnam War started: trying to shape people’s mind by entertaining them. In that regard, there is another idea put forward by Americans to justify the difficulties experienced in Vietnam, the hostility of

Vietnamese people whom they went to help and were making things hard on them. In fact, it is very difficult for a people to friendly welcome people who come with heavy artillery, thereby bringing about massive destructions and the progressive disappearance of once Vietnam's pristine landscape. Le Ly Hayslip who was also in her village in Vietnam at the time of the War lets us know that harm was inflicted on them by both camps. She writes: "If the Republicans were like elephants trampling our village, the Viet Cong were like snakes who came at us at night." (Hayslip: 69)

It is clear that the local populations could not know which way to turn in those conditions. They simply did not know whom to trust. After the fashion of Taylor in *Platoon*, the same young American soldiers in *Full Metal Jacket* supposedly endowed with principles of Democracy and freedom also lash out at the behavior of the Vietnamese. He says: "We're getting killed for these people, they don't really appreciate it. They think it's a big joke" (Kubrick, 1:21:55). The perspective conveyed in the movie clearly supports the stance that beyond the War "doves" back in the U.S., the local populations to the rescue of whom they came constituted another hindrance. On the other end, in the *Vietnam Hearings* published in 1966, Senator James William Fulbright acknowledges the logic of the Vietnamese point of view:

After all, Vietnam is their country. It is not our country. We did not even have the right that the French did. We have no historical right. We are obviously intruders, from their point of view. We represent the old Western imperialism in their eyes. I am not questioning your motives. I think our motives are very good, as has been testified on numerous occasions. But I still think from their point of view it is their country and however bad the people have acted, other countries have had civil wars, we had one. (Fulbright: 354)

Senator Fulbright was one of the rare Americans who made the effort to put themselves in the shoes of the Vietnamese. The versions of the war transmitted in the Hollywood blockbusters are one-sided with a clear agenda. The truth is that Americans were completely wrong about the length of the war and its implications. They did not have the support they were supposed to have from the neighboring countries because their motives were deemed wrong by most of those countries. They sacrificed generations of young Americans because of their imperialism they undertook in the East in the name of democracy. They did not pay attention to the warnings of Graham Greene who lays the blame of the murder of his American character on the American leaders and decision-making and the ideas they instilled in young Americans in his book *The Quiet American*, hereby referring to his main character Alden Pyle:

They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved. He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair's about, and you gave him money and York



Harding's books on the East and said, 'Go ahead. Win the East for Democracy.' He never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture-hall, and his writers and his lecturers made a fool of him. When he saw a dead body he couldn't even see the wounds. A Red menace, a soldier of democracy. (Greene: 31-32)

It is clear that one of the main motives of those Hollywood movies is to change the narrative of the war. Let us turn our focus on how they have striven to turn a battlefield defeat into a representational victory.

III. The substitution of a military defeat into a representational victory

The war in Vietnam has turned into an extremely bitter defeat for Americans. In the battlefields, they lost the war and were obliged to leave the country scampering away. After the war, American leaders understood that it was the image of the world's first superpower that was smeared and slandered by the war's outcome. Thus, a whole industry of movies was in charge of restoring the nation's image. They did it quite well to the point of winning hands down the battle of representations and turning a battlefield defeat into a representational triumph. With the assistance of the American mighty and extremely influential soft power, the veterans who were first dubbed as villains were turned into heroes whose feats were hampered by both war objectors and hostile Vietnamese allies in Hollywood movies. Besides, many of the filmmakers did not even bother to go to Vietnam or carry serious investigations about the country before representing it in their movies. The spy in *The Sympathizer* is taken aback by the Auteur's arrogance and misleading imagination when he is introduced to the scenario of his film:

I pitied the French for their naiveté in believing they had to visit a country in order to exploit it. Hollywood was much more efficient, imagining the countries it wanted to exploit. I was maddened by my helplessness before the Auteur's imagination and machinations. His arrogance marked something new in the world, for this was the first war where the losers would write history instead of the victors, courtesy of the most efficient propaganda machine war created (with all due respect to Joseph Goebbels and the Nazis, who never achieved global domination). Hollywood's high priests understood innately the observation of Milton's Satan, that it was better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven, better to be a villain, loser, or antihero than virtuous, extra, so long as one commanded the bright lights of center stage. (Nguyen: 129)

As a matter of fact, the spy is right when he says that it was the first time when the losers of the war would write history. The comparison with the French is very illustrative; for however effective the French colonial domination was, they made more efforts to succeed in their mission than American whose film industry is monstrously effective. Coppola who claimed that his movie *Apocalypse Now* would substitute to the actual war is the embodiment of the character

of the Auteur. No matter how horrific the global success of his movie constituted after its release from a historical perspective, he managed to misrepresent the war and serve the American purpose by entertaining the world. One of the French Officers he stages through Willard's journey from Vietnam to Cambodia serves him to support the propaganda of the double game policy applied by Vietnamese. The French officer in *Apocalypse Now* asserts:

The Viet Congs were invented by the Americans Sir...The Vietnamese are very intelligent. You never know what they think. The Russians want to have them "Come and give us some money. We are all communists. Chinese. "Give us guns, we are all brothers. They hate the Chinese. Maybe they hate the Americans less than the Russians and the Chinese. (*Apocalypse Now* 2:06:28)

Coppola's French character contributes to discredit the role played by Vietnamese in the war, supposedly manipulating in turn the French, the Russians, the Chinese and the Americans. Therefore, the first success they managed through the Hollywood movies was to disparage Vietnamese of both camps by rendering them either mute or as wrongdoers. *Full Metal Jacket* is all about the internal struggles of Americans and the moral degeneration of some soldiers throughout the war. *Apocalypse Now* portrays an indogenous representation of Vietnamese rendering them almost insignificant. It is a reminder of the movie that the Auteur makes in *The Sympathizer* whose disregard towards Vietnamese is bemoaned by the spy: "In this forthcoming Hollywood trompe l'oeil, all the Vietnamese of any side would come out poorly, herded into the roles of the poor, the innocent, the evil, or the corrupt. Our fate was to be merely mute; we were to be struck dumb." (Nguyen: 130)

This is the exact fate of Vietnamese in *Apocalypse Now*. One of the very prerogatives of movies or literature is to convey emotions. By silencing Vietnamese or portraying them in a disparaging way, they might bear little importance to the public while there are Americans whose lives are depicted in a very subjective and sympathetic way. The scenarios are set in a way to make the public feel for the American soldiers. Even when they commit massacres like in *Platoon* because they are too afraid to search the boat and open the fire on Vietnamese out of panic, the indifferent representation of the Vietnamese makes it hard for the public to feel sympathy for them.

One has not to forget that the primary goal of the Hollywoodian representations is to retrieve the victory lost in the battlefield. In this respect, it was necessary to demonstrate that the failure was not one of the brave soldiers in the field, but rather one of the War "doves" whose prevarications and hostility prevented from achieving any triumph. The idea is also nurtured in *Apocalypse Now* through the typical character of Colonel Kurtz who had great war



records though: “You have to have men who are moral and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instinct to kill without feeling, without passion, without judgment, because it’s judgment that defeats us” (*Apocalypse Now* 3:02:20)

Judgment is thereby smashed by Colonel Kurtz and even if he turned mad in the movie, his position was shared by many War “Hawks”. Yet, if we deprive human beings of their faculty of judgment, it will bring about chaos in the world as illustrated by the environment caused by Colonel Kurtz’s actions. However, with the power of narratives, such stances can gain credit through their subtle artistic representations. Narratives are also sometimes constructed to serve a common purpose and in the case of Hollywood, the purpose was to deconstruct the idea of failure and turn into a constructed reality more convenient for a superpower like the United States of America. Jerome Bruner explains how we use narratives to account for the reasons they lost, or rather were prevented to win the war in Vietnam:

...we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual’s level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues and mentors. (Bruner 4-5)

As such, Hollywood filmmakers play the role of narratologists who construct meaning by striving to reshape history through their representations of the war in their movies. With this in mind, they use images and symbols but also strong language that participates in the shaping of particular propaganda. As Sarah Upstone puts it: “...narratologists are concerned with how language constructs meaning within stories.” (Upstone 64). It is also in this respect that Barnes’ words to the Lieutenant concerning Elias can be understood after their feud. He tells the Lieutenant that: “Elias is a water-walker, like them politicians in Washington trying to fight this war with one hand tied around their balls. Ain’t no need or time for courtroom out here.” (*Platoon* 1:01:00)

Barnes uses very strong words to criticize politicians and all of those who opposed to the war. He is portrayed as a merciless patriotic American soldier whose only purpose is to win the war and who does not care about moral issues or judgments. Even if there is the character of Elias who is completely different from Barnes and who has higher moral standards, *Platoon* definitely depicts American soldiers who were patriots and whose only failure was the internal fights between them, thereby rejecting the victory of Vietnamese over Americans. Taylor defines his comrades as: “They’re the best I’ve ever seen, Grandma. The heart and soul” says Taylor about the others who are for most them from modest families.” (*Platoon* (16:46:00)

By stressing the values of the young American soldiers, the veteran villains can then be turned into misunderstood heroes. Americans who used to think of the soldiers who went to Vietnam as baby killers or war losers are put in a position where they look at them as brave soldiers who fought a very confusing war defending democracy despite an enemy that was within the American people. Taylor adds in that respect: “ I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy. We fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us.” (*Platoon* 1:54:30)

It was a way to denigrate the merit of the enemy and to discharge oneself by finding the enemy within one’s community. In the Hollywoodian representation of the Vietnam War, the losers are the Vietnamese, be they from the South or North. While the Southern ones are rendered mute and somehow hostile, the latter have been stripped of their victory as they have completely lost the battle of representations. In fact, while war is an utterly serious event and its effects terrible and long-lasting, art can be everlasting and its representational power can have an impact beyond one’s expectations. The spy in *The Sympathizer* goes as far as saying that art can even survive war and sadly weighs in on the possible impact of the Auteur’s work of art. He states:

Yes, art eventually survives war, its artifacts still towering long after the diurnal rhythms of nature have ground the bodies of millions of warriors to powder, but I had no doubt that in the Auteur’s egomaniacal imagination he meant that this work of art now was more important than the three or four or six million dead who composed the real meaning of the war.” (Nguyen 172)

It might be hard to argue against the plea of the spy. Literature and movies are the main arts loved by people. Through those two means people are entertained and messages are conveyed. The ones that have been transmitted through Hollywood movies are meant to restore the image of America. Such an enterprise has led to a misleading role played by Hollywood on purpose. This is what urges the spy in *The Sympathizer* to state that: “Hollywood did not just make horror movie monsters, it was its own horror movie monster...” (Nguyen 129)

CONCLUSION

The consequences of the Vietnam War are absolutely terrible both for Americans and Vietnamese. The number of casualties is simply outstanding. The damages caused on the landscape as well as the psychological effects on war participants are equally disheartening. Therefore, it is extremely sad to see some people distort the truth of the war by entertaining the world.



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