

Indochine and the Dynamics of Gender

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Abstract

Although filmic discourses on the Vietnam War have been associated with American filmmakers and producers, the last internationally celebrated film release on the subject was French. Fittingly, *Indochine* (1992) dealt with the French presence in Vietnam and the Vietnamese's struggle to free themselves from their colonizers. With the benefit of hindsight, the filmmakers were able to present their film as a critique on the apologetic limitations of US productions, as well as on the hypocrisy of American inattentiveness toward France's predicament only to be followed by the US's attempt to succeed the French as Vietnam's subsequent colonizing power. The film's political agenda, however, is ruptured via its use of female protagonists to represent the two warring nations. Where and how this rupture occurs can be better understood using discourses on gender.

The existence of a Vietnam War movie genre has been traced to the official withdrawal of the United States from the war of colonization in that country. Film historian Robert Sklar observed that in earlier film-era wars (World Wars I and II and the Korean conflict), “[American] motion picture companies cooperated with the government in producing a variety of films [...] that explained, dramatized, and aided war aims” (335). Rare pro-war films (such as the John Wayne vehicle *The Green Berets*),¹ anti-war documentaries, and “echoes and shadows” of the conflict reflected in genre and exploitation movies were the only possible means for the Vietnam issue to be tackled in American films, but “after the Communist victory [in 1975], it became possible to look back” (Sklar 337). It is the manner of this looking back that occasions this paper’s consideration of the French production of *Indochine*,² as well as its insertion into a matrix of ideologically problematic US film practice, that makes the Régis Wargnier film appear innovative, at least initially, in comparison. After assessing how the film fares vis-à-vis US filmic discourses on the Vietnam War, this paper will then look more closely at how the politics of gender are worked out in the film, especially within the context of colonial and postcolonial relations.

The Vietnam film genre, to begin with, is itself a matter of careful periodizing and qualifying, as the above account demonstrates. Writing from the perspective of the present, Michael Selig enumerates that, although the so-called Vietnam movies share an “appropriation of the language and iconography of a particular historical moment (usually from the ’60s and early ’70s) and the subordination of that moment to ‘traditional paradigms’ which are decidedly not exclusive to the so-called Vietnam film genre,” the use of such a type of imagery “merely masks the attempts to reestablish a traditional cultural and political identity” to the way in which the American defeat

¹ All crew and cast information on films listed in this paper were derived from the Internet Movie Database, with search page address at <<http://us.imdb.com/search>>. Video availability was confirmed mainly through Amazon.com, including (when necessary) its European sites; Asian videos not listed at Amazon.com were searched in various appropriate sites, starting with Poker Industries (web address <<http://www.pokerindustries.com/>>). I wish to acknowledge the assistance of two students from the spring and fall semesters of 2006, namely Yu Taeyun and Ham Jongsuk respectively, for their unstinting and indispensable resourcefulness and good cheer.

² All mention of *Indochine* in this paper refer to the Columbia/Tristar Studios identical laserdisc and DVD releases, with English translations as provided in the video’s subtitles.

“created a cultural crisis among the American people” (2). Wargnier himself, in *Indochine: Un film de Régis Wargnier*, declared as much when he maintained that his objective was to undertake a more responsible retelling of the nature of the colonial conflict (“*au milieu de l’Histoire et de voir comment l’Histoire infléchit ces destins*”) with his recollection “*des grands films romanesques, américains pour la plupart*” (*Indochine* 82).³ Significantly, the film won a raft of institutional prizes in France (Césars for performances and technical achievements), Europe (Goya for Best European Film), and the US, including the National Board of Review, Golden Globe, and Oscar for Best Foreign Film (“Awards for *Indochine* [1992],” Internet Movie Database), plus *Time* magazine citations as one of the best films of the year as well as of the decade. Yet most individual US critics have professed only moderate appreciation, if not outright dissatisfaction, toward the film. Perhaps the most favorable review by a major American critic, outside of that of *Time* magazine’s Richard Corliss, has been that of Roger Ebert, who nevertheless concludes that the screenplay is “long and discursive and not very satisfying,” while the movie itself is “an ambitious, gorgeous, missed opportunity – too slow, too long, too composed” (Ebert n.p.).

The reluctance on the part of American film critics to acknowledge another Western nation’s take on the Vietnam War could stem in part from an unarticulated yet understandable pride in the US’s own store of Vietnam War films, one of the many peaks in what observers have described as a post-Classical Hollywood Golden Age in American Cinema.⁴ After the

³ The French passages may be translated as follows: “within the course of History, to see how History determines [human] destiny” for the parenthetical remark, followed by [Régis Wargnier’s recollection] “of the great film romances, especially the American ones.” I am not in a position to determine whether any perceivable irony in each of these statements was deliberate or not.

⁴ Film scholar Raymond J. Haberski, Jr. (122-43) goes as far as claiming that the period, roughly the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, was as much a Golden Age for film criticism as it was for film production. That the period, also known as the New American Cinema, coincided with the intensification of the US’s involvement in the Vietnam War and ended in 1975 with American defeat and the release of the first summer blockbuster, Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*, is now commonplace enough to be considered standard knowledge; see Godfrey Cheshire, “*Apocalypse Again*,” on which more later.

aforementioned embarrassment of *The Green Berets* and allegorical explorations in exploitation projects, American filmmakers deduced that the US pullout from Vietnam could now allow them to produce critical discourses on the war without seeming anti-American.

Perhaps the most celebrated instances of these productions would be those of two Oscar best film winners with opposed ideological readings, Michael Cimino's allegedly illiberal *The Deer Hunter* from 1978 and Oliver Stone's better-received *Platoon* from 1986. The depiction of American soldiers as innocent victims peaked during the year of *The Deer Hunter*'s release, as evident in such titles as Sidney J. Furie's *The Boys in Company C* and in Ted Post's *Go Tell the Spartans*; even Ted Kotcheff's 1982 entry *First Blood*, the original Rambo film, observed this liberal-humanist dictum of portraying US soldiers' trauma without demonizing the Viet Cong. Other titles that might clinch the argument for 1978 as a watershed year in Vietnam War film discourse (argued effectively in Desser 81-102) is another Oscar prizewinner, Hal Ashby's Jane Fonda-starrer *Coming Home* and Karel Reisz's *Who'll Stop the Rain*, the adaptation of Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldiers*; plus Francis Ford Coppola's much-delayed *Apocalypse Now*, finally released the year after. Even Ted Post's *Good Guys Wear Black*, a Chuck Norris potboiler, has the lead character state that the Vietnam adventure "was a war that never should have begun, and a country we never should have entered [...]. Thousands of victims died without really understanding why, mainly because the reasons for the war were beyond any rules of logic" ("Memorable Quotes from *Good Guys Wear Black* [1978]," Internet Movie Database).

Enter Indochine

In terms of the aforementioned liberal perspective, *Indochine*'s narrative raises not only the issue of the usefulness of such an approach, but more important, the question of how gender has been configured on separate levels – that of cultural texts, cinema in particular, and that of historical practice, from both sides of the conflict; there is of course the danger, in the latter category, of on the one hand using Vietnam as a synecdoche of the Other; and of on the other hand conflating the US and France into the West. One admittedly simplistic way of resolving this predicament would be to further qualify the Vietnam-as-Other approach as the East, which was the manner in which the war

was consistently regarded in cultural texts, and delineating whenever possible which “West” between the two colonial adventurers is being referred to, whether France or the US.

Indochine's initial distinction from the Hollywood Vietnam War film project is its farther periodization, the '50s era of French colonial administration being challenged by the southward advance of Communist liberation fighters. Eliane Davries, a single middle-aged woman, adopts Camille, a “princess of Annam,” after the latter's parents die in a plane crash; along with Camille, Eliane agrees to oversee Camille's parents' plantation. Eliane conducts herself according to strict rules of civil and secular propriety, raising Camille as she would a European child (Camille never speaks Vietnamese even toward the end of the narrative) but also arranging to eventually turn over the plantation to her as well as marry her off to a similarly wealthy native merchant family. Discreetly, Eliane carries on a passionate affair with a French naval officer, Jean-Baptiste, but lets go of the dalliance when the latter insists on his freedom. Unaware of the affair, Camille also falls in love with Jean-Baptiste, prompting Eliane to forbid him from seeing her and rushing Camille's wedding arrangements with Tanh, who has also been rebelling against his parents' (and his country's) excessive authoritarianism. Camille and Tanh decide to break up and run away from their respective families, and Camille treks all the way to the far-flung destination that Eliane had arranged for Jean-Baptiste. To get near him she agrees to be sold to slavery, but in his rescuing her she shoots and kills his naval superior, and the two become fugitives who take advantage of the disguises worn by roving theatrical troupes. The couple are separately caught and Jean-Baptiste commits suicide on a day-pass at Eliane's house to see his and Camille's son Etienne, while Camille suffers six years in prison where she emerges as a hard-line Vietminh cadre. The war ends with the Geneva negotiations which Camille attends and to which Eliane brings Etienne, but the two never get to see Camille.

The use of female protagonists to represent the two warring countries may be the film's most significant contribution to Vietnam-film generic tradition.⁵ Even by standard “positive images” feminist requisites, the figures of Camille and Eliane hold up admirably, particularly in relation to the male characters in the film. Paradoxically, the larger generic framework, that of

⁵ Alison Murray's comparative review of *Chocolat*, *Utremer*, and *Indochine* describes the Vietnamese national narrative in *Indochine* as inscribed in the major women characters' bodies.

(European) art-epic production, also ensures that the men do not suffer from lack of sympathy either. Tanh gallantly agrees to allow Camille to seek her true love and later assists the two of them by recommending them to a Communist-sympathetic theater troupe; expelled from a Paris university for protesting the Diên Biên Phu massacre, he declares to his mother, “The French have taught me freedom and equality; I’ll fight them with those.” Jean-Baptiste is of course the fiery and desirable object of passion shared by mother and daughter, who undergoes a domesticizing transformation when he renounces his freedom for the sake of Camille. The most extreme instance of the movie’s insistent humanism is that of the character of Eliane’s unrequited suitor Guy Asselin, a ruthless counter-insurgency expert who resorts to torture and employs mercenary rebel-hunters, but who offsets such damaging traits by a keen wit, his devotion to Eliane and his job, and his fall from grace with the authorities where he remarks, with consciously ironic self-reference, “The innocents are kicked out, the guilty will go free.”

Complications

The problematic of this narrative strategy is twofold in nature, one building up from the other. To begin with, it would be difficult to accept as historical fact that women were the major political players in the Vietnam conflict, whether involving the French or the Americans. In giving prominence to the participation of its women characters, however, *Indochine* manages to extend viewership identification and sympathy with the real-life power players, the men. The role of women in political life derives from the concept of difference, and the nature of their participation originates with the function of their bodies. Monique Canto relates that, to the questions of how the city can maintain itself and ensure that it satisfies its citizens’ desires,

woman-as-political-animal provides an answer. With woman, a place can be found in political theory for both procreation and the representation of desire – and hence also the satisfaction of desire. Procreation and representation are related questions, moreover; taken together, they indicate the difficulty of conceptualizing, within a given political framework, the possibility of reproduction: reproduction of the real in order to satisfy desire, and reproduction of human life so that the city may endure. (340)

At first glance, this assignation of political value to women on the basis of their bodily difference may seem at odds with the “narrative and visual reconstitution of a heroic male subject, a prerequisite for which is the devaluation and abuse of the feminine” in Vietnam-film texts (Selig 3). Furthermore, it may not necessarily be possible, though Selig makes the positive assertion,

to account for the films’ consistent effacements of the issues of race, class, nationalism, and gender (their historical misrepresentations, we might say) by focusing on their all too conventional concern with the narrative and visual reconstitution of the male subject and their almost always violent repression of the feminine. (Ibid.)

If one were to pursue this line of inspecting the physical valuation of women’s bodies in *Indochine*, there would appear to be the rupturing of its benevolent-because-motherly colonialist capitulation: although it is Eliane who gets depicted as a repressed yet ultimately passionate matriarch, it is Camille who is undressed twice, without her even being sexualized in both scenes the way that Eliane charges her scenes with Jean-Baptiste with her desire for him. What this implies, using standard Orientalist lines of reason, is that the body of the Other can be gazed at with more clinical regard; within the terms of the film, the seemingly indulgent undressing of Camille may also perhaps have been intended to balance her character’s eventual domination of the political narrative, in which it is Eliane’s (and Guy’s and Jean-Baptiste’s) people who are forced to negotiate with hers.

Some degree of reductionist danger might also be present herein, though, in that this reading might be too close for a text that operates both as a self-contained attempt at providing high-cultural pleasure *and* as an insertion into a highly involved mode of film practice. On the one hand, Hollywood and even mainstream American literary texts on the Vietnam War can hardly defend themselves from charges of feminizing the enemy in “reducing the Vietnamese to mere ‘gooks’ – something between a woman and an animal” (Lawson 23; also cf. Selig 7-8) and in exploiting “the fear of becoming a woman (of losing one’s ‘balls’) [as] one of the indoctrinational weapons used by the military in preparing young men for battle” (Lawson 22). On the other hand, the configuration of Eliane and Camille’s sameness, overshadowed by their difference from men, is

inflected not merely by the obvious category of gender but the even more crucially political one of class. To use an outmoded application of body discourse, Eliane and Camille can be seen to constitute the head or rational element in fictional interventions on the Vietnam War, in contrast with the hysterical young males of the standard Hollywood fare who may in this context be seen as obsessed with masculinity precisely because of their feminized function within the historical dramaturgy in their losing to (and thereby being symbolically raped by) the enemy.

This opens up a more troubling possibility on the use of gender in *Indochine*: are Eliane and Camille, in their both being privileged members of their respective national bourgeoisies, masculinized in terms of their respective historical agencies? There would be ways of carefully contextualizing the question and advancing answers for each character – i.e., in their portrayal in formal terms (where they function as both mother and lover and are considered in those same terms by the male characters), in their narrative insertions (where class privilege renders them superior to the men around them), in their intertextual contributions (where they serve to “rectify” the feminization of the political players in Vietnam-film discourse yet function as a rationalizing alternative to the same tradition), and in their significations within historical accounts of the war. This last category may not necessarily encompass certain areas of the previous ones, but the nature of the discursive complications it presents makes it ideal for further pursuing the issues already raised thus far.

Nations and Boundaries

Indochine in this respect can be seen as falling within a development in '90s global film practice of the internationalization of the Vietnam-film genre – i.e., it can be situated within a spate of works unified by their political specificity in the Vietnamese nation (including Hong Kong and Australian “boat people” texts and the French *L'Amant*, released the same year as *Indochine* – cf. Devine 357-58),⁶ not to mention the phenomenon of films on Vietnam, notably Tran Anh Hung's *Mùi du du xhan* (The Scent of Green Papaya) and *Xích lô* (Cyclo), making an impact in American and European arthouse circuits along with other Asian productions. Within such a globalized

⁶ Among the films cited by Devine (357-58) are Ann Hui's *Tou bun no hoi* (Boat People), Stephen Wallace's *Turtle Beach*, and Jean-Jacques Annaud's *L'Amant* (The Lover).

awareness, the roles that Camille and Eliane perform work not merely as *dramatis personae*, but as allegorical figures. In this respect, Camille's sexuality is distinguished by its racialization through a "strategic, rather than merely tactical, deployment of a peculiar 'silence'" described by Abdul JanMohamed as crucial to the construction of a Manichean allegory "which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system. The exchange function of the allegory remains constant, while the generic attributes themselves can be substituted indefinitely (and even contradictorily) for one another" (JanMohamed 103, 106). The question not only of how Manichean *Indochine* as an allegory is, but whether Manichean applies in the first place, should not preempt the consideration at least of the two women characters as representations of their respective nations. Within this framework, the danger of appreciating them first of all as bodily entities within the body politic can be expressed in these terms: "When a society or political order speaks generically about 'the body,' it can deny the needs of bodies which do not fit the master plan" (Sennett 23).

In fact this can be seen in how standard definitions of what constitutes a nation have sought to elide categories of race, language, and religion, relying on the significantly less-political category of geography though ultimately falling back on an even more charged requisite of "a soul, a spiritual principle" (Renan 19). The underside – in fact, a consequence as well – of this desire for understanding one's own nation and that of others is manifested in the fact that, in terms of Asian scholarship at least,

the negative image of the people subjugated by Western colonial powers, which dominated the colonial ideology, was drawn on the basis of cursory observations, sometimes with strong built-in prejudices, or misunderstandings and faulty methodologies [...]. Those who proclaimed the people of the area indolent, dull, treacherous, and childish were generally not scholars. They were monks, civil servants, planters, sailors, soldiers, popular travel writers, and tourists. (Alatas 112)

In the formation of resistance to such gross misrepresentation, what has been described as the Janus-faced nature of nationalism has resulted in a quandary for the female subject: on the one hand,

the emancipation of women has been represented in and from the West as one of the many promised benefits of modernity; on the other hand, resistance to the West has entailed with it a resistance to the project of modernity as well, and along with it the vaunted emancipation of women:

Wherever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardized, and whatever rights they may have achieved during one stage of nation-building may be sacrificed on the altar of identity politics during another. (Kandiyoti 382)

The collapse of the French colonial system in Indochina bisected not just France's colonial malaise, particularly in the subsequent emergence of Algerian resistance, but also the larger trend of a decline in Western supremacy in Asia through the 1970s (Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars 3), except for the US and its strongholds, Korea and the Philippines. Predictably, the right-wing version of the story listed the following differences between, on the left, the sources of French defeat and, on the right, the causes of the Vietminh's success:

Poor intelligence	Communist mass-indoctrination
Underestimating the enemy	Singleness of purpose
Lack of a positive political program	United and continuous leadership
Vacillating politicians	Ruthlessness
Left-wing propaganda and sabotage	Good intelligence
Defensive-minded attitude	Good planning
Reluctance to get into the jungle	Support from Red [sic] China
Undue reliance on air support	

(O'Ballance 255)

The list evinces not just a willingness to provide more positive (and quantifiably greater) rationalization for the author's side, but also lays blame on the solidarity of Others – a fact that calls for eventual qualification in the wake of the now-known differences within the then-seemingly stable alliance comprising the former Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and North

Vietnam. In fact, the French pullout from Vietnam can be more usefully expressed as “a welcome escape from an impossible situation” wherein “in this proxy confrontation between the superpowers France’s colonial sovereignty was of secondary concern” (Jenkins 162-63).

Moreover, as Benedict Anderson has commented, whatever transnational solidarity had transpired occurred primarily as “an understanding that linked colonial rulers from different national metropolises, whatever their internal rivalries and conflicts” (152-53). More significantly, Anderson maintains that the phenomenon of reverse racist discourse was never expressed in the literature of colonial resistance, proving his point by quoting the Constitution drawn up by Macario Sakay for the latter’s rebel Philippine republic – a text that starts by declaring that no citizen “shall exalt any person above the rest because of his race or the color of his skin; fair, dark, rich, poor, educated and ignorant – all are completely equal” (ibid. 153-54).

Vietnam Connection

Applying this principle to Camille helps to delimit the character’s actual political progression from wealthy and Westernized native to unwavering freedom fighter who retains enough measure of affection for her adoptive mother in breaking down and telling her to leave, since “Your Indochine is no more.” The difference in spectatorship response to the film somehow betokens this less-than-radical desire for the Other to perform within the codes of Western honor and loyalty, notwithstanding the fact that even in the film, it is the Western figure of Guy Asselin who spearheads, consciously and remorselessly, the violation of all the rules of conduct that he claims to stand for. Thus just as much as the film was appreciated in the US for its acceptable, politically (though definitely not historically) correct re-gendering of the Vietnam narrative, the movie was also known to have turned its Camille performer, Linh Dan Pham, into a media star in what is perhaps officially the most openly anti-Communist Asian country, South Korea.⁷ Although primarily France-based (her starring role, Monica Teuber’s *Jamila*, was in German, while her latest film is

⁷ I am grateful to Professor Kim Shin Dong of Hallym University for confirming this insight, unavailable as of this writing in English- and French-language print and internet information sources, as well as to Messrs. Won Myung Ho, Moon Jeong Woo, and Kim Jong-il for assisting my searches.

Jacques Audiard's *De Battre mon coeur s'est arrêté*, the well-received remake of James Toback's *Fingers*), in the mid-1990s Linh appeared in a number of Korean prestige productions. Among these were Seo Yun-mo's 1994 film *Lai Daihan* (a derogatory term for a Korean-fathered illegitimate Vietnamese child), and the then-concurrent TV series on Korean soldiers' experiences as US allies during the Vietnam War, *Meonameon Ssongba-gang* (The Distant Songba River), from the novel by Bak Yong Han.

In this sense, and through Linh, *Indochine* may have played a vital role in the political discourse of the current Korean cultural wave. The critical self-examination of the occasionally controversial role played by Korean troops in Vietnam (Lee Kim 622-35) preceded – in a sense, heralded – the more urgent, and internally more controversial, tackling of the issue of reunification with Communist North Korea; it were as if the breaking down of a relatively mild taboo (the Korean military's overseas performance) enabled the culture to confront the more traumatic issue on the homefront.⁸ Here it becomes possible to see, in a strictly delimited sense, how conflicts arising from ethnicity (in this case the potential rejection of a pro-Vietnam text by a presumably anti-Communist viewership) are resolved through the creation of a separate but related internal conflict (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 116-17); in particular terms, these would involve the affinities between *Indochine*'s liberal politics and the South's aspiration to handle the threat of North Korea in a manner that would be of mutual benefit to the two states and that would hopefully result in their reunification.

One final, admittedly minor, aspect of the triangulation among Vietnam, the US, and Korea involves the use of the derogatory term used by American troops to refer to the Viet Cong.

⁸ At least one study, Lee Hyangjin's *Contemporary Korean Cinema*, argues that Korean films from both sides subtly adopt the rhetoric of "one nation," justifying the necessity to reunify the country. This rhetoric, in a way, reflects the genuine aspiration of the Korean people to restore their cultural homogeneity and solidarity, which, they believe, transcends the current ideological confrontation. The idea of "one nation" is deeply valued by the public on both sides, as it appears to be grounded in their firm sense of ethnic homogeneity. (4)

The term “gook” was first used against Filipino revolutionaries during the Philippine resistance against American colonization (again, an instance of déjà vu: the US sought to replace a European occupation force, at that time that of Spain, with its own). Possibly a corruption of the Tagalog word for tutelary spirit, “gugu,” that might also account for the phrase “goo-goo eyes,” the use of “gook” was reinforced during the Korean War by the fact that it means “country” in Han-gul. From its derogatory application by US soldiers to refer to Koreans and Chinese, it was finally brought over to Vietnam, thus securing its status as the “[Orientalist] racial epithet emblematic in describing [...] the ubiquitous and invisible enemy” (Lee, qtd. in Pearson n.p.).⁹ As the First-World country whose history is linked with the three Asian regional territories – in chronological order, the Philippines in Southeast Asia, Korea in East Asia, and Vietnam in Indochina – the US had consistently justified its interventions by identifying itself as each country’s savior. It purportedly set out to rescue the Philippines (and Cuba) from Spain, and subsequently liberated South Korea from the Communists. Its avowed project in Vietnam was similar to what it did for Korea, in that the Communists (also from the North) had to be prevented from taking over the country. Yet unlike in Korea, it did not allow for a territorial compromise; and as in the Philippines’s experience, the natives read its intention as a colonization attempt that called for nationalist resistance; for just as the Filipinos were looking forward to savoring their hard-won freedom from Spain, so were the Vietnamese eager to move forward after having expelled the French.

French Leave

This critique of the US’s role in Vietnam, while extraneous to the plot of *Indochine*, is

⁹ William Manchester’s account of Douglas MacArthur’s father’s experience during the Philippine-American War describes an alliterative opposition “between the ‘goddamns,’ as GIs of that era called themselves, and the ‘gugus,’ their word for natives, a precursor of ‘gooks’” (42; ascribed to Leech 405 and Lee and Henschel 20). One further connection among Koreans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos is a practice routinely condemned in the West: that of dog-meat consumption. Although ascribed (perhaps erroneously in certain specific instances) to Chinese influence, and existent in some parts of China, dog-eating is more commonly associated with the three “gook” nationalities – cf. the “Dog Eater/Dog Muncher” entry in Wikipedia’s “List of Ethnic Slurs.”

nevertheless fundamental in terms of both its timing and its content. Crucial to the trajectory of the film's international marketing strategy is the figure of France in the film. Undoubtedly the casting of Catherine Deneuve as Eliane Davries was intended to proceed from the play on her renown as the model of Marianne, the symbol of France.¹⁰ Similarly as relevant to the narrative would be her persona as a woman whose cool exterior conceals simmering, even dark, passions (notably in Luis Buñuel's 1966 film *Belle de jour*, reissued in 1995). In *Indochine* the burden of her representational function is demonstrated not so much in the relative respect accorded her body (as opposed to the "humanizing" of her emotions) but in the astounding narrative curve Eliane undergoes, all the while retaining the very same function – that of mothering – with which she first appears in the film and proceeds to render the tale of the triangulated relations with her and her daughter's lover. At the point where Camille rejects her vision of a happy-ever-after existence in the plantation and where she retrospectively realizes that Camille had planned to abandon her marital commitments, the plot flash-forwards to a now aged Eliane telling the story to a young man, about the age of her lover Jean-Baptiste, but distinctly Vietnamese in features. It is Etienne, her grandson, Camille and Jean-Baptiste's son, who at one point became entwined in his parents' legendary exploits when Jean-Baptiste, captured and separated from Camille, had asked villagers to suckle his infant son; so, the legend goes, did the tale of how all Vietnamese women, even those who no longer lactated or who were too young to do so at the time or who had not even seen Jean-Baptiste and Etienne, claimed to have nursed the child.

At the point where we first see Eliane and Etienne, however, their intimacy, the low-light situation, and the still-recent memory of Eliane's story of Jean-Baptiste (before even he and Camille became lovers) drive home the impression that Etienne is Jean-Baptiste's latter-day substitute. The second flash-forward, after Eliane relates how Jean-Baptiste was captured and had to enlist, as it were, the women of Vietnam to nourish his son, distinctly identifies the relation between Eliane and Etienne as grandmother and grandson respectively; the scene is succeeded by Eliane's acquisition of Etienne from Jean-Baptiste through local colonial and religious authorities, and how she insists on the Oriental practice of slandering an attractive child, in the presence of the bewildered white soldier

¹⁰ This insight was pointed out in a generally unappreciative review of the film by Vincent Canby in the *New York Times*, which nevertheless opened with the statement, "Catherine Deneuve reigns in *Indochine*."

and nun, in order not to arouse the jealousy of evil spirits. When she explains, “The evil spirits are listening,” however, she casts a glance at them that suggests how she might not hesitate to include them in the category. The last appearance of Eliane and Etienne (whose names at this point suggest sibling, if not twinborn, relations) is at the Geneva convention where Camille, unseen since her rejection of her mother and her mother’s country, and destined never to be seen by either Eliane and Etienne or the film viewers, is negotiating for the Vietminh side. Eliane, who could not bring herself to see Camille, instructs Etienne to look for his mother; Etienne realizes the absurdity of his difference and alienation from his biological mother, and rejoins Eliane outdoors. When Eliane expresses regret that mother and son did not find each other, Etienne replies, “*Ma mère, c’est toi,*” upon which Eliane feigns an accident with the heel of her shoe and turns away so Etienne would not see her expression. The fact that in doing so she turns her back on the audience as well makes it impossible to see her face, and at the same time facilitates the audience’s speculation of what she was feeling – grief? happiness? both or neither? – while the official loss of the French colony is being negotiated. Moreover, although the English-language subtitles render what may be literally translated as “My mother, that’s you” into the flatter “You are my mother,” the moment resonates painfully (for all the characters as well as with Other audiences) with an early scene establishing Eliane’s character as a plantation master: after she flogs a worker for attempting to escape and tells him how much it hurts a mother to punish her children, the peasant answers, literally in French, “You are my mother and my father.”

That Eliane and Etienne’s dramatic high point should be made synchronous with the 1954 convention brings in the added reading of how the French had retained a feeling of bitterness toward their expected ally, the US, along with a respect for the Vietminh, for a succession of reasons:

for Roosevelt’s initial opposition to the reassertion of French control in Indochina after World War II, for [the US’s] subsequent grudging admission that the area lay in the French domain, for its lukewarm diplomatic support during the 1954 Geneva conference, and for its readiness to assume France’s place in Vietnam immediately after Geneva. (Sullivan 56-57)

Thus the textual production of *Indochine* itself can be read as a nationalist rebuke to the gung-ho representations of the Vietnam conflict from Hollywood, but whether this was made at the expense of their making what may be considered a reverse gung-ho presentation may be an issue that could only be settled in historical retrospect, once, say, other participants in the conflict (the Vietnamese first and foremost) come up with their sobering reassessments of what they believed had actually transpired.

The act of making public what in Western culture is gendered as private (Canto 349-50) – the story of Eliane and Camille – might perhaps provisionally explain why Eliane-as-France should be overvalorized in the multiplicity of her functions – as lover, sister, and grandmother; yet it is as mother, first to Camille (Vietnam) and then to Etienne (the part of Vietnam that France brought home), that her character serves to modify two related points that have been raised about mothering in feminist discourse. First is the claim that mothers identify more with their female infants than with their male ones, but nurture female infants less because of their ambivalence about growing up in a patriarchy (Hirsch 182-83). Such a typology gets glossed over in *Indochine* because of the aforementioned agglomeration of other feminine functions ascribed to the Eliane character; further, if we concede that in Catherine Deneuve-as-France the fuller representation would include French men, then her inability to identify with Camille's cause is in danger of being conflated with her effectiveness as plantation manager. Her relationship to Etienne would seem to be less qualifiedly ambivalent, but it is the Etienne figure that is in question here, particularly in Jessica Benjamin's suggestion that the son's rejection of the mother would not necessarily constitute a refusal of her omnipotence as it would entail an attempt by the son to claim the phallus (140). What Etienne rejects would be the omnipotence of his biological mother, Camille; what he claims as the phallus would be, ironically, his refusal to reject his spiritual mother, Eliane.

After *Indochine*

Hence in employing gender as a masquerade in much the same way that femininity operates in its phase of performing the masquerade even without being aware of it, *Indochine* conducts its critique of the imagining of Vietnam by the US without acknowledging the radical potential of the Vietnamese's anti-colonialist project, much less admitting the masculinist nature and

cause of the French involvement. The narrative thread of the representation of Vietnam in the Western imaginary awaits a further and far more unsettling unspooling. So far, since the film's release, two developments may be provisionally "read" in its wake, one intertextual and the other historical.¹¹

The first event would be the reissue of Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* twenty-two years later, as *Apocalypse Now Redux*. *Apocalypse Now* was the first Vietnam War film to win the top international film prize, the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival, even though it was originally screened as a work in progress.¹² Of the nearly fifty minutes added to the new version, the longest sequence, nearly a half hour, consisted of Capt. Benjamin L. Willard and his crew

¹¹ I must confess to a fear of exceeding my grasp, as well as unduly distending the boundaries of this paper, if I were to include a third event, so complex in its intertextuality and casually perverse in its formal, temporal, and sexual premises that it demands an article all its own. In the bravura opening sequence of Brian De Palma's *Femme Fatale*, set during the Cannes Film Festival, Régis Wargnier appears as himself during the premiere of his next Catherine Deneuve-starrer, *Est-Ouest* (East-West). His date gets seduced by another woman, which sets off the metaphysical-thriller plot mechanism of *Femme Fatale*. What would Wargnier, a specialist in conventional epic humanist cinema, have to do with this theme? The key, as I see it, lies in Deneuve who, though absent during the premiere, enjoys (so to speak) queer-icon status, to the point where the US's most successful lesbian publication, *Curve*, had originally named itself after her (Belge n.p.).

¹² Although *Apocalypse Now* dealt overtly with the Vietnam War, other US-produced previous Cannes Grand Prix winners were already referencing the conflict: Robert Altman's *MASH*, although ostensibly set during the Korean War, situated its sensibility squarely in the countercultural 1960s through the nihilism and black humor of the screenplay of former Hollywood blacklist victim Ring Lardner, Jr.; while Travis Bickle, the lead character in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, although based on the story of a man who attempted to assassinate an American presidential candidate, is introduced as a mentally unbalanced Vietnam War veteran – inspiring in turn a real-life mentally unbalanced individual who would also attempt to assassinate an American President. Francis Ford Coppola was not a newcomer to the Cannes Film Festival either – his film *The Conversation* had earlier also won the Grand Prix.

discovering a hidden French plantation on their way to terminate “with extreme prejudice” renegade Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (practically all the “*Redux* version only” cast members are in fact French – cf. “Full Cast and Crew for *Apocalypse Now* [1979],” Internet Movie Database). While having dinner with the plantation family, Captain Willard is harangued by the owners, who maintain that Americans like him should know better about attempting to colonize Vietnam (which they describe somewhat enigmatically as “the biggest nothing in history”) after the French had suffered their loss of the colony.¹³ Later he retires to the parlor for a tryst with the heiress, who tells him ominously, “The war will still be here tomorrow” (“Memorable Quotes from *Apocalypse Now* [1979],” Internet Movie Database).

The second event appears to fulfill the heiress’s prediction, this time from a different aspect of French colonial experience. After France withdrew from Indochina in 1954, it had to contend with an even fiercer struggle for independence from the *Front de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Front) of Algeria, then as now a highly politicized Islamic population; among the FLN’s luminaries during that moment was revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon. All accounts of the Algerian-French conflict acknowledge that it was far more ferocious and debilitating, especially for the French, than the Indochine experience; the filmic account of the war, Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, remains a more unqualified achievement than *Indochine*, with one critical assessment describing it as “a great incendiary epic [...] about an] event that triggered a seismic wave of anti-colonial movements across the Third World, serving [...] as a more practical lesson in the violent means deemed necessary to win” (Matthews n.p.).

¹³ In the *Independent Weekly*, film critic Godfrey Cheshire states that “What these colonial holdouts seem to be saying is that Americans will lose the war because they don’t have the strong, gut-level reasons for holding onto Vietnam that they, the French, still feel.” The logical uncertainty of this reading stems from its implication that any colonizing country with “gut-level” attachment to its colony will succeed in “holding onto” its territory, contrasted with the historical reality that, at this point in *Apocalypse Now Redux*’s narrative, the French had already actually lost the war that the Americans were then striving to win. In any case, even if we grant, as Cheshire argues, that this had been right-wing scriptwriter John Milius’s intended slant all along, the precedence of *Indochine*’s impact – of the French criticizing the US’s role in Vietnam by referring to their own experience as precursor – remains.

One would be merely echoing widespread conventional opinion in pointing out how the US, in messing around with a number of Islamic peoples, has once again failed to learn, or more likely, opted to ignore, the French example. And where Algeria had proved to be more traumatic for France than Vietnam had been, one can only look back and anticipate with further dread what consequences await the US's ongoing military adventures.

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This paper explores the main tenets of gender studies of language developed in Western linguistics. The article contains a comparative critical analysis of deficiency framework, dominance framework, difference framework and dynamic framework and exhibits the implications of different approaches to manifestation of gender and sex in language. The changes in gender dynamics and roles in society for an individual or group can be changed by either economic standing, age and other factors. These can either be behaviors which society doesn't question, are hidden within society and society may even be against changing. A handful of behaviors are sometimes considered negative by a portion of society whom believes it makes men and women unequal. Feminists being the most popular example of this. Other than that gender dynamics are an important part in the human experience and have been found in every society throughout history. Including our own, and will continue to be relevant in the societies our future descendants make.