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Gender Relationships between American Soldiers and Vietnamese Women during the Vietnam War



“William A. Robinson’s Capture, Shot down 20 September 1965”

Source: <http://www.pjsinnam.com/VN_History/SEA_Photo_Albums/Misc_1/PJFE%20Capture.jpg>

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INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War has inspired a lot of historians and still continues to raise lots of questions. Why did the Americans decide to intervene there? and could they win this war? are two recurrent questions which have produced a variety of arguments. The American involvement in this war was perceived differently on both sides, the American and the Vietnamese. For the Americans, it was a way to stop the “supposed” rise of Communism and for the Vietnamese, it was a way to restore their independence and to liberate themselves from the colonialism imposed on them by the French, and the imperialism inflicted by the Americans. But the war brought such horror, - horror because many civilians were killed, and horror through the fact that it was chemical warfare on the part of the Americans. The use of defoliants, “Orange agent” and other atomic systems were no secret for the U.S army. The Vietnam War or to be more precise I should say the Vietnamese “conflict” because it was not a war to the politicians of this period, is often considered as a genocide and ecocide. It depends on the points of view but to the Americans, it was not a genocide, it was just another fight against the rise of Communism...it does not seem convincing if we consider that there were three million people killed, among which there were babies, women and old persons. It is unlikely that babies were Communists... It is important to give a definition of the term “genocide”: according to the Collins English Dictionary, it means “the policy of deliberately killing a nationality or ethnic group”, thus we can suppose that what happened in Vietnam was more or less a “genocide” because it is reported that the Vietnamese were considered as “animals”, “gooks” and were the target of the Americans because they were “Communist-friendly”. All these features were causes to kill them. We can also add that this war was also an ecological disaster, indeed, we can also call it an “ecocide”. Let us again give a definition: “Ecocide”, according to the Collins English Dictionary, means the “total destruction of an area of the natural environment, especially by human agency”. When we look at pictures showing us the aftermath of the war, nobody can say that it was not an absolute ecocide. It is reported that 60% the landscape was destroyed, burnt and all the agriculture suffered from this massive use of chemical. Thirty years after the war ended, people still suffer from the results of this massive bombing. Crops or rice paddies are still more or less poisoned, and people feel the effects of these chemicals inside their flesh and the generations following the war, as well. It is important to add is that this war revealed

the extreme cruelty toward these people, whether they were really Communists or not. This war, like any other war, is a way to understand how far human beings can go in the direction of cruelty. Everyone understands that war means death but in this case, cruelty was at a peak. Like any other war, men, women and children suffered, but also old people, babies. Every Vietnamese family bears today the marks of this war.

In this study I will focus on the Vietnamese women, whether they were old or young, mothers, grandmothers, or daughters and their relationships towards the American soldiers. My study will explore the gender relationships between, on the one hand, the American “male” and on the other hand, the Vietnamese “female”, and I will analyze their behaviors during warfare. The war raises the question of gender because these are two concepts totally linked one to another; war is in majority represented by men whereas women only had passive roles such as supporting their husbands or taking care of the children, first and then since World War I and II they began to have some activities such as making the weaponry. Traditionally, war represents a way for men to prove their virility, their strength. To serve in the military is a way for people to show how patriotic they are. patriarchy is another concept which needs to be defined before we begin our study of gender relationships during the Vietnam War. Patriarchy, according to the Collins English Dictionary, is defined as “ a form of social organization in which a male is the head of the family and descent, kinship, and title are traced through the male line”. In wartime, men are traditionally soldiers, it is their “duty” to fight and in a society dominated by patriarchs, it is normal to see the men becoming soldiers given the inequality of men and women in their social roles. War and gender are still linked today in the sense that the dominant role is prescribed to men. In time of war, this relationship is stressed. In the *Feminist Review of 2008*, Cynthia Cockburn writes that “ there is in fact a sexual division of war, just as there’s a sexual division of labour. [...]the patriarchal relation itself is a relation as much between masculinity and femininity as between men and women, a relation of dichotomy and complementarity, heteronormative, of domination and subordination, characterized by coercion and violence”. Thus we can understand that war and gender are two related notions and that gender relationships are stressed during wartime emphasising the differences between men and women or “masculinity” and “femininity”.

During the Vietnam war, this gender relationship between American soldiers and Vietnamese peasants appeared in different ways. But what did these gender relationships

look like? And what did they bring to the conflict? How was the notion of gender perceived by both sides? This will be the subject of my study. We will begin by seeing first that the American soldiers used violence to express their male-domination of the Vietnamese women. Then in the second part of this study, we will focus on the war of the women and their rebellion to male American domination. Finally, we will look at male resistance in the anti-war movements in America, and examine the notion of “redemption” for crimes against humanity.

Vietnam is a very special country for me, it is birthplace of my family, my personal history and the roots of my life. I have a particular tenderness for the country even if I have never been there. Half of my family comes from Vietnam, and even if I am a *lai gióng* which means that I am of a mixture of Vietnamese and French, I have been raised in two cultures and I cannot deny my Vietnamese identity. I wanted to explore this conflict from the perspective of women to better understand how I could have behaved. I feel personally affected by this war because members of my family were there and fought. With this study I wish to pay a tribute to my family, to show my pride of belonging to Vietnamese culture, culture which has proven itself so resilient in the face of brutal and cruel oppression. Perhaps we can find here a lesson for all of humanity.

PART I

US Soldiers' Mistreatments of Vietnamese Women

Chapter 1 . Rape and Violence

Rape is a common technique in warfare. Indeed, in almost all the wars, the use of rape appears as a way to terrorize people. But why? Is man a natural rapist? In fact, the conditions of the war trigger this behavior. The American soldier going to war does not naturally think of raping when he is called to fight for his country, he has a precise goal: to defend his country. But then why does rape appears? In the case of the Vietnam war, rape is a way to demonstrate the domination of men over women. They wanted to show American superiority to the enemy and frightened them. As the US soldiers could not distinguish the resistance fighters from the civilians, they were lost. They did not know how to recognize the enemy, anybody could be a Communist, or a member of the **NLF***. According to Arlene Bergman, US soldiers were told that it was normal to do so, they were encouraged to despise the Vietnamese women.

Moreover, she explains that the Pentagon gave them reasons to fight with arguments of racial and sexual superiority : *“The Pentagon soon understood that if it could not motivate the men to fight for a bad cause, it could give them reasons to fight using arguments concerning their racial and sexual superiority”*¹ in other words it means that the argument of racial and sexual superiority can be seen as a kind of racism and thus can be linked to gender. It also underlines the fact that the racist hatreds inside the United States would be replaced by racist attitudes towards the Vietnamese in Vietnam. The question of gender appears in the fact that rape is specifically a form of hatred against women as an entire category, thus there is also a feeling of misogyny on the part of the rapist. According to Tamara L. Tompkins who has done a report on the Serbian war, *“unlike most other forms of wartime atrocities, rape is a gender-specific act. As such, it is an outlet for, and expression of, hatred of women as a class. Sometimes, the nature of the specific acts inflicted on women when they are raped are cruel in such a biologically-specific way that one literally feels the loathing of women”*² it means that

* **NLF**: National Liberal Front: it fought the guerillas in the South

¹ Arlene Bergman, *Femmes du Vietnam* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1975) 98 Translated by author.

² Tamara L. Tompkins, *Prosecuting Rape as a War Crime: Speaking the Unspeakable*, taken from the internet site www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/Diana/index.htm, August 12, 2008

the males are guided by their “male-domination” and that they feel they can have a control over women because they are men. It suggests “machismo” too. The rape can be understood also in the fact that before going to war the soldiers are trained to be “Men”. Men in the sense that they will have to prove their strength and that the climax of the war will permit them to prove at last their ability to serve their country. To hold a machine-gun will make them feel real men. They endure hard training and even if they suffer, they do not have to show their emotions because they would be associated to “wimps” or “queers”. They were also taught that violence was a way for them to survive and that if they did not kill the enemy, then the enemy would kill them. All this training had the effect of increasing their hatred toward all Vietnamese people and of increasing their desire to fight. A famous training exercise, repeated endlessly, was:

this is my weapon (hoisting his gun over his head)

this is my gun (grabbing his crotch)

this is for fighting

this is for fun³

It was really symbolic of US military tactics indoctrinating soldiers to believe that using their “gun” was a legitimate activity. What is interesting to analyse also is that they were protected by their higher command and sometimes were even encouraged to rape. Arlene Bergman explains that there is what they call the “Mere Gook Rule” which is an unwritten law that protects the American soldier if he is accused of rape : *“Mere Gook Rule is an unwritten law that guarantees freedom to a soldier if he is accused of raping a Vietnamese woman”*⁴. So if rape occurred, nothing could happen to them, and therefore, everybody in the group would know quite openly what to do if soldiers would rape. But the act of raping is legally considered a crime. As Karen Stuhldreher says; *“it is a crime according to international law, prohibited under the Geneva Convention and punishable by death or imprisonment under Article 120 of the American Uniform Code of Military Justice,”*⁵ a crime that appeared not to have been punished severely and there were not many reports on trials or sentences for rape during the Vietnam War. Stuhldreher also writes that *“in Against Our Will, Susan Brownmiller provides Army court-martial statistics for rape and related charges: only fifty-eight percent of those tried between 1965 and 1973 were convicted. Information on*

³ Bergman 90, translated by author

⁴ Bergman 101, translated by author

⁵ Karen Stuhldreher, “State Rape: Representation of Rape in Vietnam”, taken from the internet site www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties August 12, 2008

*sentencing was difficult to come by, according to Brownmiller*⁶. She writes, “*a sentence of two to eight years at hard labor might be typical for rape, even in cases in which the victim had been murdered; sodomy, attempted rape and attempted sodomy were preferred as charges because they carried lesser penalties; and sentences were routinely cut in half by a board of review.*”⁷ Nevertheless, no one was really imprisoned for hard labor and those cases were too often not mentioned. So we can suppose then that during wartime, a soldier can feel free to do what he wants because he is not threatened to be sent to jail. Moreover, we are under the impression that rape is “normal” during wartime which means that no one is really surprised to hear reports of rape or torture because it is common.

Yet, war does not mean “to be free to torture and to rape”, because if we consider that the majority of women who were raped were civilians, even children, it suggests that it is then not an attack on the enemy on equal terms, soldiers versus soldiers, it is targeted towards the population. Even if we know that during wartime all the feelings are too much exacerbated and that the men are not really controlled, this is an insufficient explanation. Rape is practised systematically as a way to frighten people, but also as a way to have control over them. Rape is also experienced by the rapist as a symbolic “victory” of the war itself because men gained control over the enemy population even if it is a control over only women or children. To the soldiers this is real power. It is a process of victory too. In *Against Our Will*, Susan Brownmiller states that “*Rape by a conqueror is compelling evidence of the conquered’s status of masculine impotence. Defense of women has long been a hallmark of masculine pride, as possession of women has been a hallmark of masculine success. Rape by a conquering soldier destroys all remaining illusions of power and property for men of the defeated side*”⁸, which symbolises again that victory is embodied by the act of rape.

Given this military value of rape, we can understand why it was practised routinely. Stuhldreher reports that “*rape was described by GIs as SOP- standard operation procedure*”⁹ which means that it was part of everyday life as if somebody was going to buy some bread for lunch. The mere use of the abbreviation SOP is disgusting. In addition to this, we can say that the army, in majority composed of men, is the field to express a violence as a pride of being men. Rape is a male concept, there are almost no reports of women committing

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Stuhldreher

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

rape and as war is an activity in which men are dominant, rape is an inevitable consequence, “the gun” will be used to force women to have sexual intercourse. It is also a way to reduce the women to their “primary role”, regaining passivity, and of submission to male pleasure.

Rape is one form of violence and war is a place where many forms of violence are legitimized. In the case of rape, the violence aims at full control over the victim’s body and mind. If we analyze the numerous reports on rape given by journalists, and by the GIs themselves, we can see that physical mutilations frequently accompany rape. For example, in one report given by a GI, he wrote: “*I saw one case where a woman was shot by a sniper, one of our snipers. When we got up to her she was asking for water. And the lieutenant said to kill her. So he ripped off her clothes, they stabbed her in both breasts, they spread her eagle and shoved an E tool up her vagina, an entrenching tool, and she was still asking for water. And then they took that out and they used a tree limb and then she was shot*”¹⁰ we can see the various techniques used by the soldiers to torture the women. We can also mention that the “lieutenant said to kill her” which corresponds to observation we have made earlier, that soldiers were protected by their superiors and often the superior participated directly in these actions. This shows that these acts of violence were not perpetrated by individuals but by whole groups. There is collective agreement before they begin to act.

The mutilation of the genitals or the breasts can be considered rape too, because it is the violation of a sexual region, as is the act of rape. It is also the destruction of the femininity of a woman. The breasts symbolise womanhood and by cutting them or stabbing at them, it is a way to dehumanize her body. This report is not the worst. In *the Winter Soldier Investigation in 1971*, by the VVAW (Vietnam Veterans Against the War), many GIs reported acts of rape and violence that we can hardly imagine given they are too horrible. What follows is the report of Don Dzagulones: He was an interrogator, with the Americal Division in the South of Vietnam: “*Another time they brought in a woman prisoner who also was alleged to be a spy. They continued the interrogation in a bunker and she wouldn't talk. I don't think she even gave them her name. So they stripped off her clothing, and they threatened to rape her, which had no effect on her at all. She was very stoic. She just stood there and looked at them defiantly. So they threatened to burn her pubic hairs, and I guess it wasn't done on purpose, I'm sure of that, but they lighted a cigarette lighter and she caught on fire. She went into shock. I guess she was unconscious, so they called the medics. The medics came and they*

¹⁰ Bergman 105-106 translated by author

gave the medics instructions to take her to the hospital under the pretext of being in a coma from malaria, which they did. And nothing was ever done about that."¹¹ This testimony reflects the atmosphere that reigned during the war, that is the systematic use of violence towards the women, but also towards their attributes of women -genitals- and the act of removing the clothes, to humiliate the victim especially when we know that in the Vietnamese culture, nudity or sexuality was a taboo. We can easily understand the feelings of this woman, ashamed, who had to face her aggressors, standing naked in front of them and lately whose genitals are burnt. It is almost unbearable to read. As a woman I can hardly bring myself to imagine the same situation.

Moreover, there are very few reports on the side of the Vietnamese women. They did not mention this, because perhaps they were ashamed. My grandmother told me that these girls, if they were alive, were even pregnant and they were sent into other villages or even in the mountains not to be seen. They were most often abandoned by their parents, the parents being too ashamed and these women could never marry after that, because no one wanted a woman that was tarnished by the Americans. They had to live with that trauma, and sometimes with the baby of the enemy. My grandmother told me it was very difficult for them to find a place in their society today, that is male-dominated, and inheritantly governed by Confucianism.

To compare the bad treatment in the Vietnamese society, we will look briefly at Tamara L. Tompkins' studies of the Serbian War. She writes that many women were raped by Serbian soldiers and these poor women had to face two difficulties, first they had to stand the remarks of the Muslim Community, and secondly, they were sometimes abandoned by their own husbands, who could not bear the idea of having his wife sexually touched by other men. Moreover, these men were also forced to look on during the rape, and were completely traumatized; they preferred to leave their wives. Some, on the other side, continued to live with their wives and understood that it was not their fault if they had been raped.¹² . The victims of rape were not stigmatized by North Vietnamese and their allies. The rapes of

¹¹ Vietnam Veterans Against War, [The Winter Soldier Investigation](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties) taken from the internet site <www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties> August 12, 2008

¹² Tompkins

Vietnamese women during the war were made by South Vietnamese and American soldiers can be seen in stark contrast to the North Vietnamese policy of soldier chastity.¹³

The VVAW were not the only ones to give information about what really happened in Vietnam. Mark Baker also wrote *Nam* in which he recalled various testimonies of soldiers. These testimonies were not just reports on violence towards the Vietnamese, they also included the feelings of the soldiers when they had to fight in the jungle, in a hostile area they never imagined to find themselves in. At one place in this report, we are told that the GIs attacked a father and his daughter, one GI tells his story about what the soldiers did to the young girl: “ *We pulled her pants down and put a gun to her head.[...]She was crying so a guy put a rifle to her head and pulled the trigger just to put her out of picture.[...] After we raped her, we literally start stomping her body. And everybody was laughing. We kicked the face in, kicked in the ribs and everything else. Then we start cutting the ears off, the nose off [...] we cut off one of her breasts and one guy got the breast.*”¹⁴ Here again, we can see the killing of two civilians, a father and his daughter, moreover, a young girl, just because they were Vietnamese, they were not Communists and the soldiers just killed them because they saw them with an American can of fruit. Is it normal to kill people because they have a can of fruit? In peacetime, would these same men kill innocent persons because they wanted to eat their food? It seems surreal but in the context of the war it really existed. This story is one illustration of the insane cruelty of soldiers toward women. The act of cutting limbs was conducted like a hunter cutting the head of an animal as a trophy. The ears and fingers were reported by “shared” by the soldiers and some even wept because they were deprived of a relic from this event. It suggests that these men do not have self-control anymore, that they do not kill because it is the context of the war, they kill because they like it. The victim is here no more than an animal, she is raped after her death, but what does a soldier feel when he rapes a dead-woman? Does it really mean superiority, control of a population? Or is it an act of pure savagery, just for fun?

There were numerous accounts of gang rapes. Gang rape is a form of rape that is made by many persons at the same time. Gang rape is all the more cruel since the same victim is assaulted by many men in turn and often in front of a larger public. In the streets, often the

¹³ The only book that claims North Vietnamese raped women is in Le Ly Hayslip’s book, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places in which she writes that she was raped by two VC’ men.

¹⁴ Mark Baker, Nam an extract from documents provided by Professor Feeley

families of the victims were forced to participate too. In the *Winter Soldier Investigation*, a soldier named Joe Galbally said *"This wasn't just one incident; this was the first one I can remember. I know of 10 or 15 such incidents at least"*¹⁵, talking about gang rapes. Another interesting report on gang rape is made by Mooney and West, citing Brownmiller, and talking about a girl named Pham Thi Mao: *"Of the five men in the patrol only one, Private First Class Sven Eriksson, did not participate in Mao's rape and murder. As one soldier described the ordeal, individual acts of superfluous cruelty practiced on Mao appeared to be a competition for a masculinity pecking order. Eriksson, for refusing to take his turn in Mao's gang rape, was derided by the patrol leader . . . as a queer and a chicken. One of the followers . . . later haltingly told the military prosecutor that fear of ridicule had made him decide to go along with the rest: "Okay, let's say you are on a patrol. These guys right here are going to start laughing you out. Pretty soon you're going to be an outcast from the platoon."*¹⁶ Another Vietnam vet, who did a great deal of raping, put it more bluntly, *"it wasn't like the Vietnamese were humans. . . . They were a gook or a Commie and it was okay."*¹⁷ Here, the act of gang raping appears as imposed by the soldiers among the soldiers who are reluctant to do so; they use threats and insults to encourage them to rape and by attacking their virility, they trigger this violence.

Given these soldiers are conditioned as being men, strong and superior, if someone tells them they are queers, then it is an attack on their whole identity because to be a soldier you cannot be "a queer". The mere fact of being in the army is for them an act of masculinity. This use of insults to provoke a total loss of self-control, and to perform twice more violence just to prove that you are not a queer was common behavior. Many felt they had to prove their value to the superior and to their peers. This act of gang raping to prove virility is in fact a form of justification, if one does not feel personally attacked by such words, then why does he have to do it? By acting like this, he justifies himself and does not want to be lesser than the other comrades. Arlene Bergman recalls this event in another form, to her, *"[...]after having eaten and rested, the Sergeant announced that it was time for recreation. The four men raped her many times and continued their patrol. At nightfall, they raped her again and killed her"*¹⁸ Frightening isn't it? They have lost all sense of morality, they raped then keep the

¹⁵ Vietnam Veterans Against War

¹⁶ James W. Mooney & Thomas R. West, *Vietnam: A History and Anthology* (Brandywine Press, 1994) 246

¹⁷ Vietnam Veterans Against War

¹⁸ Bergman 110 Translated by author

appetite to eat and then they rape again. They acted as programmed robots, they have lost their capacity for reason. It is as if they were amusing themselves, as if it was a game. Gang rapes appear very frequently in reports on the Vietnam War, more frequently than individual acts. It suggests that the whole battalion was involved that if a soldier did not participate, he might witness what happened and report it. By engaging in the crime, silence was maintained. My Lai, a village that was erased from the surface of the earth within few hours, GIs killed almost 500 civilians, men, women and children; raping women and children. But what is less known is that there were many “My Lais” during the war.

Arlene Bergman distinguishes various forms of rape in her book *Femmes du Vietnam*. She writes of “*rape as a form of terrorism*”¹⁹, which regards rape as a form of military policy in time of war, encouraged as a tactic to dominate the enemy population and to comfort the soldiers in need of reaffirming their virility. This form of rape is also a way to frighten the population in order to make them obedient to the commands of the rapist. Arlene Bergman distinguishes also another form of rape that is the “*rape as a form of vengeance*”²⁰ which is a form of violence towards the enemy as a result of a frustration among the soldiers. She explains that the major problem the soldiers had was that they could not differentiate the real enemies from the civilian population, “*the American soldier did not know when the enemy would attack*” or “*it frightened them not to be able to distinguish the civilian from the enemy*”²¹. Thus, by attacking the general population they would have the chance to target at least one enemy. Women were also soldiers during the Vietnam war so it was difficult for American soldiers to recognize the enemy guerilla because they all dressed in the same civilian clothes. Moreover, the GIs were exposed to numerous traps by the Vietnamese and they were constantly on the guard because anyone was able to trap them, from the teenager to the old person, we have to bear in mind that the Vietnam War was a war against the people’s resistance not a war only between soldiers. Civilians also participated in this war in very many ways. Bergman writes that the American soldiers acted this way because they were humiliated by the Vietnamese “*sometimes the NLF would demoralize the GIs, using loud speakers to transmit messages. They wanted to make them realize their powerlessness.*”²² and thus the GIs redirected their own humiliation towards the women by violating them. Soldiers were often humiliated with the traps the Vietnamese made.

¹⁹ Bergman 105. Translated by author

²⁰ *Ibid.* 106 Translated by author

²¹ *Ibid.* 107. Translated by author

²² *Ibid.* 108 Translated by author

My grandmother told me that a frequent kind of trap was to put a rusted nail on a plank then the soldier walks on the plank and the nail pierces his boot. The rusted nail provokes infections and the soldier is then unable to walk. Another kind of trap is to dig a hole and to fill it with wooden sharp stakes and to recover it with leaves. The soldiers could not see it and fell into these holes being severely wounded or even killed. These traps were not of the highest technology, rather “do-it-yourself“ traps, but still it really functioned because many soldiers were caught this way. So the feelings of humiliation were strong on the part of the soldiers because they did not know where or when they could fall into these civilian-made. The humiliation was all the more felt since the GIs had modern weapons made for this war, but nevertheless were caught in these primitive traps. The answer to Vietnamese defenses was brutal: rape and violence against women and children using sticks and bottles and even rape of the dead bodies and disgrace against their memory by playing with their corpses, mutilating them. All these reports show the process of controlling a population, of deshumanizing the women and of using them as objects.

Chapter 2. Prostitution

It is often said that prostitution is the “oldest job of the world”. Well, the American soldiers not only raped Vietnamese women but also felt the need to create a place for massive prostitution. At the period of the Vietnam War, a lot of women became prostitutes, not by pleasure as we can imagine, but because they were forced to do that, they needed money to survive first and to raise their children or families. The prostitutes were in majority widows that had lost their husbands in the war, or single women that needed money to send back to their families. Prostitution existed already in Vietnam when the troops arrived but it was developed largely thanks to the Americans. Prostitution is, like rape, a physical abuse of women. In the case of rape, they are violently beaten or mutilated, but prostitutes also suffered violence. Prostitution differs from rape in the sense that the women do it by conscience or sometimes because they are forced to, whereas the victim of a rape disagrees.

The prostitutes are also paid, sometimes they do not see the money they get because the pimps take the money back. They are also very often forced to prostitute because their pimps threaten them. In any case, prostitution is oriented towards men in majority and thus interferes with the notion of gender. Here again, the man wants to dominate the woman by having sexual intercourse with her, and is even ready to pay for this intercourse. It also suggests that the woman is nothing more than an object and that this object of desire represents a certain amount of money, some can be cheap, others can be expensive. Prostitution in Vietnam took many forms. If we talk about prostitution in brothels or in the street, the price changes. Women in the street appear to be “cheaper” than those who work in luxury brothels, with a Madam, such as escort girls for rich men. The bars and brothels were “legal” contrary to those who worked in the street but it is necessary to mention that prostitution was “illegal” in Vietnam at first, but of course it was made “legal” thanks to the corrupted government of South Vietnam. Anyway, it means that the woman has a price, and that she is nothing more than a product whose price can be negotiated. In Vietnam, prostitution appeared in various forms.

First, there was the basic prostitution in the street. As Arlene Bergman writes “*in the city of Saigon only, there were more than 200 agencies that recruited young women from the*

countryside to make them work in the 21.000 bars, hotels and brothels»²³ which means that in Saigon only the majority of the prostitutes were concentrated. The girls of the peasantry are most illiterate and poor so they are easy preys for prostitution. As it appears today in Eastern European countries, prostitution was not systematically said to the girls that were recruited. In Eastern European Countries, they are told that they will be models or barmaid in luxurious bars whereas they are in fact put in streets, controlled by pimps and beaten if they do not bring enough money. They have no way to escape and are afraid. Anyway, prostitution was highly encouraged by the Americans in the Vietnam war. As Tamara L. Tompkins says:” *The American government not only consciously tolerated prostitution in Vietnam, but in most cases division commanders controlled and regulated it. McNamara stated, ".in 1965 the main idea was to keep troops contented and satisfied. Ice cream, movies, swimming pools, pizza, hot dogs, laundry service and women."*²⁴ Here it means that the prostitution was protected by the government just as the rapes were. Is it a coincidence? Women are rated at the same level as pizza and ice-creams which also emphasizes the fact that they really are products of consumption just as pizzas are. This statement also suggests that the prostitution was a way for the soldiers to have sexual intercourses with women given their wives or girlfriends were far.

In other words, the government proposed prostitutes to the boys so that they could relieve themselves and thus it created a massive amount of prostitutes. But this industry also brought drugs, and venereal illnesses. The government then contributed to the drug addiction and to the illnesses the soldiers could face. Arlene Bergman states that “*in 1967, there were 400 opium smoking rooms, by 1970, the number increased to 3.000. Thanks to the CIA, Indochina became the hub for international heroin trafficking. The CIA bought off civil servants with the profits of this flourishing system.*”²⁵ which means that there were also a lot of corruption there and that the country was completely corrupted with the rise of the prices, and the unemployment because the economy was entirely based on American money. A civil servant of the **GVN*** says according to Arlene Bergman: “*The Americans want girls and we want dollars. Why not? It is an inexhaustible source for the State.*”²⁶ here is an example of what the troops of the North called the “puppet Government of Thieu”, this civil servant is in fact guided by the Americans and his Government too.

***GVN**: Government of Vietnam, based in Saigon and recognized by the United States

²³ Bergman 126 Translated by author

²⁴ Tompkins

²⁵ Bergman 125 Translated by author

²⁶ *Ibid.* Translated by author

Consequently to this support from the Government, many brothels flourished along the American base camps or even inside the base. Arlene Bergman tells: *“In Pleiku, inside the base camp, a single room which was in fact a mere tent held between ten and twenty beds”*²⁷ which means that the men did their affair altogether in the same room. It is quite pathetic because we are under the impression that these men are so “sex-thirsty” that they do not even need intimacy to have sexual intercourse. Tamara L. Tompkins also writes: *“At the brothel set up within the base camp of the 1st Infantry Division at Lai Khe, approximately 120 women “serviced” a 4000 man brigade”*²⁸; it is enormous it means that roughly one woman had 33 men to “service”. The Pleiku camp was named “Sin City” and it was obviously a good name for this camp. Following what Arlene Bergman wrote about the conditions in Pleiku, we can imagine that it was the hub for trafficking, because those women were not only prostitutes, they were also barmaid or masseuse. Madi Gilkes writes that: *“At Phu Loi, the brothel was only able to operate during daytime as the NLF was active in the surrounding area at night.”*²⁹

There were major places for prostitution on US camps: for example Pleiku, Lai Khe and An Khe, those places were controlled by the US military from 1966. According to Madi Gilkes, these places were created to prevent any venereal diseases and for the boys not to go to the brothels of the city where there were no security. She says: *“[...] with the intention of preventing servicemen from visiting potential security-risk brothels, and from contracting venereal diseases”*³⁰ this means that prostitution was more or less regulated, and we cannot but believe that these women must have been recruited with tests. Because if they had to work to US camps, the soldiers had to make sure that they were reliable or that they were not spies or members of the NLF. Unfortunately, some were really spies. Indeed, it is reported that there were acts of sabotage inside the military camps where the prostitutes worked. They knew exactly what happened in the camps and who came and left the base, they could give important information to the **PLAF*** and organize missions to steal the GI’s weapons. But the GIs never suspected these women to be warriors of the guerillas. To them, they were good at being a prostitute, or maids and sexual slaves nothing more.

* **PLAF**: People’s Liberation Armed Forces, it was the Army of Communist South Vietnam

²⁷ Bergman 126-127 Translated by author.

²⁸ Tompkins

²⁹ Madi Gilkes, “Missing from History: The Other Prisoners of War” taken from the internet site

<www.troubleandstrife.org/Issue41/4109.htm> , May 26, 2008

³⁰ *Ibid.*

As Arlene Bergman writes: *“The GIs had no respect for these women. They could speak freely in front of them. They were afraid that the Saigon whores would steal their weapons but at the same time, they were unable to imagine that these women could also be soldiers.”*³¹ Here lays the lack of intelligence of the GIs, they should have known that these women could talk, that they are above all Vietnamese before being prostitutes and even some were on the side of the Americans, some were also on the side of the Communists because they were the ones who promised to treat them right. This should have been taken into account from the GIs. They should have thought that there might be a tiny possibility to have Communists in these camps... Anyway, sex was a real business if we take into account the fact that there were 500 000 prostitutes just in the South of Vietnam. Kathleen Barry says that *“prostitutes were welcomed to US bases as local national guests”*³² it is evident that they are mocking the women they were welcomed as prostitutes who were doing their jobs among the “sex-thirsty” soldiers. Some were in the city of Saigon but others were in the provinces. Those who were in the provinces were slaves not only sexual slaves, they could wash cars and also do their jobs as prostitutes. Some others were rented as Arlene Bergman says: *“A soldier could rent a woman for the day, the week or the month.”*³³, this is what Madi Gilkes calls “key woman”: *“an alternative to working in a bar or brothel was to become a key woman; through this arrangement, a woman lived with a serviceman for a period of time-from one week to the length of his tour of duty-during which he would pay her rent and living costs”*³⁴ which means that these women were really exploited by the men, this system of renting the woman was highly set because of the fear of venereal diseases but they were paid a very low wage and were treated like animals because we have to bear in mind that the soldiers were racists towards those women and that they were only a means to have sexual intercourses, nothing more. They did not have much consideration, they were “whores” as the boys called them. They received about \$2 for their service and if they complained about the wage they would be threatened by the military.

In Vietnam, my grandmother told me that the girls were told they would be child minders or maids in rich houses. In fact, they were sent into brothels and soon became disillusioned. My grandmother also told me that the girls that came from the countryside were

³¹ Bergman 129 Translated by author

³² Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York University Press, 1995) 133

³³ Bergman 127 Translated by author

³⁴ Gilkes

highly demanded because the majority of them were virgins, thus they were pure and their price could be very expensive. Many mothers of the countryside did not know what happened to their daughters and when they were asked that their daughters could have a better life in Saigon, working and having a salary, they trusted and were happy for their daughters. My grandmother told me about neighbours that did trust to that “American Dream” if we may say so, and they finally discovered that their daughter was a sexual slave for a rich American that had no consideration for her except for being his object of desire. They were completely shattered and felt guilty of having sent their daughter to the city, for her well-being moreover. My grandmother also told me that sometimes she was afraid for her proper daughters, that is to say my aunts and my mother, because they could be solicited too. She said she did not feel at peace when she sent them to the market or when they went to see their friends. Fortunately, no one was ever approached or something. But there were not only Vietnamese women in this sexual business, there were also women from Thailand and from the Philippines who came there, and there were also prostitution sites in Thailand and the Philippines for the US military.

As we can see, it developed actively during the war. More strikingly, Madi Gilkes says that: “ *Some women however turned to prostitution after becoming victims of rape. In traditional Vietnamese society, the shame and dishonour of rape compromised to the victims’ eligibility for marriage and forced women to take the only economic option open to them*”³⁵ this means that, as I mentioned it before, prostitution has various forms, from those who do it to have a living to those who are forced to do that. Anyway, it is a way of trafficking women in any sense that it took place. Indeed, Vietnamese traditions were very strict and women had to be “pure” before the marriage, it was a way to prove that they received a good education, and that there would be no dishonour for their family. My grandmother told me that there were strict behaviour to adopt in the families, and even on the day of the marriage, there was a typical ceremony. The families of both sides bought a Peking pig, and waited for the wedding night, if the husband realised that his wife was not pure, then he would cut off the ears of the pig and sent back his wife with the ears of the pig, that would be an enormous dishonor for the family of the girl and the husband would repudiate her and make her bad reputation for her not to find a husband again. So we can easily understand that these poor women, having to bear the fact that they were raped and that could not find any

³⁵Gilkes

possibility to marry were sometimes obliged to prostitute because it was an easy way to make money, instead of staying in the village and being the laughing stock of everybody. Moreover, when a girl was seen with American soldiers they were directly judged as cooperating with the enemy, and were badly treated by the population, because the Americans represented the enemy, so if a woman was having an affair with a GI, even if the boy treated her with respect and really loved her, then she was assimilated as treacherous. Nationalism is much more important in Vietnam than Communism, they love their country much more than everything.

Le Ly Hayslip, that I had mentioned before, is an American-Vietnamese woman who accounts for this patriarchal society in which she was raised, and explains how she had to face the mistreatment from men but also by the people of her village. She came from a village south of Da Nang, and by the age of 16 years old, after having worked as maid in a rich Vietnamese family, she became pregnant of her employer and was badly looked upon by the members of the village. She had to flee to Da Nang with her mother and her baby. Then she became a prostitute in Saigon and was offered \$ 400 to sleep with two servicemen :” *I stared at the cash the way a thirsty prisoner stares at water. Four hundred dollars would support my family, me and Hung for over a year- a year I could use finding a better job and making connections or, as a last resort greasing palms for a paid escape. And to make it, I wouldn’t even have to work up a sweat or risk going to jail or getting blown up by a mine or blown away in an ambush. I just lie down and let these two American boys be men. What could they do to me that had not been done already?*”³⁶ this story reflects what we said before, that prostitution was an easy way to make money and that people could feed their families easier than by working hard . Le Ly Haislip’s story is very moving, since she was abused by American men but also by VCs as she called it. She was raped by two Vietnamese there and became “friendly” with the Americans because she thought that her proper comrades have treasoned her, and decided to change on the other side despite she had fought with the VCs. To her, it was just like another kind of job. But in majority, the VCs were opposed to prostitution.

There are some reports that showed the NLF highly condemned the presence of Americans in Vietnam. For example Sandra C.Taylor writes: “*The Communists complained*

³⁶Le Ly Hayslip with Charles Jay Wurts, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 224

that the Americans had “attempted to turn Saigon into a brothel”³⁷ and they warned the girls to be careful saying, according to Sandra C. Taylor, that “the Americans were engaging in psychological warfare, tempting young women and men with the crude immoral American lifestyle and exposing them to “social diseases on an unprecedented scale”³⁸. She also adds that there was a heavy propaganda from the NLF just after the massacre of My Lai. This propaganda was broadcast on radio, the Liberation Radio, Sandra C. Taylor writes:” They charged that the enemy was engaging in “bloody massacres” , that he had struck at the women’s movement using massacres and terror while “at the same time trying to mislead and seduce sisters” and he also “used money and a depraved and obscene culture to persuade sisters, especially sisters in revolutionary families, to make love with him, thus undermining their family happiness”³⁹. Well these words may appear very harsh to hear but it was true that the Americans there were in a process of winning the control of the population, using prostitution as a means to an end. Prostitution in Vietnam was condemned, and even if it appeared normal to Americans, we have to bear in mind that the Vietnamese were highly shocked to see their country declining in sex- trafficking. The famous “winning hearts and minds” said by President Johnson took all its sense in the conflict in Vietnam. They recreated their way of life in Vietnam. We also have to take into account that a lot of prostitutes became pregnant of American soldiers and that their babies were left in Vietnam, since the soldiers were not having a romance with these women, they did not “recognize” their babies. Those babies were called the *Bui Doi*, which means the Children of Dust. They were Amerasian but never learnt to speak English, and some really look like Americans. It is reported that there were 100 000 Bui Doi in Vietnam when the troops left. A Vietnamese well-known singer named Phi Nhung was born at Pleiku and is Amerasian. She once told that when she was a young girl she suffered a lot of the mockery from the others because she was Amerasian and because she had no father. Her mother left her and she was raised by her grandmother. She went to the US with the Amerasian Resettlement Program and succeeded in finding her father. She now lives in California and very often sees him.

An interesting point to analyse is also that in Vietnam, the American culture appeared very rapidly in the South. As we mentioned before, there were hot-dogs, pizzas and ice-creams, but there were also Coca-Cola and all the big trademarks that came from the United

³⁷ Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War* (University Press of Kansas, 1999) 66

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Taylor 66

States. The influence of occidentalism came among the prostitutes majorly. They wanted to be more attractive towards the soldiers because they also faced racism from these men. Arlene Bergman states that:” *The surgeons of Saigon, trained in the United states, preferred to embark on a profitable business. They carried out thousands of operations on Vietnamese women, to make them fit with the standard sexual image for Occidental playboy.*”⁴⁰. Thus, it means that the occidentalisation is not only a way to look like Western women, it is also a great business.

Therefore, if a woman wants to be beautiful, she has to erase the part of Asian she has in her body, such as her slanting eyes or her nose. The prostitutes did this operation to please their customers as Arlene Bergman says: “ *to fill out the hips or the breasts with silicone was more profitable and soon became a necessity for those who worked in bars* ”⁴¹ in other words, it meant that these women were ready to mutilate their body just to please the soldiers, despite they knew that these men would not stay for a long time in Vietnam, even if they knew that they were treated as animals or slaves, despite they faced racism from them. What a sacrifice for men who did not worth it! This sacrifice was also useless because when the troops left Vietnam these women, for some of them who were drug-addicted died of overdose or committed suicide. They lived in a total misery, and very totally desperate. Nevertheless, this sacrifice had a price and the surgeons knew it, they made a lot of profit doing these operations, even if for some women, it did not succeed. Because this new technology of making women more attractive had also some drawbacks, some operation failed and the result on the women were awful. For example, Arlene Bergman says: “ *the plastic surgery contains some risks, says Doctor Thai Min Bach. he made a lot of operations but also spent half his time rectifying the errors of other doctors.*”⁴². Nevertheless, the craze for « americanization » prevailed over the risks. The doctors used the example of Mrs Nguyen Kao Ky, the wife of the vice- President to convince the women to make these operations, as Arlene Bergman writes: “ *one of the first woman who tansformed herself thanks to plastic surgery is the delightful Mrs Nguyen Kao Ky*”⁴³. But these operations were not affordable to all the women so when they could not pay for that, they changed their names, using an American name such as Ann or Fran that replaced Xuan or Phuong⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Bergman 130 Translated by author

⁴¹ Bergman 131 Translated by author

⁴² *Ibid.* Translated by author

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 132 Translated by author

The americanization of Vietnam was not only seen through changes of appearances , it also came through television. Arlene Bergman talks about a Vietnamese millionaire who saw roller skates on TV: “ *after having seen on the American military television a roller skates competition, a millionaire named Le Huu Tai opened an ice rink where people could move in with hard rock music. He says :” this, you see is a civilized way of life, it gives the impression of an Americans style, and we can say that the Americans are civilized. The ice rink provides a contribution to our civilization »*⁴⁵ This man and all the people who were interested in the American culture this way, and copying the American way of life were considered as enemies too since they adopted the occidental style, for the NLF and even for the resistance in the South, it was unacceptable. These traitors were not Vietnamese anymore for the resisters.

All that the Americans brought to Vietnam was considered by the Communists as an insult towards the women, they believed that it was degrading the image of the woman, forcing her to have sexual intercourses or treating her like a grind, causing her to change her physical appearance to be more attractive. I think that doing this is a way to deny our origins. If you have slanted eyes, then what is the problem? Why do you need to have big round eyes to be more beautiful? I recently saw an article on a Vietnamese website saying that nowadays in Vietnam, the plastic surgery was really lucrative. When you watch the Vietnamese TV, or Vietnamese shows, all the women are occidentalised, they all did plastic surgery to feel more beautiful but they look like wax dolls, it is as if they had no expression on their face, they are not delightful anymore, they are superficial. They do not look like Vietnamese, they want to look like the Eurasian. Moreover some operations really are failures, because the shape of their face or jaw is Asian, the shape of their body, thin, of a small size is Asian, so it is impossible to insert an American face or an European face in this body and sometimes the result is catastrophic, they do not look like Asian but they also do not look like American, their nose is too big, the cheekbones a failure, in short they lost their personality and money for nothing. If they remain natural, they are the standards of beauty for Asia just as the American women are for the United States.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Despite all the atrocities the women had to endure from the American soldiers, the rapes , tortures, killings of civilians and prostitution, we can see that the Vietnamese women are also warriors and that they largely took part in the conflict.

PART II

The War of the Women

The hatred towards Westerners that began with the French involvement and the colonialism they brought there, treating the Vietnamese such as slaves and wanting to impose their culture and way of life there was the primary cause of the resistance. This hatred of the colonialism was because they wanted their independence. At first, it was not just to follow the rules of Communism, it was because they were Nationalists. This hatred of the colonialism is highly denounced in Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of The Earth*, he denounces colonization from the point of view of the colonized and called to armed struggle to end this colonialism. Even if Fanon did not inspire Ho Chi Minh, the struggle is the same, it is the complex of the colonized, which refers to a feeling of inferiority, a kind of paranoia imposed by the "white", the colonizers and the rejection of the White man. Here, the Wretched of the Earth, the peasantry, are the Vietnamese. Many other authors such as Memmi or Bhabha were anti-colonialists too and talked from the voices of the oppressed. Later on, the American involvement was seen as a shock to the Vietnamese. They thought that with the victory of Dien Bien Phu and the withdrawal of the French, they could finally be independent. Even if the country was cut into two parts given the Geneva Accords, the French were gone and that was the most important. In the North, Ho Chi Minh was the leader of the DRV and in the South, elections were supported by the Americans. However, all the Communists of the South were told to go back to the North and the Catholics of the North, who were afraid not to be able to practise freely their religion were asked to go back to the South. But, Communists still remained in the South, as Sandra C. Taylor says "*to foment any future "political" struggle or even armed uprising if the promised election for a national government did not take place*"⁴⁶. The elections did not take place but President Diem was still in position in the South comforted to be helped by the US. The Communists that remained to the South were strongly opposed to Diem's regime, that they qualified of authoritarian. Moreover, the soldiers of the South, known as the ARVN, in active cooperation with the police were reputed to be merciless towards the opponents of the new regime. Sandra C. Taylor explains: "*they began to kill and arrest opponents of the new regime*"⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ Taylor 34

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3. “No other road to take”

The women began to resist when the French invaders were still there. There are many accounts on these women who were engaged in the war against the French and who continued their fights against the American later. The example of **Ut Tich** is one of the most well-known of Vietnam. Ut Tich lived in a poor family and her parents were working for French Masters. As a little girl she was hired by a rich landowner but she was poorly fed and often beaten. When she escaped, she took refuge at her uncle’s house where she found papers about Ho Chi Minh ‘s plans to achieve victory among the French. At the age of 15, she became a liaison for resistance fighters in the district; then she participated in an ambush where she killed seven French soldiers and captured many weapons. Later on, she became an active member of the Communist Party. When the American troops arrived, she became also active, organizing face-to-face struggles and doing a lot of propaganda, with ambushes to kill soldiers and she earned the title of *Heroine of the Liberation Army*. She died in 1970.⁴⁸ This story of Ut Tich, fighting for the two wars in Vietnam is one among many others. Many women followed the sayings of Ho Chi Minh, and decided to fight for their country, not to be oppressed and inferior anymore. To them, North and South were brothers, thus, there was no difference between them. My grandmother has always told me this statement too, North and South are brothers and if the South is attacked, then the North will do his possible to help it. My grandmother has always told me traditional myths and legends and has always sung nursery rhymes to me when I was little. And I can remember one of these legends, my grandmother told me that Vietnam was born of the love of two gods, Lac Long Quan a sea god and Au Co, his wife, the goddess of the mountains. They had a hundred children, one half of them going to the mountains with their mother, which formed the North of Vietnam, and the others going with their father to the sea, which means the South of Vietnam. Thus, she told me, the children of Au Co and Lac Lon Quan are brothers, so North and South are brothers. I was and still am fascinated by these myths and legends of Vietnam. The power of oral stories is very strong there and every old person has something interesting to say, or to teach to the young people.

This anecdote put aside, as I said, many women became warriors during the conflict. They came from the peasantry for the majority and most of them were illiterate. “Even

⁴⁸ Taylor 11

women have to fight” was a motto for the women, to rise their will to fight. At first, they were not Communist or interested in Communism, they were just Nationalists and they wanted to free their country from the domination imposed by foreigners. There were many reasons for the women to join the Front (NLF). They hated the French and the Americans too, but they also wanted to fight because they suffered from atrocities, they wanted to revenge on their oppressors. Many women decided to fight because they were personally touched by tortures or because they saw other women be victims of torture. As Arlene Bergman says: “*Le Thi Hong Gam entered into the guerilla at the age of 16, after having witnessed the rape and murder of her best friend*»⁴⁹. We can easily understand that this young girl was highly traumatized by this vision of horror and thus, to revenge her friend and because she felt angry, she decided to fight. Another woman, **Huyn Thi Kien** says that she saw a pregnant woman being attacked by GIs. She was about to deliver her baby. There were five GIs, they tied her up to the bed and raped her to death, then they pulled out the baby with their bayonet. And they laughed. Huyn Thi Kien says that she was afraid for her life and that the only thing she could do was to join the women’s forces.⁵⁰ Just as we saw in the first part of this study, the violence among the women was really horrible, this account is frightening because this poor woman, about to deliver, was not a dangerous, ferocious warrior, but the soldiers attacked her and killed her, for no apparent reasons, or just because it was funny to kill a pregnant woman! This account of Huyn Thi Kien is also similar to other accounts that convinced the women to engage in the war with the Communists, and of course, with the war of the women. Some women were even on the side of Thieu’s regime but when they saw the atrocities, they changed sides.

The NLF was formed in 1960 after the uprisings of Ben Tre which welcomed the success of Nguyen Thi Dinh as a military leader and strategist, and was composed of those who were resisters in the South. The Ben Tre uprisings were led by Nguyen Thi Dinh and it consisted in planning an uprising in Mo Cay District, the poorest district of Ben Tre Province. The action began in Dinh Thuy, a hamlet of Mo Cay District, and this hamlet was radicalized. The peasants had four rifles they had taken from defeated troops, but they decided to make mock rifles out of wood and coconut to supplement the rifles they had. The ***Dong Khoi*** *went as planned. The uprising was successful and it spread, the equipment seized was

⁴⁹ Bergman 111 translated by author

* **Dong Khoi**: it means uprising in Vietnamese

⁵⁰ Bergman 111 translated by author

enough to equip a company. Well-equipped troops were defeated by radicalized peasants, among whom the majority were women.⁵¹

These women were called the “long-haired warriors”, a name that was at first given to the women of the Ben Tre uprisings by Ho Chi Minh himself but soon, it became applied to all the women warriors. These women warriors recruited by Nguyen Thi Dinh were 2 millions in 1967. The NLF was not composed of Communists only, as Sandra C. Taylor writes: “*the NLF included former Viet Minh but also followers of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, members of minority ethnic groups, students, farmers and refugees from the Diem ‘s regime*”⁵² moreover , two women also helped to form the NLF, Nguyen Thi Dinh and Duong Quynh Hoa an eminent physician. The armed force of the NLF is the PLAF, *the People’s Liberation Armed Forces*. At the same time, the Women’s Liberation Association is founded, it is a Communist Association that includes only women. Women are recruited and are given some tasks to do. They have to follow some rules, the “*three-pronged attack*”: spreading propaganda and recruiting which consisted in distributing leaflets urging the opponents to join the side of the revolution, performing support services to the NLF which consisted in acting as liaisons between village and jungle, performing intelligence work, providing food and clothing for soldiers, hiding them from the enemy troops and harassing the ARVN and the police which meant demonstrating against enemy troops, interfering with troop movements and badgering government officials. The face-to-face struggles appeared to be direct action, the women in groups demanded compensation for their dead, for the loss of their crops, for the destruction done by chemical defoliants⁵³. They succeeded in recruiting opponents; many soldiers of the ARVN became Communists and even if those soldiers had treated them bad, they never took any revenge on them, they welcomed him as a brother because to them the enemy was not the South, it was the United States. But they had also to practice the *five loves*: love of the country, love of the work, love of the equality , love of the masses and love of peace⁵⁴.

Many women were active and really participated to the resistance in the South by following the rules given by the North. They thought that there was “no other road to take “, this sentence was said by Nguyen Thi Dinh when she wrote her memoirs, concluding it by

⁵¹ Taylor 46

⁵² *Ibid* 36

⁵³ Taylor 38

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 42

saying that these women, and her in particular had no choice, they were to fight. Some of them fought with the armed forces, but the majority of them were young or unmarried women. The young were much more interested to fight than the other women because they had no family, no husband and thus they were free to fight, and they could die for their country. These young women were also fearless, they were not afraid of being killed. They were much more ferocious than the men sometimes. They were between 15 or 17 years old, but at first, they could not participate to the fights, they were member's of the Women's Liberation Association which worked at the same time with the NLF. Their primary tasks were to do the cooking and to repair clothes. But, when they came in their twenties, they could begin to fight. Sandra C. Taylor reports that the parents of these women were afraid when their daughters told them they would join the front because they could be killed, first but also because they were among men.⁵⁵ It was important for them too because they remained under the feudal rules and to see a woman among men is badly interpreted for some people. The girls can be assimilated to prostitutes, and living in a hostile jungle, and sharing their daily life with men, without marriage, gave a lot of worry to the parents. But this was not a problem for the Communist Party. Indeed, as Ho Chi Minh was a model for them, then they had to live their life following Ho Chi Minh. He never married and never had children and the message in the Communist Party was the celibacy as an example of their leader. They asked for sexual abstinence, not as a form of Puritanism, but because they thought that it was impossible to fight and to have a romance at the same time. Moreover, the NLF punished polygamy, which was widely spread in Vietnam, and promiscuity. The Women's Association said women should remain pure. They were also punished if they were caught having an affair, and could be jailed from 3 to 8 years.⁵⁶ These conditions may appear cruel but to them, it was the only way to win the war. They always believe that women could not resist love, so if they threatened the women of punishing her, then they could be sure that they would remain determined to fight, and not diverted from their mission. But this resolution became a problem for the women, when the war ended, they remained alone and were too old to get married or to have children. Fighting for Ho Chi Minh has a price, either you sacrifice your life for your country, or you choose your private life, letting intruders control your country.

The women warriors could be distinguished in various forms: first, there were the real warriors, who fought with arms and among men soldiers, in the jungle, who helped them

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 76

⁵⁶ Taylor 64

doing the cooking or providing medical assistance to the injured, they were members of the PLAF. Then, there are the guerillas and the militians. The militians were unarmed most often, and they would only attack in answer to others attacks. The militians did not belong to a political side. The guerillas had the majority of the women, indeed, very few belonged to the army, because these women were mothers with a family to care of. The guerillas were the most dangerous fighters, because they were not distinguished by the American soldiers. They remained in their city or their villages. They were organized, they made propaganda and called for every women to fight. They gathered information, they were also spies and picked up the ammunitions in places where there were Communists fighters. They would observe the enemy to know everything about them in order to be able to planify ambushes. The women used hand-made weapons, like swords or daggers, but also wooden weapons; they even had weapons from the Soviet Union and from China. Then, they captured a large amount of weapons from the enemy. They employed fragmentation mines too. As a Marine reported, the most feared mine was the “Bouncing Betty”. He said “ *Should you put your foot to that flat rock or the clump of weeds to its rear...*” and an other soldier said also “ *The infantryman knows that any moment the ground he is walking on can erupt and kill him; kill him if he’s lucky. If he’s unlucky, he will be turned into a blind, deaf, emasculated, legless shell.*”⁵⁷This meant the NLF had a bad reputation over the GIs, they were afraid of them somewhat. This, the women knew it and were proud of it.

As Arlene Bergman writes:” *in the first months of 1968,about 10000 of women from the Region of Trung Bo entered in the Armed Forces. 40% of the women in Nam Bo came in the guerilla. The women in the guerillas of Cho Lai, Back Ai, Ben Tre also lead an heroic struggle and have killed more than a thousand of enemies... »*⁵⁸. These women were much more engaged in the guerillas because they could continue to work as peasants at the same time raise their children, and during the night, they carried on operations. They could at the same time prepare ambushes, and when they saw American soldiers, they returned to their agricultural jobs, as if nothing happened, that is why American soldiers had so many difficulties to see the enemy. Women were also the ones to make the traps that the American were afraid of, they did booby-traps, they used **punji* stakes** to place in the side and bottom

***punji stakes**: it means sharpened bamboo sticks that were placed in camouflaged pits and it wounded soldiers
⁵⁷ John Simkin, Spartacus Educational, taken from the internet site< www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk > June 17, 2008

⁵⁸ Bergman 268 translated by author

of pits and explosive devices made from the unexploded ordnance⁵⁹. It is quite ironical to see that the majority of the bombs employed against the Americans in the booby-trap were indeed American bombs that did not explode.

They helped to make an underground village in Cu Chi, the town is famous for having a “200 miles long tunnel complex”, inside these tunnels there were hospitals and places where the Communists could hide. Moreover, the tunnels were not suspected until 1968.⁶⁰ It is incredible to imagine that there was life under the surface of the earth, it really shows the determination of the NLF to resist and their brilliant ideas. Who could ever think that there were tunnels? The women of Cu Chi highly participated in the construction of these tunnels with their hands or with a teaspoon. Their job was difficult but they were very clever, and the ARVN or the American never remarked the construction. But not only did they dig the tunnels, they also “*nursed the injured, buried the dead, prepared food and entertained people living inside. But they also suffered from the claustrophobic conditions, the foul air, and the fear of the bombs, injuries, and illness. They were unable to bathe or to cleanse themselves, even their menstrual periods. Spending months underground had a deleterious effect on mental health as well.*”⁶¹ It is completely amazing to realise that these women had to live like this for months, it is difficult to be closed in a tunnel for five minutes, because you begin to suffer from claustrophobia or because there is no air or windows but to be kept there for months is just impossible, unbearable. This shows that they have a heavy mental strength and really loved the cause they were fighting for because the conditions were really inhumane. These tunnels were sources of illnesses and infections. But there were also other ways to fight, others tactics.

The “search and destroy” policy of General Westmoreland in 1965 consisted in finding and killing members of the NLF. But the problem was that it costed many Vietnamese lives and sometimes the women could not follow the three-pronged strategy because they could put their lives in danger. Thus Hanoi sent new themes on which to resist: “*arouse hatred among the people toward the aggressor, encourage solidarity against the common enemy of the war, use revolutionary violence, including assassination and terrorism, and*

⁵⁹ Taylor 82-83

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 87

⁶¹ Taylor 87

believe and preach the inevitable victory of the Party and the Revolution”⁶². It was difficult for them to continue this duty of propaganda, recruiting new members because the American troops were numerous and the women were afraid for their lives. They nevertheless followed the rules of Hanoi, whenever they could, they killed Americans. The major problem was that many regions had been defoliated by the Americans, which meant that the revolution was quite difficult to continue. The areas that were controlled by the Communists totally disappeared and the women had to find new ways to continue the revolution. In Da Nang, where the American troops were present, there was no possibility to resist, thus, the women encouraged the men to go on strike for seventy-six days. They shut the markets, and closed the schools.⁶³ The women had to find new strategies to spread the doctrine. They thus decided to have access to the Americans camps. It was quite daring but still, it worked.

The story of **Nguyen Thi Luong** is an example which reflects the trick of the women of the revolution. Luong was a messenger for the NLF until she was arrested and sent to prison. Then she was released and returned to work with the women’s movement. she was asked to transfer orders but she could not because she could be arrested and sent again to jail. Thus, she decided that she would claim she was mad. She did not wear any clothes, except a sash around her waist to carry messages, and she slept, naked, in the dirt. Some soldiers asked her to eat dog feces (!) to prove that she was really mad and she did. Then, as she was considered as really mad, she had a complete access to the military camp where she learnt a lot of useful information that she could transmit to the NLF. She did it for five years, without having been discovered and her disguise served her well. She even confessed that she was a Communist, but the soldiers did not believe her. She was asked by the soldiers if she preferred the NLF or the Saigon forces, and she said she like them both because they were all sons and daughters of the dragon. Again, with this answer, she was considered as mad.⁶⁴

The prostitutes that we talked about previously were also tricky, they were members of the NLF too and had access to the American bases, they gathered information and gave them to the NLF. Other women work for the GIs, washing their clothes or polished their shoes. As the women warriors were dressed in black pajamas, like the peasants, the American never suspected them to be members of the guerillas. Their sandals were made of rubber, the rubber

⁶²*Ibid.* 69

⁶³*Ibid.* 69-70

⁶⁴Taylor 80

of tyre, they wore it because it would never be worn-out. As Arlene Bergman writes: “ *these women get commonly in the base camps to determine the location of the targets they would bomb at night. The day after the attack, they come to see the results of this night offensive. When it is a failure, they reexamine the place, smiling humbly yo GIs they pass and the day after, they plan another attack* »⁶⁵

But once the women were caught, they were severely treated by the soldiers and their conditions in prison were really awful. For example, the story of the world-wide known “tiger cages” of the Con Son prison on the archipelago of Con Dao, known also as the French Poulo Condore shows the torture and conditions in which prisoners were held. According to Don Luce, who went there, there were 300 women in the prison. The story of **Thieu Thi Tao** is just amazing: “ *In prison, Thieu Thi Tao was beaten on the head with truncheons. Her head was locked between two steel bars. Water was forced down her throat. She was suspended above the ground. Late in 1969, she was transferred to the Tiger cages of Con Son. for several days, she was hung from an iron hook. Her spine was damaged by this torture and she still wears a neck brace.*”⁶⁶ And he also adds: “ *Tao was a 16-year old school student then. She was put in the cages because she would not salute the flag. She was blinded by the caustic lime that was thrown on the prisoners as disciplinary measure. “I was a Communist”, she says.*”⁶⁷ Tao had also a sister, Tam who was also sent to Con Son. At fifteen, she was the youngest prisoner on the island.⁶⁸ Sandra C. Taylor explains the conditions of the prisoners too: “*[...] they were poorly fed, they had to supplement their rations of rice gruel with dead birds or geckos and how they game that bit of protein to those who were closest to death. The cell was packed with prisoners when it was hot, and left with only two when it was cold. The women had no sanitary facilities during their menstrual periods and had to tear the sleeves of their shirts to use as protections. They had no privacy and almost no opportunity to bathe.*”⁶⁹

Another woman, called the smiling woman, named **Vo Thi Thang** was sent to Con Son. Despite her tortures, such as electric probes and shocks but also psychological torture and physical abuse, she kept smiling. She said that she knew the Communists would win,

⁶⁵ Bergman 270 Translated by author

⁶⁶ Don Luce, *Hostages of War: Saigon's Political Prisoners* (Washington DC, 1973) taken from the internet site <www.historiansagainstar.org April 26, 2008

⁶⁷ Luce

⁶⁸ Taylor 85

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 86

that's why she kept smiling.⁷⁰ These cruelties among the prisoners were highly denounced by Don Luce and people in the world was shocked at seeing the images of these prisoners. But the most important fact to keep in mind is that these tortures were taught to the Saigon forces by American soldiers. Even if some of the GIs did not participate actively in torturing the prisoners such as throwing them from helicopters for instance, I said some, because there are actually who did participate; they happily shared their techniques and we can say that they were not in lacks of inspiration. However, these women 's love of the country was amplified and some of them became radicals. But what is also a proof of their reliability is that they never talked, they never betrayed their comrades and were capable to endure all the tortures and beatings and even die. They remained silent.

In the North, the situation is the same. Women are also warriors but they belong in majority to militia units. The warriors of the North were called "*Giai Phong Mien Nam*" in Vietnamese language. When they became aware of the involvement of the American troops, they encouraged the South to resist, as they did with the French who were, like the Americans, a foreign invader. The bombings of the North began in 1964. In 1965, the women were taught the "*three responsibilities*" to follow: to take their husband's places in the fields, maintaining agricultural production so that the men could fight in the South; then they had to care for their families, raising their children for the cause of the revolution and conducting family affairs; then they were to go in the fields to till the soil and to defend their villages from invasion or attacks from the skies. They were also urged to encourage their sons and husbands to join the army and fight, sacrificing thus their family happiness for the fatherland.⁷¹

It is true that many women in the North sent many of their sons to the battlefield even if they knew later on that their sons were killed, they continued to send their sons. There are families that are completely split and the women lost their husbands and children but also their brothers and others male members of their families. It is said also that these women were much more engaged in the struggle than the women of the South, because the North was deeply rooted with Communism, and all the women there were ardent Communists. They were at the same time mothers and warriors. As they were asked to do the agricultural jobs, they could feed the soldiers but also the population in the city. They were trained to use

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 73

⁷¹ Taylor 115

weapons and excelled in the use of anti-aircraft guns. But as Sandra C. Taylor writes, they were frustrated because they could not go to the South until 1966, and to them it was a sacred mission.⁷² Women of all ages contributed to the war, even the elderly participated, by hiding refugees or feeding them and they were called “the white-haired warriors”.

The youth could help too, and their major tasks were to repair the roads. They also helped to repair the *Ho Chi Minh Trail* maintaining it to permit supplies to come directly to soldiers. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a route that crossed the jungle and that permitted the soldiers to receive supplies. It began in the North of Vietnam, then went in Laos and Cambodia then finally entered the South of Vietnam. Many women worked in its construction, and carried lots of supplies under difficult conditions. Sandra C. Taylor explains: “*They wielded picks and shovels, carrying baskets of dirt and filling holes in the road so that trucks could pass at night. Tran Thi Truyen, sixteen years old, carried a sixty-pound pack and hiked for thirty days in the rainy season*”.⁷³ It is also reported that the Ho Chi Minh Trail could provide sixty tons of supplies per day to the NLF, and along the trail, there were hospitals and base camps. But the major problem was malaria, many people suffered from this disease and many died along the Trail. The Trail was also the means to provide soldiers from North to South. The American soldiers aimed at destroying the Trail but it was difficult for them, because there were too many people going back and forth, each time they attacked, the Vietnamese repaired and even if they used aerial attacks, they could not distinguish the Trail. But women in the North were more active than those in the South, yet the situation was not the same, the South had to be careful more than in the North, and as Sandra C. Taylor says “*northern women did not live among the enemy, they were no subject to torture*”⁷⁴. They were trained to hate the Americans because to them they were the enemy, and Thieu was just an American too. They really believed in Communism and were really ready to sacrifice for this ideology, they followed carefully the “Three responsibilities” and were constantly fighting. Fighting against the enemy, having to bear the constant bombings, but also fighting as women, with their children, with the agricultural tasks. The work these women did, North and South sisters, was a painstaking work but it did work, the ants have eaten elephants!!! This image of ants and elephants is Le Ly Hayslip’s definition of the

⁷² *Ibid.* 117

⁷³ *Ibid.* 120

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 124

Vietnam war.⁷⁵ The elephant symbolises the US troops because they damage everything when they are around.

The women fighting for the Saigonese troops also existed but they never did anything to attack the Communists and many joined the Communists later on. Some people were afraid to be killed and decided also to join the Saigonese troops but it did not last long, they soon return to their primary feeling: Communism.⁷⁶ Le Ly Hayslip, whom we mentioned above, was disappointed by her experience with the North, yet, she was not a warrior for the South, she just became friendly with the Americans, and her two husbands were American soldiers; these were the men she dated with and even if she had a quite disastrous personal history with men and had to prostitute she never became an ardent defensor of the Thieu's government. But among these women warriors, there were also what was called the "*third force*". The third force was composed of urban intellectuals mainly, and of nuns. They were not all Communists, but were above all patriots, they just wanted the independence and freedom of the country. The urban intellectuals were also badly treated and even sent to prison if the troops discovered they were Communists. Among this third force, there is **Duong Quynh Hoa**, whose name we mentioned above, the physician; she was also a Party member, but was mainly patriotic. Lawyers, teachers but also writers belonged to the third force and they wanted to work for peace. The Buddhist nuns also composed the third force, they were advocating for peace and religious freedom, which was not the case in Vietnam when we remember that President Diem, a fervent Catholic, made a crusade among the Buddhists.

Their message of peace was difficult to achieve and some did not succeed in it. Others believed strongly that peace was possible but their message remained silent. Everybody recalls the two nuns, Tri Tuc and Nguyen Thi Kieu, who immolated themselves in 1967 to protest⁷⁷. This action of immolating themselves shows how they were determined, and that they did not hesitate to sacrifice themselves, thus becoming martyrs, to call for peace. But this third force also had limits, during the war, it was impossible in Vietnam not to take sides. Either you were a Communist, or you were for the Saigonese Government. If you remained neutral or if you were an anti-war activist, then you could face two dangers: either you were considered a Communist by the Saigonese or by the American, or you were considered as a

⁷⁵ Hayslip 68

⁷⁶ Taylor 63

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 92

treator by the Communists. It was an infinite problem. It also shows that you could not freely think what you wanted and there was no freedom to think. But either you were a Communist or a supporter of Thieu or Diem, you were in danger... Some also were on both sides, my mother told me they gave information to the Army of the South but when they saw Viet Congs they also gave them information. They said they were all brothers so they could not choose!

Chapter 4. The awakening of the women

The war in Vietnam showed that women were able to handle weapons, planning attacks and ambushes but it also permitted to see that their conditions, within the Communist Party was not as restricted as one may believe. Indeed, in a society where the principles of Confucianism were deeply rooted, those women could hope to be emancipated in many ways. Confucianism was brought to Vietnam by the Chinese, and the precepts were not in favor of the women. “*A hundred daughters are not worth one son*”⁷⁸ is one of the precept. It suggests that the women are inferior and that the man is the dominant. The man can buy wives and is free to have as many wives as he wants whereas the woman has no rights. She is the slave of her husband and has to bear all the difficult tasks. She has to follow the three obediences: “*at home, obey the father; leaving home, obey the husband; when the husband dies, obey the oldest son*”⁷⁹. The woman is confronted to the patriarchal system, which emphasizes the fact that women belong to men. Her duty is to give birth to sons, nothing more. If she is not able to have sons and only have daughters, then the husband can take another wife. We can understand that these situations were hard for the women. The women had always been on earth to suffer in Vietnam, my grandmother told me. She suffers because she is a girl so she represents a burden for her family, then she suffers because her marriage is forced and she cannot marry with the man she loves, the parents choose the husband for their daughters, and she suffers while having her babies, she carries on many duties on her shoulders. And she has to work hard too.

It is true that in the Confucian precepts, precepts that my grandmother ‘s family applied in Vietnam, the victim is the woman. But with the arrival of Ho Chi Minh, the traditional status of the woman evolves. Ho Chi Minh, born Nguyen Ai Quoc, founded the Communist Party in 1930; it had yet included women. The uprisings of 1930, because there was starvation and because the power of the French was so heavy, caused him to be arrested in Shanghai, but he was released by the British. Later, he went to the Soviet Union. In 1941, as the Japanese were occupying Vietnam, he created the Viet Minh, to fight against the Japanese. But Ho Chi Minh returned to China where he was imprisoned. When he came back

⁷⁸ Taylor 20

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

to Vietnam in 1943, he thought that he could ally with the US since there were both fighting the Japanese, but they did not want to support him.

He offered promises to the women who would join him. Sandra C. Taylor writes: "*Ho Chi Minh called to an end of polygamy and advocated the right for women to vote and participate in civic affairs saying: "Women are half the people; if the women are not free, the people is not free."*"⁸⁰ To Ho Chi Minh, the recruitment in the party was based on an equality between men and women. This statement is highly symbolic. It is true that women should be praised for what they accomplish, the men are engendered by women too so there should be a respect of them, not considering them as slaves. If the master or the richman is treating women as slaves, then he has to recall his origins, he comes from a woman too. That misogyny was also seen among the American troops towards Vietnamese women, if we take into account what they did to them. Under the words of Ho Chi Minh, many women began to have hopes concerning their conditions. They could continue to keep their traditional roles of loyal wives and mothers, but there could be a renewal in their ways of life. The Communist Party then began to recruit members, among who were women. We can easily imagine that it should have been hard for them to engage, having to confront the refusal of their husbands or even of the elderly. Because we have to say that in Vietnam, the elderly have a lot of influence among the others. What they say has to be taken into account, and they teach lessons of morale, even if what they say is hard to hear, yet you have to obey them. Anyway, the conditions of the women changed and it was in their favor. As I said earlier, women were recruited in the Party and they were also considered as equal to men, which was a revolution in their conditions when we know that there were so badly treated by the French colonialists.

In Vietnam, heroism is very important and the women are fed with stories of heroines. During the war, there were lots of emulating stories, praising the women and insisting on their courage. The major example is Ut Tich, whom we mentioned before. Her story reflects exactly what the Party taught them. Ut Tich was a warrior but she did not sacrifice her family. She had six children and despite her mother role, she was a sapper and was very useful in the guerillas. When she was killed, she became a martyr and her story was told to other women but also in schools, as a model. But Ut Tich also convinced her own children to fight for the independence. These stories were told to boost the women in their fights and to encourage

⁸⁰ Taylor 24

them. Some who led to the killings of the enemy or who died as martyrs were praised. some women even had medals or statues.⁸¹ We have to precise that these women were not seen as victims in Vietnam, they never considered themselves as such, even if they were tortured; even those who died were not regarded as victims, they were heroines. Sandra C.Taylor notes: “*International Women’s Day on March 8 was an appropriate time to celebrate the Vietnam’s revolutionary heroine*”.

Two major figures for heroism were Nguyen Thi Dinh and Nguyen Thi Binh. Nguyen Thi Dinh was the one who led the Ben Tre uprisings. She was also one of the founder of the NLF. She inspired all the movements of revolution towards the women and was a deeply Communist. She also came from the peasantry and understood the situation of the women. She became a model for the women in Vietnam, and as a strategist and tactician, she gave many useful advice to the women. She belonged to the PLAF and was promoted to General, which of course is quite rare for a woman. She was called the “Queen of the Viet Cong”, but never became a tough woman, she remained modest, and was moved when she learnt that there were martyrs⁸². She kept her femininity despite her important role among the men. Nguyen Thi Binh is often mistaken with Nguyen Thi Dinh. She was deeply rooted in the revolutionary movement because her grandfather too was a hero of the revolution against the French. She also was a founding member of the NLF. She was the representative of the NLF during the Peace Talks in Paris in 1968. She was a diplomat. She helped to publicize the NLF and dramatize the inequity of the American war. She travelled a lot in the Third world to speak about the Vietnam’s cause.⁸³ She became Minister of the Foreign Affairs in the PRG, Provisional Revolutionary Government, in the South.

But the awakening of the women cannot be seen just only through these two figures. Many women remained unknown, yet they participated actively in the war. To remain unknown was not a problem for them, they knew that they did not have to be known to work hard for revolution. They were unknown in their villages but they also did not know the names of their comrades. And it permitted them not to be arrested sometimes. With the Communist Party, women could have access to many fields that they could not ever imagine before. They could be recruited into the Party as “female cadres” thus becoming members of

⁸¹Taylor 90

⁸²*Ibid.* 123

⁸³*Ibid.*

the political wing. Their mission was to make propaganda in the villages, to convince the peasants to join their cause. More than 30 percent of the NLF cadres were women, and they held more than 30 percent of the positions on district and provincial level committees. In Yen Bay Province, women made up 50 percent of the cadres. Female cadres spent months with villagers, carrying out *dan van** propaganda activities, such as teaching politics and stirring up hatred of local officials for their tax-collecting methods, their torture and imprisonment of those suspected to be Communists.⁸⁴ These women lived among the peasantry also to be accustomed to their way of living, and thus they could melt with the population in case there was an attack. They were generally warmly welcomed but sometimes, women peasants did not like the way they talked. They said they talked “manly” and only talked about fighting, struggling and never talked about home and children.⁸⁵ These female cadres were very useful to spread the propaganda for the NLF and even if they could not have a political role like Nguyen Thi Binh for example, they were happy to achieve missions in the districts.

But the women ‘s conditions also developed in labour. Indeed, during the war, as men were in the battlefields, the women had to work in the fields where they performed new techniques for the crops. Arlene Bergman says that in the committee of the co-op there were 15 members, and 11 were women. In the textile industries, in the North, women have no manager and they organised their works as it pleases them. In 1960, there were 20% of women employees and by 1972, there were 42%.⁸⁶ In the South too, they worked in industry and they had a wage equal to the job they did. They could have rights and were not submitted to physical punishments from their managers. They were very happy to go to work and were proud to be the men’s equals. Concerning education too there were huge progress for the women. Many peasants were illiterate, and the female cadres taught them how to read, but if they could not learn, then they would learn by heart the messages for revolution by listening to them. There were also many teachers, in fact they had just learnt how to read but they could teach to the others; the teachers also had a particular relationship with the students, they were judged by the students each month and they could know if they had to improve their way of teaching or if they had to make changes in their teachings.

* **Dan van**: it means political action among the people

⁸⁴ Taylor 38

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 40

⁸⁶ Bergman 208

In the South for example in the Quang Tri province, many students were adults, and the majority were women; in the classrooms, there are 23 women and 2 men. There were also special schools for the elderly. In 1973, 85% of the population in Quang Tri were illiterate, and two years later they would eliminate this illiteracy.⁸⁷ The women are taught to read and there is no difference between them and the men in school. Moreover, this permitted them to have access to new abilities in their work. They could replace men as physicians and public-health personnel. By 1969, 33% of skilled workers and scientific cadres were women. They also taught in universities. Women became 60 to 80 % of the workforce in the North.⁸⁸ Education was important for them, because they could prove that they were equal to men and that they could learn as well as them. It is interesting to see that even in Occidental countries such as in the US the women did not have the same rights as men. If we take for example the situation of the women in the industries during the Second World War, they were really exploited by the men. In Vietnam, at this period, the women began to gain in rights and were not as exploited as in the US. Moreover, there is a great respect towards minorities such as the Jarais or other ethnic minorities. These people also fought with the guerillas and were welcomed in the Party too. They were despised by the South Government but the Communists included them as Vietnamese, not as parasites. This was not the case in the US, where Blacks were badly treated, had to work in the dirtiest places or the hottest. They could not even belong to trade-unions.

Women were also the equals of men in the family. When they went to work or when they fought, their husbands who were at home cared for the children, which was not the case before. There was also the abolition of polygamy which was a great victory among the Confucian way of life. The democracy in the family was also adopted, which meant that the men did not have control over their wives anymore and that nobody was superior to the other in the family. But even in France, it was not the case. Women had to ask their husband the permission to work until 1966, and they could not open an account at the bank until the 1980s. In the US too, there was no democracy in the family and women had to ask permission to their husbands if they wanted to do something. It is as if the husbands were fathers in fact... Thus, the Communist ideals are not as repressive as the Americans believed. Women could also divorce in Vietnam, when their marriage was forced, or when the husband was violent. Moreover, the majority of the lawyers in the North were women... There were not

⁸⁷Bergman 295

⁸⁸ Taylor 117

sexual repression of the women neither. They were treated with respect and even the former prostitutes of Saigon could find jobs. The female cadres did not despise them and they could have a new life and forget their pasts. They were rehabilitated and not considered as sexual objects or in margin to the society anymore. The statue of the entryway of the Women's Museum in Hanoi has a message from the role of the women in revolution seen by the Communist Party: "*Women are not only equal to men in society, they are also equal to their husbands. We will abolish inequality between husbands and wives. We will abolish polygamy. Women are equal to men in standing for the elections. Since they carry out the same work as men, women are to receive the same pay as men. We plan to liberate all women to be totally free and equal in society and in the families.*"⁸⁹

Feminism was strong in Vietnam, as we have seen with the Women's Association. But there was also the Women's Union whose President was Nguyen Thi Dinh in 1976. The purpose of the Women's Union was to help the children, caring for them, but also to help for the education of the adults and in the sanitary domain. Many women of the PRG were leaders of the Women's Union, and their principal message was to suppress the feudal system in which the woman was literally the man's slave. But, nevertheless, even if all the evolutions are positive, many women remain devoted to Confucianism, and the major problem comes from the men. It is in their nature, as Vietnamese, deeply-rooted with Feudalism, to consider women as inferior. And these changes were not welcomed by everybody in the same ways. There was still a lot of work to do among the men.

My grandmother also was deeply and fundamentally Confucian, and still is. To her, the oldest son is considered as the chief of the family when the father dies and there are a lot of disparities between the daughters and the sons. For example, when the family is gathered, men eat first, and women later. Even nowadays, after having lived in France for thirty years, she still recreates her microcosm of life in Vietnam, and she belongs to the ones who never accepted or could be equal to men. She told me she was raised like this and that she knew only this, thus, she applied it to her own family. Moreover, she had to support my grandfather's second wife, and was never angry to him. I told her it was an attitude of submission but she answered it was normal for her. She even considered the children of this second wife as hers, calling her "mother" and everything. My grandmother is the typical

⁸⁹Taylor 54-55

peasant of the North, chewing betel, and wearing black pajamas even nowadays at 78. She was totally devoted to her children and to her husband, and even if life had not been easy for her, she had the courage to raise sixteen children, ten were hers and six belonged to the other wife, whom preferred to work as maid in a rich family. Thus despite all the awakening of the women, and even if it showed that the Communists were in advance compared to the Occidental, yet there is a lot of work to do. My grandmother is the living example of this, and she proves that it had not quite well worked.

After having seen that the women were also warriors in Vietnam, fighting the American soldiers which they hated, we will now see that there were also American soldiers that did not want to participate in the war and that led anti-war movements. These men had the courage to say NO.

PART III

The anti-war movements or GI's resistance

Chapter 5. Racism turns Black Soldiers on the side of the Vietnamese

When the United States entered the war, all the men were mobilized to fight against the spread of Communism. The fear that Vietnam could be a Communist country, supported by the Soviet Union led the American government to mobilize the men to go there. The Government feared the domino effect: they thought that South East Asia would soon fall in the hands of Communism. Thus, it was an argument to invade Vietnam. Many soldiers were sent there, among who were the Black Soldiers. During the mobilization, many soldiers of minorities ethnic groups such as Latinos, or Blacks were sent to Vietnam. There were also poor white people that came from the Southern States. This was the results of the Project 100.000. The project 100.000 was created by the Defense Department in 1966 to allow minorities, Blacks in particular, to enlist. In fact, before the Project 100.000, only Black soldiers who were in the army as part of their career were in Vietnam. This project was a way to bring those soldiers away from the US due to the growing movements led by Black leaders calling for the liberation of the Blacks. It was not said this way, of course, the Blacks were just explained that the government permitted them to enlist by lowering the standards of recruitment. Thus, those who came from poor cities or minorities could enlist even if they had had no access to education. This was a way also to regroup the Black soldiers by promising them that they belonged to the United States and that they had to fight for their countries. During 1966 and 1969, as a result of Project 100.000, 246.000 soldiers were recruited among which there was 41% of Blacks .

Anyway, the Blacks were happy to fight for that war, thinking that if they proved to be good soldiers, then they would be well included among American society. They felt that they were really citizens, and they remembered that they also fought in the World Wars. They followed Du Bois, leader of the NAACP (National Association of the Advancement for Colored People), as he said: “ We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly.” Thus they entered the war, thinking that their fate would change, ready to combat for their country. Some also said that they were ready to go to war because it was a way to

escape the poor conditions in which they were living in the States. We have to bear in mind that at that time, there were still segregation among the Blacks in work, or at school. For example, Wallace Terry, a former journalist at Time, interviewed a Black soldier, named A.E. Woodley Jr. who told him that he wanted to escape the life he had in the United States: “I thought the only way I could make it out of the ghetto, was to be the best soldier I possibly could”.⁹⁰ Some others had the choice between going to the war or going to jail. These men were those who were arrested during the riots in the US. Wallace Terry writes: “ You’ll either join the Marines or go to jail.”⁹¹ What a Cornelian choice! But was it better to stay in jail when we know the conditions the Blacks suffered there? And sending them to war could also be interpreted as a way to confront them to death too and to consider them as cannon fodder. In the United States, a Black’s life did not worth the White’s life.

In Michael Moore Fahrenheit 9/11, for example, we can see him interviewing Senators asking them if their sons went to Iraq, and they said no, whereas the minorities did go. This shows that the rich, powerful man can spare his life or his son’s whereas the poor and moreover who comes from a minority is directly sent. He does not have the choice. And Peter Davis, in the film *Hearts and Minds*, an anti-war masterpiece, shows that General Westmoreland too believed that the lives of coloured people does not worth. General Westmoreland said that “The Oriental does not put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in Orient”. Well this sentence cannot be more racist, it is amazing to see such words, how dares he judge that an Oriental life is less important than a Westerner’s?

Moreover, in Vietnam, they highly respect the death, and the dead and they really praise their ancestors. This statement shows at the same time that even in the United States, life does not worth very much if we consider that they sent mainly minorities there, thus it we want to be clear, a Black or a poor White’s life does not worth anything too for them, it is as if a Black soldier’s life was not as important as a White’s. I was shocked by the word “cheap” in fact, life is not cheap or expensive, we cannot deal with that, it is not a product. And when we think that three millions people died in Vietnam, mainly civilians, then it appears to me that this statement is the one of a man that does not seem concerned for the killings his country

⁹⁰ Wallace Terry, *Bloods: an Oral history of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York, Random House, 1984) taken from the internet site <www.bsu.edu> August 15, 2008

⁹¹ John Maycock, “War within War” (The Guardian, 2001) taken from the internet site< www.guardian.co.uk> August 15, 2008

perpetrated. It is there a kind of extermination, to me, but it underlies also that by saying this, he justifies himself, not to have blood on his hands. Anyway, it is a real racist point of view to say so. Life is given to people equally, and we are also equal in death, everybody dies, and it is our common fate, for they are rich or poor, Black, Yellow or Whites, everybody has to die one day. And even if this brave General said that he has expressed himself inaccurately, the damage has been done, but it really showed how these Americans saw the war, he said what the other thought, and that's why also this war was so unpopular, it was just a conflict with poor peasants, barefoot and it was just not important.

But the climax was not the same once they arrived in Vietnam. Their dreams to fight hands in hands with the white soldiers soon disappeared to set the place for racism. Racism appeared not only towards the Vietnamese called "Gooks", it also set foot in the military itself. Racism towards the Blacks is deeply rooted and it was "transmitted" generations after generations. African Americans are seen as inferior to the Whites. They are not even considered as animals, they are beyond that. They are not human beings for these racists, they are like the Vietnamese are, people of coloured skin, and in this, they are inferior. The white supremacy was and still is the motto for these racists. The Blacks have always been mistreated in the army, as Pat Chin says: "*After World War I, they faced racist death squads like the Ku Klux Klan upon their return to home. They also went into combat in large numbers in World War II, even though the military continued to deny them adequate equipment and training.*"⁹² This statement shows us that everything was done consciously even if in 1948, President Truman desegregated the military.

Pat Chin also writes that the Black soldiers remained poorly trained and ill equipped.⁹³ This statement explains us that in fact, this desegregation was only voted as a law, not in facts. These soldiers were not respected at all and we are under the impression that the white soldiers let them ill equipped as to have arguments to prove that they were no good in the army, not capable to fight in wars. This could then show that Blacks were no good soldiers. We can suppose that they were mocked too, but, there, it is not a question of whether they were good or not, Blacks or Whites. If a soldier is ill equipped, even if he is white, he will encounter difficulties to fight. Here, the Black soldier faces two problems, he is Black and ill-

⁹² Pat Chin, "Africans Americans in the Military: the Struggle Against Racism and War" (article from the Workers World, 2002) taken from the internet site <www.hartford-hwp.com> August 15, 2008

⁹³ Chin

equipped so the whites could laugh at them strongly. That is pitiful moreover when we know that these men too died there, just as whites did. For the Blacks, the war in Vietnam was the first combat where they were reunited with the white soldiers and for the first time, there was no segregational units. In Vietnam, racism among the Black soldiers was rampant, just as torture on the Vietnamese was. They had to face insults from their comrades such as “nigger”; “brown boy” but not only. As in the United States, Martin Luther King was calling for the integration of the Blacks in the American society, hoping that his “Dream” could realize, he soon became the idol among the Black soldiers. But when he was assassinated in 1968, some White soldiers applauded his murder. For example Don Browne, a Black soldier said that he heard a white soldier saying “I wish they’d take that nigger’s picture off” when talking about Martin Luther King’s murder because he was always on TV. It is really intolerant from the whites to say so when we know that Martin Luther King was an advocate for peace among Blacks and Whites. But this statement also reflects that the “Dream” of MLK was a kind of “utopia” somewhere, because statements like this does not reflect any desire to perform a reconciliation between Blacks and Whites.

On the contrary, we are under the impression that the assassination of MLK was a kind of relief for these racists. At the Navy base in Cam Ranh Bay, these men made racist graffiti, such as “*I’d rather kill a nigger than a gook*”⁹⁴, cross burnings and were proud to say they were members of the Ku Klux Klan. But the most striking element is that this was tolerated in the camps, it is really proved that racism touched seriously the army. To annoy the Blacks, they also raised the Confederate flag, which symbolises racism, and the oppression linked to it, and they would put it on their tanks or jeeps. There was segregation inside the camps. The white soldiers did not want the Blacks to wear their Afro-style haircuts and claimed that they were not used in cutting Afro hair. Wallace Terry ‘s interview of a Black sailor says:” *When they caught a brother with an Afro, they just took him down to the brig and cut all his hair off and throw him to jail. All the beast motherfuckers walking around with their hair looking like goddamn girls and we can’t wear our hair motherfucking three inches long.*”⁹⁵ By claiming that they did not know how to cut Afro hairstyle hair appears to me as if a doctor was saying, “I can’t treat you, I don’t know how to treat Asians”. It is really striking to see such comments. It appears as if those men had contagious diseases. And Terry also reports that when a soldier (white) was writing “Peace” or “Fuck the War”, then the other soldiers were

⁹⁴ Maycock

⁹⁵ Maycock

either sympathetic for some, or they disregarded him but if it was a Black, it changed everything. The black was reprimanded for such words.⁹⁶ This difference of treatment between black and white soldiers appears also in the cultural domain. They could not hear the music they wanted to, read the books they wanted to. Terry explains that the country music prevailed on the soul music. And he is right when he says: “*If Blacks can account for up to 22% of the dying, they should have at least 22% of the jukebox music on Armed Forces radio*”.⁹⁷ Music was a way to escape from the daily life, with sounds of rifles, bombs or cries and it was also a useful way to give messages. The Blacks are moreover the precursors of music, they are the ones who have music inside their flesh. The majority of the famous songs comes from Black singers. Thus, by denying them the right to listen to music, there were no way for them to cut off from what was surrounding.

It was also reported that Black had to do the most difficult or the most dangerous tasks in the army, thus suggesting once again that slavery is not finished and that they were always first in the front, they were the first to be killed, as if they were shields for the white soldiers, but they were also charged with the rapes of the Vietnamese women. It is common statement among the soldiers to accuse the Black soldiers of raping the women. Many did so maybe, certainly too, but the whole majority were White men and they did it because they thought that the Vietnamese women were inferior to them. Thus they “re—created” the ambient racism they had of the Blacks on the Vietnamese. However, by constantly saying that the Blacks were rapists they could discharge themselves, but the problem in this way of doing is that the Black is already a victim, he has to bear all the atrocities of the world; everything bad is attributed to the Blacks. Angela Davis writes: “*The myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications*”⁹⁸.” Here this statement can be understood as a way of accusing the Blacks of rape in Vietnam not to be guilty themselves. And as the public opinion is “accustomed” with seeing the Black as inferior and as “bad”, then this accusation will add more hatred among them. This is a vicious circle. They are the “savages” who rape and torture women.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (Vintage, 1983) taken from the internet site <<http://lists.econ.utah.edu/>> July 24, 2008

But this was not true in Vietnam. It was easy to credit the Blacks with all the atrocities since nobody would contradict them; moreover, Vietnam was a kind of “neutral” territory for the white soldiers, and even if they sometimes could not show their racism in the United States, there they could, they were out of America, no one to defend the Blacks like Martin Luther King or Muhammad Ali. They felt free to target the Blacks.

Many Blacks saw this rampant racism as a way to increase their hatred towards the United States, and they soon understood that their combat was not in Vietnam but in the United States itself. They understood that the Vietnamese were also coloured people and that they, Blacks too, were fighting against coloured people. They did not want to because it would mean that they assimilate to the white soldiers and that they were racists too. Soon, among the Blacks soldiers, a feeling of resistance appeared. They saw that the Vietnamese too were suffering white discrimination and they soon began to identify with the enemy. They heard Martin Luther King ‘s words:”The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is the US government.”Moreover, they saw that the boxer Muhammad Ali refused to go to war by saying:”I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet Cong.They want me to go to Vietnam to shoot some black folks that never lynched me. Never called me nigger, never assassinated my leaders.” This sentence was spread among the Black troops and they felt that what Ali said was true. Muhammad Ali was not permitted to go to the War until the Project 100.000 because he failed at the tests. They said to him that he had problems in writing and spelling and that he had no education. But when the Project 100.000 passed, he was asked to go to Vietnam but he refused and as a consequence to this refusal, he was sent to jail. He was released then; but to Ali, it was also on the grounds of religion that he decided not to go there. He had discovered Islam and to him it was not good to fight. He followed the sayings of Martin Luther King who asked the Blacks to be “conscientious objectors”.

The Vietnamese were, like them, victims of racism. The Vietnamese then became their “brothers”, as Michael Herr says while talking to a Black soldier:” *If I were to firin’ back, I might kill one th’ brothers*”.⁹⁹ Another Black soldier also said:” Most of the people were like me...naive. We did not know what the hell was going on. Ho Chi Minh made a point that struck in many our minds. He said, “*It’s a civil war*”... *And it was obvious that we were the agressors because we were 14000 miles from home rather and vice versa. We were fighting*

⁹⁹ Michael Herr, Dispatches (London Picador, 1998) taken from the internet site < www.americans.org.uk > August 15, 2008

Charlie in his own backyard. We didn't really feel that we were fighting for our country. Half the brothers felt it wasn't even our war, and were sympathetic with Ho Chi minh."¹⁰⁰ This statement reflects that Black soldiers were not prepared, and that there was obvious racism too. They did not know why they fought there because they did not feel Americans. They were Americans on papers, or on their ID's but in reality not. They were still the slaves that came from Liberia. They were on the margin. Thus they could not feel patriotic for a country that never welcomed them as really Americans. Another interesting example is made by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the former basketball player, who wrote a book, *Giant Steps*, in which he talks about one of his friend who went to Vietnam. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar could not fight because he was too tall, a chance for him then...But he was really active with other Blacks sportsmen to call for anti-war and for the liberation of the Blacks. "*My man Munti, who had lived in my building, went to Vietnam all gung-ho (it means enthusiastic in Chinese language). He was a point-man on patrol in the jungle and loving it. then one day, his squad walked right into a horseshoe, a classic Viet Cong ambush where they let you move forward until you're almost encircled and then open fire from 270 degrees. Most of the guys in his unit were hit, and Munti got a flesh wound, some shrapnel in the mouth. They were pinned down, some guys dying when the VC stopped shooting and yelled to them in English, 'Why are you fighting us, soul brothers?'. As quickly as the ambush had begun it dispersed. Munti went wild after that . His political awareness had been magnified a thousand times; his life has been spared. From then on Munti decided he just wasn't going to fight anymore.*"¹⁰¹This extract lets us understand that the Blacks were also seen by the Vietnamese as their brothers, there were no hostility towards them. This also shows that this man realized that he was actually fighting against people who spared his life and thus, it meant that these people and the Blacks were in fact fighting for the same reasons.

The Viet Congs soon understood the underlying problem among the US Army, and discovered that the Blacks could help them because they shared the same hatred of the white American soldiers. Thus they urged the Black soldiers to join them or to stop fighting against them, underlining that their struggle was to be fought in US soil. Wallace Terry explains that the NLF dropped propaganda leaflets on the battlefields. It was written: "*If you go AWOL because you don't want to fight or because you can't put up with the army racism, the NLF*

¹⁰⁰ "Black GIs, Rebellion and the Fall of the Flag" (Revolutionary Worker # 994, 1999) from the internet site www.rwor.org August 15,2008

¹⁰¹ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *Giant Steps* (Bantam books, 1987) from the internet site www.revcom.us August 15, 2008

will get you out of the country."¹⁰² He also says that sometimes the Viet Cong screamed "Go home soul man" to the Blacks during the combat. This proves that the Viet Cong were also tricky; they played on this similar racism to make the Blacks feel conscious that the United States involvement in Vietnam was a way of fighting against democracy and that the Blacks too had no democracy in the United States, they thus shared the same struggle. It recalls us of the three-spronged tasks the guerillas had to accomplish, having to make propaganda to attract recruits on their side. In parallel with what Abdul-Jabbar said, Terry also says that: " *the Vietcong would shoot at a white guy, then let the black guy behind him go through, then shoot at the next white guy*".¹⁰³ Gerard Gill states that there was an "unwritten agreement" between the NLF and Black soldiers : " *recounting his chance encounter with an armed NLF soldier in Saigon, one black airman recalled that the NLF soldier "pulled a hand grenade on me. I put out my 38 but he told me 'this is not for you brother, it's for Charlie'"*"¹⁰⁴, Charlie being the name to refer to the Whites. This kind of solidarity between the Blacks and the Vietnamese as a whole suggests that they got along together, and in this sense they also got on well with Vietnamese women, they spared them too, not raping them or torturing them because they were also their "sisters".

Terry also gives an example of Emmanuel "Manny" J. Holloman of Baltimore who says: " *I'd go back the first chance I got. I would go right now, regardless of the situation, because I feel I belong there*". Terry explains that Manny was in charge of arranging for the repayment of the Vietnamese for accidental damages or killings. Manny was often referred to as a "gook lover" by his comrades. But Terry states that Manny was well treated by the Vietnamese, and allowed to freely go into the Vietnamese villages. He also married a Vietnamese woman in 1968. This thus means that the Vietnamese agreed that their daughters marry the Blacks because they did not represent a threat to them or because, contrary to the White American soldiers, they did not embody the enemy. Terry also gives the example of a soldier named Robert E. Holcomb who did not want to go to Vietnam and did all he could to escape being drafted. He was also chased by the FBI, for riots and for hiding AWOL soldiers. But the FBI proposed him to become an informant to them by infiltrating activist groups, which he refused preferring to go to the war instead. He says that he was "sworn into the army in manacles", but between having to denounce the activities in activist groups such as the

¹⁰² Maycock

¹⁰³ Terry

¹⁰⁴ Gerard Gill, *Black soldiers's Perspectives on the War* (Routledge, New York 1984) from the internet site <www.americansc.org.uk> August 15, 2008

Black Panthers or having to go to war, he chose. Thus he was sent to Vietnam. When he arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, he wanted to be sent to war zone, and was in charge of a small group. Terry says that he gave many details on the atrocities the American did to the Vietnamese, for instance, he says:” *his group actually picked up a man who has been charged with raping a Vietnamese woman and Holcomb himself decided to send him away*”.¹⁰⁵ well, this statement shows that the Black men were more concerned about the fate of Vietnamese, especially women and that they did punish, when they could, those who did atrocities. It suggests that they do not share the same image of what a Vietnamese women is like as the White soldiers. Holcomb says that he saw the Vietnam war as “*an attack on minority people, minority people being used to fight each other*”.¹⁰⁶ In this statement, Holcomb shows that he has understood everything. If we take into account that many Blacks died too, that they were sent there in a large number to fight another minority because of a “supposed domino theory” then Holcomb is alright. He understood the politics of the American Government.

The feeling of having been fooled on the really cause of the war, the feeling of racism they could see in the troops led these men to choose resistance. But they were strongly influenced by their leaders in the United States. Whereas Martin Luther King strongly opposed the war, his sudden death arose the hostilities between the Black soldiers and the whites. At this period, Malcolm X, one of the leader of the Nation of Islam was already dead in 1965, assassinated too because too disturbing. He, contrary to Martin Luther King, called for liberation of the Blacks by “any means”. He strongly opposed the Vietnam war because he was on the side of the Vietnamese. He said :”they want you to be non-violent here but they want you to be very violent in the South Vietnam”. He inspired lots of Blacks in Vietnam. He was a revolutionary who dared to call the United States as a racism nation, and he wanted the Blacks to be free from this racism society, urging them to rely on themselves and on their Black culture. Malcolm X was widely inspired by Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this book, Fanon explains that the colonized has to rebel against the concept of colonisation, and that he has to use violence to do so.

Violence is a means to create a “renewed man”, he also calls for a total rejection of the French and American occupation in the Third World, thus denouncing US imperialism. Malcolm X also, like Fanon, rejects US imperialism and calls for a revolution of the Blacks

¹⁰⁵ Terry
¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

against their oppressors, the White Americans. But there was also another movement which was really influent: the Black Panthers and by the way they too were inspired by Fanon. One of their members, Eldridge Cleaver denounced strongly the war, saying: "*Black Americans are asked to die for a system in vietnam, in Watts they are killed by it.*" This statement refers to an impoverished community in Los Angeles. Soon, the Blacks soldiers began to claim their roots by assimilating themselves to Black Panthers. The Black Power was there. They wanted to show their pride of being Black, their identity, they called themselves Bloods. Terry says: "*they would wear black gloves, black amulets but also slave bracelets*"¹⁰⁷ The imagery is highly symbolic here and requires attention. The act of wearing slave bracelets proves their pride of having had slaves as their ancestors, this act also reveals that these men felt they were not free in the United States, that they were still slaves.

Following the teachings of the Black Panthers was a revolution inside the camps. They turned out what could be a weakness, the color of their skin, into a strength. To show their pride they also put black flags on their jeeps, just as the White did with the confederate flag. Black is thus beauty. The Blacks troops formed militant bodies too, as Terry writes: "*Blacks In Action, The Unsatisfied Black Soldier, the Ju Jus, the Mau Maus*".¹⁰⁸ The Mau Maus referred to Malcolm X comparison of the vietnam war with the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, where they too fought against colonialism. These groups supported each other and studied black history but also listened to soul music, the music they were not allowed to listen to, they also talked about the Black Power, and the Civil rights Movement.¹⁰⁹ The organizations sometimes reunited 400 soldiers. Moreover, due to this racism, Black and Whites troops began to segregate even if the bars in Saigon. The Blacks reunited in the Khanh Hoi district and also wrote signs forbidding the Whites to come "No Rabbits allowed". But the problem that later came was that racism began to take another shape. It became more and more violent within the troops. The troops began to face each other with weapons. The Blacks attacked the Whites and vice versa; it is reported for example that at China Beach, some white servicemen started flinging rocks and abuse at blacks soldiers or at the Long Binh Stockade, in 1968, white officers who did not offer lifts to black soldiers were attacked and as a result of it, a riot formed.¹¹⁰ but these fights were strongly recommended by the Black panther Party who were told by the founder of the party, huey Newton to "turn their weapons against white

¹⁰⁷ Maycock

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

officers” or Kathleen Cleaver said also “ Right inside the US imperialist beast’s army, you are strategically placed to begin the process of destroying him from within”.¹¹¹ By saying this, the Black Panther Party urges the Blacks to fight against the American, not against the vietnamese anymore. There is a coalition against the whites, and some black troops even defect on the side of the Vietnamese, thus applying the Black Panther Party’s message which also asked them to fight along with the Viet Congs.

The resistance among Blacks soldiers was expressed not only in Black Power manifestoes, but also took the form of combat refusals. They did not want to go into battle and there were many desertions. Many Black soldiers were what we call “AWOL” which means “Absent WithOut Leave”. They preferred to flee rather than to fight people that were not their enemies. One black soldier even said that he was fleeing like he was a slave, some others decided to remain in Vietnam, and by 1971, there were 100 deserters in a district of Saigon nicknamed “ Soul Alley”. In an article of 1970, it was reported that in Soul Alley, the children have “Afro-Asian features” and that Black GI’s have their arms around Asian girls.¹¹² Soul Alley was also a den of iniquity, where those AWOLs were totally under drugs influence, mainly heroin . One ex-soldier describes his life there: “*you get up late, you smoke a few joints, you get on your Honda and ride around the PX, buy a few items you can sell on the black market, come back, blow some more grass, and that’s it for one day.*”¹¹³ This sentence shows that the daily task of a former soldier consists in doing whatever is against the law, as if he was traumatized by orders.

Moreover, these men attack violently other officers when they come to look for them to re –enrol them in the army. And last but not least, the area is anti-white, which means that if a white soldier dares to approach, then it is at his own risk. These forms of resistance were not as peaceful as we can understand but yet, it was a way to protest against a war that was “not theirs”. If we talk about the relationships towards Vietnamese women, then we can see that many Blacks got on well with them and were allowed to enter in their family, and with their resistance they prove to the vietnamese that they rejected the war, thus being different from the other American soldiers but above all their history looked like the Vietnamese ‘s. Vietnamese here is taken as a whole people, but among the Vietnamese, of course, the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² “Soul Alley: Home for Black AWOLs and Deserters”, TIME; 1970 December 14 taken from the internet site <www.time.com> August 15, 2008

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

women are concerned because by being on their side, the Black soldier does not perform any atrocity to the Vietnamese women, on the contrary he loves her and marries her... And by defecting on the side of the Vietnamese, they proved that they too were revolutionaries and that the struggle was not finished. Even if they could gain some consideration at the end of the war, and if the racism among the troops dissipated a little, when they returned to the US, they found that the public opinion has rejected the GIs and those who became “friendly” with time in the camps did not want to melt with them in the US soil. The climate of war is particular, it emphasizes the relations, it dramatizes the situations, there are violences but also friendship and reliability but once peacetime arrives, reality reappears, harder than ever...

Chapter 6. “The Whites also resist: they are not so bad...”

Resistance to the war began in the 1960s and soon spread largely in Vietnam. The major cause for this resistance was because the soldiers began to understand that they were told lies from the Government, and that the conflict was based on a false ground. They soon understood that the war was not to help the Vietnamese in letting them the right to have a Democratic country, but it was a way to spread US imperialism abroad. In addition to that, the image the Americans received in Vietnam was not the same that during World War II when they were seen as the liberators. A soldier says: “ *we saw the hate in the eyes of the local villagers who never welcomed us as “liberators”*. And the majority also understands that the war is not theirs and that there was too much money spent for a war that they were less and less sure to win. A resistant soldier says: “ *The vast resources and sums of money the government squanders in support of a corrupt dictatorship in Saigon belong to the American people. It should be used to improve America, to make our country the shining example all of us want it to be- a free society- free of poverty and hunger, free of racial oppression, free of slums and illiteracy, and the misery they produce.*”¹¹⁴ Thus, we can see that they strongly felt that they had been used and sent there to fight an “impossible war”.

The GIs United Against the War in Vietnam declare in their statement of aims: “ *We, as GIs, are forced to suffer most of all in the Vietnam fiasco. Many of us were drafted into the Army against our will-nearly all of us kept in its grasp against our will-all in order to carry out this illegal, immoral and unjust war. We are forced to fight hand to die in a war we did not create and in which we don’t believe.*”¹¹⁵ The GIs United was initially created by a Black soldier but the organization represented Whites, and Latinos too. The boys complained about being forced to engage recall us the Cornelian choice between “army or jail” but the major feeling of anger towards the Government came from the enlistees. They were promised to have a good training, a good classification and moreover a good assurance, but as we can see the promises were not fulfilled and it is reported that the majority of AWOL were enlistees and they represent 64% of AWOLs.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴GIs United Against the War in Vietnam, “Statement of Aims” taken from the internet site www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties _ August 15, 2008

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “1961-1973: GI resistance in the Vietnam War” from the internet site www.libcom.co.uk > August 15, 2008

What struck them too was that there were a lot of casualties, friends moreover and that the enemy caused them many problems: he was hard to fight, they admitted that they had difficulties within the battles, with the frequent ambushes, the booby traps, they were lost, they stated that the enemy was invisible for them. Yes, the enemy was invisible but at the same time everyone could be the enemy, there were Viet Congs everywhere, from the men to the women, the elderly, the children, everybody could put a trap or planify ambushes. The GIs say: *“This is not to mention the tens of thousands of innocent Vietnamese who are dying at our hands , many of them killed only because we can no longer tell the difference between them and our “enemies”*¹¹⁷. This statement shows that the soldiers could not bear anymore the situation and if they felt that the Vietnamese were victims, then it meant that they no longer believed in the war. From the moment when you feel pitiful or sorry for the enemy then you are not fighting the war, you regret it. This statement also recalls us the declarations of other GIs who said that to them “if a vietnamese was dead, it was a VC” or the famous “kill them all” as an instruction they received.

We can understand that little by little these first statements among which the VC is the bad, the “gook”, lately transformed as the VC victim. in a letter wrote to his family, a soldier wrote: *“ My spirit is with you and Nick, hoping that you children will not have to see, or do, some of the ugly and terrible things in the world today. I probably have seen the majority of it. Children being slaughtered like cattle. Women being mutilated and raped. The people, who want the best for their family and friends, being strung up and brutally murdered.”*¹¹⁸ This statement is moving but it sums up the war in two or three lines, the Vietnam war was nothing more than bloodshed and it was not a war between soldiers to soldiers, it was between technological , chemical warfare and civilians. Among the soldiers there are “blood-thirsty” men who torture and mutilate women for fun because it is funny, because she is a Commie, but fortunately some have a soul and a they understood that these people, women in particurlarly, old and young, suffered. Nevertheless, the major point that triggered this feeling of resistance was also that too many men died, for nothing, and among those who died in majority were the poorest from the working-class and the minorities.

Resistance appeared through various forms, active and passive. The individuals acts were the very first acts of resistance soon followed by a whole resistance.To begin, there was

¹¹⁷ GI's United Against the War in Vietnam

¹¹⁸ Bernard Edelman, Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam (W.W. Norton& Company, 2002) 218

what the most easy form: fragging. This form of resistance is a form of disobedience from a soldier. Fraggings consisted in murdering an officer who appeared as incompetent, unpopular and aggressive. They used a fragmentation grenade that they put inside the officer's tent. This method was largely used because there was no evidence when using it. It was not the case with a pistol for example, because with the bullets, the aggressor could soon be found.

Moreover, there were also bounties that went from \$50 to \$1000 on the heads of the soon-to-be victims as the Marine Colonel Robert Heintz writes, and also says that the underground newspaper GI Says "offered a publicly \$10000 bounty"¹¹⁹ on Lieutenant Colonel Weldon Hunnicutt, who ordered the attack on Hamburger Hill in 1969. David Cortright, in *Soldiers In Revolt*, also states that between 1969 and 1971, there were 520 attacks due to fraggings which resulted in the killings of 85 officers.

Calendar Year	Number of Assaults	Deaths
1969	96	39
1970	209	34
1971	215	12

Source: David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt* 44

But the fraggings were made in many steps, the officers were often warned before, but if they did not change, then the grenade blew them up, Dave Blalock, a Vietnam veteran, explains that the officer was "putting a lot of pressure on us to get some body count" and a night, after discussing about the fate of this commander, they left a grenade on his bunk saying "quit fucking with us", he continued to be awful with them and was warned another time "this time the pin was pulled apart way out of the grenade" but the man harassed them even more and about a week later, he was dead. And he then explains that after that "everybody was nice with them."¹²⁰ These violent attacks were made to express their resistance but also to express that they do not want to obey orders anymore. The fraggings are made with grenades, but we can easily imagine that other soldiers also used other methods to

¹¹⁹Colonel Robert D. Heintz, Jr., "The Collapse of the Armed Forces"(Armed Forces Journal, 7 June 1971) taken from the internet site <www.warbirdforum.com> August 15, 2008

¹²⁰ Dave Blalock, "1967-1973: GI resistance in Vietnam- a personal account by Dave Blalock" taken from the internet site< www.libcom.co.uk>August 15, 2008

kill some bad officers. by doing this, it results in a mini-guerilla inside the army. As their resistance were seen in a bad way, they did not have other methods to express their feelings about the war, so the main thing was to rebel against the one who embodies war, who prones war and who says that war is good. It was their way to protest.

Another way of resistance appears with sabotage. For example, it is reported it was in the Navy that sabotage appeared the most. The boys who did not want to be sent to Vietnam would use bolts and chains to unabled the ship to go and as a result of this sabotage, the ship had to be repaired, thus permitting the boys to stay longer at home, for example the sabotage of the USS Forrestal in 1972 permitted the soldiers to have a delay of two months. This sabotage can also be perceived as an alarming message of powerlessness towards the Government who had no qualms about sending men there. These sabotages threatened high-tech weapon systems, in the case of the USS Forrestal, it caused \$7.000.000 in damage because it wrecked the ship's radar center¹²¹. Some other forms of resistance in the battlefield were also to refuse combat, or going on patrol or to disobey orders. For example, Zinn explains that in 1967, an army doctor refused to teach Green Berets saying they were "*murderers of women and children*" and "*killers of peasants*".¹²² The Green Berets are well-known for their cruelty among the Vietnamese, they really are portrayed as the most cruel soldiers, teachings their techniques of torture to the Saigonese troops. Dave Blalock also says that his unit refused to go on patrol and that they used armbands to prove they too were anti-war soldiers. He explains that his comrade had returned from the United States and saw the growing anti-war protests there, they wanted to do the same.¹²³ Thus by seeing that they were supported in the US, the feeling of resistance decupled and they really felt that they were not alone to refuse this war. Cortright also reports that the men of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry refused to take a dangerous route which was surrounded by Viet Congs. The debate was also transmitted on television by CBS.¹²⁴ And in 1969, in the Infantry, an entire company sat down on the battlefield. The famous expression "search and destroy" was replaced by "search and avoid"missions which meant that they intentionally avoid to fight with the Vietnamese, they replaced these fightings by pot parties that could last three days.¹²⁵ Once again, new refusals, the troops are really united, they do not give in. The troops are really

¹²¹ "1961-1973: GI resistance in the Vietnam War" from the internet site< www.libcom.co.uk> August 15, 2008

¹²² Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (Harper-Collins, 2003) 493

¹²³ Dave Blalock

¹²⁴ Cortright 36

¹²⁵"1961-1973: GI resistance in the Vietnam War" from the internet site< www.libcom.co.uk> August 15, 2008

determined to prove that their resistance is well-prepared and that it will last but it also shows that they wanted to survive too to this war, and by refusing the combats, they could avoid being killed or injured.

Desertion is also a form of resistance that appears frequently. I have said before that the AWOLs were very often seen among Black soldiers but concerning the White troops too desertion and AWOLs appeared. In 1969, the desertion rate increased considerably and by 1970 it was reported that the US Army had 65.643 deserters and by 1970, 52.3 % of soldiers fled. Concerning the AWOLs, one GI went AWOL every three minutes and from 1967 to 1972, there were 354.112 soldiers that left their posts¹²⁶ The deserters were punishable for this act but in the act of desertion, the underlining message is survival. Desertion means no fighting and thus an escape to death.

Cortright makes a distinction between “GI movement” and “GI Resistance”, GI Resistance being inside the battlefield and GI Movement being those who would “*exert pressure on politicians and the higher echelons of the military*”.¹²⁷ The GI movement ‘s goal was to be known inside the US, they led peace demonstrations, signed petitions, built organizations, Cortright says. But their steps were restricted, they did not have to speak publicly or to make public declarations, and those in the troops could not attend demonstrations in a foreign country because they could face punishment, according to Cortright. Thus, a tricky soldier decided to create the coffeehouse concept, where the soldiers could come and talk about their refusals to go to war , to simply relax. The first coffeehouse opened in Fort Jackson in South Carolina in 1968 and the concept spread in other states.¹²⁸ These coffeehouses are reported by Zinn as “ a public nuisance” and closed by court action. But the soldiers did not lack ideas to continue their missions. They soon decided to demonstrate, locally and nationally, to show their support to those who were in Vietnam but also to be vividly heard.

Another way of protesting came from underground newspapers. Zinn explains that by 1970, fifty were circulating among which there was for example the Vietnam GI in Chicago or the Last Harass at Fort Gordon. He says that these newspapers printed antiwar articles, told

¹²⁶ Matthew Rinaldi, “1963-1974: the Olive-Drab Rebels: Military Organising During the Vietnam Era” (Radical America Vol 8, 1974) taken from the internet site www.geocities.com August 15, 2008

¹²⁷ Cortright 50

¹²⁸ Zinn 494

how to resist military domination and gave news about the harassment of GIs and practical advice in the legal rights of servicemen.¹²⁹ Cortright also states that the anti-war soldiers published newspapers, he explains that there were about 250 newspapers circulating during the war and that even if some did not last long, *Vietnam GI* newspaper appeared for several years, with three thousand subscribers in Vietnam.¹³⁰ There were ten thousands subscribers among all the GIs, in Vietnam and in the United States. The founder of the Vietnam GI was Jeff Sharlet, who soon understood that the war in Vietnam was a “civil war” as he said. His newspaper was a great success and even had media coverage but when Sharlet died prematurely at the age of 27, the publication stopped. Thus we can understand that the resistance had to be well-organized to work, it has to spread to be fully recognized.

Some groups formed too among the anti-war soldiers such as the VVA of Bob Muller for example. But the most famous organization is the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, it was founded in 1967, by six veterans, after a peace demonstration. They wanted to create the first organization that would regroup Vietnam Veterans because it did not exist at that time. They soon became famous and a lot of members joined them. In 1971, there were some 20.000 members in this organization among which there were 2000 GIs in action in the battlefield. They held the Winter Soldier Investigation in January 1971 in Detroit. The Winter Soldier Investigation was an event that was held publicly to denounce the crimes committed during the Vietnam war, and the various atrocities that were done there. The goal of the VVAW was to inform the people on the Vietnam war but also to condemn the policies that led to this war. They also wanted to arouse the anti-war movements in the United States, and to make people see, through these atrocities, that the war was not justified there. Soldiers had to testify about what they did or saw in Vietnam. They confessed about the rape, torture, mutilation, bombings and all that could be used to destroy the enemy. And some of the testimonies were really amazing. They told of the My Lai massacre, they told of the racism either the Blacks felt, or the Vietnamse felt. Everything was said, it was a kind of big confession there but nevertheless, the Winter Soldier Investigation was a way to speak the unspeakable, to let people know what happened, to let them understand that war is not good. But the mission of the VVAW cannot be reduced to denouncing the atrocities only.

¹²⁹ Zinn 494

¹³⁰ Cortright 55

One of the most symbolic movement led by the VVAW was to occupy the Statue of Liberty in December 1971. Doing thing was a strategic way to relate the Statue of Liberty with the anti-war movement because it is the Statue in itself which inspires liberty. Nevertheless, it created a great success. But the VVAW not only protest, it also helped some men, racist and sexist by forming groups where they could talk freely. Arlene Bergman states that they published an article in their newsletter called “the Veteran” : “ *we rarely speak of the encourage that our sisters have to bear when they walk in the streets whereas they are targets for men: how many women have been raped, and what did we do concerning this? Even if the system in which we are living is the main culprit for the oppression among women, we are to bear our own responsibilities. We have to try to understand what our sisters have to face, how they should desire the independence which men enjoy, whereas everything is done in their disfavour. We have to rally to their cause, the cause that mean total emancipation for women* ». ¹³¹ In this article, we can see that the VVAW are on the side of the Vietnamese women, that they understand what they felt while they were raped and thus this shows that there is some progress among the man. That the women’s concerns seem to draw his attention too.

Thus we can see that the VVAW not only provide the troops support, but it also helped the men to take into account that the women were equals to the men and that they were not inferior to them as they always believed. But an important thing is not to confuse all the men together. Some are not violent or rapists, and do understand the difficult relationships of men and women. But the struggle will have no end, the whole life is a matter of men and women...

Resistance, in all the wars, has turned to be the way for people to protest. For the Vietnam War, these men decided to protest because the subject of the war was not fair. It was a way to survive too, and to show that they were ready to put the Government on knees. The resistance highly contributed to the end of the war. There was in a sense a war within a war there but these men, being totally radicalised when they came back also suffered in the United States. Even if the anti-war movement had spread among civilians and students, the Vietnam War was not a popular war and the GIs were not welcomed with flowers at home either....

¹³¹ Bergman 113 Translated by author

CONCLUSION

To conclude this study, I would say that we have analysed the conflict in both sides: the men and the women. We have seen that men were capable of the worst atrocities among the Vietnamese women but this does not mean that all the men have to be blame too. The one who is to be blamed is the American Government, who decided to intervene there. The American government is too much concerned with what happens outside, and does not see that his own country needs its support. The Vietnam war was a total failure, it has created so many victims, so much harm and it has traumatized the veterans but also the Vietnamese. Yet, it did not stop the Americans to get involved in conflicts that did not interfere with them later. The chemical warfare used in Vietnam showed that there were roughly eight millions tons of bombs and defoliants thrown among the citizens of Vietnam, the “Operation Rolling Thunder” was a success indeed. But this chemical warfare also demonstrates that the war is not ended in Vietnam, even nowadays, people are still under the influence of this. In the agricultural field for example, the lands were completely poisoned and destroyed. It took a long time for the peasants to recover from this. Water was polluted, rice paddies, the aftermath of the war did not bring peace there on the contrary, many people felt this trauma nowadays too. The Defoliants such as Agent Orange and its brothers Agents Blue and White, did not only polluted the areas and destroyed, they also eradicate the vegetations, the environment. The luxurious landscape of Vietnam were transformed into a “Star Wars” landscape, nothing around there, destruction only and death. The women there suffered while under the involvement of the GIs but after too. They had to bear deformed children, had to endure stillbirths.

Sandra C. Taylor who went there twenty years after the end of the war saw that there were still contamination among the lands and that people had developed many diseases, the women had Siamese babies, or stillbirths and the babies that died were highly monstrous. So, thank you America. The napalm also killed many people. No one can ignore the photo of the girl who was burnt by napalm, running naked because her back was totally burnt, this image was known worldwide and was also seen in *Hearts and Minds*. This was reality in Vietnam, not a fiction. Many bombs, known as Cluster bombs, never exploded, and continue to harm the peasants working in rice paddies or the children walking in the countryside. The result of the war is catastrophic there, many people continue to die with these bombs, they are

also handicapped by losing a leg for example. But the United States did not only this disaster among the civilians but also brought their way of life there. The drug abuse is very high in Vietnam, there are syringes everywhere in the street. My uncle went there last year, for the holidays, and was afraid for his children, he said that AIDS had developed dramatically there. The syringes everywhere in the street could be very dangerous for young children. And he said that one neighbour there told him that his son was infected with AIDS by a friend. He was about to go to the United States and was sent to do tests to see if he was able to immigrate to the US and was happy to inform his friends of this. He was to go there with his brother. But then, one of his friend asked him if he wanted to drug a little bit, to celebrate this. He said no because he had never taken drugs and the “friend” pushed the syringe in his arms by force. They both did not know that they had AIDS, and when the man went to do the tests, he was said that he could not go to the US because he had AIDS, but his brother could. My uncle told me that he saw the guy, he was completely tired because the treatment is so expensive that he could not afford it. This example shows that the drug-trade there is really spread and dangerous.

Of course, we cannot blame the US for all this but they have developed the use of drugs there too, that, we cannot deny. Ho Chi Minh City, former Saigon, now looks like New York, it has many buildings, it is highly represented with Hilton, Mc Donald’s and all the big trademarks that come from the US but when we leave the city to go in the countryside, children sometimes do not have shoes, and all the material to go to school. Their clothes are sometimes worn. My aunt went there for her work and gave pens to children that came to her, they were so happy she said, she gave them sweets and money. These children refused the money, they said they could not take it. They also told her that some of them worked too, they sold pastries in the market during the week-ends, my aunt was moved to tears. Indeed, with our society of consumption, the children on this generation are used to “Playstation” and other video games and are sometimes capricious, they want a “GameBoy” but not the oldest, the newest, the most beautiful and they do not even play for a long time with it because soon another one appears . They do not content themselves with one game or a book which would be far useful to them. In Vietnam, some children do not have this, and they refused the money my aunt gave them. These kinds of behavior really put you down on Earth...

This study also made me realise that what was happening in Iraq was the same. The same so-called help for democracy, the unfair motives to go there, the conflict lasting for

more than five years now. I also found parallels with Abu Ghraib, but I was not the only one of course. The tortures during the Vietnam war were done by Americans but also by the Saigonese, and these men were taught these tortures by the Green Berets. Even if the tortures were sometimes indirectly made by the GIs, well in Iraq, the soldiers did it themselves. These tortures are really vicious, racist and intolerable. When we know that sexuality is a taboo there because of the influence of Islam, that homosexuality is a crime for them because it is against nature, putting the men naked, having to touch one another is really vicious and sadistic. It was probably “funny” like it was “funny” in Vietnam to put oil in women’s genitals once they were dead or when they used their “penises” to see if the women did not hide messages or something. It was “funny”. Funny for whom? Funny to humiliate people, funny to see the men cry asking for pity, funny to attach them like dogs? It is just disastrous. The human being amazes sometimes. What is the pleasure in doing this? Just to consider them as animals, like in Vietnam.

From the moment when the enemy is dehumanized, the soldier does not have feelings anymore, and they are trained to have no more feelings. Just as they called the Vietnamese “Gook” and treated them like sub – human people they did the same in Iraq. There are many accounts of rapes, torture among the women too. This male-domination, the superiority among the foreigners, moreover if they are Muslims, this recalls Vietnam. It is another example of how far can go the human’s stupidity, and it tends to approach infinity indeed. The anti-war movement also grows in the United States against war in Iraq, but we never hear it on the media or a little. George’s intention is not to be the responsible of this stagnant war, he is the hero, the one who defies terrorism, and so what? Nothing happens, the involvement in Iraq made many killings among the Iraqi population, and now there are guerillas there. Is it George happy? Certainly. Many GIs come back to United States in coffins, or are severely wounded, they commit suicides, they prefer desertion, but nevertheless, he does not understand. This war is a failure too and the US imperialism, involving in others countries to appear as saviors is just upsetting. It has to understand that proning the Human Rights there or there is not enough, they also have to apply it to themselves.

Anyway, this study also permitted me to analyse deeper this country and my grandmother was a useful help for me. I soon became familiar with the names of the cities, or figures and this was a way to spend some good times with my grandmother, Ba. Ba means grandmother in Vietnamese language. I wanted to study this conflict without taking any side.

I wanted to remain neutral, not to tend to go too much on the side of the Vietnamese, but little by little, I soon realised that it was not possible for me not to support my people. So this is my point of view , and it does not mean that everybody shares this view. Everybody thinks what he wants, but for me, seeing the pictures of My Lai, with elderly people or young children let me think of my family. I said to myself, it could have been my mother or it could have been my grandmother. Moreover, my mother also told me that she had shrapnel in her body, because a soldier was playing with his grenade. She told me that she had to go to buy something for my grandmother and she took her little brother with her. She saw a soldier playing with his grenade, throwing it in the air and catching it but it was normal for her, it was not the first time she saw it. Then it fell and exploded, a young girl who was playing was dead, my mother had some pieces of grenade in the arm and the knee. It was a fragmentation grenade I suppose because it lets pieces when it explodes and people can be harmed by it . My mother told me she was lucky, thanks to the wind that was blowing, all the pieces went on the other side, otherwise she would have been seriously wounded. But I do not want to imagine the worst. She said that death was surrounding everywhere there. Some of her friends died too, they were youth, and hit by bullets.

My mother also said to me that she heard people giving nicknames, or having kinds of code between them, these people were against the Viet Congs. They used these codes not to be heard by them. For example, my mother said she had very often heard the name “Dap Mo” which meant there was a bomb attack. A sentence using “Dap Mo” would be : “I’ve just come from the market but the road was blocked because a bus was “dap mo””. Or they used that to refer to the soldiers of the North too sometimes. My mother told me that she did not understand at first, but soon, she could warn her mother saaying that she had heard these codes. Their neighbours were also of those who used these words.

In a nutshell, I just wanted to pay a tribute to my family too, to have their points of view and to understand myself why there were not many studies on the side of the Vietnamese. On television we are under the image of the “remasculinization” of the man, with Rambo and his friends like John Wayne. Susan Jeffords, in *The Remasculinization of America*, explains that this remasculinization appeared to rise the morale of the veterans and for them to think that they were not ridiculous too. But I think that it is also a way to change History in their favor, by showing Rambo killing some bad VCs or John Wayne’s praise for the Green Berets. It is a way to rewrite the war, saying that they won and that they were

heroes. But we cannot rewrite reality, facts are facts. It was a combat between David and Goliath, and once more David won....

APPENDIX

Year	Fragging	'Combat Refusal' convictions	World-wide figures for US Forces		Vietnam Drug Offences
			AWOL	Desertion	
	a	b	c	d	e
1965			Not available	Not available	0.25 per 1000
1966			Not available	Not available	0.25 per 1000
1967			46.8 per 1000	13.2 per 1000	0.25 per 1000
1968		82	138.5 per 1000	15.7 per 1000	4.5 per 1000 (marijuana) 0.068 per 1000 (opium)
1969	239	117	46.9 per 1000	21.1 per 1000	8000 arrested
1970	383	131	66.3 per 1000	25.8 per 1000	11058 drug cases (1146 hard drugs)
1971	333	Not provided	84.0 per 1000	33.9 per 1000	7026 hard drugs
1972	58	Not provided	74.9 per 1000	27.5 per 1000	
1973			77.0 per 1000	24.6 per 1000	

This document accounts for the different forms of resistance within the battlefield¹³²

¹³² Charles Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man: The Rank and File in Today's Military* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970) taken from the internet site www.americansc.org.uk August 15, 2008.

Some Images about the subject



GI's resistance. Source: internet site www.flickr.com September10, 2008



Vietnamese woman, warrior. Source: internet site www.casahistoria.com September 10, 2008



Blacks Soldiers Solidarity. Source: internet site www.timeout.com September 10, 2008



My Lai Massacre, the young woman behind with the boy in her arms is going to be raped by the US soldiers. Source: internet site www.quakeragitator.wordpress.com September 10, 2008



Phi Nhung, Vietnamese singer. She is Amerasian and was one of the children left behind after the war.

Source: internet site www.yeunhacvang.com September 10, 2008

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