

TELLING STORIES: THE VIETNAM WAR DOCUMENTARY

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

‘Telling Stories: The Vietnam War documentary’ is an original piece of research that addresses a much-neglected area in documentary film. The study encompasses twenty-six documentaries produced by ten different countries and examines them in terms of international perspectives, documentary form and function, and political debates. The first part of the thesis explores the international political context and the various rivalries and alliances that played a part in the conflict. The second part provides a detailed examination of the twenty-six documentaries providing both textual and contextual analysis. The third part is devoted to film theory and cultural theory.

The study interrogates the challenge the Vietnam War documentary poses to current categorisation systems. It explores the complex nature of documentary - presenting an argument with evidence, representing reality and storytelling. Ethical issues with regard to the filming and exhibition of images that contain human suffering, dying and death are also considered by this study. A generic examination of these films reveals the Vietnam War documentary’s relationship with its predecessors of the First and Second World Wars and with other genres, both fiction as well as non-fiction. The study focuses on what is distinctive about the Vietnam War documentary and particular attention is given to the impact of the global media explosion as well as the significant contribution made by Western non-government-sponsored filmmakers. The thesis also examines these documentaries in terms of propaganda techniques, revolutionary Third Cinema and postcolonial debates concerning the Oriental and the ‘other’.

‘Telling Stories’ offers an expanded understanding of the Vietnam War documentary – politically, culturally and generically. It is not only a product of the war but of a much wider international political arena. The Vietnam War documentary has been influenced by national film cultures, traditions and developments in fictional as well as non-fictional cinema. This study reveals that the Vietnam War documentary is a vibrant genre that encompasses different documentary formats and aesthetic styles; as well as traditional, contemporary, and avant-garde techniques.

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INTRODUCTION

While British, American and German World War II documentaries continue to attract scholarly attention, academic studies concerning the Vietnam War documentary are scarce and limited to a handful of American films or recognized filmmakers. Yet a large number of film documentaries were produced during the Vietnam War, not only by the United States of America (USA), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), but also by a variety of international filmmakers from countries such as Australia, Canada, Cuba, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Sweden and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

With only a handful of academic essays available on the subject, it is surprising to find that no comprehensive survey or in-depth analysis of the Vietnam War documentary has been provided to date. Moreover, there is no study devoted to the war documentary as a genre and few Vietnam War historians offer an international view of the conflict. Placing these films in context is only the first part of a much larger project aimed at exploring who produced these documentaries and why, as well as how these films tell their stories and what they tell us about the war. These films are highly revealing on a number of levels and they present us with a valuable opportunity to expand our knowledge of the Vietnam War and the Vietnam War documentary, as well as the war documentary and the documentary form. While this research proposes to make a significant contribution to the fields of Vietnam War history, documentary film history and theory, the author readily acknowledges that this research is but a first step rather than final word on the subject.

‘Telling Stories’ has a dual purpose to examine the politics of war as well as the politics of representation. This research project is driven by a number of fundamental questions with the underlying hypothesis that the Vietnam War documentary is a complex genre that is not only a product of the war but also of a much wider international political context. In addition, it has been influenced by national film cultures, traditions and developments in fictional as well as non-fictional cinema and the media, in particular, television. The second hypothesis is that the Vietnam War documentary not only challenges current modes of documentary categorisation but is also a multi-faceted genre that requires alternative theoretical approaches in order to understand the wider significance of this body of texts.

Using the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) directory, national collections were contacted and many offered assistance in obtaining the necessary titles for this research, including the American Library of Congress, the Australian Film Commission, the British Film Institute, and the National Film Board of Canada. Other private collections such as Third World Newsreel and International Historic Films, as well as educational institutions and organizations such as The Imperial War Museum and Educational Media On-line, also proved invaluable in providing titles for the study.

This research examines twenty-six Vietnam War documentaries made *during* the conflict and produced by ten different countries: Australia, Canada, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), France, German Democratic Republic, Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), UK, USA, and USSR. It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of all the Vietnam War documentaries produced but rather an in-

depth generic, narrative, textual and contextual analysis using a broad selection of international documentaries.¹

Parameters of the Thesis

Many Western Vietnam War historians differ in their time-frames as to the exact beginning and ending of the war. Some Western historians refer to this period of American involvement as the ‘Second Indo-Chinese War’ or the ‘Second Vietnam War’. It should also be noted that Vietnamese historians refer to this period as the ‘American War’, but again, time-lines can differ.² For the purposes of this study, however, the starting point chosen is 1965 as it coincides with the arrival of American fighting forces, and ends at 1975 with the fall of the South Vietnamese capital and the evacuation of the last American personnel from their embassy in Saigon.

Not surprisingly there seems to be no definitive list of Vietnam War documentaries made during the war. Many documentary historians, such as Eric Barnouw and Richard Barsam, tend to highlight films they consider significant. The most extensive listing to date can be found in Linda Dittmar’s and Gene Michaud’s *From Hanoi to Hollywood* but even this listing has proved to be incomplete.³ While a number of familiar

¹ Attempts to contact the national collections of China, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, and Vietnam have been unsuccessful to date. Although responses have been received from the National Film Archives of Hungary, Poland and the USSR, accessing the documentaries has proved difficult, especially as copying is not permitted.

² Luu Doan Huynh, ‘The American War in Vietnamese History’, in *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, ed. by Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (London: Sharpe, 1993) pp.243-247 and John Tran, ‘Vietnamese Cultural Production During the American War’, in *The Vietnam Era*, ed. Michael Klein (London: Pluto Press, 1990) pp.199-211. Tran uses the period 1965-1975.

³ Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (eds) *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (London: Rutgers, 1990) lists 100 documentary films made during the period (1965-1975). Jeremy Devine’s *Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second: a critical and thematic analysis of over 400 films about the Vietnam War* (London: McFarland, 1995) lists around fifty documentaries, including some foreign-language documentaries, however, Devine’s analysis is limited to English-language fictional films. Jean Jacques Malo and Tony Williams’s *Vietnam War Films* (London: McFarland, 1994) lists 600 feature films

documentaries are included in the study there is a significant portion of less well-known documentaries and even new material not acknowledged by any previous study.⁴

The war documentaries chosen for examination were filmed either in North Vietnam or South Vietnam *during* the conflict and often at close quarters to the fighting. Although some documentaries contain images from North and South, there were travel restrictions imposed by both governments on journalists and filmmakers alike, therefore few filmmakers had access to both sides during the conflict. These documentaries focus on the war's impact on Vietnam and its people as well as foreign troops and personnel drawn into the conflict. As they were produced during the war these documentaries offer contemporary historical perspectives. They offer first-hand accounts, often very personal testimonies of the conflict, and can be regarded as primary documents. Some of these documentaries are filmed entirely on location and offer original material. Other filmmakers offer a combination of original material with stock footage from other sources. There are notable exceptions whereby the documentaries are made up entirely of stock newsreel footage as their filmmakers never actually set foot in the war zone. Although these filmmakers may not be able to claim the same status as those who bear witness, nevertheless, their films remain pertinent in terms of a generic analysis.

The thesis concentrates on the documentaries produced for the big screen for two reasons: first, because many of these documentaries found both national and international audiences, and second, because this is the last time that the war

and television shorts (1939-1972) from the USA, Vietnam, France, Belgium, Australia, Hong Kong, Great Britain etc., but no documentary titles are included.

⁴ Numerous US and Australian military films have been located yet not identified in any previous filmography, four of which are discussed later in the thesis: *Action in Vietnam* (Australia, 1966), *The*

documentary would be produced for and exhibited widely to cinema audiences. Unlike documentaries of World War II and the Korean War, the Vietnam War documentary faced stiff competition from the increasing proliferation of the new visual medium of television.

The documentaries chosen for scrutiny are *Foreign Correspondents visit The National Liberation Front* (National Liberation Front, South Vietnam, 1965), *Why Vietnam?* (USA, 1965), *Action in Vietnam* (Australia, 1966), *The Anderson Platoon* (Fr/USA, 1967), *A Face of War* (USA, 1967), *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* (Cuba, 1967), *A Nation Builds Under Fire* (USA, 1967), *The Unlucky Country* (Australia, 1967), *Cadeau Sanglant* (aka *As Saigon Slept*, South Vietnam, 1968), *A Day of Plane Hunting* (North Vietnam, 1968), *The Gentle Hand* (USA, 1968), *Inside North Vietnam* (UK/US, 1968), *Pilots in Pyjamas* (East Germany, 1968), *Reportage from North Vietnam* (USSR, 1968), *Struggle For Life* (National Liberation Front, South Vietnam, 1968), *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam* (North Vietnam, 1968), *Young Puppeteers of Vietnam* (National Liberation Front, South Vietnam, 1968), *The Battle of Khe Sanh* (USA, 1969), *Communist Massacre in Hue, South Vietnam* (South Vietnam, 1969), *In the Year of the Pig* (USA, 1969), *The People's War* (USA, 1969), *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* (Cuba, 1969), *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (Canada, 1970), *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* (North Vietnam, 1970), *Vietnam! Vietnam!* (USA, 1971), *Hearts and Minds* (USA, 1974).

Unlucky Country (Australia, 1967), *A Nation Builds Under Fire* (USA, 1967), *The Gentle Hand* (USA, 1968).

Excluded from this analysis are documentaries primarily concerned with national protest movements, war crime confessionals such as *Interview with My Lai Veterans* (USA, 1972) and *Winter Soldier* (USA, 1972), and Vietnam veteran biopics such as *Terry Whitemore, For Example* (UK/Sweden, 1969), as they tend to focus either on the internal conflicts of the individual or countries concerned. Also excluded are docu-dramas such as *Tell Me Lies* (UK, 1968) made by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company that play out intellectual debates about the war. Similarly excluded are those documentary films commissioned for television such as Michael Grigsby's *I was a Soldier* (UK, 1970) produced by Granada Television.⁵

Even with the benefit of these strict parameters and a synthesis of available filmographies and responses from national and independent collections it is impossible to provide a definitive list of documentary production within each country.

Certainly, North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam produced a significant body of war documentary films, over a dozen. In contrast, and from current filmographies, it would appear that the South Vietnamese regime focused on producing large quantities of newsreels rather than documentaries. Only two documentaries produced by the South Vietnamese government have been identified pertaining to this period and both are included in this study.⁶

⁵ Broadcast in the UK, 28 April 1970, ITV channel. This thirty-eight minute colour documentary reveals the difficulties of three young Texan men adjusting to life back home after their tour in Vietnam.

⁶ See the filmography in Sarah Rouse's article, 'South Vietnam's Film Legacy' in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.6, No.2, 1986, pp.211-222.

The United States Government was by far the biggest producer of film documentaries on the war, yet these were mainly for military consumption. Scores of armed forces documentaries were produced by the US Department of Defense, in particular, as part of their Vietnam War ‘Big Picture’ Series. Most of these documentaries concerning the army, navy and air force were usually no more than twenty-five minutes long. In complete contrast to the large body of Government documentaries, or indeed, to the plethora of US television network documentaries produced by companies such as CBS, there appears to be only four non-government-sponsored documentaries produced for the big screen in the US during this period that fit the criterion of this research, and all four are discussed in detail later in Chapter Two, Part IV.

The GDR and Cuba each produced several significant documentaries due, in the main, to the sustained political interest of key documentary filmmakers who repeatedly travelled to Vietnam to produce films about the war.⁷ However, it would appear that countries such as Australia, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom each only produced two or three relevant documentaries for the big screen, and these include both government-sponsored and independently-produced films. Again, several relevant filmographies and articles reveal that a number of documentaries on the war were made by and for the national television networks of each of these countries, the significance of which will be discussed later in Chapter Three.

⁷ The other politically-committed documentary filmmaker to visit North Vietnam was the veteran Dutch filmmaker, Joris Ivens. Unfortunately, the author was unable to access copies of his two documentaries, *La ciel, la terre* aka *The Threatening Sky* (Fr, 1966) and *Le 17e Parallele: La guerre du peuple*, aka *The 17th Parallel: the People's War* (Fr, 1968). Ivens also contributed to the documentary *Loin du Viêt-nam* aka *Far From Vietnam* (Fr, 1967) which was made by a collection of international filmmakers, however, this documentary was not included in the study as it was mainly concerned with moral and intellectual

A detailed analysis of the twenty-six documentaries chosen for scrutiny can be found in Chapter Two with a full filmography at the end of the thesis along with an additional filmography of all other Vietnam War documentaries referred to in the study.

Aims and Objectives

The first aim of this research is to reveal the breadth, depth and diversity of films in this category, most of which have lain unrecognized and untapped as resources by the historian, film historian and film theorist.

The second aim is to provide a multi-national perspective, examining the political context and factors influencing their production, much of which is steeped in Cold War alliances and rivalries. This research explores how these documentaries not only underline the worldwide interest in the Vietnam War but also reveal the political interests of their respective governments and filmmakers. Moreover, by mapping the Vietnam War documentary on an international level and on a historical time-line, this study asks how these documentaries tackle issues, developments and crises pertaining to the war.

The third aim is to identify what is significant about the Vietnam War documentary. By applying recognized film theories, it soon becomes clear that the Vietnam War documentary raises numerous issues concerning the documentary form and the war documentary specifically, challenging both past and current thinking. In providing an in-depth review of the key documentary theories this research reveals a serious lack of

debates played out in France and the USA, and Ivens' contribution, albeit filmed in North Vietnam, was relatively small.

consensus among theorists, which may be in part the reason why the war documentary is a much-neglected area. Using a broad range of international documentaries, this study attempts to provide a more sophisticated generic analysis of the Vietnam War documentary. Although the number of documentaries utilized may seem excessive, this study maintains that such numbers are necessary to validate both an international approach and a generic study. The latter investigation has drawn on methods used by film historian Jeanine Basinger, as she analyses forty films in pursuit of a generic template for the World War II Combat film.⁸

The fourth aim is to place these documentaries in a broader social and cultural context in order to examine representations of national identity and race. The majority of studies of the Vietnam War, whether in history, literature or film, are from a Western perspective. This study attempts to redress the balance by including alternative views of the war with the aid of the international documentaries, in particular those from North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Cuba and the USSR.

Methodology and Principal Research Questions

The nature and breadth of the research demands a pluralistic approach in terms of methodology. The first chapter of the thesis deals with historical context and employs multiple secondary sources in order to set out the international dimension to the war and the political conditions in which these documentaries were produced. Just as American policy dominated events in the war, American perspectives in both film and literature tend to dominate histories and images of the Vietnam War. Yet the broad range of

⁸ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

foreign documentaries on the subject underscores the global interest in the conflict and its political ramifications. Although it was a limited war geographically, confined to a small area of South East Asia, it was also a proxy war during which many nations aligned themselves with one side or the other, either to pro-Communist North or the non-Communist South.⁹ Forty countries sent aid: economic, military or humanitarian. Six countries - Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and the USA - sent troops to Vietnam. The thesis asks to what extent these films expound the various political stances and alliances, the key events, and shifts of opinion within the period.

The second chapter of the thesis is devoted to textual analysis and adheres to the ‘New Film History’ approach advocated by established British film historians James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper. This approach incorporates a greater level of methodological sophistication by scrutinizing film examples via a system of *process* (economic, industrial practices, studio production strategies and relationships with funding councils and censorship bodies), *agency* (producers, directors, editors, cinematographers, writers, composers, designers and stars), *reception* (critic and audience response, publicity materials and fan clubs), social and historical *representation* (national identity, gender, ethnicity) and *archival* evidence (memoirs, personal papers, production files, scripts, censor reports, government papers).¹⁰

With regard to these documentaries two areas, reception and archival evidence, have proved challenging, but this is not uncommon. As Chapman *et al* point out, reception

⁹ A more detailed explanation of the complex political constituents of South Vietnam will be provided in Chapter Two.

studies in particular is a complex area; one cannot assume a national response to be 'monolithic'. This is certainly true with regard to the critical response to certain Western-produced war documentaries as they are far from uniform. Attempts at accessing Vietnamese national film archives have proved unsuccessful and thus this research relies heavily on translated secondary material. Similarly, the international reception of these documentaries has been difficult to trace but a few useful items have been located, translated and incorporated where relevant.

The thesis will also ask if national cinema histories, especially the development of the national documentary movements, help to provide a greater understanding of the documentaries' construction and meaning. For example, it explores whether early documentary traditions of Russian and British cinema, along with the more contemporary developments in the 1960s such as French *cinéma vérité* and American 'direct cinema', have a bearing on these war documentaries. The thesis will also explore debates concerning Third World Cinema, in particular revolutionary Third Cinema, and whether these ideas can be applied to the Vietnamese and Cuban documentaries of the Vietnam War but this area will be explored further in Chapter Three as will the impact of classic Hollywood fictional cinema such as the World War II Combat film, as this genre may also have a bearing on some of these documentaries.

Chapter Three of the thesis is devoted to theory and ideology, in particular film theory and cultural studies. The research asks three fundamental generic questions. First, what does the war documentary owe to the documentary tradition? Second, what does the

¹⁰ James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper, eds., *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp.6-7.

Vietnam War documentary owe to the war documentary tradition? Third, what is distinctive about the Vietnam War documentary? Finally, this research examines the Vietnam War documentary in terms of postcolonial debates and asks whether they validate or challenge key theories concerning racial stereotypes and power structures.

Chapter Three is divided into three parts. The first part will explore whether the war documentary occupies a specific place in the documentary form. For example, how does the Vietnam War documentary relate to the founding principles outlined by John Grierson? The thesis also asks whether these films can be adequately categorized into modes or typological groups developed by established documentary historians and theorists such as Bill Nichols, Michael Renov, Patricia Aufderheide and others. In the area of narrative, the thesis will examine closely how these documentaries tell their stories. Film theorist Bill Nichols maintains there is little difference between the non-fiction film and the fiction film as both have plots, characters, situations, tensions, conflict, resolutions and closure. According to Nichols, however, the documentary tells its story using evidence and argument.¹¹ The thesis will explore many of Nichols's ideas but will focus particularly on the role of the documentary commentator as storyteller. Also considered within the section on documentary storytelling are issues regarding visual ethics and 'the gaze'.

Part II of Chapter Three examines the specific conditions influencing the production of these war documentaries, for example, the nature of the conflict, access to the war zone, the impact of global media on the content of these documentaries and in particular the

¹¹ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

contribution of independent filmmakers to the genre. This section also considers questions of documentary hybridity and asks if there is evidence of the ethnographic, environmental documentary, and even the fictional war film, influencing the structure and content of these war documentaries. Rounding off this part is an examination of visual conventions such as iconography as well as a detailed examination of three iconic images of the war and how they are utilized by documentary filmmakers.

The final part of Chapter Three examines the documentaries in terms of propaganda techniques, political cinema and postcolonial debates. The thesis sets out to explore what the Vietnam War documentary owes to its predecessors, such as the World War II documentary film. Many of our preconceptions of a war documentary have their origins in World War II documentaries, in home front or battle front, allied or enemy documentaries. This research also offers a more detailed examination of the use of propaganda techniques and how they are employed by these Vietnam War documentaries. Racial stereotypes of the wily oriental have featured widely in Western literature and Hollywood cinema. This study offers an opportunity to assess whether such stereotypes pervade Western-produced Vietnam War documentaries and if they are confined to government propaganda documentaries or if they also inhabit non-government-sponsored documentaries. Similarly, postcolonial theories regarding representations of race developed by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha will be employed in the examination of both Vietnamese and Western-produced Vietnam War documentaries.

Before launching into this multi-disciplinary analysis, a critical review of the literature relating to international perspectives of the Vietnam War, the documentary form and the

Vietnam War documentary is offered in order to identify where this work is posited, how the thesis intends to develop key theoretical areas and to challenge current debates.

Literature Review

This section reviews academic books, journals, and postgraduate theses in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA) in the areas of documentary history and theory, war documentaries and Vietnam War documentaries specifically. It also considers secondary sources in the area of historical perspectives of the Vietnam War, in particular international comparative perspectives.

International Perspectives of the Vietnam War

There are numerous histories of the Vietnam War from an American perspective and a growing number of histories and autobiographies offering the Vietnamese point of view. Of the many histories written on the Vietnam War from an American perspective, Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*, and Michael Maclear's *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* remain the most definitive histories of the conflict.¹²

¹² Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, rev.ed. (London: Pimlico, 1994) and Michael Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* (London: Thames Mandarin, reprinted 1991). For collective oral testimonies, Mark Baker's, *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (New York: Quill, 1982) and Al Santoli's, *Everything We Had* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982) as well as Elizabeth Norman's *Women at War: The Story of Fifty Military Nurses Who Served in Vietnam* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 1990) are useful in providing vignettes from a wide-range of servicemen and women. More detailed accounts can be found in autobiographies of soldiers who served in Vietnam including Tim O'Brien's, *If I Die in the Combat Zone – Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (New York: Dell, 1969) and Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July* (London: Corgi, 1976). O'Brien could have avoided the draft as he had secured a place at university. Yet despite his reluctance to serve he completed his tour of duty in the army with distinction. Kovic enthusiastically enlisted with the marines and went to war only to return as a paraplegic. His poor treatment as a disabled veteran led him to become a prominent anti-war campaigner during the final years of the conflict. In contrast to the GI's viewpoint is General William C. Westmoreland's autobiography, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Dell, 1976). Westmoreland was Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam and who believed passionately in the US support of South Vietnam. He retired in June 1972 when Nixon reduced forces in Vietnam. There are several excellent journalistic accounts of the conflict. Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1978) is perhaps the most colourful and influential. Many young photographers made their reputations during the war, among them Welshman, Philip Jones Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc* (New

New Yorker and former World War II veteran Karnow reported from Asia on behalf of numerous prestigious newspapers including the *Washington Post* and the London *Observer*. Karnow witnessed first hand the suffering of the soldiers and civilians on both sides and interviewed many key officials both at the time of the conflict and afterwards. *Vietnam: A History* was first published in 1983 some time after the conflict ended. Karnow admits that his memories are selective and his recollections should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, the work is still considered by historians to be one of the most comprehensive and definitive assessments of the war.

Former Fleet Street journalist Michael Maclear worked as a television correspondent for the Canadian networks. Published in 1981, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* was originally a twenty-six episode television series but later Maclear was persuaded to expand his material into a fuller literary account of the conflict. Both television and literary accounts rely heavily on interviews undertaken by Associated Press journalist, Peter Arnett. Maclear's title covers the thirty year period from April 1945 to April 1975 that covers both the French Indo-China War and the American Vietnam War and points to the fact that the last American troops actually left in 1975.

York, London, Collier Macmillan Ltd, 1971). From the Vietnamese perspective, there are a number of useful autobiographies, for example, two military autobiographies by the North Vietnamese commander General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961) and also *National Liberation War in Viet Nam* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1971), and Van Dôn Tr'ân, *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (California: Presido Press, 1978). Oral testimonies such as Sandra C. Taylor's *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1999), Nhu Tang Truong with David Chanoff and Down Van Toai's *A Vietcong Memoir* (New York, Vintage Books, 1985). Dual perspectives are offered in edited collections such as William Dudley and David Bender, eds., *The Vietnam War: Opposing Viewpoints*, 2nd rev., (San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 1990), and Jayne Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (London: ME Sharpe, 1993). In his essay, Luu Doan Huyh estimates there are some 7,000 books from American authors alone on the subject.

Unfortunately, neither Karnow nor Maclear place the conflict in a wider global context. Indeed, there are few histories that provide comparative international perspectives, and those available are mainly edited collections produced by university presses.

The first significant collection of essays entitled *International Perspectives on Vietnam* is produced by Texas University Press.¹³ This collection is compiled by American foreign relations specialist Lloyd Gardner and Vietnam veteran Ted Gittinger. The collection includes contributions from reputable scholars from China, Russia and Japan. In his introduction, Gardner argues that, apart from being a ‘proxy war’, the Vietnam War encompassed many wars: ‘part of the contest between East and West, between communist and capitalist, between democracy and tyranny’.¹⁴ The collection is divided into three parts: ‘North Vietnam and Its Allies’, ‘Allies of the United States’, and finally ‘The World System’. Dividing the study into the various camps is a valuable methodological tool, one that is adopted by this thesis when analysing the corpus of documentary texts.

The second useful collection of essays *America, the Vietnam War and the World* is a joint publication issued by the German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press in 2003.¹⁵ In this collection, historians Andreas Daum, Lloyd Gardner and Wilfred Mausbach attempt to internationalize the history of the Vietnam War and put together a comparative perspective. They contend that even a ‘synthesis of American and Vietnamese narratives would still not constitute a “full history” of the war’ but their

¹³ Lloyd Gardener and Ted Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (Texas: A&M University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Gardener and Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, p.4.

¹⁵ Andreas Daum, Lloyd Gardener, Wilfred Mausbach, eds., *America, The Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

edited collection provides a significant contribution to understanding the international scene.¹⁶ Daum, Gardener and Mausbach also argue that there are two major narratives to pursue. First, one needs to place the war within a Cold War framework as the South Vietnamese liberation movement was aided and abetted by the USSR, China and North Vietnam, and second, there is also a Third World de-colonialization narrative to be considered. Both these narratives are explored further in Chapters One and Three.

Although both these edited collections prove invaluable in piecing together an international perspective, other sources are required to help establish a fuller picture, for example, in establishing Cuba's relationship with Vietnam or indeed France's postcolonial role in Vietnam during the years 1965-1975.

Documentary Film History, Documentary Theory and Genre Theory

Early documentary histories tend to focus either on John Grierson and the British Documentary Movement or the Canadian documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty, and there continues to be a great deal of academic interest in these early formative years of documentary. Another popular period for documentary historians is the 1960s, with the advent of *cinéma vérité* in France, Direct Cinema in the USA and the Observational Cinema movement in the UK. Since the development of new technologies (video and the internet) and the popularity of recent socio-political documentaries, *Bowling for Columbine* (dir.Moore, Canada/Germany/USA, 2002), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir.Moore, USA, 2004) and *An Inconvenient Truth* (dir.Guggenheim, USA, 2006), there has been renewed interest in the documentary form resulting in a rush of texts from respected critics and academics alike. Moreover, renewed academic interest has prompted the

¹⁶ Daum, Gardener, Mausbach, eds., *America, The Vietnam War, and the World*, p.8.

publication of a new quarterly refereed journal, *Studies in Documentary Film*.¹⁷ Yet, with all these recent developments and the advent of several major conflicts in the Gulf, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, the war documentary remains a neglected area of study.

There are numerous studies on the documentary form, too many to review within the confines of this study, nevertheless, there are a few key academic texts that have a bearing on this research. The key texts can be divided roughly into three groups: those that provide a history of documentary film, those that discuss documentary theory and those that offer a combination of the two approaches - although those few studies that offer the combination approach tend to offer only a brief overview. None to date have offered a detailed historiography of developments within documentary theory, in particular issues regarding genre and categorization.

In *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston sets out 'to examine the documentary idea, its sources, its practice, its development and its current state, with some thoughts as to its future possibilities'.¹⁸ He divides his monograph into five sections: 'the creative treatment of actuality'; 'creative: documentary as art'; 'treatment: documentary as drama'; 'actuality: documentary as science'; and finally, 'documentary in the age of the digital image manipulation'. With the exception of the last category, his sub-titles correlate to the principles set out by Grierson and therefore he devotes much of the book

¹⁷ *Studies in Documentary Film* first published in 2007 by Intellect Books claims to be the first refereed scholarly journal devoted to the history, theory, criticism and practice of documentary film.

¹⁸ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: the documentary film revisited* (London: BFI, 2001), p.6. Winston re-published this text in order to bring his survey up to date with more contemporary developments. In this revised edition he also includes material concerning documentary ethics and regulation that was originally covered in another publication, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* (London: BFI, 2000).

to Grierson's ideas and how they have been developed over the decades by different documentary filmmakers. However, war documentaries barely get a mention. While Winston's extensive survey and discussions about documentary film and art are fascinating, it is his method of holding each documentary development against Grierson's principles that proves stimulating and worth pursuing in terms of the Vietnam War documentary.

Film historians Erik Barnouw and Richard Barsam both provide detailed histories of the documentary film form including sections on the World War II documentary and the Vietnam War documentary. In *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction*, Barnouw offers a survey of documentaries produced from early Lumière cinematography to the 1980s.¹⁹ His descriptive categorization of the chapters, such as 'explorer', 'reporter', 'painter', 'advocate', 'poet', 'promoter', 'observer,' and 'catalyst', demonstrates the chronicling rather than theoretical style of the work. He designates chapter titles of 'Bugler' for the World War II documentarians and 'Guerrilla' for Vietnam War documentarians but these categorizations are far too broad for the purposes of this research. Furthermore, the term 'Guerilla' is misleading and unsuitable for the majority of these documentaries as this research will reveal in the debate concerning Third Cinema that can be found in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, Barnouw does offer some useful insights into a few Vietnam War documentaries. Not only does he consider the US government film *Why Vietnam?* in some detail but also draws attention to some more obscure films including *Nguyen Hun Tho Speaks to the American People* (National Liberation Front, 1965), *The Way to the Front* (National Liberation Front,

This research will draw upon Winston's *Claiming the Real II* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) in the section on genre when discussing documentary and visual ethics.

1969) and *Some Evidence* (North Vietnam, 1969). He briefly mentions three of Santiago Alvarez's documentaries along with some other interesting international contributors: *Pilots in Pyjamas* (East Germany, 1967), *With a South Vietnamese Marine Battalion* (Japan, 1965), *Fire* (Poland, 1969), and *Napalm* (Syria, 1970) all get a special mention. Barnouw also pays some attention to *Inside North Vietnam* made by Felix Greene for CBS as it highlighted the difficulties American television networks faced in offering the enemy's viewpoint.

In *Non-Fiction: A Critical History* Richard Barsam provides a similar yet more concise list of films and analysis.²⁰ He pays significant attention to Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds* and is one of the few film historians to acknowledge the existence of John Ford's *Vietnam! Vietnam!*, along with the circumstances surrounding its withdrawal from exhibition. Apart from these minor sections in Barnouw's and Barsam's histories, no other publication to date provides an extensive and detailed survey of the Vietnam War documentary and it is a major aim of this thesis to provide the reader with a more detailed analysis of a broad selection of Vietnam War documentaries as can be seen in Chapter Two.

In his ground-breaking work published in 1991, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bill Nichols sets about addressing a major gap in documentary literature by examining styles, strategies and structures of documentary film rather than history. *Representing Reality* contains a three part structure. Part One is concerned with definition and dividing various documentaries into a four 'mode'

¹⁹ Eric Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Richard Barsam, *Non-Fiction: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

system. These four modes are entitled ‘expository’, ‘observational’, ‘interactive’ and ‘reflexive’. In Part Two, Nichols examines differences between telling a story and making an argument. He raises the debate between subjectivity and objectivity and the relationship between fiction and documentary, narrative and exposition. The final part, Part Three, examines the themes of ethics, politics, style, rhetoric and representation. A fuller analysis of Nichols’s documentary modes, documentary narrative and argument and ethics will be provided in Chapter Three on genre as this thesis proposes to test Nichols’s theories concerning categorization and representation against a wide selection of international Vietnam War documentaries.

Edited by Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* is a collection of nine essays by key academic figures including Bill Nichols and Brian Winston, as well as two essays from Renov himself.²¹ Nevertheless, it is Renov’s documentary template that is of the most interest to this study as he offers the reader ‘four fundamental tendencies of documentary’. These four tendencies are ‘to record, reveal or preserve,’ ‘to persuade or promote’, ‘to analyze or interrogate’, ‘to express’, but he argues these four are not exclusive and can overlap. Renov points out that to record and reveal, in other words to provide a duplication of the world ‘can never be unproblematic’.²² He also reminds the reader that those non-fictional films that use persuasion as the dominant trope are in the tradition of John Grierson, and here he specifically mentions war documentaries such as the *Why We Fight* (1942-1945) series, *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh*, and *Hearts and Minds* but unfortunately not in any detail. Whether any of these modes can

²¹ Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²² Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.26.

be applied successfully to war documentaries, in particular Vietnam War documentaries, remains to be seen.

Since these early theoretical discussions by Nichols, Renov and Winston, other academics such as John Corner, Carl Plantinga, Stella Bruzzi and Michael Chanan have entered into the debate and a more detailed analysis of their ideas will be considered later in the chapter on the documentary form and genre. Two recent publications, however, have attempted to provide a dual historical and theoretical approach. The first is Patricia Aufderheide's succinct *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* and the second is Paul Ward's *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*, both of which provide incisive overviews of the key developments and debates.²³

In *Documentary Film*, film journalist Aufderheide covers the history of the documentary, from *Nanook of the North* (dir. Flaherty, USA, 1922) to *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir. Moore, USA, 2004), paying particular attention to the long-form documentary and the work of independent filmmakers. She asks key questions about the nature of documentary, its relationship with reality, and the conventions the documentary/nonfiction film shares with the fictional film. Aufderheide also considers the much-neglected area of sponsorship and funding and how these impact on the types of documentary produced. Yet the most useful contribution to this particular area of research lies in her provision of documentary 'sub-genres'. She divides the documentary into six sub-genres: 'public affairs', 'government propaganda', 'advocacy', 'historical', 'ethnographic' and 'nature'. She surmises that documentaries are 'a set of

²³ Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007).

choices – about subject matter, about forms of expression, about point of view, about the target audience’.²⁴ All these areas will be considered along with the issue of funding when analysing the twenty-six Vietnam War documentaries selected.

In *Margins of Reality*, film lecturer and practitioner Paul Ward considers the early contributions by filmmakers such as Grierson but also considers the contribution of theorists such as Bill Nichols to the issue of genre and categorization. Yet by assessing a broader range of more contemporary documentaries, including drama-documentaries, mock-documentaries and animated documentaries, he argues that ‘it is very difficult to sustain a notion of there being stable categories’.²⁵ Like Nichols, Aufderheide’s categories will be examined and tested, and Ward’s ideas will be explored more closely in Chapter Three Part I.

In his study *Genre and Hollywood*, film theorist Steve Neale traces the development of genre theory in Film Studies from the 1960s to the present day.²⁶ He divides genre theorists into two groups: first, those dealing with the aesthetic components and characteristics usually of a particular genre, and second, those dealing with social and cultural significance. Both these approaches will be employed in the generic analysis of the Vietnam War documentary.

Neale notes that in the beginning Film Studies borrowed heavily from both literary and art traditions in terms of classification, subject-matter, narrative and visual conventions, and that early theorists, such as Ed Buscombe, Tom Ryall, Colin McArthur and Rick

²⁴ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, p.127.

²⁵ Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*, p.1.

Altman, focused on constructing formulas and specific patterns for particular genres such as the western, the crime/gangster film and the musical. More recently, film historians have expanded the list of major genres to include comedy, war, thriller, science-fiction, detective, epic, social problem, teen pic, biopic, and action-adventure film. Moreover, Neale argues that genre theory continues to expand and now encompasses 'the feature film', 'the newsreel' and the 'serial'. Neale also raises the issue of 'hybridity'; that 'many Hollywood films – and many Hollywood genres - are hybrid and multi-generic'.²⁷ He expounds the idea that not only can genres overlap but also some individual films can be considered under a number of generic headings. He argues that the industry often employs a strategy of flexibility, using additional descriptive terms that are less rigorous and exact in order to broaden the film's audience.²⁸

Neale advocates a process he calls 'inter-textual relay' that combines discourses of publicity, promotion and reception, including trade and press reviews.²⁹ Again this research adopts a similar approach, considering a broad selection of Vietnam War documentaries that may pose a threat to current thinking and may not prove formulaic due to their diversity. Unlike fictional film, however, there is a lack of statistical information such as budgets, box office figures, and critic and audience responses with regard to documentaries, even in the Western trade press. This lack of information has proved to be a significant handicap in attempting to offer an empirical approach to these war documentaries.

²⁶ Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁷ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, p.51.

Neale rightly points out that aesthetic theories of genre focus on issues of repetition and variation, similarity and difference and considers characters, plot, settings and technique in terms of formula. Moreover, genre theory balances three elements: subject-matter, thematic preoccupations and visual conventions otherwise known as iconography. Fictional film genres even have their own conventions in terms of music and stars. Aesthetic genre theory has been applied almost exclusively to fictional cinema, in particular Hollywood cinema, but not to documentary. It may be possible, however, to identify patterns in a documentary category, such as the war documentary, in the same way that it has been possible to identify and analyse patterns and styles in fictional films, as this research will demonstrate in due course.

The Vietnam War Documentary

To reiterate, there are numerous academic works and journal articles on American, British and German World War II documentaries from a variety of national perspectives, however, there is not a single work devoted to the history of the war documentary. Many war film historians, such as Jeanine Basinger, include documentaries in their analysis and even make the suggestion that there is a connection between the combat film and the war documentary in terms of structure, but without expanding any further.³⁰ In terms of distinguished filmmakers such as John Ford, Santiago Alvarez and Emile de Antonio, there is no monograph devoted to their respective documentary work. This is particularly surprising when one considers the

²⁸ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, p.32.

²⁹ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, pp.2-3.

³⁰ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Analysis of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

numerous volumes on Ford.³¹ A search of postdoctoral theses in the UK provides no further material with regard to the war documentary as a genre or indeed the Vietnam War documentary, although there does appear to be some interest among postgraduate students in the USA in the documentary work of John Ford, Emile de Antonio and Santiago Alvarez.³²

Again there are many academic studies focusing on Hollywood's fictional representation of the Vietnam War, but there are none that examine the Vietnam War documentary.³³ In terms of scholarly works undertaken in the area of the Vietnam War documentary, there are six academic essays found in four edited collections: *Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*; *The Vietnam War and American*

³¹ Joseph McBride's *Searching For John Ford: A Life*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), is the only biography to include the documentary, *Vietnam! Vietnam!* in some detail. Michael Chanan has produced a useful short pamphlet-style dossier on *Santiago Alvarez* (London: BFI, 1980). Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible have produced a useful compilation of interviews and essays entitled, *Emile de Antonio: A Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³² For example, Ahmed Alasli, 'The American Documentary Films of the Vietnam War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Dallas, 1992), Robyn Brown Blaupied, 'Reading John Ford's *December 7th*: the influence of cultural context on the visual remembering of the Pearl Harbour attack' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hawaii, 2004), Randolph Robert Lewis, 'America is Hard to See: Emile de Antonio and the Art of Political Filmmaking' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1994).

³³ Academic texts that examine fictional films include: Julian Smith, *Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam*, (Charles Schreiber & Sons, 1975), James Wilson, *Vietnam in Prose and Film* (London: McFarlane Press, 1982), Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From the Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket*, (William Heinemann, 1989), William J. Searle's edited collection, *Search and Clear: Critical Responses to Selected Literature and Films of the Vietnam War* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988), Eben J. Muse, *The Land of Nam* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1995), Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), Mark Taylor, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), and Cynthia Weber *Imagining America at War: morality, politics and film* (London: Routledge, 2006) all consider Vietnam War fictional films but not documentaries. In *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), Guy Westwell briefly refers to *The Anderson Platoon* (1966) and *A Face of War* (1968) when discussing cinematic realism in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (USA, 1986). In *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), Keith Beattie focuses on fictional films of the Vietnam War but also considers television series and even allegorical Westerns. Beattie provides a brief paragraph on Vietnamese cinema, both fictional and documentary, using similar secondary sources from magazines such as *Framework*, *Film Comment* and *Cinemaya*.

Culture; Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television; The Vietnam Era, all produced over a decade ago, three by American university presses.³⁴

The first of these collected works, *Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, is edited by cultural historians Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud. From the onset the editors declare the collection as ‘work in progress’. In their introductory chapter, ‘America’s Vietnam War Films: Marching Toward Denial’, Dittmar and Michaud offer a summary of each contribution and also provide a critical overview of the period. They point out that the various essays have a common ground in that they analyse ‘power’ both in terms of making war and of making images about war. Three quarters of the collection is devoted to fictional representations of the war including Vietnam Veteran films and allegories, but it is the final section that is the most interesting for the purposes of this research. Indeed, three of the four essays in this section deal with documentary films made during the conflict.

The first of these essays, ‘Documenting the Vietnam War’, is by film and music historian David E. James.³⁵ His analysis includes literary accounts of the war as well as fictional films and documentaries. It is an eclectic piece that raises important issues regarding race and images of ‘the Other’ as well as the politics of representation. James examines in some detail *Why Vietnam?*, *A Face of War*, *In the Year of the Pig* and the experimental film *The Liberal War* (1972), but it is his ideas on ‘trip to the front’

³⁴ Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, eds., *Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), Michael Andregg, ed., *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Philadelphia, 1991), Michael Klein, ed., *The Vietnam Era* (London: Pluto Press, 1990).

³⁵ David E. James, ‘Documenting the Vietnam War’, in *Hanoi to Hollywood*, eds. by Dittmar and Michaud, pp.225-238.

documentaries such as *A Face of War* and *The Anderson Platoon* that are of most interest and require further exploration.

In contrast, Michael Renov's essay 'Imaging the Other' is more concise, offering an in-depth analysis of three documentaries, one of which is by Cuban experimental filmmaker Santiago Alvarez. Renov's contribution in this area is not surprising as he is a renowned documentary theory specialist but he does reveal here an interest in the ideas of cultural theorist Edward Said. Again, these ideas are explored further in Chapter Three Part III in the section on Orientalism and postcolonial theory.

Finally, there is a contribution from David Grosser, lecturer in American history and politics, whose essay on Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds* offers the first in-depth analysis of a single documentary. Grosser not only considers content and context but also raises the issue of objective journalism and how this is challenged by Davis's documentary. One other point to mention about this particular publication is that it offers one of the few extensive filmographies of both fictional and documentary film. The documentary filmography is not complete, however, and for the purposes of this research other sources need to be consulted. It is not intended that this thesis will provide a comprehensive filmography of all Vietnam War documentaries produced as the exact number is not known, but all the documentaries examined in detail are duly catalogued at the end of the thesis.

The second collection, *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, is edited by another cultural history duo, John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg. Although the editors declare an interest in the mass media and popular culture, the collection tends to focus on literary

interpretations of the war, with the exception of Claudia Springer's erudite essay 'Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam.'³⁶ Her comparative analysis of the Defense Department films is most pertinent to the parameters of this research, in particular to the study of the war documentary film as a genre. In her essay, Springer analyses key documentaries from Capra's World War II series *Why We Fight* as well as eight Vietnam War documentaries: *Why Vietnam?* (1965), *The Unique War* (1966), *Vietnam Village Reborn* (1967), *Know Your Enemy – the Viet Cong* (1968), *Your Tour in Vietnam* (1970), *The First Infantry Division in Vietnam 1965-1970* (1971), *The Battle of Khe Sanh* (1969), and *Mission in Action* (1971).

Springer also highlights some of the major problems in producing an official documentary on the Vietnam War, such as difficulties in identifying the enemy. She argues that the same techniques employed in World War II documentaries to differentiate between good and evil could not be used in the Vietnam War documentary. Moreover, these government films obscured important differences between Russian, Chinese, North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front peoples, preferring to assign the unilateral, and in this case negative, term 'Communists' to them all.

Most importantly, Springer offers a potentially useful method of analysis where she divides these Defense Department films into three categories entitled: the 'ethnographic film', the 'training film' and the 'military history film'. A more detailed analysis of these types will be offered in the final chapter on genre. As Springer's selection of

³⁶ Claudia Springer, 'Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam', in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. by Rowe and Berg.

government films is not exhaustive, the thesis proposes to put to the test her categories against other government and military documentary films not only from the USA, but also from North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Australia. The textual analysis of military films can be found in Chapter Two but the generic analysis of these Vietnam War documentaries in terms of Springer's categories can be found later in Chapter Three.

The third collection, *Inventing Vietnam: the War in film and Television*, is edited by Michael Anderegg. This anthology of fourteen essays is almost entirely dedicated to analysing representations in fictional films such as *Full Metal Jacket* (UK, 1987) and television series such as *Tour of Duty* (USA, 1987-90). Only one essay by Thomas Slater, 'Teaching Vietnam: The Politics of Documentary', is devoted to documentary issues.³⁷ In his contribution Slater is keen to highlight the importance of differing points of view and as an example juxtaposes the conservative documentary *A Face of War* (1969) with the far left documentary *Hearts and Minds*. Unfortunately, much of his essay is devoted to analysing the PBS series *Vietnam* (1983). Nevertheless, Slater asserts that students need to pay particular attention to how the enemy is represented in both fictional and documentary films.

The fourth collection, *The Vietnam Era*, is edited by Michael Klein, lecturer in American Studies and specialist in Vietnam War literature and fictional films. Among his collection is an essay by John Tran entitled 'Vietnamese Cultural Production during the American War'. Tran provides valuable insight into Vietnam's approach to the arts. He discusses the importance of the Vietnamese maintaining their identity through their own language despite two thousand years of foreign domination. Tran points out that

Vietnam has long been considered one of the most literary of civilizations and a nation of poets. Tran provides an overview of film production, mainly newsreel and documentaries, but also some feature films produced by North and South Vietnam. He highlights three South Vietnamese documentaries: *Art and Youth* (National Liberation Front, 1969), *Nixon and the Hornet's Nest* (National Liberation Front, no date given), and *Guerrillas of Cu Chi* (National Liberation Front, 1968).³⁸ The only other film he mentions in any detail is *The Defence of Haiphong*, a North Vietnamese production. Although Tran's descriptions are useful, there is little by way of critique. Nevertheless, Tran provides an important piece of the puzzle that is Vietnamese film production during the war.

One of the first articles to draw attention to the existence of Vietnamese documentary films and discuss their contribution to the war debate appears in the journal *The Nation* in January 1966.³⁹ In his short article, 'Films from the Vietcong', freelance film editor and camera assistant Peter Gessner describes the exhibition and reception of a few National Liberation Front films screened in local high schools in the USA. He notes that, despite the limited exhibition and poor quality of the film prints, the screenings were actually well attended by the students much to the indignation of their parents.

Gessner seems reluctant to name the six or so films in circulation but from the descriptions given, the one concerning the Buddhist protests against the Diem

³⁷ Anderegg, *Inventing Vietnam: the War in film and Television*, p.13.

³⁸ From the description Tran gives of *Art and Youth* and *Nixon and the Hornet's Nest*, these two films combined are also known as *Young Puppeteers*.

³⁹ Peter Gessner, 'Films from the Vietcong', *The Nation*, 24 January 1966, pp.110-111.

government would appear to be *A Message From Viet-Nam* (1964).⁴⁰ The second film described was more identifiable as *Foreign Correspondents visit the National Liberation Front* (1965) (aka *Foreign Correspondents Visit South Vietnam*). Being a practising filmmaker, Gessner is naturally quick to point to the technical crudeness of the narrative construction, editing and sound. Yet despite these films' technical and political shortcomings, Gessner argues they are a valuable record of the 'face of war in Vietnam' and a 'humbling experience to the viewer'.⁴¹

In 1969 the American journal *Film Comment* dedicated a whole issue to filmmaking in Vietnam. The first of the contributions 'Films in Vietnam' is an edited transcript of an interview with an unnamed film officer employed by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and stationed in Saigon in the late 1960s. The officer describes his duties and responsibilities including the making of ten films. It is a very frank and illuminating report in which the officer talks about political and financial relationships with various governments and film companies. For example, he reveals the extent of French influence in film theatres and newsreel production despite their defeat and withdrawal from Vietnam, and how American commercial features dominated the theatres in the South Vietnamese cities. The officer also points to the poor state of the South Vietnamese cinema industry and the inadequate salaries of its workers. Throughout the report the officer reveals an extensive knowledge of Vietnamese cinema including National Liberation Front propaganda films. It is a very informative piece and is accompanied by a USIA filmography. The edition also includes two brief interviews with filmmakers from North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front who describe

⁴⁰ *A Message From Viet-Nam* was actually made by the National Motion Picture Centre, Saigon not the 'Viet Cong' or the National Liberation Front, therefore it is possible Gessner is referring to another

the difficulties in making and screening films in Vietnam and how they try to get their message across to an international audience.⁴²

In 1984, another American journal, *Framework* published two lengthy articles by Vietnamese film historians, with the aid of translators, on the development of their national cinema.⁴³ The first article by Pham Ngoc Troung, 'Vietnamese Cinema from its Origins to 1945' covers the emergence of cinema in Vietnam under colonial rule during the first half of the twentieth century. The second article 'The Seventh Goddess' is by Communist filmmaker Bui Phu. Although full of anti-imperialist rhetoric it is more pertinent to this research as it continues the story of Vietnamese cinematic development through the Indo-Chinese War (the French War) and the Vietnam War (the American War) to the late 1970s. This thesis will draw on Bui Phu's article in more detail later in reference to both national film production and postcolonial debates surrounding Third World Cinema and revolutionary Third Cinema.

In her article, 'South Vietnam's Legacy,' Sarah Rouse, Senior Film Cataloguer at the Library of Congress, Washington, describes the events leading to the acquisition of a major deposit of South Vietnam press and film materials in May 1975.⁴⁴ Among the collection were 527 reels of film. She discusses some of the problems cataloguing this vast film collection, for example, difficulties with translation, identifying multiple copies of the same item, and the lack of supplementary printed material, including original production records and scripts. Nevertheless, she is able to categorize the

documentary.

⁴¹ Peter Gessner, 'Films from the Vietcong', *The Nation*, 24 January 1966, p.110.

⁴² *Film Comment*, 2, Spring 1969, pp.46-88.

⁴³ 'Vietnamese Cinema', *Framework*, n.25, 1984, pp.63-93.

collection into newsreel, short documentaries, ‘hard’ documentaries and other miscellaneous footage. She also manages to glean vital statistics about film production and distribution in South Vietnam. Rouse names a few examples from each category, briefly describing their contents. Since access to the collection is difficult as most of these items have been given ‘master copy status’, the information given by Rouse in the article, despite its brevity, is invaluable. This study not only draws on the archive examining in detail two ‘hard’ documentaries from this catalogue but also places them in the wider dimension of the war and a national documentary cinema.

Propaganda in the War Documentary

Despite several major studies having been conducted on World War II documentaries using archival evidence, in particular government documents, visual analysis of propaganda methods employed in war documentaries appears to be a much-neglected area. Even from a theoretical perspective, propaganda studies seem sparse and those studies available too unwieldy to be effective in terms of film analysis. Nevertheless a few studies have proved useful in approaching this contentious and problematic term.

In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell examine the term ‘propaganda’ from a historical and theoretical perspective.⁴⁵ They assert that propaganda in its most neutral form means to disseminate or promote ideas, but more recently it has become associated with something that is negative, even dishonest. ‘Words frequently used as synonyms for propaganda are *lies, distortion, deceit,*

⁴⁴ Sarah Rouse, ‘South Vietnam’s Film Legacy’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.6, No.2, 1986, pp.211-222.

⁴⁵ Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (London: Sage, 1992).

manipulation, psychological warfare and brainwashing'.⁴⁶ They argue that the purpose of propaganda is to send out an ideology that will reinforce or modify attitudes or behaviour of a target audience.

In *Film: Form and Function*, film historians George Wead and George Lellis point out that propaganda was utilized by the Communist bloc from the early twenties, and was employed not only by the German Nazi government but also by the British and Americans during World War II. Wead and Lellis maintain that a government propaganda film usually 'calls not for change but for action to preserve or strengthen a regime already in power' and, while some are overtly propagandist in nature, others are more cleverly disguised as educational or information films.⁴⁷

Similarly, in his introduction to *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, film historian Richard Taylor offers a number of useful insights into the complex nature of propaganda. He remarks, "'propaganda" becomes what the enemy engages in, while one's own "propaganda" parades under the guise of "information" or "publicity"'.⁴⁸ Taylor stresses the need to distinguish between these three terms and surmises that 'propaganda' plays on emotions while 'information' and 'publicity' appeal to reason.⁴⁹

Another study that offers analytical pointers is *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* by Jo Fox.⁵⁰ She argues that both sides needed to employ propaganda techniques in order to convince their peoples of the necessity of

⁴⁶ Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, p.2.

⁴⁷ George Wead and George Lellis, *Film: Form and Function* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), p.378.

⁴⁸ Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, (London: IB Tauris, 1998), p.7

⁴⁹ Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, p.12.

war, maintain morale and guarantee full co-operation. One of the devices was to emphasize identity or national traits, another device was to demonise the enemy. Fox points out it is the primary task of the propagandist to identify the enemy publicly and target them for the nation's anger and blame. They provide a contrast between the enemy who is portrayed as 'barbaric', 'ruthless' and 'cruel' and the victim who is 'innocent', 'fair', 'moral' and 'heroic'.⁵¹

However, for the purposes of this research Philip M Taylor's brief article, 'Techniques of Persuasion', offers a unique insight into the mechanics of producing propagandist material as he uncovers a British government World War II document that contains specific instructions and examples of how to employ propaganda methods successfully.⁵² This document will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three and used to examine the corpus of Vietnam War documentaries presented in this study with particular attention being paid to devices that demonize the enemy.

Third World Cinema, Third Cinema and Postcolonial Theory

World Cinema is a developing area of interest in terms of both film history and film education. Despite the fact that Asian cinema studies are proving increasingly popular in academic circles, no section has been assigned specifically to Vietnamese cinema. This is surprising considering that in 1991 Channel 4 devoted a season to 'Vietnamese Cinema' that included both fictional and documentary films, and was hosted by notable

⁵⁰ Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema*, (Oxford: Berg Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany*, p.137.

⁵² Philip M Taylor, 'Techniques of Persuasion: basic ground rules of British propaganda during the Second World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.1, No.1, 1981, pp.57-65.

film historian Tony Rayns.⁵³ Expectations of a follow-up book to the series were disappointed.

In *Third World Film Making and the West*, film historian Roy Armes argues there are a number of ‘obvious hazards’ to consider when studying Third World films.⁵⁴ First, apart from the problems of definition and delineation, most studies are from a Western perspective and there are issues regarding language and translation. Second, any study that synthesizes diverse subjects such as culture, politics, economics and ideology, runs the risk of oversimplification. Third, that one needs to consider the influence of indigenous film industries as well as reaction to Western cinema when considering Third Cinema and Third World Cinema. With these hazards in mind, and with the assistance of Third Cinema manifestos such as Fernando Solanas’s and Octavio Getino’s ‘Towards a Third Cinema’, this thesis aims to interrogate Vietnamese War documentaries in order to ascertain whether they represent examples of revolutionary Third Cinema or even Third World Cinema.

As already outlined earlier, particular attention will be paid to Edward Said’s seminal study *Orientalism*. Said asserts that anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient is an Orientalist and what he or she does is Orientalism.⁵⁵ Said also argues that ideas, cultures and histories cannot be understood unless studied in terms of ‘configurations of power’ and that Orientalism contains doctrines of superiority, racism and imperialism.⁵⁶ Although Orientalist discourse has been applied to fictional cinema,

⁵³ *Vietnam Cinema* (Exclusive Enterprises Production for Channel 4, 1990).

⁵⁴ Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1987), Introduction.

⁵⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁵⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, p.5.

it would seem it has not been applied to the same extent to documentary film and, with the exception of Renov's brief article, it has not been applied specifically to Vietnam War documentaries. This research sets out to apply Saidean discourse to Western-produced Vietnam War documentaries and asks whether Western documentary filmmakers act as Orientalist experts defining and confining images of the Orient and Oriental in their films. Although ground-breaking, Said's work garnered criticism as well as praise. Via a series of essays later gathered in a collection entitled *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha not only challenges the rigidity of Said's binary paradigm, West versus East, but argues for a more sophisticated power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.⁵⁷ A more detailed analysis of Said's and Bhabha's theories will be offered in Part III of the final chapter on politics, propaganda and postcolonialism. However, it is important to note that neither scholars' work relates specifically to the Far East nor indeed to film. This research attempts to apply specific theories and concepts developed by Said and Bhabha to both Vietnamese and Western Vietnam War documentaries.

The opening chapter focuses on the international context and the politics of war. By synthesizing secondary sources this chapter maps out the development of the war, the key figures and events, national policies and international alliances in order to build a more extensive and multi-faceted perspective of the conflict.

⁵⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

CHAPTER ONE

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES on the VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War encompassed many wars: a civil war between the North and South, a war of insurrection within the South, and a Cold War between East and West fought between Communist and democratic nations either directly or by proxy. Depending on the political perspective it was also an ideological war against Eastern Communist tyranny or Western imperialism. Of the many assessments of the war, the description that the Vietnam War was ‘a proxy war’ is the most significant in terms of this research as it purports to the wider international dimension to the conflict. To understand this international interest it is useful to look at the global picture as well as events in Vietnam itself.

Focusing on the key developments of the war, the alliances, national and international policies as well as changes in public opinion offers a more developed and expanded historical analysis of the war not provided by any scholarly study to date. This enhanced perspective not only underpins the textual analysis of the films but also provides the following chapter with a vital structure by placing the films into the countries of production and political camps. This chapter begins, however, by outlining the basis of the civil war and the political divisions within Vietnam, particularly in the South.

Mapping the Vietnam War

During the period 1858-1884 the French conquered Vietnam and joined it with Cambodia, Laos and Annam to form the French colony of Indochina. For a short period during World War II (1939-1945) the Japanese controlled Vietnam but they were

removed in 1945 by the Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh forces. Following the Second World War, between the years 1946-1954, France tried to regain control over Vietnam. This period, known as the French Indochina War, saw bitter fighting between the French and the Vietminh until the French were defeated at the battle of Diên Biên Phủ in 1954. Fearing the spread of Communism through South-East Asia, otherwise known as the 'Domino Theory', the United States had provided the French with substantial financial aid to fight Ho Chi Minh and his allies.⁵⁸ Following the French defeat Vietnam was divided along the 17th Parallel into North and South Vietnam according to the Geneva Agreement of 1954. The North, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was led by the Communist leader Ho Chi Minh. The South, the Republic of Vietnam, was led by the pro-Western leader Ngo Dinh Diem. However, the division was supposed to be temporary and according to the terms of the 1954 Agreement, elections were to be held in 1956 resulting in the unification of Vietnam. The terms of the agreement were to be monitored by a special international commission led by India, Poland and Canada but despite their efforts, the agreement broke down and war ensued. It was not until 1976 that the two parts were finally reunited under the new title: the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

With the departure of the French, the USA now supported the South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem and continued their policy of 'containment'. Their joint aim was not to unify the two parts but check Communist expansionist plans to assimilate the South either through counter insurgency measures or by a negotiated peace.

⁵⁸ RB Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War Volume II*, p.18, George Herring, *America's Longest War*, 2nd edn (New York: Knopf, 1986) p.42 and George M Kahin *Intervention: How America*

Despite American support there was indigenous protest within South Vietnam against the Diem government which was repressive, corrupt and despotic. Resistance came from a number of groups within South Vietnam, such as the Buddhist community which demonstrated against the regime in many major cities. The majority of Vietnamese were Buddhists, although there were fourteen different sects blending elements of Confucianism and Taoism with superstition, magic, idolatry and ancestor worship. There had been a tradition since the French occupation to limit the authority of the Buddhist clergy and curb the construction of temples. Diem and his government continued this policy and even obstructed public worship. Moreover, by promoting Catholics to key military and government civilian posts the Diem regime actively discriminated against Buddhists gaining top appointments and positions of power.

By 1963 Buddhists were gathering in numbers to protest against their religious freedoms being curtailed. They mobilized themselves quickly and effectively, organising rallies, printing and distributing pamphlets, going on hunger strikes and briefing foreign journalists. The response by Diem's regime was brutal. They attacked protest rallies and raided temples, arresting hundreds of monks and nuns. The Buddhist reaction was equally dramatic. On 11 June 1963, in a plea for the government to show compassion to all religions, a sixty-six year old monk, Quang Duc committed the act of self-immolation. The horrifying image of this monk's burning body made headlines across the world and brought international condemnation of Diem and his government. Yet the policy of repression continued and further protests were violently broken. Nevertheless, the Buddhist leader, Tri Quang continued to lobby for the installation of a South

Became involved in Vietnam (New York, 1986), pp.85-8, all suggest billions of US dollars were donated to the French by the USA to fight the Communist forces of Ho Chi Minh.

Vietnamese government that would fairly represent the ‘aspirations of the people’. Unfortunately, when Diem was finally overthrown he was followed by a succession of military regimes that continued to suppress the Buddhists. By June 1966, after a period of long resistance, Tri Quang was himself arrested and shortly afterwards the movement collapsed.

More threatening than the Buddhist protest movement was the armed resistance of the pro-Communist sect known as the National Liberation Front (NLF) or Vietcong (VC).⁵⁹ Formed in 1960, the NLF was fundamentally a South Vietnamese guerrilla force with no specific territory or base to defend. The NLF recruited young people, mainly men from local villages and as such these young recruits were hard to identify as they blended in with the peasants.⁶⁰ Maclear estimates that by 1968 the NLF covertly held sixty per cent of the hamlets and villages in the South.⁶¹

The National Liberation Front (NLF) was supported by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) but they were not the same fighting force. While the NLF used covert tactics, the NVA were trained to fight conventional battles as well covert operations. The NLF used guerrilla type ‘hit and run’ manoeuvres, operating mainly at night, rather than direct confrontations. As Stanley Karnow points out, it was the Vietminh veterans of the war against the French that formed the ‘nucleus’ of the NLF.⁶² The Vietminh

⁵⁹ The term ‘Vietcong’ was a contemptuous nick name created by US psychological warfare advisers from the term ‘Vietnamese Commies’ or more precisely ‘Vietnamese Communists’.

⁶⁰ According to historian William R. Haycraft, the NLF also attracted individuals from a variety of backgrounds including Buddhists, Catholics, socialists, Cao Dais, Hoa Haos, intellectuals, students, Montagnards and military deserters but did not represent these organizations in a formal sense. See Haycraft, *Unravelling Vietnam: How American Arms and Diplomacy Failed in Southeast Asia* (London: MacFarland & Co., 2005) p.29.

⁶¹ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.351.

⁶² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, p.245.

veterans were known as ‘cadres’ and assigned to NLF detachments. The cadres acted as surrogate parents, ideological tutors, even personal confessors to their troops. Cadres were usually Communist Party members and during the early part of the war were likely to be native Southerners who had hidden in the South after the 1954 partition or had gone North and returned later. However, by 1966, NLF losses meant that around 100,000 North Vietnamese regulars were sent to the South each year which did not prove popular with the NLF troops, particularly after the losses during the 1968 Tet Offensive.⁶³

The Tet Offensive or ‘Spring Tet’ is the more common translation for the Vietnamese term ‘Tet Mau Than’ which refers to the first day of the new lunar year, 31 January 1968. However, Tet Mau Than was also a strategy known by the NVA and NLF as the “General Offensive - General Uprising” and continued throughout 1968.⁶⁴ Figures for casualties are difficult to obtain or when offered, difficult to verify. Both sides lost significant numbers of men and equipment but even by their own admission the Communist forces sustained huge losses. In spite of the military disaster, it was a propaganda victory for the NLF and the North as they showed their ability to infiltrate and strike at the US bases and South Vietnamese regime.

The declining health and ultimate death of Ho Chi Minh in September 1969 did not put a halt to the conflict. From 1972, and much to the displeasure of President Thieu,

⁶³ Figures from Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp.478-479. According to Karnow around half a million North Vietnamese and NLF troops died in the war. According to Maclear, around one quarter million South Vietnamese soldiers died in combat, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.203.

⁶⁴ For an in depth account of the strategy and execution of the Tet Mau Than campaign see General Tran Van Tra’s essay, ‘Tet: The 1968 General Offensive and General Uprising’ in *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, ed. by Jayne Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (London: ME Sharpe, 1993), pp.37-65.

President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger entered into peace negotiations with the Le Duc Tho, Ho's successor. Although a ceasefire was agreed in January 1973, a year later hostilities resumed. With key South Vietnamese cities falling to the NVA in 1975, Communist forces finally captured Saigon on 30 April 1975 and the South Vietnamese government surrendered.

Thus, the Vietnam War was primarily a civil war as opposed to a multi-national or world war. Yet the war not only impacted on the USA and Vietnam but also affected many countries, its consequences reverberating throughout America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific. Over forty countries were directly or indirectly involved: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Republic of China (Taiwan), Denmark, Ecuador, East Germany, West Germany, France, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Uruguay and Venezuela. These countries sent either military, monetary, medical or humanitarian aid to North or South Vietnam.

To understand this widespread international interest and for the purposes of contextual analysis, as well as forthcoming textual analysis of the documentaries, the political study has been divided into three camps, those that supported the Communist North, those that supported the non-Communist South and those perceived as 'neutral' nations.

**Allies of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (South Vietnam):
China, USSR, East Germany (GDR), and Cuba**

As Jeffrey Brody points out, the Vietnam War occurred ‘during the height of the Sino-Soviet split, at a time when China and the Soviet Union struggled for domination of the Communist bloc and leadership of the international Communist movement’.⁶⁵

As exponents of the Chinese military strategy of “people’s warfare” the Vietnamese national liberation movement consequently enjoyed the support of the Chinese and their leader Mao Zedong.⁶⁶ However, China refrained from becoming directly involved as it had suffered large casualties in the recent Korean War. Moreover, the Chinese felt threatened by the Soviet military build-up on their northern border. Nevertheless, China wanted North Vietnam to enter into a protracted war that would bleed the USA financially. Similarly, the Soviet Union leader, Nikita Khrushchev also refrained from direct action. Only after his removal from office in 1964, did the Soviet Union become more involved in South East Asian affairs. It is important to view the role of both super powers in tandem as the North Vietnamese were very adept in playing China and the USSR off one another in order to obtain necessary goods and arms.

As early as 1950 China provided weapons to the Vietminh. In 1955 the Soviet Union was financing emergency rice imports from Burma to North Vietnam in order to avert a famine. It was Khrushchev who supplied the North with surface to air missiles despite urging the North to consider peaceful negotiations. The Soviet Union also provided the

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Brody in *International Encyclopaedia of Propaganda*, ed. Robert Cole (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), p.832.

⁶⁶ “People’s Warfare” is a military strategy attributed to the Communist leader Mao Zedong that involves drawing the enemy deep into the country and engaging in a mobile guerrilla war. While maintaining the

North with one of the strongest air defence systems comprising of 8,000 anti-aircraft guns, 200 surface to air missile batteries, and complex radar systems and computerized control centres. While North Vietnam relied more and more on weapons from Russia, it still depended on China for rice. By the mid 1960s China and the USSR together were supplying the North with nearly 6,000 tonnes of aid daily. \$300 million was supplied by China in 1967 alone. China also supplied the North with labour battalions to keep lines of communication such as bridges and rail lines open to China.⁶⁷

As early as 1957 the Soviet Union favoured a permanent division of the country. For the greater part of the war and in spite of supplying the North with military aid, the USSR encouraged peaceful negotiations. It was the USSR who proposed that the North and South be admitted as separate states to the UN but to no avail. By the late 1960s the Soviet Union was frustrated by the war both politically and economically, for not only were the North Vietnamese stubborn in their resistance to peaceful negotiations but the massive aid programme was draining Soviet coffers. As Karnow points out:

...like America, the Soviet Union was mired in Southeast Asia for essentially symbolic reasons. To abandon their Vietnamese comrades would expose the Soviets to charges, especially from their Chinese rivals, of betraying the worldwide struggle against 'US imperialism'.⁶⁸

Consequently by the early 1970s both China and the USSR wanted rapprochement with the USA and were no longer willing to prop up the North Vietnamese regime. In 1972, China invited President Nixon to Beijing for talks. The Chinese were now afraid that the policy of bleeding America dry could backfire, for a weak USA meant there was no counterweight against the USSR. Not surprisingly, the North Vietnamese were unhappy

support of the people its ultimate aim was to bleed the enemy in terms of military, financial as well as human resources.

with the prospect of Sino-American talks and feared a 'sell-out' but were kept on board because of their dependency on Chinese aid.⁶⁹

In East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) took an active role in opposing the war and setting up Communist peace councils that promoted anti-imperialism. Founded in 1965 the Vietnam Committee, part of the German Peace Council of the GDR, offered aid to the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front of the South. Not only did the government give financial aid but it also provided medical supplies and offered several thousand Vietnamese students education and training in East Germany. Even the trade unions donated substantial sums of money. By 1975, 1.5 billion marks had been donated and more would follow after the war had ended in support of the reconstruction effort. East Germany would also play an active part in the work of the International Commission for the Investigation of US War Crimes in October 1970.⁷⁰ Both East and West Germans were horrified by the reports of the war and the images they were seeing on their televisions, particularly the use of chemical weapons such as napalm and Agent Orange. The impact morally united the two countries in providing donations and petitions against the war.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Figures from Karnow's, *Vietnam: A History*, p.472.

⁶⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp.467 and 598.

⁶⁹ There are no records in the available filmographies that indicate China or the USSR made any documentaries about the war during this period. A request for information from their National Film Archive in Beijing has received no response to date, however, a response from their National Film Archive in Moscow suggests there are relevant documentaries. Unfortunately, the regulations of the national film archive require requests for viewing copies be made in person and relevant copyright clearances be obtained prior to any duplicates being supplied. Nevertheless, a film offered by the Education Media Online UK group has been discovered, *Reportage from North Vietnam* (USSR, 1968), and will be examined in the course of the thesis.

⁷⁰ There are numerous records that indicate East Germany made documentaries about the war during this period, however, there are no records in the available filmographies that West Germany made any documentaries about the war during this period. A request for information from the National Film Archive in Berlin has not proved fruitful.

As Clifford Staten outlines in his account of Cuba's history, Cuba and the United States have been inextricably linked since the mid nineteenth century both culturally as well as economically.⁷² However, when Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, following a revolution that deposed the long serving Fulgencia Batista, Castro's Popular Socialist Party imposed a Marxist-Leninist form of Communism and brought the country under Soviet political and economic influence, thus breaking ties with the USA. This alliance almost had disastrous results when the Soviet Union deployed ballistic missiles at sites in Cuba. These missiles were described as defensive measures by the alliance but many of the missiles were long range and could reach cities on the eastern American seaboard. Not surprisingly in the Cold War climate, the United States government perceived the move as aggressive and threatening. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, as it became known, was solved by President Kennedy and his government using a combination of diplomacy and the threat of force to persuade the Soviets to withdraw the missiles from Cuban soil.

Although there is no direct connection between the war in Vietnam and developments in Cuba, parallels can be drawn. Until the 1960s Cuba was heavily dependent on America economically. The USA purchased half of Cuba's sugar production and owned half of Cuba's arable land. The USA also owned ninety percent of Cuba's utilities, fifty percent of its railroads, and acquired substantial interests in its mining operations, oil refineries and livestock.⁷³ Like Vietnam, the Communists in Cuba claimed that they were liberating their country from US imperialism. Moreover, Fidel Castro believed that the Cuban revolution could be duplicated in other countries, such as Venezuela and

⁷¹ Günter Wernicke, 'World Peace Council and the Anti-War Movement,' in *America, The Vietnam War, and the World*, ed. Daum, Gardener, Mausbach, pp.299-320.

Angola and consequently provided funds, arms and guerrilla training to both countries. Although Castro spoke vociferously in support of the Vietnamese Communist struggle, there is no evidence that Cuba sent aid or troops to North Vietnam and the NLF. By the time Castro had set up the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the early 1970s, a group made up of countries from Latin American, Africa and Asia focusing on issues of anti-colonialism and mutual economic development, the war in Vietnam was drawing to its conclusion.

Allies of South Vietnam: the USA and Australia

The United States dominated the course of events in Vietnam from the 1950s until the defeat of the South Vietnamese government in 1975. However, it was not until 1964 before the US officially entered the conflict when, without formally declaring war, President Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam and sent American combat troops to defend the South. Those against American involvement would use contraventions of international law – the non-declaration of war and the use of chemical weapons, including napalm and Agent Orange – as the basis of their criticism.

The United States had been providing South Vietnam with ‘advisors’ from as early as 1961. ‘Advisors’ were military personnel but only became involved in combat operations when accompanying South Vietnamese forces. Unlike combat troops, ‘military advisors’ did not instigate, direct or execute actions on their own. By 1963 US President John F. Kennedy increased American ‘advisors’ to 13,000 and aid now reached \$500 million for the year. Kennedy supported the doctrines of counter-

⁷² Clifford L. Staten, *The History of Cuba* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

⁷³ Staten, *The History of Cuba*, p.84.

insurgency and encouraged Diem and his government to pursue policies of political and economic reform in order to win the support of the people particularly the peasants but Diem was an autocrat and resisted such reforms. Following the assassination of President Kennedy, President Lyndon B. Johnson continued to support the government of South Vietnam despite any progress towards a democratic state. In 1964 Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam and then in 1965 ordered combat troops into the South to support a government that was both unpopular and unstable. Although in 1963 Diem was overthrown in a military coup backed by the US, his replacement, General Nguyen Khanh also failed to bring peace to the South and in 1965 he too was replaced by another military leader, General Nguyen Cao Ky. In response to Buddhist anti-war demonstrations Ky's troops occupied key cities in 1966 and US troop figures now reached 330,000 peaking at 540,000 in 1968.⁷⁴ In September 1967, elections were held in South Vietnam but failed to legitimize the Ky-Thieu leadership. Nevertheless, the former General Nguyen Van Thieu tried to put into place land reforms that would address the problem of tenant farmers being exploited by corrupt and greedy landlords but it was too little too late as some one million people found themselves homeless due to the drastic counter-insurgency measures adopted by the South Vietnamese government and its allies in the South.⁷⁵

1968 was also the year of the Tet New Year Offensive where key areas of South Vietnam were targeted by the NLF. Attacks on US bases at Da Nang and Hoi An and wide scale attacks throughout South Vietnam by the Vietcong including Hué, Ben Tre,

⁷⁴ According to Karnow around three million Americans served in Vietnam during the war, *Vietnam: A History*, p.479.

⁷⁵ John Dumbrell, *Vietnam: American Involvement at Home and Abroad*, British Association for American Studies 22, (Halifax: Ryburn Publishing, 1992), pp.17-22. Dumbrell describes in more detail the reasoning behind Thieu's "Land-to-the-Tiller" initiative made law in March 1970.

the US Embassy and the Presidential Palace in Saigon became part of the Tet Offensive. Despite these significant losses, the Communists had secured a huge psychological victory. For now the American public were witnessing daily, through newspaper and television reports, their troops taking severe casualties and with no end to the conflict in sight popular support for the war and their President was waning. Until Tet the media were dependent on government sources and interpretation of the war but during Tet, the press became more sceptical and inclined to assess situations independently from the official government line. Ironically, the American media overplayed the damage the NLF had inflicted on the US and South Vietnamese forces and conversely they helped to undermine US public confidence in their own government and military forces. Although there are still disputes as to who emerged victorious from the campaign, most historians agree that Tet signalled the turning point of the war.

By the time Richard Nixon was elected to the office of US President on 5 November 1968, over 30,000 American soldiers had died in Vietnam.⁷⁶ Nixon and his aides devised an exit strategy known as 'Vietnamization' whereby the US government could withdraw its troops and transfer responsibility to South Vietnamese government forces. The USA would maintain the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) with advisers, equipment and even B-52 air cover but the South Vietnamese army were effectively to hold their own. Vietnamization was designed not only to bring the troops home but also to placate the American public.

The US government started to reduce troop numbers from 1969, however, the withdrawal was slow and painful. Meanwhile, the protest movement against the war

was gathering momentum in the USA and worldwide. In November 1969 the revelation of a massacre by US troops in the South Vietnamese village of My Lai made shocking headlines both at home and abroad. Later that year Washington was the venue of two major anti-war demonstrations and on 2 May 1970, when students protested at Kent State University, the National Guard opened fire and killed four students. It was not until 1973 that a ceasefire was agreed between the two sides and the USA began to withdraw their troops from Vietnam. However, in 1974 the conflict re-ignited and the Communists began to gain ground in the South. Finally, in 1975 the North captured the Southern capital Saigon and the US government were forced to evacuate personnel and their families in a dramatic exit via the roof top of their embassy building.

Even the broad linear histories of the Vietnam War, such as those provided by Stanley Karnow and Michael Maclear, are somewhat dismissive of America's allies. Karnow refers to the South Korean, Thai, Filipino, Australian and New Zealand forces as merely 'token troops.'⁷⁷ Maclear provides figures of allied losses for the period 1965-1973 as follows: South Korean: 4,407, Australia and New Zealand: 469, Thailand: 350.⁷⁸ Yet neither provides an adequate explanation as to why troops were committed by those five countries in the first place.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, p.616.

⁷⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, p.566.

⁷⁸ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p292.

⁷⁹ For more information regarding Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand's involvement in the Vietnam War see Hiroshi Fujimoto, 'Japan and the War in Southeast Asia – 1965-1967', in *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, ed. Gardener and Gittinger, pp.176-189, Thomas Haven, *Fire Across the Sea: the Vietnam War and Japan 1965-1975* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), Robert Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (North Carolina, MacFarland & Co, 1994), Robert Rabel, *New Zealand and the Vietnam War: Politics and Diplomacy*, (New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 2005), Kil J Yi, 'The US-Korean Alliance in the Vietnam War: The Years of Escalation, 1964-68', in *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, ed. Gardener and Gittinger, pp.154-175, Arne Kislenko, 'US Relations with Thailand During the Vietnam War' in *America, The Vietnam War, and the World*, ed. Daum, Gardener, Mausbach, pp.197-220. Ki in particular dispels the myth that only 'token troops' were offered. He explains how South Korea sent more than 300,000 troops during the course of the war and

Much of US and Western politics at the time were dominated by the Cold War and fears of being overrun by Communism, as encapsulated by the 'Domino Theory'. The domino effect in terms of South East Asia was that if South Vietnam fell to the Communists, the next domino would be Laos, followed by Cambodia, Burma and down into the sub-continent, including the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. A succession of US government administrations propagated this theory and used it to try to persuade their allies in NATO and SEATO to join in support of South Vietnam.

During the 1960s the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members consisted of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, UK, USA, Turkey, and West Germany. In 1964, when the USA was preparing to commit to the war, it asked members for support and participation. While modest amounts of non-military support were offered to the South, all NATO members refused to send troops. The USA had more success in persuading some of its South East Asian allies of the validity of its arguments due to their proximity to the crisis. The South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was set up in 1954 and consisted of the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines. Like NATO, SEATO was a mutual defence system. However, neither South Vietnam, Cambodia nor Laos were signatories to the agreement; therefore there was no pro-forma obligation for these nations to defend South Vietnam. In fact the organisation never adopted an official position either for or against its members becoming involved and while Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines came to South Vietnam's assistance it

points out that they lost 1.6% of their force while the US lost 1.7%. (Yi, 'The US-Korean Alliance in the Vietnam War', in *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, ed. Gardener and Gittinger, p.156).

was more in response to President Johnson's 'More Flags Program' than due to SEATO alliances or policy.

In spring 1964, President Johnson's administration launched 'The Free World Assistance Program' also known as the 'More Flags Program'. The original objective was to pursue non-combat-related aid for a beleaguered South Vietnam. It was a public relations exercise inviting as many countries as possible to show their support of South Vietnam. The response to this call was varied. Australia offered military advisers, livestock and veterinary experts, agricultural equipment, condensed milk, construction equipment and railway cars. Canada offered wheat. West Germany offered machinery, equipment and teachers for an engineering school. Japan offered construction materials, equipment and technical expertise to build a dam. New Zealand offered a surgical team, woodworking machinery and veterinary equipment. South Korea offered karate instructors for the military and the United Kingdom offered advisers on counterinsurgency and police operations, along with medical, mining and engineering materials for schools.⁸⁰ Despite, Johnson's initial success the Program failed to draw significant support. Belgium, Iran, Denmark, Greece and Spain only tentatively agreed to send aid while Norway, Netherlands and Pakistan refused outright.

In 1965, Johnson renewed his call for assistance and this time twenty-nine countries responded, although according to Robert Blackburn, fourteen of those countries were responding to a humanitarian crisis caused by devastating floods rather than the 'More Flags Program'. Countries such as Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Ecuador, Greece,

Guatemala, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom all sent medical aid, some sent medical personnel.⁸¹ By now Johnson had committed American forces and was pressing its allies for military assistance but only Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan responded.⁸²

As Peter Edwards points out the majority of material written and recorded about the war is from the United States' point of view and consequently, most people, including the Australians, are unaware that Australia was a willing ally of the USA and the Republic of South Vietnam.⁸³ Around fifty thousand men and women from the Australian army, navy and air force served alongside American and Vietnamese forces, around five hundred died in the conflict.⁸⁴ Moreover Australia and New Zealand paid for their military commitments as opposed to Korean, Filipino and Thai forces which were subsidized by the United States.⁸⁵

Edwards argues that Australia entered the war not only to support its friend and ally the United States but also to prevent the spread of Communism that might eventually affect countries directly towards the North of Australia, including the Malayan peninsula and

⁸⁰ Details from Blackburn's, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War*, p.13.

⁸¹ Full details of the each country's contribution can be found in Blackburn's, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags"*, pp.26-28.

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⁸³ Peter Edwards, 'The Strategic Concerns of a Regional Power: Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War,' in *America, The Vietnam War, and the World*, ed. Daum, Gardener, Mausbach, pp.221-236.

⁸⁴ According to an official Australian government web page approximately 50,000 Australian army, navy and air force personnel served in Vietnam, around 500 were killed and a further 2,400 were injured. The Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs, *The Vietnam War 1962-1972*, <<http://australiansatwar.gov.au/throughmyeyes>>,[accessed 9 November 2005], (para.1).

⁸⁵ Figures produce by historians such as Fujimoto, Haven, Blackburn, Yi, Kislenko would appear to suggest that all these countries

Indonesia. In other words, Australia accepted the validity of the Domino Theory and as a result of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Treaty (ANZUS) of 1951, Australia accepted the burden to defend the Western alliance. The Australian government was particularly anxious that the USA did not resort to nuclear weapons and hoped, by their direct involvement to influence and restrain America's use of force. In 1963, they sent a small team of advisers, but in 1965 after increasing pressure from the USA, Australia dispatched a battalion of 800 infantry to Vietnam. Around 120 artillerymen from New Zealand followed shortly afterwards. The maximum Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) forces in Vietnam was 8,000 which was small in comparison to the half a million troops committed by the US forces. Australia had conscription for 21 year old males, cynically known as the 'birthday ballot' but New Zealand had no conscription. By 1967, public opinion in Australia was turning against the war. Radical students began protesting and even collecting money in support of the National Liberation Front. Once again, the Tet Offensive in 1968 proved to be the turning point for Australian policy toward Vietnam and debates began along the lines of bringing the troops back home rather than increasing numbers. By 1971, the government was planning a staged withdrawal, a process that was speeded up so as to have most troops out by Christmas 1971. Full withdrawal was completed by the end of the year. Naturally America did not take kindly to this but Vietnam was becoming an electoral liability for the Australian government of Gough Whitlam. The result was a breakdown of American-Australian relations as Nixon relegated Australia to the group designated as America's critics.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ While there are no records in the available filmographies that Australia made any documentaries about the war during this period, a request for information from their National Film Collection in Melbourne has

‘The Neutrals’: France, United Kingdom, and Canada

The term ‘neutrals’ is used advisedly with respect to these three countries, for though they were perceived as nonaligned in as much as they did not send troops or send financial aid to support the war, further investigation shows that they did have allegiance to one side or another for political or economic reasons.

During the early 1950s American support of French forces against the Communists in Vietnam amounted to two billion dollars in aid and after France’s withdrawal from the area it was expected that it would in turn support American policy especially as 17,000 French citizens remained in the South.⁸⁷ Yet, relations between the two countries were more complicated as political scientist Marianna Sullivan details in her study, *France’s Vietnam Policy: a Study in French-American Relations*.⁸⁸ Using a variety of primary sources such as government documents, newspaper accounts, memoirs and interviews with key government officials conducted by Sullivan herself, she pieces together the troubled relationship between the two democracies. She surmises that France’s Vietnam policy during the period 1963-1973 was largely a product of relational, historical and situational factors. She traces the conflict between the two countries over the area known as Indochina back to World War II. Sullivan argues that following the recovery period, France was anxious to reassert itself on the international stage but the USA, being the power in ascendance, refused to share power. Not surprisingly this frustrated the French, in particular their leader, President Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle was resentful that the USA had provided little diplomatic assistance to the French at the

revealed that documentaries were indeed produced, two of which are discussed within this thesis: *Action in Vietnam* (1966) and *The Unlucky Country* (1967).

⁸⁷ Figures from RB Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War Volume II: The Struggle for South-East Asia, 1961-19* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1985), p.18.

1954 peace negotiations; moreover, he suspected its intentions were not honourable and that the USA intended to usurp France's position in Indochina. In August 1963, de Gaulle spoke out publically about the situation in Vietnam. He called for a united Vietnam free of outside interference and referred to the 'neutralization' of South Vietnam. Although he did not refer directly to the United States the inference that the Americans should draw back was clear. During 1964 de Gaulle continued to speak both privately and publically about the dangers of further escalation and on 1 September 1966 in the Cambodian capital Phnompenh, de Gaulle made another key speech that further inflamed relations with the US. He insisted that the USA withdraw all its troops, accept the principle of Vietnamese self-determination and accept the necessity of dealing with China. In an effort to promote stability and in the hope that France would be allowed to reassert its influence in the region, de Gaulle had successfully managed a rapprochement with Hanoi and although no formal relations were established with the National Liberation Front, French officials had met with NLF contacts in Algiers, Phnompenh and Peking. President Johnson and his administration were angered at de Gaulle's pronouncements and horrified that he should suggest that the peace process involve China.

Although de Gaulle was viewed by the Americans as arrogant, bitter and anti-American, Sullivan shows he had a great deal of support from the people, not only the French but also the 700,000 Vietnamese exiles, mainly from South Vietnam, living in France because of the American support of the Saigon regime. The exiles included former Vietnamese leaders such as Thanh, Bao Dai and even General Khanh. Sullivan

⁸⁸ Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: a Study in French-American Relations* (London: Greenwood Press, 1978).

examines a range of French newspapers, from the Gaullist *La Nation*, to moderate papers such as *Le Monde*, pro-American papers such as *Le Figaro* and Communist papers such as *l'Humanité*, and surmises that they concurred with de Gaulle's position; moreover that they were strongly opposed to the bombing of North Vietnam and showed compassion for the victims both in the North and the South.

In June 1969, General de Gaulle was replaced by President Pompidou and a new era of more cordial relations ensued with President Nixon. Unlike de Gaulle, Pompidou refrained from any criticism and offered a mediatory role. As France now held a more neutral position it was able to play a major part in the peace negotiations that began in 1969 and concluded in 1973, in Paris. Despite the efforts of de Gaulle and Pompidou, France was unable to regain influence in Vietnam and reclaim its assets. Ironically, just as in 1954 when all French assets in the North were confiscated so a similar process took place in the South in 1975 after the fall of Saigon.

America was particularly concerned that the British government did not publicly oppose it. On the whole the British government supported American policy in South East Asia but endorsed a defensive strategy in South Vietnam rather than an attack of the North. In response to Johnson's 'More Flags' program, Britain sent police advisers, medical equipment and a paediatric team, technical experts, equipment for schools, a professor of English, and a typesetting machine.⁸⁹ Yet in spite of considerable pressure from the Johnson administration, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson refused to send British troops to Vietnam.

Many historians point to Britain's involvement in defending Malaysia against Indonesian expansionist designs as the main reason for Britain's reluctance to give military support to the US in Vietnam. In his book, *All the Way with JFK?*, Peter Busch argues that not only did Britain initially support the USA diplomatically, adopting the role of cold war and commonwealth ally but actively demonstrated that it was not 'soft' on Communism.⁹⁰

Busch discusses in detail the role Britain played in the lead-up to the war in Vietnam, focusing particularly on the years 1961-1963. Busch contends that Britain's support of the USA in Vietnam was far more subtle than most historians acknowledge. First, as one of two countries that chaired the International Commission for the Supervision and Control (ICC) of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, Britain wielded influence over the delegations of Canada, India and Poland and the reports these countries issued.⁹¹ Second, Busch argues that Britain could have opposed Kennedy's Vietnam policy especially in light of Diem's unpopular, undemocratic, repressive and corrupt regime. Yet the British government wanted the defeat of the Communist forces of the NLF and so chose to support Diem by sending counter-insurgency experts to Saigon to help the police and the South Vietnamese army. With its experience in defeating the Communist-led guerrilla campaign in Malaya, Britain believed it could help South Vietnam against the NLF. Third, by setting up the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM) in Saigon in 1961, the British government sent an unequivocal signal of support to the South Vietnamese government and the United States. BRIAM also showed its allies and the Soviet Union that the British were prepared to safeguard their interests in South

⁸⁹ Details from Blackburn's, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags"*, p.142.

East Asia and, moreover, they were not interested in promoting peace negotiations in South Vietnam.⁹²

In her book, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, Sylvia Ellis takes up the story from 1964, when Harold Wilson and his Labour government were elected to power.⁹³ Using documents from the Public Record Office and the Lyndon Johnson Library, Ellis pieces together the reasons for the breakdown of the ‘special relationship’ between Britain and the USA. Ellis examines three areas in particular: first, pre-existing expectations on both sides that whatever the crisis, and taken that they were closest allies, Britain and the USA would support one regardless, sacrificing national self-interest if necessary; second, how a series of verbal understandings about the role each should play broke down; third, how the key personalities affected political decision-making. Ellis, like other historians, points to the ‘icy’ relationship between Wilson and Johnson. She describes how Wilson was fearful of Johnson’s power and zeal for the war in Vietnam. Johnson, on the other hand, could not understand Wilson’s reluctance to join the anti-Communist crusade in the same way he had supported the USA in Korea.

Despite its decline on the world stage, Britain was still regarded as the fourth major power after the USA, USSR and China, and her lack of interest in sending troops was not only a military but also a huge moral blow to the USA. Indeed, the fact that America’s closest ally refused to send troops undermined the whole of American policy

⁹⁰ Peter Busch, *All the Way with JFK?: Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.206.

⁹¹ The USSR was the other country that co-chaired the ICC.

⁹² Busch, *All the Way with JFK?*, p.91.

⁹³ Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, (Connecticut: Praeger, 2004).

in Vietnam, for if South Vietnam was worth saving why was Britain not willing to get involved?

Still Wilson held out, refusing to send even a token force of a hundred men as originally requested by the Johnson Administration. His government had serious financial problems with the balance-of-payments deficit curtailing any military action abroad. Until August 1966 British forces and finances were stretched with their commitment in Malaysia but as the military situation improved, America expected Britain to transfer its forces to Vietnam. Wilson again resisted, mindful that the conflict in Vietnam could widen further if China and the USSR were also to intervene. Ellis reminds us that the Labour government had only a small working majority and that Wilson was a skilful pragmatist, trying not to alienate Britain's closest ally while keeping his party and the electorate on his side. Thus, America had to settle for public support from the British government but at the same time tolerate private efforts for peace.

With the escalation of US forces in the South and the bombing of the North, Wilson was under increasing pressure from anti-war lobbyists as well as his own backbenchers to work for peace. Even with his victory in the March 1966 general election, Wilson was facing widening opposition to the war both within parliament and from the general public. By 1967 there were large public demonstrations in cities around the world including London, Tokyo, Stockholm, Vancouver, Brussels and Johannesburg as well as Washington. On 17 March 1968, 25,000 anti-war demonstrators attacked the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square, London. It was a violent affair with forty-five

demonstrators and 117 police requiring medical treatment and 246 people being arrested.⁹⁴

Although Canada was seen as a long-time ally by the USA both historically and politically, it did not openly support nor oppose America's intervention in the war. While the Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Mike Pearson, admired the liberal domestic policies pursued by young American President Kennedy, his foreign policy troubled the Canadian government and its people. Historians Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, examined the national press and numerous polls that indicated Canadians were divided over the war, for although they feared Communism they also feared the dominating influence of American culture and politics.⁹⁵

Bothwell's assessment of the relationship between Canada and the USA during the Vietnam War years reveals it to be somewhat confused and precarious. During the course of the war, Canada provided safe haven to 50,000 Americans who crossed the border into Canada to escape the draft. While the US government was unhappy about the exodus it was also aware that these men could not be legally extradited. This aspect of the war is well known and documented but Bothwell points to some lesser known facts. For example, although the Canadian government refused to send troops, 20,000-30,000 Canadians voluntarily joined the American armed forces to fight in South Vietnam. The official death toll of Canadians who gave their lives is 111 and their

⁹⁴ Figures from Arthur Marwick's, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.635.

⁹⁵ Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, John English, *Canada Since 1945*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World 1945-1984* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

names are registered on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington.⁹⁶ Although Canada had very little invested in South Vietnam it depended heavily on trade with the USA and stood to lose out if it openly criticized its neighbour. Again Bothwell points to another illuminating fact that in 1966, the US spent \$300 million in Canadian Commodities including chemicals such as napalm obviously destined for South East Asia.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, in response to Johnson's 'More Flags' program, Canada sent emergency hospital units, medical personnel, polio vaccines, food and emergency aid, and donated a science building for the University of Hue along with nine teachers, text books, and even offered training for Vietnamese students in Canada.⁹⁸

Pearson's early response to the war was to offer an emissary to negotiate peace on behalf of the Americans. Blair Seaborn, a member of the Canadian delegation to the International Control Commission, was sent to Hanoi but was unsuccessful.⁹⁹ Shortly afterwards in 1965 when America began to bomb North Vietnam and send US troops into the South, Pearson began to express doubts to Kennedy's successor, President Johnson. Pearson wanted the USA to halt the bombing of North Vietnam and resume negotiations, Johnson refused and at this point the US-Canadian relationship broke down. The USA did not want to be dictated to and the Canadians, while willing to mediate, did not want to be just a mouth-piece for the Americans. Even when a new liberal Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, came to power in June 1968, Canadian policy towards the war remained the same. Like Pearson before, Trudeau and his cabinet had

⁹⁶ Figures from Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, p.212.

⁹⁷ Figures from Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, p.227.

⁹⁸ Details from Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags"*, p.141.

⁹⁹ Canada, along with Poland and India was part of the International Control Commission (ICC), a truce supervisory group set up under the 1954 Geneva Accord. The Commission was responsible for monitoring the ceasefire but had no formal powers to investigate political opposition movements developing within either North or South Vietnam.

serious reservations and privately opposed the war but they did not openly criticize America. Again Trudeau and his Minister for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, offered to negotiate for peace. By now, however, neither Washington nor Hanoi had any confidence in Canada's ability to broker peace.

This chapter has set out the background and development of the conflict, both nationally and internationally, and it details the key political and economic relationships underpinning the various alliances. The juxtaposition of the various historical perspectives, albeit procured from different secondary sources, nevertheless offers a more developed understanding of the complexity of the war and underpins the detailed analysis of these internationally produced documentaries.

The following chapter focuses on the documentaries themselves, analysing their conditions of production and content but also utilising the international context and national policies outlined in this chapter as a tool for interrogation. Again, grouping the documentaries into the relevant political camps allows for greater textual and intertextual analysis, not only with regard to historical specificity but also with regard to the forthcoming issues of genre and ideology.

CHAPTER TWO

TEXTS - Part I

This chapter offers the first integrated and in-depth analysis of a broad selection of internationally produced Vietnam War Documentaries. It provides a detailed textual and contextual examination of twenty-six documentaries shedding new light on their construction and their mediation of the conflict. In order to provide a more sophisticated analysis of the texts, these documentaries are examined via a system of process that includes funding and industrial practices such as production, distribution and exhibition; agency that assesses the contribution made by national film bodies and government departments, producers, directors, editors, composers and stars; reception that considers the response from contemporary critics; and representation that considers areas of national identity, gender and ethnicity, although this last section will be considered further in Chapter Three.¹⁰⁰ In addition, this chapter also considers whether national film movements, indigenous or foreign, have influenced a particular group of documentaries or director.

The chapter is divided into four parts along the lines of the previous chapter: the first concerns Vietnamese film production both in the North and the South; the second and third consider government-sponsored documentaries made by their respective allies; the last section analyses films made by non-government-sponsored and independent filmmakers mainly from 'neutral' countries. Each sub-division follows a chronological film release system in an attempt not only to posit the documentaries into corresponding time-frames but also to track political changes and shifts within official policies and public opinion.

Vietnam War Documentaries made by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

The chapter begins with documentaries produced by Vietnamese filmmakers and government organisations. It offers a brief history of Vietnamese film production both prior to and during the war not only as a tool for contextual analysis but also as a prelude to interrogating these documentaries in terms of Third World Cinema and Third Cinema in the next chapter.

As outlined earlier in the literature review, there are a few discrete articles that help to build a composite picture of Vietnamese film production and exhibition during the Vietnam War.¹⁰¹ By far the most detailed and relevant is Bui Phu's article 'The Seventh Goddess' as he focuses on the development of Vietnamese Cinema, fictional and documentary film, during the period 1953-1980, in particular, Communist filmmaking.

According to Bui Phu, indigenous documentary filmmaking began in Vietnam in 1946 with two very short documentaries, *The Declaration of Independence at Ba Dinh* and *The Welcoming of Ho Chi Minh on his return from France*.¹⁰² These were exhibited wherever possible while the conflict with the French ensued. As a practising filmmaker Bui Phu relates the many difficulties in acquiring filmmaking and projection equipment

¹⁰⁰ See Chapman, Glancy and Harper, eds., *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*.

¹⁰¹ John Tran, 'Vietnamese Cultural Production During the American War,' in Michael Klein, ed., *The Vietnam Era* (London, Pluto Press, 1990), pp.199-211 and 'Films in Vietnam,' *Film Comment* 2, (Spring 1969), pp.46-88, Sarah Rouse, 'South Vietnam's Film Legacy' in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.6, No.2, 1986, pp.211-222.

¹⁰² Bui Phu also provides details of the period leading up to the Indo-Chinese War and explains that when cinema started in Vietnam in the early 1920s, it was confined to urban areas and attracted the rich, educated elite as the poor could neither afford the tickets nor read the French inter-titles. At first, only French films were shown but later, American Westerns, Chinese adventure films and Japanese martial arts films were screened, although eventually American films dominated the market. During both World Wars

such as 35mm Pathé projectors, stands, bulbs and microphones, and recalls that sometimes they would cobble together equipment using various components from other machines.

He also describes the setting up of Communist cinema units in the South during the 1950s and again points out the many difficulties such as the scarcity of film processing chemicals and power generators needed to produce and exhibit films. Moreover, these generators were very noisy and tended to give away their secret locations. Despite these obstacles, documentary shorts were made in the South during the 1950s.

Production in the North was centred at a location called The Palm Grove where the vegetation helped to camouflage the laboratories. The first sound film, *The National Congress in Honour of the Combatants*, made in 1953, was seen as a landmark for Vietnamese cinematic independence. During the hostilities with the French, the Vietnamese redeployed scores of cadres from fighting duties to filmmaking, distribution and exhibition of films. As the films were silent, live narration was required. According to Bui Phu the commentators had to have a certain level of education, political awareness, a clear voice and ‘spirit’ but also have a lively manner, be concise and persuasive, ‘he had to know how to convince the public, to gain consensus from superficial things right up to calls for popular insurrection against the enemy for liberation of the country’.¹⁰³

there were attempts to make Vietnamese films, but these were made by foreign production companies who used Eurasian actors with only a few Vietnamese forming part of the production crew.

¹⁰³ Bui Phu, ‘The Seventh Goddess’, p.76.

At the beginning of the 1950s the Palm Grove unit had only six projection teams and eight production teams. Not surprisingly the unit found it difficult to produce and exhibit enough material to meet the demand. With the setting up of the National Society of Film and Photography in 1953, however, teams expanded rapidly and were aided by the donation of equipment from the USSR, which constituted around ninety percent of equipment used by the North and NLF.¹⁰⁴ In 1960, the first projector was made in Vietnam as well as the establishment of a cinema school. Soon a huge countrywide network of cinema units in factories, schools, plantations and farming co-operatives could be found in the North.

During American involvement, particularly periods of ‘escalation’ (1965-1968 and 1972-1973), these cinema units suffered severe casualties. Two hundred filmmaking and projection personnel lost their lives, nevertheless, production and exhibition continued albeit on a reduced scale. Bui Phu acknowledges the areas of Quang Binh and Vinh Linh were particularly affected by heavy bombing from B52 planes and refers to the underground screenings given regularly to small audiences.¹⁰⁵ He provides some astonishing figures for the same; 500,000 screenings to 300,000 spectators over a period of five years. He also describes how Communist cinema units were able to screen films close to the outskirts of Saigon without detection from the South Vietnamese regime. Unfortunately, he provides no similar exhibition and viewing figures for the South.

¹⁰⁴ During the 1960s the German Democratic Republic also donated equipment including cameras, light meters and film stock and even helped to duplicate NLF films, *Film Comment* 2 (Spring, 1969), p.87.

¹⁰⁵ Phu does not mention any documentaries specifically, although *A Day of Plane Hunting*, filmed in the region of Quang Binh, and *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* are documentaries that depict life under these conditions. *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* also shows an example of one of these underground cinemas.

Nevertheless, Bui Phu provides a vital overview of the emergence of Vietnamese Cinema and the conditions of production and exhibition during the conflict. His account of the precarious nature of producing and exhibiting films and resilience of the Vietnamese cinema to survive such conditions is not only corroborated by other Vietnamese historians but it is borne out by the documentaries themselves as will be demonstrated in due course.

The selection of North Vietnamese and NLF documentaries examined in this study can be divided generally into two production groups, those for home consumption and those for foreign consumption, although some home front films were suitably dubbed and eventually exported abroad. Home front films focus on the daily life and struggle of the ordinary Vietnamese people depicting them as heroic. These films were generated as morale boosters. Documentaries concentrating on the extensive devastation to life and land by US bombing raids were probably designed for export as these would have had a demoralising effect upon the North Vietnamese. These films take great pains to highlight civilian targets such as hospitals, schools and residential areas and focus on innocent loss of life.

Some North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front documentary films would find their way to Europe and the United States via sympathetic political or humanitarian groups such as the US Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (USCANLF-SVN), but these were comparatively rare. Such films were usually in 16mm format and dubbed or sub-titled in French or English.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ During the late 1960s this New York based group acquired thirty films from North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front and lent them to American schools, peace and civil rights organizations,

i. War Documentaries made by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

When Ho Chi Minh converted the photographic unit of the Propaganda Ministry into the State Enterprise of Cinematography and Photography in 1953, its prime objectives were to publicise government policies, the activities and achievements of the Vietnamese people and army, and to educate the people in culture and politics. Once US combat troops entered the conflict these aims were updated to include cultivating opposition to the ‘American invaders’.

Over seven hundred newsreel and documentary films were produced during the period 1965-1975. Compared to the wealth of documentaries, only thirty-six feature films were produced during the war. Not only did the North lack the equipment to produce films, in particular multiple prints, but also exhibition was problematic as it was not practical to show long films with the constant threat of aerial attack. In the early days of the war, films were still shown in the open air at night but later they would be screened in underground cinemas to avoid the air raids. These cinemas were built ten to fifteen metres under the surface but still there were problems as the electricity would often be cut off by the bombing raids. Both documentary and feature films were exhibited by mobile film units travelling all around North Vietnam and, as most of these were silent films, they would be accompanied by live narration usually performed by the

churches and private individuals in 200 cities. USCANLF-SVN also distributed a range of materials concerning the war as well as organized seminars, radio-television appearances, meetings and marches in protest against American involvement in Vietnam.

projectionist. The projectionist/narrator often improvised making the talk more relevant to each audience.¹⁰⁷

Made in black and white and twenty-eight minutes long, *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam* (North Vietnam, 1968) is a government documentary produced under the direction of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Commission for the Investigation of US War Crimes in Vietnam. The documentary is narrated in English by an unseen Vietnamese male narrator and is a bleak indictment of the US bombing campaigns of the North. The images of distraught people are relentless and particular attention is placed on the suffering of children. In conjunction with this attempt at appealing to the audience's sense of indignation and humanity, it also offers a scientific approach by quoting statistics and chemical formulas. The documentary provides data relating to US troops and military hardware deployed, numbers of Vietnamese dead and injured, as well as those Vietnamese in the South who have been uprooted, displaced and forced to live in 'strategic hamlets'.¹⁰⁸ The statistics are often displayed as text only, for example:

Up till 1966, American aircraft have destroyed in North Vietnam:
8 CITIES AND TOWNSHIPS
294 SCHOOLS
74 HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CENTRES
110 CHURCHES AND PAGODAS

Each section is accompanied by moving images and stills. Much of the documentary has no music or narration, although the opening and finale sequences are accompanied by rousing military music and when the narrator does speak, he uses language that is

¹⁰⁷ 'Films in Vietnam', *Film Comment* 2, (Spring 1969), pp.58-59.

¹⁰⁸ In early 1962 the South Vietnamese government, under President Diem, began a policy of creating 'strategic hamlets'. This involved corralling peasants into armed blockades in order to deprive the Vietcong of support and sanctuary. Not only were the peasants forced to build these hamlets but they were also expected to defend them. Yet the money, medical aid and weapons were often embezzled by corrupt local officials. Not surprisingly, the policy proved ineffective as the peasants hated the hamlets and the majority were destroyed either by the VC or their own occupants.

highly charged. For example, when describing US fragmentation bombs and their effect on the human body, the narrator comments wryly: 'Never has the art of killing achieved such a refinement'. The documentary ends similarly on a highly charged and defiant note: 'For the Vietnamese people no sacrifice is too great when the independence and the freedom of the country are at stake. No force on earth can save US imperialism from inevitable defeat'.

This particular documentary was distributed by the left-wing American film co-operative Newsreel, which seems to confirm that certain films were intended for export via political organisations sympathetic to their message. Documentary theorist and Newsreel historian Bill Nichols praises the film for its simple organisation. He describes the visual material as 'shockingly graphic, detailed, painfully blunt' and the narration as 'cool, scientific, detached'. Nichols argues the viewer is allowed to 'ponder and react' to the material rather than be constantly guided and manipulated by the narrator.¹⁰⁹ The result, according to Nichols, is that the film is more powerful and effective than a straightforward attack on US policies. Nichols is astute in his assessment of the documentary's form and style but what he fails to acknowledge is that the detached, impartial, scientific technique adopted by the documentary's filmmakers is a sophisticated form of propagandist art. A further analysis of propaganda techniques such as this can be found later in the chapter on genre.

In contrast to *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam* which was specifically produced for Western markets, *A Day of Plane Hunting* (North Vietnam, 1968) is a short home front film made by the Documentary and Current Affairs Film Unit. This documentary

was designed to encourage the North Vietnamese people to be patient, do their duty and have confidence that their methods will prevail. Filmed in the province of Quang Binh in 1968, the documentary focuses on a small group of female farm workers stationed at a gun post on the look out for US aircraft trespassing over the demilitarized zone into Northern territory. According to the credits two film units were employed to make this documentary, one military and one civilian, although which is which is not clear. However, no credit is given to the narrator and it is likely that the voice-over was a later addition for it would normally be the role of the travelling projectionist to provide the commentary.

The documentary opens with a melody from a familiar song celebrating the 1955 victory of Diên Biên Phủ and continues with this celebratory tone to praise the dedication and hard work of these women at their gun post. Their individual identities are not revealed. It is possible this is a communist strategy - not to distinguish them as personalities, or it could be because they are symbolic figures, one group of many working to defeat the enemy.

The documentary purports to depict 'a day in the life', however, it is likely that it incorporates a longer period.¹¹⁰ An unseen male provides the narration: 'Every day, every day, they stand at their position. Every day, every day they are ready'. Women take turns to manage the post but most of the time they work in the rice fields. The documentary celebrates the success of this particular village, again unnamed, claiming

¹⁰⁹ Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left (1971-75)*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), pp.108-109.

¹¹⁰ 'In the Third World Newsreel catalogue and in the filmography of Michaud & Dittmar, eds., *Hanoi to Hollywood*, this film is entitled 'A Day of Plane Hunting', however, it is also been documented as 'One Day in Vietnam' in the *British National Film Catalogue*, 1974, p.207.

that of the 500 planes downed in the province, two were brought down by this post. The documentary includes footage from what it calls 'the cemetery' of wrecked US planes also found in Quang Binh province. Although there is no information available to corroborate these figures, the cemetery is geographically plausible as Quang Binh province is located adjacent to the demilitarized zone along the seventeenth parallel and the nearest landfall for US planes flying from aircraft carriers off the coast. It is strategically the ideal point for North Vietnamese forces to intercept US planes.

The documentary incorporates images of the women training in hand-to-hand combat and gun target practice, but this is mainly for display and designed to encourage their audience to remain ready and prepared at all times. In contrast to these practical demonstrations is a series of poetic nature images, those of birds being particularly symbolic. For example, when the village comes under attack not only do the school children take cover but a close-up shot of a chicken sheltering her young under her wings is juxtaposed and enhances the sense of vulnerability. Similarly, after the attack, doves are shown flying back to the dovecote, and a duck with her brood takes to the water, both images signalling a return to normality and restoration of an otherwise idyllic life.

The film continually stresses the need for calm, patience and continuity. The narrator says: 'Success is not easy. Sitting, being patient is success'. When the women on gun duty are provided with food by those colleagues working next to them in the rice field, the narrator comments: 'Success is also caring for each other'. The film's narrator

closes the documentary by repeating the opening words: ‘Every day, every day they stand firmly. Every day, every day they are ready for the US planes’.¹¹¹

Released mid-point during the war *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* (North Vietnam, 1970) is an epic documentary both in terms of production and content. Fifty minutes long and made in black and white it is clearly made for the home audience as a morale booster as it depicts Vietnamese ingenuity, resilience and community endeavour to survive in adverse conditions.

Although the opening credits roll to the sound of dramatic military-style music, the initial images are picturesque with waves lapping at the shore and fisherman casting nets from their small boats, all accompanied by Vietnamese pastoral music. This gentle scene, however, is quickly supplanted by the stark images and sounds of war.

The documentary is narrated by an unseen female who provides the necessary geographical and military context to the images.¹¹² Vinh Linh is an area close to the border with South Vietnam by the seventeenth parallel, on the northern bank of the Ben Hai river. During the war it bore the brunt of the US assault from both the air and the sea, forcing its occupants to live underground. Before the bombing and blockade of the area, Vinh Linh supported a rural community of 70,000 people. Over a period of four years, the US dropped some half a million tonnes of missiles, transforming this rural

¹¹¹ My thanks to Mr Anh Phan of Buckinghamshire New University and Mr Hai Lee of BBC Radio Vietnam for their help in translating the Vietnamese commentaries. While Phan translates the title as *One Day on Duty*, Lee translates it as *One Day of Military Duty*. The documentary provides full credits at the outset. According to Phan, the screenplay writer Banh Chên, was a significant name in documentary filmmaking during the 1960s and 1970s but the study has not been able to find any other reference to him in the available Vietnamese film histories.

idyll into a wasteland. The narrator tells the audience that the tonnage of bombs dropped on Vinh Linh was three times more than was dropped on Japan in World War II. The statistics are accompanied by a montage sequence of burnt out homes and churches, even the close-up of a shattered crucifix is included. The response of the locals was to dig themselves in, gradually building up an extensive network of shelters and trenches until whole villages existed underground.

The documentary repeatedly juxtaposes scenes of the war over ground with images of daily life continuing below ground, including women cooking, work being undertaken and schools being run. These positive scenes of men and women labouring in the fields and underground are all accompanied by jaunty, uplifting music. The film also contrasts aerial shots of B52 bombers and the devastation to the land below, with images of the Vietnamese farmers clearing the debris and replanting the land with rice.¹¹³ There are many poetic images, such as a new born baby and new shoots of rice that are used as metaphors of survival and regeneration. The final contrasting shot is of a North Vietnamese flag flying triumphantly over a shattered insignia from a downed US aircraft.

Filmmaker Ngoc Quynh spent over a year filming these conditions both over and underground using only basic equipment, much of which was improvised. For example, he used light from magnesium flares to film inside the tunnels. North Vietnamese film crews were expected to fight when necessary and many died during the conflict. During

¹¹² The narration was probably a later addition as the projectionist would normally give the live commentary.

¹¹³ Again these aerial images would probably have been acquired from outside sources.

one attack on Vinh Linh, Ngoc Quynh lost three of his crew and 5,000 metres of film which forced him to stay on and reshoot much of the documentary.¹¹⁴

Vinh Linh is an overtly propagandist film with all the Communist rhetoric of an idyllic way of life under threat from the capitalist West. The narrator refers to the Americans as ‘invaders’, ‘imperialists’ and even compares them to ‘the Hun’. Although the Americans are singled out as the enemy, the existence of the South Vietnamese government and army are not even acknowledged but rather the North Vietnamese are depicted as defenders of both the North and the South.

It is clear that the home audience is expected to take pride in the inhabitants’ achievements. The Communist work ethic of teamwork, placing the needs of the community before the needs of the individual, is shown to be the key to success and survival. Both men and women are depicted as carrying the burden of fighting, farming and digging shelters. The images show vividly the living conditions of ordinary people but these people are not allowed to speak for themselves. The young female narrator repeatedly adopts the term ‘we’, feigning to speak for the people, but she is the voice of the government of North Vietnam.

Not surprisingly, some of the statistics quoted are questionable, figures such as ‘the 235 planes, 36 warships, 1000s of invaders’ destroyed by the people of Vinh Linh.

Similarly, there are unconvincing images of smiling, happy workers, but the images of

¹¹⁴ Not much is known in the West about these Vietnamese filmmakers. According to a review of the documentary in the *Morning Star*, 7 September 1991, p.8, when it was aired during the Channel 4 season on ‘Vietnamese Cinema’, the title of ‘People’s Artist’ was bestowed on Ngoc Quynh by the Vietnamese people in recognition of his tenacity in re-shooting this documentary after losing his crew and original film in an US air raid.

extreme conditions over and underground are credible and often harrowing. The network of underground tunnels is an extraordinary feat of engineering and the people's ability to adapt to living underground, running schools, hospitals and cultural events, is remarkable. Despite the propagandist rhetoric, *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* provides a valuable insight into the lives of ordinary people and the workings of the state of North Vietnam.

ii. War Documentaries made by the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam

Made early on during the conflict in 1965, *Foreign Correspondents Visit the National Liberation Front* is a short twenty-minute black and white film made by the Liberation Film Studios. It records the visit of French and Australian journalists Madeleine Riffaud and Wilfred Burchett to an NLF unit somewhere in the South. The correspondents, working for the French Communist Party publication *L'Humanité*, are shown being welcomed enthusiastically into their midst and not surprisingly much political kudos is made of their presence.

The film employs a male Vietnamese 'voice of God' narrator who addresses the audience in English.¹¹⁵ Not only does he offer the audience a description of the events but he often addresses the audience directly in order to draw them in and involve them more effectively. The documentary's opening image is a headshot of Madeleine Riffaud sporting a traditional Vietnamese headdress consisting of a patterned scarf elaborately entwined around her head. Only at the beginning is Riffaud allowed to speak as she

¹¹⁵ A 'voice of God' narrator is an anonymous commentator whom the audience hears but does not see. The 'voice of God' narrator/commentator is usually male with a professionally trained, richly-toned voice that is authoritative and matter-of-fact in tone. The unseen speaker can also be referred to as the 'omniscient narrator' and tends to sound neutral, impersonal, and even 'above the fray'. The 'voice of

identifies herself, her colleague and her newspaper in French but other than this, her views or indeed Burchett's, are not expressed directly to the camera. The narrator uses repetition in his 'welcome' to Riffaud and Burchett who are described as 'dear European guests'. He welcomes their intention 'to get the inside story' of the Vietnamese struggle and in doing so he also welcomes the audience to whom the NLF are anxious to tell their story.

Although this is one of the earliest made films of the conflict, it is very much in keeping with those which follow in that it is full of images of Vietnamese resilience, ingenuity and industry. The NLF are shown using traditional and modern methods of warfare, such as constructing punji stick defences and traps, as well as commandeering US military equipment and spent shells to re-mould into other tools such as lamps. Predictably, the film is full of anti-American rhetoric such as 'checking US imperialism', 'the inevitable outcome of defeat for the enemy', and 'President Johnson is shuddering in the White House'.

The film makes more sophisticated arguments as it shows footage of anti-government protests in South Vietnamese cities. Moreover, the documentary makes claims that South Vietnam is being used as a testing site for American military technology, a claim that would be verified by US historians after the war. The soldiers are shown toiling in the fields, producing crops and farming animals while the narrator emphasizes how the soldiers are anxious not to be a burden to their fellow countrymen. Images of soldiers undertaking agricultural work are unusual for NLF documentaries. More common are

God' or 'omniscient narrator' not only offers the dominant but usually the only perspective on the documentary images screened.

images of NLF soldiers attempting to improve themselves through study and appreciation of the arts.

Throughout the film, images of Riffaud and Burchett typing or making sound recordings are woven into images of NLF military activities. They too join in with various festivities, particularly group dancing which suggests something of the tribal to Western eyes giving the impression that they both have 'gone native'. The final shots show the departure of the two journalists with appropriate gifts, including a lamp made from a bombshell case. As the narrator says farewell to the journalists he is also saying farewell to the audience, underlining how successful a filmic device and propaganda tool the journalists have been for the NLF filmmakers. Yet the filmmakers do not offer these well-respected, renowned war correspondents an opportunity to speak to camera, and ultimately they fail to capitalize on Burchett's and Riffaud's abilities as eloquent political commentators sympathetic to the Communist cause.

Madeleine Riffaud had been a member of the French Resistance, the *Groupes de Combat des Facultés*, in World War II and had shown an early interest in events unfolding in Vietnam. She had witnessed the departure of the French from Haiphong harbour in 1955 and in 1964 joined a group of Western journalists and photographers, led by Burchett to spend several weeks with the NLF in the South Vietnam jungle. According to Virginia Elwood-Akers, Riffaud viewed the resistance in Vietnam as a popular revolution, equating the struggles of the Vietcong against an oppressive government with the earlier struggle of the French against occupation by Nazi

Germany.¹¹⁶ In an early article, she wrote: ‘Millions of people are thus ready to sacrifice everything as we ourselves did at the time when we faced the Nazis’.¹¹⁷ Indeed, just as members of the French Resistance were known as ‘Maquis’, so Riffaud similarly labelled her Vietnamese revolutionaries in the first instalment of her memoirs, *Dans Les Maquis* (1965). In 1966 she returned to North Vietnam and again documented her experiences in a follow-up publication entitled, *Au Nord-Vietnam: écrit sous les bombes* (1967).

As Elwood-Akers points out, there are no official lists of journalists who covered the Vietnam War yet her research reveals that at least seventy-six international female journalists reported back, many from the combat zone.¹¹⁸ Nearly all had to overcome extreme prejudice and obstacles set by the military in order to gain access to the fighting. Elwood-Akers argues that they represented different styles, backgrounds and political views. Those who arrived early on in the conflict, like Dickey Chapelle, Marguerite Higgins, Martha Gellhorn and Madeleine Riffaud, were veteran war correspondents of World War II and Korea. Chapelle and Higgins were ‘hawks’ (pro-war and anti-Communist), Riffaud was pro-Communist, Gellhorn, Fitzgerald and Mary McCarthy were ‘doves’ (pro-peace) and highly critical of American policy. Many worked for prestigious publications and corporations such as the *New York Times*, the *National Broadcasting Company*, the *Associated Press*, *The Christian Science Monitor*,

¹¹⁶ Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondent in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988).

¹¹⁷ Madeleine Riffaud, ‘North Vietnam: Two Months, Two Thousand Kilometers During the Escalation’, *L’Humanité*, 27 October 1966, p.2, quoted from Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War*, p.80.

¹¹⁸ Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War*.

Newsweek, *the United Press International* and *L'Humanité*, and covered key events.¹¹⁹ Yet, despite their significant presence and contribution to the reporting of the war, with the exception of Riffaud in this NLF documentary, none appear to have been recorded by a Vietnamese or Western, government or independent documentary film.

Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett was also an experienced war correspondent having worked for the British *Daily Express* newspaper during World War II, following the MacArthur campaign in China and Burma. He also covered the aftermath of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima but his frank reports made him unpopular with the US military and he was subsequently prevented from entering Japan. Burchett joined the French Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* and in 1951 travelled first to China and then Korea in order to cover the war. Following the Korean War (1950-1953), Burchett worked for the radical American leftist paper *National Guardian*, travelling to Moscow to report on economic and scientific progress in the Soviet Union. For most of his career, Burchett courted controversy, particularly with his reports from Vietnam. As early as 1952, he was writing articles and books in support of the Communists in Vietnam and had even interviewed Ho Chi Minh.¹²⁰

In 1965 Burchett, now 54 years old, was still travelling throughout Vietnam using the Ho Chi Minh trail, which was difficult and dangerous terrain, in order to obtain the story. As a result of his special relationship with the North Vietnamese regime, he gained unprecedented access to Communist forces both in the North and South. According to biographer Roland Perry, Burchett wrote seven books, made twenty films

¹¹⁹ Patches Musgrove and Beverly Deepe covered the Tet Offensive in Saigon while Catherine Leroy reported from Hué. Jurate Kazickas was in Khe Sanh during the height of the battle. Several female

about the Communist movement in Vietnam and was seen by the National Liberation Front as a leading symbol of the resistance against the South.¹²¹ Unfortunately, the material pertaining to Burchett in *Foreign Correspondents*, while complementary, does not support the notion of Burchett being a leading figure in the Communist party of the North or the National Liberation Front of the South.

Since the opening and closing titles of *Foreign Correspondents* are in Vietnamese, it is likely that the film would have been exhibited both in the North and in South wherever possible. Nevertheless, the fact that this viewing copy was narrated in English and obtained from the Australian Film Archives, indicates that not only were the NLF anxious to reach outside audiences but were particularly interested in addressing allies of the South Vietnamese government, not only in the USA but also in Australia and New Zealand.

Another NLF documentary originally designed for the home audience but adapted for export is *Young Puppeteers of Vietnam* (National Liberation Front, South Vietnam 1968). The film follows the activities of a young puppeteer troupe through the process of making their puppets, rehearsing and finally performing to a village somewhere in the jungle. The voice-over narration is provided by an unseen female narrator, although the translation is rather poor in places as the original Vietnamese narrator, whose voice can

correspondents, including Riffaud, Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, gained access to North Vietnam.

¹²⁰ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.240.

¹²¹ Roland Perry, *The Exile – Burchett: Reporter of Conflict* (Victoria: William Heinemann Australia, 1988), p.178.

still be heard in the documentary's background, provides a more fulsome commentary to the film's events:¹²²

In South Vietnam there is everywhere evidence of the American's sin. Every day there is no time when there is any relief from the horrendous sound of the air raiders from the Pentagon intending to ruin our country. They have received our fire-storm and more and more have been defeated. The American demon now understand our courage... they have left behind a lot of aircraft on the ground and all of the new branches are blossoming under the sun.

The last reference is to the children of Vietnam and indeed the title of the documentary is, in fact, *The Art of Childhood* not *Young Puppeteers of Vietnam* as first thought. Again the Vietnamese-speaking narrator provides the audience with more information, explaining that the puppeteer group is made up of fifteen to sixteen year old boys and girls working industriously at their art: 'They practice to make puppets appear alive. They learn how to keep smiling in all circumstances'.

The group are shown making their puppets out of scrap metal from downed US planes, shells and ammunition. The troupe wears black pyjamas, the standard Vietcong uniform, but their weapon is art. They are filmed travelling through dangerous terrain to give a performance to a village mainly consisting of young children and elderly people. Each person in the audience holds a few branches, the importance of which is revealed later. As enemy aircraft fly overhead, the stage is dismantled rapidly and the audience use the branches for camouflage. Interestingly, the play performed is not one from ancient Vietnamese history or mythology but rather depicts current political events. The play depicts Uncle Ho repulsing Nixon, not by an army of Vietnamese soldiers or technological weapons, but rather symbolically, using the form of a giant hornet which stings Nixon to death and chases the American helicopter away. It is also possible that

¹²² Again, my thanks to Anh Phan and Hai Lee for their assistance in providing a translation of this documentary.

the hornet attack is also a reference to primitive methods used by the Vietnamese in the past and by the NLF during the war, in which bees or hornets nests were used as grenades against the enemy.

The documentary contains a number of rousing songs, one in praise of Ho Chi Minh, another is the National Liberation Front anthem. There are also other traditional arts such as poetry and flute music all of which would appeal to home front audiences both from the North and the South although the fact that it was dubbed into English suggests the documentary was also meant for export. As the emphasis is on children and includes minimal propagandist slogans, it is possible that this documentary was designed specifically for the Vietnamese child audience to boost their morale and instil courage. The small amount of propagandist rhetoric in the documentary, such as referring to the US forces as ‘sky bandits’ or giving the American invaders a ‘good spanking’ is strikingly absent in the English commentary again suggesting that the film’s English narration was tempered specifically for export.

As historian John Tran states, the images in this documentary are in stark contrast to the usual negative images of bombing, devastation, burning villages and distraught people: ‘Literally out of the wreckage of the war, a positive image of survival is created’.¹²³ Yet Tran’s assessment is limited for the documentary is also a celebration of Vietnamese culture and tradition and has an ethnographic slant not usually associated with a war documentary, and the relationship between the Vietnam War documentary and the ethnographic documentary will be explored further in the next chapter on genre.

¹²³ John Tran, ‘Vietnamese Cultural Production During the American War’, in Michael Klein, ed., *The Vietnam Era* (London, Pluto Press, 1990), p.206.

Also made in black and white and thirty-five minutes long, *Struggle For Life* (National Liberation Front, South Vietnam, 1968) was one film specifically designed for export, targeting American rather than European audiences, although this does not become clear until the end of the documentary. The film is subtitled ‘Medicine and Health in South Vietnam’ but nearly two thirds of the film is taken up with images of destruction from American bombing campaigns including aerial shots. In the opening credits, the filmmakers declare their sources: ‘This film was made from American, Vietnamese, French, Canadian and Swiss documents. It is dedicated to the Medical Corps of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam’.

The documentary uses a combination of male and female narrators whose English is very sophisticated, but the awkward expressions reveal that they are foreign students of English rather than native speakers. The information imparted by the narrators is a sustained attack against the American position in Vietnam, quoting bombing statistics, details of chemical warfare, disingenuous statements from US presidents and government officials, all combined with images of suffering by the Vietnamese people. The documentary highlights the massacre of civilians at the village My Lai and provides a long list of other villages that have suffered atrocities. It is one of the few documentaries to make reference to the ‘Tiger Cages’, a method of torture inflicted by the South Vietnamese government on dissidents.¹²⁴ Images of the torture of civilians along with the remains of dead men, women and children dominate the film throughout. It is also one of the few documentaries to allude to the role of the cadres.

¹²⁴ Dissidents were imprisoned in cramped cages for lengthy periods, resulting in full or partial paralysis. In addition to their imprisonment, lime was thrown over them causing painful skin lesions.

It is not until the last ten minutes that the audience is introduced to the work of the Medical Corps who travelled with the convoys and served alongside the fighting units. A team of NLF medics are filmed, undetected by the South Vietnamese government authorities, inoculating children in a suburb of Saigon, although it is impossible to ascertain the location as there are no identifiable city features to corroborate this statement.

What is impressive, however, is the set up of a mobile field hospital in the jungle. The hospital includes x-ray and operating facilities run on a generator powered by a bicycle. Plastic sheets are used to set up a sterile area and pure water is produced using laboratory methods, all under camouflage. A Vietnamese French-speaking doctor is interviewed but the accuracy of the translation is hard to ascertain as much of the speech is drowned out by the English voice-over. Assuming that the translation is accurate, it would appear that the doctor is expressing propagandist rhetoric, for he says that despite the US technology and money, they have ‘an invincible weapon’ and that is ‘the total support of the people’. This interview adds to the propagandist nature of the documentary but it is the finale that sets this film apart from the rest, as the narrator appeals directly to the American people for support:

Human ingenuity alone cannot win the struggle for life. Medical associations in some European countries have managed to send supplies - quinine, antibiotics, plasma, surgical kits. Could not the Americans do the same? Not only supplies – scientific journals and bulletins would be of inestimable value. The tangible presence of American assistance would be proof of the fact that the American people have another voice than that of the roar of the B52s and that they are determined as the Vietnamese people believe them to be to put an end to the war. Is this too much to ask?

While the opening image of the film is of the American B52 bombers delivering their destructive payload, the final image in the documentary is of a man moving heavy supplies on his adapted bicycle. These two images are in stark contrast to one another. The final image echoes other images of the Vietnamese human supply line but it also reiterates the underlying success and strong will of the Vietnamese as opposed to the callous inhumanity of the technology used by the Americans.

iii. War Documentaries made by the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

By the late 1960s there were 230 theatres in South Vietnam. Most of those in major cities such as Saigon, Hué and Danang were still operational but those in the provincial capitals had been shut down. Ironically, most of these cinemas were still owned by the French who remained in control of the distribution and exhibition of films, with the exception of Forces screenings.¹²⁵ Although some French newsreels were still being shown during this period, it was companies such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer rather than Gaumont and Pathé who dominated the newsreel sector. French fictional cinema was similarly replaced in the main by American films, but Chinese, Japanese and Indian feature films were also shown. Despite there being a fully-equipped and well-staffed Vietnamese National Motion Picture Centre, few fictional films were made. The Centre did produce newsreels and documentaries most of which were only shown in the capital. The Motion Picture Directorate of the Ministry of Information and Open Arms produced large number of newsreels and documentaries, and distributed bi-weekly news magazine

¹²⁵ Among the American fictional films that proved popular with the Vietnamese were musicals by Elvis Presley, Westerns, such as *How the West Was Won* (USA, 1962) and war films such as *The Longest Day* (USA, 1962). The American forces were given free screenings of a wide variety of fictional films but the Defense Department and film distributors would not allow these films to be shown to the ARVN army as they were regarded as 'foreign nationals'. The French fare tended to be more sophisticated. Films such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Fr/Jap, 1959) and *A Bout de Souffle* (Fr, 1959) were shown at the French Cultural Centre in Saigon, but these proved less popular.

films supplied by the United States Information Service (USIS). The Vietnamese Army Psychological Warfare Directorate also produced documentaries and short features and it would seem there was a programme to take these propaganda films to the people, particularly in rural areas, using mobile units.¹²⁶

Two short documentaries made by the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces are *Cadeau Sanglant* (aka *As Saigon Slept*, South Vietnam, 1968) and *Communist Massacre in Hue, South Vietnam* (South Vietnam, 1969) both are made in black and white. The first film, *Cadeau Sanglant* is a short six minute documentary made in conjunction with the South Vietnamese National Motion Picture Centre. The film depicts the disastrous effects of Vietcong rocket attacks on the capital city of Saigon over an eleven day period from the 19th to 30th May 1968, and is narrated in French by a female Vietnamese ‘voice of God’ commentator. The title ‘Cadeau sanglant’ meaning ‘bloody present’ and is not only bitterly ironic but also acts a pointed rebuke to the North Vietnamese who were celebrating Ho Chi Minh’s 78th birthday during this period.

The documentary offers a day-by-day account of the sustained attack with the narrator describing each attack in detail - the date and time, the specification of the rockets used, the districts, and the casualties – with gruesome images of devastated homes and dead bodies included as supporting evidence. The narrator tells the audience that these ‘innocent victims’ were originally from the North but had fled the Communists and come to the South in search of freedom. Many of the images are of dead children and one particularly disturbing picture is the body of a charred baby. Over these images of

¹²⁶ ‘Films in Vietnam’, *Film Comment* 2, (Spring 1969), pp.46-88, Sarah Rouse, ‘South Vietnam’s Film Legacy’ in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.6, No.2, 1986, pp.211-222.

destruction, fire crews are seen attempting to put out the flames and the narrator singles them out for special praise. Yet no interviews are conducted with these firemen or indeed the survivors.

The narrator's language is often sophisticated, even poetic as she comments on how the Communists have 'closed forever, the smiling eyes of children'.¹²⁷ By way of an epitaph to the film itself, she declares, 'let them rest in peace knowing that Vietnam will continue the struggle and win their freedom and the future of their children'. Apart from the opening title music, which is militaristic and designed to embellish the official forces logo, much of the film's narration and images are accompanied by mournful music, either Vietnamese traditional or Western orchestral, both adding to the sombre nature of the film.

The second Armed Forces documentary, *Communist Massacre in Hue, South Vietnam*, reveals the exhumation of mass graves of South Vietnamese civilians killed by the Vietcong and their subsequent funeral ceremonies. Again, the film opens with the emblem of the Armed Forces and military music. The initial scenes are of fighting in the distance and civilians fleeing with whatever they can carry. While the film's commentary is in English, the 'voice of God' narration is provided by an unidentified American male. The narrator explains that during Tet, the Communists abducted many civilians in order to aid escape. Unfortunately these people did not return to their families, and one year on there is a rumour that a mass grave has been discovered. The film follows the excavation of various sites and the exhumation of the bodies. He tells the audience 'the horrible truth' that many of the victims were 'savagely tortured'.

From the images presented it is impossible for the audience to ascertain if this is true, but what is clear is that these are indeed mass graves. The narrator proceeds to give dates and numbers of casualties per site. He asserts that all ages were found among the dead, even children under twelve years old. He also insists that these are all civilians, mainly farmers or teachers. The local authorities and army are shown helping to move and organize the coffins. It is hard to comprehend how the relatives have been able to identify their loved ones as the bodies must have significantly decomposed. Once again there are no interviews with the authorities or the families to explain the identification process but rather these scenes are accompanied by mournful Vietnamese music or Buddhist chanting.

Despite the macabre subject-matter of both documentaries the visual and narrative styles are quite different. While *Cadeau Sanglant* is more poetic in its imagery and narrative language, *Communist Massacre* is more acerbic in tone. These attributes are epitomized by their ‘voice of God’ narrators, one a gently-spoken female who engages with the peoples’ loss, the other a detached, sharply-spoken male who seems devoid of any personal outrage or compassion for the victims and their relatives. Again, it is likely these documentaries were designed for different audiences: *Cadeau Sanglant* with its French-speaking narrator is clearly a home front film while *Communist Massacre* with its English-speaking commentator would seem to be designed for foreign markets.

Nearly all of the Vietnamese documentaries analysed here were made prior or during the Tet Offensive. It is likely that North Vietnamese documentaries such as *US Techniques and Genocide in North Vietnam*, *A Day of Plane Hunting* and possibly even *Vinh Linh*

¹²⁷ Original French text: ‘ils sont fermés pour toujours – les yeux rieurent des enfants’.

Steel Ramparts were made during the Tet Offensive, hence there is no reference to this pivotal period of insurgency within the films themselves. Similarly, there is no reference to the Tet Offensive in the NLF documentaries *Young Puppeteers* or *Struggle for Life*. However, the latter refers specifically to the massacre at My Lai which would indicate that it was common knowledge to the Vietnamese people at least, if not the international community, that a major atrocity had been perpetrated by US troops in this South Vietnamese village. Although *Cadeau Sanglant* makes no reference to the Communist insurgence of 1968, the film's action clearly takes place during the second phase of the Tet Offensive (5 May -18 June 1968).¹²⁸ In contrast, *Communist Massacre in Hue* not only makes direct reference to the Tet Offensive but uses images of carnage as a highly effective propaganda tool against the NLF and North Vietnamese forces.

More challenging, however, is identifying a distinctive national style within Vietnamese documentary cinema during this period. The USIA officer interviewed in the 1969 *Film Comment* article contends that National Liberation Front films showed elements of classic Eisenstein montages but this is not borne out by the examples provided by this analysis.¹²⁹ The officer also points to the crudeness of the print and improvisational quality of the editing of NLF films which seem to hark back to early Soviet revolutionary cinema but admits this is not necessarily by design but rather by dint of poor production conditions. He also claims there are resonances in NLF documentaries of Soviet-style juxtapositions, mood and tension shots but whether this is a deliberate strategy or just coincidence is not clear. Yet there is no evidence that Vietnamese

¹²⁸ For a detailed account of the Tet Offensive see General Tran Van Tra's essay, 'Tet: The 1968 General Offensive and General Uprising' in Jayne Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (London: ME Sharpe, 1993), pp.37-65.

¹²⁹ 'Films in Vietnam', *Film Comment* 2 (Spring 1969), pp.58-60.

filmmakers or indeed Vietnamese audiences were familiar with early Soviet fictional or documentary cinema.

A similar argument could be made that there are resonances of British Second World War documentaries in North Vietnamese and NLF documentaries. Indeed British war documentaries such as *Britain Can Take It* (d. Humphrey Jennings, Harry Watt, GB, 1940) and *Listen to Britain* (d. Humphrey Jennings, Stewart McAllister, GB, 1942) share similar characteristics with North Vietnamese documentaries such as *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts*, *A Day of Plane Hunting* and *Young Puppeteers* with their emphasis on the courage and resilience of ordinary people, celebration of culture, contrasting images of underground and over ground perspectives, images of industry, and contain many poetic qualities including the use of symbolism.¹³⁰ But again there is no evidence that Vietnamese filmmakers or audiences were familiar with this particular national wartime cinema.

¹³⁰ *London Can Take It* depicts London during the Blitz. The film shows daily devastation, houses, businesses, transport bombed, but these images are always accompanied by positive images of recovery and perseverance, even humour. The documentary has an unseen American narrator who heralds the British, in particular, Londoners as heroic. He bestows on them many laudable titles and descriptions such the 'greatest civilian army' and the 'peoples' army [...] guarding the frontiers of freedom'. The cinematography combines aerial shots with images of the city during the day and night, and shots of the underground during the air raids. The core theme of *Listen to Britain* is the sound of a nation at war. It is a poetic documentary that opens with pastoral images of fields containing crops billowing in the breeze and waves lapping the shore. The images are soon supplanted by images of war, planes and gun posts, workers travelling to the mines, work in plane factories all accompanied to lively music. The war images are interspersed with the nation celebrating their culture, for example, dancing at the Blackpool ballroom, London's National Gallery's lunchtime piano recitals, female factory workers singing to the radio, and Flannagan and Allen singing 'Underneath the Arches' to service personnel. The cinematography is particularly striking as many images are shot in near dark conditions either at sunrise or sunset, resulting in people and buildings being shot in silhouette against the sky. It is narrated by Canadian Leonard Brockington who describes the documentary as a 'war song of a great people' in his film commentary.

TEXTS - Part II
Vietnam War Documentaries made by Allies of North Vietnam
and the National Liberation Front: Cuba, the German Democratic
Republic, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

i. War documentaries made by Cuba

Established in 1959, three months after the fall of the Batista dictatorship, the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC) was responsible for organising film activities in Cuba. It had complete control over all aspects including production, distribution, cinemas, exhibition, importing and exporting films, film schools and film magazines. The ICAIC was founded by a group of young intellectuals who, because there were no film schools in Cuba, had to acquire the necessary skills on the job. Only two members had any formal film training. Later, prospective filmmakers were sent via fellowship schemes to countries such as Czechoslovakia, France, the United Kingdom and the USSR to learn technical skills. Most towns in Cuba had a cinema, the capital Havana boasting nearly one hundred cinemas. Nevertheless, the ICAIC initiated a massive cinema-building programme in towns throughout the country. It also created *cine-moviles*, mobile projection crews that used cars, trucks, small boats, even mules to deliver films to remote villages where they showed films to schoolchildren during the day and screened films to the peasants at night.

Two documentary films made under the auspices of the ICAIC on the Vietnam War during the conflict, *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* (Cuba, 1967) and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* (Cuba, 1969), were made by Santiago Alvarez. Alvarez was a founding member of the ICAIC and although highly educated had no previous film training. Like many members of the organisation he had to acquire skills along the way. Alvarez made over a dozen trips to Vietnam and even interviewed Ho Chi Minh on one occasion. Alvarez

and his cameraman Ivan Napoles took great risks to film the bombing of Hanoi in 1966, and in 1969 he returned to film the funeral of Ho Chi Minh.

Hanoi, Tuesday 13th was filmed in the capital in December 1966 at the height of the US bombing of North Vietnam and captures the resilience of the Vietnamese people under horrific conditions. According to film reviewer Victoria Wegg-Prosser, the date is significant as it is the date on which President Johnson authorized the bombing of the North.¹³¹ Film historian Andy Engel, however, suggests the title refers to the date Alvarez and his cameraman arrived in Hanoi.¹³² In the opening credits, Alvarez acknowledges that the documentary was made under the auspices of the ICAIC and The Organisation of Solidarity of Asia and Black Africa, but he also acknowledges in the final credits the co-operation given by the Documentary News Studios of Hanoi.

The documentary uses a combination of still photography, moving image and images from literary and cultural manuscripts accompanied by text titles and music but there is no voice-over narration in the original documentary.¹³³ The opening images of paintings, engravings and manuscripts are in colour in order to emphasize the richness of Vietnamese cultural traditions. The music alternates between traditional Eastern and modern Western music. One Western song, 'They're Coming to Take Me Away,' with its mad, hysterical refrain, is used to accompany the shots of downed American pilots being captured and taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese.

¹³¹ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, V.39, No.462, July 1972, p.139.

¹³² Andi Engel, 'Solidarity and Violence', *Sight and Sound*, V.38, No.4, October 1969.

¹³³ The film's titles and text are narrated in English for export to Europe and USA.

The film opens with text and illustrations from the Cuban poet, José Martí's book *La Edad de Oro* of 1889. The reference to Martí is key to understanding Cuba's view of the war as a fight for liberation, for not only was Martí a highly respected literary figure, he was also a revolutionary freedom fighter who wanted to liberate Cuba from the dominance of the Spanish Empire. Born in Cuba in 1853 but educated in Spain, Martí wrote articles and poems about national independence. After travelling to Mexico and to the United States, Martí returned to Cuba to support the fight for independence and died in battle in 1895. Hence, Martí is considered to be the father figure of modern Cuba and is highly revered by Cubans. By incorporating the works of Martí, Alvarez would have helped Cubans associate themselves with the Vietnamese struggle and appreciate the role of the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, who was also a poet-warrior.

Along with images of Oriental life, Alvarez provides a background to the war, explaining in part the history of oppression the Vietnamese endured under the Cambodians, Siamese, Chinese and French and their continued heroic struggle for freedom. He includes colourful stills of early manuscripts and photographs of pagodas and statues. In stark contrast to these elegant cultural images are stills of American President, Lyndon B. Johnson. Alvarez uses a grotesque film image of a cow giving birth to represent Johnson's arrival in the world. He also utilizes film footage of student protests in the USA.

The documentary then cuts to depict Vietnamese rural life, showing fishermen, rice workers and even children employed in various activities. These activities are labour intensive, although Alvarez depicts them as idyllic. The inclusion of scenes of small

scale manufacturing units, such as clothing and bottling factories, are designed to emphasize the industrious nature of the Vietnamese.

It is around twenty minutes into the film before the audience actually views images of present day Hanoi. Even here, Alvarez plies the audience with more idyllic images of children eating ice lollies, people going about their daily business, goods being transported - flowers, vegetables, ice blocks. The city is bustling but in a calm and happy way with pretty girls smiling at the camera. Alvarez underscores the faster pace of city life with the sharp intercutting of images, jumping quickly from one shot to another. However, the mood and music change ominously as the camera focuses on the making and deployment of individual bomb shelters which are dug into the pavements and parks of Hanoi.

The pleasant city scenes are dramatically transformed into chaos as Hanoi comes under attack. The sounds of bomb explosions along with loud anti-aircraft fire all work to give the audience some idea of the terror experienced by the North Vietnamese during an US air raid. The combination of sharp editing and fast camera panning, both across the screen as well as vertically, contribute to the sense of chaos and confusion. The following scenes of devastation and distress also work to invoke sympathy from the audience as men, women and children are shown searching for loved ones, trying to salvage something from their wrecked homes and burying their dead.

Despite the carnage, the film remains determinedly upbeat as Alvarez shows how the people re-mobilize themselves and get back to work. Accompanying these images of continuity and resilience, he uses a highly political, didactic slogan: 'El odio en energia'

which translated means: ‘We transform our hatred into energy’.¹³⁴ This slogan is repeated several times throughout the second half of the documentary and is another example not only of his eclectic style but of how Alvarez puts his own political interpretation to the war.¹³⁵

Alvarez was a fervent Castro supporter and would no doubt been influenced by Castro’s rousing public speeches that were also broadcast on national radio. During the years 1966-1968 as the US bombed the North and sent troops into the South, nearly all of Castro’s speeches contained pro-Communist Vietnam and anti-American rhetoric, whether they were concerned with the economy, trade or international affairs. Castro would repeatedly refer to the ‘heroic people of Vietnam’ and reserve defamatory slogans such as ‘imperialist monster’ or ‘imperial vandalism’ for the USA and their policy in Vietnam.

But we cannot but feel indignant when viewing the aggressive, savage, and criminal actions of the imperialists against the people of Vietnam: the criminal, repugnant, and cowardly aggression; piratical aggression that places Mr Johnson among the worst criminals that humanity has ever known, among the worst pirates [...] in the heart of Asia, the imperialists use hundreds of airplanes in bombing raids which slaughter women and children, waging chemical warfare against no less than a socialist country. And they do it with considerable impunity, considerable impunity.¹³⁶

The second Alvarez film chosen for scrutiny is *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh*, a twenty-three minute documentary tribute to the life and work of Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The title refers to the age of Vietnamese

¹³⁴ This is the subtitled translation on the copy provided by the distributor Third World Newsreel. Another translation provided by Cuban Cinema expert Michael Chanan, ‘We turn anger into energy’ is less powerful. See Michael Chanan, *Santiago Alvarez*, BFI Dossier No.2 (London: BFI, 1980), p.36.

¹³⁵ See ‘’5 Frames Are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5:’ An Interview with Santiago Alvarez,’ *Cineaste*, v.6, n.4, January 1975, for more details regarding Alvarez’s political influences.

leader at the time of his death. The images of Ho Chi Minh's life are given references not in terms of the year but in terms of his age such as '20', '35', '40', '51', '55', '76'. Intercut between the celebratory images of Ho are somewhat provoking and often distressing images of the war. Alvarez includes moving images of Vietnamese prisoners being tortured and executed by American soldiers and photographic stills of Vietnamese bodies mutilated by napalm. He also tries to provide a counterpoint in the film with alternative images that depict American losses and public dissent, for example, he uses images of coffins draped in the American flag, of protest movements and even draft cards being burnt.

Furthermore, Alvarez utilizes images of nature to great effect. Employing time-lapse photography, he repeatedly uses the motif of a flower. The close-up shot of a flower unfurling its petals in the opening credit is mirrored by the US bombs opening up their tail fins. Not only are flowers associated with Ho Chi Minh but the flower is also symbolic of the peace movement in the USA. The film shows both Ho being showered with flowers and American student protestors placing flowers on the gun barrels of the US forces. These floral images contribute to the poetic quality of the film.

The film is an eclectic blend of visual images including newsreel footage, still photography and artwork combined in an impressionistic and poetic style. Alvarez employs a variety of visual film techniques such as split-screens, torn screens, multi-image sequences, freeze frames, even celluloid film burning to a white screen. Like *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* the documentary does not employ a narrator but uses written titles.

¹³⁶ Fidel Castro, 'Communism Cannot be Built in One Country in the Midst of an Underdeveloped World' in M.Kenner and J.Petras, eds., *Fidel Castro Speaks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.291. Speech

Alvarez also incorporates sound and music very effectively. He uses the distinctive and dramatic sounds of war such as gunfire and missiles screeching, jumbled to produce a sense of fear and disorientation. The music is an unusual mix of Western and Eastern music. For example, Alvarez uses an electric guitar to accompany the film's title but also includes classical music such as Bach as well as traditional Cuban and jazz. For his finale, Alvarez resorts to a simple propagandist slogan: 'THE YANQUIS DEFEATED WE WILL CONSTRUCT A FATHERLAND TEN TIMES MORE BEAUTIFUL'.

The ICAIC was a member of a newsreel exchange scheme with other socialist countries and it is likely that Alvarez's documentaries would have been distributed via this network. But Alvarez's films also found their way to the West and the USA. *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* was one of several Cuban films exhibited at the National Film Theatre, London in October 1969. Despite, the United States' economic and cultural blockade of Cuba during this period, there is evidence that by 1975 both *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* were available for exhibition through branches of the US film collective, Newsreel. *Guardian* film critic Derek Malcolm felt that Alvarez made his best films either in Vietnam or about Vietnam. He praised Alvarez for his use of imagery and the way he underlined images with music: 'His methodology as a socialist was to attempt to use images as powerfully as they are used in the west to sell goods'.¹³⁷

made on May Day 1966 at the Plaza de la Revolució, Havana.

¹³⁷ Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*, 17 June 1999.

ii. War documentaries made by the German Democratic Republic (East Germany)

Made by Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Schuemann for Deutsche Fernsehfunk and the DEFA-Studio for Newsreels and Documentary Films, *Pilots in Pyjamas – Hanoi Hilton* (East Germany, 1968) is the second instalment of a four part documentary series that investigates the lives of ten American pilots being held captive by the North Vietnamese. All the pilots interviewed are identified by name and rank. Prompted by questions spoken off camera, the pilots talk mainly about their conditions and treatment as prisoners of war (POWs).

The film opens with stock footage of captured American pilots in the field and the crowd's angry reaction towards them. The film then moves quickly to interior shots of the prison and the POWs. One prisoner picks up a fan with the words 'Souvenir of Hanoi Hilton'. The film plays on this ironic title showing a variety of Hilton hotels in glamorous locations around the world. Although this is supposed to be a humorous nick-name for their accommodation, the North Vietnamese obviously take great pride in revealing the pilots' living conditions which are neat and clean. They also stress that the men are clothed adequately and well fed. Moreover, they point out that their captives have access to clean water even though it is American pilots who are responsible for bombing river dykes and polluting North Vietnamese rivers.

One of the POWs identified in the documentary, is senior officer Colonel Risner who confirms to camera that they are 'well fed' and their medical needs are adequately addressed. The film repeatedly shows the POWs being well treated, having access to reading materials and health care and even being allowed to celebrate Christmas, albeit

on a modest scale. Following his release, Risner would confirm that the POWs' testimonies including his own, were extracted under coercion.

The film is also interested in making comparisons between the two nations using examples in terms of wealth. One POW describes life at his air force base in South Vietnam as offering all the luxuries: good food and drink served twenty-four hours a day, films, air conditioning, a swimming pool, a library and access to religious services. A more specific example is the contrast between a pilot's expensive clothing and equipment, which cost around \$10,000, as opposed to simple Vietnamese dress.

Among the captured equipment of the pilots is a copy of the US survival book in which American personnel are advised to treat the 'natives' with respect, to be friendly, not to laugh at them or bully them and to leave the women alone. The pilots tell the interviewer they are surprised at the fair treatment they receive as they expected to be starved, tortured or killed. The film also incorporates US military footage of brutish survival training as they prepare soldiers in the event of capture by the enemy. The footage is made more forceful by the use of similar photographs from the French and German magazines such as *Paris Match* and *Stern*. Yet this training is reserved for army personnel not air force and the pilots are not given the opportunity to explain why they did not receive similar training.

The POWs are only allowed to respond to set questions and often appear uncomfortable doing so. Their lack of enthusiasm and dead-pan expression when responding suggest that the answers may have been at the very least rehearsed if not coerced. There are many instances where it appears they are being forced to denounce their country's

actions against their will. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any rapport between them and their captors, no friendly debate or discussion with their counterparts. Indeed, their captors are not interviewed at all. The questions are first issued in German and then translated into English for the prisoners, making the interview process stilted and contrived. At every opportunity the questions are designed to score points against the Americans, which lends the documentary a propagandist slant even though it is not a North Vietnamese film. It is often sermonising in its tone and language praising the 'socialist humanity' of the North Vietnamese and damning the US government as 'criminals'. The documentary filmmakers takes great pains to highlight how the US has broken the Geneva Accord by bombing the North without first declaring war.¹³⁸ In contrast, the North is shown maintaining codes set out by the Geneva Convention by treating US prisoners humanely. This contrast is emphasized with images of US and South Vietnamese troops torturing Vietnamese people, including women and children.

As there are no reception details available regarding this documentary it is not clear whether contemporary audiences were convinced by the interviews and images or whether they felt these images were contrived to give a false impression of living conditions. For example, the POWs are given a lavish breakfast, one that would not look out of place at a genuine Hilton hotel breakfast buffet rather than a prison in a Third World country. Moreover, when the narrator explains that the POWs are not entirely incarcerated and therefore could easily escape, this does not appear a viable option, as these tall men with Western features would be easily identified in the streets of Hanoi and villages of North Vietnam.

¹³⁸ The Vietnam War was not only an undeclared war on the North by the USA but the Vietnam conflict took place thousands of miles from the USA. US civilians and territory were never at risk.

It is obvious they are being used as pawns for propaganda purposes by the North Vietnamese regime and their allies, in this case, an East German film company. The only advantage these men might have secured from co-operating with the filmmakers is that they may have been able to show their people back home they were alive.

Although nicknamed the 'Hanoi Hilton', the prison has a history dating back to French colonial times. It was built during the late 1800s and was named *Maison Centrale*, a term usually assigned by the French to denote a prison. Under Communist control it was named Hoa Lo. American POWs were detained in Hoa Lo as early as 1964 and certainly, on release, they systematically testified to the appalling conditions in the prison including poor food, unsanitary conditions, withholding of medical treatment and even torture. Torture, including rope bindings, irons, beatings and prolonged solitary confinement, was meted out to the inmates. The aim of torture was not to extract military secrets but to force the soldiers to make confessions, either written or recorded, that could be used as propaganda material against the USA. After their release and return to the US, many former POWs wrote or gave accounts of their confinement and torture, including John McCain (later US Senator), Colonel Joseph Kittinger, Colonel Bud Day and Brigadier General Robinson Risner. The numerous testimonies and overwhelming evidence given by the surviving POWs make clear that the pleasant living conditions depicted by the documentary are largely contrived.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ For more on the conditions experienced by American POWs see Robert Coram's biography, *American Patriot: the life and wars of Colonel Bud Day* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008). Day spent sixty-seven months as a POW in the Hanoi Hilton alongside John McCain.

In an interview given to Guy Hennebelle of the French magazine, *Cinéma*, Heynowski and Schuemann (H&S) talk extensively about the making of this documentary.¹⁴⁰ H&S reveal their journalistic backgrounds and how they prepare for an interview by composing in advance about a hundred questions, only half of which are posed and most of the others are answered in the course of the interview. They also reveal their warm-up technique which involves a general conversation lasting about an hour, the aim of which is to attain a level of mutual confidence. They admit that they play a ‘cat and mouse’ game, an ‘ideological duel’. Hennebelle is clearly impressed by H&S’s methodology, perceiving it as a combination of political investigation with a cinematic approach; he claims that ‘they have found a new form of journalistic cinematography’.¹⁴¹

In the Hennebelle interview H&S acknowledge their Marxist-Leninist influences but also reveal their belief that ‘man is a product of his environment’. H&S are particularly interested in how these POWs, who are intelligent men, have been manipulated into committing mass murder. They acknowledge that not all the pilots were stationed at the Hanoi Hilton but rather were dispersed into several camps across the North. Moreover, they admit that not all pilots agreed to be interviewed: two POWs had refused. Furthermore, the pilots were not allowed to confer before being interviewed. H&S claim that the Vietnamese authorities gave them ‘carte blanche’ with the interviews, and they were happy with the result.

¹⁴⁰ Guy Hennebelle, ‘Entretien avec Walter Heynowski et Gerhard Scheumann, *Cinéma*, December 1970, no.151, pp.52-63.

¹⁴¹ ‘...découvert une nouvelle forme de journalisme cinématographique’ - Guy Hennebelle, ‘Entretien avec Walter Heynowski et Gerhard Scheumann, *Cinéma*, December 1970, no.151, p.53.

It is not surprising that Heynowski and Scheumann produced an anti-American documentary, considering East Germany's political and financial support of North Vietnam. What is surprising is their refusal to accept that they were duped by the North Vietnamese authorities about the conditions in the prison. In an interview given after the war, Heynowski and Scheumann revealed their awareness that many of the prisoners, including Colonel Risner, had published their memoirs. But rather than admitting their failure to address the issue of torture, they preferred to dismiss such ordeals by stating that many POWs were rewarded with promotion following their release, insinuating that their false testimonies were bought. After hostilities had ended the directing duo returned on several occasions to make retrospective documentaries about the war. Ironically, one documentary, *Devil's Island* (1976) concerned the torture of dissidents in South Vietnam at Con Son.¹⁴²

In *Projecting History*, film historian Nora Alter delves deeper into the work of Heynowski and Schuemann.¹⁴³ Alter reveals that H&S produced a significant body of work starting with a short documentary entitled *400 cm³* (1966) about blood donations given by the East Germans to the North Vietnamese. With the success of this film, H&S were allowed access to North Vietnam to shoot a series of documentaries during the years 1967 to 1978. Alter claims that H&S were the first European filmmakers to be awarded visas and permission to film in North Vietnam.

¹⁴² *Young Cinema and Theatre*, No.2, 1978, pp.14-27.

¹⁴³ Nora M. Alter, *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema 1967-2000* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp.11-43.

H&S produced fourteen films in 35mm format, mostly in black and white but varying in length from four to ninety minutes.¹⁴⁴ They made their films available in several languages and screened them uncensored at numerous international festivals. According to Alter, H&S documentaries were well received, not only by the Eastern bloc, but also by the ‘neutral’ Scandinavian countries. The *Pilots in Pyjamas* series was political dynamite. Alter argues this was ‘the first incontrovertible photodocumentation of the existence of U.S. pilots in the North’.¹⁴⁵ Alter offers further details of the film’s impact on the world’s socialist and capitalist press in the Autumn of 1967. The American *Sunday News*, the French *Paris Match*, the Danish *Stuttgarter Zeitung* and the Dutch *Zie* all reported on the film’s revelations. Stills from the documentary series were even shown on the American NBC’s *Nightly News* programme although Alter does not provide dates for any of the above.¹⁴⁶

Alter divides their oeuvre into three categories: agitative war films not made on location in Vietnam, interview films made mainly on location and which include the four-part *Pilots in Pyjamas*, and finally, on-location films made in the immediate aftermath of the war. Alter discusses all fourteen documentaries in some detail but pays particular attention to the ten interviews included in the *Pilots in Pyjamas* series. Alter points to the way that H&S, through their method of questioning the captives, are able to invoke resonances particularly with German audiences. Alter argues that the questions have strong referents to the German experience of World War II and its aftermath, for example, the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden, the division of post-war Germany and

¹⁴⁴ The fourteen H&S films are: *400cm³* (1966), *The Witness* (1967), *Pilots in Pyjamas – Yes, Sir; Hilton Hanoi; The Job; The Thunder Gods* (1968), *100 Pushups* (1971), *Remington Cal.12* (1972), *Devil’s Island* (1976), *Free Admission* (1976), *The First Rice: Thereafter* (1977), “*I’m Truly Sorry*” (1977), *The Iron Fortress* (1977), *At the Water Trench/Grave* (1978).

¹⁴⁵ Alter, *Projecting History*, p.28.

even the Nuremberg War Crime Trials. Alter asserts that H&S successfully as well as subtly draw historical parallels between Germany and Vietnam.

Although Alter does not apply the term 'auteur' it is clear that she considers them to be documentarists of great significance, particularly as the political focus of their work and their methodology challenged the 'objective' role of the documentary. However, she does not take into account the influence of the state-sponsored DEFA which controlled all aspects of filmmaking in East Germany.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, in the case of *Pilots in Pyjamas* there is nothing visually distinctive about this film that would elevate H&S to auteur status or place them on an innovative and artistic level of other Vietnam War documentarists such as Santiago Alvarez or Emile de Antonio.

Alter also seems to ignore the fact that other East German filmmakers were producing Vietnam War documentaries at the same time as H&S. Films such as *Think of My Country* (GDR, 1966) a black and white documentary showing the effects of US bombing raids on the Vietnamese countryside, *Ballad of the Green Berets* (GDR, 1967), an eleven minute black and white documentary of American Green Berets methods in Vietnam, and *From Hanoi to Ben Hai*, (GDR, 1967) a fifty minute colour documentary

¹⁴⁶ Alter, *Projecting History*, p.28.

¹⁴⁷ Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) was state-owned and the only film producer, distributor and exhibitor that existed in East Germany from 1946-1993. DEFA directors had social prestige, job security and good working conditions. DEFA films, both fiction and non-fiction, were subject to rigorous scrutiny and censorship by representatives of the USSR, who were ultimately accountable to the Cinema Ministry based in Moscow. These representatives would examine scripts and cast lists, issue filming permits and inspect completed works. In the early 1960s, the governing party of East Germany the Socialist Unity Party (SED) gave the DEFA more artistic freedom but, as a result of the critical works produced, subsequently clamped down on freedom of expression. By the mid-1960s the SED had imposed drastic censorship measures and demanded the advancement of socialist ideals from the industry. For more information on the DEFA see Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk, eds., *The German Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2002).

which follows the journey of an East German television crew from the capital, Hanoi, in the North to a region near the border of South Vietnam.

iii. War documentaries made by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Another state sponsored documentary is *Reportage from North Vietnam* (aka *Report on North Vietnam*, USSR, 1968) is a twenty minute colour documentary on events in the Northern cities of Hanoi and Haiphong as well as the rural countryside. The opening shot tracks a wounded figure climbing upstairs towards the camera. The English-speaking male unseen narrator reveals the figure to be captured US pilot Major Richard Eugene Smith. He is followed by another figure, Marine pilot James B. Stockdell. Neither captives are allowed to speak but are in effect paraded before the audience as the face of the enemy, the USA. The film then cuts swiftly to a sequence that identifies and explains the use of pellet bombs, showing horrifying images of their effects on civilians, particularly children. The action then moves to images of North Vietnamese anti-aircraft weapons firing and North Vietnamese civilians taking cover from the air raid. The narrator provides the audience with some disturbing statistics including that on average there are ten bombing raids every twenty-four hours and that six times more bombs were dropped on Vietnam than in the whole of World War II. Shots of captured US pilots, in particular Major Smith, are regularly intercut with images of devastation in order to underscore a sense of culpability. The documentary also celebrates North Vietnamese resilience and culture, including a children's festival. However, shots of happy children playing with toys, masks and instruments are contrasted with the final images of orphaned children trying to cope with the trauma of losing parents.

Although the film has an English-speaking narrator, the titles are in Russian and there is reference to Russian aid being provided along with images of Russian cargo ships offloading goods in Haiphong harbour. It is likely this film was made for both home consumption and export to friendly Communist states, although according to the British Film Catalogue it was available in the UK in 1969.

While the script by Aleg Arsaloff is rather crude, the photography by Rouben Petrosov is sophisticated, often poetic. Petrosov intercuts images of old and new Vietnam, of rickshaws and trams, Vietnamese sail boats and steel cargo ships. There is an element of the ethnographic documentary in the way the film focuses on the strong facial images of Vietnamese people and highlights their everyday way of life. Surprisingly, the documentary owes little to Russian documentary traditions of Dziga Vertov and Esfir Shub; on the contrary, the opening shot tracking from darkness into light to the figure of the US pilot framed in the doorway, is rather reminiscent of a John Ford image used in the Western, *The Searchers* (USA, 1956). If the shot is a deliberate reference to Ford and the figure of John Wayne, then it is a pointedly ironic one.

Although information on Aleg Arsaloff and Rouben Petrosov has proved elusive, it is likely that they both trained at the State Institute of Cinematography, Vsesoyuznyi Gosudasstvennyi Institut Kinematografii (VGIK). The Institute was dominated by the influential documentarist, Roman Karmen. While Vertov with his kaleidoscope methods and Shub with her compilation techniques were aligned to the avant-garde movement, Karmen emerged from a different generation of filmmakers who were directly linked to the Communist party. Karmen graduated from VGIK in 1932 and is known to have taken a keen interest in the Vietnamese struggle for independence

culminating in him making a documentary entitled *Vietnam* (1955). He took up a post on the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1965 and also became a Professor at VGIK in 1970. Karmen's work continued to dominate Soviet non-fiction cinema well after his death in 1978. Indeed, his films and technical writings formed an integral part of teaching at VGIK well into the 1990s.¹⁴⁸ Thus, it is likely that Karmen was the key influence on Arsaloff and Petrosov, both politically and artistically.

Again, all the allied films detailed in this section were made early on in the conflict, pre-Tet, so it is not surprising that they tell us very little about how the war is progressing but rather testify to the relentlessness of the conflict. What is more significant about this particular group is that a number of these documentaries had a wider circulation than first anticipated as they were not limited to exhibition in Eastern bloc countries sympathetic to the Communist cause but found audiences in Western Europe, Scandinavia and the USA. Without specific data regarding exhibition and reception, it is difficult to assess the impact of these documentaries on Western audiences but the fact that were exhibited at all suggests that they offered not only an alternative view to the war but also posed a challenge to the dominant American perspective of the war.

¹⁴⁸ For more information on early Russian documentarians see Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet!: History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR* (London: IB Taurus, 1999).

TEXTS – Part III
Vietnam War Documentaries made by Allies of South Vietnam: the United States of America and Australia

i. War Documentaries made by the Governments of the United States of America

It is clear from available filmographies that there is an abundance of US documentaries made during the conflict by government-sponsored filmmakers, as well as media organisations and independent filmmakers. Most government documentaries were designed for public exhibition but military forces documentaries would have been shown only to forces personnel, however, there are exceptions such as *Why Vietnam?* (USA, 1965).

Made in black and white, thirty-two minutes long, and produced by the United States Armed Forces and Information Service, *Why Vietnam?* was designed to win support for the war from the home audience. Ten thousand prints of the documentary were circulated throughout the USA to civic organisations, colleges and schools but the film was also broadcast on commercial television.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, this was the documentary shown to all GIs before they embarked on their tour of duty as part of the US Army's 'BIG PICTURE' series.¹⁵⁰ When the film was screened to the US forces, the commanding officer or instructor was supplied with an information guide in order to assist with driving home the key points of the film.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Film Comment*, Vol.4, No.1. Fall 1966, p.4. No details of the broadcast were given.

¹⁵⁰ Other Films in 'THE BIG PICTURE' series include: *Ready to Strike*, *US Army Adviser in Vietnam*, *The Fight for Vietnam*, *Operation Montagnard*, *Action Vietnam*, *The Sky Soldiers*, and *The Small Boat Navy* among others.

¹⁵¹ Document 107, 'Armed Forces Film Information Guide, *Why Vietnam?*', in David Culbert and Lawrence Suid, eds., *Film and Propaganda in American: A Documentary History, Volume IV, 1945 and after* (London: Greenwood Press, 1990).

Why Vietnam? is a persuasive and sophisticated pro-war film produced by the Directorate for the Armed Forces Information and Education. It combines a speech made by President Johnson to the nation, intercut with a detailed explanation of America's past and present involvement in Vietnam. Televised to the nation on 28 July 1965, Johnson's speech is an eloquent oration and the filmmakers rely heavily on his authoritative presence and persuasive arguments to provide structure and tone to the documentary. Indeed, the documentary uses Johnson's opening lines, 'My fellow Americans ... ,' to identify and address the audience and instil a sense of comradeship that they are all in this together. His speech is in response to a mother's letter sent to the President asking him why her son is fighting in Vietnam. Whether or not the letter is a contrived device is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, it is a highly effective method of drawing in the audience, not only for the original television audience but also the film audience of *Why Vietnam?*

Why Vietnam? was based on the *Why We Fight* series (1942-1945) in which the United States government first presented their version of 'the Big Picture'. This series adopted an educational style. *Why Vietnam?* like its predecessors uses a lecture-format with extensive narration and visual aids to detail the historical background to the conflict. The film uses documentary footage of past conflicts, maps of the region and statistics in order to explain the political and military complexity of the struggle.

The film's history lesson begins with Hitler and the Nazis, employing footage of the conference at Munich where the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain attempted to appease Hitler. The documentary uses an unseen narrator whose voice is commanding and authoritative: highly indicative of the 'voice of God' technique. He

reminds the audience that this policy was a 'short-cut to disaster'. Many examples are given to underline the idea that failure to oppose aggression proves costly in the long-run. Finally, the Korean War is offered as a success story whereby aggression, in this case Communism, was checked and as a result Korea was divided at the 38th Parallel with the Communists governing the Northern section.

The history lesson now turns to Vietnam and begins with the battle at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 where the French were defeated and ousted from their colony. Although this may seem a convenient date to start, important background details are ignored, such as the constant Vietnamese opposition to centuries of occupation. More importantly, the successful removal of Japanese invaders during the Second World War by Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnamese Communist forces (the Vietminh) is also absent from this history lesson. Although the history lesson includes the French defeat in 1954 it lacks analysis. For example, the film fails to mention that the USA provided the French with substantial financial support, and no mention is given to the fact that it was a French professional army not conscripts that were defeated by the Vietminh. All these hidden facts, if exposed, would have raised uncomfortable questions, most importantly: why would American aid to the South prove any more successful in defeating the Communists?

Images of the division of Vietnam into North and South focus only on negative images of the poverty in Hanoi and the mass exodus from the North of one million Vietnamese who did not want to live under Communist rule. These images are accompanied by mournful music. In contrast, the narrator proceeds to paint the South as a land of milk and honey with free elections and land reforms that allow farmers to own and benefit

directly from their hard work. Natural resources are identified including coal, tin, zinc, manganese, natural rubber and of course rice, all of which the narrator emphasizes are 'coveted by the North'.

The depiction of the South as a democratic and potentially prosperous country is misleading as the South was already experiencing unrest as a result of undemocratic practices pursued by successive governments. South Vietnam was also showing signs of an economic downturn and beginning to rely heavily on US economic aid. While documentary images depict saws and ploughs being distributed, South Vietnam was becoming more and more dependent on food aid from the USA as its farming lands were destroyed and its peoples relocated as a result of American strategies to deny the NLF cover .

The narrator also outlines the history of American aid to the South. From 1959 President Eisenhower is shown pledging aid in the form of food and arms. Johnson's speech reiterates this commitment through the eleven years from Eisenhower to Kennedy and then himself. Repetition of phrases such as 'commitment' is used to underscore key points. Tone is also an important factor. The narrator is often ironic or scathing about Communist ideals or intentions, in particular, the idea that the Communists see this as a war of 'liberation'. Similarly, the narrator is quick to undermine Ho Chi Minh's image as a kindly, smiling grandfather by commenting that behind the smile he is planning 'a reign of terror'. The Communists are depicted repeatedly as untrustworthy using tactics of terror and non-direct conflict. Images of slaughter and devastation, particularly of women and children, are linked to the Vietcong. In contrast, the fighting forces of the South are portrayed as heroic, hard

working, embattled and consequently deserving of US support. The narrator points out how initially the US provided only military or technical aid in the form of 'instructors' and 'advisors' but that this was no longer enough as the South had suffered severe casualties. Statistics and comparisons are made to underline the extent of their losses, for example, the South Vietnamese army had already lost more than the total US forces lost in World War II. He concedes that the North has suffered similar casualties, yet remains unmoved by the human cost. There is a tone of disdain from the narrator as he explains that the North is being supported by the Chinese. Consequently, the narrator describes the escalation of US involvement as 'counter-action'. Central to the film's argument is the threat to the region and world stability, as Johnson sums up: 'there are great stakes in the balance'. The documentary invokes the Domino Theory and the fear of Communist expansion but does not explain the theory specifically in terms of South East Asia. This would suggest that Cold War fears regarding Communism were well-embedded in the American psyche and any further explanation to the home audience was not required.

The documentary often invokes the experts, the most important of these being President Johnson himself who reminds the viewer that he has witnessed three wars, World War I, World War II and Korea, and is thus able to conclude: 'Retreat does not bring safety. Weakness does not bring peace'. Other experts called to give testimony regarding the necessity of America's actions include: Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Both use language that suggests America's role is defensive rather than interventionist or expansionist. McNamara says: 'We wish to emphasize: we seek no wider war [...] the key to the situation remains the cessation of

infiltration from the North into the South'. The rhetoric and images repeatedly place the blame on the North and its supporter China, for the escalation of fighting.

Throughout the film, images of American technical superiority are displayed; long lines of helicopters, bombers, fighter jets and aircraft carriers. These images are intended to reassure the American public, particularly the outgoing forces for which the film was primarily intended. The accompanying rhetoric is also intended to reassure the audience as Johnson says:

We do not seek the destruction of any government. Nor do we covet a foot of any territory [...] We do not want an expanded struggle with consequences that no-one can perceive. Nor will we bluster or bully or flaunt our power. But we will not surrender. And we will not retreat.

Ironically, this is exactly what happened and the final minutes of the documentary are prescient with images of coffins draped in American flags, and B52 bombers dropping bombs indiscriminately as the war sets to escalate further. On 8 March 1965 the first US combat troops arrived in Vietnam; by the end of the year, US troop strength had reached 200,000. The escalation was dramatic.¹⁵²

Artistically, there are not many innovative qualities about this documentary. In many ways it is a typical propaganda film despite its rhetorical sophistication and smooth intercutting of historical and contemporary images. Similarly, the soundtrack is very much in keeping with a propaganda film. It employs sinister music for the enemy, rousing military music to depict the heroic American and South Vietnamese forces, and melodic pastoral Oriental music for the South Vietnamese peasants. The documentary also uses sound effects to heighten the drama, for example, the use of a gun-shot to

¹⁵² Figures from Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*.

accompany a photographic still of an assassination. Nevertheless, there is one artistic aspect of this documentary that is innovative, which is the new cinematographic perspective offered by the introduction of helicopter warfare. The manoeuvrability of the helicopter provides the cameraman with the opportunity for new and exciting aerial shots, particularly of the land below. The on-board camera also takes the viewer closer to the fighting, showing soldiers disembarking from the helicopter under fire or alternatively, the helicopter evacuating the wounded from the combat zone. Either way the camera captures the sense of urgency and vulnerability.

Produced by the US Defense Department, *A Nation Builds Under Fire* (USA, 1967) describes how the government of South Vietnam and its people are trying to improve their country with the help of the USA. The film is introduced by the Vice President of the United States and is hosted by the popular Hollywood actor, John Wayne. The Vice President opens the film from the comfort of his office under the imposing emblem of the United States government. Yet it is Wayne who narrates most of the documentary in front of the camera and supposedly on location in a rural part of South Vietnam, although the actual location is not disclosed.¹⁵³ Nevertheless the opening is unusual as the Vice President and an unseen narrator set the scene using pencil sketches of the Vietnamese people and soldiers.¹⁵⁴ Both repeatedly refer to events in Vietnam as ‘the story’. While the unseen narrator speaks of ‘the story of war’, the Vice President argues that the story is not just about the war but of ‘the hope and the determination’ of the people of South Vietnam. The Vice President insists that it is a ‘story that needs to be told’.

¹⁵³ While John Wayne is an international star, the fact that the US Vice President, Hubert Humphrey is not identified by name would suggest that this film was intended for the home audience only.

At this point Wayne takes charge, appearing first as an artist's sketch, then in person. He too reiterates the need to tell 'the story'. Throughout the forty minute colour documentary, Wayne weaves together the various elements, introducing a number of speakers to the camera. With the exception of a South Vietnamese commander, Major Vee, most of the speakers are American military personnel. Wayne introduces four key experts: Lt. Mark Nelson (US Navy), Sgt. Shelley Blunt (US Airforce), Sgt. Ken Sanders (US Marine Corps) and Dale Kemery (US Army). The interaction between this group is clearly staged, particularly the discussion concerning the needs of South Vietnam and how the government and the US are setting about providing security, local government, communication systems, education, and health provision for the people. A further staged discussion is between four unidentified GIs who talk about the importance of winning the 'hearts and minds' of the people.

The emphasis of the film is on the USA assisting the South Vietnamese who are portrayed as 'brave people' suffering at the hands of Communist 'aggressors'. Figures offered suggest that the Communists killed over 20,000 civilian leaders because they refused to side with them. Wayne refers to the Communists as 'cut-throats' and 'terrorists' and thus the US are not only protecting the weak but also defending 'freedom' and 'democracy'. One of the metaphors invoked repeatedly by Wayne is the American War of Independence of 1776. The metaphor is meant to allude to the South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development Cadres who are trying to liberate the people from poverty and the intimidation of the Communists. Wayne and his colleagues explain that 20,000 South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development Cadres are being

¹⁵⁴ The artist credited for these pencil drawings is Howard Brodie.

trained by South Vietnamese and US military forces with a variety of skills to help protect and improve the lives of peasants in their local districts. These cadres are assigned to their village for up to one year. This is the only US documentary viewed to date that gives details of this major initiative. Yet it is also confusing in as much as the Communist National Liberation Front also has 'cadres' leading their units who are similarly dressed in the black pyjama outfits associated with the peasants. Interestingly, the documentary acknowledges this confusion.

The documentary is full of positive language with regard to developments in Vietnam. The slogans 'nationhood' and 'nation building' are repeated regularly throughout the film. Other slogans not used by other government documentaries such as 'social revolution' and 'civic action' are also repeatedly employed. These terms are used in reference to mechanisms of government and services being organized by the South Vietnamese both in the cities and in the villages. From the onset, the documentary praises the Vietnamese for their efforts to fight for freedom and self-determination. Images of peasants working hard on local projects, being trained in skills such as carpentry as well as self-defence pepper the film.

A Nation Builds Under Fire is one of the few documentaries that alludes to the 'More Flags' program. Wayne refers to thirty-nine countries of the 'free world' who have pledged support and the film includes excerpts showing West Germans helping to set up social centres and schools and an Iranian surgical team working in a hospital in a district of Saigon. Above all, it is the US military that is seen helping to build South Vietnam's infrastructure such as roads, seaports and airports.

Despite Wayne's presence, this film was made by the US Defense Department for distribution and exhibition to the forces only, with the intention to recruit, educate and boost morale. The figure of Wayne is distinctive but instead of wearing civilian clothes, he is dressed in Western military fatigues. This is unusual as Wayne did not hold any military rank in the forces. He even wears a name tag, presumably to reinforce his solidarity with the men, and his front-of-camera leadership is a powerful endorsement of US policies.

Many well-known Hollywood actors and television stars can be found commenting either in front of the camera or providing 'voice of God' narration in US military or government documentaries. Hollywood stars such as Glenn Ford, Charlton Heston and John Wayne made significant contributions to US government documentaries. These stars held important associations for the viewing public as they portrayed heroic figures in Westerns, Epics or War Films. Their presence acted not only as an endorsement of their government's policies but also as a call to arms. Their image translated in much the same way as World War I recruitment posters of Alfred Leeze and James Montgomery Flagg. Leeze's 1914 poster featured the iconic image of Lord Kitchener and the words 'Your Country Needs You'. Three years later Flagg employed the same format and pose but this time with the image of Uncle Sam, the national personification of the United States, and the words 'I Want You for the U.S. Army'. Flagg's poster would be deployed extensively during World War II but it is not clear if it was utilized during the Korean or Vietnam War.

Of all the stars employed by these Vietnam War documentaries, John Wayne in *A Nation Builds* is undoubtedly the most iconic and the most powerful. Although there is

no evidence regarding the reception of this documentary, testimonies by Vietnam veterans refer to Wayne's influence on them. In his autobiography, Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic wrote how it was Wayne's heroic character in the World War II combat film *Sands of Iwo Jima* (USA, 1949) that inspired him to sign up to fight in Vietnam.¹⁵⁵ Wayne's iconic image as the 'all American hero' remains intact today and many film historians and biographers argue that it is difficult to separate the man from the myth.¹⁵⁶ Apart from his many popular Westerns such as *Red River* (1948), *The Searchers* (1954), *Rio Bravo* (1959) and of course *The Alamo* (1960), Wayne made sixteen fictional war films including *Back to Bataan* (1945), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *The Flying Leathernecks* (1951), *The Longest Day* (1962) and *In Harm's Way* (1965) - all major box office successes.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Wayne himself was the number one box office star in the years 1951-55 and number two during the years 1956-1970.¹⁵⁸

By choosing to place himself in front of the camera Wayne acknowledges the importance of his image to the success of the documentary message. His authoritative drawl, the distinctive swagger in his walk, his display of masculine courage, leadership and camaraderie are all key characteristics of his on-screen and off-screen persona. As Richard Dyer notes in his seminal work, *Stars*:

John Wayne's image draws together his bigness, his association with the West, his support for right-wing politics, his male independence of, yet courtliness towards, women – the elements are mutually re-enforcing, legitimating a certain way of being a man in American society.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (London: Corgi, 1976).

¹⁵⁶ Emanuel Levy, *John Wayne: prophet of the American way of life* (London: Scarecrow, 1988), Richard D McGhee, *John Wayne: actor, artist, hero* (Folkestone: McFarland, 1991), Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *John Wayne: American* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁷ Following on from *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, a year later Wayne directed and starred in a fictional film about the war in Vietnam, *The Green Berets* (USA, 1968) and despite failing to impress the critics, this film went on to be the tenth highest grossing film in the USA in 1968.

¹⁵⁸ Figures from David Pirie, *Anatomy of the Movies* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp.108-111.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Dyer, *Stars*, rev.ed (London: British Film Publishing, 1998.), pp.63-64.

Dyer also points to how some stars can also be considered authors, and that they can influence films as much as a director or writer. Dyer acknowledges that Wayne is such a star.¹⁶⁰ While Dyer's argument is limited to fictional cinema, a similar case could be made for Wayne's dominating presence in *A Nation Builds Under Fire*.

The Gentle Hand (USA, 1968), a twenty-nine minute colour documentary made by the United States Navy, depicts the work of American military surgeons working with civilians in South Vietnam. The four-man surgical team is posted in the village of Rach Gia. The opening image of the film is a tracking shot of a military man walking down a corridor towards the camera. An unseen 'voice of God' male narrator, later identified in the credits as John Elvin, introduces the team with accompanying shots of the men at work. The men are identified in the order of military superiority: Bob Richter, Lt Commander, a thirty-five year old orthopaedic surgeon, graduate of North Western Medical School; Jerry Grant, a volunteer surgeon from New York, with a specialization in Neurology; Jerry Hasekar, Lt Junior Grade Team Anaesthetist; Dennis Renander, a Hospital Corpsman Third Class, laboratory and X-ray Technician.

The narrator states 'their job' is to care for the two and a half million people in the province of Ken Yan. The narrator tells the audience of a 5000 year old culture where half the population died before the age of fifteen. With images of a market full of fish, the narrator explains that although no one starves there is no understanding of sanitation and many die of typhus, worms and dysentery. Moreover, the narrator refers to the Vietnamese reliance on 'archaic witchcraft, herbs and potions and incantations'. He

¹⁶⁰ Dyer, *Stars*, pp.152-154.

explains that the hospital in which the team operates was built by the French but only has 400 beds serving a region of two and a half million people. The team is assisted by two Vietnamese technicians and four Vietnamese interpreters, however, most of the technicians and nurses have no qualifications and have been trained on the job. He comments that the clinics are full as word has 'got around' that there are US doctors at the hospital. In addition, as many of the patients have come from far away, they have brought their families along, and the relatives have also moved into the hospital, living in the corridors. From this explanation, the audience could expect to see scenes of chaos with the hospital overrun with patients and families, not so, instead the viewer is presented with images of orderly queues for treatment and vacant corridors.

Images of the team at work in operating theatres and hi-tech laboratories, and organized ward rounds are juxtaposed with images of men and women in traditional dress and long queues of eager patients. These images are overlaid with superfluous, patronising comments, claiming that the Vietnamese are 'not used to the periodic check-up' and that the village medicine men's 'Chinese medicines rarely work', all of which imply that the Vietnamese are very backward. Moreover, images of patients showing humility and expressing thanks to the doctors all help to underscore the good work undertaken by the team. Indeed, the narrator tells us of one particular patient who insists on sitting on the floor rather than on a chair as his way of showing respect for the doctor. The documentary also includes a visit to the villages by Gerry Grant and Winnie, a nurse from MEDCAP, again there are long queues of sick men, women and children. The film's drive plainly shows that the Americans are present in Vietnam to 'improve primitive conditions'. The narrator underscores the humanitarian and philanthropic purpose by stating: 'This is the meaning of compassion'.

There is very little discussion of the war itself other than to mention injuries caused by the VC or terrorist attack. Some of the documentary is clearly staged; for example, the team stopping work at midday due to the stifling heat and humidity, followed by an emergency call due to a VC ambush injuring five men. It is not clear, however, whether the injured men are ARVN soldiers, VC soldiers or just civilians caught up in the cross fire.

The Gentle Hand is also indicative of how the role of Western women has been pushed to the periphery of histories of the war. This is epitomized by the MEDCAP nurse, Winnie, who is the only member not invited to comment on her role in the medical team. In her study 'Women in a Man's World: American Women in the Vietnam War', Lenna Allred points out that because the US Defense Department failed to categorize recruits by sex, there are no official statistics of the number of women who served in Vietnam.¹⁶¹ It is estimated, however, that between 7,500 and 11,000 female military personnel, mainly nurses went to Vietnam to serve their country. A further 1,500 women from the Army, Navy and Air forces were billeted to South East Asia to work in the areas of intelligence gathering, air traffic control, photography, cartography and secretarial. Moreover, some 50,000 civilian women were estimated to have worked as nurses, teachers, journalists, missionaries, entertainers and flight attendants either for private companies, government or humanitarian agencies such as the Red Cross.¹⁶² Yet

¹⁶¹ Lenna Allred, 'Women in a Man's World: American Women in the Vietnam War', in James S. Olson's *The Vietnam War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (London: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp.303-317.

¹⁶² Few women wrote about their experiences but some contributed vignettes to oral history collections such as Al Santoli's *Everything We Had* and Mark Baker's *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*. Allred's statistics are from Kathryn Marshall's *In the Combat Zone*:

no Western government or military documentary seems to be devoted to the role of forces women in Vietnam and nurses play only a fleeting role even in Western documentaries such as *The Gentle Hand, Hearts and Minds* and *Vietnam! Vietnam!*.

Made by the US Department of Defense, *The Battle of Khe Sanh* (USA, 1969) is one of the few documentaries that focus on a specific time and place in the history of the war and a sustained military encounter. The film opens with spectacular images of mountains piercing the cloud formations. The unseen narrator explains to the audience that they are looking at a north west corner of South Vietnam dominated by 4000ft mountains and thick jungle among which lies the small valley of Khe Sanh. The narrator advises the audience that although it is peaceful now, for seventy days and nights from 21 January to 31 March 1968, it was the scene of the ‘most bitterly fought and highly publicised battle of the Vietnam War’, and that some 6000 marines and allied troops held out against a besieging force of 20,000 North Vietnamese troops. The narrator raises the questions, ‘Was Khe Sanh worth it? Why did United States Military Command feel it necessary to defend it? This is its’ story’. From this point on, the film brings in expert witnesses to answer these fundamental questions and tell the story of the siege. The first and most important of these witnesses is Colonel David E. Lownds of the marine corps. Using maps and a terrain model, Lownds attempts to explain the strategic importance of the position of Khe Sanh but to non-military personnel it has little meaning, particularly as most of the surrounding hills and roads are identified only by numbers such as ‘Hill 558’, ‘Hill 861’, ‘Hill 881’, or ‘Hill 950’.

The film raises the spectre of the French defeat at D ien B ien Ph u and tries to explain why the French lost. It would seem that although the narrator acknowledges the brilliance of the North Vietnamese General Giap, the simple explanation offered is that, unlike the US at Khe Sanh, the French had no air support. Despite the US military's confidence that their forces would win, the US media and audience were not so convinced and papers such as *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* are revealed within the documentary to be showing real concern that there would be a repeat of the defeat at D ien B ien Ph u.

The narrator describes US air power as their 'secret weapon' although with figures proffered of 600 flights a day, including B52 bombers, this strategy can hardly be described as secret. Not only are the planes shown dropping food and munitions but the narrator proudly announces that 'Operation Niagara' 'scorched' and 'pulverised' the enemy with napalm and bombs. The statistics offered are astonishing: within a two and a half month period 103,000 tonnes of bombs were dropped in the area. Not only does the documentary claim that these were the 'most intense in the history of warfare' but as a result of such bombing, the enemy sustained 15,000 casualties. The narrator justifies the action by adding that the peace negotiations were improved by this victory at Khe Sanh but there is no evidence to support this.

As a little light relief from the images of war, the documentary allows US soldiers to describe conditions in Khe Sanh including their morale, which one anonymous soldier refers to as 'good'. Another explains the troops 'culinary skills'. He describes the various ad hoc stews made from rations, for example, 'hippie delight' is a stew made with everything thrown in it. These amusing testimonies are accompanied by images of

soldiers' leisure time; playing cards and basket ball, reading, playing the guitar as well as washing and sleeping.

The final images of the documentary include those of General Westmoreland and President Johnson awarding medals to marines such as Lownds and bomber pilots involved in the siege. President Johnson's words provide the soundtrack at this point as he talks about the 'great appreciation' for the 'protection' provided and 'selfless bravery' shown by these men.

The narrator concludes that: 'Perhaps some day historians will call it the most important single battle in Vietnam – only time can determine that'. Ironically, the post-war historical assessment was not what they expected, for it became clear that the siege at Khe Sanh was merely a decoy used by the NVA to allow the NLF to make lightning strikes at US bases all over the South. These strikes, known as the Tet Offensive, proved to be of ultimate significance rather than the Battle of Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh is one of the few documentaries that describes a conventional battle and a clear victory for the USA in Vietnam. Although the documentary highlights many key aspects of this battle, it does not acknowledge the fact there were few conventional battles fought in this war, Khe Sanh being one of only two major confrontations, the other being the battle for Ia Drang Valley in 1965.

Perhaps it is because the arguments are well honed by this stage that this government documentary does not attempt to explain why America is involved in Vietnam, as other government or military documentaries attempt to do, such as *Why Vietnam*. It could be that the producers wanted to avoid controversial political issues. What is clear from the

references to the press is that the government wanted to redress negative media reports and capitalize on a military victory, in order to paint a more positive picture of its forces.

Accounts of the events at Khe Sanh vary according to historical sources. According to Maclear, two elite NVA divisions, 325th and 304th divisions of 15,000-20,000 troops came down the Ho Chi Minh trail to besiege the fortress.¹⁶³ According to Karnow's sources, it was four NVA infantry divisions, 40,000 strong with two artillery regiments and armoured units 'converging' on Khe Sanh.¹⁶⁴ In all other respects, the accounts are similar.

Colonel David E. Lownds was told by his commanding officer General Westmoreland to dig in with his 3500 US marines and 2100 ARVN rangers. While Westmoreland was confident of victory, others including President Johnson were not. Johnson actually had a terrain model of Khe Sanh built in the situation room in the basement of the White House and would regularly visit late at night for report updates. Karnow also claims that Westmoreland went as far as to consider a tactical nuclear strike but this was ruled out by Washington as they believed it would encourage the anti-war protests at home. In Karnow's opinion, the analogy with D ien B ien Ph u and the French defeat was 'preposterous' but nevertheless, Westmoreland believed that the NVA were attempting to 're-enact' the D ien B ien Ph u victory at Khe Sanh.¹⁶⁵ Karnow called the battle a 'fiasco' and noted that following Westmoreland's departure in June 1967, the fortress was abandoned almost 'in secret' to avoid press attention and media controversy.

¹⁶³ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.256.

¹⁶⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, p.552.

Maclear pointed out that from the start Khe Sanh became the most controversial battle of the war and that the press, public and even the President feared a bloody disaster for US forces. Quoting journalist Peter Braestrup, Maclear points to the huge media interest in the siege. According to Braestrup, Khe Sanh accounted for at least a quarter of all film reports concerning Vietnam on American network news, some as high as fifty per cent on networks such as CBS.¹⁶⁶

An entire nation was an almost instant eye-witness. The six o'clock news had become the living-room war. The faces on the 'box' did not just haunt from 9,000 miles away: they were the boys from next door, and sometimes one's own son. The faces, so youthful, trustful, scarred, scared or brave, peered from every newspaper and every magazine ...¹⁶⁷

By the end of this pointless siege, Westmoreland had been removed as Head of the US military operations and public opinion had turned against President Johnson and his policy in Vietnam.

Filmed several years later on behalf of another government group, the United States Information Agency (USIA), *Vietnam! Vietnam!* (USA, 1971) is a fifty-eight minute colour documentary. It is divided into two parts. The first part is entitled 'Vietnam: The War and The People,' and the second is entitled, 'Vietnam: The Debate'. The film purports to be educational, informative and balanced, however, this is a deceptive documentary both in terms of production and content. There is no indication until the end titles that this is a government film. Instead, the opening credits allude to Hollywood, for it is the name of well-known director John Ford who is credited with being the film's executive producer. In addition, the documentary opens to the written

¹⁶⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp.553-554.

¹⁶⁶ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.265.

title: 'John Ford presents'. This would imply that Ford, not the USIA, had full artistic control.

The film opens with the distinctive voice of Hollywood actor, Charlton Heston, citing key words and icons of the sixties such as 'mini-skirts', 'King', 'Apollo', 'psychedelic', 'The Beatles', 'Streisand'. However, the list and corresponding images end with the words: 'no single word repeated itself on the pages of the newspapers of the sixties with so much controversy as the name, Vietnam'. From this point onwards the narrative becomes murky. Heston's complex, poetic narration, verging on the existential, is confusing. More importantly, there is no attempt to explain how the war began and why America became involved. The emphasis, if any, is that the US are there to protect the people of the South, and a process of demonization is used to depict the North and the Vietcong. Scenes of South Vietnamese cities and the towns suggest an idyllic way of life under threat. Images of American soldiers evacuating villagers with the explanation that they will be returned home when the Vietcong threat is over are deliberately misleading, for there is no reference to the forced movement of peoples into strategic hamlets. No scenes of homes being torched or men, women and children being tortured are included but rather disturbing material is used in conjunction with atrocities committed by the Vietcong.

In the second part, the documentary uses a variety of interviews but on a highly selective basis. Rather than producing a fair and balanced debate, the experts employed by the film tend to be in support of the war. Although Senators Eugene McCarthy, Charles Goodill and William Fulbright are allowed to voice their opposition to the war, they are

¹⁶⁷ Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, p.269.

overpowered by a series of presidential speeches from Eisenhower through to Nixon, which rousingly defend the necessity for American involvement in Vietnam. Moreover, the producers take great pains to highlight America's allies in the war: Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Republic of South Korea and the Philippines. This is the only documentary to refer to other allied countries that sent troops to South Vietnam, but this again only helps legitimize the war and the film's rationale. Only those wounded soldiers who supported US policies in Vietnam were given a voice. Protestors, particularly women, are depicted as stupid and ineffectual. The interview medley technique as espoused by Emile de Antonio in his documentary *In the Year of the Pig* (discussed later in this chapter), is also employed in *Vietnam! Vietnam!* but with less finesse.

Vietnam! Vietnam! was also produced to win support for its policies but it was specifically designed for audiences abroad rather than at home. The USIA was set up in 1948 in the heat of the Cold War and still exists as a government agency. It produces magazines in a number of languages, operates libraries in foreign countries and broadcasts in a variety of languages via its radio station, *Voice of America*. The USIA's programmes and policies are determined by the Department of State but generally speaking, the Agency's mission is to promote America, particularly its foreign policy, to the rest of the world. In the case of Southeast Asia, the Agency tried to present US policy as politically and morally honourable.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ USIA are barred from showing their films to US audiences by act of Congress, the only exception being the film on the life of the late President John F. Kennedy which received Congressional approval for theatrical release at home.

Vietnam! Vietnam! was conceived in 1966 to persuade non-Americans of America's noble intentions and deeds, but by the time it was issued in 1971 it was considered outdated. Filming began in Vietnam in October 1968 during the last days of the Johnson administration, and was finished nine weeks later but editing was only completed in June 1971. In that same month, Tad Szulc of the *New York Times* reported that the film was going to be shelved but it was finally released in September 1971. The film took over three years to make at a cost of \$252,751 and was the most expensive USIA film ever made.¹⁶⁹

USIA showed the film at only twenty-nine of the one hundred and seventy-six agency posts during the first eight months. Of the one hundred and sixty-one prints sent to its foreign outposts all but a few were returned without being screened to the public. Even at home, Americans entitled to view the documentary, such as those from the media or Congress, on the whole ignored the film. During the year of the film's release, USIA offices came under attack with many of its buildings bombed or sabotaged in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Germany, Jamaica, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Turkey and Yugoslavia among others.

Although John Ford was credited as executive producer, he was not present during the shooting.¹⁷⁰ Instead, Sherman Beck shot eleven hours of film with the help of a three-man crew: a cameraman, an assistant cameraman and a sound man. Indeed, Beck not only directed the film but he wrote it, with Ford advising on what should be shot and choosing newsreel footage and other material to be included. Beck was a member of the

¹⁶⁹ Tad Szulc, *The New York Times*, 10 June 1971, p.6.

¹⁷⁰ Ford made two visits to Vietnam, the first in the winter of 1968, and the second in the Spring of 1969.

Army Signal Corps in World War II and had been directing USIA films since 1949. In an interview with Joseph McBride, Beck revealed that he was sent to Vietnam by Bruce Herchensohn, USIA's Assistant Director of Motion Pictures and Television, to film an anti-NVA story, but Beck's original ideas were transformed by Ford's post-production additions and editing.

Known more for his popular Westerns, director John Ford served with great distinction in World War II.¹⁷¹ He had been working for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in the Field Photographic Unit when the Head of the OSS sent him to Midway in the Pacific to photograph the battle which took place on 4 June 1942. It was a great victory for the USA and the documentary directed by Ford *The Battle of Midway* (US Navy, 1942), was highly acclaimed for its ground-breaking realism. Ford also employed famous Hollywood actor Henry Fonda to narrate the events. In *Vietnam! Vietnam!* Ford would try to repeat this winning formula, this time using Charlton Heston as the narrator. *Cineaste* journalist Fred Kaplan wrote:

This is a slick film, well made, and historically interesting. It was USIA's last Vietnam film. In a sense, it marks the end of an era. It was the final straw, the first time – judging by the reaction to it – that any attempt to display American foreign policy as utterly benign and Communism as utterly monolithic and evil was so utterly rejected by America's friends and allies.¹⁷²

As Kaplan rightly points out, only the atrocities committed by the Communists are depicted. Kaplan believes that Part Two was not in the original plan for the

¹⁷¹ John Ford's directorial career spanned more than fifty years from the silent era to the introduction of 'talkies' and later colour film. He was a prolific filmmaker producing over 140 films, from classic Westerns such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956) to comedies such as *The Whole Town's Talking* (1935) and *The Quiet Man* (1952) to literary adaptations such *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *How Green Was My Valley* (1941). During World War II, John Ford served in the United States Navy. As Head of the Photographic Unit for the Office of Strategic Services he earned the rank of Commander. Ford made several documentaries for the American government and military departments, however, there is no work devoted to his documentary films.

¹⁷² Fred Kaplan, 'Vietnam! Vietnam! An Exclusive Report on John Ford's Propaganda Documentary for the USIA,' *Cineaste*, Vol. 7, No.3 (1976), p.20.

documentary but was added on as the political climate changed. Kaplan contends that ‘*Vietnam! Vietnam!*’ was certainly not the crudest portrait of the war that the USIA produced. In many ways, it was one of the subtlest’.¹⁷³

Film historian and critic Joseph McBride was also one of the few to see this documentary. Despite McBride being a great admirer of Ford, he denounced the film as being ‘one of the grisliest war films ever made, yet it is also one of the most jingoistic and hawkish films Ford has ever been associated with’.¹⁷⁴ He also felt it resembled one of his classic Westerns, *Drums Along the Mohawk*:

Glib as it may sound, Ford’s view of the war is reminiscent of a Western. The Vietcong are the bad guys, the peasants are the terrorised farmers, the Americans are the Earp Brothers come to clean up the territory so decent folks can go to church and set up schools.¹⁷⁵

McBride revealed later that although Ford had agreed to make the film for the USIA, the veteran director was surprisingly sceptical about the war. Ford even wrote to an old school classmate: ‘What’s the war all about? Damned if I know, I haven’t the slightest idea what we are doing there’.¹⁷⁶

Although location filming in Vietnam had finished by December 1968, the documentary was not released until 1971. Despite, various attempts to include other material, particularly from the US, such as the anti-war demonstrations, it remained out of touch with national and international opinion and so was withdrawn by the USIA from international exhibition.

¹⁷³ Kaplan, ‘*Vietnam! Vietnam!*’ p.22.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph McBride, ‘Drums Along the Mekong,’ *Sight and Sound* 41, Autumn 1972, p.215.

¹⁷⁵ McBride, ‘Drums Along the Mekong,’ p.215.

¹⁷⁶ Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp.690-697.

With the exception of *Vietnam! Vietnam!* most of these official documentaries were made and released prior to the Tet Offensive and its aftermath, thus, these documentaries were able to deliver the US position with a certain conviction. Although *The Battle of Khe Sanh* was filmed during the Offensive, the tone of the film suggests that despite the impact of Tet on the American public, the US government was still trying to depict the battle as a victory. By the time *Vietnam! Vietnam!* was released to foreign audiences, the atrocities at My Lai had made front pages around the world and other news images were making a marked impression, all of which made this film's pro-war position unacceptable.

ii. War documentaries made by Australia

Although not included in any of the current filmographies, this research has uncovered two documentaries produced by the Australian government during the conflict - *Action in Vietnam* (Australia, 1966) and *The Unlucky Country* (Australia, 1967).

Action in Vietnam is a twenty-seven minute colour documentary made by the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit. The film's opening shot is of a parade of soldiers from the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment who have recently returned from duty in Vietnam. The soldiers appear to be receiving a hero's ticker-tape welcome, with crowds of cheering spectators lining the streets, although this parade coincided with ANZAC Day celebrations in Sydney and was very early on in the Vietnam conflict - in other words, before dissent grew against the war.

The unseen male narrator's voice is not only officious but reflects a sense of pride. He emphasizes the tradition of these soldiers following in the footsteps of their fathers and

grandfathers by serving their country. Yet the narrator does not explain how the war began and why Australia is involved in this particular conflict. Instead the film backtracks to the battalion's manoeuvres in South Vietnam. This main section of the film is introduced by an impressive underside shot of an Australian Army helicopter then moves to foot patrols and armoured vehicles. Australian engineers (sappers) are shown clearing Vietcong booby traps, uncovering VC hideouts and cached Chinese weapons, yet the enemy remains elusive. There are also traditional camp shots of soldiers cooking using a billy, cleaning their guns, reading magazines, writing letters home, playing football and even swimming in a lake. The film also shows the 1st Battalion Medical Platoon setting up a medical clinic and administering to village women and children. There are several poetic shots, none more so than the final images of the film with a soldier silhouetted against the dawn sky and helicopters in front of an orange sky.

The second documentary uncovered, *The Unlucky Country* is a twenty-five minute colour film also made by the Commonwealth Film Unit for the Australian Department of Defence. The film attempts to outline the objectives of the South Vietnamese Government and Australia's support of and contribution to these objectives. The film opens with images of South Vietnamese peasants working in the fields and selling their goods at market but the images are accompanied by melancholic Oriental music suggesting all is not what it seems. The unseen Australian male narrator has an officious and authoritative voice as he tries to explain the politics and society of South Vietnam. The film soon turns to images of helicopters and military equipment. The film also includes a montage of black and white photographs showing the destruction and the displacement of Vietnamese villages, and blames the Vietcong for the same.

The narrator asserts that the destruction of the villages and crops results in the villagers moving to towns which are absorbing some one million refugees at this time. The film then moves to the busy city of Saigon where a Vietnamese government official describes the government's dual objectives of developing a country and winning the war. He also explains that there is a manpower shortage and the film shows images of women doing traditional men's work such as digging and building.

It is not until half way through the documentary that the narrator addresses the issue of Australian involvement. One objective is to retrain the Vietcong who have defected from the Communists. A senior military figure, Commander Brigadier Jackson, from the 1st Australian Task Force seems to bask in the camera's spotlight as he explains that their aim is not only to destroy Communism but help build a better way of life for the South Vietnamese. He makes a number of provocative political comments including 'choice' is the right of every human being but Communists have no choice and therefore are not human. Jackson refers to the 'civic action programme' which offers food and medical care. It also helps to improve South Vietnam's infrastructure by providing materials and equipment and training the Vietnamese with necessary skills to build houses, schools and reticulated water schemes. There are plenty of grateful smiling natives in the film, in particular the children who are given helicopter rides for a treat. Admittedly, this is not the usual iconic image of the fighter or transport helicopter.

Australian doctors and nurses are shown attending military and civilian casualties at Benh-Vien hospital, however, the images of children with munitions' injuries are particularly emotive. Finally, the film includes a speech, clearly scripted for Australian consumption, given by the director of the Vietnamese press. He says that of the forty

countries who have given aid to date, Australia has given the most, and shows his appreciation for the entire medical and educational support. Yet it is clear that he regards the military support to be the most significant. He refers to the Australian forces as valiant fighters who have taught them much, particularly anti-guerrilla warfare. Again, this is one of the few films to refer directly to the SEATO/Columbo Aid Plan and indirectly allude to the 'More Flags Program'.

While the first of these Commonwealth Films, *Action in Vietnam*, was aimed at the forces, it is more than likely that *The Unlucky Country* would have had a broader screening to the general public although there are no records to confirm this. Both films were made prior to the Tet Offensive, at a time when the Australian government was confident of their role in Vietnam and confident of public support and thus these two documentaries are imbued with a self-assuredness of purpose.

TEXTS - Part IV
**Vietnam War Documentaries made by Canada, France,
the United Kingdom, and the United States of America**

This final group of documentaries represent in the main commercial and independent filmmaking interests rather than government-sponsored documentaries although, in one case, a national film board is responsible for commissioning the documentary in question. Many of the documentaries are the result of co-productions between various countries and filmmakers with diverse political backgrounds and must, therefore, be considered on an individual basis.

Originally intended for French television *La Section Anderson* (Fr/USA, 1967) directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer, was produced by Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française. Later dubbed into English and entitled *The Anderson Platoon*, the documentary made its way to US cinema screens and television audiences in the UK, Canada, Australia, West Germany, Holland and Yugoslavia.¹⁷⁷

The Anderson Platoon follows the exploits of a group of thirty-three infantrymen in the field under the command of Lt Joseph Anderson over a period of six weeks in 1966. The platoon forms part of Bravo Company and they are filmed conducting ‘Operation Irvine’ which is an attempt to seek out, surround and capture Vietcong forces and weapons. The film follows the platoon from base camp into rural areas, villages and jungle. The soldiers are filmed under the duress of ambushes, fire fights, extreme weather conditions, and also the tedium of waiting around for orders. The documentary also captures the camaraderie of the soldiers on and off the battlefield. Not all the film

¹⁷⁷ *The Anderson Platoon* received much critical acclaim in the US and won an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 1967.

is devoted to war manoeuvres as Schoendoerffer captures the platoon's humanitarian work as well as follows one soldier's visit to Saigon on leave.

Schoendoerffer is the unseen narrator and sets out his reasons for making the documentary in his opening statement:

The Vietnamese War is a tragedy especially for us French who feel partially responsible. We fought there when it was called the Indo-Chinese War. I went to spend six weeks, night and day, with an American Army Platoon. I went back to rediscover the Vietnam I had left thirteen years ago with the French Army but, except for several poignant scenes, I discovered, above all, America.

The director informs the audience that Lt Anderson is a twenty-four year old black American trained at West Point and assigned to the US First Air Cavalry Division. The platoon contains a mixture of black, white and ethnic soldiers, most of who come from poor uneducated backgrounds. Twenty-eight of the thirty-three men are conscripts, drafted for two years of service, one of which is spent in Vietnam. Schoendoerffer does not identify all thirty-three men but rather singles out key members, informing the audience of these soldiers' home states, their former professions, or backgrounds and current roles in the platoon. He also tells the audience if the soldiers are going to die or be wounded over the next six weeks. For example, Reece, the platoon's radioman, is formerly a farmer from South Carolina; Padella is a Texan rancher of Mexican origin; Greyhouse is a blues singer from Alabama; and eighteen year old Shannon will be killed in an ambush in two weeks time. This identification parade is reminiscent of a muster call in the forces, or, in a fictional war film, a roll call of the dead and, or living prior to the end credits. In order to keep the audience focused on the men, Schoendoerffer repeats the role call at key points throughout the documentary.

The filming of Shannon's dead body is done respectfully from a distance. Included in the long shot are four fellow soldiers who wait sombrely for the helicopter to remove the deceased. Schoendoerffer, also shows respect for the rest of the soldiers' in their moment of grief, for although he pans across their faces in close-up he only offers side views rather than let the camera make eye contact with the men. Close-ups are used, however, to show the distress of another soldier Kelly when he is wounded and desperate for medical attention. These are strikingly new and rare images in terms of the Vietnam War documentary, although not for Vietnam War photographers such as Larry Burrows or Philip Jones Griffiths.

The final sequence of the film shows one white wounded soldier comforting another wounded colleague who is black. It is clear that Schoendoerffer wants the documentary to end on a positive note, one of racial harmony. Earlier in the documentary, the director informs the audience that segregation in the forces was dissolved during the Korean War. Schoendoerffer seems to imply with his documentary that there are no longer any racial tensions in the US army; this may be the case for the Anderson Platoon but from the many oral testimonies provided, this would seem be the exception rather than the rule. While Lt Anderson is called 'sir', as is due to his rank, it is intriguing that none of the soldiers are given a voice and allowed to comment on their captain or their colleagues.

Furthermore, despite his focus on the men, there is no real in depth view of them as individuals, with the exception of Reece. The film crew follow Reece on leave to Saigon where he picks up several girls and squanders all his money, forcing him to return to the platoon four days earlier than expected. During this interlude, we learn that

Reece comes from a poor background. He has never experienced an en-suite bathroom nor seen elephants at the zoo. During a Vietcong attack on a parade in Saigon, Reece admits he feels safer with his platoon. Yet even these comments are mediated via Schoendoerffer, the director and narrator, not spoken by Reece directly to camera.

Along with the absence of interviews there is no attempt to paint a wider picture of the war. Schoendoerffer remarks that the platoon is unaware of the big picture and that the soldiers are 'small pawns in a big game'. This would explain the soldiers' lack of enthusiasm or interest at the briefing given by Bravo Company's Captain. Again, it would have been illuminating to hear from the platoon members themselves, including the Lieutenant and Captain, as to what they thought of the war and their role within it.

Schoendoerffer's documentary reveals the futility of chasing the Vietcong from one location to another. He describes these as 'fruitless searches'. At one point they are sent to find a Vietcong camp but on arrival find it had been abandoned two weeks earlier. Moreover, the problems of identifying the enemy are well illustrated by this documentary as the platoon struggle to find the VC snipers and guerrillas in the landscape and among the Vietnamese villagers.

Schoendoerffer's documentary is in stark contrast to the authoritarian government films as he takes a very personal, humanistic approach towards the war. Although there is no real in-depth view of them as individuals, the soldiers are at least identified and the audience is provided with basic background details about this group of men. The film also reveals the fear and devastation of war on the soldiers, the villagers and the Vietcong. The documentary is not an anti-American statement but rather an anti-war

statement. The enemy is not the Americans, nor the Communists, nor the Vietcong, but the war itself.

Schoendoerffer was a veteran of the battle of Diên Biên Phủ in 1954. As an army cameraman, Schoendoerffer had first hand experience of the horrors of war. After a battle lasting fifty-six days the French were defeated by General Giap and the Vietminh. The French lost 3000 men with 10,000 more being taken prisoner and placed into prisoner of war camps. Although, Schoendoerffer survived the camps, 7,000 men did not. Surprisingly, Schoendoerffer elected to stay on in South Vietnam after his release from the Vietminh POW camp and worked as a war correspondent for *Life* and *Paris Match* magazines. His long-term commitment to reporting on Vietnam and his personal and humanitarian documentary seems to support Marianna Sullivan's argument that the French felt a very strong bond with the Vietnamese, however, Schoendoerffer does not display any of the anti-American sentiment espoused by the French press.¹⁷⁸

In a rare interview with Sarah Ferguson of *Sight and Sound* in 1991, Schoendoerffer reveals much about his past, in particular, his relationship with Vietnam. He declares, 'Indo-China was the country of my second birth [...] I became an adult there and have carried those experiences with me ever since'.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, he stresses the fundamental differences between France's and the United States's respective relationships with Vietnam. Whereas America's relationship was relatively new, Indo-China (Vietnam) was a French colony with links dating back to the time of the missionaries. He also points out that when the French sent troops, they were full-time

¹⁷⁸ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, p.75.

¹⁷⁹ Sarah Ferguson, *Sight and Sound*, Vol 1, Issue 8, December 1991, pp.26-28.

professional soldiers unlike the US troops who were mainly conscripts, yet his documentary fails to highlight this last point. It is poignant that as Schoendoerffer was filming this documentary, the USA was escalating its troop commitment. Moreover, French President De Gaulle was to call for US troop withdrawals while visiting neighbouring Cambodia. Yet there is no reference to either of these events in his documentary.

Schoendoerffer's experience of war and the region was invaluable in providing an authentic experience of the conflict from the ground. Schoendoerffer worked alongside cameraman Dominique Merlin and soundman Raymond Adam to produce this documentary. All three took great personal risks in the field. Some ground shots are designed to show the difficulty of the terrain but there are also a number of chaotic scenes literally filmed close to the ground as the three of them take cover from the enemy. Much of the photography is gritty but there are also poetic shots of the landscape as well as some spectacular aerial shots taken from the helicopters.

The documentary opens with idyllic pastoral images of Vietnam accompanied by Vietnamese music. This is interrupted by images of war and sounds of artillery fire. Schoendoerffer uses the authentic sounds of war and the jungle but also allows soulful blues music to interpret the mood of the soldiers. Another departure from the realist format is when Schoendoerffer uses Western popular music as a descriptive background to the images; for example, he uses Nancy Sinatra's 'These Boots are made for Walking' for a patrol scene through the jungle.

The critics praised the film for both its realism as well as its poetic qualities. Film critic, James Thomas argued:

We have seen much gorier scenes than these in war films. But that was fiction. It was the reality of the situation which stripped the nerve ends last night for we were actually worrying about the life of the man on the right hand of the picture.¹⁸⁰

British critic George Melly praised the documentary for its editing and called it a ‘work of art’.¹⁸¹ Melly also insisted that ‘it presented a totally convincing indictment of the war’.¹⁸²

This last point by Melly is debateable as the documentary fails to be critical of policies and methods used by the US and South Vietnam government in conducting the war. Methods such as ‘Search and Destroy’ (aka ‘Search and Sweep’), blanket bombing of the North, the use of napalm, anti-personnel weapons and chemical agents that poisoned the land and the people, are issues not addressed by Schoendoerffer’s documentary. Similarly, *The Anderson Platoon* ignores the issue of torture and atrocities although there are a number of disturbing scenes where villagers are interrogated and suspects are taken away. Schoendoerffer makes no comment when a female and two male suspects are removed by helicopter, however, the silence makes the audience wonder where they are being taken and what happens to them.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ James Thomas, *The Daily Express*, 19 May 1967.

¹⁸¹ George Melly, *The Observer*, 21 May 1967.

¹⁸² Melly, *The Observer*, 21 May 1967.

¹⁸³ One method of interrogation used by the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN), under the auspices of the American forces, was to interrogate the suspects in flight, throwing them out of the helicopter to their death whether they co-operated or not. Schoendoerffer does not refer to this brutal practice but in *Hearts and Minds*, Peter Davis interviews a CIA operative who confirms this was indeed a widespread method of interrogation and torture.

It is also debateable whether *The Anderson Platoon* was significantly influenced by the French *cinéma vérité* movement of the 1960s. *Cinéma vérité*, also known as Observational Cinema (United Kingdom), Direct Cinema (USA) and Candid Eye (Canada), broke away from the then standard practice of planning, scripting, and staging events including interviews.¹⁸⁴ Until the 1960s much of documentary practice had been determined by heavy sound and 35mm photography equipment which was static and required labour-intensive effort in setting up in various locations. With the development of new lightweight portable 16mm camera technology that could also synchronize sound, documentarians could access different locations more easily and be more spontaneous. Also by capturing sound instantly, in particular conversations, exponents of *cinéma vérité* were able to dispense with the need for a narrator. Moreover, it gave the impression of unmediated observation and presented events in live or real time.

Cinéma vérité, along with Direct Cinema, Observational Cinema, Candid Eye were movements that seemed to be searching for an underlying truth. According to Eric Barnouw, however, there were significant differences between *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema:

The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the [...] *cinéma vérité* artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of the involved bystander; the *cinéma vérité* espoused that of provocateur. Direct cinema found its truth in events available to the camera. *Cinéma vérité* was committed to a paradox that artificial circumstance could bring hidden truth to the surface.¹⁸⁵

Certainly, Schoendoerffer made very effective use of the lighter equipment, following the platoon into difficult terrain, yet he does not abandon the traditional ‘voice of God’

¹⁸⁴ French anthropologist filmmaker, Jean Rouch and his group coined the term *cinéma vérité* which was in turn taken from Russian documentarist, Dziga Vertov’s *kino-pravda*.

¹⁸⁵ Keith Beattie, quoting Eric Barnouw, (1983:255) in *Documentary Screens: Non-Fiction Film and Television*.

narration. Although Schoendoerffer's perspective, both visually and aurally, is all-important in the documentary, it does not constitute one of provocation. Nevertheless, his search for an underlying epistemological truth about the Vietnam War remains in keeping with the ideals of the *cinéma vérité* movement.

Also filmed in 1966, *A Face of War* (USA, 1967) is another documentary focusing on the soldiers' perspective. Seventy-seven minutes long, this black and white film was the directorial debut of American director, Eugene S. Jones, a former World War II marine and experienced television cameraman.¹⁸⁶ The documentary follows Mike Company, the 3rd Battalion of the 7th Marine Regiment, over a period of ninety-seven days. During filming, a number of marines were either killed or wounded and Jones and his assistant were both hurt.

The film opens up with close-up shots of guns, grenades and mortars being placed on soldiers' bodies. In the background, the commanding officer is giving the soldiers instructions but we do not see the platoon until the camera pulls back. Most unusual is that the film does not have any opening title or credits but rather as the action rolls, the audience is informed of the following:

The sights and sounds you are about to witness were filmed and recorded in Vietnam.

The events and circumstances were experienced by a single American infantry unit over a period of 97 days.

¹⁸⁶ There are very few production details available concerning this documentary other than it was produced by Commonwealth United Entertainment (CUE), a division of the Commonwealth United Corporation (CUC). According to *Today's Cinema*, 19 March 1969, CUC was a US conglomerate with reported assets of \$206m, however, much of its wealth was steeped in oil wells and real estate. Figures from *The Hollywood Reporter*, 10 July 1969, reveal that CUC entertainment division assets only amounted to \$7,960,072 which would indicate that CUE was a relatively small player in Hollywood terms. Moreover, in 1968-69 CUE had only twenty-three films in its programme many of which were purchased from outside sources rather than produced in-house.

This stark approach epitomizes much of the film's tone. No 'voice of God' commentary is provided but rather the images are accompanied by the natural sounds from the soldiers' speech and conversations including: the officers' commands and pep talks to the soldiers; the radio broadcasts by the soldiers to base camp; the medivac helicopters radioing for assistance. Even the cinematography is from the soldiers' point of view, as they traverse a tall bamboo field, the audience can only see either the man directly ahead or behind. When the soldier dives for cover, the camera similarly follows and there are often chaotic shots as a result. All the sights and sounds of war are offered unadulterated including the soldiers' cries for help as they are injured and images of wounded soldiers writhing in agony. However, the camera refuses to linger on these images. Moreover, in spite of the harsh realities of war there are still many poetic shots, such as the soldiers silhouetted either against the bright sun or the sky at dusk.

As the film comes to a close, a role call of the soldiers is provided, displaying each soldier's rank, name, town and state, age and whether they were injured or killed. The role call is accompanied by a sardonic song about signing up to the Marine Corps and being sent to Vietnam:

When I checked in they said we'd have a place we think you'd like.
 We'll send you off to Company M, M stands for Mighty Mike.
 They took me off to Tindo Hill away out in the sticks.
 Where all day long they teach the Cong Marine Corps tricks.

There was a hamlet to our west we called it No Name Bill.
 The VC they harassed until we had our fill.
 In three months time their snipers wounded sixty four
 But I'm glad to say that No Name almost is no more.

Now the Skipper started up a pool where each pays a quarter
 To guess which day the VC hit the hill with 60 mortars.
 It's just not fair our gunny says 'you're never gonna win
 Unless you see happen to be the winner's next of kin'.

This dark-humoured song provides an ironic antithesis to the official Marine Corps anthem and the men are heard humming the tune as they move out on night patrol and the final credits role.

Again, *A Face of War* was one of the first war documentaries to benefit from the new technologies available during the 1960s. The lighter, portable equipment made manoeuvrability possible, particularly in the difficult and often dangerous terrain of Vietnam, and new high speed 1000 ACAS film allowed 40% of the film to be shot in near dark conditions.

Jones was clearly influenced by the Direct Cinema movement evolving in the US during the 1960s as espoused by documentary filmmakers such as Robert Leacock and the Maysles Brothers. These early practitioners of Direct Cinema believed filmmakers should not be in the frame, nor provide voice-over commentary, or interview subjects but rather should keep contact with their subjects to a minimum. Moreover, they should not manipulate the *mise-en-scène* but allow events to unfold naturally and let audiences view the events in a chronological sequence. Direct Cinema filmmakers considered themselves to be objective reporters, reacting against the static conditions of previous television reportage. They sought to offer an unobtrusive, ‘fly on the wall’, ‘slice of life’, and in Jones’s case ‘close to the action’ view of the world, presented in live or real time.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ See Keith Beattie’s *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), for more information on direct cinema.

New York Times film critic Howard Thompson felt that Jones's documentary was to be commended as:

One of the most authentic, intimate and remarkable war records ever put on film [...] even more than *The Anderson Platoon* [...] *A Face of War* conveys the tedium and apathy of warfare, alongside an almost methodical acceptance of sudden attack and death.¹⁸⁸

Time magazine's review also praised the documentary linking it to the tradition of war photography:

Combat photography has become almost commonplace, an adjunct to the 6 o'clock news and weather. *A Face of War*, though, has a rightful claim to be judged as art: it is a documentary in the great tradition begun by Civil War Photographer Matthew B. Brady when he took his cumbersome cameras to Virginia in 1861.¹⁸⁹

Others, however, were not so impressed, for example, the *Variety* critic commented:

Obviously, the attempt was to portray war on its lowest level – that is, ordinary soldiers doing their job – without any “big picture” modulations of ideological and political propaganda. This is at once, film's greatest internal liability as well as its greatest commercial asset.¹⁹⁰

The *Variety* critic also pointed to another crucial factor that while the film was in black and white, audiences could see on television ‘comparable events in deathly living colour’.¹⁹¹ Indeed, John Mahoney of *The Hollywood Reporter* made similar observations but also added that there was limited appeal for such a film and few outlets would be prepared to exhibit the film.¹⁹² Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest *A Face of War* experienced distribution or exhibition problems as a result of its content.

Documentaries from the combat zone, such as *A Face of War* and *The Anderson Platoon*, give the impression that there were harmonious relations among the US

¹⁸⁸ Howard Thompson, ‘*A Face of War* Offers Intimate Record of 97 Days with GIs’, *The New York Times*, 11 May 1968.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Cinema: *A Face of War*, *Time*, 3 May 1968.

¹⁹⁰ *Variety*, 6 March 1968.

¹⁹¹ *Variety*, 6 March 1968.

soldiers, that relations between white soldiers and their black and ethnic counterparts (African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans) were void of racial divisions. Yet this was not the case, and many oral testimonies reflect a far from perfectly integrated world. These testimonies would also indicate that a West Point trained black officer, such as Lt Joseph Anderson, was rare.

As Ernest Obadele-Starks and Amilcar Shabazz point out in their research, 'Blacks and the Vietnam War', the black experience in Vietnam has been, until recently, largely ignored.¹⁹³

The actual reality of the war is typically treated as a monolithic phenomenon. What the white soldier experienced, all soldiers experienced. Recently, more balanced and sophisticated studies have gone beyond such a reductive depiction of the war and have emphasized the fact that the wartime experience of the blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other non-white soldiers included not only battles with the Vietcong, but internal battles with racism, ethnic and linguistic chauvinism, and prejudice and other forms of discrimination as well.¹⁹⁴

Obadele-Starks and Shabazz also provide supporting evidence in the form of testimonies by black soldiers such as Terry Whitmore and David Parks, military doctors such Capt. Fenton Williams, and black oral history collections from Stanley Goff and Robert Sanders, and Wallace Terry.¹⁹⁵ However, it is Terry's collection of interviews that reveals a poignant change in the black soldier's perception of the war. It would seem that initially most black American soldiers supported the war effort and believed they were helping the South Vietnamese but as the war progressed, and as the civil

¹⁹² John Mahoney, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 March 1968.

¹⁹³ Ernest Obadele-Starks and Amilcar Shabazz, 'Blacks and the Vietnam War', in James S. Olson's *The Vietnam War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (London: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp.319-334.

¹⁹⁴ Obadele-Starks and Amilcar Shabazz, 'Blacks and the Vietnam War', p.320.

¹⁹⁵ Terry Whitmore, *Memphis-Nam-Sweden: The Autobiography of a Black American in Exile* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), David Parks, *GI Diary* (New York: Harper and Row 1965), Fenton A. Williams, *Just Before Dawn: A Doctor's Experiences in Vietnam* (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), Stanley Goff and Robert Sanders, *Brothers: Black Soldiers in the Nam* (New York: Berkeley Books: 1982), Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984).

rights struggle intensified at home, more black American soldiers expressed dissent, even anti-war sentiments. Terry's interviews also reveal that although there were racial divisions at home and at base camp, under fire, white, black and ethnic soldiers pulled together.

Yet, as Obadale-Starks and Shabazz point out, despite the growing contributions from those who served in Vietnam there remains little information on the ethnic minorities' experiences of the war and how they interacted with each other. Furthermore there is a lack of information regarding the socio-economic and religious background of those black-Americans who served.

Clearly there was an opportunity with films such as *A Face of War* and *The Anderson Platoon* to explore racial issues but this opportunity was lost. It remains a mystery as to why Schoendoerffer chose to follow the story of the poor Southern white boy on leave in Saigon rather than explore the extraordinary story of the black American Captain Anderson, after whom the director named his documentary.

There are other inherent problems with the 'trip to the front' documentaries as the politics of the Vietnam War are inseparable from the politics of representation. Film historian David E. James argues that documentaries such as Schoendoerffer's *The Anderson Platoon* and Jones's *A Face of War* use the GI as intermediary between us and Vietnam. The GI is 'our surrogate'.¹⁹⁶ Yet he is both victim and aggressor, hero and villain and this often places the audience in an uncomfortable position most clearly

shown when he comes under fire or when troops are shown perpetrating acts of inhumanity such as torching villages. James also points out:

The typical Vietnam War documentary re-creates a trip to the front; its transformation of the movie theatre into the theatre of war depends on the effectiveness with which the audience can be made to experience phenomenally the textures and terrors of battle.¹⁹⁷

This highlights another problem: the audience becomes so enveloped by the intimate aural and visual experience offered by these documentaries that they fail to examine the issues surrounding the conflict. Not only is the war reduced to sensation and spectacle, but we rely on the experts, in this case Schoendoerffer and Jones, for their view of the conflict. As film historian Claudia Springer points out, too much weight is given to the experience of ‘being there’ and as a result viewers are not encouraged to hold their own opinion.¹⁹⁸

Photographed, written and presented by English journalist Felix Greene, *Inside North Vietnam* (UK/US, 1968) is also ‘a personal report’ as the film’s subtitle announces. Over a period of three and a half months, Greene shot some ten hours of colour film mainly taken from travelling through heavily bombed countryside. Greene admitted he preferred to stay away from Hanoi but spent considerable time in Haiphong Harbour. Greene starts with a written commentary which provides the audience with useful background information to the film:

In 1967, I was sent to North Vietnam by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and was also under contract by CBS Television News. I travelled in North Vietnam for over three months. The film left Vietnam uncensored. It was processed in

¹⁹⁶ David E. James, ‘Documenting the Vietnam War’ in Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, eds., *Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.241-242.

¹⁹⁷ James, ‘Documenting the Vietnam War’ in Dittmar and Michaud, eds., *Hanoi to Hollywood*, pp.241-242.

¹⁹⁸ Claudia Springer ‘Vietnam: A Television History and the Equivocal Nature of Objectivity’, *Wide Angle*, Vol.7, No.4, 1985, p.58.

Hollywood, California. The footage entered the US under license of the United States Government.¹⁹⁹

Initially, Greene provides a romantic, idyllic view of North Vietnam with images of women working in the rice fields, buffalo roaming and children playing, all of which is accompanied by Vietnamese music and song. This idyllic setting is interrupted by an air raid siren. From this point on the film concentrates on the destruction meted out by American forces and the resilient spirit and resourcefulness of the North Vietnamese.

Like many Western government official films, Greene uses a map to demonstrate the position of Vietnam in the Far East and locate the Northern position from which he is reporting. He also makes the important comparison in that North Vietnam is only one twenty-sixth the size of the USA. Like many official films he uses statistics. Greene admits he has no way of verifying the statistics but argues that the images of destruction speak for themselves. He explains that on 2 March 1965, US planes began a daily systematic bombing of the North. Greene claims that a greater tonnage of bombs had been dropped on North Vietnam than were dropped on Nazi Germany during World War II. He also reports on towns and cities that were reduced to rubble:

Phat Diem bombed fifty times - totally destroyed. Fu Li bombed forty times - totally destroyed, Nin Binh bombed one hundred and twenty times - totally destroyed. The list could go on. Apart from Hanoi and Hai Phong, city life has ceased to exist.

Greene combines the statistics with images of bombed homes, hospitals, schools, temples and churches. The images of destruction and human suffering are genuinely disturbing but their impact is somewhat diminished by the incongruous images of smiling Vietnamese factory workers, intermittently interjected in between. Greene tends

¹⁹⁹ Although Greene's film was uncensored, he later revealed he was not allowed to film any North Vietnamese military installations.

to labour the point with statistics, but his insight into the nuances of North Vietnamese society is fascinating. For example, Greene reveals under the Communist regime young people are urged to follow the 'Three Postponements'. First, they must postpone falling in love; second, if they are already in love, to postpone marrying; and third, if they are already married, to postpone having children. What Greene fails to point out is that this ruling frees up the female workforce to labour in the fields and in the factories. Moreover, Greene claims there is no conscription to the army but does not address the issue as to what happens to those men and women who refuse to join voluntarily or to those women who fail to adhere to the Three Postponements.

Greene also provides a valuable insight into education and healthcare in the North. He shows how under Communism the peasant population has benefited greatly in these two areas whereas under the French, the ordinary Vietnamese workers had no access to modern medicine or even a basic education. Greene's documentary is the only Western documentary in this selection that provides a basis for understanding the determination of the North Vietnamese people, their commitment to the Communist ideal, their devotion to their leader Ho Chi Minh and their ability to resist the forces of the most powerful country in the world, the United States of America.

There was general praise for producing the film almost single-handed, nevertheless, Greene was heavily criticized in the British and American press for his one-sided view. Penelope Houston called the film, 'more or less open propaganda'. Ann Pacey remarked, 'Mr Greene leaves no doubts where his sympathies lie and the result is

strictly, almost jolly, propaganda'.²⁰⁰ Cecil Wilson called Greene's personal report 'an avowedly pro-Hanoi one' and asked the question 'is there not suffering in the South as well as in the North?'²⁰¹ Felix Barker commented, 'Impressive documentary stuff, but its "objective" view is suspect in a way hard to define'.²⁰² But some critics saw past the intensely personal view and one-sided perspective, as did Eric Rhode:

Greene's open commitment to the North Vietnamese cause allows him to make connections which I have never seen made on those often admirable and balanced television reports: such as why sophisticated gadgetry is unlikely to destroy a society whose technology is primitive.²⁰³

John Mahoney of *The Hollywood Reporter* called the film 'inherently moving and shocking', and although did not dispute its contents, he criticized the film for being constructed in the Communist mould of propaganda.²⁰⁴ Similarly, the critic from *Variety*, was also dismissive of its construction:

Those Americans who believe in the wrongness of US involvement in Vietnam don't have to go for Hanoi's recruiting-poster viewpoint. As a political act this Greene film is perhaps meaningful, but as a film it's almost beneath discussion.²⁰⁵

It would be easy to dismiss this film as old-styled propaganda but there is one aspect of Greene's documentary that is innovative. Greene adopts a front-of-camera stance in order to present his lengthy report. Today's television audiences are used to seeing journalists on the frontline reporting directly to the camera. Yet this was a novelty in the Vietnam War documentary. With the exception of the star-fronted US military documentaries, Greene's stance is unique, for neither Jones, Schoendoerffer, de Antonio, Rubbo nor Davis present themselves to camera.

²⁰⁰ Ann Pacey, *The Sun*, 14 February 1968.

²⁰¹ Cecil Wilson, *Daily Mail*, 14 February 1968.

²⁰² Felix Barker, *Evening News*, 22 February 1968.

²⁰³ Eric Rhode, *The Listener*, 29 February 1968.

²⁰⁴ John Mahoney, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 February 1968.

Over one hour and forty minutes, *In the Year of the Pig* (USA, 1969) provides a historical account of America's involvement in Vietnam. American director Emile de Antonio uses a collection of interviews with government advisers, politicians and military leaders, intercut with historical footage of past and present day Vietnam, secured from multiple media sources. Speeches and statements given by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Republican and Democratic senators and congressman including Morton, McCarthy, Dirksen, Gruening, Ford, Nixon, and military commanders including General Westmoreland and Colonel George Patton III, are juxtaposed to provide a debate-style format. This structure is usually employed to provide the audience with a balanced argument but in this case the format provides a highly critical attack on American policy towards Vietnam.²⁰⁶

The documentary opens with some stark images intercut with blank screens and accompanied by the disturbing sound of helicopter blades whirring incessantly. The opening and closing image is of the American Civil War memorial - the statue of the Gettysburg soldier. It is a thought-provoking image cleverly linking the Vietnamese struggle with America's own past, thus drawing the audience in. In contrast, the image of the burning Buddhist monk is shocking and only serves to distance the audience.

De Antonio tries to provide a historical background to America's involvement but does not offer a solution for America's disengagement. The discussions regarding the Gulf of Tonkin incident, in which Americans were misled into thinking the US Fleet was being attacked by North Vietnamese forces, are significant. However, it is the images

²⁰⁵ *Variety*, 27 December 1967.

showing ordinary Vietnamese tortured and killed and having their homes destroyed that make the most impact. Moreover, the conduct of military personnel is often revealed as obscene. Few acquit themselves well. For example, General Patton III describes his men as a “bloody good bunch of killers” with a huge grin on his face. Another distasteful image is of a Chinook helicopter, especially fitted out as a gunship and nicknamed ‘birth control’. De Antonio also juxtaposes images and music in an ironic manner; for example, for the finale he presents the same Gettysburg image but this time in a negative print and accompanied by ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’.

In the Year of the Pig took de Antonio two years of extensive research and editing and was produced in black and white on a modest budget of \$168,000.²⁰⁷ It was the first American cinematic documentary film to openly criticise US government policy towards Vietnam. Indeed, de Antonio’s film offers a direct counterpoint and challenge to the official version of the war provided by government information films such as *Why Vietnam?* The film’s release was well timed as it coincided with the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive and the start of the backlash against the war.

De Antonio was well connected and had access to money, so financing his films did not prove problematic. Indeed, his Vietnam project attracted some celebrity backers, including actor Paul Newman, composer/conductor Leonard Bernstein and photographer Richard Avedon. De Antonio was well established as a radical filmmaker by the time he set out to make *In the Year of the Pig* and moreover he was motivated:

²⁰⁶ Music composer and editor Steve Addiss made several trips to Vietnam to study traditional music and instruments. De Antonio encouraged Addiss to include traditional and modern Vietnamese music in the film score.

²⁰⁷ Figures from *Film Quarterly*, Vol.28, Winter 1974, p.60.

I was angry about Vietnam and wanted to do something [...] I had good connections with both the NLF and the DRV and connections in Eastern Europe, and was able to go all over Europe and collect Soviet footage, East German footage, Czech footage, etc. I then did a lot of shooting of all kinds of people like Jean Lacouture, Phillippe de Villers, and various Americans, and some really crazy stuff like Senator Morton calling Ho Chi Minh the George Washington of Vietnam.²⁰⁸

De Antonio sourced his film well, using newsreel from the American Broadcasting Company, United Press International, Associated Press, Paramount News, Fox News, Movietone, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the French Army film archives at Fort d'Ivry as well as Communist film collections in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In an interview given to *Film Quarterly* magazine entitled 'Radical Scavenging', de Antonio revealed that although seventy per cent of the sound was produced by him, only thirty-five per cent of the images were his own.²⁰⁹ Yet, de Antonio never went to Vietnam to research or shoot original material.

Nevertheless, the original footage de Antonio does provide is usually in the form of interviews where he shows tremendous political adroitness:

It's always a coup to get the Establishment to undress for you, to have one of the leading Republicans in the Senate say, "Ho Chi Minh is to Vietnam as George Washington was to America," To have that guy say, "We have made Vietnam into a concentration camp" – that has much more dramatic force, more credibility, it's a more political act.²¹⁰

In an interview with British journalist Nina Hibbin, de Antonio also revealed he had access to further footage that depicted atrocities but said he deliberately chose to focus on the interviews: 'we had a lot of that kind of material but we preferred to let people

²⁰⁸ Alan Rosenthal, 'Emile de Antonio: An Interview,' *Film Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.1, Fall 1978, p.9 In the interview, not only was De Antonio defensive about his work but also he was highly critical of Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds*.

²⁰⁹ Bernard Weiner, 'Radical Scavenging: An Interview with Emile de Antonio', *Film Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.1, Autumn 1971, p5.

²¹⁰ Weiner, 'Radical Scavenging', p6.

condemn themselves out of their own mouths'.²¹¹ There are more than a dozen main interviews with key players but the 'cast' as printed in the film's press pack acknowledges some seventy personnel used to present this historical account of events and attitudes towards the war. Veteran American film critic, Pauline Kael, is one of the few to acknowledge the tremendous work involved in this compilation method:

He has gone to what must have been enormous effort to put the film together so that the words of men, like Dulles, Dean Rusk, Joe McCarthy, and Wayne Morse and of experts and journalists like Roger Hilsman, Paul Mus, Harrison Salisbury, Jean Lacouture, and David Halberstam tell the story. They provide his polemic, without any additional narration. This makes it more credible – and more of a feat.²¹²

Moreover, Kael describes de Antonio as playing a 'highly sophisticated game', not only expertly extracting film clips from the archives but editing them sensitively together.

Although the film played to fifty universities in the USA, de Antonio found it difficult to exhibit his documentary, especially after a Los Angeles cinema was broken into and had the screen daubed with the word 'traitors' in black paint prior to screening the film.²¹³ De Antonio also came up against the American Legion, a war veteran organisation, as they too tried to limit the theatrical release of the documentary.²¹⁴ Apart from the cities of Boston and New York, de Antonio was unable to find a broader theatrical release in the US.

²¹¹ Nina Hibbin, *Morning Star*, 20 November 1968

²¹² Pauline Kael, *New Yorker*, 15 November 1968.

²¹³ Weiner, 'Radical Scavenging', p5.

²¹⁴ The American Legion is a mutual-help, war veterans' organization chartered by Congress in 1919. The Legion's headquarters is in Indianapolis, Indiana but it has offices in each State and posts worldwide. In September 1966, Vietnam War veterans were approved for membership in the Legion and the organization voiced concern over the fate of POWs in Vietnam. In 1982, the Legion contributed \$1 million to the construction of the Vietnam War memorial in Washington. In August 1990, the Legion filed a law suit against the federal government for failure to conduct a study of the effects of Agent Orange on the health of Vietnam veterans which was mandated by Congress.

Yet film critics, both at home and abroad, praised the film particularly when it was exhibited at a number of international film festivals including Cannes, Leipzig and Florence. Dubbed in French, it ran for fourteen weeks at one theatre in Paris. The film was also aired on television in several European countries including the UK, West Germany, Sweden, Finland, Holland and Norway. The fact that the documentary was so anti-war did not seem to deter the critics and viewers. Some national papers, such as *The Washington Post* went as far as to call the film ‘propaganda’ but not in a damning way. The paper described the film as a noteworthy political document, ‘an eloquent and exhausting act of protest’, even as ‘a formal renunciation of the American Dream’.²¹⁵

John Coleman of the *New Statesman* was another critic undeterred by the partisan line adopted by de Antonio:

He is a propagandist, if by that you mean he has strong beliefs about the way the world wags and is prepared to use all the film documents at his disposal to make a case. But I’ve yet to find him tampering with the evidence, only selecting it according to his lights.²¹⁶

Another British film critic, Margaret Hinxman of *The Telegraph*, commented:

The bias, inevitably, is strongly anti-American, though much of the criticism comes from the mouths of respected U.S. politicians [...] of all the emotive pro-Ho movies that have been made about Vietnam, this one seems the most concerned about making sense of the criminal mess.²¹⁷

In a much later interview given to *Cineaste* magazine in 1982, de Antonio revealed the importance of history to his work and the research that went into making this particular film.²¹⁸ He admitted he had read nearly two hundred books in French and English on

²¹⁵ *The Washington Post*, 26 October 1968.

²¹⁶ John Coleman, *Newstatesman*, 6 December 1968.

²¹⁷ Margaret Hinxman, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 24 November 1968.

²¹⁸ Gary Crowds and Dan Georgakas, “History is the Theme of All My Films”: An Interview with Emile de Antonio’, *Cineaste*, Vol.12, No.2, Spring, 1982. Reprinted in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner, eds., *New Challenges For Documentary*, 2nd edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp.94-109.

Vietnam. He also conducted some extensive film research. De Antonio visited the National Liberation Front's main offices in Prague where he obtained valuable footage. He travelled to East Germany where he was given Roman Karmen's footage of the restaging of the battle of D ien B ien Ph u.²¹⁹ In Paris, he obtained a copy of the film, *The Life of Ho Chi Minh* which contained early stills of Ho and his family. Even the French Army's film library granted him access. This library had a significant collection of films concerning Vietnam including those taken by Sergeant Pierre Schoendoerffer when he was head of a camera crew in Vietnam during the Indochinese War. De Antonio was clearly proud of the breadth and depth of film material he uncovered which spanned thirty-five years of Vietnamese history, encompassing their colonial past, World War II and the Japanese occupation, the rise of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh, and finally to American intervention. Unfortunately for the audience, de Antonio's documentary ends at a crucial turning point: the Tet Offensive.

Made by the Marxist film collective, Newsreel, *The People's War* (USA, 1969) was shot in black and white. The cinematography appears grainy and the editing is crude, almost amateurish. *The People's War* employs a testimony technique in an attempt to provide the audience with an insight into North Vietnamese society during wartime. Both young and old, male and female describe their lives. Those who provide testimonies include agricultural workers, shop and factory girls, and a young male student studying at one of the few polytechnics in the North. The testimonies are accompanied by a wealth of images, often concerning the devastation inflicted by the US bombing campaigns, but the main focus of the film is to depict the concerted effort

²¹⁹ De Antonio includes here an explanation on how the audience can detect a re-staging of the event by looking at the Vietminh troops' neat attire.

made by the Vietnamese people in defending and improving their way of life.

Newsreel also issued an explanatory statement along with the distribution of the film:

We went to North Viet-Nam in July, 1969, at the invitation of the government, to make a film useful to the anti-war movement [...] We wanted to film more than the devastation because we wanted to produce more than an indictment. We wanted to show our country why we had lost the air-war in the north and the ground war in the south. We wanted to catch enough of the spirit of the people and the rationale of their organizations to make Americans understand that we were fighting against a people as unified in their determination to achieve their freedom as once we were to achieve our own.²²⁰

In spite of this explanation and the testimonies, the film is confusing both narratively and politically. With the exception of one young boy, the audience does not hear the witnesses speak in their native language. No subtitles are provided but rather a ‘voice of God’ narrator provides the commentary in English. Consequently, the testimonies can not be authenticated.

Newsreel had the co-operation of the North Vietnamese government, and through the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, acquired additional footage from the Documentary Film Studios and Army Film Studios of the DRVN, as well as help from the National Liberation Front. Although such footage was a welcome addition, as much of it would have been impossible to film by Newsreel themselves, it has the effect of giving the film a distinctly partisan feel. Newsreel’s documentary is so successful in its anti-war, anti-American military stance that it not only appears to be a pro-Communist propaganda film but gives the impression that filmmakers were being used as pawns by the North Vietnamese authorities although, at the time, the Newsreel group felt they were pushing the boundaries of the documentary movement.

The Newsreel group produced and distributed short documentary films covering a number of political issues, including women's liberation and civil rights movements as well as the anti-Vietnam War movement that was gaining momentum in the later part of the 1960s. Working from two separate locations, New York and San Francisco, Newsreel was a collective band of filmmakers who emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sharing similar political aims that were considered radical at the time. The filmmakers came from different backgrounds and with different levels of expertise. They were not concerned about producing technically polished documentaries but rather presenting ideas. Founding New York member Robert Kramer stated:

We shoot as best we can – but we shoot what's important to us, what meets our perceptions of our lived reality; we cut according to our priorities, our ideologies, not “to make it plain and simple to them”. Not to present a “line”. Not to present the lived reality as less complex than it really is. Not to enter into that sterile game: modulating our emotions and intensities and intelligences in some vain hope that by speaking your language your way we can persuade you.²²¹

The group's logo is a provocative image of a flickering machine gun with the word 'Newsreel' punctuated on the side. Apart from their collective title, Newsreel films bear no individual credits.

In *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left*, documentary historian Bill Nichols follows the development of the group, focusing in particular on the years 1971-1975.²²² His research includes interviews with members of both the New York and San Francisco divisions. Nichols admits he was drawn to the group's films because they often addressed important political questions and were concerned with institutional

²²⁰ BFI microfiche – no date but the documentary was shown at the National Film Theatre, London as part of AMERIKA film season in 1971.

²²¹ Interview with Robert Kramer in *Film Quarterly* 20(2)1968/69, p.47.

²²² Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left (1971-75)*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

oppression or national liberation. He describes the Newsreel style as either ‘agit-prop or educational’.²²³

Nichols provides important background information about Newsreel’s initial set up and the conditions from which the group emerged. He recounts how the New Left grew from the college campuses of private and state universities, where students were from the liberal middle class rather than working class. Nichols contends that the New Left only truly existed between 1965-1969 but to include the civil rights and anti-war movements, the period 1962-1972 should be examined. Nichols maintains:

Radicalization usually involved exposure to the Vietnamese War, to the Civil Rights struggle and later the idea of Black Power, to the youth or counter-culture, to the oppressive alienation of middle-class life in America, and to the use of Third World liberation struggles as a phenomenon reaching far beyond Vietnam.²²⁴

He argues that the first ten films made by the group were ‘militant films [...] designed to attract an activist audience’ whereas the early 1970s films were ‘designed to unify groups, militant or otherwise’.²²⁵ Hence, the Vietnam War was of central importance to Newsreel from its inception and continued to be for years to come. Even in 1971, Newsreel released two films about the war, *Only in the Beginning*, about an anti-war rally in Washington and a protest of disabled veterans in Saigon; *Winter Soldier*, a publicly staged testimony of three hundred GI veterans confessing to war crimes they committed or witnessed in Vietnam. Newsreel was also bold in the way it distributed films made by North Vietnam, such as *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam*, at a time when few would dare. They showed their films on college campuses and at community centres, even on the walls of buildings.

²²³ Nichols, *Newsreel*, p.16.

²²⁴ Nichols, *Newsreel*, pp.22-23.

Finally, Nichols makes an interesting comment with regard to the Newsreel format. He remarks that Newsreel documentaries tend to utilize the expository mode, relying on narration which assumes the viewer agrees with the view presented. Moreover, the films mainly use direct address of a narrator, which works well for factual information. He also notes that they do not use circumscription, counterpoint or contradiction and seldom use interviews with whom they disagree or ‘whose integrity or logic they wish to subvert’.²²⁶ This, of course, is in complete contrast to the strategies employed by Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis.

Written, directed and narrated by Australian-born filmmaker Michael Rubbo and produced on behalf of the National Film Board of Canada, *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (Canada, 1970) is a film about the effect of war on the dispossessed peoples of Saigon. Filmed in the South Vietnamese capital in the 1970s around the time of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, Rubbo follows the work of three young American journalists from a little known agency called *Dispatch*. The three journalists are: Dick Hughes, who opens his house to shelter young orphan shoeshine boys; John Steinbeck Jr, who joins a Buddhist community on a river island just outside Saigon; Steve Erhart who investigates refugee life in a city slum known as the “Cemetery Community”. Nevertheless, it is Rubbo, the unseen director and narrator, who steers the audience through the documentary. By using colour film, Rubbo enhances the view of Saigon street life and the vibrancy of Vietnamese traditions. The title, *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, is taken from a traditional Vietnamese folksong heard in the background of the film.

²²⁵ Nichols, *Newsreel*, p.261.

²²⁶ Nichols, *Newsreel*, p.291

Rubbo's opening words are measured and reflective, setting the pace and tone of the documentary:

'The war will not end until Saigon is badly hurt'. A Vietnamese man told me this on my first day there [...] Saigon is fat on American money but the war that brought the money here is not seen [...] the killing war is just off stage.

Nevertheless, the consequences of the war are all too clear in this film. The refugees, the orphans, the girls reduced to prostitution, the abject poverty are brought into sharp focus by this documentary. Rubbo expresses well the tensions between the American way and Vietnamese life corrupted by American money and economic dependency. In contrast to this seedy life in the slums is the Buddhist religious community on the island. Steinbeck argues that only here can you see the real Vietnam with its people untouched and uncorrupted by the war. Yet these idyllic images, are at the same time, surreal. As the smiling Buddhist leader with his followers pray to the sound of temple bells, they are accompanied by images and sounds of US helicopter gunships and boats patrolling nearby.

Each of the journalists tries to immerse himself in his chosen area of interest. Dick lives with the shoeshine boys, providing them with shelter, stability and a sense of order, nevertheless, he realises that he will never be fully accepted by them. This becomes evident when he challenges young Wee, the children's gang leader, about a missing camera and money exacted from the other journalists. Wee's response is to become defensive and angry even though it is clear he is responsible for both breaches of the house rules. Similarly, Steve has great difficulty gaining the trust of the Cemetery Community, despite his ability to speak the language and being accompanied by a Vietnamese guide. The locals are afraid that Steve is a CIA spy and, therefore, refuse to

speak about the war. Steve misguidedly tries to buy their friendship by offering the children ice lollies or giving money, a ploy that does not succeed. While Steve is interested in observing family life in this ghetto, Rubbo's focus is more on the dilemma faced by the Bar Girls. These prostitutes are no longer considered pure Vietnamese so they do not wear the traditional white costumes and long hair. Instead they have adopted Western dress, hairstyles and make up. Many of these girls have had babies by US soldiers and their future life appears very bleak, especially as tuberculosis is rife among the 5,000 strong Cemetery Community. In contrast, Steinbeck, having adopted local costume, diet and traditions, including playing the Vietnamese flute, seems to have 'gone native'. Despite throwing himself into the Buddhist way of life, Steinbeck stops short of becoming a follower of the monk.

Rubbo was just thirty-two years old when he made this penetrating documentary. He was fortunate enough to receive funding from the National Film Board of Canada despite not having any previous documentary filmmaking experience. In an interview given in 1975 he revealed that he became involved in the Vietnam War 'from a protest point of view'.²²⁷ He admitted he felt out of his depth when he attended the official briefings and so pursued a very personal story. This would explain why there is no reference to the historical development of the war or the beginning of peace negotiations during this time within the documentary. Similarly, there is no reference to the Tet Offensive that took place at the same time of year, but now two years past. In the film's commentary, Rubbo says his film 'does not concern itself with the politics of the situation, but with what happens to the little people when you pump two million dollars an hour into a country along with thousands of enormous foreign soldiers and all their

needs, appetites and frustrations'. Yet this is a political film about the long term negative impact of colonialism. As one astute commentator of this film says: 'More than shells and bombs are being hurled into the war in Indo-China; millions of US dollars and nearly a million American troops have had as corrosive an effect on life there as CS gas and napalm'.²²⁸

Like Schoendoerffer, Rubbo provides a strong personal view of the effects of the war but this time upon the Vietnamese people rather than the soldiers fighting. Although it is not an observational, fly-on-the wall documentary, again there are strong resonances of *cinéma vérité*, of getting beyond the surface of events and revealing a hidden truth. There are also a striking elements of the ethnographic within this documentary that will be discussed further in the chapter on genre.

Using a phrase from a Lyndon Johnson speech for its title, *Hearts and Minds* (USA, 1974) is a full-length commercial documentary that delves deep into the American psyche in order to explain America's policy towards Vietnam. Like de Antonio, Davis uses a collage technique, weaving interviews with scenes of life in both Vietnam and America. Davis concentrates particularly on American middle-class life: high school football games, Independence Day celebrations, mothers meetings, even jingoistic excerpts of old Hollywood war movies are included.

Davis conducts interviews with key players, either those waging the war or protesting against it, including figures such as: Walt Rostow, former US policy-maker, General

²²⁷ *Sightlines*, vol.9, No.1., Autumn 1975, pp.17-20.

²²⁸ Lenny Rubenstein, *Cineaste*, vol.4, no.4, Spring 1971, p.29.

Westmoreland (Commander of the US forces in Vietnam); General Khanh (exiled South Vietnamese leader); Clark Clifford (former Secretary of Defense); Daniel Ellsberg (former Defense Department official); Georges Bidault (France's foreign minister at the time of Diên Biên Phủ). He also includes interviews with ordinary Americans, ex-servicemen and protestors as well as South Vietnamese civilians, dissidents, businessmen and religious leaders. One particularly striking interview is with an old Vietnamese coffin-maker who reveals that 800-900 coffins a week are used to bury Vietnamese children killed either by bombs or poisoned by chemical warfare.

Although Davis's collage of interviews mirrors de Antonio in many ways, Davis has one more technique that adds gravitas to his documentary - this is the use of 'dead air'. 'Dead air' is an expression taken from the medium of television which refers to the time when no one is talking. It is usually a negative comment but in *Hearts and Minds*, Davis's uses 'dead air' positively as he allows the camera to dwell on the interviewee or situation and gives the audience time to digest the speech or event. The most successful example of this technique is the interview of two Vietnamese sisters who describe the loss of their sister, their home and belongings, and their livelihood in a single American air raid. The camera stays silently focused on these sisters for around thirty seconds after the interview is over, allowing the audience to take on board the full extent of their tragedy and despair.

Davis himself is visually absent from the film, although he can occasionally be heard off-camera asking the questions. Nonetheless, each key interviewee is identified. The emphasis of this documentary is on the human face of the war rather than statistics or weaponry. Using skilful editing, Davis juxtaposes interviews that present opposing

viewpoints. This is not to say that the documentary remains neutral. In fact the documentary develops into a damning indictment of American policy in Vietnam. One powerful example is the callousness of General Westmoreland as he states that “the Oriental does not put the same high price on life as does the Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient...”. Davis juxtaposes Westmoreland’s speech with images of Vietnamese men, women and children grieving inconsolably. Perhaps the most powerful admission of guilt comes from Daniel Ellsberg who declares: “We weren’t on the wrong side, we are the wrong side”. Although not voiced out loud, Davis uses the material to ask some fundamental questions about America - why were the Americans in Vietnam, what did they do there and how, in turn, did the war affect America?

In colour and 112 minutes long, the film was made for Columbia Pictures on a huge budget of \$950,000. Davis came from a journalistic background, working first for the *New York Times* and then as a writer and producer for CBS news. He was already established as a serious filmmaker when he made *Hearts and Minds*, having already made the controversial documentary *Selling of the Pentagon* (1971) on behalf of CBS. Davis shot approximately 150 hours of original footage and incorporated 30 hours of stock film.²²⁹ As Davis was refused entry into North Vietnam, however, he had to rely on stock footage from other sources. Most of the stock material, such as battle interviews, was produced by ABC or NBC correspondents and came from their respective film libraries, whereas the bombing footage was given to the filmmaker by the US Air Force.

²²⁹ Figures from ‘The Making of Hearts and Minds’, *Filmmakers Newsletter*, Vol.8, No.6, April 1975.

Filming began in Autumn 1972 and took one year. Davis wrote to the people he wanted to interview and, with the exception of former President Johnson, Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger, most candidates agreed to be interviewed. Some regretted their decision to contribute to the film; for example, Walt Whitman Rostow issued an injunction against the documentary, arguing that it invaded his privacy and defamed his character, but a Los Angeles judge ruled against him and cleared the way for distribution.

Yet Davis insists that his documentary is more psychological rather than political:

We were trying to understand the psychological basis and need for this war. By the early 70's, we were destroying Indochina as a reflex action; most people didn't even want the war anymore but felt no great pangs about its continuation. The whole idea of beating the Communists, at least among many of the people we were interviewing, had vanished by this time.²³⁰

Davis used a native-speaking researcher to help with the Vietnamese interviews, but filming in the villages proved difficult for a number of reasons. Primarily, there were concerns about being sensitive to the people's plight. Davis admitted it was difficult filming the little Vietnamese boy grieving for his father. The crew held back allowing only the cameramen to blend with the mourners at the funeral. There were also concerns for the film crew's safety, not to mention practical problems to overcome, such as the lack of electricity in the villages to power equipment.

On the whole, the interview process is hidden. One exception is the interview with David Emerson and his wife, who lost a son in Vietnam. The audience hears Davis ask the mother, what did their son want to be? Davis revealed in a subsequent interview that his visual absence from the documentary screen was deliberate:

I really get offended by journalists and filmmakers who want us to know about themselves and how well they can argue with some politician they're interviewing, or how adroitly they can narrate a scene so that you admire their words instead of understanding the reality they have tried to film.²³¹

Like de Antonio, Davis was educated in Harvard and like de Antonio, was able to articulate clearly his role as a documentary filmmaker:

I don't think it is my job as a journalist and filmmaker to give sermons on what to do. I would hope I have some function in trying to discover the truth of a significant historical era that we have passed through and are still passing through. But aside from playing a part, however minor, in that discovery, I don't see the film as having any other function outside of understanding. To understand, after all, is to begin to act.²³²

The documentary was shown to sell-out audiences at the Cannes and San Francisco Film Festivals and attracted glowing reviews from the popular press. This is not to say the film did not receive criticism. The film, rather like the war, polarized the American people. It even garnered celebrity supporters, such as Frances Fitzgerald, author of *Fire in the Lake*, as well as celebrity critics, such as the singer Frank Sinatra and comedian Bob Hope, who denounced the film at the Oscars. The American national press criticized the film's manipulative, coercive style and that it made no reference to the Cold War and its impact on political perspectives. Indeed, there is no reference to North Vietnam's allies, the USSR and China. Stefan Kanfer of *Time* magazine criticized the film as lacking a proper chronology, historical perspective and for being altogether simplistic. He argued:

Perhaps the deepest flaw lies in the method: the Viet Nam War is too convoluted, too devious to examine in a style of compilation without comment. And righteous indignation may tend to blind the documentary film maker to his prime task: the representation of life in all its fullness, not only those incidents that conform to his thesis.²³³

²³⁰ Interview with Davis in 'The Making of Hearts and Minds', p.21.

²³¹ Interview with Davis in 'The Making of Hearts and Minds', p.24.

²³² Interview with Davis in 'The Making of Hearts and Minds', p.24.

²³³ Stefan Kanfer, *Time*, 17 March 1975.

Bernard Weiner described the documentary as ‘brilliant in spots, confused in others’. Weiner says the film is too long, repetitious and not well organized but ‘contains some immensely powerful moments and is an extremely important film’.²³⁴ Peter Biskind criticized the film for suppressing the political dimensions of the conflict in Vietnam and down-playing the importance of the anti-war movement at home. Despite these flaws, Biskind thought the film was ‘an achievement of no mean proportion’.²³⁵

By the time Davis had finished filming *Heart and Minds*, the last American troops had left Vietnam and the American POWs in Hanoi had been released and returned to the USA. Nonetheless, there is neither a sense of relief nor peace with honour. With the documentary’s final images of the physical and mental scars carried by the American soldiers who served, Davis emphasizes the terrible legacy of the war on those who survived.

This chapter has demonstrated the variety of international documentaries produced during the conflict; it has examined each text, providing narrative, production and reception details wherever possible. It has identified national film movements such as early Russian revolutionary cinema, British World War II documentary film, French *cinéma vérité*, and American Direct Cinema, in order to assess the ideological and aesthetic impact of such influences on specific groups or individual documentaries.

The selection of documentaries highlighted by this study ably demonstrates the political alliances and rivalries. Positioning these documentaries in their political context, both

²³⁴ Bernard Weiner, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 28, Winter 1974, pp.60-63.

²³⁵ Peter Biskind, *Cineaste*, Vol.7, No.1, 1975, p.32.

nationally and internationally, as well as identifying their specific chronological time-frame has enhanced our understanding of these films but equally these documentaries have prove illuminating in terms of ‘capturing’ the many complex relationships, personalities and events that have defined the conflict.

Each of the groups analysed have offered a different historical dimension to the conflict and together they create a new, more extended map of the Vietnam War. However, with the exception of the Cuban filmmaker Santiago Alvarez, it is mainly the work of the non-government-sponsored documentaries that prove the most thought-provoking both politically and artistically as they not only challenge official lines but experiment with new documentary formats and visual techniques. Nevertheless, the following chapter provides further detailed analysis of these films, examining the generic, thematic and ideological characteristics running through this body of texts.

CHAPTER THREE

GENRE - Part I

The Documentary Form and Function

This chapter engages with some key generic and theoretical questions. The first part deals with the history and classification of the documentary form and asks just how effective is current documentary categorization in defining and analysing the Vietnam War documentary? Part Two asks what is distinctive about the Vietnam War documentary. Part Three asks what is the Vietnam War documentary's relation to politics, propaganda and debates concerning Third World Cinema and postcolonialism. However, this chapter begins by examining the roots of the documentary form, in particular the work of John Grierson, as his formative ideas remain relevant to the analysis of the Vietnam War documentary.

John Grierson and early Documentary

Like photography, early film was used to record and preserve people, places and events. Film pioneers, such as the Lumière brothers, are particularly associated with these early films, often referred to as '*actualités*' that recorded scenes from everyday life.²³⁶ Early cinema showed newsreels of recent events and became increasingly important during the First and Second World Wars. Between the two wars a new cinematic form, 'documentary', was developed by filmmakers such as John Grierson (Scottish), Robert Flaherty (Canadian) and Dziga Vertov (Russian), which was distinct from *actualités*, newsreel and fictional cinema.

²³⁶ In 1895 Auguste Marie and Louis Jean Lumière patented their cinematograph, a combined camera and projector which operated at 16 frames per second. One of the earliest films of Vietnam, *Coolies at Saigon* (1897), is attributed to Lumière cinematography.

Film critic, producer and director John Grierson (1898-1972) is generally accredited as being the ‘father of documentary film’.²³⁷ Although Grierson’s contribution to the development of documentary film is immense, it is his legacy to the theoretical debate that is of interest to this research. Grierson wrote that documentary film was conceived ‘as an instrument to be used systematically in fields of public instruction and enlightenment’.²³⁸ Yet he also described documentary as being ‘the creative treatment of actuality’.²³⁹ In ‘First Principles of Documentary’, Grierson set about distinguishing what he considered to be higher and lower categories of nonfiction film. He assigned the ‘lecture film’ to the lower category as ‘they do not even dramatize an episode; they describe, and even expose, but, in any aesthetic sense, only rarely reveal’.²⁴⁰ Moreover, Grierson aspired to distinguish documentary from other nonfiction films and raise it to artistic status.

...one begins to wander into the world of documentary proper, into the only world in which documentary can hope to achieve the ordinary virtues of an art. Here we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it.²⁴¹

Grierson believed there were three basic principles underpinning the documentary film. First, that the living scene and living story can be a vital art form; second, that the original (native) actor and original (native) scene were better guides to interpretation of the modern world than an artificial one; and third, that rawness and spontaneity were more worthy than artifice. Furthermore, Grierson believed that not only did the

²³⁷ For more biographical information see Forsyth Hardy (ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), Introduction, pp.13-39.

²³⁸ John Grierson, *Documentary 47*, The Edinburgh Festival of Documentary Film 1947.

²³⁹ Hardy (ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, p.11.

²⁴⁰ Hardy (ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, p.146.

²⁴¹ Hardy (ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, p.146.

documentary filmmaker need to master the material but also distinguish between description and drama.²⁴²

Throughout his life Grierson championed the art of the documentary. In his final interview in 1972, Grierson shows an awareness of current film developments yet is scathing of both British Free Cinema as well as French avant-garde cinema. He also expresses a profound disappointment that nobody, including the British Broadcasting Corporation, has continued or encouraged what he refers to as the 'poetic line' of the documentary form. Similarly, while Grierson demonstrates his awareness of current affairs, including the war in Vietnam, he makes no reference to any Vietnam War documentaries.²⁴³

Nevertheless, according to Grierson's principles, the majority of Vietnam War documentaries produced by the respective warring governments would be assigned to the lower category precisely because they take the lecture format. The key example of this is *Why Vietnam?* Similarly, US military documentaries fronted or narrated by Hollywood stars, such as *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, would have failed to meet Grierson's basic criteria as they do not represent the native actor or native scene and are therefore artificial on both counts. In contrast, works such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds* do allow their subjects to speak for themselves and thus seem to adhere to Grierson's ethos. Yet directors such as de Antonio and Davis employ first-hand testimony to create a complex political argument, one that often places the native actor in a damning light. Documentaries shot in the war zone in real time, such as *A*

²⁴² Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary*, pp.146-148.

Face of War and *The Anderson Platoon*, incorporate Grierson's principles of rawness and spontaneity yet they also raise new ethical issues of spectatorship. Moreover, they deny the 'native' actors, in this case the foot soldiers, a voice. Similarly, works such as *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* with its use of poetic images and collage techniques seem to adhere to Grierson's drive to master the material and raise documentary to a vital art form. Yet such avant-garde documentary forms and techniques would have been perceived as artificial and contrived in Grierson's terms rather than following a 'poetic line'. Of all the Vietnam War documentaries the only one that would seem to match Grierson's principles and ideals is *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* and it is not surprising that this film won the British Film Academy's 'Robert Flaherty Award' in 1971.

While Grierson's writings promote certain aesthetic goals for the documentary as an art form he does not offer a system with which to label or categorize documentary types. This challenge was taken up by documentary historians such as Erik Barnouw and Patricia Aufderheide and documentary theorists such as Bill Nichols, Michael Renov, John Corner, Carl Plantinga and others. Nevertheless, there is little consensus with regard to labelling and categorization of documentary types and while the term 'genre' is used in terms of fictional cinema it is rarely adopted by film historians and theorists.²⁴⁴ The lack of consensus by documentary theorists is also accompanied by an aversion to engaging meaningfully with each others ideas and this tendency, of working

²⁴³ Elizabeth Sussex, 'Grierson on Documentary: the Last Interview', *Film Quarterly*, Vol.26, no.1, Autumn 1972, pp.22-30.

²⁴⁴ The term 'genre' is derived from a French word meaning 'kind' or 'type' but its etymological root can be traced back to the Latin word *genus* which also can mean 'kind' or 'family'. Indeed, the concept of genre has precedents in ancient history in the writings of Aristotle who divided poetry into categories such as tragedy, epic and lyric. From ancient Greece and Rome, the idea of 'genre' - of identifying, grouping

in a mutually exclusive manner rather than build constructively upon one another's ideas, is in complete contrast to what has taken place in the arena of genre studies in Western fictional cinema.

In his work on Hollywood fictional films, Steve Neale argues that genre and the generic are 'multi-faceted concepts' that involve categorization and formulas containing audience expectations constructed for commercial consumption.²⁴⁵ Although Neale refers specifically to fictional cinema rather than documentary, there are several documentary categories such as the social documentary, environmental documentary, ethnographic documentary and the war documentary that audiences can readily identify. While some documentary historians seem comfortable discussing documentary using these kinds of subject-based typological labels, documentary theorists resist or avoid using the same, instead inventing a myriad of systems using different terminology such as styles, modes, strategies and genealogies.

For example, historians Patricia Aufderheide and Erik Barnouw use a typological approach based on authorship and subject-matter. Theorists such as Bill Nichols, Michael Renov, John Corner, and Carl Plantinga use a more scientific, analytical approach based on techniques of format and style. More recently documentary theorists such as Stella Bruzzi, Paul Ward and Michael Chanan argue against the practice of developing distinct categories. The result of these multi-system and anti-system theories is very confusing even to the well-initiated.

together, labelling, and distinguishing categories - has travelled down the centuries through to nineteenth century art discourse and more recently, twentieth and twenty-first century film theory.

In order to ascertain whether or not any of these systems are useful in addressing the war documentary, and more specifically the Vietnam War documentary, a more detailed survey of the various typologies, strategies and modes used by the experts would be helpful at this stage. The survey is not intended to be an exhaustive historiography of documentary theories but rather a demonstration of the variety of documentary systems that have been developed over the years and the lack of consensus among documentary theorists.

The forthcoming analysis also acts as an experiment, using familiar and less familiar documentary theories and applying them to an untested body of texts, the twenty-six Vietnam War documentaries. To date documentary theorists have used preferred examples, often renowned documentaries that suitably demonstrate the effectiveness of their own particular system. Often the selection of examples is limited – John Corner only offers nine. Not surprisingly, they do not choose documentary examples that challenge or undermine their systems. However, no one key theorist chooses to focus on a specific body of texts in this way.

Documentary Classification – styles, modes, strategies, genealogies and sub-genres

Film historian and theorist Bill Nichols has devoted much of his career to analysing and defining documentary filmmaking. Nichols's first attempt at documentary classification appears in a small article published in the magazine *Film Comment* entitled 'The Voice of Documentary', in which he offers four documentary definitions which he initially calls 'styles'.²⁴⁵ By 1991, however, Nichols clarifies his ideas and provides us with four

²⁴⁵ Neale, *Hollywood and Genre*, p.252.

²⁴⁶ Bill Nichols, 'The Voice of Documentary', *Film Quarterly* (1983), Vol.36(3), pp.17-33. The first, the 'direct-address' style describes the early documentaries of Grierson and his followers which were didactic

distinctive ‘modes’ of documentary: ‘expository’, ‘observational’, ‘interactive’ and ‘reflexive’ in his seminal work, *Representing Reality*.²⁴⁷ Until this point Nichols struggles to find suitable terminology to best describe his documentary categories, uncertain whether to call them ‘characteristics’, ‘voices’, ‘styles’, or ‘modes’, finally, he settles on ‘modes’. With this publication, Nichols becomes the authority on documentary and the four mode system, the paradigm for others to either work with or work against, although he would later update the four to five and then finally to six modes to be discussed in more detail later in this section.²⁴⁸

At this point, documentary theorist Michael Renov joins the quest to find a suitable categorization for the documentary form. In his chapter, ‘Towards a Poetics of Documentary’, Renov gives a cursory nod to the efforts made by others to generically label the nonfiction film. He suggests the problem of categorization is not about defining attributes but rather in the nature of genre definition where boundaries are inherently unstable. Hence, Renov offers his own method of modalities which he insists are neither exclusive nor fixed. Renov also employs a system of four modes which he considers are ‘constitutive of documentary’. The first mode is ‘to record, reveal or

and had authoritative ‘voice of God’ narration. The second, ‘transparent’ style describes films from the post World War II period of *cinéma vérité* which gave the impression of immediacy, capturing events without mediation. The third style is not clearly labelled but involves witness participation and interviews and is a development from the direct-address style. The fourth, ‘self-reflexive’ style of documentary is more complex and mixes observation with interviews, voice-overs with intertitles, producing discourse rather than appearing all-knowing.

²⁴⁷ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, Chapter II, pp.32-75.

²⁴⁸ In Nichols’s next publication, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) he introduces a fifth category, the ‘performative’ mode, to his system. Performative documentaries are different from the previous four as they stress the subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse, however, they could be criticized for being too avant-garde and being excessive in terms of style. Nichols also assigns his five categories with dates: Expository Mode (1930s), Observational Mode (1960s), Interactive Mode (1960s and 1970s), Reflexive (1980s), Performative Mode (1980s-1990s) but these dates would be revised in his next publication.

preserve’, the second is ‘to persuade or promote’, the third is ‘to analyze or interrogate’ and the fourth is ‘to express’.²⁴⁹

Renov argues that ‘to record, reveal or preserve’ is the most elemental of documentary functions and one that has its roots not only in the early *actualités* of the Lumière Brothers but in early photography. He acknowledges there are important ontological issues within this mode’s desire to capture a moment in time, to restore loss, to cheat death or rather return the dead to life.

According to Renov, the second mode ‘to persuade or promote’ is the most dominant trope of the documentary. He argues that these documentaries tend to use experts and structure logical arguments but are not adverse to using emotion or expression to persuade. Renov states the most effective tool is the ‘truth claim’ which he maintains is ‘the baseline of persuasion for all of nonfiction, from propaganda to rock doc’.²⁵⁰

The third mode is ‘to analyze or interrogate’ which seems to be a logical addition to the first mode ‘to record and reveal’. Nonetheless, Renov maintains ‘presentation is not automatically interrogation’ and contends that too few documentarists have this critical approach to their work which he considers to be a valuable ingredient.²⁵¹

The final mode ‘to express’, according to Renov, ‘is the aesthetic function that has consistently been undervalued within the nonfiction domain’.²⁵² Most documentary

²⁴⁹ Michael Renov, ‘Towards a Poetics of Documentary’ in Michael Renov, ed., *Theorizing Documentary*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.23.

²⁵⁰ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.30.

²⁵¹ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.31.

²⁵² Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.32.

historians and theorists, including Renov, credit Robert Flaherty as documentary film's first poet. Renov argues that, historically, the artistic, expressive and subjective element of documentary has been repressed in favour of scientific and objective ideals. He suggests that the documentary form has suffered from what he calls 'aesthetic straight jacketing'.²⁵³ He contends it is the 'collision' of art and science, invention and mechanical reproduction that can create the 'poetic effect' in documentary. Moreover, it can induce an emotional response, entertain as well as inform, resulting in what Renov refers to as 'pleasurable learning'.²⁵⁴

Throughout his chapter Renov insists these four modalities have the ability to overlap and that any subsequent friction can add to the richness of the nonfiction film form. In addition, he makes clear that to integrate and balance these tendencies in a documentary film does not necessarily produce the best work.

Renov's modal system is attractively simple, and most Vietnam War documentaries can be accommodated into this system. For instance, the 'trip to the front' films, such as *A Face of War* and *The Anderson Platoon*, are examples of Renov's first mode 'to record, reveal or preserve', and most government-sponsored documentaries fit comfortably within the 'persuade or promote' mode. On the other hand, most non-government-sponsored and independents, such as *Hearts and Minds*, *In the Year of the Pig*, and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh*, operate within the 'analyze and interrogate' mode, though *In the Year of the Pig* and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* also fit into the 'to express' mode. In addition, Renov's assertion that 'presentation is not automatically

²⁵³ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.35.

²⁵⁴ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, p.35.

interrogation' is exemplified by the documentary *Inside North Vietnam*. Despite Greene's journalistic scoop being allowed to film in the North, his documentary lacks the necessary critical approach and, not surprisingly, was labelled by the American film press as a propaganda coup for the North Vietnamese. Although Renov's four mode system lacks depth, it is a good starting place for analysing how various documentaries work, including the War documentary and the Vietnam War documentary.

In *The Art of the Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*, John Corner offers his own system of 'modes' analysing documentaries in terms of vocabulary and syntax.²⁵⁵ He divides images into four modes and speech into three modes. *Evidential Mode 1*, also known as 'reactive observationalism' refers to the 'fly-on-the-wall' style documentary that makes use of minimal directorial intervention. *Evidential Mode 2*, also known as 'proactive observationalism', has a more discursive use of *mise-en-scène*. *Evidential Mode 3* is 'illustrative', where the visual is subordinate to verbal discourses and acts only in support of the argument. The *Associative Mode 4* is where visualization is 'primarily engaged in the making of second-order meaning'. The three speech modes are *Evidential Mode 1* or 'overheard exchange', *Evidential Mode 2* or 'testimony' and *Expositional Mode 3* which is the classic mode of documentary speech that includes authoritarian commentary either directly to camera or by out-of-frame, 'voice of God' commentary. Corner applies his modes, along with detailed analysis, to nine documentaries ranging from *Coalface* (1935) to *Roger and Me* (1989).

²⁵⁵ John Corner, *Art of the Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp.28-30.

Despite the examples provided it is not an easy system to follow or utilize, particularly as several modes can apply to one documentary. What is vital about Corner's system, however, is that he separates the visual imagery from the sound and commentary. The identification of three distinct speech modes in documentary reminds us of the importance of commentary and offers us an opportunity to focus on the use of 'testimony' and 'authoritarian commentary' which frequently pervade these war documentaries. Most government-sponsored documentaries from both sides use 'authoritarian commentary' but the Western independents such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds* use testimony to great effect. Similarly, *A Face of War* uses 'overheard exchange' to drive the film's soundtrack, but often this is difficult to decipher, particularly when it involves radio communications and orders issued during an attack.

In *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, Carl Plantinga examines a wide variety of documentaries using a multi-disciplinary approach that draws from film and media studies as well as other disciplines such as linguistics and philosophy.²⁵⁶ His system examines structure, style, discourse and voice in the nonfiction film. Plantinga argues that along with the creation of definitions and categories, there is a tendency 'to promote preferred uses of nonfiction film, or foreground characteristic thought to be desirable or "proper"'.²⁵⁷ He asserts that past attempts at definition have failed because they are too broad in scope or too narrow or have 'fuzzy boundaries'.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Carl Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Plantinga examines independently-produced features, journalistic documentaries, government-sponsored film, public television films, compilation films, poetic and experimental films but not ethnographic, anthropological films or docudramas.

²⁵⁷ Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-fiction Film*, p.9.

Thus, Plantinga offers his own typology which contains three 'strategies', analysing documentaries in terms of structure, voice and style. The first strategy, 'structure', has three strands: narrative, rhetorical, and categorical. The narrative structure usually offers a representation of historical events. The rhetorical structure presents an issue or argument and presents a set of reasons or evidence in order to persuade the spectator. The categorical structure is 'synchronic' and is of a topical nature. Plantinga's third strategy of 'style' also contains three strands - sound (music and narration), cinematography, editing and tone.

The second strategy, 'voice', again has three strands - formal, open, and poetic - and is based on the degree of 'narrational authority' offered by the film.²⁵⁹ The formal voice has an epistemological function in that it explains the world. It is classical in form and style and, like classical fictional film, it tells the audience everything it needs to know about the action. The open voice is epistemically hesitant; it observes or explores rather than explains. Plantinga associates this voice with direct cinema or *cinéma vérité* and claims it has affinities with art cinema. The poetic voice is less concerned with explanation, observation or even exploration but more concerned with the nonfiction film as art. Plantinga says this voice encompasses avant-garde documentaries, metadocumentaries, documentary parodies as well as poetic documentaries. He argues that the poetic film represents its subject as an aesthetic object, the avant-garde film is 'style-centred', the metadocumentary plays on the manipulation of the image and sound, and the documentary parody uses double-meanings, irony and tongue-in-cheek clichés

²⁵⁸ Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-fiction Film*, p.12.

²⁵⁹ Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-fiction Film*, p.106.

Plantinga presents his 'strategies' as an alternative approach rather than a new system of identification. Yet, he acknowledges that there are alternate voices which can mix up the three strategies. He also admits there are 'fuzzy' areas in between such the dramatic documentary or docudrama which he labels as 'hybrid genres' lying between fiction and nonfiction.

Like Corner, Plantinga's system of strategies is intricate and unwieldy. In terms of the Vietnam War documentaries included in this analysis, many use more than one of the structural categories of narrative, rhetorical and synchronic, for example, government and military documentaries such as *Why Vietnam?* and *The Battle for Khe Sanh*. Most Western and Communist government documentaries tend use the 'formal voice' strategy, explaining the world in an authoritative manner. Identifying the relevant voice strategy in the independent documentaries is more complicated. While those that espouse direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* techniques, such as *A Face of War*, adhere to the 'open voice' category which observes or explores rather than explains, *The Anderson Platoon* offers commentary explanation. Similarly, other independent documentaries that do not employ direct cinema techniques such as *Inside North Vietnam* and *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, offer more of an observational, exploratory 'open voice' rather than an authoritative 'formal voice'. Similarly, assigning the 'poetic voice' to avant-garde documentaries such as Alvarez's *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* is seemingly straightforward. Conversely, films such as de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* and Davis' *Hearts and Minds* which both use collage techniques are more complex as they use multiple structures and voices. It is not surprising, therefore, that while some leading theorists refer to Plantinga's work, none seems to have adopted his system of 'strategies'.

Ironically, Plantinga argues that theory is but a conceptual tool and alone is insufficient in providing an understanding as to how films construct meaning and consequently, he recommends that filmmakers, films and movements be studied in their historical context in order to obtain a greater insight into how documentary and fictional films work.

In 2000, film theorist and academic Stella Bruzzi entered into the debate with her contribution, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*.²⁶⁰ Bruzzi's opening gambit is to declare that documentary has not kept pace with developments in critical and cultural theory. Not only does she propose bringing the debate up to date by focusing on documentary filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s but she wants to introduce an alternative way of discussing documentary, one that is more open and positive, not based on categorization nor based on documentary's failings to capture the 'real'.

Bruzzi starts by dealing with the 'shortcomings and preoccupations' of past and current documentary theorization. She singles out Nichols's modes for scrutiny arguing that of all the systems, his is the one that prevails. Bruzzi describes Nichols's system as being chronological or even genealogical, of having a 'family tree'. She maintains there is a Darwinian element to the evolution of his five modes, a notional 'survival of the fittest'; a progression from 'primitive to sophisticated and complex' but she also asserts that this progression is false and contrived. Moreover, she makes the argument that his modes have become defined by what they are not, rather than what they are, and with the development of new documentary forms which are 'hybrid, eclectic and modern' his system is increasingly undermined. Bruzzi's final criticism is that since Nichols himself

agrees that these modes may overlap, then why construct rigid categories in the first place? Instead she prefers to focus on other issues such as realism, narration, aesthetics and performance.²⁶¹

Since Renov's, Corner's, Plantinga's and Bruzzi's critical interjection into the debate, Bill Nichols has provided documentary enthusiasts with a further, more erudite instalment, *An Introduction to Documentary*.²⁶² Designed specifically for students of the documentary, the work is structured around a set of key questions concerning ethics, definition, content, form and politics and is accessible both in terms of language and ideas.

Nichols reiterates that it is not easy to define documentary as it is always relational or comparative, that it is a 'fuzzy concept' due to the fact that it changes over time and that no one definition covers all the films that we consider to be documentary.²⁶³ Nichols prefers to approach a definition of documentary from four different angles – institutions, practitioner, texts, and audiences. He insists that documentary practice is constantly evolving. Not surprisingly then, he offers an updated set of six modes in *Introduction to Documentary*. The six modes are 'poetic', 'expository', 'observational', 'participatory', 'reflexive', and 'performative'. Nichols expounds that any development of new modes is due to limitations in previous modes or developments in technology or to a changing social context, sometimes a combination of these elements. He argues that a new mode

²⁶⁰ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁶¹ Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, Introduction, pp.1-5. When Stella Bruzzi updates *New Documentary* in 2006, she again singles out Nichols's system for its failings even though Nichols has by now revised his system into six modes. Still, Bruzzi does not offer any reasons why Nichols's paradigm dominates documentary discourse, nor discusses what the alternatives are and why these alternatives have failed to be employed in the same way as Nichols's.

²⁶² Nichols, *An Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

should not be viewed as better but rather as different. Nichols now concedes that modes can overlap and individual documentary films can even combine modes. He also concedes that the six modes of representation ‘function something like sub-genres of the documentary film genre’ in as much as they set up conventions and expectations.²⁶⁴ Thus after years of struggling with various descriptive adjectives and nouns, Nichols succumbs to using the term ‘genre’.

The ‘poetic mode’ is linked to modernist avant-garde as it emphasizes visual associations, has tonal or rhythmic qualities and, because it tends to ‘reassemble fragments of the world poetically’, can be criticized for being too abstract and lacking specificity. Although this is a new category created by Nichols, it refers to certain documentary films made in the 1920s such as Joris Ivens’s *Rain* (1929).²⁶⁵ Nichols also considers later documentaries such as Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955) and Godfrey Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) as examples of poetic documentaries.

The ‘expository mode’ also refers to documentaries made in the 1920s but which emphasize verbal commentary and directly address issues in the historical world. These documentaries are more rhetorical: they propose perspectives, advance arguments or recount history. They address the viewer directly with voice or titles or both. They use a ‘voice of God’ commentary, where the speaker is heard but not seen, or a voice of authority commentary, where the speaker is heard and also seen. Both types of commentary organize and make sense of the images, however, the images are subservient to the commentary and act in a ‘supporting role’. The ‘expository mode’

²⁶³ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.21.

²⁶⁴ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.99.

gives the impression of objectivity and the commentary ‘seems literally “above” the fray; it has the capacity to judge actions in the historical world without being caught up in them’.²⁶⁶ Nichols cites documentaries in Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series (1942-1945) as examples of the ‘expository mode’.

The ‘observational mode’ is ‘the fly on the wall’ documentary where everyday life is observed by an unobtrusive camera. This mode is a direct result of technological developments in the 1960s. Portable 16mm cameras and portable tape recorders provided a new freedom of movement to record image and sound. These documentaries have no voice-over commentary, no supplementary music or sound effects, no title or re-enactments and no interviews. On the other hand, these documentaries can be criticized for their voyeuristic and non-interventionist stance. Examples of the ‘observational mode’ are Pennebaker and Leacock’s *Primary* (1980) and Churchill and Broomfield’s *Soldier Girls* (1980).

The ‘participatory mode’, formally known as the ‘interactive’ mode, emphasizes the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject. Interviews form the basis of the documentary, often supplemented with archival footage to provide historical context to issues raised. There is a strong anthropological basis to these documentaries as the filmmaker goes into the field to experience the lives of others. Despite the fact that filmmakers actively engage with their subjects, they refrain from ‘going native’, and retain ‘a degree of detachment’.²⁶⁷ Participatory filmmakers can serve as mentor, critics, interrogators, collaborators or provocateurs and are visibly on the scene as

²⁶⁵ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.138.

²⁶⁶ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.107.

opposed to observational filmmakers who are absent. However, 'participatory' documentaries can be criticized for being naïve, for relying on witness testimony and for being too intrusive. Examples given by Nichols are Connie Field's *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980) and Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* (1989). Nichols also includes Michael Rubbo's *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (1970) in this category because the filmmaker's voice is personally involved in the events unfolding but one could contend this film has more than one authorial/interactive voice, as the three journalists whose exploits we follow provide their own thoughts and perspectives. Nichols also includes compilation films that include interviews such as Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1969), but again Nichols can be challenged as there is little interaction between the filmmaker and the subjects. De Antonio does not conduct the interviews himself but rather uses archival footage from other sources.

Nichols describes the 'reflexive mode' as the most self-conscious mode. He argues that reflexive documentaries question issues of representation and realism and challenge techniques and conventions, and he uses as examples Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and *The War Game* (1966). Despite earlier examples, Nichols tends to associate this category with the 1960s. He also points out that these documentaries can be criticized for being so abstract that they lose sight of the issues.

The sixth category, the 'performative mode' is a new addition which Nichols associates with developments in the 1980s. This mode is both subjective and expressive, rejecting notions of objectivity in favour of style and affect. These documentaries combine actual with imagined, personal with political. Nichols points out that performative

²⁶⁷ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.116.

documentaries may be criticized for their lack of objectivity and excessive use of affect and style. He argues that Alan Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955) is partly performative as there is a personal, haunting quality to the commentary.

Three modes - poetic, expository and observational - appear the most relevant with regard to the Vietnam War documentary, yet there are also resonances with the participatory, reflexive and even performative modes in some of these films.

In terms of the poetic documentary, the works of Alvarez and de Antonio immediately come to mind, in particular Alvarez's *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* with its floral motifs echoing the tail fins of the bombs and their impact on the ground. Similarly, de Antonio's innovative collage technique for *In Year of the Pig*, patching together interviews with stills images, photographic negatives and a variety of music and sounds, contributes to the artistry and poetic effect. Examples of the poetic cinematography can also be found in other documentaries, for example, the dusk and dawn images offered by films such as *The Anderson Platoon* and *A Face of War*.

Many of the government and military documentaries, particularly from South Vietnam and its allies, fit Nichols's expository mode. These documentaries give the impression of objectivity and appear 'above the fray' but this is not true for North Vietnamese or National Liberation Front (NFL) documentaries which are both partisan and passionate, with some containing direct appeals to the audience for assistance in their 'struggle'. While Western expository documentaries refer to Vietnam's history and culture, North Vietnamese and NFL documentaries focus on their leader Ho Chi Minh as their historical anchor. Moreover, these documentaries rarely employ authoritative 'voice of

God' commentary. Instead, it was usual for the travelling projectionist to provide the narration, representing someone with whom the people could identify rather than a figure of authority.

Concerning the observational mode or 'fly-on-the-wall' documentaries, many Vietnam War documentaries have segments that fit this category, even those that are interview-based. Sequences such as the child grieving inconsolably by the grave of a recently buried parent in Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds* are compelling and highly emotive both in terms of subject matter and also in terms of ethics. Arguably the most outstanding and extreme examples of 'observational' Vietnam War documentaries are those that provide an experiential 'trip to the front' journey through the combat zone, such as *The Anderson Platoon* and *A Face of War*. These films offer the audience the opportunity to observe close up the difficulties of a ground war and the intensity of mortal combat from the safety of the cinema. Again, this raises the issue of the visual ethics relating to offering a subject's suffering and vulnerability as cinematic education or even entertainment.

The third of Nichols's categories, the participatory or interactive mode, has already been discussed in terms of *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*. Another documentary that fits into this category is Felix Greene's *Inside North Vietnam*. Greene actively engages with his subjects and is seen in front of the camera as he interviews a doctor in the village hospital and reports on farming in the countryside. Interestingly, Greene was rebuked by Western film critics for being naïve and unwittingly creating Communist propaganda on behalf of the North Vietnamese regime.

Bruzzi has argued that Nichols's modes are increasingly defined by what they are not rather than what they are. Several Vietnam War documentaries, in particular the non-government-sponsored films, seem to support her criticism, as they provide examples of how Nichols's modal system breaks down and becomes redundant when put to the test.

Many of the non-government-sponsored Vietnam War documentaries fail to confine themselves to a particular mode. *In the Year of the Pig*, *Hearts and Minds* and *Pilots in Pyjamas* appear to straddle several of Nichols's modes yet are also defined by their failure to subscribe to other characteristics of these same modes. For example, all three documentaries rely heavily on interviews, yet these films do not fit neatly into the participatory (interactive) mode, for the directors are not seen conducting the interviews. Moreover, de Antonio is not personally responsible for the majority of the interviews he includes in his documentary, nor does he personally enter into the war zone to secure the same. It can be argued that these two factors undermine the participatory (interactive) operational mode of this war documentary.

Similarly, de Antonio utilizes historical documents, proposes perspectives and gives the impression of objectivity which would also adhere to the expository mode. Yet, the film does not address the viewer directly as there is no 'voice of God' commentary in keeping with this mode. Many of the interviews incorporated by the documentary help to explain the historical background to the war but rather than be objective they are employed to create an argument that is distinctly partisan. Finally, de Antonio's creative use of images and sound shifts the documentary from the expository mode, where images are subservient to the commentary, and places it into Nichols's poetic mode. Even in this latter mode, the documentary does not fit comfortably as the film is

narratively linear rather than abstract, and specific in the political argument it sets out to present. *In the Year of the Pig* is a case in point as to how difficult it is to ascribe Nichols's system to these documentaries.

It is important to note that documentary historian Patricia Aufderheide is the only one to use the term 'genre' consistently in relation to the documentary. Her system of categorization offers six 'sub-genres' of the documentary form. Aufderheide's first sub-genre is the 'public affairs documentary' which uses an investigative or problem-orientated approach. The public affairs documentary offers 'an authoritative, often social-scientific view of an issue, speaking as professional journalists on behalf of a public affected by the problem'.²⁶⁸ According to Aufderheide, these documentaries can be divided into either individual or institutional analysis. Interestingly, Aufderheide includes a number of Western-produced Vietnam War documentaries under this heading such as Felix Greene's *Inside North Vietnam*, Michael Rubbo's *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* and Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds*, the inherent distinction being that these are non-government-sponsored films as opposed to government-sponsored, as the next category reveals.

Under the next sub-genre heading, Aufderheide argues that the 'government propaganda' documentary was designed primarily to motivate troops and mobilise civilians. She notes that the propaganda documentary was at its most influential during the First and Second World Wars, before the advent of television and when film was the dominant medium. She argues that propaganda documentaries differ significantly from other documentaries in that their backers, usually agents of the state, have enormous

power and, therefore, can control the message without being challenged. She reminds the reader that during World War II, government agencies on both sides were created to control the film message. Aufderheide also points out that although the term ‘propaganda’ is linked more often with governments, it can also be produced by any person or organization wishing to convince an audience of their point of view or cause. She spends some time on this sub-genre, in particular government-sponsored World War II documentaries, but does not consider government propaganda films from the Korean or Vietnam Wars.

Aufderheide’s third sub-genre is the ‘advocacy documentary’ produced for political causes by advocates and activists. These films are ‘highly focused and designed to motivate viewers to a particular action’ and in many ways they are similar to the government propaganda documentary, even though ‘they operate in a different context’.²⁶⁹ While government propaganda documentaries would work to preserve the state, advocacy documentaries would often challenge or even threaten to overthrow the state. Aufderheide points to activist filmmakers of the 1960s involved in promoting issues relating to civil rights, human rights, anti-colonialism, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). She adds that these documentaries were often produced by students or ex-students who formed film collectives such as Newsreel (USA), the Dziga Vertov Group (Fr), London Filmmakers Co-operative (UK) and the London Women’s Film Co-operative (UK). Aufderheide also includes in this category left-wing documentarists known as ‘Committed Documentary Filmmakers’ from Europe, UK, Japan and the USA who were affiliated to the Communist Party.

²⁶⁸ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, p.60.

²⁶⁹ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, pp.77-78.

The fourth sub-genre is the 'historical documentary' which often represents events for which there is no film record and so it employs photographs, paintings, objects or images of documents, even dramatic re-enactments, experts, sound effects and music to evoke the event. Aufderheide divides this sub-genre further into 'story' or 'compilation' historical documentaries, 'biographical' historical documentaries and 'revisionist' documentaries that challenge the dominant historical record of a person or event.

The fifth sub-genre is the 'ethnographic documentary' usually about other cultures, exotic peoples or customs. Aufderheide classifies the work of Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch in this category and points out that Rouch was a trained anthropologist. She observes that ethnographic documentaries 'often claim to rescue for civilised viewers a lost glimpse of a passing exotic culture' and that they raise issues about the power and meaning of film.²⁷⁰ The sixth and last of Aufderheide's sub-genres is the 'nature documentary' which she says can also be referred to as the 'environmental', 'conservationist' or 'wildlife documentary'.

Certainly, Aufderheide's categories of 'public affairs', 'government propaganda' and 'advocacy' have direct relevance to this research but there are also resonances of the 'ethnographic' and 'environmental' documentary in many of the Vietnam War documentaries highlighted by this thesis.

Clearly, films produced by the governments of North Vietnam and South Vietnam and their respective allies fit the category of 'government propaganda' but so do propaganda

films from the National Liberation Front. Yet, despite these propaganda films, the US government had difficulty in controlling the message, particularly with the global media explosion and the advent of television, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Although Aufderheide refers to the film collective Newsreel producing ‘advocacy’ films, she does not make specific reference to any film in particular. Certainly the group produced a number of such films including Vietnam war documentaries such as *The People’s War*. Also there are other Vietnam War documentaries that could be assigned this category, including Emile de Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig* and Felix Greene’s *Inside North Vietnam*, for although these films do not promote activism or overthrowing the state, they do challenge the United States government’s view of the war.

Aufderheide places Michael Rubbo’s film *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* in the ‘public affairs’ category but it could also fit in the ‘ethnographic’ category. With the exception of the trip to the Buddhist Temple, a religious retreat and oasis of calm and tranquillity, Rubbo’s film is distinctly uncomfortable to watch. Rather than paint a charming and exotic picture of Vietnam, Rubbo reveals the underbelly of Vietnamese urban life, one of abject poverty, of women forced into prostitution and orphaned children reduced to stealing or racketeering, as a result of the war. Another film that could fit into the ‘ethnographic’ category is the NLF’s *Young Puppeteers* which focuses on the traditional arts and crafts of the Vietnamese and their ability to maintain the same even under the duress of war. Similarly, the US Defence department’s film *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, which depicts Vietnamese village society as evolving from a primitive state to

²⁷⁰ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, p.108.

something more sophisticated, could also be considered from an ethnographic point of view. Indeed, many of the allied government documentaries such as the US film *Vietnam! Vietnam!* and the Australian film *The Unlucky Country* present an ethnographic angle to their documentaries depicting the Vietnamese as either ‘noble savages’ requiring preservation or ‘primitive children’ requiring protection.

Similarly, many of these war documentaries also contain stark images of the environmental impact of the war both in the North and the South. Films produced by the North Vietnamese and the NLF, such as *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam* and *Struggle For Life*, feature images of the massive environmental damage to the Vietnamese countryside due to the relentless bombing campaigns of the US in the North and the use of chemical defoliants in the South. Western-produced documentaries such as Greene’s *Inside North Vietnam* also include images of widespread environmental damage in the North while Davis’s *Hearts and Minds* highlights the poisonous effects of Agent Orange in the South. The latter documentary reveals how the defoliant enters the food chain and is responsible for the high death toll among South Vietnamese children. Conversely, US and South Vietnamese government and military documentaries avoid environmental issues completely.

In *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*, theorist Paul Ward takes a look at more recent events in documentary filmmaking, particularly at the modern hybridizations of the documentary form.²⁷¹ Ward makes a case for a more ‘complex typology of modes of documentary’ and how they interact. He also advocates an argument espoused by Carl Plantinga, that documentary is ‘an open concept’ with ‘fuzzy boundaries’, and as such it

is not easy to come up with a model of documentary that explains *all* documentary texts and their variants. Moreover, Ward points out that not only is documentary as ‘vibrant’ as ever, on both small and big screens, but also it is this ‘deviation’ from the ‘documentary norm’ that keeps the form alive.

It is significant that the most vibrant Vietnam War documentary work comes from experimental filmmakers, such as Emile de Antonio and Santiago Alvarez, who consciously pushed the boundaries of the form. Documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* can certainly be classed as ‘deviations’ from the war documentary ‘norm’.

Michael Chanan’s book, *The Politics of Documentary* is the most recent entry into the debate.²⁷² Chanan’s research concentrates on the last fifteen years of documentary film produced in America and Europe as he discusses the impact of new technology, in particular video, computers and the internet. Chanan argues that the inherent problem in defining documentary lies in the term ‘genre’ which is itself ‘slippery and ambiguous’.²⁷³ While he acknowledges that current debates focus around generic hybridity in both documentary and fictional cinema, Chanan prefers to look at documentary in terms of genealogy or to use his metaphor an ‘extended family’ or ‘network of families’.

The main branches of this genealogy would represent particular traditions or even subspecies, each with its own classic examples, which serve as models, paradigms, examples or instances [...] but like any family some members may not resemble one another and some would inter-marry or marry out.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).

²⁷² Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: BFI, 2007).

²⁷³ Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, p.31.

²⁷⁴ Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, p35.

Chanan expounds this idea further by arguing that some documentary sub-genres can even cross over into fictional cinema, for example, the docudrama.

Chanan's genealogical metaphor is not specific or detailed enough to be of much use in terms of documentary categorization. However, the notion that there are family resemblances or marrying processes among certain groups may be useful to this study. For example, in considering the Vietnam War documentary's connection with the ethnographic, anthropological and environmental documentary or comparing the conventions of the war documentary and the fictional war film. A more detailed analysis of this last point will be offered in Part II of this chapter.

Despite all these systems and strategies, there still does not seem to be an overarching paradigm that ably serves this corpus of documentaries. Nevertheless, each of these notable theorists opens avenues of investigation that prove revealing in terms of individual or groups of Vietnam War documentaries. Aufderheide's categories of 'government propaganda', 'public affairs' and 'advocacy' seem to offer the war documentary the most in terms of subject-matter identification, Nichols's system of six modes, in particular, the 'poetic', 'expository', 'observational' and 'participatory' offer the most in terms of identifying distinguishing features, yet the combination of the two still tells us relatively little about the Vietnam War documentary. Plantinga argues that theory alone is not enough in providing understanding as to how documentary works and that one must study filmmakers, films and movements in their historical context. Ward raises the issue of 'hybridization' and how deviation from the norm keeps the documentary form vital. Linked to Ward's idea of hybridization is Chanan's concept of 'family resemblances' that documentaries categories are not only fluid but are able to

cross-over even into fictional cinema. These lines of investigation, including contextualization, deviation, hybridization and fluidity, will be pursued later in this chapter when focusing on developments within the war documentary and the Vietnam War documentary specifically. Finally, Bruzzi's advocacy for an alternative way of discussing documentary, one that is more open and positive, not based on categorization nor based on documentary's failings to capture the 'real', is also challenging. This encourages the analyst to employ other approaches not confined to documentary or even film theory but to broaden the historical and theoretical spectrum.

Nevertheless, debates concerning the capturing of the 'real' and 'truth claims' are pertinent to the war documentary particularly when considering the issue of propaganda, to be discussed later in this chapter. The next section, however, engages with the relationship of documentary with reality and storytelling as well as 'the gaze'.

Documentary Function - Representing Reality, Presenting Truth, and Storytelling

The camera clearly can do much more than reproduce an action staged before it. It is a creative instrument, if properly directed, and not just a reproduction instrument [...] It can be a window on reality.

By the addition of close-up you give your camera power of intimacy. By addition of one lens or another, you have a telephoto command of detail and intimacy. You have microscopic power over reality.

By bringing in the element of angle you add new viewpoints which, if properly used, can add to the dramatic, that is to say, to the creative power of your description.— *John Grierson*²⁷⁵

The second debate among documentary theorists concerns documentary's relationship with reality and truth but the debate also revolves around characteristics that the documentary film shares with fictional film, in particular, storytelling. Ever since John Grierson described documentary as being 'the creative treatment of actuality', theorists

have debated these issues because Grierson's writings do little to distinguish the two forms. Once again, there are some familiar names in this arena: Brian Winston, John Corner and Bill Nichols.

In Chapter V of *Representing Reality* entitled 'Telling Stories with Evidence and Argument', Nichols continues his assessment of the documentary form by comparing fictional and factual film forms. He argues that documentaries, like fictional films have plots, characters, situations and narratives. Fictional films are about imaginary worlds but documentaries are about the historical world. Nichols contends that documentary is less about story and more about argument; moreover 'documentaries do not present *the* truth but *a* truth'.²⁷⁶ As Nichols points out:

Documentary offers access to a shared, historical construct. Instead of *a* world, we are offered access to *the* world. The world where, at the extreme, issues of life and death are always at hand ...²⁷⁷

Nichols cites the three definitions of documentary from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: first, to give a photographic and aural representation or likeness of the world; second, to stand for or represent the views of individuals, groups or agencies; third, to make a representation, or a case, an argument, about the world explicitly or implicitly.²⁷⁸

Nichols breaks down documentary into three components: evidence (the material basis for argument), perspective or point of view, and commentary which he says is the more

²⁷⁵ John Grierson, 'Creative Use of Sound', in Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary*, p.157.

²⁷⁶ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.118.

²⁷⁷ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.109.

²⁷⁸ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.111. Winston provides a more detailed etymology of the word 'documentary'. He points out the modern source of the word is 'document' which refers to 'something written, inscribed, furnishes evidence or information' dates back to 1727 but its Latin root, *documentum*, dates back to 1450 and refers to a legal document. He argues that the etymology is particularly significant as we continue to associate the documentary film form with that of providing evidence, *Claiming the Real*, p.11.

overt and direct form of presenting an argument. He maintains that rhetoric in the documentary is persuasion through evidence, factual material, confessions, documents and objects. He alerts us to the importance of commentary as it represents the filmmaker's view of the world whether the commentary is provided by the filmmaker or by social actors recruited to present and/or narrate the documentary. Moreover, Nichols points to the power of the commentator in 'steering' the documentary and its audience and argues that documentary is defined by a triangular relationship between the filmmaker, the text and the viewer.

In a recent article by John Corner which re-visits Nichols's seminal work *Representing Reality*, Corner asserts that storytelling has always been the 'key ingredient of successful documentary' that it is not only commentary but the structure and sequencing of materials, whether it be archive footage or interviews, that form part of the narrative process. He argues:

Where a documentary focuses on specific individuals, circumstances and actions, the story design can approximate to at least some features of fictional narrative, working creatively, for instance, with anticipation, episodic developments and various types of reversal, suspension of resolution etc.²⁷⁹

Nevertheless, he claims that the fact/fiction divide remains, that they are two separate domains despite their similarities.

Corner is right to draw attention to the fact that documentaries, like fictional cinema, have a beginning, middle and end, working along classic narrative principles of enigma and resolution. Whether this resolution is satisfactorily achieved in the war documentary, particularly in the Vietnam War documentary, is contentious.

Nevertheless, documentary films and even war documentaries follow episodic lines either directly linear or, in the case of some Vietnam War documentaries, in an abstract fashion.

Many Vietnam War documentaries open with idyllic pictures of rural life in Vietnam, which is shattered by war. The idyllic images are replaced by those of human misery and death, and because the war has not concluded, the resolution is unsatisfactory. The Vietnam War documentary offers the most extreme form of narrative progression from equilibrium to serious disruption to a new uneasy equilibrium.

It can be argued that war documentaries can be only assigned this title if they are made during a conflict, after which they become retrospective historical assessments rather than contemporary accounts.²⁸⁰ War documentaries made during a conflict may claim they can predict the outcome with certainty but the outcome is unknown, thus playing a significant part in terms of perspective. Hindsight is a valuable asset in the historical overview of a war or a battle, as the documentary film *The Battle for Khe Sanh* proves. For while this documentary was filmed as a victory for the Americans, the historical retrospective proved that the battle was merely a decoy for the Tet Offensive and this offensive was the real turning point of the war, one that favoured the Communist North and NLF. Some Vietnam War documentaries made towards the end of the conflict, such as *Hearts and Minds*, were released after cease fire agreements were signed in 1973 and US troops had formally left Vietnam. Nevertheless, a sense of uncertainty

²⁷⁹ John Corner, 'A Fiction (Un)like Any Other?', *Critical Studies in Television*, Vol.1, Issue 1 Spring 2006, p.92.

²⁸⁰ In order to maintain this contemporary perspective, a war documentary needs not only to be filmed and edited but to have completed the post-production process prior to the war's completion, for even the choice of titles and music could inflect a sense of historical retrospective.

pervades these later films as the war between North and South continued. More specifically, none of the documentaries scrutinized here is filmed from the perspective that the war is over.

A similar comparison between fictional films and documentaries can also be made in terms of cast of characters. In a fictional film, the revelation of these characters and their personalities, whether they are heroes or villains, is the cornerstone of storytelling. The same is true of documentary although the designated role of protagonist and antagonist depends entirely upon the political perspective of the filmmaker and viewer. Certainly, some Western independent Vietnam War documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds* question these traditional roles and perspectives.

Despite the lack of scientific evidence by way of audience studies, many documentary theorists, such as Nichols, Corner, Plantinga, Winston and Springer, refer authoritatively to ‘audience expectations’ being different for the non-fiction film. Indeed, Springer argues that viewers bring a different set of ‘questions’ to a fictional film than a documentary. For example, with a fictional film they ask themselves: ‘Will I be entertained?’ but with a factual film they ask themselves: ‘What will it teach me?’²⁸¹

The documentary viewer may expect to be led or guided by the documentary commentator, to have the issues and events explained. In terms of a war documentary and specifically a Vietnam War documentary, viewers may expect the film to address fundamental questions such as: what is the war about, how did it begin, what is the

²⁸¹ Claudia Springer, ‘Vietnam: A Television History and the Equivocal Nature of Objectivity’, *Wide Angle* 7, no.4, p.53.

current situation and what needs to be done to end the conflict? Viewers may also expect to see incorporated in a war documentary a clear explanation of the political issues, major events and outline of the various parties such as the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front. They may also expect a war documentary to describe the key figures - again in the Vietnam War documentary these would include Ho Chi Minh, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon – and present an opportunity to hear from these figures via speeches or interviews. Interestingly, only three of the films selected in this study attempt a detailed overview of the war: *Why Vietnam?*, *In the Year of the Pig* and *Vietnam! Vietnam!*. Moreover, no filmmakers in this survey conduct their own interviews with these leaders but rather they make use of other footage.

The documentary commentator, whether off camera or on camera, is extremely powerful in terms of ‘steering’ the audience. The commentator can be the surrogate voice of the producer or the filmmaker, sometimes both. In the case of the Vietnam War documentary it can be the voice of the government or the filmmaker and again, sometimes both. If there is no commentator, the audience is still ‘steered’, albeit subtly, through images, point of view, editing, sound and music. As Nichols points out, documentaries that deliberately avoid commentary, such as observational films, merely ‘adopt a posture of innocent neutrality’ and the notion that one is being provided with all the necessary evidence to judge for oneself is misleading.²⁸²

²⁸² Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.128.

Moreover, as Claudia Springer points out, objectivity in a documentary, particularly one about the Vietnam War, is not necessarily a good thing since it can be a means by which the producers play safe and avoid controversial issues.²⁸³ Springer surmises:

A text that foregrounds its position can be valuable for its clear-cut presentation of an argument. A text that obscures its position may end up being all things to all viewers and can lead to knowledge of “facts” but ignorance of issues.²⁸⁴

Yet despite the reality of war, the war documentary has traditionally been treated with suspicion as it has become almost synonymous with the propaganda film, the distortion of truth for political ends, even with the propagation of lies. In this way, the war documentary appears to be the antithesis of the form itself. Indeed, there appears to be a similar response to these Vietnam War documentaries, with critics preferring the observational ‘fly-on-the-wall’ mode rather than the expository ‘persuade and promote’ mode on the supposed basis that these documentaries offer a more truthful or authentic account of the war. Films such as *A Face of War* and *The Anderson Platoon*, which use direct cinema techniques, were much lauded by the critics for offering a realistic, even experiential view of war. Issues of authenticity are closely bound with issues of the filmmaker’s authority, of ‘being there’ to witness the war first-hand and if necessary be ‘in the line of fire’ along with the troops. While these ‘trip to the front’ documentaries give viewers a window into the world of war, they still only present a visual and aural view of the war, one that is controlled and mediated by the filmmaker not the soldier.

Point of View - Visual Ethics and the Gaze

Images of destruction, pain and suffering are central to the war documentary. As Susan Sontag points out, the iconography of suffering has a ‘long pedigree’ in art and literature

²⁸³ Springer, ‘Vietnam : A Television History’, *Wide Angle* 7, No.4 (1985), p.54.

²⁸⁴ Springer, ‘Vietnam : A Television History’, *Wide Angle* 7, No.4 (1985), p.58.

from ancient Greek sculptures, Renaissance paintings of the passion of Christ to war photography.²⁸⁵ She argues that there is an ‘appetite’ for images of pain and that gruesome images ‘invite’ the audience to be either ‘spectators or cowards’, to look or look away.²⁸⁶ She traces the development of war photography from Roger Fenton’s images of the Crimean War of 1855 to images of the first Gulf War in 1991 and includes iconic photographs from the Vietnam War. Although Sontag’s review does not take into account the war documentary, her line of enquiry is pertinent to this research.

The seriousness of the subject-matter, pain, trauma and death as a result of war, whether on a grand scale or on a more intimate level, raises particular moral and ethical issues with regard to the position of the filmmaker and the placing of the audience. Yet visual ethics is a relatively new scholarly area currently being developed under a number of academic fields including trauma studies, postcolonial theory, race and gender studies. Documentary film theorists who have referred to this area tend to focus on issues of reality, truth and the problems of mediation. Nevertheless, two familiar figures re-emerge in this area: Bill Nichols and Brian Winston.

In Chapter III of *Representing Reality*, Nichols tackles ethics and documentary codes of conduct, for example, the issue of consent and the responsibilities of the filmmaker to his subject(s) and audience. He also highlights the dilemma between ‘the right to know versus the right to privacy’ as well as the dilemma between ethics and aesthetics.

²⁸⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003).

²⁸⁶ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, pp.37-38.

Nichols argues that ‘style attests not only to “vision” or to a perspective on the world but also to the ethical quality of that perspective and the argument behind it’.²⁸⁷

Brian Winston also points to the two overarching relationships underpinning documentary filmmaking.²⁸⁸ The first is the relationship of the filmmaker with the participants of the film: to allow the participant freedom of expression, to respect their privacy and, by dint of exhibition, do no harm to the participant. The second relationship is that of the filmmaker with the audience - their right to know information and the duty of the filmmaker not to deceive or commit fraud against them.

There is no evidence to suggest that any scenes of combat were staged or reconstructed in the Vietnam War documentaries surveyed here, although this was a major concern with regard to early war documentaries, including early Vietnamese documentaries. Issues regarding staging or ‘playing to the camera’, however, are apparent in non-combat scenes in both government and military films of South Vietnam, the United States and Australia. There are numerous examples of government officials and military commanders speaking to the camera, either from behind an official desk or in front of military personnel or equipment, offering up what are clearly carefully scripted and well-rehearsed speeches. An extreme example of a Senior Officer ‘playing’ to the camera can be found in *The Unlucky Country* as Commander Brigadier Jackson gives a lengthy jingoistic speech while propped up against his military vehicle. It is not dissimilar to the stance John Wayne takes in many of his war films and the documentary, *A Nation Builds Under Fire*. The result of these staged episodes is to give

²⁸⁷ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.80.

²⁸⁸ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.236-250.

an unnatural and contrived air to these war documentaries but not necessarily a false or fraudulent one.

Winston is similarly concerned with the contracting process, in particular the notion of 'consent', pointing to legislation developed in the West by the United States and by the European Convention of Human Rights. Such legislation not only supports freedom of speech and privacy, but protects against coercion and the exploitation of the most vulnerable, for example, minors and the mentally ill. Winston asserts that 'the central question for documentary ethics is how much mediation is ethical?'²⁸⁹ Winston argues that documentaries are both journalistic and artistic but the documentarist must weigh up the audience's 'right to know' with the legal and moral duty of care to the participants and thus must be wary of producing 'voyeuristic' and the 'exploitative' documentaries'.²⁹⁰

Nichols's work also addresses issues surrounding 'the gaze'. While he readily acknowledges the importance of the feminist psychoanalytical work undertaken by Laura Mulvey in the area of visual pleasure and fictional cinema, he maintains that issues of voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism are rarely central to documentary cinema. Nichols insists that it is the desire for knowledge (epistophilia) rather than the desire to look (scopophilia) that is of central importance to documentary.²⁹¹

The majority of Vietnam War documentaries appear to bear out Nichols's epistophilia argument, although there are some striking episodes within certain Western

²⁸⁹ Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, p.132.

²⁹⁰ Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, pp.140-158.

documentaries where the gaze is both male and voyeuristic. One such episode in *Hearts and Minds* is an intimate scene where two American soldiers are filmed with prostitutes, fondling their breasts and bragging about their sexual exploits to camera. In contrast, the women are not offered a chance to speak about their experiences or feelings. It is not clear what were the terms of consent agreed between the subjects and the filmmaker but the women become increasingly uncomfortable about the presence of the camera and crew and the way they are being treated by the soldiers. While it may have been Davis's design to reveal such behaviour as reprehensible, the camera's gaze reinforces the male voyeuristic perspective that has turned these women into sexual objects. Consequently, the prostitutes are exploited on several levels: by the soldiers, the filmmaker, and even the audience, all of whom have become party to the women's exploitation whether they agree with it or not. Another voyeuristic episode can be found in *A Face of War* where a large number of soldiers witness the birth of a Vietnamese child. Here, the Vietnamese woman is completely exposed to members of a platoon as well as the camera and the audience. Again, there are serious questions as to whether consent was given by this young woman.

More pertinent to this research area is Nichols's discussion of 'the camera gaze' with regard to capturing death. Once again he offers a form of categorization in order to distinguish between the various documentary gazes. The 'accidental gaze' is when the camera comes upon the moment of death unexpectedly, yet Nichols acknowledges that it is difficult to separate the accidental gaze from morbid curiosity. The 'helpless gaze' shows the filmmaker's inability to affect the events but is not complicit in the same. With this position the filmmaker is active in capturing the events but unable to

²⁹¹ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, pp.76-80.

intervene. The 'endangered gaze' places the filmmaker at personal risk while the 'humane gaze' is a more subjective personal response and absolves the filmmaker of any accusation of morbid curiosity with regard to death and dying. Finally, Nichols offers the detached 'clinical or professional gaze'.²⁹²

The 'accidental gaze' is more prevalent in Western documentaries, in particular, the 'trip to the front' documentaries of Schoendoerffer and Jones but equally the 'endangered gaze' can be applied here as the filmmakers have no control over the events unfolding. The 'humane gaze' can be attributed to the images captured by Rubbo of the death and funeral of the prostitute in the cemetery community. Similarly, 'the humane gaze' can also be applied as Davis and his team film the young child grieving inconsolably by the grave of her relative. In contrast, there are few images of people grieving incorporated by the North Vietnamese and NLF documentaries, so on the whole, we can attribute the 'professional or clinical gaze' to the images of mass destruction and human carnage. It is the 'helpless gaze', however, that is the most controversial and difficult to verify, particularly when it is applied to a subject's suffering or torture as well as death. Although these documentary filmmakers did not capture the infamous Loan execution of a VC suspect (discussed in detail in Part II), there are other morally compromising scenes that make the viewer question the role of the filmmaker in such instances.

As David E. James pointed out, 'the trip to the front' documentaries often place the audience in uncomfortable moral positions when witnessing US soldiers committing unprovoked acts of violence, for example, torching homes or brutalizing a captive.

²⁹² Nichols, *Representing Reality*, pp.83-86.

Indeed, many Western government documentaries show Vietnamese people being displaced from their homes. The 'trip to the front' documentaries in particular contain disturbing images of Vietnamese villagers rounded up into groups while their homes are unceremoniously searched and destroyed. These villagers are usually elderly men and women and younger women with babies and children. Those who remain silent and still often provide more compelling viewing than those who express emotion or distress. The viewer may surmise that they were probably too frightened to show any emotion in case it singles them out for interrogation, even torture. Yet many of these men and women chose to look directly into the camera, their faces devoid of anger, frustration, defiance or fear, nor do they show any resignation to their fate. It is this return of the gaze that is both disturbing and haunting.

One particularly disturbing episode in *Hearts and Minds* is that of a middle-aged village man being led away by US soldiers, presumably for further questioning. His young son attempts to follow but his father repeatedly pushes him away. The action takes place in near silence with the father repeatedly looking up at the camera. There is mutual recognition by the subject and the filmmaker as to what his fate will be but neither makes any protest. Most striking is the child's silence even when he is forcibly separated from his father by a US soldier. Although the episode is brief and contains no actual violence perpetrated against the man or child, the viewer is placed in an epistemological and emotional dilemma – wanting to know what becomes of them and why the filmmaker did not do more to intervene. The 'helpless gaze' of the filmmaker in this instance is not just unsatisfactory but morally culpable.

While Western filmmakers are willing to capture and exhibit intimate images of the suffering and death of Vietnamese people, they are not so willing to do the same with images of Westerners. For example, Davis exhibits a Vietnamese child crying inconsolably over a family member's grave and Rubbo captures a Vietnamese funeral with close-ups of the dead women laid in an open casket. Yet no Western director is prepared to offer similar intimate images of a dying or dead US soldier or the close-up of a soldier's corpse being zipped into a body bag. Whether such an image was considered taboo, unethical or simply unpalatable by Western filmmakers is unclear but the distinction remains.

GENRE - Part II:

The Vietnam War Documentary:

conditions, characteristics and visual conventions

This section focuses on what is distinctive about the Vietnam War documentary. It investigates how the Vietnam War documentary differs from its predecessor of World War II, in particular how it was influenced by the global media explosion and the new medium of television. It assesses the new and vital contribution of non-government-sponsored filmmakers to the genre. It also interrogates the Vietnam War documentary in terms of the influence of other documentary sub-genres and fictional cinema, as well as other visual conventions including iconography and iconic images of the war.

Conditions influencing the development of the Vietnam War Documentary

There are significant differences between the World War II documentary and the Vietnam War documentary as a result of the nature of the conflict, control of documentary production and exhibition, the development of other visual media, and the contribution of non-government-sponsored filmmakers, all of which had an impact on the genre.

Nature of the Conflict

The Vietnam War saw only two conventional battles at Ia Drang and Khe Sanh. As outlined before, the North Vietnamese Army and NLF fought a covert war, one of hit and run, ambushes and insurgence. The Communist forces held no strategic strongholds in the South for the allied forces to defeat and although the allied forces bombed the North, they did not go as far as to invade. In geographical terms there was no real battle

front or front line, no major military campaign to film but rather a series of endless patrols to seek out and destroy the enemy who, on the whole, proved elusive.

Visually identifying the enemy and capturing them on film presented a huge problem for documentary filmmakers. Even during the Tet Offensive when the Vietcong came out into the open, it was press and television reporters rather than filmmakers who caught the various clashes, including the storming of the US Embassy in Saigon and the North Vietnamese Army's occupation of the city of Hué. The latter was a messy street-by-street fight between the North Vietnamese Army and US forces. Unfortunately, stock footage of the occupation of Hué was not incorporated by any of the documentary filmmakers included here, not even by de Antonio nor Davis.

Similarly, the North Vietnamese had problems obtaining aerial shots of the vast devastation inflicted by the US bombing campaigns of both North and South Vietnam as they had no air force of their own. Instead they had to acquire relevant pictures from stock footage provided by outside sources. Consequently, Vietnam War documentary filmmakers had to adapt to this new type of warfare and production conditions.

Production and Exhibition

During the two World Wars, only governments commissioned and issued documentary films and newsreels. There is no evidence to suggest that independent filmmakers were allowed to film, distribute or exhibit any alternative view other than that dictated by the government. The Vietnam War, however, witnessed a change in the relationship between governments and filmmakers. Although the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front kept strict controls over the production of their films, they allowed

foreign filmmakers, from both Communist and democratic countries, access to their operations. Similarly, the South Vietnamese government and the US government also encouraged into the war zone national and international filmmakers from friendly or neutral countries but not those sympathetic to the Communist cause. Yet the documentaries produced by national, friendly or neutral filmmakers did not always reflect positively on South Vietnam and its allies. Many independent and neutral filmmakers took advantage of the lack of censorship and produced documentaries that were damning of South Vietnamese and US policies. Moreover, despite attempts by the US federal authorities to ban or curb distribution in the US, the independents found ways to distribute their films and, in the case of Newsreel, distribute films made by ‘the enemy’.

Global Media Explosion and Advent of Television

Similarly, the increasing internationalization of the world press made it impossible for democratic governments in the US and the West to control information. In his groundbreaking study, *The Uncensored War*, Daniel Hallin argues:

The media had extraordinary freedom to report the war in Vietnam without direct government control: it was the first war in which reporters were routinely accredited to accompany military forces yet not subject to censorship, and it was a war in which the journalists clearly did not think of themselves simply as “soldiers of the typewriter” whose mission was to serve the war effort.²⁹³

Hallin argues that the new approach of ‘objective reporting’ underpinning the work of these journalists was often viewed as adversarial by the US government. Hallin recognizes that at the beginning of the war Western journalists displayed a ‘Cold War consensus’ that made them less critical and more inclined to rely heavily on official

²⁹³ Daniel Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), p.6.

information provided by the US government. This changed following Tet as journalists, sceptical of government briefings and assessments, became less dependent on official sources. With his study of the *New York Times* from 1961-1965 and US Network evening news from 1965-1973, Hallin contests Michael Arlen's 'living room war' concept of media saturation and de-sensitization by maintaining that the majority of reporting was taken up with routine battle coverage, reports on technology and lightweight human interest stories about the troops.²⁹⁴ He insists that while there may have been quantity there was little quality, and coverage was not only narrow but also failed to tackle the larger questions.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Hallin does acknowledge a division between the older journalists and 'fresh-faced' younger reporters who, as journalist David Halberstam commented, 'came to the story remarkably clean, carrying no excess psychological or political baggage...'²⁹⁶ Hallin surmises that the US public came to see the war as either a 'mistake' or 'tragedy' rather than a 'crime'. Hallin's study, although significant and rigorous, is limited to the US press and television networks and does not consider the impact of the media on the Vietnam War documentary.

A further perspective is offered by Neville Petersen on other networks, in particular the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) who both covered the war.²⁹⁷ He points out that during World War II these organizations had relied on 'eye-witness' reports by war correspondents but

²⁹⁴ In *The Living Room War* (New York: Viking, 1966), author Michael Arlen refers to the saturation and desensitization effect of the daily war reports as 'bang bang' coverage and argues that constant images of violence in the media turned American public opinion against the war.

²⁹⁵ Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"*, p.209.

²⁹⁶ David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Knopf, 1979) quoted in Hallin, pp.5-6.

²⁹⁷ Neville Petersen, 'The Coverage of the Vietnam war in an organization context: the ABC and CBC experience', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Fall 1998, Vol. 23, Iss.4.

during the 1940s and 1950s they turned to news agencies that provided 'neutral' or 'value free news'. At this time journalists themselves were not permitted to broadcast. Petersen claims that television networks such as ABC felt threatened by the advent of television and the way that pictures might determine what was 'news'. Consequently, in order to preserve 'value free news' no reporters were allowed to report on-camera or even provide voice-over reporting. This policy proved untenable, however, as the lack of trained personnel in Vietnam obliged correspondents to report in front of the camera. He concludes that events in Vietnam and the breakdown of political consensus compelled journalists 'to make more value judgements of their own'. Although there remained organizational constraints throughout the war, by the end of the conflict, journalists from ABC and CBC had become more 'self-assertive' and 'news values had undergone a marked shift'.²⁹⁸

Several Western Vietnam War documentary filmmakers came from journalistic backgrounds, for example, Felix Greene (UK), Peter Davis (USA), Heynowski & Scheumann (GDR) and Pierre Schoendoerffer (Fr). Greene's documentary *Inside North Vietnam* and Davis's *Hearts and Minds* incorporate numerous interviews, and Heynowski & Scheumann's *Pilots in Pyjamas – Hanoi Hilton* relies heavily on an interview format for its structure. Despite their journalistic backgrounds and training none of these directors adopts a 'neutral' stance or offers 'value-free' news reporting. While all the other directors remain visually anonymous, Greene is the only director who appears willing to break with tradition and stand in front of the camera and by doing so, takes visible ownership and personal accountability of his work.

²⁹⁸ Petersen, 'The Coverage of the Vietnam war in an organization context', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Fall 1998, Vol. 23, Iss.4.

Television audiences now take for granted being able to view the correspondent as he/she delivers a report. Contemporary war correspondents such as Kate Aide, John Simpson, Martin Bell and Ragi Omar have attained celebrity status for their daring reports from the combat zone. During the Vietnam War, however, this was new territory that was crossed not only by Greene but also other journalists such as Charles Wheeler, Martin Bell, Julian Pettifer, David Jessel, Brian Barron and John Pilger who delivered a more personal-style of news reporting as they stood before the camera.²⁹⁹

Arguably the single most important influence on the war documentary, and in particular the Vietnam War documentary, was the advent of television. During the two World Wars, war documentaries as well as newsreels were shown to the public in cinemas in the United States and the West, as broadcast television was not available until the late 1940s. US television camera crews were sent to cover the Korean War (1950-1953) but television news was in its infancy and television ownership was limited to the few that could afford it. During the Vietnam War, television ownership in the USA and the West was widespread even among the middle classes, and the daily news programmes featured up-to-date reports and moving images of the war. As this was a time before direct satellite feed or internet, images were often several days old as film footage had to be sent manually out of Vietnam by plane.

Another example of the shift towards television can be seen in British news coverage of the war. Like America, the British public was inundated with news from Vietnam. This was due, in part, to the influx of British press and television reporters into the region.

Photojournalists such as Larry Burrows, Philip Jones Griffiths, Tim Page and Don McCullin were producing powerful images of the suffering endured both by troops and civilians. Up-and-coming young journalists such as Martin Bell, foreign affairs news correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), along with Michael Charlton and Julian Pettifer for the BBC documentary programme *Panorama*, regularly sent film reports and analysis on the events unfolding in Vietnam.³⁰⁰ The independent channel Granada was also producing documentaries on the war for programmes such as *World in Action* and *Tonight*.³⁰¹ All this was at a time when cinema attendance was waning and television ownership was on the increase in the UK. Therefore, it is not surprising that so few documentaries on the subject were made for the big screen by British documentary filmmakers.

As the Western public became less reliant on cinema for their information about the war, documentary films had to offer something different. Moreover, as documentary films were slower to produce and exhibit, producers had to take into account that their films could easily seem dated. One film that found it impossible to keep abreast of developments, both in terms of the war abroad and public opinion at home in the United States, was John Ford's *Vietnam! Vietnam!*

In Vietnam the situation was very different. Although there was some television ownership in the Southern cities such as Saigon and Hué, factual films, including war documentaries would have been shown in city cinemas. There are reports that the US

²⁹⁹ "BBC in Vietnam", *Timewatch*, BBC 2, 1995.

³⁰⁰ On 4 July 1966, the BBC transmitted the documentary *Twenty-four Hours: Western Eyewitness in the North Vietnam*.

³⁰¹ On 28 April 1970, Granada Television broadcast Michael Grigsby's documentary *I was a Soldier* about three Vietnam veterans returning home from the war.

and the South Vietnamese governments had a strategy to supply rural villages in the South with a television set in order to spread government information and propaganda ideas, but no figures regarding television ownership in Vietnam are available to verify the same.³⁰² In the North, war documentaries were shown in cinemas in cities such as Hanoi but also by mobile film units travelling to villages. These mobile film units screened documentaries in small make-shift rooms often situated underground. Similarly, there is little information with regard to television ownership in the North although it unlikely that ownership would have been widespread, even in the cities, but rather the North Vietnamese would rely on film documentaries or radio reports for their information.

Non-Government Documentary Directors – Politics, Personal Vision and Style

During World War II, as Hollywood directors such as Frank Capra, John Ford and William Wyler offered their skills to the war effort, they suppressed their personal vision and respective styles to conform to the government war documentary template and propaganda message. Indeed it almost impossible to identify and distinguish these directors' World War II documentary works from one another.

In contrast, the non-government-sponsored documentaries of Emile de Antonio, Pierre Schoendoerffer, Felix Greene, Michael Rubbo, Eugene Jones and Peter Davis offered perspectives that differed from the official government line. While de Antonio's and Davis's films appear directly at odds with their government, Jones also refused to toe the government line, albeit less overtly, by revealing war to be anything but heroic.

³⁰² Nicholas Cull, David Culbert and David Welch (eds), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia 1500 to the Present*, (Oxford: ABC Clio, 2003), p.422.

Similarly, Schoendoerffer exposed the war as a sad legacy of French colonialism and thus indicted his own country and government in the continuing tragedy. Unlike previous war documentaries, many non-government Vietnam War documentary directors such as Michael Rubbo and Pierre Schoendoerffer presented very personal assessments of the conflict, deviating from their governments' party-line in order to pursue their own personal agenda. Two directors, de Antonio and Alvarez, created very distinctive films combining politics, personal vision and style in a unique way.³⁰³

Cuban filmmaker Santiago Alvarez began making documentaries in his forties. Despite his late start, he emerged as a prolific filmmaker producing sixty-two films. The three recurring themes of his work were to celebrate the achievements of the Cuban Revolution, to highlight the struggle against American imperialism, and to express solidarity with Vietnam.

In the interview given to *Guardian* critic Derek Malcolm in 1979, Alvarez admitted:

It will be no surprise to you that I use film as a kind of intervention that I try to use the drama of events to make my own interpretation of them. I am proud to admit that I am biased. I support socialism because I believe socialism supports humanity.³⁰⁴

According to Malcolm, Alvarez did not like to be called a documentary filmmaker but rather a 'news pamphleteer'.³⁰⁵ In addition to his documentary work, Alvarez would

³⁰³ I have included Michael Rubbo and Santiago Alvarez in the non-government-sponsored category even though both received state funding. Rubbo was sponsored by the National Film Board of Canada and Alvarez was sponsored by the ICAC. However, neither were directly commissioned by their respective governments to make their films but rather they both had what seems to be complete artistic freedom in making their documentaries. However, this was not the case with East German state-owned DEFA and the work of Heynowski and Scheumann.

³⁰⁴ Derek Malcolm, 'Master of the Moviola', *The Guardian*, 19 June 1979.

³⁰⁵ Malcolm, *The Guardian*, 19 June 1979.

make one 'noticiero' a week and by 1969 Alvarez had personally produced over 500 noticiero films.³⁰⁶

You mustn't forget that I am at the same time a journalist and a documentarist, that's to say that the facets of the journalist and the documentarist co-exist within me. And isn't a documentarist also in a way a journalist? What is revolutionary journalism? What is a documentary? Isn't a documentary perhaps a testimony re-elaborated starting from the ideological view of the director? He records the testimony and then transforms it and projects it into the film? I can't separate journalism from documentarism.³⁰⁷

Alvarez felt montage was the most important device in his filmmaking. He also felt that spontaneity was key to filmmaking:

I don't write scripts beforehand. As a creator I have my 'interior scenario' a vision anticipating what I'm filming or going to film [...] This happens even when I'm making a film without filming directly.³⁰⁸

Alvarez preferred to use material either shot by himself or other Cubans, but if that was not possible he would use stills, newspaper cuttings, posters, sketches, diagrams. Alvarez admitted that his favourite part of filmmaking was the editing, which he undertook himself. While creating the visual structure he would also select and synchronize the sound track. He preferred the spoken word or music to narration. Moreover, Alvarez believed that fifty per cent of the film's value was in the soundtrack.³⁰⁹

In stark contrast to Alvarez, Emile de Antonio came from a privileged and educated background but like Alvarez, de Antonio had no formal training and had to learn his craft along the way. Yet the lack of film or art school training turned out to be something of an advantage as it allowed him to develop a different approach to the documentary form. De Antonio revealed:

³⁰⁶ Andi Engel, 'Solidarity and Violence', *Sight and Sound*, V.38, No.4, October 1969, p.200.

³⁰⁷ Chanan, *BFI Dossier Number 2: Santiago Alvarez*, p.8.

³⁰⁸ Chanan, *BFI Dossier Number 2: Santiago Alvarez*, (London: BFI, 1980), p.5.

I have always looked upon documentary as belonging to politics as much as to art. Those documentary films which have survived, which have had any meaning, which have been artistically interesting have been political [...] In our time, the film documentary is the art of opposition. My films have been against the chief assumptions of the American state, and I think my films have succeeded in making a new kind of art form in film out of political film material.³¹⁰

In *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible argue that his work made a 'significant impact on both the form of documentary cinema and the political practice of filmmaking' during the 1960s and 1970s.³¹¹ They also credit him for being a leading advocate of a politically committed cinema supporting filmmaking co-operatives such as Newsreel. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, de Antonio lived in Greenwich village, New York, mixing with radical artists - painters such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol; the musician John Cage and beat author Jack Kerouac. De Antonio's collage technique of cutting and pasting newsreel, film, photographs and sounds from old phonograph records was very much influenced by the pop artists who incorporated found materials in their artwork. Kellner and Streible sum up de Antonio as a charismatic maverick, full of contradictions:

De Antonio without the benefit of technical training took the tools of documentary cinema and applied the aesthetic principles of the modern and modernist artists he admired and promoted. His method of synthesizing new and archival footage into forceful, historically informed arguments went against existing film practices. He challenged the newsreel's voice of God tradition and shunned the ambiguities of the new direct cinema, denouncing the myth of *cinéma vérité* at every turn.³¹²

Documentary theorist Stella Bruzzi concurs when she points out that de Antonio not only uses archive material as an illustrative tool but as an active ingredient. She argues

³⁰⁹ "'5 Frames Are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5.'" An Interview with Santiago Alvarez', *Cineaste*, v.6, n.4, January 1975.

³¹⁰ Tanya Neufeld, 'An Interview with Emile de Antonio,' *Artforum*, March 1973, p.79.

³¹¹ Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible, 'Emile de Antonio: Documenting the Life of a Radical Filmmaker', in Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible (eds), *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, Visible Evidence Series, Vol 8, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.1.

that by foregrounding opinion and deliberately showing bias, de Antonio undermines the notion that documentary is transparent and non-interventionary. Bruzzi asserts that de Antonio echoes Eisenstein's radical filmmaking in the way he constructs meaning through editing. She notes that de Antonio uses a technique he himself describes as 'democratic didacticism'.³¹³ This technique juxtaposes people, voices, images and ideas to build an argument.

One vivid, consistent facet of de Antonio's work is that his collage method does not attack hate figures [...] but rather gives them enough rope by which to hang themselves – turning often favourable original footage in on itself.³¹⁴

De Antonio and Alvarez both felt content and style were inseparable. Both employed the use of montage and collage techniques but unlike de Antonio, Alvarez was prepared to experiment with different styles - naturalist, impressionist, abstract expressionist and pop - to get his ideas across. Moreover, Alvarez tended to speak to the masses, educated and uneducated, while de Antonio was speaking to a smaller intellectual audience. While both de Antonio and Alvarez have garnered both academic and critical attention as radical and experimental documentary filmmakers, their vital contribution to the development of the war documentary has been overlooked until now.

Characteristics - Genre and Hybridity in the Vietnam War Documentary

The most relevant contribution to a generic analysis of the Vietnam War documentary to date is by film historian Claudia Springer. In her essay, 'Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam', she analyses eight war documentaries produced by the American military forces during the Vietnam War: *Why*

³¹² Kellner and Streible, 'Emile de Antonio: Documenting the Life of a Radical Filmmaker', in Kellner and Streible (eds), *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, p.72.

³¹³ The concept of 'democratic didacticism' is a difficult one to define: 'democratic' alluding to equality, freedom of choice and 'didactic' meaning to instruct and have an authoritarian manner?

³¹⁴ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p.29.

Vietnam?(1965), *The Unique War* (1966), *Vietnam Village Reborn* (1967), *Know Your Enemy – the Vietcong* (1968), *Your Tour in Vietnam* (1970), *The Battle of Khe Sanh* (1969), *The First Infantry Division in Vietnam 1965-1970* (1971), *Mission in Action* (1971).³¹⁵ Springer divides these Defense Department films into three categories which she entitles: The Ethnographic film, the Training Film and the Military History film.

Springer argues the ‘ethnographic film’, such as *The Unique War* (1966) and *Vietnam Village Reborn* (1967), was designed to teach the GIs about Vietnam and its people. These films depict American troops as benevolent and philanthropic by showing them delivering medical, technical and educational assistance to the Vietnamese people. Springer points out that these films contain a ‘self-congratulatory rhetoric about American generosity’.³¹⁶ Springer notes that one of her selected films, *The Unique War*, is narrated by the famous Hollywood actor, Glenn Ford.

The ‘training film’, such as *Know Your Enemy – the Vietcong* (1968) and *Your Tour in Vietnam* (1970), is more straightforward in that it was aimed at preparing the troops for their professional role in Vietnam. The ‘military history’ films, such as *Why Vietnam?*(1965), are more problematic as the US government and military attempt to put a glorious and victorious slant on historical events even when there was none. Springer points out that the American military was faced with a difficult task of ‘instilling enthusiasm’ in its recruits for the war in Vietnam. Moreover, the Department of Defense was not prepared for the level of resistance from both civilians and members of the armed forces during the 1960s and 1970s. While World War II and Vietnam War

³¹⁵ Claudia Springer, ‘Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam’, in Rowe and Berg (eds) *The Vietnam War and American Culture*.

documentaries shared a similar purpose in motivating and educating troops, their relationship with civilians was different. Even the exhibition venues differed, for example, World War II documentaries were distributed to public movie theatres but government-produced Vietnam War documentaries were shown almost exclusively to the troops, with the exception of *Why Vietnam?*, which was shown at high schools and colleges as well as broadcast on television. Springer notes that *Why Vietnam?* was attacked openly by critics for being misleading and inaccurate. Springer contends that although these military films are designed to prepare soldiers for their tour and may contain important information, they actually evade difficult questions such as: who is the enemy?; why are Americans fighting there?; are Americans helping in Vietnamese self-determination or fighting for American self-interest?

Certainly, the examples Springer provides would suggest that the latter is true but there are government-produced documentaries that do address these important questions. One such documentary is *A Nation Builds Under Fire*. Another documentary *The Unlucky Country*, produced by the Australian government, also tries to address these key questions. Yet, of Springer's three categories of military documentaries the 'ethnographic film' is the most contentious and requires closer generic interrogation.

The Ethnographic Issue

The Ethnographic film has a history that parallels the development of the documentary, for not long after the Lumière Brothers unveiled their cinematographe in 1895, ethnographers quickly took up the equipment, recognizing it to be a valuable tool for

³¹⁶ Springer, *Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam*, in Rowe and Berg (eds) *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, p.105.

their work. In the late nineteenth century, ethnographic pioneers such as Alfred Curt Haddon, Franz Boas and Felix-Louis Regnault, utilized the cinematographe to capture their research subjects, but it was not until the late 1960s that ethnographers David and Judith MacDougall used portable filmmaking equipment and direct cinema techniques to conduct interviews and allow subjects to speak for themselves.

David MacDougall argues that ethnographic filmmaking is not only an ‘exploration of other cultures’ but ‘seeks to reveal one society to another’. He insists that ethnographic film must do more than merely record or be a scientific instrument but become art, although not in a self-conscious manner. MacDougall also makes an important distinction between exotic travel or adventure films and ethnographic films, stating that they ‘fail to approach other cultures with enough genuine interest to become truly ethnographic’.³¹⁷

Anthropologist and filmmaker Karl Heider makes a similar case:

Ideally, ethnographic films unite the art and skills of the filmmaker with the trained intellect and insight of the ethnographer [...] Filmmakers must think ethnographically, or scientifically; ethnographers must think cinematographically, or visually.³¹⁸

Heider maintains that ethnography and anthropology are interchangeable and that one should not be concerned with distinguishing labels such as ethnologists, ethnographers, social anthropologists, cultural anthropologies, anthropologists and social scientists. Moreover, he prefers to look at *how* ethnographic a film is, as he does not believe it to

³¹⁷ David MacDougall, ‘Prospects of the Ethnographic Film’, reprinted in Bill Nichols (ed) *Movies and Methods: Volume I*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1976), pp.135-150.

³¹⁸ Karl G Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (London: University of Texas, 1976), Preface ix.

be a fixed category. Heider also points out that all films are ethnographic as they are about people, even those that are not are still *made* by people.³¹⁹

In her survey of documentary sub-genres, Patricia Aufderheide observes that ethnographic documentaries ‘often claim to rescue for civilised viewers a last glimpse of a passing exotic culture’.³²⁰ Certainly, early ethnographers such as Haddon are considered ‘salvage anthropologists’ as Haddon believed that while progress was inevitable, certain aspects of human history were being eroded or destroyed by this progress.

A more recent evaluation of the ethnographic documentary comes from cultural historian Fatimah Tobing Rony, who describes this technique of preserving aspects of human history as ‘ethnographic taxidermy’, in other words, seeking to present something that is dead as living.³²¹ In her study, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle*, Rony examines representations of ‘the native’ in ethnographic documentaries. She points out that not only are the majority of ethnographic films concerned with exotic, non-Western people, but of mainly dark-skinned people who are regarded as ‘savages’ or ‘primitives’. She argues that the viewer is generally ‘presented with an array of subsistence activities, kinship, religion, myth, ceremonial ritual, music and dance, and – in what may be taken as the genre’s defining trope – some form of

³¹⁹ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p.6.

³²⁰ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, p.108.

³²¹ F.T. Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, p.101.

animal sacrifice'.³²² Moreover, these peoples are presented as 'without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives'.³²³

Nevertheless, questions still remain: are Vietnam War documentaries also ethnographic or anthropological documentaries, do they attempt to both 'salvage' and 'preserve in film' primitive or exotic cultures, or do they provide detailed studies of human behaviour?

The first point to make is that none of the Vietnam War documentary filmmakers, including Michael Rubbo, Peter Davis, Pierre Schoendoerffer and Eugene Jones, considered themselves to be ethnographers or anthropologists. These war documentarians did not take up filmmaking as a scientific research tool. Nonetheless, recurring subject-matter, images and motifs within the war documentary give rise to the question of whether such a rigid and recognizable in form can become fluid enough incorporate these other sub-genres.

Most Vietnam War documentaries, particularly those with Western perspectives, offer glimpses of Vietnamese culture such as pagodas, straw hut villages and rice fields, some offer more exotic images of life in the cities with rickshaws, flower and fruit markets and Vietnamese women in traditional dress of tunic and trousers (*ao dai*). Yet none of them sets out to focus on Vietnamese traditions and customs, village life, the family unit, ethnic or religious diversity, nor is there any sense that by filming these images they are rescuing or salvaging Vietnamese culture for posterity.

³²² Rony, *The Third Eye*, p.7.

³²³ Rony, *The Third Eye*, p.7.

Many of the South Vietnamese allied documentaries such as *A Nation Builds* (USA), *The Gentle Hand* (USA), and *The Unlucky Country* (Australia) highlight the improvements they have made in the areas of education, healthcare, building programmes and infrastructure, all of which presupposes that Vietnam is poor and backward. Other films such as *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (Canadian) and *Hearts and Minds* (USA) show the insidious influence of American culture upon Vietnamese society.

Of all the war documentaries examined in this study, *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* stands apart. The documentary does not include any combat sequences or skirmishes, no military personnel are featured and there are no preparations for war. The war may appear in the background or on the periphery, for example, a helicopter in the distance, a military post on the corner, a dead body on the outskirts of the city, but it remains very much a war documentary precisely because it depicts the effect of war on the people. The fear and the uncertainty for all the subjects pervade the documentary and are epitomized by the orphaned child who disappears overnight, rumoured to have been taken by the NLF. Compared to the Cemetery Community, the Buddhist Island Community appears untouched by the trauma of war. In MacDougall's terms, Rubbo and his team of journalists reveal a 'genuine interest' in their subjects. In Rony's terms, the documentary goes beyond 'scientific voyeurism' and as a result *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* can be considered generically fluid, crossing boundaries to incorporate the ethnographic and anthropological documentary within the war documentary.

In contrast, Vietnamese documentaries avoid dwelling on old images of Vietnam and instead focus on how Vietnamese culture is adapting and evolving, for example *Struggle For Life* shows well-equipped NFL hospitals set up in the jungle, and puppet plays in *Young Puppeteers* introduce current themes rather than act out scenes from traditional folklore. *Foreign Correspondents visit the National Liberation Front* also shows the Vietnamese capable of combining old traditions such as dance with methods of adapting to modern warfare in the jungle. Moreover, North Vietnamese films such as *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* and *A Day of Plane Hunting* take great pains to show that despite the devastation and disruption, crops are sown, livestock are tended and children attend school in between bombing raids. Similarly, North Vietnamese allied films, such as the Cuban *Hanoi Tuesday 13th*, show city life continuing to bustle in between air raids.

There is an argument that the ‘trip to the front’ documentaries, *The Anderson Platoon* and *A Face of War*, could be considered an anthropological study of men in a combat environment. Yet, neither documentary offers in-depth interviews with the soldiers. Both filmmakers deny the soldiers a voice, Schoendoerffer by his authorial narrative presence and personal recollections, and Jones by offering only a visual and aural experience of war rather than investigating the mental and emotional effects on the soldiers under these conditions.

The Environmental Issue

In the same way we must also consider whether any of these war documentaries are environmental documentaries or hybrids.

Vietnam War historians such as Stanley Karnow and Michael MaClear refer only briefly to the use of the herbicide and defoliant Agent Orange; even fewer describe its effects on the wildlife and human population. Frances Fitzgerald acknowledges the fact that the use of various kinds of defoliants along with napalm and phosphorous 'rendered certain parts of the country uninhabitable' but provides no further details.³²⁴ Historian Marilyn Young highlights the effects of Agent Orange on American veterans and their families, particularly their offspring who developed cancers and birth defects, but does not consider the impact on the Vietnamese population.³²⁵

In *Vietnam: Anatomy of A War*, Gabriel Kolko is more explicit in revealing how herbicides were employed as new experimental weapons systems first tested by the USA in Vietnam in August 1961. Initially, US deployment was strictly controlled although herbicides were used on food crops as well as on densely forested areas. From 1965, however, the programme was escalated and by 1967 covered 1.7 million acres. Over the nine year period, twenty per cent of South Vietnam's jungles, thirty-six per cent of its forests and forty-two per cent of its food crop had been affected by herbicides such as Agent Orange. Kolko also reveals that in 1963 the US government commissioned a study of dioxins such as those contained in Agent Orange, suspecting they might cause cancer and birth defects. By 1967, the devastating effects of these dioxins was known to the US government, yet they continued with their defoliation policy until 1970, when a shortage of herbicides for domestic crop use in the USA ended the programme in Vietnam.³²⁶

³²⁴ Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake*, p.376.

³²⁵ Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1991).

More recently, in 2003, veteran war photographer Philip Jones Griffiths published his own visual study of the effect on the Vietnamese population, in *Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam*.³²⁷ His work focuses on the terrible physical effects on the Vietnamese and their offspring. Griffiths also provides historical details about the US military operation originally named 'Operation Hades' but later renamed 'Operation Ranch Hand'. Although he draws on a number of US government publications, magazine articles and scholarly journals, he does not provide the reader with specific references for the facts and figures that he provides. He states that '46,000,000 litres of Agent Orange dropped in South Vietnam, 20,000 villages sprayed, 5,000,000 people affected'.³²⁸ Griffiths also points out that not only were the South Vietnamese affected by ensuing birth defects but that American and Australian soldiers, as well as North Vietnamese soldiers who had come to the South to fight alongside the NLF, were also affected by the contamination.

Vietnam War documentaries made during the war certainly highlight environmental issues, especially those produced by the North and the NLF such as *US Techniques of Genocide*. There are other documentaries, such as *Vietnam: Land of Fire* (North Vietnam, 1966) and *Bacteriological Warfare in Vietnam* (North Vietnam, 1966), that focus on the impact of the weapons used by US forces on the Vietnamese people and land, but again, these documentaries were not intended as scientific studies or driven by ecological arguments.³²⁹

³²⁶ Gabriel Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a War, 1940-1970* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), pp.145-146.

³²⁷ Philip Jones Griffiths, *Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam* (London: Trolley Ltd, 2003).

³²⁸ Griffiths, *Agent Orange*, p.4.

On the other hand, US and Western documentaries seem to avoid the subject although towards the latter part of the war, documentaries such as *Hearts and Minds* reflect the devastating impact of Agent Orange on the food chain and on infant mortality in South Vietnam. It is only after the war that US documentaries such as, *Agent Orange: a Story of Dignity and Doubt* (USA, 1980) and *Ecocide: a Strategy of War* (USA, 1981) focused on the damage inflicted by US weaponry upon the Vietnamese eco-system.

While many Vietnam War documentaries offer ethnographic, anthropological and environmental aspects to their stories in as much as their subject-matter overlaps, with the exception of *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, the Vietnam War documentaries examined in this study do not offer ethnographic, anthropological or environmental arguments strong enough to constitute a generic hybrid.

World War II Combat Film – transferable characteristics

Despite the lack of historical overviews and theoretical analysis to date, there are other studies that offer some useful ideas pertinent to a generic examination of the Vietnam War documentary, including studies on the war film itself. One such study is Jeanine Basinger's *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, which contains an analysis of some forty fictional films.³³⁰ Through this research Basinger sets out to establish a definition of the genre and to examine how the basic definition evolves through variants.

³²⁹ Excerpts of *Vietnam: Land of Fire* and *Bacteriological Warfare in Vietnam* can be found on the Education Media Online web site as part of the ETV collection.

³³⁰ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of A Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Basinger breaks down the combat film into three categories: ground, air and sea, each having its own space, costumes and weapons. In these areas the soldiers come under attack not only by the enemy but also by nature. Each area offers specific dangers from their environment such as thirst (ground/sea), disease (ground), gravity (air) or suffocation (sea). She claims that ground combat films featuring infantry tend to be pure combat films, sea films that focus on the navy tend to feature domestic life on board their vessels, and air films tend to focus on the chain of command.

Basinger likens genre to a Lego set, explaining that by using the same pieces in a variety of combinations different films, such as the propaganda or anti-propaganda, pro-war or anti-war film, can be built. She creates a generic template for the combat film which includes: the hero, enemy deception, a group of mixed ethnic types, an objective, maintenance of equipment, talk of family or home, discussion of 'why we fight', journey or last stand, outnumbered heroes, death, sacrifice, burial or funeral, nature as enemy, a mascot, mail call, weapons and uniforms, music other than score (such as a harmonica being played), big combat finale, roll call of living or dead at the end. She adds, 'as audience familiarity increases, the basic definition grows referential and abstracted, because people know it and can fill in the blanks'.³³¹

Basinger constructs five stages of development of the World War II combat film which she refers to as 'waves'. The first wave, starting at the beginning of the war and ending in 1943 provides the basic definition. The second wave begins in 1944 and continues to just past the end of the war. During this second period the basic definition is accepted by filmmakers and audiences and so 'shorthands' can be used. The third wave starts

from the end of the 1940s to the 1950s and not only includes the Korean War combat film but also sees renewed interest in World War II films. The fourth wave begins around the early 1960s and introduces the big epics that recreate major events, thus ‘officially replacing “reality” with “filmed reality”’.³³² The final wave sees ‘a period of inversion’, for unlike the Korean War, there were no Vietnam Combat Films made during the war with the exception of *The Green Berets* (1968).³³³

Basinger’s study is interesting on three counts: first, in the way she traces the evolution of the World War II Combat film; second, in the way she is able to establish a generic template; and third, how it can cross genres, for example, into the Western. Her work begs the question whether a similar exercise can be fruitful in terms of the Vietnam War documentary. Moreover, has the fictional war film had any influence on the Vietnam War documentary?

The documentaries selected for scrutiny were made during the period 1965-1975. With the exception of *The Battle of Khe Sanh* and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh*, it is difficult to identify any of these films in terms of chronological timeframe although, on further scrutiny, there are some interesting shifts within both Western and Communist documentaries.

During the period 1965-1968, South Vietnamese and allied documentaries are self-assured, morally confident and convinced of victory. The documentaries produced from 1969-1973 are less self-assured, for example, films such as *Vietnam! Vietnam!* are seen

³³¹ Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, p.17.

³³² Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, p.122.

to be struggling with the complex political position in Vietnam and the anti-war lobby in the USA. As a result, South Vietnam and its allies, in particular, the US attempt new ways of convincing the public. In addition, independent filmmakers begin to challenge their governments' view of the war as being necessary or justified. The period 1973-1975 shows American independent filmmakers openly re-evaluating their position in Vietnam and identifying their country as Vietnam's enemy, not its defender or friend. Many historians refer to the 1968 Tet Offensive as the turning point of the war and when public opinion in America and the West begins to change. Contributing to this change was the national and international condemnation of the massacre of civilians by American troops in the South Vietnamese village of My Lai in 1968. The combination of these two events, plus the war-weary television audience, arguably had a part to play. Certainly there is a marked contrast in reception between de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* released in 1969 and Davis's *Hearts and Minds* released in 1974. Thus, Basinger's method of dividing the films into chronological groups proves useful in terms of analysing the Vietnam War documentary.

Similarly effective is Basinger's iconographic template tracing particular motifs and recurring themes. Vietnam War allied military documentaries can also be divided into air, sea and ground. Each area has specific visual conventions. In the case of the Vietnam War documentary, air and sea documentaries focus on technical hardware rather than personnel, however, army documentaries focus on troop manoeuvres through difficult terrain and weather conditions. Documentaries such as *Action in Vietnam*, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*, in particular, Schoendoerffer's *The Anderson Platoon* and Jones's *A Face of War*, contain many of the characteristics Basinger describes in her generic

³³³ Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, p.123.

template for the fictional combat film including nature as enemy, issuing of the mail, the harmonica music, religious service and roll call of the dead. In some cases the roll call in the Vietnam War documentary is also a roll call of the living, of those who survived. This specific characteristic is particularly striking as it does not appear in World War II documentaries and, therefore, can only be attributed to the influence of the World War II fictional combat film on the Vietnam War documentary.³³⁴ Unlike the World War II combat film, however, Vietnam War combat documentaries do not include discussions of ‘why we fight?’.

Other Visual Conventions - Iconography and Iconic Images

As with the World War II Combat film, the Vietnam War documentary contains its own visual conventions, including cinematography and editing as well as iconography. First, locations for Second World War documentaries, depending on which continent the battle front was fought (Europe, Africa or the Far East) are not necessarily obvious; in contrast, the Vietnam War documentary setting is easily identifiable. Most of the documentaries selected open with distinctive images of the Vietnamese landscape: rice paddy fields, buffalo grazing or working the rice fields, peasants with traditional conical straw hats, san pans on the river, US helicopters in the sky, soldiers traversing the fields or the jungles, and Vietcong soldiers dressed in black pyjama outfits.

³³⁴ In his essay, ‘Documenting the Vietnam War’, David E. James also makes the connection between the cinematic codes of World War II feature films and 1960s American documentary films but provides little by way of in-depth analysis. Although he does not refer specifically to Basinger’s work, he points to recurring motifs such as ‘the man on point listening to the jungle before waving his troop on, the chaplain’s pre-battle address giving the imminent self-sacrifice a divine sanction, the football game in the mud, the communal bath in a natural pool, the smiles and gratitude of the natives’, all of which are drawn from the World War II feature film.³³⁴ James’s central example is Jones’s, *A Face of War*, but he also refers to Schoendoerffer’s, *The Anderson Platoon*.

The iconography becomes more specific, however, when one examines films from both sides of the conflict. Iconography of films from South Vietnam and its allies fit the above description. There are plenty of idyllic rural scenes of peasants working the fields carrying on a seemingly primitive existence living in straw huts. Conversely there are the bustling city images of roads burgeoning with traffic, goods and traders as well as elegant young Asian girls in traditional costumes of white tunic and trousers (*ao dai*). The US military films in particular emphasize technology, in particular fire power, weapons such as artillery guns, navy ship guns, air force bombers, and access of helicopters into difficult terrain. Spectacular aerial shots from helicopters are frequently employed by Western military documentaries. Despite all this hardware being displayed and launched, there are few films that offer a full frontal engagement with the enemy. Documentaries such as *Action in Vietnam* tend to show skirmishes rather than battles in the traditional sense. Even the documentary *The Battle of Khe Sanh* is disappointing in terms of showing actual battle footage. Despite its claim of victory, the documentary shows no enemy casualties nor captured prisoners of war.

Moreover, images of allied forces' interaction with the South Vietnamese peasants are often uncomfortable to watch as the relationship is noticeably strained. As US troops enter villages, the inhabitants - mainly elderly men, women and young children - are markedly subdued. Unlike the World War II images of ecstatic locals greeting allied forces as they arrive to liberate their country, the Vietnamese are guarded in their responses, fearful that they may be singled out as Vietcong sympathizers. Even when their homes are being torched and they are rounded up for relocation, they offer no protest.

The iconography of the North Vietnamese documentaries also focuses on rural scenes but these include images of mass devastation, bomb-cratered fields, villages and towns levelled including schools and hospitals. Aerial views of US planes indiscriminately blanket bombing the countryside below are always included. City scenes also show life disrupted by air raids, the devastation of homes, and frightened people hurrying to hide in small bomb shelters along the pavements. These films focus on the most vulnerable, dead and injured children and the elderly. NLF documentaries are always concerned with covert operations and the ingenuity of making the most of very little. Here, the iconography inevitably involves camouflaged people traversing thick jungle terrain and concealed bases including hospitals built underground.

It would be remiss of this research not to address the issue of seminal images of the Vietnam War and whether or not the Vietnam War documentary created or contributed to the impact of such images during the war and post-war in historical memory.

Three images in particular have become symbolic of the Vietnam War both in print and film: the Buddhist monk being burnt alive, the shooting of a prisoner in the head and a distressed young girl running naked down a road fleeing from an air raid. These images, more than any others, have become icons of the war despite the fact few people know the names of these individuals nor the circumstances surrounding each particular event. These three images were taken in South Vietnam between the years 1963-1972. Film footage of these three events was captured by television cameramen rather than documentary cameramen but nevertheless was incorporated into Western documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds*.

The first iconic image is that of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who committed the act of self-immolation in protest against the repressive government of South Vietnam, and in particular the treatment of Buddhists. During the course of the war seven Buddhist monks protested in this manner. Although most acts of self-immolation were reported by the international press, it is not clear if all were photographed or indeed filmed.³³⁵ Many of these acts of protest were witnessed by the international press as the Buddhists themselves alerted the media to the events. Yet the most widely employed image both in print and film is the self-immolation by Thich Quang Duc which was photographed by Malcolm Browne of Associated Press on 11 June 1963.³³⁶ The image of Duc's burning body was reprinted into postcards and sold on the streets of Europe in the 1960s; even China distributed millions of copies of the photo throughout Asia. American journalist and special reporter for *The New York Times*, David Halberstam, was also present at the event and recounted how the monk remained silent during his ordeal. He also noted that fellow monks prevented the police from reaching Duc to extinguish the flames. Halberstam himself admitted he was too shocked to cry or take notes but later he recalled that other spectators wailed or prayed.

It is not clear who filmed the self-immolation of Duc and others and whether this image made television news programmes in the USA and Europe. According to Daniel Hallin, the image of Duc on fire did not even make page one of the *New York Times*. Yet a cursory glance at Halberstam's résumé reveals that he was regularly reporting on such

³³⁵ Despite the many histories of the war, it has proved extremely difficult to obtain details of the seven Buddhists who committed the act of self-immolation and most information has been gathered from press reports rather than histories. Quang Duc, aged seventy-one died in Saigon on 11 June 1963. Thanh Thue, a seventeen year old novice priest died in Saigon on 13 August 1963. Dieu Quang, a Buddhist nun in her early twenties, died in Saigon on 15 August 1963. Thich Tieu Dieu died, aged seventy-one, in Hué at the Tu Dam Pagoda on 16 August 1963.

³³⁶ Browne's photograph of Duc won the 1963 World Press Photo of the Year.

events and that these reports did make the front pages of *The New York Times*, even if the images did not.³³⁷ Indeed, the self-immolation of seventy-one year old monk Thich Tieu Dieu secured a two page spread in *Life* magazine on 23 September 1963 under the heading, ‘Vietnam: Historic Self- Sacrifice of a Buddhist Monk’.³³⁸

Six years later Emile de Antonio weaves the dramatic images of Buddhist self-immolation into his collage documentary *In the Year of the Pig*. De Antonio does not identify these monks, unlike the cast of politicians clearly labelled in his documentary. The first image appears very early on in the documentary, at the two minute mark, and lasts seven seconds. Despite its brevity and filmed in black and white, it is a compelling and truly awful image. The footage is not accompanied by live synchronized sound but by the whirring sound of helicopter blades artificially introduced by the director. Although reports indicate the monks made no sound, de Antonio’s choice of soundtrack to accompany this image is equally dramatic. It heightens the sense of fear and tension as well as acts as a political metaphor by stamping an American presence over the image. The image is taken at relatively close quarters and the monk’s burning body is outlined by the flames against the dark.

De Antonio only uses seven seconds of footage but it seems a great deal longer and is overwhelming, probably more so if viewed on the big screen. For many of those viewers able to sustain their gaze, there is once again the uncomfortable issue of spectacle as they witness with both horror and fascination a human being burnt alive.

³³⁷ Daniel Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: the media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), p.45. David Halberstam, ‘Another Buddhist Immolates Himself’, *The New York Times*, 14 August 1963, p.1, ‘Thousands of Buddhists Rally at Saigon Pagoda’, *The New York Times*, 19 August 1963, p.1, ‘Nun’s Act a Surprise’, *The New York Times*, 16 August 1963, p.3. Associated News Press, ‘2 More Buddhist Suicides by Burning in Vietnam Protest’, *The New York Times*, 16 August 1963, p.1.

Despite the absence of natural sound and smell of burning flesh, of all the images of death and torture, of mangled bodies and distressed people, this film image is arguably the most visceral as the monk's body twists and contorts as it burns. It is likely this first image is that of Thich Tien Dieu who committed suicide at the Tu Dam Pagoda in Huế in the early hours of the morning, hence the dark background. The second image of self-immolation appears much later in the documentary and is likely to have been that of Quang Duc as it takes place in a city street during daylight hours. This black and white footage is accompanied by some lengthy historical commentary about the political and religious background leading up to the self-immolation, and the impact this act made on headlines across the world. A combination of explanatory contextual commentary and the fact that this image is taken at a distance makes the image less dramatic and less visceral than the first, but again it should be taken into account that the image would have been writ large on the big screen.

The second iconic image is the summary execution by Colonel Nguyen Ngoc Loan of a suspected Vietcong sympathizer in the streets of Saigon during the Tet Offensive. This image was captured by Eddie Adams of the Associated Press and two NBC cameramen on 1 February 1968. While Colonel Loan became notorious for his actions, his victim (Nguyen Tan Dat), remained nameless in terms of the world's media, despite the fact he was a commander of a Vietcong sapper unit.

In his analysis of this image, film historian David Culbert argues that although most television coverage was 'visually uninteresting; television's impact was overrated', this

³³⁸ *Life*, Vol.35, No.6, 23 September 1963.

image was an exception to the rule.³³⁹ On the whole, Culbert accepts Hallin's research and conclusion that the 'living room war' theory was bogus. Like Hallin, Culbert argues that most coverage was tame in terms of visual violence and that media coverage tended to follow intellectual elite opinion. Nevertheless, Culbert makes a strong case for the Loan execution as having a 'profound effect' on the American people as well as European public opinion.³⁴⁰ He traces the progress of the film footage from the point of capture to its export out of Vietnam via Tokyo then by satellite transmission to NBC in New York and through to its dissemination both in the US and Europe. On 1 February the Adams still was shown on NBC's leading nightly news programme, the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*. The next morning the photograph appeared on the front pages of newspapers worldwide including the London dailies. Later that day the colour film footage was broadcast on all three American television networks: American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS) and National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and British television news programmes.

Culbert provides some interesting statistics to substantiate his argument. First, he points out that this image reached a vast audience, particularly in the USA where NBC's *Huntley-Brinkley Report* alone had twenty million viewers. Second, that there were seventy-eight million television sets among a total US population of two hundred and two million. Despite the figures suggesting only one third of the population had access to a television screen, Culbert makes the rather ambitious claim that by 1968, television

³³⁹ David Culbert, 'American Television Coverage of the Vietnam War: the Loan execution footage, the Tet Offensive (1968) and the contextualization of visual images' in Mark Connelly and David Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda* (London: IB Taurus, 2005), p.210.

³⁴⁰ Culbert, 'American Television Coverage of the Vietnam War: the Loan' in Connelly and Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda*, p.205.

was the principal source of news for the majority of Americans.³⁴¹ He also cites many responses to the image, including one from a presidential aide, all of whom expressed their shock, horror and disgust. Yet most of his witnesses are former academics or journalists, such as Pat Barnes of the *Washington Post*, who credits the image with turning the public against the war. Culbert surmises:

The Loan footage and photography legitimized the moral arguments of the anti-war movement. In this moment of crisis, a television news story and a still photograph became part of the foreign policy-making process for the average person [...] and for policy-makers, both military and civilian.³⁴²

Culbert rounds off his case study by stating that although the contextualization of images in terms of historical memory continues to be problematic, nevertheless these issues need to be addressed.

The third image is of a young girl fleeing naked from her burning village. Kim Phuc (Phan Thi Kim Phuc) was nine years old when she suffered severe burns as a result of a US air force strike on her village of Trang Bang. The image was taken on 8 June 1972 by Vietnamese photographer Huynh Cong Ut, more commonly known as Nick Ut, working for the Associated Press (AP). There were also numerous television teams from the BBC, ITN and NBC as well as other journalists and photojournalists from major papers and magazines, all of whom had been held up on the road by the South Vietnamese Army as the attack was taking place. However, it was Ut and NBC cameraman Le Phuc Dinh who captured the pictures of the injured Kim Phuc and her family. Le Phu Dinh also captured on film Ut and ITN correspondent Christopher Wain attending to Kim's injuries by pouring water from their canteens over her severely burnt

³⁴¹ Culbert, 'American Television Coverage of the Vietnam War' in Connelly and Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda*, p.205.

³⁴² Culbert, 'American Television Coverage of the Vietnam War' in Connelly and Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda*, p.211.

back. Back in the US there were issues with printing her picture. Prior to receiving this image, the Associated Press news agency refused to print pictures of nudes of any age or sex, especially if they were full frontal, but AP's New York photo editor Hal Buell overruled the ban on this occasion, recognizing it to be a poignant image of the conflict.

Peter Davis incorporates the colour film footage of both the Loan execution and Kim Phuc's escape from the air raid on her village in his 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds* but unlike de Antonio, makes no attempt to provide contextual details. For example, Davis does not explain that the Loan execution took place during the Tet Offensive in Saigon, during the chaos of a sustained Vietcong attack and that the victim was indeed a commander of a VC unit. Nor does Davis's documentary explain that the village from which Kim was fleeing was harbouring members of the Vietcong and that South Vietnamese troops had made a concerted effort to evacuate civilians before the US air strike. In the case of Kim, however, Davis does offer more visual information than the photographic still.

Although Davis utilizes only five seconds of the Loan execution footage, it is gruesomely explicit as Nguyen Tan Dat, with hands tied behind his back, falls like a rag doll to the ground with blood spurting from his head. The inclusion of this brief sequence takes the viewer by surprise and provokes horror. The fact that Davis does not give the audience time to anticipate the event, nor time to dwell on the execution is highly effective. It delivers a short, sharp, shock effect on the viewer. In one sense, the few seconds devoted to the killing of Dat is precisely the time it takes to extinguish a human being's life; in another sense this horrifying footage is almost lost among the

mass of gruesome images Davis has woven together in his documentary, just as Dat's death is lost among the million victims of the war.

Davis's incorporation of images of Kim Phuc and her family are more complex. The thirty-two second sequence is interspersed with an interview with former bomber pilot Randy Floyd, who clearly shows remorse at his part in the war in Vietnam. Interestingly, Davis chooses to use film footage that occurred after the seminal moment captured by Adam's photograph, where Kim, no longer in such distress, is received into the caring hands of the reporters who give her water to drink and pour the rest over her burnt back. She is no longer crying and frightened but is quiet and accepts their help. Unlike the photograph, the film footage reveals her injuries and the aid which she receives. The film footage also reveals the serious injuries sustained by her baby brother who is being carried by Kim's grandmother. The baby is burnt so badly in places, skin is hanging off his body and he is moaning with pain. Davis uses Floyd's articulate commentary in between and over these images as he talks about how he would feel if his children were napalmed.

De Antonio and Davis both recognized the value of these iconic images by incorporating them into their documentaries. By refusing to dwell or expand further on the images, they show an awareness that these images have already achieved a degree of visual currency and therefore minimal use is all that is required to tell the director's wider stories. It might have been advantageous to elaborate on the events or even interview witnesses, but this would have meant that other people's stories would have been excluded. For de Antonio and Davis, these images were useful in as much as they had become a visual short-hand for all that is wrong about the war.

While de Antonio and Davis seemed to relegate these key images to the background of their stories, there is one further factor to consider, that of cinematic scale and holding the audience's attention. Referring to Arlen's *The Living Room War*, Philip Knightley reminds us that combat footage and the roar of the battle was often lost on the small screen of the television. Knightley also adds that these short bursts of news were sandwiched between advertisements, soap-opera dramas and even late night war movies.³⁴³ De Antonio, Davis and other Western documentary filmmakers had the advantage of scale and the uninterrupted attention of their cinema audience. So despite their brevity, these images had the potential to make a indelible imprint on their audiences, which would reinforce, if not enhance, their seminal status.

One final iconic image to be considered is the image of Ho Chi Minh himself. Not all the documentaries examined here make use of film footage or poster images of the North Vietnamese leader, but those that do tend to incorporate images of Ho in his later years. Of the Western documentaries that incorporate images of Ho, de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* is the most elaborate both visually and historically. De Antonio employs experts to explain Ho's background and political education along with some early footage, as well as the seminal 'Uncle Ho' excerpt with him in advanced years running down the steps to greet a group of excited children. One French academician who had met Ho Chi Minh, Professor Paul Mus of Yale University, talks animatedly about the leader in an informed and complimentary manner, not a response expected from a

³⁴³ Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty of War: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker* (Quartet Books, rev.ed. 1982) referring to television coverage in Michael Arlen's *The Living Room War* (New York: Viking, 1966).

Westerner wary of Communism, nor indeed a Frenchman who had suffered the loss of a vital colony.

Only Alvarez's documentary eulogy *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* employs a variety of visual images depicting Ho throughout the years. What is unusual about this film is that despite having privileged access to Ho Chi Minh before his death, Alvarez avoids any attempt to film or interview the leader himself. Moreover, there is no written evidence on the part of Alvarez or his biographers that explains this failure to capture the same. More recently, however, new archival evidence has come to light suggesting that not all was what it seemed in the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and that there might have been some censorship or self-censorship issues that prevented any new material concerning Ho being produced by Alvarez or others.

In her article, 'Ho Chi Minh: creator or victim of Vietnamese Communism?', historian and biographer Sophie Quinn Judge describes the 'deep fissures' within the VCP; that Ho and his allies were often outnumbered and outvoted in the Vietnamese Politburo by their adversaries.³⁴⁴ Judge insists Ho did not have complete control of the party nor was he an autocrat. She explains that Ho only represented one branch of Vietnamese Communism, one that was influenced by the more sophisticated, intellectual collaboration with French and Soviet Communism. Ho faced competition from a more anarchic branch led by Troung Chinh, one that grew out of the traditions of peasant rebellion and was influenced by China. While Ho was considered the 'soul' of the

³⁴⁴ Sophie Quinn Judge, 'Ho Chi Minh: creator or victim of Vietnamese Communism?', *Twentieth Century Communism*, Issue 1, 2009, p.72.

revolution, Troung Chinh was considered its 'builder and commander'.³⁴⁵ According to Troung Chinh and his followers, Ho had committed two fatal mistakes: first, he compromised with the French by allowing them to return to Indochina after the Second World War, and second, at the 1954 Geneva conference, he agreed to divide Vietnam in two along the seventeenth parallel. After a major Worker's Party meeting in December 1963, Ho was forced into political retirement and was destined to play only a symbolic role. Judge argues that new archival evidence uncovered in the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) contradicts the portrayal of Ho as a powerful leader but rather pictures him as weak and too willing to compromise with the West. While Judge ably demonstrates that Ho remained an inspirational figure to the Communist Vietnamese people, he did not have any real political power during the Vietnam War and had to be cautious not to overstep his largely symbolic role.

With this sensitive political background, it is likely that any attempt to garner further attention or give voice to Ho in a press interview or film documentary during this time would probably be frowned on, even censored by the VCP. Again, it is important to reiterate the potential of the big screen to reinforce and enhance images. While poster images of Ho were more widespread than film in North Vietnam, the potential of film to disseminate his image abroad, for better or worse, as hero or villain, cannot be underestimated.

³⁴⁵ Judge, 'Ho Chi Minh: creator or victim of Vietnamese Communism?', *Twentieth Century Communism*, Issue 1, 2009, p.85.

GENRE - Part III:

The Vietnam War Documentary:

Politics, Propaganda, and Postcolonialism

The second set of generic questions addressed in this section are: what does the Vietnam War documentary owe to the previous war documentaries of World War I and II, in particular, the use of propaganda techniques? If the documentary form aspires to impartiality, objectivity and above all revelation of ‘the truth’, how does the Vietnam War documentary match these aspirations? Lastly, with the emergence of political debates concerning the Third World during this period, how do postcolonial theories applied to the Vietnam War documentary enhance our reading of these films?

Attempts were made to film battles during the Boer War (1899-1902) but the results were so poor that re-enactments were devised. Experiments in filming the Mexican revolution (1914-1916) proved more successful mainly because the Mexican leader, Francisco ‘Pancho’ Villa, promised to fight only during daylight hours to enable the American film company to capture the events. According to David Culbert, it was World War I that represented the ‘turning point’ for the non-fiction film. Culbert highlights *Battle of the Somme* (UK, 1916) as the most important documentary to come out of the war, not just because it conveyed battle conditions for the first time, but also because records indicate that it secured huge audiences throughout Britain.³⁴⁶ In *Forward Soviet!*, Graham Roberts points out that during the First World War the lack of documentary material from the Russian Front was due to a ban on filming during the first few months, and later due to poor planning and incompetence. Roberts also claims

³⁴⁶ David Culbert, Lawrence Suid, ‘Film, War and the Military’ in *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., Oxford University Press 1999. *Oxford Reference Online*.

there was some documentary film shot during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) but most of it was staged or reconstructed for French companies such as Pathé, who were interested in capturing events in Russia and showing them to Western audiences.³⁴⁷

Yet it was not until World War II that the skill of the documentary filmmaker really came to the fore and was received with enthusiasm by the masses. During the war, British directors such as Humphrey Jennings, Roy Boulting and Albert Cavalcanti produced works such as *Fires were Started* (d.Jennings, 1943), *Desert Victory* (d.Boulting, 1943) and *Three Songs of Resistance* (d.Cavalcanti, 1945) that were both critically acclaimed and popular with audiences. In the United States, established Hollywood directors such as Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler and John Huston were also commissioned to make documentaries on behalf of the government. In the service of their country, these popular directors turned their talents to produce documentary films such as the *Why We Fight* series (p.Capra, 1942-1945, USA), *The Battle of Midway* (d.Ford, 1944, USA), *Memphis Belle* (d.Wyler, 1944, USA) and *The Battle of San Pietro* (d.Houston, 1944, USA). Other notable World War II documentarians include the German, Leni Riefenstahl, whose documentary film *Triumph of Will* (d.Reifenstahl, Ger, 1934) glorified Hitler and the Nazi movement, and the Russian director Roman Karmen.

World War II documentaries can be divided into three groups: home front, battle front and military training film. The home front film such as *London Can Take It* (d.Jennings/Watt, UK, 1940) and *Listen to Britain* (d.Jennings/McAllister, UK, 1942)

depicted the war effort by civilians, the battle front documentary such as *Desert Victory* depicted key military events in various geographical locations at sea, on land and in the air. Both home front and battle front documentaries would have been given public exhibition but the military training film, such as John Ford's *Sex Hygiene* (1941), was specifically produced for forces exhibition. The seven films from the *Why We Fight* Series – *Prelude to War* (1942), *The Nazis Strike* (1942), *Divide and Conquer* (1943), *The Battle of Britain* (1943), *The Battle of Russia* (1943), *The Battle of China* (1944), *War Comes to America* (1945) - were also designed for military viewing only, although some were also shown at public theatres.

Documentary films made during World War II by Britain, USA and Germany continue to attract scholarly attention. Some film historians single out particular directors for scrutiny, drawing on private collections and national film archives; others focus on particular government departments such as the Crown Film Unit, using primary documents from official government archives. British film historians Anthony Aldgate, Jeffrey Richards and James Chapman employ a dual approach of utilizing private and public sources while examining a combination of fictional and documentary cinema. Although most discuss the films in terms of propaganda produced by governments, few offer any significant analysis as to how propaganda methods are put into practice within the documentary film.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet!: History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR* (London: IB Tauris, 1999), p.12.

³⁴⁸ Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards's *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) and James Chapman's *The British At War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London: IB Tauris, 1998). In *Film and Propaganda in American: A Documentary History, Volume IV, 1945 and after* (London: Greenwood Press, 1990), editors Lawrence H. Suid and David Culbert provide readers with a collection of fascinating primary documents relating to fictional and documentary films of the period 1945 to 1980. However, Culbert only provides the briefest of overviews and only a cursory nod to the problems of defining the term 'propaganda.'

Unlike World War II and Korea, the Vietnam War proved more challenging to governments in terms of controlling the message, particularly for the South Vietnamese and its allies.

North Vietnam controlled film production through the State Enterprise of Cinematography and Photography (formerly known as the photographic unit of the Propaganda Ministry). Not only did the North Vietnamese have central control of their film industry, but they could produce and distribute their message to North Vietnam and the NLF with relative ease. There is no documentary evidence, however, to suggest that the opposition were able to distribute their films in the North although there were other ways in which they attempted to distribute propaganda.³⁴⁹ The NLF, on the other hand, would have had access to cinemas and films in the South and presumably could be influenced by films made by the South Vietnamese regime and its allies.

³⁴⁹ In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Jowett and O'Donnell reveal that in 1965 the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) became the ultimate authority in delegating propaganda. The two main aims of JUSPAO were to undermine the support of the Communist regime in the North and to secure the support for a democratic South Vietnam. To achieve these aims, three specific audiences were targeted: first, the North Vietnamese; second, the Communist Vietcong soldiers and their supporters in the South; and third, the non-Communist South Vietnamese. The propaganda campaign aimed at the Vietcong was known as *Chieu Hoi*, literally meaning 'open arms' but also inferring a re-uniting with loved ones. Through leaflet drops and broadcasts from low flying planes, the Vietcong were encouraged to give up the fight and return to the fold. Those Vietcong who surrendered were offered protection, medication and new jobs. They were also used for propaganda work. The campaign aimed at the Vietcong appeared effective as 200,000 people surrendered during the years 1963-1972 but other campaigns were not so successful. US planes also dropped leaflets over North Vietnam appealing for peace, and dropped miniature radios tuned to specific frequencies so they could broadcast propaganda to the North. The South Vietnamese and Americans also tried to influence public opinion in the South by producing films, television shows, radio broadcasts, newspapers and pamphlets warning of the dangers of Communism. However, eighty per cent of the population were farmers and therefore had little access to cinemas, television or radios. Hence, propaganda teams were sent into the countryside to speak and perform in the villages. See Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, pp.203-205. Much of Jowett and O'Donnell's information has been extracted from R.W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: The US Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview, 1981).

South Vietnam controlled documentary film production through its Motion Picture Directorate of the Ministry of Information or the Vietnamese Army Psychological Warfare Directorate and Open Arms unit but also had assistance from the United States Information Service (USIS). The US government not only used the USIS but also the United States Information Agency (USIA) to promote their ideas and policies abroad, and military films were produced by the Defense Department Army, Navy and Air force directorates. The US and South Vietnamese governments had the most difficulty in controlling propaganda ideas seeping into their respective countries. With North Vietnamese and NLF films being screened in secret locations, the South Vietnamese government could not gauge the extent of exhibition and dissemination of Communist ideas. In the case of the USA, the threat was more overt as the official government message came under fire from respected American independent filmmakers who were providing an alternative reading of the war and from Communist-produced films being exhibited on their soil.

A more detailed analysis of the use of propaganda techniques in these war documentaries would be useful and illuminating at this stage.

Propaganda in the Vietnam War Documentary

Propaganda: the systematic propagation of information or ideas by an interested party, especially in a tendentious way or to encourage or instil a particular attitude or response. - *The Oxford English Dictionary* ³⁵⁰

Filmmaker and producer John Grierson greatly admired the Germans' use of propaganda during World War II and felt there were valuable lessons to be learnt. He accepted that it was a 'cold-blooded' weapon that could either be used for the 'supreme

good' or as a 'black art'.³⁵¹ Writing towards the end of the Second World War, Grierson is unequivocal about the necessity of propaganda in times of war.

If propaganda shows a way by which we can strengthen our conviction and affirm it more aggressively against the threat of an inferior concept of life, we must use it to the full, or we shall be robbing the forces of democracy of a vital weapon for its own security and survival. This is not just an idea: it is a practical issue of modern scientific warfare.³⁵²

More pertinent to this research is a British Second World War government document uncovered by film historian Philip Taylor.³⁵³ Issued by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in June 1939 and entitled 'International Propaganda and Broadcasting Enquiry', the document contains eighty-six basic rules considered to be of value when constructing propagandist materials.³⁵⁴ Among these eighty-six rules are some fundamental pointers and some more sophisticated strategies. For example, in the general ideas section, the memo opens with the following:

1. In a stratified society persuade the dominant group.
2. To convince the educated minority, propaganda must be subtle and indirect...
3. As regards the masses of people, appeal to their instincts and not to their reason...

6. Evils against which propaganda is directed should, if possible, be personified...

28. A particularly effective means of propaganda is the idealisation of national heroes.

30. A useful device is to get a neutral to state our national case.

33. Propaganda is a machine for generating and maintaining enthusiasm. Propaganda should therefore:-
 - (i) never be dull
 - (ii) never be offensive to its audience

³⁵⁰ *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary Vol III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

³⁵¹ John Grierson on 'The Nature of Propaganda', *Documentary News Letter*, 1942, reprinted in Forsyth Hardy(ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p.104.

³⁵² John Grierson on 'The Nature of Propaganda', *Documentary News Letter*, 1942, reprinted in Forsyth Hardy(ed), *Grierson on Documentary*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p.104.

³⁵³ Philip M Taylor, 'Techniques of Persuasion: basic ground rules of British propaganda during the Second World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.1, No.1, 1981, pp.57-65.

³⁵⁴ Document reference: PRO INF1/724. Memorandum by the International Broadcasting and Propaganda Enquiry, 21 June 1939.

34. The highest art in propaganda is to maintain the appearance of impartiality while securing the wholehearted adoption of the view propagated.³⁵⁵

Non-fiction films of World War II, Korea and Vietnam employ many of the propaganda techniques recommended in this document. Nevertheless, there are key areas where some Vietnam War documentaries diverge significantly from the World War II propagandist template.

The first propaganda technique employed was the demonization of the enemy. Post World War II, democracies on both sides of the hemisphere feared the spread of Communism during the Cold War period, which included a fear of both Russia and China. Certainly, US government and allied documentaries during the Vietnam War exploit this threat that Communists of any sort were to be feared and distrusted. For South Vietnamese and allied documentaries, the North Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, is the 'hate' figure and is attributed with all the characteristics of a deceitful and wily Oriental. They even attempt to pour scorn on the familial term 'Uncle Ho' implying he has unscrupulous intentions by playing on such a role.

Conversely, documentaries produced by the North and their Communist allies, such as Cuba and East Germany, single out the United States as an 'imperial' force that has designs to colonize, dominate and exploit the Vietnamese people. It is significant that none of the South Vietnamese leaders such as Diem, Thieu or Ky are selected as targets for attack by the documentaries but rather President Johnson is the sole figure for their abuse. In *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th*, Cuban director Santiago Alvarez uses a distasteful and derogatory image of a cow giving birth as a metaphor for Johnson's entrance into the

³⁵⁵ Document reference: PRO INF1/724. Memorandum by the International Broadcasting and Propaganda

world. Despite these attacks on US leaders, many NLF films such as *Struggle for Life* appeal directly to the American people for assistance. Conversely, the East German film *Pilots in Pyjamas* decries American imperialism while indicting the American POWs as war criminals. These men are specifically identified by name and rank and there is no doubt that the filmmakers make each of them personally accountable for war crimes.

With the intervention of US troops in the conflict, the North was able to capitalize on the argument that once again their country was being invaded by foreigners and thus appeal to the nationalism of the people. The propaganda message of ‘Save Vietnam from American Imperialism’ was powerful and effective. Terms such as ‘invaders’ and ‘imperialists’ appear repeatedly in North Vietnamese and NLF films such as *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts* and *Foreign Correspondents Visit the National Liberation Front*. Other pro-Communist films also adopt powerful slogans such as Alvarez’s, ‘El odio en energia (we transform our hatred into energy)’ in *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th*. The use of repetitive language and stirring slogans are all essential devices of propaganda.

Not only was the North able to depict the US as an evil capitalist superpower attempting to suppress a revolutionary struggle, but also that the Vietnamese people were heroic underdogs outwitting and overcoming this powerful aggressor. The focus of North Vietnamese films on everyday life was crucial, and the role of each person within the war was deemed significant. Films such as *A Day of Plane Hunting* evoke the drudgery of life in the villages but also the necessity and rewards of maintaining one’s post.

Again, the film uses repetition in the phrase ‘every day, every day’ to emphasize these elements.

The second technique employed was the idealization of national heroes. For Communist films, only one figure was necessary to make that kind of identification and that was their leader Ho Chi Minh. He was not only regarded fondly by the North Vietnamese who referred to him as ‘Uncle Ho’ (*Bac Ho*) but he was also admired as a poet-warrior. While there were other exceptional military leaders, such as General Giap and General Nguyen-Thi-Dinh, who could also represent the heroic, poet-warrior, none of these figures possessed the iconic status that Ho Chi Minh held both nationally and internationally.³⁵⁶

In contrast, the South Vietnamese and allied filmmakers had difficulty in identifying specific heroic figures as none of the South Vietnamese leaders seem to fit the template. Instead, American and Australian documentary films such as *A Nation Builds Under Fire* and *The Unlucky Country* regularly referred to the ‘heroic’ peoples of South Vietnam continually under threat from Communist ‘aggressors’. These films also used positive language and images such as ‘nationhood’ and ‘nation building’, all designed to appeal to audiences back home. Moreover US military documentaries relied on vicarious associations with Hollywood stars, such as John Wayne, Raymond Burr and Glenn Ford, to bring about audience identification with heroic figures.

³⁵⁶ Ho Chi Minh and The Communist Party of Vietnam believed in the concept of ‘armed propaganda’, meaning that soldiers would carry ideas and well as guns, and their use of this concept was extremely successful in both their wars against the French and the Americans. Vo Nguyen Giap, former history teacher turned Army General and hero of D ien B ien Ph u, saw political education as central to the success

The third propaganda technique employed by these documentaries was to maintain a semblance of impartiality. Many Western Vietnam War documentaries present evidence in the form of a balanced debate containing pro-war and anti-war arguments. Yet the balanced debate format is turned on its head by some government-sponsored as well as non-government-sponsored and independent filmmakers such as Ford, Davis, and de Antonio, as they structure the arguments to markedly favour one side or the other. Thus films such as *Why Vietnam?*, *Vietnam! Vietnam!*, *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds*, only offer a semblance of impartiality. Indeed, independent filmmaker Emile de Antonio seemed to revel in the controversy of his partisan role. In an interview de Antonio remarked:

There is out-and-out propaganda in the film, obviously, although sometimes I don't know what the distinction between propaganda and passion, and propaganda and politics.³⁵⁷

Kellner and Streible suggest that Antonio identified with the soldiers in Vietnam, having himself served first in the Marine Corps and then in the Army Air Force during World War II.³⁵⁸ They argue that the opening and closing image of the soldier from the 163rd Pennsylvania infantry is a personal symbol as de Antonio fought as a Pennsylvanian soldier. Kellner and Streible believe that de Antonio took care to separate his critique of American foreign policy from the ordinary soldier who carried out orders. They insist the film does not 'demonize the troops, saving the commanders and power elite for that (dis)honor' but rather it shows them 'as victims of an imperialist war'.³⁵⁹ Certainly, the

of the army. Indeed, the motto of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) was 'propaganda is more important than fighting'.

³⁵⁷ Gary Crowds and Dan Georgakas, "'History is the Theme of All My Films': An Interview with Emile de Antonio", in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner (eds), *New Challenges For Documentary*, 2nd ed., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp.96-97.

³⁵⁸ Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible, 'Emile de Antonio: Documenting the Life of a Radical Filmmaker', in Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible, eds., *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, Visible Evidence Series, Vol 8, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp.36-37.

³⁵⁹ Kellner and Streible, 'Emile de Antonio: Documenting the Life of a Radical Filmmaker', in Kellner and Streible (eds), *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, p.38.

final images of wounded US soldiers being evacuated from the war zone are both emotive and politically powerful.

Moreover, Kellner and Streible point to the political significance of the music selected by de Antonio to accompany the images. For example, the re-enactment images of the French defeat at D ien B ien Ph u is accompanied by the sound of ‘La Marseillaise’ played on native Vietnamese instruments. Another example is the bamboo flute rendition of ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’ which again underscores similarities of the Vietnamese struggle for independence and likens it to that of the French and American. At best, the selections are intentionally ironic but at worst, they can be read as scathing of French and American policy in Vietnam. Yet the most obvious example of de Antonio’s desire for American audiences to see the Vietnamese point of view is by his choice of title, ‘In the Year of the Pig’. Again, Kellner and Streible argue that de Antonio’s choice of title immediately draws attention to an Asian perspective of time and history.

Commandeering a quote from one of the film’s interviewees, ‘we aren’t on the wrong side, we are the wrong side’, film historian David Grosser concentrates on the negative image of America portrayed by the film *Hearts and Minds*.³⁶⁰ Grosser argues that film director, Peter Davis, asks the question, ‘what did we do to Vietnam?’ as opposed to ‘what did the Vietnamese do to us?’. He asserts that the film is not just a powerful indictment of US government policy towards Vietnam but also suggests there is something wrong with American culture:

³⁶⁰ David Grosser, ‘“We Aren’t on the Wrong Side, We Are the Wrong Side”: Peter Davis Targets (American) Hearts and Minds’, in Dittmar and Michaud, eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, pp.269-282.

In assessing responsibility for the war, Davis suggests that there is something malignant, racist, and warlike in American culture that infected the population as a whole and ultimately “caused” the war.³⁶¹

According to Grosser, Davis could not have made his documentary if the anti-war movement had not gained substantial ground in the USA. The film would not have received studio backing or distribution if the public had not been more receptive to the anti-war stance. Indeed by now, the majority of Americans were against the war not because they believe intervention was wrong but because the war was proving too costly in terms of American lives and money. Grosser also argues that Davis turns the canons of independent, objective and balanced journalism inside out with his film for not only does the film divide the interviewees unequivocally into villains or heroes, pro-war or anti-war, hawks and doves, but directs audience sympathies towards the Vietnamese and American victims of the war.

While government propaganda films work along the lines ‘to promote’ the necessity of the war and ‘to persuade’ the country that their hard work and sacrifice is needed, they also operate to reassure the country that their valiant efforts are being rewarded and that victory is at hand, even if it is not. Moreover, the drive to reassure can result not only in the propagation of lies but also may deliberately omit or prevent negative information being divulged that may be used to criticize the ruling party or lower public morale. For example, the deliberate omission of information on casualties and war crimes on the part of South Vietnamese and allied US forces in the case of the Vietnam War documentary can also be regarded as another effective tool of government propaganda. Similarly, North Vietnamese, NLF, US and South Vietnamese films all exaggerate

³⁶¹ Grosser, “‘We Aren’t on the Wrong Side, We Are the Wrong Side’”, in Dittmar and Michaud (eds), *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, p.278.

victories and omit reference to their own military losses. Although there are no exact figures of the overall casualties, estimates for North Vietnamese and NLF troop casualties are around half a million, a quarter of million of South Vietnamese troops and fifty-five thousand US personnel, with Vietnamese civilian deaths considered to be in the millions.

US and South Vietnamese films blame civilian losses on the NLF and the Communist supply chain infiltrating from the North. The devastation and displacement created by US and South Vietnamese 'search and destroy' and strategic hamlet programmes in their efforts to rid the South of Communist forces are similarly laid at the door of the North and the NLF forces. Military films also avoid depicting the consequences of chemical warfare on South Vietnamese people and land. North Vietnamese films such as *US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam*, *Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts*, which include statistics of damage inflicted by US bombing missions, are graphically illustrated by still and moving images of the devastation to buildings and civilian casualties, particularly children. On the other hand, films such as *A Day of Plane Hunting* exaggerate the North Vietnamese success in bringing down US planes.

Another topic blanked out by the allied Vietnam War documentarians was the large numbers of drugs available to the US forces, in particular heroin, and the high incidences of drug addiction among the returning troops. Again, the written testimonies of journalists such as Michael Herr and oral testimonies compiled by authors such as Mark Baker are full of such accounts but no documentary made during the war from any quarter raises this issue. In his authoritative work, *The Politics of Heroin in South East Asia*, Alfred McCoy and his colleagues trace the history of the drug's development and

its use in South East Asia. Quoting an article in *The New York Times* published 16 May 1971, McCoy reveals that army medical doctors believed that 10-15% of GIs in Vietnam were heroin users.³⁶²

There are many written accounts of atrocities being committed by both sides, particularly methods of torture used on both military and civilian subjects under interrogation. Accounts by numerous military personnel indicate that the use of torture was widespread during the Vietnam War, despite contravening the Geneva Convention. Films such as Heynowski & Scheumann's *Pilots in Pyjamas*, Alvarez's *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* and de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* show images of tortured victims, in these cases, reportedly committed by US/South Vietnamese forces. Indeed, de Antonio later revealed he possessed more powerful images of torture but refrained from using them.

Despite the revelation of the atrocities committed by US forces in the South Vietnamese village of My Lai, official US and South Vietnamese documentaries fail to address the perpetration of war crimes committed by their forces. Yet, with the exception of the NLF's *Struggle for Life* which refers only briefly to massacres in My Lai and other villages, North Vietnamese and NLF films generally fail to expose or capitalize on specific events such as My Lai or tap into worldwide condemnation of the brutal behaviour of US troops towards innocent civilians. Towards the end of the war the atrocities were discussed more openly in two major Vietnam veteran documentaries, *Interviews with My Lai Veterans* (USA, 1972) and *Winter Soldier* (USA, 1972), however, both were made several years after the event and filmed in the USA.

³⁶² Alfred W McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

In addition, as indicated in many of the personal testimonies, the practice of collecting trophies from dead victims by US soldiers was also commonplace. These usually took the form of collecting victims' ears and stringing them into a necklace; even the taking of scalps has been documented. These practices, known as 'souvenir' taking, were documented by the soldiers themselves who usually photographed the event. Rape was also a common form of torture used by US soldiers against Vietnamese women and children, and many Western women were also targeted by the troops, including American military female personnel and Red Cross nurses. It was also common for these rape victims to be subsequently murdered.

Yet these appalling crimes were largely ignored by the allied Vietnam War documentarians, including the independents, and even by the pro-Communists who could have used evidence of these crimes for propagandist purposes.

Third World Cinema and Third Cinema

The Vietnam War coincided with national movements in several continents, not just in Asia, that influenced political, economic and cultural production. Of particular relevance to this study are the debates concerning the Third World Cinema, Third Cinema and decolonization.

'Third Cinema' was a term first coined in the 1960s by a group of Latin American filmmakers and theorists to describe an indigenous mode of filmmaking that was politically, culturally and aesthetically different from Western cinematic traditions, in particular, Hollywood classical narrative and European art cinemas. The term has

become synonymous with radical filmmaking in Latin America, Africa and parts of the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s but has also become erroneously conflated with the term ‘Third World Cinema’.

The confusion arises from the origin and application of the term ‘Third World’ which came into usage in the 1950s to describe ‘non-aligned’ nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was both an economic as well as a political model. The First World referred to capitalist democracies in Western Europe, North America (Canada, USA) and the Pacific (Japan, Australia, New Zealand). These constituted developed market economies. The Second World referred to planned economies of the Communist bloc (USSR, Eastern Europe, China but also the People’s Republic of Korea, Vietnam and Cuba). Third World referred to developing countries with a market economy (Latin America and the remainder of Asia and Africa) many of which had been former European colonies.³⁶³ However, not all Third World countries were newly independent colonies. Furthermore, many countries defined as Third World had a well-established film industry, such as Egypt, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, and only some filmmakers from Third World countries went on to produce radical, revolutionary films recognized as Third Cinema.³⁶⁴

Vietnamese Cinema, in particular Vietnamese War documentaries, provide the Third World and Third Cinema historian with a highly complex case. According to economic and political definitions, North Vietnam belongs to the Second World group of planned

³⁶³ Roughly outlined, the Spanish and Portuguese were responsible for colonizing Latin America, while Europeans had colonies in Africa, Asia and the Far East.

³⁶⁴ See James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2003), pp.305-307. Chapman points out that while early cinematograph arrived in most Third World countries around the

economies as the North was considerably more industrialized than the South. South Vietnam, however, could be designated to the developing Third World category with its non-industrialized farming practices and poor infrastructure. The first cinemas were set up in urban areas of Vietnam during the First World War. There was a two-tier system in the South: the educated elite who spoke French and the masses who generally spoke Vietnamese and or Chinese. This was also reflected in cinema exhibition with French-owned cinemas showing French films (and later American) and Chinese theatres showing films from Hong Kong and China.

Roy Armes claims that during the struggle against the French, the Vietnamese produced a 'guerrilla cinema' and that an authentic national cinema was created with the establishment by Ho Chi Minh of the National Society for Film and Photography in 1953.³⁶⁵ While this may be a plausible argument for the period known as the Indo-Chinese War, it is a contentious argument for the period currently under review as a closer scrutiny of Third Cinema reveals.

The Third Cinema film movement was developed by a group of intellectuals calling for a 'tricontinental' cultural revolution in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Three key theoretical publications underpinned this movement: Glauber Rocha's 'The Aesthetics of Hunger'(1965) later reprinted as 'The Aesthetics of Violence'(1965), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's 'Towards a Third Cinema'(1969) and Julio García Espinosa's 'For an Imperfect Cinema'(1969). Due to their radical content these publications soon acquired manifesto status as they encouraged anti-colonialism both

1890s with Lumière, the first indigenous feature films were made in Brazil and Cuba in 1913, in Argentina in 1915, Mexico and Chile in 1916 and Egypt in 1927. Ibid p.307.

politically and culturally which, in film terms, included the rejection of the dominant model of Hollywood Cinema.

The movement was heavily influenced by recent historic events, in particular the Vietnamese victory over the French, the Cuban revolution, and the Algerian victory and independence from the French. Revolutionary leaders such as Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara became iconic figures to the movement.³⁶⁶ The most important figure, however, was the Martiniquan psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). Fanon's publication *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), provided the Third World movement not only with a critical analysis of colonialism as a system of oppression but also with an anti-imperialist militant manual.³⁶⁷ Fanon argues that under revolutionary conditions a decolonizing national culture, with the assistance of the decolonizing intellectual, undergoes three stages: first, the assimilation of the colonizing culture; second, the rejection of assimilation and re-affirmation of an authentic national identity; and third, the revolutionary and nationalist phase. Third Cinema intellectuals, in particular Solanas and Getino, were inspired by Fanon's model of the role of the intellectual in a political and cultural revolution.

The Third Cinema manifestos were translated and published in American and European film journals such as *Jump Cut*, *Cineaste* and *Framework*. The most widely distributed

³⁶⁵ Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West*, pp.146-147.

³⁶⁶ See Robert Stam's chapter 'Beyond Third Cinema: The aesthetics of hybridity', in Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (eds), *Rethinking Third Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.31-48.

³⁶⁷ Born in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon enlisted in the French army and was posted to Algeria. His experience of racism within the French army and violence against the Algerians influenced his later writing. After leaving the army he studied medicine and psychiatry as well as literature, drama and philosophy. He published his first book on colonial oppression, *Black Skin, White Masks*, in 1952. He did not live to see the international impact of his third work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*) as this was published after his death in 1961.

manifesto was Solanas and Getino's 'Towards a Third Cinema'. First published by the influential Cuban magazine *Tricontinental* in October 1969 in four languages (Spanish, French, English and Italian), it is the only Third Cinema manifesto to have found its way into Western anthologies of key film texts.³⁶⁸

In their article, Solanas and Getino highlight Third World liberation movements with specific mention given to 'the Cuban Revolution' and 'the Vietnamese struggle'. They also refer to key political texts written by revolutionary leaders such as Mao Zedong and Che Guevara. Their extensive article works through the concept, production, exhibition and reception of Third Cinema.

Third cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that *recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time*, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the *decolonization of culture*.³⁶⁹

Not surprisingly, much of the argument is devoted to the denunciation of US cultural and economic imperialism, in particular the detrimental influence of Hollywood, in terms of both production and exhibition, as it epitomizes the Western capitalist system. While Solanas and Getino make clear that revolutionary cinema needs to be well organized, they also stress that it needs to be open to experimentation, take risks and learn from mistakes. Moreover, the repeated use of metaphors relating to warfare and weaponry is not simply a romantic description but rather it emphasizes their view that this is both a political and cultural war; a fight to reclaim national identity.

In this long war, with the camera as our rifle, we do in fact move into a guerrilla activity.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ For a more detailed history of the publication and translation of Solanas and Getino's manifesto in journals and theoretical anthologies, see Jonathan Buchsbaum's article, 'A Closer Look at Third Cinema', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.21. No.2, 2001.

³⁶⁹ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Bill Nichols (ed) *Movies and Methods*, Vol.I. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p.47.

³⁷⁰ Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, p.57.

The camera is the inexhaustible *expropriator of image-weapons*; the projector, *a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second*.³⁷¹

Solanas and Getino also describe film as a ‘detonator’, believing it will ignite not simply debate among the people but real cultural and political change.

They also seem to advocate non-fiction films as opposed to fictional cinema, praising the work of documentarists such as Santiago Alvarez, Chris Marker, Joris Ivens and the left-wing film collective, Newsreel.

Pamphlet films, didactic films, report films, essay films, witness bearing films – any militant form of expression is valid, and it would be absurd to lay down a set of aesthetic norms.³⁷²

As practising filmmakers, Solanas and Getino were obviously familiar with the tools of their craft but also showed an awareness of recent technological advances such as portable equipment and synchronized sound. They emphasize how new technologies not only contributed to the advent of revolutionary film but also helped to democratize the practice:

The revolutionary filmmaker acts with a radically new vision of the role of the producer, teamwork, tools, details [...] Each member of the group should be familiar, at least in a general way, with the equipment being used: he must be prepared to replace another in any of the phases of production.³⁷³

Moreover, Solanas and Getino discovered at screenings of their own documentaries that the audience no longer inhabited the role of passive spectators but rather as participants, essential to the ultimate success of a revolutionary cinema.

... every comrade who attended such showings did so with full awareness that he was infringing the System’s laws and exposing his personal security to eventual repression. This person was no longer a spectator; on the contrary, from the moment he decided to attend the showing, from the moment he lined himself up

³⁷¹ Solanas and Getino, ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ in Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, p.58.

³⁷² Solanas and Getino, ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ in Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, pp.55-56.

³⁷³ Solanas and Getino, ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ in Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, p.58.

on this side by taking risks and contributing his living experience to the meeting, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than those who appeared in the films.³⁷⁴

Although the seeds of their ideas are outlined in their original manifesto, Solanas and Getino were far more erudite in terms of separating Third Cinema from its predecessors in later publications, for example:

First cinema expresses imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas. Big monopoly capital finances big spectacle cinema as well as authorial and informational cinema, second cinema is all that expresses the aspirations of the middle stratum, the petite bourgeoisie [...] Second cinema is often nihilistic, mystificatory [...] cut off from reality. In the second cinema, just as the first cinema, you can find documentaries, political and militant cinema. So called author cinema often belongs in the second cinema [...] For us, Third Cinema is the expression of a new culture and of social changes [...] reality and history. It is also linked with national culture [...] Third Cinema is an open category, unfinished, incomplete. It is a research category. It is a democratic, national, popular cinema. Third Cinema is also an experimental cinema.³⁷⁵

Vietnam War documentaries from the North during this period are very much in the traditional vein of Western-style government propaganda films – they persuade, promote and reassure the people of the validity of their fight. They repeatedly express the continued need to work together to defeat the enemy along with the much-promised victory at the end. While the rhetoric may be anti-imperialist, there is nothing revolutionary or experimental about these documentaries. Indeed, there is no evidence that documentaries made either by the NLF or the Communist North were exhibited as part of political meetings or discussion groups. Moreover, although many of these Vietnamese films were joint efforts, with film crews multi-tasking as Solanas and Getino recommend, it is also apparent that wherever possible individual credits were given to specific production personnel.

³⁷⁴ Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, p.61.

Film historian Paul Willemen argues that while First Cinema was for the bourgeoisie and Second Cinema was for the petit bourgeoisie, Third Cinema was a socialist cinema for the people by the people, not professional filmmakers but industrial workers, peasants, unemployed and students.³⁷⁶ Yet, North Vietnamese and NLF filmmakers were dedicated, trained filmmakers assigned specific projects, not peasants who took up equipment and filmed spontaneously. Similarly, most Third Cinema filmmakers like Solanas and Getino were intellectuals, educated and highly literate as exemplified by their manifestos. Unfortunately, this research has not been able to uncover the specific backgrounds of the Vietnamese filmmakers but other filmmakers from Third World countries such as the Cuban Santiago Alvarez, were also educated intellectuals, albeit from modest backgrounds.

Third Cinema film historian Teshome Gabriel argues that it is not so much where it is made or who makes Third Cinema but the ideology it espouses, standing in opposition to imperialism and class oppression. In other words, Third Cinema is not defined by its geographical origins but by its socialist politics.³⁷⁷ Yet, this would then include First World left-wing groups such as US group Newsreel, even though the original Newsreel members were educated intellectuals.

Another Third Cinema historian, Mike Wayne, describes the movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as ‘a cinema of social and cultural emancipation’, one that

³⁷⁵ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, ‘L’Influence du “Troisième Cinéma” dans le monde’, published in *CinémAction*, XX, and (July-September, 1979).

³⁷⁶ See Paul Willemen’s chapter ‘The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections’, in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI, 1989), pp.1-29.

³⁷⁷ See Teshome H. Gabriel’s chapter, ‘Third Cinemas Guardian of Popular Memory: Toward a Third Aesthetic’, in Pines and Willemen (eds) *Questions of Third Cinema*, pp.30-52. Also Teshome H. Gabriel,

represented 'the most advanced and sophisticated body of political films' to date.³⁷⁸ His study picks up on Solanas and Getino's use of the term 'guerrilla cinema'. Wayne argues that there are two distinct meanings: first, in terms of 'representation' of guerrilla warfare and second, in terms of 'conditions of production'.³⁷⁹ In other words, where filmmakers are working in politically difficult and dangerous conditions such that their work may be seized or censored or the filmmakers themselves may be arrested, imprisoned, tortured or killed.

These two interpretations are relevant with regard to documentaries produced by the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam. First, they were indeed depicting a guerrilla war although they were very careful to focus on images of their hidden jungle life rather than images of violence. Second, filmmakers produced and exhibited their documentaries in secret within South Vietnam away from traditional cinemas and the scrutiny of government authorities. Yet again, these films can hardly be classified as experimental or radical in the sense that Solanas and Getino were advocating. They were not conceived as 'detonators' for a cultural revolution. Indeed, these films are very much in keeping with traditional Western-style war documentaries of narrative storytelling and propaganda. Although many of the documentaries made by the NLF highlight their cultural traditions and identity, they also revel in their success at appropriating materials from the forces of imperialism rather than rejecting them. Once again, it is important to note that some NLF documentaries denounce the imperialist government of the USA while calling to the American people for material support with which to continue their struggle.

Third Cinema in the Third World: the Aesthetics of Liberation (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

Of all the Vietnam War documentaries surveyed in this study, only Santiago Alvarez's documentaries *Hanoi, Tuesday 13th* and *79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh* ably fit the Third Cinema revolutionary template both ideologically and artistically. They provide a rallying cry for resistance, revolution and solidarity within an innovative, experimental format not associated with traditional forms of Western documentary production although later categories, such as Nichols's poetic mode, were devised to accommodate these new forms.

Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory

The politics of representation, in particular of race and national identity, are a central feature of the war documentary and at the core of the Vietnam War documentary. As ethnographer Fatimah Toby Rony points out, 'race' is a nineteenth-century Western invention, one that is colour coded (white, red, black, yellow).³⁸⁰ The typological skin colour assigned to the Eastern Oriental is yellow along with particular attributes such as wiliness, duplicity, and inscrutability. Despite any scientific proof being offered, these negative attributes have been perpetuated and can be found inscribed in Oriental characters in popular nineteenth and twentieth century fictional Western literature.

In his study *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940* William Wu examines the popular literary characters of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan. These fictional Chinese American characters incorporate a number of stereotypical Eastern features. Fu Manchu, the evil, inscrutable, power-hungry genius created by

³⁷⁸ Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), p.1.

³⁷⁹ Wayne, *Political Film*, p.57.

writer Sax Rohmer, was to become the archetypal Asian villain. Moreover, Wu argues that the threat of the 'Yellow Peril' incorporated a number of fears - the threat of military invasion, of competition to the white labour force, of moral degeneracy of Asian people, and miscegenation.³⁸¹

Not surprisingly, many of the US military documentaries play to these negative stereotypes of the Eastern person as being wily and devious. They infer that the North Vietnamese, and particularly the NLF, are insidious in as much as they cannot be located, nor is it possible to distinguish between civilian and soldier, friend or foe. The ability of the Vietnamese to sustain huge casualties and endure great hardship without capitulation reinforced notions of the Easterner as something to be feared or needing to be controlled. However, the US government and its allies also needed to garner support for the South Vietnamese, and subsequently many of these documentaries play against the stereotype by insisting that the South Vietnamese fighting to maintain democracy are honourable, noble, courageous and heroic. Documentaries such as *Why Vietnam?*, *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, *Vietnam! Vietnam!* and the Australian government documentary *The Unlucky Country* all stress these positive qualities of the South Vietnamese people.

Postcolonial theories regarding Orientalism, racial stereotypes and power relations between the colonizer and colonized offer vital tools with which to interrogate these documentaries. Two scholars in particular have led the field in postcolonial discourse - Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha and although their studies focus on the Middle East,

³⁸⁰ Rony, *The Third Eye*, p.10.

India and Africa and are based on Western literary examples, nevertheless, their theories are pertinent to this research.

In his study Edward Said argues that not only is Orientalism an academic tradition but also a Western style for dominating and having authority over the Orient.³⁸² During the course of his study, Said examines scholarly works, literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, and religious and philological studies and he asserts that anyone who writes about the Orient is an Orientalist and what they do is Orientalism. Said claims that Western writers and scholars viewed the Orient as ‘requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption’ but also contends that Europe regarded the Orient as a sort of ‘surrogate’ even ‘underground self’.³⁸³ He argues that Orientalism not only incorporated doctrines of superiority but racism and imperialism. Indeed, Said makes some fundamental observations, for example, the scientist, scholar, missionary, trader and soldier all have positional superiority by the fact that they could be there and that the power wielded by the Orientalist is not limited to the political, but includes intellectual, moral and cultural power.

³⁸¹ William Wu *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982).

³⁸² The term ‘Orientalism’ refers to the eighteenth and nineteenth century philological study by European academics of original Asian texts. This field of academic research was developed not only to translate Asian literatures and histories but also to assess and classify these civilizations according to their development. Later, certain proponents of European nineteenth century artistic culture became interested in these foreign cultures and consequently romantic and exotic representations of the East were infused into Western art, literature and music under the same title. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Orientalism acquired a third meaning, when some national activists such as Frantz Fanon and scholars such as Edward Said argued that the Orient could not be understood unless seen in the context of Western imperialism. At this time, Third World nationalism and anti-imperialism played an important role in the disintegration of European empires in Asia and Africa, with struggles for independence in India, Palestine, Algeria and Vietnam among others. With the publication and translation of key texts such as Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), a new academic discipline, Post-colonial studies, emerged in the West (Europe and the USA) during the 1970s and 1980s. See Edmund Burke III and David Prochaska, eds., *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), Introduction, pp.6-10.

Said argues that Orientalism was almost entirely a European invention partly imaginative, partly real and that there is a constant interchange between the academic and imaginative meanings of Orientalism. Moreover, Orientalism was a method of defining European culture and identity in contrast to the Oriental 'other'. Oriental ideas of the 'other' include Oriental despotism, splendour, cruelty and sensuality. He describes 'the Occident' (the West) as being characterized by notions of 'rational', 'developed', 'humane', and 'superior' while the Orient is characterized by notions of the 'aberrant', 'undeveloped', inferior, 'incapable of defining itself', 'something to be feared or controlled'.³⁸⁴ Finally, he draws attention to the tendency to discuss other cultures with hostility and aggression yet emit a 'self-congratulatory tone' when referring to one's own.³⁸⁵

In a follow-up article, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', Said elaborates further his ideas that although there is an 'imaginative geography' regarding the Orient, it is not simply fictional. Orientalism could not exist without there being Orientals and Orientalists. He introduces the notion that there is a process of 'fossilization' with regard to studies of the Orient.³⁸⁶ Moreover, the Orient is regarded by the West as not having an independent existence but rather it has been 'confined to the fixed status or an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of Western percipients'.³⁸⁷ Said surmises that Orientalism reveals problems with the relationship of other cultures, societies and histories; the relationship between power and knowledge; the role of the intellectual;

³⁸³ Said, *Orientalism*, p.206 and p.4.

³⁸⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, p.300.

³⁸⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, p.326.

³⁸⁶ Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', p.5.

³⁸⁷ Edward Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Race and Class*, 27, Autumn, 1985, p.4.

and the relationship between different texts, between text and context and between text and history.

Although the general consensus was that Said's study offered an original polemic, there are weaknesses in *Orientalism* with which his contemporaries took issue and which are relevant to this research. In his review of *Orientalism*, eminent historian Bernard Lewis accused Said of creating an evil and conspiratorial image of the West. Similarly, Syrian philosopher Sadik Jalal al-Azm rejected Said's idea that all representations by one culture of another are inevitably misrepresentations. Moreover, al-Azm felt that Said's focus on literary Orientalism was at the expense of other political, strategic and economic factors and other artistic mediums. More recently, historians such as Edmund Burke III and David Prochaska point to Said's tendency to homogenize areas such as geographical, racial, cultural, class and gender differences within both the Occident and the Orient as another weakness of his work.³⁸⁸

Another theorist who engages with Said's theories regarding Orientalism, albeit from a psychoanalytical perspective, is Homi K. Bhabha. In a series of essays, Bhabha challenges Said's oppositional relationship between West and East.³⁸⁹ He rejects the polarized, dualist discourse that employs negative and positive images of oppressor and

³⁸⁸ See Edmund Burke III and David Prochaska (eds), *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), Introduction, pp.6-10, Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.190-201, and Conor McCarthy, *The Cambridge Introduction to Edward Said* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) for more information about *Orientalism* and its reception.

³⁸⁹ Homi K. Bhabha's collected essays can be found in *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003).

oppressed, Orient against Occident, self against other, arguing the relationship is more complex than Said sets out in *Orientalism*.³⁹⁰

He examines the issue of stereotyping races and the processes of ‘repetition’, ‘fixity’ and ‘ambivalence’ that gives the stereotype ‘currency’.³⁹¹ Again, Bhabha recommends that scholars investigate the ‘process of subjectification’, in particular positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence of the colonizer and the colonized.³⁹² Bhabha acknowledges that the stereotype is often depicted as monstrous and despite the lack of proof, provides the colonizer with the moral authority to dominate and civilize the colonial subject. However, once the colonized has been ‘civilized’ and assimilated this undermines the colonizer’s moral authority to dominate.

Another key concept introduced by Bhabha into postcolonial discourse is that of ‘mimicry’. Bhabha argues that the colonial subject is required to adopt outward forms and internalize the values of the colonizer and that ‘the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is both profound and disturbing’.³⁹³ He argues that mimicry is not mimetic, narcissistic identification, integration nor acceptance but rather a form of ‘camouflage’ of ‘almost but not quite’, resulting in a denial of self and ultimately the colonized remains ‘other’.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ Bhabha, ‘The Commitment to Theory’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.38.

³⁹¹ Bhabha, ‘The Other Question’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.66. Bhabha refers briefly to the ‘duplicity of the Asiatic’ as a stereotype, however, he does not examine this in any detail but rather focuses on the depiction of African-American and later the Anglo-Indian in Western literature.

³⁹² Bhabha, ‘The Other Question’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.67.

³⁹³ Bhabha, ‘Of Man and Mimicry’ in *Location of Culture*, p.86.

³⁹⁴ Bhabha, ‘Of Man and Mimicry’ in *Location of Culture*, p.91.

Bhabha presents two other concepts which are pertinent to this research: first, the concept of ‘liminal spaces’ which he sometimes refers to as ‘Third Space’ or ‘in-betweenness’ and second the concept of cultural ‘hybridity’. In his essay ‘The Commitment to Theory’ he advocates the study of liminal space as a means ‘to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multi-culturalism or the *diversity*, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*.’³⁹⁵ Bhabha argues that cultural identity is not fixed, not locked in the past but is in constant flux as a result of cultural contact and interaction, thus he perceives it as an ongoing process.

There are only a handful academic studies that apply Saidean and Bhabhadean theories and concepts to Western fictional films of the Middle and Far East, but it would seem, with the exception of Michael Renov’s brief article, none to documentary film.³⁹⁶ Focusing on three Vietnam War documentaries produced in the United States by independent filmmakers, *In the Year of the Pig* (1969), *The People’s War* (1969) and *Only in the Beginning* (1971), Michael Renov draws on several of Said’s ideas, first, on

³⁹⁵ Bhabha, ‘The Commitment to Theory’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.38.

³⁹⁶ Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar edited collection, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: IB Taurus, 1997), focuses mainly on early pre-World War II Hollywood cinema arguing that films of the East thrilled viewers with their images of the exotic, of unbridled passion, wild adventure and miscegenation. Bernstein and Gaylyn also argue that Orientalism continued to infiltrate new genres such as film noir and the adventure movie into the 1970s and 1980s. Contributors elaborate on Said’s framework but also draw on feminist analysis, genre criticism, and psychoanalytical theory. Sylvie Blum-Reid’s study *East-West Encounters: franco-asian cinema and literature* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), concerns mainly French fictional films about Vietnam and Cambodia produced in the 1990s, films such as *Diên Biên Phú* (Pierre Schoendoerffer, 1992), *Indochine* (Regis Wargnier, 1992), *L’Amante* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992), *L’Odeur de la papaya verte* (Tran Anh Hung, 1993). Although Blum-Reid does not refer to Said directly her themes of interrogating the East –West divide echoes Said’s discourse on Orientalism. Blum-Reid also argues these films espouse the idea that Westerners are indelibly changed by the Orient as it suggests a new consciousness and introspection that results in a life-changing transformation. Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Gary Needham, eds., *Asian Cinemas: A Reader & Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) is a collection of essays examining, national cinema, genre criticism, auteurism and stardom in Japanese, Chinese, Hong Kong, Indian, Taiwanese and Turkish fictional cinema, using combinations of Saidean Orientalist theories, Bhabhadean concepts of liminal space and hybridity, postcolonial historical context, and cross-cultural criticism. Elizabeth Heffelfinger and Laura Wright, eds., *Visual Difference: Postcolonial Studies and Intercultural Cinema* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) is another edited collection of essays focusing on fictional cinema regarding

positional superiority. He asserts that de Antonio's documentary, *In the Year of the Pig*, uses Western 'experts' to represent and contain the Orient for Western audiences:

The authorities interviewed in the course of the films are much in the order of Said's Orientalists, the "experts" who, as scholars, journalists, political leaders, set the agenda for policy decisions and establish the limits of public debate.³⁹⁷

While Renov's assessment is correct, he seems to have missed the obvious that de Antonio, along with other Western documentary filmmakers such as Davis, Greene, Rubbo, and Schoendorffer, are Orientalists representing and containing the Orient for Western audiences. As Said points out, Orientalism was aimed at Occidental consumption or readership, not Oriental. Similarly Western documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig*, *Hearts and Minds*, *Inside North Vietnam*, *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, and *The Anderson Platoon* were all made for Western not Vietnamese audiences. However, unlike Oriental scholars, who in Said's opinion hid or disguised their interests as 'innocent scholarly endeavour', these filmmakers were more open and transparent about their objectives.³⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Renov makes a more crucial point when he argues that the 'bad threat' as encapsulated by Saidean 'otherness' is turned upside down, for it is the American government and the capitalist system that is depicted as the threat to society both in the East and the West, and although Renov's selection is limited, this reversal of 'otherness' can also be found in other Western independent documentaries.

Hollywood's depiction of modern Africa and India, and the national cinemas of India and New Zealand, again engaging briefly with Saidean and Bhabhadean discourse.

³⁹⁷ Renov, 'Imaging the Other: Representations of Vietnam in Sixties Political Documentary', in Dittmar and Michaud, eds., *Hanoi to Hollywood*, p.263.

³⁹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, pp.333-336.

For instance, interviews given by General Patton III and General Westmoreland that are included in critical documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds* reveal the disdain of Western military leaders for the Vietnamese. Patton's speech, lauding his men as being a 'bloody good bunch of killers' contains not only notions of racial superiority but also the notion that the Oriental needs to be terminated without due consideration or humanity. General Westmoreland's speech that 'the Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as the Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the orient [...] life is not important', is in the same vein. Westmoreland exudes this Western sense of superiority and the racist belief that the Oriental is beneath the level of human. Yet, these speeches are incongruous to the West's moral authority of being 'developed' and 'humane' and the unpalatability of their message turns their Western speakers into the 'bad threat' and 'other'.

Although American directors de Antonio and Davis successfully undermine the racism espoused by the figures such as Patton and Westmoreland, there are additional images in their documentaries that Western audiences find hard to understand - one such image is the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk. Of all the images of the Vietnam War this is the one that stands out in Western documentaries and reinforces Western ideas of Oriental 'otherness'. The self-sacrifice of a religious figure in such a painful and horrific manner was alien and frightening to the West. Yet Western documentaries offered such images without contextual detail or explanation, expecting Western audiences to understand or even empathize.

There is a self-congratulatory tone to most Western government-produced documentaries that is condescending and patronizing in their philanthropic rhetoric. As

Said highlighted, there is this tendency when one culture discusses another. In documentaries such as *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, *The Unlucky Country* and *The Gentle Hand*, their government sponsors boast of their achievements in providing healthcare, food, schools and infrastructure, avoiding the fact that by attempting to destroy the North Vietnamese and the NLF, their governments actually destroyed South Vietnam both socially and economically.

Western documentaries, both government-sponsored and non-government-sponsored fail to address the issue of ethnic diversity within Vietnam. After centuries of occupation from a succession of invading forces, Vietnam was made up of different tribes, cultures and religions. The different features of native Vietnamese peoples are clearly captured by films such as *A Nation Builds Under Fire*, *The Gentle Hand* and *The Unlucky Country*. Although Catholicism, Buddhism and Confucianism are acknowledged within many of the films, few explain or explore Vietnamese racial and religious diversity.

Many of the Vietnam War documentaries produced by the West unwittingly undermine attempts to fossilize perspectives of the East. While villages and farmlands seem frozen in time, Vietnamese metropolises, both in the North as well as the South, are shown to be quite advanced with cars and motorbikes pictured alongside traditional rickshaws laden with goods. Images of Vietnamese city dwellers, some in modern Western dress and some in traditional dress, epitomize this duality of past and present. The opening images in *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* of the Saigon market, where traditional Eastern fare such as lotus flowers are on sale side by side with Western products such as Daz

washing powder, are not only examples of the East-West divide but also of how traditional and modern lives conflate in the city.

The most serious challenge to Western attempts to define, confine and have power over the Orient are posed by the Vietnamese-produced documentaries that refute Western visions of a fossilized Orient. Documentaries such as *Struggle for Life* and *Young Puppeteers* exemplify the Vietnamese ability to mix traditional and modern ways of life, that they are rational, literate, educated, capable of defining themselves and capable of resistance. Moreover, they challenge Said's model of the relationship between the 'active' Europeans (Westerners) and 'passive' Orientals. Even among the poorest, least educated people, the Vietnamese obviously have the ability to articulate themselves clearly, as demonstrated by the humble village coffin-maker featured in Davis's documentary *Hearts and Minds*.

Criticisms levelled at Said's discourse on Orientalism that it tends to homogenize important areas, such as political, geographical and racial diversity, can also be aimed at these Vietnamese War documentaries. The most obvious area of political homogeneity is the depiction of Communism. Claudia Springer points out that while US military films do not distinguish between the various forms of Communism adopted by countries such as USSR, China and North Vietnam and the NLF, the same is true of most Vietnam War documentaries including Communist ones. Despite this homogeneity, within Western government-produced Vietnam War documentaries, 'Communism' forms an additional 'aberrant' or layer of 'otherness'.

Many of Bhabha's concepts of the stereotype, mimicry, liminal space, and hybridity can also be located in these Vietnam War documentaries. Two striking examples immediately spring to mind. This first is the figure of the NLF doctor being interviewed in the depths of the jungle in *Struggle For Life*. He is an elegant softly-spoken Vietnamese man who, rather than discuss the difficult jungle conditions for administering healthcare, prefers to expound on the heroism of his Communist fighting colleagues. Not only does this political-military sermon seem incongruous to someone in the medical profession, the rhetoric seeming more appropriate to a Communist party conference, but the fact he speaks eloquently in French, the elitist language of the former colonizing power, transports this figure into 'other', 'liminal' and 'hybrid' territory. Indeed the doctor represents a convergence of Bhabhadean ideas. The doctor mimics both past and current colonizing powers. He represents a hybrid not only of past French colonial history but also of a contemporary colonial presence, that of Communism and finally, he is a reminder that colonialism is not locked into the past but is an ongoing process.

The second and more profound example, is the figure of Wee, the Vietnamese street boy in *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*. Wee is dressed in Western garb, sporting a spiv hat and talking a mixture of American slang and Vietnamese as he postures like an American gangster while hustling his clients. Wee mimics the colonizer in the most grotesque manner, but again appears to validate many of Bhabha's key theories regarding the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, particularly of the liminal space in-between. This man-child Wee represents not only the monstrous stereotype of the colonized but also the monstrous 'other' of the colonizer, and he too is the product cultural interaction and the ongoing hybridization of cultures.

Bhabha argues that hybridization is a powerful force:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority [...]) It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.³⁹⁹

This explanation of hybridity also proves invaluable in the assessment of the figure of John Steinbeck Jr in Rubbo's *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*. Although Steinbeck has adopted Eastern dress and lifestyle, by reversing the mimicry process and undermining the pure identity of the colonizer, he too subverts the colonial process of domination, and turns the gaze back on the colonizer.

Postcolonial theories have offered an alternative and dynamic method of analysing these Vietnam War documentaries that is distinct from traditional historical archival approaches to the war documentary and distinct from traditional documentary film theory models and concepts.

This chapter has set out to interrogate the complexities of the Vietnam War documentary. It has tested the Vietnam War documentary in terms of past and current forms of documentary structures and styles. It has paid particular attention to the issue of hybridity in the Vietnam War documentary, focusing on its relationship with the ethnographic documentary, the environmental documentary and the fictional war film. It has also ventured into the nascent domain of visual ethics and 'the gaze', considering

³⁹⁹ Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonder', in *The Location of Culture*, p.112.

specifically the ethical problems of capturing images of pain and death. The chapter has also addressed the huge impact of the global media explosion, in particular the new medium of television, upon the Vietnam War documentary. It has analysed in detail key iconic images of the war and considered the role of the documentary film in disseminating these images. It has assessed these documentaries in terms of how they employ standard Second World War propaganda techniques and interrogated the films in terms of revolutionary Third Cinema models and postcolonial discourse. This chapter has demonstrated the many theoretical approaches that can be employed in analysing this corpus of films, and how each approach offers a greater understanding of the texts and the contexts in which they were produced.

CONCLUSION

‘Telling Stories’ has addressed a major gap in the literature relating to the Vietnam War documentary. The study set out to reveal the breadth, depth and diversity of the films in this category; to provide a multi-national perspective, examining the political backgrounds influencing their production; to identify what is significant about the Vietnam War documentary; and to place the documentaries in a broader social and cultural context. It has rigorously investigated the complexities of this body of films by adopting a plural approach: first, by synthesizing a comparative international history of the Vietnam War; second, by contextualizing a broad selection of internationally produced documentary films; third, by testing current documentary systems in order to find one suitable in defining the Vietnam War documentary.

The selection of twenty-six Vietnam War documentaries from ten different countries (Australia, Canada, Cuba, France, German Democratic Republic, UK, USA, USSR, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam), well represent the political alliances and rivalries created during the civil war in Vietnam (1965-1975). They embody the concerns not only of Communist, non-Communist and democratic government-sponsored filmmakers but also non-government-sponsored filmmakers from allied and neutral countries. Certainly, the majority of films made during the war represent official government stances but there is a significant number of films that offer individual views, many of which diverge from their governments’ stand-point.

Placing the documentaries in their political and historical context has enhanced the reading of these films and, in turn, the films have emphasized the alliances as well as

the divisions struck during this period of international affairs. This research has identified and examined the divisions within Vietnam, particularly the role of the National Liberation Front in the South; the key events such as the Tet Offensive 1968; the key figures such as Ho Chi Minh, and how they are represented in these documentaries. It has also highlighted those countries that were directly involved militarily and those that provided political, financial or humanitarian support to either side. By setting out comparative international perspectives, synthesising secondary historical sources, and using the Vietnam War documentaries as primary historical evidence, this research provides an expanded historical, ideological and textual understanding of the war.

The analysis of these documentaries has revealed the different methodologies these filmmakers have used to tell their stories about the war. Many of these documentarists have been influenced by national documentary traditions, such as early Russian, British and World War II documentary traditions. Other documentarists have been influenced by more contemporary documentary movements such as French *cinéma vérité*, American 'direct cinema', and South American 'Third Cinema' movements. While several Western documentarists, such as Pierre Schoendoerffer and Eugene S. Jones, embrace the new technologies of portable equipment and colour film, Vietnamese filmmakers show remarkable ingenuity in adapting and maintaining old equipment in order to produce and exhibit documentaries successfully under difficult and hazardous conditions. Non-government-sponsored filmmakers, such as Emile de Antonio and Santiago Alvarez, use experimental methods and a variety of media to create their war documentaries. The detailed examination of this corpus of films has not only revealed

their diversity, highlighting many neglected and unfamiliar films, but also provided a greater understanding of the more familiar films and their directors.

This research has examined in detail the characteristics of the war documentary as a genre. Of all the documentary forms, the war documentary is arguably one of the most distinct as it is subject-specific, both visually and aurally. Images of war are highly significant in both battlefield and home front documentaries. Historically, war documentaries address issues such as why we fight, identifying the enemy and what needs to be done to win, and they incorporate notions of selflessness and sacrifice. Traditionally, a war documentary presents a call to arms to the troops fighting and those supporting them. War documentaries provide information about the current state of the war and how the enemy is being defeated. Absent from a war documentary is any dissent or criticism of the government about the way the war is being conducted. Despite continued production of war documentaries throughout the years and their distinctive characteristics, the genre has largely been ignored by most documentary classification systems to date.

This study has demonstrated how the war documentary, in particular the Vietnam War documentary, challenges current forms of documentary categorisation and the perceived 'truth-telling' function of the documentary form. It has revealed that, while documentary historians appear comfortable with using the term 'genre', documentary theorists prefer to use alternative terminology such as 'modes', 'strategies' and 'genealogies'. The generic study of the Vietnam War documentary has highlighted problems within documentary theory, in particular the lack of consensus among theorists as to how to categorize the various types of non-fiction film. Not only do

theorists fail to agree on a universal system of documentary categorisation, but the multitude of systems offered by documentary experts vary from basic to complex, with a range of films examples that are either too broad or too narrow to be effective. While each system provides analytical tools with which to interrogate documentary, none of these systems, including Bill Nichols's popular six-mode system, proves adequate in terms of analysing the diversity of films encompassed by the Vietnam War documentary. Nevertheless, this study has extracted the most useful elements of each system and applied them, along with other theoretical tools, to interrogate this corpus of documentaries and the many ways these films construct meaning.

The ongoing debates regarding representing reality, presenting truth, and narrative storytelling are addressed by this study and this research has shown how the Vietnam War documentary encompasses these issues, often in the extreme. While government-sponsored documentaries present the gruesome reality of war through their images, they also manipulate the truth through their narration, cinematography, editing and use of standard propaganda techniques. In terms of expectations, the war documentary is the antithesis of the documentary function to produce balanced and objective presentation of the facts. Yet while many government-sponsored Vietnam War documentaries have been severely criticized for their manipulation of the facts, other non-government-sponsored directors have been praised for the same manipulation of the facts and partisan views displayed. Directors such as Santiago Alvarez, Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis received much critical acclaim for their overt political standpoints and artistic expression of the same. The distinction being made by the critics is that government-sponsored documentaries distort the truth but these non-government-sponsored filmmakers express a higher truth.

Particular attention has been paid to the importance of the narrator in these documentaries wherein the mechanisms used to steer the audience are varied and often sophisticated. Many of the government-sponsored documentaries use authoritative commentators employing either 'voice of God' techniques or in the case of some US military documentaries employing Hollywood stars, such as Charlton Heston and John Wayne. This research has also examined Western non-government-sponsored documentaries in which the narrator is absent, for example, the debate-style documentaries of Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis, and the 'trip to the front' documentary *A Face of War*, and has demonstrated how, despite the lack of narration, the audience is still being skilfully manoeuvred.

The thesis has engaged with legal and moral issues encompassed by the new area of visual ethics in documentary. This study has addressed the issue of spectatorship with regard to the gaze in the Vietnam War documentary, particularly relating to images of pain, dying and death. It has highlighted the emotional and moral dilemmas in which the audience is being placed when presented with such images. The Vietnam War documentary offers many examples of death and suffering, but few documentaries are prepared to exhibit the dying moments of a human being. Western documentaries that exhibit such images use Vietnamese rather than Western subjects and often in unexpected circumstances, such as the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk or the street execution of a Vietnamese VC prisoner, as opposed to a subject dying on the battlefield. The study reveals that such iconic images were not actually captured by documentary filmmakers but by war photographers and television reporters. Nevertheless, the incorporation of these images by Western non-government-sponsored

filmmakers, such as Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis, in their documentaries has enhanced their seminal status and distributed them to a wider audience.

This study has demonstrated how the Vietnam War documentary has been influenced by developments in the documentary form, the World War II war documentary and, in a few cases, it has been influenced also by fictional cinema, such as the World War II Combat film. The Vietnam War documentary, in particular US government-sponsored documentaries, has also been influenced by Hollywood directors and stars such as John Ford and John Wayne. The thesis identifies renowned experimental filmmakers Emile de Antonio and Santiago Alvarez as having made a significant contribution to documentary artistic expression as well as the political development of the war documentary. These two directors epitomize the inseparability of the personal and the political within the Vietnam War documentary and offer something entirely new in terms of the war documentary genre. Similarly, the Australian filmmaker Michael Rubbo adds a new social and ethnographic aspect to the war documentary with *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, looking at the effects of war specifically on a poor urban community. This study has underscored the original and significant political and artistic contribution made by non-government-sponsored documentary filmmakers, such as de Antonio, Alvarez, Davis, Greene, Jones, Rubbo, and Schoendoerffer, to the development of the war documentary as a genre.

Nevertheless, the most important influence, in terms of both form and content, on the Vietnam War documentary, has been the globalisation of the media, in particular the advent of television. The proliferation of such media, particularly in Western democracies, contributed to widening the debate about the war and this research has

demonstrated that Vietnam War documentary helped to broaden that debate as many of these films were exhibited nationally and internationally. Not only were non-government-filmmakers from democratic countries including the USA, UK, France and Canada able to express alternative views to those prescribed by their governments, but the importation of pro-Communist films from North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Cuba, USSR, and East Germany also made an important contribution to widening the debate in the USA and the West.

Moreover, media images obtained from photojournalists and television crews played a key role in the construction of these documentaries, and, in the case of the Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis, provided an opportunity to be highly creative. This investigation of the role of the media has revealed that many Western Vietnam War documentarists were journalists prior to becoming filmmakers. Not only do these filmmakers use sophisticated interview techniques but they are able to articulate clearly their role in the documentary process.

Documentary theorists, in particular Bill Nichols, Michael Chanan and Paul Ward, have recognised that documentary is not a static form but can evolve by 'crossing modes' or 'blurring boundaries' or 'extending family resemblances'. This research has demonstrated how Western government and Communist government Vietnam War documentaries borrow codes from World War II propaganda documentaries thus extending the genealogical line. In a few Western Vietnam War documentaries the blurring boundaries has led to a degree of hybridity between the war documentary and the ethnographic, anthropological or the environmental documentary, although most of these documentaries remain firmly in the war documentary genre.

The few Vietnam War documentaries that do have significant visual elements of the ethnographic, anthropological and environmental, are proved to be only superficial in this regard, as the underlying drive to most of these documentaries remains political rather than scientific. Nevertheless, the ethnographic visual element in both Western and Communist documentaries remain compelling, albeit none work in the traditional ethnographic sense that they set out to ‘salvage’ or ‘preserve’ an ancient way of life or culture for posterity. The images of edenic village life in South Vietnam are merely short-cuts used to locate the action and pre-war conditions. With the exception of Rubbo’s *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, few films explain in any depth Vietnamese culture and certainly none detail Vietnamese village life. Indeed Rubbo’s documentary is the only Vietnam War documentary among this selection that genuinely crosses modes, mixing the war documentary with the ethnographic to become a hybrid documentary. Although it may seem that the ‘trip to the front’ films of Eugene Jones and Pierre Schoendoerffer are also anthropological, in as much as they are studies of men at war, these are revealed as superficial rather than in-depth or scientific studies, and only represent a small portion of the group of documentaries. However, these ‘trip to the front’ documentaries, both government-sponsored and non-government-sponsored Western documentaries, do borrow certain codes from the World War II Combat film and thus, again, display a degree of hybridity.

The final part of this study has addressed political issues, in particular propaganda, politics and postcolonialism. It has provided an analysis of propaganda methods employed by the Vietnam War documentary such as the idealisation of heroes and demonization of the enemy, as well as maintaining a semblance of impartiality. It

shows how all government-sponsored documentaries have used these methods to promote the need for war and persuade audiences of the validity of their governments' policies. The study has also shown how some non-government-sponsored films invert these same techniques. Filmmakers such as Emile de Antonio and Peter Davis use the balanced debate-style format to create partisan films that criticize and even demonize their own governments and leaders.

This research has also revealed other political motivations underlying the production of some of these documentaries, including postcolonial Third World and Third Cinema debates, particularly with regard to Vietnamese Cinema. Drawing on multiple historical sources, this study offers a detailed view of Vietnamese documentary production during the conflict, not provided in any previous study. It shows that Vietnamese Cinema has proved ambiguous in terms of Third World economic classification as well as Third World Cinema production and that, during this period, only National Liberation Front documentaries can be considered as products of Third Cinema, specifically 'guerrilla' cinema. Moreover, this study has concluded that the only films in this selection that strictly adhere to the political ideology of revolutionary and experimental Third Cinema are those produced by the Cuban filmmaker Santiago Alvarez.

The thesis has also interrogated these texts in terms of theories of Western colonial power over the East. Using Edward Said's discourse on Orientalism and concepts of the stereotype, mimicry, liminal space and cultural hybridity developed by Homi K. Bhabha, this study has successfully applied existing techniques of analysis in order to interrogate this underdeveloped area of the Vietnam War documentary. Like Said's Orientalists, Western filmmakers exerted positional power over the Vietnamese in that

they were able to travel to the war zone to film their subjects. Many of the allied Western government documentaries incorporate doctrines of racism and superiority. These documentaries portray the Communist Vietnamese as insidious, untrustworthy, aberrant and inhumane, yet portray the peasant population of the South as primitive or child-like, needing protection, education and nurturing. Vietnamese Communist documentaries defy Western attempts to fossilize and delegate their people to the role of passive Orientals. North Vietnamese and NLF documentaries testify to the Vietnamese ability to adapt to new techniques, to improve their education and living conditions, and to mix traditional with modern ways of life. While many Western government-sponsored documentaries employ traditionally negative stereotypes of the Oriental, other non-government-sponsored Western documentaries challenge these stereotypes and depictions of 'otherness'. Nevertheless, both Western and Communist Vietnam War documentaries reveal a more complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, one of cultural interaction as well as political resistance, and the thesis has identified and explored some of these areas that Bhabha identifies as the 'third' or 'liminal' space.

This study offers an original piece of research in a number of areas. First, it provides an expanded historical understanding of the Vietnam War utilising primary film documents and secondary international perspectives. Second, it thoroughly reviews and tests existing techniques such as documentary theory and applies them to a neglected area - the Vietnam War documentary. Third, it adopts familiar techniques usually employed for the analysis of fictional cinema, such as generic characteristics and visual conventions, and newly applies them to the non-fiction film, specifically the Vietnam War documentary. Fourth, it also takes familiar postcolonial theories by Edward Said

and Homi K. Bhabha and applies them to a different medium - documentary film and the Vietnam War documentary specifically in order to interrogate and shed new light on this neglected body of films. Finally, it offers a multi-disciplinary approach in the analysis of the documentaries both in terms of production and content, in order to extend knowledge of this underdeveloped area in documentary film.

While this research provides the most comprehensive study of the Vietnam War documentary to date, it is by no means exhaustive. There are further areas of exploration as well as a continuation of lines instigated by this study. As the filmographies indicate, there are many more international documentaries waiting to be uncovered and analysed, and the area of comparative international perspectives of the Vietnam War is still in a nascent stage. Also to be developed further, debates concerning the documentary form and function, particularly in the areas of genre, aesthetics, propaganda, and visual ethics. Similarly, a more in depth study of Vietnamese war documentaries, concerning both the Indo-Chinese War and the American War, examining the many layers of decolonization-recolonization, would no doubt prove illuminating.

In summary, this research confirms that the Vietnam War documentary is complex – politically, culturally and generically. It is not only a product of the war but of a much wider international political arena. Moreover, the Vietnam War documentary is a vibrant genre that has evolved from the World War II documentary, encompassing many more features than its predecessor. It has been influenced by national film cultures, traditions and developments in fictional as well as non-fictional cinema. The most significant development and influence is the global media explosion, in particular the

advent of television. The genre includes not only government-sponsored films but also non-government-sponsored, independent and experimental filmmakers whose contribution is shown to be significant to the development of the war documentary. This body of films encompasses different documentary formats and aesthetic styles; employs traditional, contemporary, and avant-garde techniques. This study has shown that while Vietnamese produced war documentaries offer a challenge to Third World and Third Cinema models, both Western and Vietnamese produced documentaries present a challenge to Orientalist postcolonial models. As this thesis has ably demonstrated the Vietnam War documentary offers a rich vein of material for future scholars, in the fields of history, international politics and postcolonialism, as well as film studies, to continue to investigate.

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Note: Filmography contains all twenty-six films scrutinized in detail. The additional filmography contains other documentaries concerning the Vietnam War referred to in the thesis. Any other fictional or documentary films referred to in the thesis have director/country/date supplied adjacent to the title.

Foreign Correspondents Visit the National Liberation Front (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1965) black/white, 20 mins.

Why Vietnam? (USA, 1965) Produced by the US Directorate for Armed Forces Information and Education, black/white, 32 mins.

Action in Vietnam (Australia, 1966), Writer, Director: John Abbott, Narrator: Max Meldrum, Cinematographer: Mike Molloy, Producer: Frank Bagnall, Australian Commonwealth Film Unit for the Department of the Army, colour, 25 mins.

The Anderson Platoon (France/ USA, 1967), Director: Pierre Schoendoerffer, Photographer: Dominique Merlin, black/white, 65 mins.

A Face of War (USA, 1967), Producer & Director: Eugene S Jones, Photography: J.Baxter Peters, Christopher Sargent, Eugene S Jones, Sound: Robert Peck, Editor: Jono Roberts, black/white, 72 mins.

Hanoi, Tuesday 13th (Cuba, 1967), Director: Santiago Alvarez, Photography: Ivan Napoles, Music: Idalberto Galvez, colour and black/white, 40 mins.

A Nation Builds Under Fire (USA, 1967), Produced by US Army Pictorial Centre, Director and Writer: Harry Middleton, Host and Lead Narrator: John Wayne, Artist Sketches: Howard Brodie, colour, 40 mins.

The Unlucky Country (Australia, 1967), Director: Don Murray, Writer: Denys Brown, Narrator: Ed Devereux, Producer: Denys Brown, Australian Commonwealth Film Unit for the Department of Defence, colour, 25 mins.

Cadeau Sanglant (aka *As Saigon Slept*, South Vietnam, 1968), Produced by the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, black/white, 6 mins.

A Day of Plane Hunting (North Vietnam, 1968), Directors: Phan Tron Quy, Nhật Hiên, Screenplay: Banh Chê, Cinematography: Trung Hiều, Pham Duính Tháng, Montage: Tuyét Phung, Music Selector: Phan Mong, black/white, 20 mins.

The Gentle Hand (USA, 1968), Director: Ens. Ian MR Shand, Editor: Robert Swarthe, Photography: C.R.Adcock, D.Crowe, Script: Ens. Ian MR Shand, Lt. Manuel J. Perez, Narrator: John Elvin, Produced by the United States Navy Office of Information, colour, 29 mins.

Inside North Vietnam (UK/US, 1968), Director, Photographer, Narrator: Felix Greene, Editor: Gordon Mueller, colour, 85 mins.

Pilots in Pyjamas: Part II- Hanoi Hilton (East Germany, 1968), Directors: Walter Heynowski, Gerhard Scheumann, Photography: Hans Lwupold, Gerhard Munch, Peter Helmich, Horst Donth, Montage: Traute Wishnewski, Barbel Lehmann, Editors: Gert Prokop, Pete Petersen, Sound: Hand-Jurgen Mittag, Music: Reiner Bredemeyer, Producer: Deustche Fernsehfunk, black/white, 61 mins.

Reportage From North Vietnam (USSR, 1968), Produced by the Central Documentary Film Studios, Director and Script: Aleg Arsaloff, Photography: Rouben Petrosov, colour, 20 mins

Struggle For Life (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1968), black/white, 20 mins.

US Techniques and Genocide in Vietnam (North Vietnam, 1968), Produced by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes in Vietnam, black/white, 35 mins.

Young Puppeteers of Vietnam (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1968), black/white, 24 mins.

The Battle of Khe Sanh (USA, 1969), Produced by the US Department of Defence, Producer: Wilbur T.Blume, Writer: Robert C. Mack, Narrator: Robert Landers, colour, 30 mins.

Communist Massacre in Hue, South Vietnam (South Vietnam, 1969), Produced by the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, black/white, 13 mins.

In the Year of the Pig (USA, 1969), Producer, Director: Emile de Antonio, Music: Steve Addiss, black/white, 103 mins.

The People's War (USA, 1969), Producers: The Newsreel, black/white, 40 mins.

79 Springtimes for Ho Chi Minh (Cuba, 1969), Director: Santiago Alvarez, Photography: Ivan Napoles, Music: Idalberto Galvez, black/white, 25 mins.

Sad Song of Yellow Skin (Canada, 1970), Script, Director, Narrator: Michael Rubbo, Photography: Martin Duckworth, Pierre Letarte, Sound: Pierre Letarte, Lester Halman, colour, 58 mins.

Vinh Linh Steel Ramparts (North Vietnam, 1970), Director: Ngoc Quynh, Other credits: Ma Cuong-Kim Mon, Pham Dinh Thang, Dinh Thong, Mai the Song, Pham Mông Ngu, Đô Ngo Khnê, Huynh Tha, Banh Châu-Nq Thu, black/white, 50 mins.

Vietnam! Vietnam! (USA, 1971), Producer: United States Information Agency, Executive Producer: John Ford, Director: Sherman Beck, Narrator: Charlton Heston, colour, 58 mins.

Hearts and Minds (USA, 1974) Director: Peter Davis, Photography: Richard Pearce, Editors: Lynzee Klingman, Susan Martin, Sound: Tom Cohen, Producer: Bert Schneider, Released by Warner Brothers/Columbia, colour, 112 mins.

Additional Filmography

A Message From Viet-Nam (South Vietnam, 1964), Producer: National Motion Picture Centre, Saigon, black/white, 19 mins.

With a South Vietnamese Marine Battalion (Japan, 1965), Director: Junichi Ushiyama.

Nguyen Hun Tho Speaks to the People (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1965).

Bacteriological Warfare in Vietnam (North Vietnam, 1966)

Know Your Enemy - the Viet Cong (USA, 1966), Produced by the US Armed Forces Information Service, black/white, 22 mins.

Think of My Country (GDR, 1966), Crew: Bernhard Seeger, Peter Ulbrich, Klaus Dieter Dorrer, Doris Mohring, Hans-Peter Minetti, Peter Sbresny, black/white, 19 mins.

The Threatening Sky (Fr,1966), Director: Joris Ivens.

The Unique War (USA, 1966), Produced by the US Armed Forces, Narrator: Glenn Ford, colour, 30 mins.

Vietnam: Land of Fire (North Vietnam, 1966), Crew: Le Quoc, Khieu Nga, Truyet Phung, Yuan Khang, LeThong, Le Van Cu, black/white, 15 mins.

Ballad of the Green Berets (GDR, 1967) black/white, 11 mins.

Far From Vietnam (Fr, 1967), Directors: Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Chris Marker, Alain Renais, Agnes Varda, colour & black/white, 115mins.

From Hanoi to Ben Hai (GDR,1967), colour, 50 mins.

Vietnam Village Reborn (USA, 1967), Produced by the US Department of Defense Army Pictorial Centre, colour, 26 mins.

Guerrillas of Cu Chi (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1968)

The Defence of Haiphong (North Vietnam, no date given)

Art and Youth (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1968)

Nixon and the Hornet's Nest (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, no date given)

The 17th Parallel: the People's War (Fr, 1968), Director: Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan, Producer: Argos Films, black/white, 113 mins.

Tell Me Lies (UK, 1968), Director: Peter Brook, Cast: Royal Shakespeare Company including Peggy Ashcroft, Glenda Jackson, Paul Scofield, colour & black/white, 118 mins.

Fire (Poland, 1969), Director: Andrzej Brzozowski.

Some Evidence (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1969)

Terry Whitemore, For Example (UK/Sweden, 1969), Director: Bill Brodie, Producer: Bill Brodie, Hasse Seiden, 98 mins.

Vietnam (Japan, 1969) Director: Kentaro Masuda, colour, 135 mins.

The Way to the Front (South Vietnam, National Liberation Front, 1969)

Women of Telecommunications Station #6 (North Vietnam, 1969), Producer: Vietnamese People's Army, black/white, 20 mins.

Your Tour in Vietnam (USA, 1970), Producer: US Department of Defense Army Pictorial Centre, Narrator: Jack Webb, colour, 32 mins.

I was a Soldier (UK, 1970), Director: Michael Grigsby, Producer: Granada Television, black/white, 38 mins.

The First Infantry Division in Vietnam 1965-1970 (USA, 1971), Producer: the US Department of Defense Army Pictorial Centre, colour, 29 mins.

Mission in Action (USA, 1971), Producer: the US Armed Forces.

Only in the Beginning (USA, 1971), Producer: The Newsreel, black/white, 20 mins.

Interview with My Lai Veterans (USA, 1972), Director: Joseph Strick, 27 mins.

Winter Soldier (USA, 1972), Producer: The Newsreel, black/white, 95 mins.

Agent Orange: a Story of Dignity and Doubt (USA, 1980), Producer: Jim Gambone, Producer: Films in Cities, Jim Gambone, Minnesota Veterans Coalition, colour, 28 mins.

Ecoside: a Strategy of War (USA, 1981), Director: Dr EW Pfeiffer, Producer: Green Mountain Films, 23 mins.