

# Vietnam Generation

---

Volume 1

Number 3 *Gender and the War: Men, Women and Vietnam*

Article 1

---

10-1989

## Gender and the War: Men, Women and Vietnam

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/vietnamgeneration>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(1989) "Gender and the War: Men, Women and Vietnam," *Vietnam Generation*: Vol. 1 : No. 3 , Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/vietnamgeneration/vol1/iss3/1>

This Complete Volume is brought to you for free and open access by La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vietnam Generation by an authorized editor of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).



**GENDER AND THE WAR:  
MEN, WOMEN AND  
VIETNAM**



# VIETNAM GENERATION

VOLUME 1      SUMMER-FALL 1989      NUMBERS 3-4

**GENDER AND THE WAR: MEN, WOMEN AND VIETNAM**  
SPECIAL EDITOR, JACQUELINE LAWSON

- 4            **PREFACE**
- 6            **INTRODUCTION**  
Jacqueline Lawson
- 12           **PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE AND THE  
COSMOGONIC MYTHOLOGY OF PRIMEVAL CHAOS  
AND ORDER**  
J. William Gibson
- 33           **"I NEVER REALLY BECAME A WOMAN VETERAN  
UNTIL...I SAW THE WALL": A REVIEW OF ORAL  
HISTORIES AND PERSONAL NARRATIVES BY WOMEN  
VETERANS OF THE WAR**  
Renny Christopher
- 46           **INTERVIEWS WITH TWO VIETNAM VETERANS:  
WELCOME HOME**  
David Berman
- 59           **MAKING SENSE OF VIETNAM AND TELLING THE REAL  
STORY: MILITARY WOMEN IN *THE COMBAT ZONE***  
Cheryl A. Shell
- 68           **THE TELEVISION WAR: TREATMENT OF GENDER AND  
THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE IN NETWORK TELEVISION  
DRAMA IN THE 1988-89 SEASON**  
M. Elaine Dolan Brown

- 74**                    **VISIONS OF VIETNAM IN WOMEN'S SHORT FICTION**  
Susanne Carter
- 90**                    **"GOING TOWARD WAR" IN THE WRITINGS OF**  
**MAXINE HONG KINGSTON**  
James R. Aubrey
- 102**                   **AS SOLDIER LADS MARCH BY**  
Alan Farrell
- 109**                   **SEXIST SUBSCRIPT IN VIETNAM NARRATIVES**  
Nancy Anisfield
- 115**                   **BACK AGAINST THE WALL: ANTI-FEMINIST**  
**BACKLASH IN VIETNAM WAR LITERATURE**  
Lorrie Smith
- 127**                   **HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN: MILITARIZED**  
**MOURNING AND CEREMONIAL VENGEANCE**  
Chaim F. Shatan
- 152**                   **POINT BLANK: SHOOTING VIETNAMESE WOMEN**  
Susan Jeffords
- 168**                   **VIOLENCE, DEATH AND MASCULINITY**  
Eric J. Leed
- 190**                   **FEMINIST CRITICISM AND THE LITERATURE OF THE**  
**VIETNAM COMBAT VETERAN**  
Kali Tal
- 202**                   **MOON LANDING: A MEMORY**  
Rebecca Blevins Faery
- 206**                   **INVITATION TO THE BURIAL OF TRADITIONAL**  
**WOMANHOOD**

- 208**      **THE DAY THEY BURIED "TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD":  
WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE PROTEST**  
Ruth Rosen
- 235**      **TAKING IN THE IMAGES: A RECORD IN GRAPHICS OF THE  
VIETNAM ERA SOIL FOR FEMINISM**  
Kathie Sarachild
- 246**      **WOMEN FOR PEACE OR WOMEN'S LIBERATION? SIGNPOSTS  
FROM THE FEMINIST ARCHIVES**  
Jenny Brown for Redstockings
- 261**      **NUCLEAR DISCOURSE AND ITS DISCONTENTS, OR,  
APOCALYPSE NOW OR NEVER**  
Jean Bethke Elshtain
- 274**      **BIBLIOGRAPHY OF UNUSUAL SOURCES ON WOMEN AND THE  
VIETNAM WAR**
- 278**      **NOTES ON THE AUTHORS**

# PREFACE

On November 12, 1989, hundreds of thousands of women converged on Washington, DC to show their support for the idea that women have a right to safe and legal abortions. The rally, sponsored by the National Organization of Women, was not ignored by anti-abortion forces, who, though vastly outnumbered, attempted to carry out the mission of "Operation Rescue"—the closing of clinics and health centers which perform abortions—in the D.C area on the days immediately preceding and following the rally. Among those anti-abortion forces were the members of a peculiar movement which styles itself "Veterans for Life."

In a strategic decision, the NOW organizers had decided to hold the rally on the Sunday of a three-day holiday weekend. The holiday, quite coincidentally, happened to be Veterans' Day. The rally was held in front of the Lincoln Memorial which, also coincidentally, happens to be in the immediate vicinity of the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

Veteran presence at the wall is always strong—nearby there are small tents set up by those who promote the "cause" of the POW-MIAs, and even a wooden tiger cage (on the plaza opening onto the Lincoln Memorial) occupied by a veteran, a symbol of his determination "never to forget his brothers still in Vietnam." On and around Veterans' Day, veteran presence at the wall sharply escalates as thousands of World War II, Korean war and Vietnam veterans pour into the city for reunions, get-togethers, commemorations, and they all make their pilgrimages to the Wall. Vets in full combat regalia gather in groups to talk to each other, and to talk to civilian visitors, mourners, and passers-by.

Though the gathering of abortion-rights activists, anti-abortion advocates, and veterans at the same place and at the same time was entirely accidental, it proved the catalyst for a bizarre discourse. Attempting to take advantage of the newly rediscovered American fondness for veterans, the anti-abortionists urged anti-choice veterans to join them in their protest against female reproductive rights. This resulted in the creation of "Veterans for Life," an organization which believes that abortion is "anti-American." Veterans for Life gathered to hold candlelight services on the Friday and Saturday before the march, and conflated their public mourning for the Vietnam war dead with their mourning for all the "murdered children." On the anti-abortion side, it was a strategically significant move, placing pro-choice ralliers in the position of appearing anti-veteran if they picketed the event or disrupted it in any way.

On the Sunday of the pro-choice rally, women streamed onto the mall, carrying banners and signs, wearing purple and white, singing and

chanting. Many came in from the northwest side of the city, and thus passed by the Vietnam Memorial and its attendant veteran host on their way to the gathering. Veterans were everywhere in evidence along the path to the Memorial, most of them dressed in fatigues (*new* fatigues, upon which they had painstakingly re sewn their badges and patches), boonie hats, and heavy black combat boots. The Memorial was cordoned off, and a veteran stood at each end of the walkway, effectively preventing marchers with signs from walking beside the Wall. Veterans for Life mingled with those veterans and tourists who had simply come to see the wall, but the rallying women were barred from the Memorial proper.

Women flooded the plaza in front of the Lincoln Memorial, enveloping the POW-MIA booths and pro-Flag Amendment booths manned by veterans. They leaned up against the tiger cage and sat on the tables of literature and bumper stickers which read "I'm not Fonda Hanoi Jane." Those of us who stood in front could turn around to face the Washington Monument and see the crowd stretching the length of the Reflecting Pool and beyond. "Wow," said one woman behind me, "I haven't seen anything like this since we marched on Washington to stop the war in '68." And above all the signs which read, "Keep Your Laws Off My Body," "Republican Women for Choice," "Bush, Stay Out of Mine!" "Every Sperm Does Not Have a Name," and "U.S. Out of My Uterus" you could see, higher than any other banner, the black POW flag waving in the wind.

As a literary critic and cultural therapist, my impulse was to "read" the event. Texts, after all, can be interpreted; symbols can be deciphered, understood. But the contradictions and anomalies inherent in any interpretation I could manufacture served to drive home the complexity of the problem. What, after all, was I to make of four Vietnam vets in combat gear carrying a banner that read, "Women Who Have Abortions Shed Innocent Blood"? Vietnam veterans calling American women baby-killers?

We have a lot more thinking to do on the subject of gender and war. This collection of essays represents a step in that direction.

Kali Tal  
Washington, DC , 1989.

# INTRODUCTION

## JACQUELINE LAWSON

War may not be “a biological necessity,” as General Friedrich von Bernhardt once claimed,<sup>1</sup> but if history is a reliable indicator, it does seem to have been a necessity more often for one gender than for the other. More than any other endeavor, war seems to ‘take the measure of a man,’ and perhaps this is why men have been so singularly fascinated by it. This, at least, is the conviction of a number of commentators on men in battle, among them former Marine William Broyles, Jr., who in an oft-cited *Esquire* essay, “Why Men Love War,” emphatically declares, “War is the enduring condition of man, period.”<sup>2</sup> It is this canard—that war is the exclusive province of men, a closed and gendered activity inscribed by myth, informed by ritual, and enacted solely through the power relations of patriarchy—that I would hope to dispel in this introduction.

Any intelligent discussion of gender and war must necessarily begin from the premise, advanced by Jean Bethke Elshtain in her influential book *Women and War*, that “war is the cultural property of peoples,”<sup>3</sup> a system of “collective violence” in which women participate equally with men, in which complicity is shared, and for which all citizens must ultimately bear responsibility. “Wars,” she quite logically points out, “are not men’s property”; “rather, wars destroy and bring into being men *and* women as particular *identities* by canalizing energy and giving permission to narrate.”<sup>4</sup> “Perhaps,” she is led to remark, “we are not strangers to one another after all.”<sup>5</sup>

It is in this spirit of collaboration, of a shared acknowledgement that ‘we’re all in this together,’ that I wish to introduce the following essays. The articles on gender and war assembled for this special double issue of *Vietnam Generation* represent the most current, vital, and sophisticated discourse on the subject to date. The range of opinion in the essays collected here attests to the remarkable dedication of scholars working in the related fields of feminism, masculinism, gender studies, and Vietnam war studies. The diversity of thought in these collected essays is manifestly prodigious: the recent surge in popularity of paramilitarism; the still unacknowledged post-war trauma of the women who served in Vietnam; mass media’s role in promulgating divisive stereotypes about men, women, and war; the recent proliferation of Vietnam-inspired fiction by women; the pernicious effects of masculinism, both as cultural phenomenon and psychological signifier; recent trends in feminist scholarship on gender and war; the genesis and impact of the



women's peace movement; and the inexorable march through our nuclear present are among the subjects explored by the contributors.

Examining the recent proliferation of narrative and visual texts devoted to militarized role-playing (mercenaries, vigilantes, and modern-day desperados), William Gibson traces the rise of "paramilitary culture," as an expression of male "regeneration through violence." The commercial success of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, and such related industries as gun shows, paramilitary camps, and *Soldier of Fortune's* enormously popular annual convention, point to a disturbing trend among men in the post-Vietnam era, individuals who wish not merely to mythologize but enact and perpetuate male rituals of violence.

While noncombatant men engage in simulated warfare, and while the real post-war suffering of male Vietnam veterans continues to receive increased attention, the experiences of women who served in Vietnam remain marginalized. Although, not surprisingly, estimates vary, between 15,000 and 50,000 American women served in Vietnam, half in a military capacity, half in civilian posts, yet for many years their stories remained untold. Mark Baker's oral history *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (1981) first brought the plight of women veterans to public attention, but it was Lynda Van Devanter's groundbreaking memoir *Home Before Morning: The True Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (1983) that provided the impetus for women veterans to publish their accounts of the war. Oral histories like *A Piece of My Heart* (1985), *Nurses in Vietnam* (1987), and *In the Combat Zone* (1987) reveal that American women were subjected to the same stresses as their male co-workers, yet the effect of this stress was either dismissed or ignored. Since the war, women veterans have reported in ever increasing numbers the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including severe adjustment problems, marital breakups, difficulty in holding civilian jobs, alcoholism, drug addiction, promiscuity, and illness, both psychological and physical. That the high incidence of PTSD among women veterans has gone largely unpublicized—and unrecognized by official agencies like the Veterans Administration—is one of the central issues raised in these texts.

In her survey of women veterans' literature, Renny Christopher points up the paradoxical position of women, both in-country and back in The World. "Having absorbed the gender role stereotypes of the larger American society," she writes, "these women expected to submerge their own needs, and to take care of the men, whose role as combat soldiers was valued more highly than that of nurses or other 'support' personnel." Moreover, many returning women veterans found the women's movement unresponsive to their needs, in part, a manifestation of their own ambivalent feelings about serving the war effort during a period of anti-war and feminist ferment back home.

An intimate exploration of the continued marginalization of female veterans is provided by David Berman, whose interviews with two medical surgical nurses, Lois Shirley and Kathie Trew Swazuk, speak to

## 8 VIETNAM GENERATION

the unremitting post-war anguish of the American women who served in Vietnam. What emerges from these interviews is a harrowing portrait of the waste and devastation wreaked by the war in Vietnam, and of the indomitability and physical fortitude of the women who chose to work among the carnage.

Cheryl Shell's analysis of Kathryn Marshall's *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975*, and of current television portrayals of American women in Vietnam, corroborates and extends the issues raised in Berman's interviews. As Shell notes, popular representations of women veterans in both the mass media and written texts "reinforce all our stereotypes about war and nurses." As she points out, the complexity of the Vietnam experience, and our national failure to confront the plight of women veterans, has resulted in the further trivialization of women's role in wartime.

In a related essay, M. Elaine Dolan Brown explores the unsatisfactory treatment of gender issues in both daytime and prime time television series. Packaged for a mass audience, these media portrayals routinely capitalize on the tired but commercially successful formula of drugs, sex, and rock-and-roll, propagating damaging stereotypes of tormented Vietnam veterans and the women who alternately love and are abused by them.

Serious attempts to come to grips with the persistent specter of Vietnam are found in the growing body of short fiction by women. In her comprehensive bibliographic survey of women's short fiction, Susanne Carter introduces an unsentimentalized canon of literature by women. Aimed not at the 'cathartic' resolution of the Vietnam-inspired literature of the 70s and 80s, but rather seeking to overturn the romanticized, highly didactic male Vietnam texts, this body of short fiction "depicts war's special brand of horror and shows how it affects both veterans and civilians, often the overlooked indirect victims of war."

James Aubrey's analysis of the writings of Maxine Hong Kingston further establishes the legitimate role of the Vietnam war in serious fiction. As Aubrey demonstrates, Kingston's works reveal a preoccupation with war, both as a source of national and intensely personal conflict. Her best known work, *The Woman Warrior*, "reads like a feminist autobiography in which Kingston learns to wield her pen like a weapon." The tension in Kingston's work between "the woman" and "the warrior" may reveal her own ambivalence about coming of age as a Chinese-American woman in an Anglo, male dominated culture.

It is the tension within white male culture itself that Alan Farrell seeks to elucidate in his provocative essay, "As Soldier Lads March By." "Reading" the military through the rarified lens of the academic establishment, Farrell suggests that a disjunction exists between scholars and veterans, a chasm of misunderstanding unbridgeable by the "rational" logicians of higher education, those arbiters of "truth" who seek always "the comfort of order." "The thought of obedience without the right to question, challenge, modify, accuse, recuse terrifies intellectuals and

represents one of the great threats held out by military service." As long as the academic ethos runs counter to that of the military, Farrell asserts, conflict will ensue and chaos will prevail.

The language of war is inherently sexist, a misogynistic rhetoric of dehumanization, violence, and phallogocentric posturing. Nancy Anisfield critiques a number of Vietnam war narratives, revealing a pattern of linguistic brutality, diminishment, and fetishization, a male lexicon of combat, in which the objectification of women's bodies and the vulgarization of female sexuality lead to a buried "subscript" of dominance and abuse.

Anti-feminist backlash in male writings of the Vietnam war is the subject of Lorrie Smith's analysis of several critically acclaimed Vietnam texts. Through feminist readings of John Wheelers *Touched by Fire*, Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story*, and Tim O'Brien's metafictional *Esquire* article, "How To Tell a True War Story," Smith establishes that a cross-current of machismo and unrepentant sexism underlies much of the "serious" Vietnam war writing. As she remarks, "The Vietnam war turns out to be the ideal screen on which to project anxiety about the power and position of white American manhood in the eighties."

As a corollary to the literary exegeses of Anisfield and Smith, psychiatrist Chaim Shatan posits a theory of "militarized mourning and ceremonial vengeance," a process whereby adolescent recruits are "militarized" in a mythic rite of male bonding and rituals of aggression. Shatan exposes the sadism and "totalitarian ideals" at the heart of Marine Corps basic training instruction, noting that the 'manhood' won is, in fact, "bogus."

The treatment of Vietnamese women, the Vietnam war's most neglected subject, is explored by Susan Jeffords, who examines recent representations of Vietnamese women in popular film and fiction. As she points out, women combatants in Vietnam are invariably depicted in isolation, sinister, alien forces on the landscape of war whose 'otherness' gives them license, not to kill but to mutilate. The brutal enactment of castration rituals in such films as *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and the Rambo series, vividly reinforce misogynistic stereotypes of women, further legitimating men's fear that women are the enemy.

Eric Leed suggests that the violence of war—mutilation, execution, torture, murder—is a peculiarly male activity, and that men seek "certainty of self and connections to other men through the medium of violence." He argues that "War is an assertion of male potencies," derived from the biological circumstance of man's inability to bear young. Among the questions Leed raises are, "In what ways does war, the encounter with death, confront men with their essence—freedom?"

The proliferation of feminist scholarship in the field of Vietnam war studies has, in the words of Kali Tal, provided "an alternative to working within the masculine framework." In her analysis of selected Vietnam combat literature, Tal asserts that the narrative underpinning

## 10 VIETNAM GENERATION

of such texts is “the literature of trauma.” The similarity of veterans suffering from PTSD, as reified through much of the male combat literature, and the struggle and anguish informing many feminist writings, “are strong indications that feminist literature may also be examined as literature of trauma.” Men and women are not, suggests Tal, so very different after all.

The 1969 moon landing, played out against the backdrop of the Vietnam war, provides the inspiration for Rebecca Faery’s eloquent meditation on gender, marriage, and her own feminist awakening. As Neil Armstrong places his boot on the dust of the moon, Faery reflects on the competing claims of womanhood. “I knew, I thought, what it was to be a satellite, with an orbit defined by someone or something else. I thought I also knew what it must be like to have a boot in your face.”

The rupture within the women’s peace movement, symbolized by The Burial of Traditional Womanhood in January, 1968, is explored at length by historian Ruth Rosen. “In many ways,” she says, “the women’s peace movement is one of the most profound legacies of the Vietnam war.” Tracing the evolution of women’s peace groups, from The Women Strike For Peace in 1961, to the current and highly visible resistance massed by women opposing nuclear proliferation, Rosen points up the conflicts inherent in the various factions of the women’s peace movement, while at the same time demonstrating that there is common ground among feminist activists. “Peace,” she reminds us, “is not simply the absence of war. For women in the peace encampments and their sympathizers, a redefinition of peace, security and defense are all necessary.”

The collection of graphics compiled by Kathie Sarachild (who, as Kathie Amatriek delivered the eulogy for Traditional Womanhood in 1968) reminds us that feminists, particularly Third World feminists, during the Vietnam war era often identified with the “people’s army” of Vietnam, and particularly with the Vietnamese women who they saw as their sisters-in-arms.

Jenny Brown’s survey and analysis of the materials contained in the Redstockings Women’s Liberation Archives affords a glimpse into the nascent feminist movement of the early 1960s, and provides confirmation of the courage and commitment of pioneering Vietnam-era feminists to radical change in all spheres of social and political life. Drawing on leaflets, broadsides, manifestos, and published essays, Brown presents a history of feminist resistance striking in its intellectual vigor, intensity, and integrity. As she declares, “We have to alert our sisters to the vital radical storehouse in the feminist tradition and get our movement going in a direction which will actually win some of the things we need before the reforms which were won in the rebirth years are completely rolled back.”

Jean Elshtain’s discussion of nuclear discourse is a fitting coda to a detailed examination of gender and war. Elshtain shows how women have been systematically excluded from “the cool language of strategy.”

# INTRODUCTION 11

a bewildering and single-gendered lexicon of first strikes, countervailing strategies, flexible response, and escalation dominance. The convolutions of such "strategic discourse" may well lead to anomie, an apocalypse of numbness, inertia and fear, in short, "a massive denial of the reality and threat that nuclear weapons present to our own survival and that of our children and their children." Elshtain calls for a new, communally-gendered discourse, that of the "hopeful, anti-utopian citizen who acknowledges a world of bewildering diversity in which we are nonetheless invited to search for commonalities as cherished achievements."

The collective voices of these nineteen scholars speak powerfully to the nature of war and warfare, both past and present, and to the implications of escalating militarism for the men and women who inhabit this planet. It is my privilege to introduce these essays, and it is my hope that the issues they raise will impel future scholars to engage actively in the ongoing critical discourse on gender and war. In closing, I wish simply to reinvoke Jean Elshtain's comment that "perhaps we are not strangers to one another after all."

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin) 1982: 36.

<sup>2</sup> William Broyles, Jr., "Why Men Love War," *Esquire* (Nov 1984): 56.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1987: 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 166.

*Ibid.*: 225.

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE AND THE COSMOGONIC MYTHOLOGY OF PRIMEVAL CHAOS AND ORDER

J. WILLIAM GIBSON

We know the man at first glance: Along the dirty, darkened street a hard-looking guy walks alone, trailed by a gang of savage punks. In an obscure Middle Eastern country a senior marine sergeant stumbles to his feet amidst the burning, bombed-out ruins of an American Embassy, his enraged eyes searching for the laughing Arab and European terrorists whom he knows watch from afar. A time-traveller from a war-torn future materializes naked and breathless, like a new born baby, and then runs into the night on a desperate mission to save humankind from eradication by robots.

Since the late 1970s, shortly after the American defeat in Vietnam, the mythic figure of the heroic male warrior returned. In *Death Wish* (1974) the middle aged man whose wife has been killed and daughter raped and driven insane by attackers never apprehended by the police, pretends to be a new victim and kills the punks. In *Death Before Dishonor* (1987) the senior sergeant and his young marine "nephews" both rescue their kidnapped commanding officer—the grand patriarch of this marine family—and destroy the terrorists. And in *Terminator* (1984), although the time-traveller dies in his attempts to destroy a robot programmed to kill the mother of the future world's great leader, he first impregnates her. He thus fathers the next generation's super warrior—the same man who sent him on his mission through time in the first place.

These three films are but instances in a vast cultural resurgence of narratives and visual symbols concerning war and warriors that have been created in the past fifteen years. Hundreds of films have been made, from expensive productions with star casts, to formula films employing lesser known actors; "action-adventure" films have been the largest category of video rentals throughout the 1980s. The same publishing houses that market women's romance novels, now produce novel series for men featuring commandos, vigilantes and mercenaries who have left normal society and made battle their way of life. From fifteen to thirty series are published each year, with each series coming out four times a year, and print runs from 60,000 to 250,000 (high) per edition. *Soldier of Fortune: The Journal of Professional Adventurers* first came out in 1975; by 1986 *SOF* sold up to a quarter of a million

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 13

magazines each month and had several competitors. Comic books have in turn borrowed from films, novels, magazines, and their own warrior genre to create series featuring mercenaries and vigilantes.

In conjunction with the print and film representations of war, a new consumer market for slightly modified versions of military assault rifles and their accessories have become a major feature of the domestic gun trade. The US Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco estimates that from two to three million had been sold by the spring of 1989. Public fears that assault rifles will be banned as a result of the protests that emerged from the Stockton, California massacre in January 1989 have increased demand for the weapons. By April 1989, gun dealers had placed order to import over 900,000 additional rifles to join those produced inside the US.

Taken as a whole, this reworking of traditional war culture constitutes what I call "paramilitary culture." The new warrior hero is only rarely portrayed as a member of a conventional military or law-enforcement unit. Instead, the new hero fights alone or with a small, elite group of fellow warriors. By being outside the dominant power structure and bureaucracy, the new paramilitary warrior can overcome forms of legal and political restraint supposedly imposed by elites on their subordinates, and thus achieve new mythic victories to replace American defeat in Vietnam. Moreover, paramilitary culture stresses the warrior role as a gender identity for all men, rather than as an occupational identity limited to soldiers and police; all men, be they bankers, professors, factory workers or postal clerks, can be warriors who are always prepared for battle against the enemies of society.

Paramilitary culture represents the newest cultural elaboration of what historian Richard Slotkin calls "*regeneration through violence*." In Slotkin's assessment, European settlers created a fundamental American myth during their wars against the Indians: American technological and logistic superiority in warfare became encoded as a sign of cultural and moral superiority. Thus, European and American civilization morally deserved to defeat Indian "savagery," and in turn, each victory by Anglo warriors "regenerated" or revitalized the society as a whole. The long history of US victories from the Indian wars through World War II reinforced the centrality of wars and warriors as symbols of masculine virility and American virtue.

Consequently, defeat in Vietnam constituted a two-fold crisis for the United States. First, defeat indicated limits to US political and military powers to successfully intervene in Third World countries. Second, defeat in Vietnam created a cultural crisis. Since American cultural traditions and personal identities are in part sustained and renewed through the myth of "*regeneration through violence*," then defeat in war ruptured this fundamental tradition and socialization process.

This disjunction of cultural tradition was amplified by several other major social changes. During the 1960s the civil rights and ethnic

## 14 VIETNAM GENERATION

nationalist movements won many victories and successfully challenged white racial domination. During the 1970s and 1980s the feminist movement challenged male sexism. Formerly exclusive male domains in both the labor market and in many areas of social life were integrated by women. What constituted the desirable values of full manhood became a problematic question as women gained more autonomy. The critique of patriarchy became an aspect of women's and men's everyday lives.

Finally, extraordinary economic changes marked the 1970s and 1980s. US manufacturing strength substantially declined; both massive trade deficits with other countries and the chronic US government budget deficits have shifted the United States from a "creditor" to "debtor" nation. The post-World War II "American Dream" of high employment rates, rising wages, widespread home ownership, and consumerism no longer seems like a viable future for much of the middle and working classes.

War mythology became a central cultural territory for articulating responses to these changes because war mythology symbolically connects the nation's historical self-conception to archaic, cosmological notions of how society came into existence from a previous chaotic or warlike condition. Male gods or supermen are the central protagonists in this primordial/historical struggle between the forces of chaos and the forces of order. Slotkin writes:

A mythology is a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. The narrative action of the myth-tale recapitulates that people's experience in their land, rehearses their visions of that experience in its relation to their gods and the cosmos, and reduces both experience and mission to a paradigm.... Myth describes a process, credible to its audience, by which knowledge is transformed into power; it provides a scenario or prescription for action, defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe.<sup>1</sup>

"Regeneration through violence" refers to the primary American *cultural archetype*, a term Slotkin defines as a "narrative of narratives, derived from and expressing the common structural form of a constellation of related myth-narratives."<sup>2</sup> Thus, James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking character in early American literature, the legends of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, Ned Buntline's "Wild Bill" Cody character and his exploits, and later, in the 20th century, western and war movies with stars like John Wayne, would be considered as "myth narratives" whose basic structural form is encapsulated in the concept of regeneration through violence.

The component stories in American war mythology usually have an ostensibly secular or historical reference—the defeat of the Indians, the Mexicans, the Spanish, the Germans, the Japanese, or some other



enemy. But the fantastic plots, heroes, and events of most such narratives make them a kind of cosmogonic mythology as well as a more historically specific cultural legitimation and motivating doctrine for an expanding American empire. Cosmogonic myths—the primary narratives of pre-industrial societies—concern the very origins and nature of the universe. Mircea Eliade explains:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the “beginnings.” In other words, myth tells us, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a “creation;” it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells only of that which *really* happened, which manifested itself completely.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars of mythology have found that in most pre-industrial societies, the creation myths take the form of a passage from “chaos” to “order” and that the period of chaos was a *war* between the “good” forces of creation and order versus the “evil” forces of chaos. Consequently, wars have been conceptualized as not simply about worldly matters of territory or secular ideas about freedom, but rather as struggles against the primordial chaos. Paul Ricoeur calls it the “theology of the Holy War:

According to that theology, the Enemy is the Wicked One, war is his punishment, and there are wicked ones because first there is evil and then order. In the final analysis, evil is not an accident that upsets a previous order; it belongs constitutionally to the foundation of order. Indeed, it is doubly original; first, in the role of the Enemy, whom the forces of chaos have never ceased to incarnate, although they were crushed at the beginning of the world; second, in the figure of the King, sent to “destroy the wicked and the evil” by the same ambiguous power of devastation and of prudence that once upon a time established order.<sup>4</sup>

War mythology thus tells its stories on both the historical, society-specific level, and at the cosmogonic level of creation myth. War mythology takes the person or group back to the back of the Great Battle, which is by definition a great victory. As Branislaw Malinowski says, myth is not “an explanation in satisfaction of scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality.”<sup>5</sup> In knowing the tales of the primordial/historical victories (and thus resurrecting the magical time in reciting them), the warrior gains strength. He becomes assured, in Eliade’s interpretation, “that what he is about to do *has already been done*, in other words, it helps him to overcome doubts as to the result of his undertaking. There is no reason to hesitate before setting out on a sea voyage, because the mythical Hero has already made it in a fabulous time.”<sup>6</sup>

## 16 VIETNAM GENERATION

The process of returning to the sacred beginning and so becoming a "god" in the primordial time is both conceptualized and ritually experienced as a form of symbolic rebirth. Many of the rituals, particularly initiation ceremonies and rites of passage, have a three-part structure during which the initiands first "die," then pass through what Victor Turner calls the "liminal" condition of being in between social categories during which they are instructed in sacred truths appropriate for their now role in society.<sup>7</sup> Finally, they experience "rebirth" as new beings living (as Eliade says) at "a higher mode of existence."<sup>8</sup> This rebirth can take two different forms. Most pre-industrial societies have myths and rituals celebrating *both order and chaos*. Rebirth can take place either in the great war before the creation of the world or in the sacred beginning of the new order.

Thus the resurgence of war mythology and its new development as "paramilitary culture" in the 1970s and 1980s represents a return to mythic origins as a way for men to heal the wounds of military defeat in Vietnam and to simultaneously alleviate the perceived threats from feminism and the many other social and economic changes of the past twenty years. In mythic thought, a strong sense of structural homology can connect categories of events or actions that modern thought holds to be quite distinct and separate. Eliade explains:

The man of traditional societies feels the basic unity of all kinds of "deeds, "works," or "forms," whether they are biological, psychological, or historical. An unsuccessful war can be homologized with a sickness, with a dark, discouraged heart, with a sterile woman, with a poet's lack of inspiration, as with any other critical existential situation in which man is driven to despair. *And all of these negative, desperate, apparently irremediable situations are reversed by recitation of the cosmogonic myth.*<sup>9</sup>

Paramilitary culture allows men to travel (in fantasy) back to the chaotic world of primeval war and experience a symbolic rebirth as a warrior to become the hero of the myth. Movies, television shows, novels, and magazines provide the narrative structure and visual imagery for these imaginary journeys; they are ways of "reciting" the cosmogonic and historical myths.

In conjunction with these texts, a whole array of war and weapons festivals have developed, such as gun shows and the annual week-long *Soldier of Fortune* magazine convention in Las Vegas. A new war game called "paint ball," in which squads of men dressed in military camouflage hunt each other with pistols firing paint-filled gelatin capsules, attracts an estimated 50,000 players each week when the weather is temperate. Shooting real combat weapons, either informally or in organized combat shooting sports, provides another means of ritually "playing" war. Special combat weapons training schools, open to both civilians and military men, have become a big business. As Brian

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 17

Sutton-Smith, a scholar of toys and culture says, "It seems to be the nature of play, games, sports, and festivals, therefore, that they are among the more open and fluid of human realities, within which it is more easily possible to express our desires and our contradictions in ways that are not possible within the conventional boundaries of society."<sup>10</sup>

Since war mythology appears in "entertainment" films, "pulp" reading material, and "games," it is rarely taken seriously by scholars. Indeed, myth is often conceptualized as a form of thought that was abolished when traditional societies were transformed by the development of industrial capitalism and science became the most prestigious intellectual approach to understanding the world. And surely, cosmogonic and historical myths do not have the same intellectual power in the modern era as opposed to times in which myth was the only significant explanation of the cosmos.

Modern scholars of myth have questioned the simple model of development in which traditional "religious" society completely changed into modern "secular" society. Instead, as Richard Stivers contends, "our society is secularized only in respect to what was *previously* sacred."<sup>11</sup> For example, the sun is no longer seen as the sky god, but as a gigantic mass undergoing nuclear fusion. Such desacrification is obvious.

What is not so obvious is that while science has become the dominant mode of *conscious* intellectual inquiry, it is largely forgotten (or more accurately, repressed) that most intellectual activity or symbolic interpretation of the self and the world occurs "unconsciously." "Conscious" mental actions are only those fragments of mental life that Stivers calls "directly present in awareness."

In myth, images of people and places and objects are concepts about the world. Myth does not have a single author or authors, but is instead an "anonymous discourse" belonging to a society. People who inherit this discourse structure the "concrete" concepts into what Will Wright calls "a theoretical idea of a social order,"<sup>12</sup> that helps people unconsciously organize their experiences and plan their actions accordingly. In this way myth can thus change to meet new problems facing the society that need explaining, without the change in myth appearing as the conscious, deliberate action or conception of a particular individual or group.

While the sky god has become mundane fusion, other sacred realms still exist. Weapons in the U.S. are discussed in ostensibly secular terms of costs and capabilities, but "Poseidon" missiles, "Trident" submarines, "Apache" and "Cheyenne" helicopters, "Eagle" and "Falcon" fighter planes constitute totemic references to mythical warriors and their weapons. Stivers contends that the "sacred," meaning what is perceived as power and ultimate reality, is still revealed in myth, even in modern societies:

## 18 VIETNAM GENERATION

My position is that side by side with modern instrumental rationality embedded in technology exist mythology and a system of rituals, which to a large degree escape our conscious awareness. Primitive man had an intuitive sense of the sacred, whereas modern man has a concept of the sacred (which he applies to every period but the modern) but no intuitive sense of the sacred.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, the sacred appears in “profane,” degraded forms—the B-grade genre films, “he-man” magazines, mere “games” and “toys”—that both their creators and their audiences and participants can consciously *dismiss* to themselves and others as not really important. By dismissing the sacred as profane trash, men show their allegiance to the secular world and its values. At the same time these narratives, images, and ritual games are unconsciously sacrilized as returns to the original worlds of the cosmogonic myths.

Only at the surface level is paramilitary culture the story of a few demented, “deviant” men. Instead the vast domain of contemporary warrior fantasies represents a geologic upheaval, an outcropping whose entire structural formation plunges into deep historical and cultural territories. The subsequent analyses will examine some of the patterns involving the rebirth of man as warrior and his actions in the primeval chaos.

### DEATH OF THE FAMILY AND THE BIRTH OF THE WARRIOR

In the traditional initiation ceremonies, the neophyte undergoes a symbolic death as the first stage of transformation and rebirth into a new social role. In much of the warrior culture, the man’s symbolic death occurs *by having his family murdered*, leaving him alone or reborn. The two most famous comic-book “caped crusaders” or superheroes that first appeared in the 1920s and 1930s were orphans. Not only were Superman’s parents killed, but Krypton’s entire populace died in the planet’s explosion. Batman saw his parents murdered when he was a boy—a scene that Frank Miller has redrawn over and over as an aging Batman’s flashback during his 1980s return as *Dark Knight*.

When John Wayne first became a star in the 1939 film *Stagecoach*, he played the Ringo Kid, a man searching for the Plumber brothers who had murdered his father and brother. Many other famous western films, a group Will Wright calls the “vengeance variation,” use the killing of the family to create their male hero.<sup>14</sup>

In the post-Vietnam period, more dead parents appeared. Contemporary men’s “action-adventure” books began with Don Pendleton’s “Mack Bolan” *The Executioner* series which first appeared in 1969 while the war was still in progress. In the first novel, Bolan is a U.S. Army sergeant stationed in Vietnam. With over 100 confirmed kills to his name, he has become such a famous sniper that he has been renamed by both friends and foes as “The Executioner.” During his tour, he is sent home on emergency family leave to confront a family crisis.

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 19

Unbeknownst to Mack, some time ago his father, a factory worker in a Massachusetts mill town, had lost his job because of heart trouble. When his health insurance expired, he borrowed money from the Mafia. Still sick, he was unable to repay his loan and interest payments on schedule and was consequently severely beaten by mob enforcers. Cindy, his teenage daughter, discovered the debt and beating. To save her father, she became a prostitute in a Mafia brothel. Bolan Sr. discovered his daughter's new occupation, and in a fit of shame and rage, he killed her, his wife, shot and nearly killed his second son, and then killed himself. The surviving second son tells the story to Mack.

Mack deserts the army and declares a one-man war on the Mafia. In the first book he kills about thirty mobsters or "hardmen," and then for the next 38 volumes (the first phase of the series) he moves from city to city, killing Mafiosi and stealing their money to sustain his onslaught.

Note that Pendleton has "doubled" the death and rebirth sequence. Bolan had already been reborn as The Executioner in Vietnam, before being born *again* through his family's death. The war and the jungle were his first death parents. In volume 39, *The New War* (1981) Pendleton changed Bolan from a one-man war anti-crime army into the commander of a super-secret counter-terrorist force working for the U.S. government: "Mack Bolan no longer existed, of course, in the official sense. He had been recreated in the government computers as one John Macklin Phoenix, U.S.A., Retired."<sup>15</sup> On his first mission as the recreated or reborn Colonel Phoenix, Bolan returns to his first warrior *home and family*, the jungles of Vietnam:

The familiar odor of jungle rot rose up to greet him, the humid warmth embracing him in its living presence, and suddenly Mack Bolan was back in his own element, the jungle master returned to the survivalist environment that had spawned him, nurtured him, provided identification for his life and manhood.

The Executioner was home again.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the very end of this volume, Pendleton reflects on how man evolved through warfare:

War everlasting? probably, yeah. That war had begun, no doubt, in a jungle very like this one. And it had marked the beginning of the human race....

Warrior Man had to fight for the luxury of contemplating a better life. At what point had it become a "right"—the right to life, the right to liberty, the right to pursue happiness? There were no such rights for primeval man....

The real war, the true war, had nothing to do with tribal boundaries or clan loyalties. The eternal war, *necessary* war, was Man struggling to be man: Man the Savage struggling continually to become Man the Noble. A paradox, sure. But the war goes on.<sup>17</sup>

## 20 VIETNAM GENERATION

After volume 39, Pendleton withdrew from writing *The Executioner* series to become a consultant and part-time supervisor for the subsequent Bolan books and the several spin-off series. The structural form and mythic pattern of his works were readily appropriated by the ghost-writers. In *War Born: The Executioner # 123* (1989), one of the series' 20th anniversary issues, Bolan returns home to the primal Vietnam war zone, "the end of the world, man. Right where civilization stops and the jungle begins." The narrator—all Bolan books are written in third person with commentary on the story by the narrator—explains the significance of this return: "There had been no true home for the Executioner since the first retaliation against the Mob at Triangle Industrial Park in Pittsfield.... But here he could feel it, the sense of belonging, almost a singing in his warrior's soul as his boots bit into the earth and hurried him on his way."<sup>18</sup>

Rebirth through immersion in death occurs to many other male characters in films, novels, and comic books. *Death Wish* (1974) and its successors is one prominent example; the killing of the hero's wife and daughter serves the same function as the deaths of the parents. *Mad Max* (1979), the predecessor to the famous Australian post-apocalyptic film *The Road Warrior* (1981), ends with Max's transformation from a highway patrolman into "the road warrior" after a motorcycle gang first burns his partner-brother "Goose" beyond recognition, and then in a second attack, runs over and kills his child and leaves his wife critically injured. In the comics, the leading male character in series such as *Punisher*, *Vigilante*, *Verdict*, *Sable*, *Tiger-X*, and *Scout* all lost either their parental or conjugal families from attacks by either criminals or Communist invaders. They became enraged, avenging warriors to compensate for their irredeemable losses.

Psychoanalysts Franco Fornari and Dorothy Dinnerstein offer important insights into this phenomenon. Fornari contends that in pre-industrial societies *and* in the human unconscious of people in modern societies, all deaths are unconsciously conceptualized and experienced as murders. Human relationships are inextricably an ambivalent combination of love and hate. As Dinnerstein shows, the long dependency of infancy and the structure of the infant-mother-father relationship in traditional patriarchal families shapes all subsequent relationships. The infant both loves its all-providing mother and hates her because she does not satisfy all desires immediately. As the infant comes to recognize other people, she/he loves the father as the authority who has miraculously escaped the power of the mother, and at the same time the father is experienced as a threat to the pleasures provided by the mother.<sup>19</sup>

Because of our ambivalences toward other people, in our unconscious fantasies, we routinely kill our loved ones and others. Their fantasy deaths in turn create both guilt and depressive anxiety in that love objects who met important needs are now (in fantasy) gone. Fornari summarizes the unconscious fantasy of killing, guilt, and projecting this

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 21

guilt onto someone else. The “paranoid elaboration of mourning” takes the form of war against the outsider; war is society’s way to protect individuals from the deep guilt they feel when they blame themselves for deaths within the society, the “melancholic elaboration of mourning:”

Everyone who dies is murdered by me; I am guilty of every death. Since this would drive me to suicide in this melancholic elaboration of mourning, I must project my guilt into the other and punish him as the representative of my bad self.... By killing the murderer I shall be able to show everyone that I am not the murderer. My relative was not killed by my own unconscious wishes; he was killed by someone else.<sup>20</sup>

The fantastic characters in films, novels, and comics and their wars against the evil ones thus disguise unconscious aggressions against loved ones. The deaths of family members thus free the male from the ambivalences and restraints of deep emotional relationships. Like Clint Eastwood in his first stellar role in Italian director Sergio Leone’s three famous spaghetti Westerns, he becomes “the man with no name” (without family).<sup>21</sup> He is reborn in the mythic world of chaos where he can develop his full powers of destruction and through this destruction, create a new social order.

## CREATING THE NEW FAMILY: FATHERS, SONS, BROTHERS, AND LOVERS IN THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR

Freed from original parental and/or conjugal families, mythic war narratives reconnect the warrior to a new family *within* the primeval chaos. This search for new familial ties moves in both inter-generational (search for fathers and sons) and intra-generational (search for brothers and lovers) directions.

Not all warriors are reborn directly from the deaths of the original families. Male warriors are also created by senior warrior-patriarchs who impose ordeals on trainees as they attempt the transformation from civilians to soldiers. By far the most famous film depicting this transition is the Marine Corps epic, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1950), starring John Wayne as Sergeant Stryker. In Wayne’s words, Stryker’s relationship to the trainees was “the story of Mr. Chips put in the military. A man takes eight boys and has to make a man of them. Instead of four years in college, he’s given eighteen weeks before they go into battle.”<sup>22</sup> Stryker says to the trainees when they first meet, that “you’re gonna wish you had never been born. Before I’m through with you you’re going to move like one man, and think like one man. If you don’t you’ll be dead.”

The film contains Stryker’s ritual beating of a trainee with a rifle butt for failure to complete the bayonet stabbing exercise. The trainee happens to be “Pete Conway,” son of Colonel Sam Conway, an officer whom Stryker knew well and liked before WWII; Stryker even named his own son Sam after the colonel. The film’s Marine technical advisor

## 22 VIETNAM GENERATION

objected to the scene, but the Pentagon approved a final version in which the violence was softened by a subsequent Mexican hat dance sequence uniting Stryker and the trainee: headquarters understood the mythic value of the ordeal that the beating signified. Later in the film, Stryker saves Conway from a grenade blast, but Conway is still hostile and distant.

Towards the very end of the film, the John Wayne character is killed by a sniper after the Americans win the battle of Iwo Jima. Immediately following his death, Conway assumes Stryker's role. He promises to finish the letter to Stryker's son that Stryker was composing when he was killed. He thus becomes father to both Stryker's biological son and to his "sons" in the squad. Echoing his "father's" words as he finally assumes the mantle of the senior warrior patriarch, the last line of the movie has Conway say, "All right, saddle up, let's get back in the war." In 1983, when the United States invaded Grenada, the Marine Corps showed *Sands of Iwo Jima* to its soldiers on the assault ship *U.S.S. Guam* the night before the invasion.

In more contemporary films, the father-son dynamics are more muted, but are still present. *Top Gun* (1986) portrayed a Naval fighter pilot whose career is endangered by his self-centered immaturity and disrespect for authority; he is troubled by the mysterious bad reputation of his deceased father, also a Navy pilot. In the course of an arduous advanced training program at "Top Gun," the Navy advance air-to-air combat school, Maverick finds a new father "Vadar," the director of the school, and learns that his biological father was really a war hero who had saved Vadar's life in Vietnam. By the end, Maverick decides that he too will become an instructor at Top Gun, and will help other adolescents make the transition to mature warrior.

Other father-son war movies include *Iron Eagle* (1986), the story of a teenager who steals a fighter plane with the help of a second father figure to rescue his biological father, who has been shot down over a Middle Eastern country and abandoned by the U.S. government; *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986), in which Clint Eastwood plays an aging Marine sergeant close to retirement who transforms an immature group of Marine enlisted men and derelict officers into warriors, first through training and then through the Grenada invasion; *Terminator* (1984), in which the father saves his mate and begets his warrior son; and *Rambo III* (1988), where Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) travels to Afghanistan to rescue his "father," Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna) from a Russian prison. Rambo is also *adopted* by an Afghan boy whose parents were killed by the Russians. The boy insists on following Rambo everywhere—including across a Russian minefield.

Recoupling of symbolic fathers or "uncles" with new sons or "nephews" sustains many serial novels. W.E.B. Griffith has sold *millions* of each volume in his seven volume series, *The Brotherhood of War*. *The Brotherhood* tells the stories of three generations of men and women in the U.S. Army officer corps. Volume 1, *The Lieutenants* (1981), introduces



## PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 23

the central characters when they were army lieutenants in World War II. The lieutenants are not men serving in the same unit, but are instead men whose paths cross. As the series progresses through *The Captains*, *The Majors*, *The Berets*, *The Colonels*, to *The Generals* (1986), the old senior officers who first served as mentors to the lieutenants retire or die and are replaced by the maturing younger officers. A new generation of young male characters is simultaneously introduced who become the adopted “sons” to the emerging “fathers” after prolonged conflicts and character tests.

Adoption by ordeal also characterizes several of the pulp serials. In *The Black Berets* (1984), a former Vietnam commando team is reunited by their Indian leader, Billy Leeps Beeker, and establishes a base on a Louisiana farm for contract operations on behalf of a super-secret (beyond the CIA) intelligence agency. Beeker rescues a mute sixteen-year-old Indian boy from white racists and adopts him: “Beeker saw in the boy the kind of son he would have chosen over all others, if fathers ever got that sort of choice. A youngster who had obvious pride and ability, who continually proved himself trustworthy and even courageous.”<sup>23</sup>

The ordeal for the adopted son comes after the Black Berets leave their home base for an overseas mission. Their enemy, a former CIA enemy named Parkes, sends an assassination team to kill everyone at the Louisiana base. Instead the Indian teenager kills them all. When the Berets return, they notice that the boy has been transformed:

The men looked at the youth, shivering though he was wrapped in the striped blanket from the plane. They remembered similar boyish faces from Vietnam, faces much too young to bear such knowledge and experience behind the eyes. Before they went away, he had seemed a child—his emaciated body had helped that illusion. Now that they had returned, he seemed a man....<sup>24</sup>

Beeker *renames* the boy “Tsali,” in honor of a famous Cherokee Indian warrior. He is thus formally adopted into the Black Beret warrior tribe, as well as his ancestral Cherokee tribe. The other Black Berets, his uncles, buy him clothes, and increase his warrior training.

At the festivals and training schools organized for men to play out certain limited parts of warrior mythologies, adoption ceremonies occur during the conclusions of most events. *Soldier of Fortune* magazine holds its annual convention at the Sahara Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas strip each year. These conventions attract about 1,000 men for five days of lectures on world affairs, weapons and equipment expositions, short schools for rappelling, knife fighting, and other exotic arts, a combat weapons shooting contest in the desert, and the more mundane activities of drinking, telling tall tales, and gambling. The total environment resembles a theme park for war movies and novels, just as Disneyland is related to Disney movies.

## 24 VIETNAM GENERATION

In 1986, the *SOF* staff decided to hold a shooting competition for the press corps—the conventions are always covered by twenty to forty broadcast and print journalists. The staff took the press out to the Desert Sportsman shooting range on a Saturday morning and gave instructions on how to fire the Glock-17 9mm semi-automatic pistol and the Heckler and Koch MP-5 9mm submachine gun. After firing a few practice rounds, each journalist fired at a series of steel plates scattered around the range, first with the pistol and then with the submachine gun. Whoever hit all of the plates in the shortest time won. At the end, the *SOF* staff gave out a few modest awards to the winners. It was a way of saying to the press, “You’re one of us now, a member of Uncle Bob’s family.” Robert K. Brown, the publisher and editor of *SOF*, is always called “Uncle Bob” by the rest of the *SOF* staff and by the conventioners who feel part of that community.

The most sacred places in American paramilitary culture are a handful of elite, combat weapons training schools. Representatives from the U.S. military, federal agencies, state and local police forces, and civilians all attend these schools to learn both basic and advanced techniques in firing pistols, shotguns, and rifles. The most famous school is retired Marine Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper’s American Pistol Institute in Pauldin, Arizona.

After the last shooting competitions students are awarded a diploma with a grade: “Expert;” “Marksman First Class;” “Marksman;” and “Certificate of Attendance.” Many students become saddened by their grade. But just at this critical moment when the class cohesiveness is disintegrating through the dual recognition that the class is over and that people are highly stratified in their abilities, Cooper opens up his arms and says, “Welcome to the Gunsite Family.”

All former students are known as “Family Members.” In his two page column in the largest selling gun magazine, *Guns and Ammo*, Cooper routinely refers to information sent in by “Family Member” as a preface to a man’s name. The graduation ceremony as an accredited gunfighter is thus an adoption ceremony into the patriarch’s tribe (complete with a totem animal, the raven).

Psychologist Samuel Osherson contends that men raised in patriarchal family structures have sought symbolic fathers or “mentors” because “boys grow into men with a *wounded father* within, a conflicted inner sense of masculinity rooted in men’s experience of their fathers as rejecting, incompetent, or absent.”<sup>25</sup> Small boys do not understand why their fathers are so physically or psychologically distant. Consequently, they invent stories to explain his absence:

The fundamental male vulnerability rooted in the experience of father lies in our fantasies and myths to explain why father isn’t there. Those are misunderstandings, usually unconscious and often very frightening to the son, that cripple our sense of our

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 25

own manhood. The son may experience his father's preoccupation with work or emotional unavailability at home as *his own* fault.<sup>26</sup>

Experiencing the failure of the father-son relationship as his own fault, the boy's growth towards manhood become problematic. In the face of an ostensibly powerful father, the son feels he is "not good enough" to merit the father's love and attention. Or, conversely, in those instances when the son becomes especially close to the mother, he sometimes feels that he has betrayed and symbolically wounded the father. In both cases, the lack of satisfaction propels boys and men to look for surrogates. As Osherson says: "A powerful mentor may speak to the hunger vulnerable young men have for a strong, all-accepting father-hero, whom he can love and revere unambivalently. 'I am that father whom your boyhood lacked and suffered pain for lack of,' said Odysseus to Telemachus."<sup>27</sup>

*The Odyssey* illuminates many of the attractions of the mythic warrior as a surrogate father. Having defeated the Trojans and outwitted the gods during years of war and adventures, Odysseus finally returned to Arcadia. He joined forces *with* his son Telemachus, and together they fought the false suitors after his wife, Penelope and thus saved the kingdom. To have a mythic warrior as father holds forth the promise of incorporating his power through his instruction and nurturance. The son can then become the equal to the father—who is now his symbolic brother—in the brotherhood of war. Perhaps he can even save the father's life in battle, providing a rebirth for the father.

At the same time, the family dynamics of *The Odyssey* are different from those in the contemporary resurgence of warrior myths. Ultimately, Odysseus returns home to Arcadia for good. His last battle indicates that the period of primeval chaos is over; the sacred order is being re-inaugurated. Equally important, Odysseus has a wife and Telemachus has a mother—Penelope.

In contrast, the narrator in *The Black Berets* describes Beeker's feelings upon discovering that his commando team's Louisiana base has been destroyed by men sent by the renegade CIA agent, Parkes. In the quote, Beeker has not discovered that his adopted son survived the attack:

Parkes's men had done it: How do you rape a warrior? You violate his unguarded home. You burn his house, you scatter his grain to the wind, you broadcast salt in his plowed fields. You put his children to the sword.<sup>28</sup>

Beeker is now *both mother and father* to his adopted son. This is not an isolated passage, but an example of the family structure in much modern warrior myth. Warriors defend the boundaries of society against "enemies." Warriors live outside the social order, within the primeval chaos. Only their fights against evil allow a stable social order

## 26 VIETNAM GENERATION

to be created. Therefore, men's reproduction of themselves as warriors through either self-generated rebirths or transforming boys into warriors is the *precondition* for safety within the society. Only when the evil ones are kept "outside," can female-centered biological reproduction, infant care and child-rearing occur inside society.

From this perspective, heterosexual relationships have very little to do with social reproduction. Instead sexual relationships signal momentary pleasures and serious dangers for the warrior. Danger to the man occurs in two different representations of women. First, women's sexual power is portrayed as dangerous. For example, Beeker's contact or "case officer" with the secret U.S. intelligence agency is a voluptuous woman named "Delilah." Every sexual encounter with her is a struggle for power:

Now he stood in front of the cot and damned himself. He was angry because Delilah was there, waiting for him—waiting for him—waiting for him in every meaning of the term. Naked, her hands were provocatively exploring herself. That, and they were egging him on, moving against that flesh he had come to desire too much—well, he thought, sometimes too much.

He was naked as well. His readiness for her was as apparent as hers for him. It took all of his self-control to stop him from just pouncing, just climbing right over on top of her. But he'd learned a lot about Delilah. He knew that neither of them would leave the room before they'd both got what they wanted. The only question was—who would show the greater need? It was a contest Delilah had no intention of losing. She was going to stay right there on the cot and enjoy this. The smile on her face showed that. She enjoyed the subtle mixture of pain and pleasure that this self-denial inflicted on Beeker.<sup>29</sup>

Beeker lost this battle. Delilah is, of course, the mythic Biblical Delilah, the woman who cut off the hair of the great warrior Samson and so destroyed his powers. The implication is that sexually powerful women are inherently castrating, and that desiring them and "losing control" is thus a form of self-destruction that must be fought.<sup>30</sup>

Women's threat appears even more explicitly in the character of the woman agent who threatens to kill the male warrior while having sex. Cowboy, a member of *The Black Beret* team, follows the Iberian airline stewardess into the plane's toilet, where "already her skirt was up, and her panties were down." She says, "I need you so bad." The sexual encounter begins and she pulls a knife from her bra:

Just when she thought she could slice his exposed throat, Cowboy went to work. He stopped the slash of the sharp blade. Then redirected it. Right into her belly.

She drew in her breath sharply. Blood spilled out along the blade of the knife.

Cowboy jerked to one side, to avoid being splashed. They were still very close, together in the tiny cubicle. He looked into her eyes, catching her surprised and terrified gaze. The sharp edge of the knife pointed downward. He pushed up on her hand. Unable to resist, the blade slid deeper, up to pierce the heart, tearing the flesh in a harsh line....

Cowboy held her up till he saw that her eyes had glazed over. Then he shoved her down onto the toilet seat and returned to the first class cabin, leaving an OUT OF ORDER sign prominently on the door.<sup>31</sup>

Many a woman dies such a sexualized death in paramilitary novels. The erotic woman is cast as a life-threatening enemy and is then killed in a long, drawn out narrative in which penetrating bullets, grenade fragments, and knives destroy her flesh and release blood and other bodily matter. In this description, she is turned into a giant mass of *excrement* that stops the toilet. The German *Freikorps*, those independent right-wing battalions that destroyed the Left in Germany after World War I, used similar descriptions of becoming excited about killing in their novels and memoirs. They spoke of desiring "the bloody mess."

According to Klaus Theweleit, the patriarchal code in Western societies has cast male as "mind" and female as "body" and the body has been denigrated as "unclean." In some societies this has meant that infants never experience their bodies as good and pleasurable. Consequently, infants and later children and adults, psychically withdraw from their bodies. Being withdrawn from the body, men who are taught they are "mind" always have anxiety about the boundaries of the body.

For these men, all "flow" experiences, such as eroticism (which mixes bodies together) overcome boundaries between the self and a larger environment. Bodily contact becomes experienced as threatening the dissolution of the self. Pleasurable sexual experience can only take the form of eliminating this anxiety by obliterating the other body, by transforming it into waste or bloody mess that has no personhood and is distant from the self.<sup>32</sup> In contemporary paramilitary novels, almost all killings (both of men and of women) are described as the sexualized penetration and destruction of the body.

Still other women are portrayed as dangerous because they represent society. They remove the warrior from the freedom of primeval chaos and confine him to domestic order. Cowboy devised a plan to deal with this type of woman as well: "You go in, play the romance, make the proposal, have the big party, luxuriate in the honeymoon—and then you leave. Before she gets fat and you get mean."<sup>33</sup>

Potential wives or women who love the warrior hero are frequently killed off in modern warrior myths. Ko, the Vietnamese woman (an intelligence agent for the Americans) who aided and came to love Rambo in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) is killed by Communist mortars after she falls in love with him and expresses the desire to return to the U.S.

## 28 VIETNAM GENERATION

with him. In *Miami Vice*, both Crockett and Tubbs become widowers within weeks of their marriages—Tubbs' wife is murdered on their honeymoon.

Those wives or lovers who aren't killed are sacrificed in another way for a greater cause. Castillo, the commanding officer on *Miami Vice*, re-meets his ex-wife, who is now involved with another man, a "freedom fighter" for another country. He makes no serious attempt to win her back. Nor did *Magnum, P.I.* try very hard to hold onto his former love and his newly-discovered daughter when they resurfaced connected to yet another "freedom fighter" who is trying to overcome the evil ones in his country and found a sacred order.

True loves must be sacrificed because they represent a threat to the brotherhood of war. In sacrificing their women to other men who are themselves warriors, modern war myths' male heroes affirm their brotherhood. The brotherhood of war between men of different countries is a stronger bond than a man's feeling for his wife or lover. Giving the woman away also reaffirms the warrior's ties with their own teams. Crockett, Tubbs, and Castillo still have each other, as do Magnum and his friends. *Casablanca* (1942), the WWII film in which Rick sends his true love, Ilsa, away with Victor Laszlo, and is left to form a beautiful friendship with the French cop, Renault, is of course the classic case.

Finally, there is important narrative reason for killing the woman or giving her away. When the true loves are killed or otherwise removed to help another man, their deaths or absences justify a rebirth of the warrior and establish his personal motive in launching another assault against the evil ones.

### THE NECESSITY OF BLOOD SACRIFICE TO SUSTAIN THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR

In recent years, former marine lieutenant William Broyles, Jr. has become the most noted exponent of "why men love war:" "War was an initiation into the power of life and death. Women touch that power at the moment of birth; men on the edge of death. It is like lifting off the corner of the universe and peeking at what's underneath."<sup>34</sup> What this "edge of death" means becomes clearer in another passage on the comradeship of war:

We loved war for many reasons, not all of them good. The best reason we loved war is also its most enduring memory—comradeship. A comrade in war is a man you can trust with anything, because you trust him with your life. Philip Caputo [another marine lieutenant] described the emotion in *A Rumor of War*: [Comradeship] does not demand for its sustenance the reciprocity, the pledges of affection, the endless reassurances required by the love of men and women. It is, unlike marriage, a bond that cannot be broken by a word, by boredom, or by anything other than death.<sup>35</sup>

# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 29

But what this praise of comradeship in war does not explicitly indicate is that the brotherhood of war *requires* that some warriors die. The brotherhood of war is a form of death worship. Only death can generate this sacred aura of wartime comradeship. The inevitable ambiguities and insecurities of complex human relationships are degraded in contrast to an imaginary "purity" of death. Ultimately, only another warrior's sacrifice can redeem the blood already spilled.

In the WWII war movies made from the 1940s until the mid-1960s, customary practice called for part of the group to die; their deaths bonded the survivors. Usually the primary male leads survived the battle—an important indicator of the way films made war seem like a relatively safe ritual transition from boyhood to manhood and why the war romance has been so seductive for men.

Many post-Vietnam war movies have made extreme sacrifices central to their plots. In *The Deer Hunter* (1979) Robert DeNiro does not successfully rescue his childhood friend who has remained in Vietnam, addicted to self-destruction. In *Uncommon Valor* (1983), roughly half of the private commando team that rescues American prisoners of war held in Laos dies; the ratio of Americans killed to Americans saved is about one to one. The good "father," Sgt. Elias, is murdered in *Platoon* (1987), as the precondition to the boy's full moral awakening and transformation into a warrior. In *Gardens of Stone* (1987), the entire plot sequence focuses on ritual sacrifice: a young lieutenant is first trained by two veteran sergeants; he volunteers for Vietnam and is killed. The movie culminates with the return of his corpse to the burial detail at Arlington National Cemetery—his original unit—and the mourning of his fathers.

These sacrifices form the collective bonds of the community. At the closing ceremony of the 1987 *Soldier of Fortune* convention in Las Vegas, a man presented editor-in-chief Robert K. Brown a five gallon water-cooler jug full of bills and coins. The man explained that the money was to be given to the Nicaraguan Contras. He then pulled off a prosthesis from his leg and held it over his head so several hundred audience members could see. He said that he collected the money during the convention by charging people five dollars to *drink beer from his prosthesis*. "Tet 1968! That's what it's all about!" he cried. In an unconscious repetition of the Christian Eucharist, his sacrificed leg was "eaten" by the community of warriors to renew and strengthen their collective body as symbolic participants in the primeval struggle against the evil ones. Blood sacrifice of one's own soldiers is a necessary part of the larger "regeneration through violence" in overcoming the enemy.

## PARAMILITARY CULTURE AND THE ABSENCE OF THE SACRED ORDER

Where modern paramilitary culture differs most radically from its direct predecessors, the American war movies and westerns made from late 1930s through the late 1960s, concerns the relationships

## 30 VIETNAM GENERATION

between primeval chaos and the sacred order that results from the victory over evil. The war movie tradition follows the cosmogonic myths in that the characters in these movies frequently talk of their hopes for a more cooperative, international world order. Such dialogue was a constant feature of the war movies written and directed by left-leaning Hollywood filmmakers with the influence of the Office of War Information.<sup>36</sup> Many such filmmakers were later purged during the blacklisting drives of the 1950s. While more conservative films often concentrated on regeneration through violence, they nevertheless included scenes linking the soldiers to their wives, girlfriends, and previous domestic lives.<sup>37</sup> These films always pointed to how battles portrayed in the film were responsible for America's world power, affluence, and the good life.

Will Wright studied the hero's relationship to society as the western genre changed its fundamental narrative structure from its rise in the late 1930s to its demise in the late 1960s. Until the 1960s, most westerns reconciled the hero with society. The hero's defeat of the villains was intrinsically connected to the establishment of a better society. In the 1960s, society was frequently portrayed as a corrupt, greedy capitalism that had destroyed the mythic western virtues. The heroes were "professionals," groups of mercenary warriors with special skills, who fight the villains for money to sustain the group. Like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *The Wild Bunch* (1970), the professionals most often died in the process. No social improvement resulted from their deaths. To the contrary, their destruction only signified the increased power of a corrupt corporate capitalism that does not tolerate individual freedom and fidelity to comrades.

Like the professional western, paramilitary culture indicates a disjunction in the cosmogonic and American cultural myths. Struggles in the primeval chaos are no longer connected to the establishment of a sacred social order. In neither the films, the novels, the magazines, nor the war games is there any vision of a world beyond war. Instead there is only a continual armed struggle against terrorists, punks, drug dealers, Third World communist guerrillas, KGB agents, illegal aliens from Mexico, black nationalists, urban dwellers fleeing the city after a nuclear war or economic collapse, motorcycle gangs, and the Mafia.

Although the "regeneration through violence" component of paramilitary culture follows the cosmogonic and American cultural tradition, the disjunction with establishing a sacred order indicates a severe, prolonged social crisis. War is no longer a renewing process necessary for an evolutionary social transition to a better, peaceful order, but instead is a desirable, permanent chaos and destruction. Paramilitary culture indicates that Americans no longer share a significant consensus on what would be a better society and how to create it.

Men especially lack a clear direction as to their proper role in society. A few well known post-Vietnam warrior films have repeated the older myth that when the warrior returned home after the war he would be rewarded with a wife. In these films, warfare becomes the way for men



# PARAMILITARY FANTASY CULTURE 31

to stop the women's movement and regain women's affections. In *Heartbreak Ridge*, Clint Eastwood wins back his ex-wife after his third war (Grenada). Similarly, Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* (1988), is reunited with his wife (a rising star in the corporate world who moved away from him and no longer uses her married name) after he singlehandedly defeats an extremely wicked terrorist group. To be sure, *Die Hard* is a parody of the genre, but it is a very loving parody. The desirable future for men is thus a return to the pre-feminist past.

But most of paramilitary culture says that the warrior's role within the primeval chaos is far more rewarding than any male role outside it. Rambo, for instance, is still in Thailand in 1988, seventeen years after most American troops were withdrawn, and thirteen years after the fall/liberation of Saigon.

That the break between primeval chaos and sacred order indicates a severe social crisis does *not* imply that regeneration through violence is an acceptable cultural dynamic when it is connected to the foundation of a new social order. Another war will not solve America's problems, nor will it solve men's problems. Warrior myths have deep historical roots and are fed by social dynamics other than geo-politics; long lists of enemies can and already have been substituted for Russians. Warrior culture will not go away by simply dismissing it as bad and saying the times call for peace. Instead, war mythology in all its variants must first be fully elaborated and analyzed.<sup>38</sup> The task beyond this analytical elaboration is to invent a new cosmogonic mythology or creative vision for men, to begin with the warrior and transform him into another kind of man whose power moves towards another mission.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press) 1973: 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row) 1963: 5.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press) 1969: 197.

<sup>5</sup> Branislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, 1925: 20.

<sup>6</sup> Eliade: 141.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press) 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Eliade: 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 31. (My italics.)

<sup>10</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture* (New York: Gardner Press) 1986: 252.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Stivers, *Evil in Modern Myth and Ritual* (Athens: University of Georgia Press) 1982: 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1975: 20.

<sup>13</sup> Stivers: 8.

<sup>14</sup> Wright: 59-74.

## 32 VIETNAM GENERATION

<sup>15</sup> Don Pendleton, *The New War*, volume 39 of *Mack Bolan—The Executioner* (Toronto: Worldwide Library) 1989: 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: 159.

<sup>18</sup> Don Pendleton, *et al.*, *War Born*, volume 123 of *Mack Bolan—The Executioner* (Toronto: Worldwide Library) 1989: 128, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row) 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, Alenka Pfeifer, trans. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press) 1975: 55.

<sup>21</sup> "The man with no name" was actor Clint Eastwood's name in Sergio Leone's three famous westerns; *A Fist Full of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966). This role was Eastwood's birth as a star warrior.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence H. Suid quoting John Wayne, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley) 1978: 97.

<sup>23</sup> Mike McCray, *Louisiana Firestorm*, volume 5 of *The Black Berets* (New York: Dell) 1985: 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 32.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Osherson, *Finding Our Fathers: The Unfinished Business of Manhood* (New York: Free Press) 1986: 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*: 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 46.

<sup>28</sup> Mike McCray, *Cold Vengeance*, volume 2 of *The Black Berets* (New York: Dell) 1984: 31.

<sup>29</sup> McCray, *Louisiana Firestorm*: 56-57.

<sup>30</sup> The figure of Delilah as symbol of castrating women appeared in much late 19th century Western art. See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1986: 373-377.

<sup>31</sup> McCray, *Cold Vengeance*: 108-109.

<sup>32</sup> Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume 1: Women Flood Bodies History*, Stephen Conway, trans., in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1987.

<sup>33</sup> McCray, *Cold Vengeance*: 105.

<sup>34</sup> William Broyles, Jr., *Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Avon) 1986: 192.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 190.

<sup>36</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press) nd.

<sup>37</sup> Jeanie Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press) 1982.

<sup>38</sup> I am writing a book on paramilitary culture and warrior fantasies. For a history of the war movie with particular emphasis on how the Vietnam war has been portrayed, see my essay "American Paramilitary Culture and the Reconstitution of the Vietnam War," in Jeff Walsh and James Aulich, eds., *Vietnam Image: War and Representation* (New York: St. Martin's) 1989: 10-42.

# **"I NEVER REALLY BECAME A WOMAN VETERAN UNTIL...I SAW THE WALL":<sup>1</sup> A REVIEW OF ORAL HISTORIES AND PERSONAL NARRATIVES BY WOMEN VETERANS OF THE VIETNAM WAR**

## **RENNY CHRISTOPHER**

In the oral history collections *A Piece of My Heart* (Keith Walker, 1985), *In the Combat Zone* (Kathryn Marshall, 1987), and *Nurses in Vietnam: The Forgotten Veterans* (Dan Freedman and Jacqueline Rhoads, 1987), and in Lynda Van Devanter's groundbreaking personal narrative *Home Before Morning* (1983), women who served in the Vietnam war speak out about their experiences. All these works are recent; women veterans of the war held their silence for many years, in part for reasons similar to those of male veterans, and in part because they often did not feel that they were legitimate veterans. Women did not perceive themselves to be "combat veterans," despite the fact that eight nurses and three Red Cross women were killed in Vietnam, and more were injured. The women who speak about their experiences often report that they attempted to talk about Vietnam, only to receive the message that no one wanted to hear about the war. Although many men had similar experiences, the silencing of women veterans is a more complicated process and has a great deal to do with the way in which our society views women and war.

The invisibility of these women, explains Keith Walker, author of *A Piece of My Heart*, has much to do with the attitude of the military: "...according to military policy, women are not supposed to be in life-threatening situations in a war zone, and therefore we have never developed an image of that in our minds."<sup>2</sup> Oral histories and personal narratives by these women are beginning to create that missing image for us, and to force us to re-examine our notions about women and war. The stories they tell are never comfortable; they go against the grain in an America that is trying to rewrite the war into something that was glorious and romantic. Women's stories of the war contain little romance and no glory.

For all veterans, the process of storytelling is also a process of recovering wartime roles. The men's and women's narratives share many common themes, but women's stories often include a theme of nurturing and caretaking absent from most men's stories. Women often felt that they were supporters of the men, and not participants in the war in their own right. Women in the military often felt that what they were doing was not as important as what the men were doing, and that in

## 34 VIETNAM GENERATION

addition to their own jobs they also had the responsibility of acting as mother, sister, and girlfriend to male soldiers. Having absorbed the gender role stereotypes of the larger American society, these women expected to submerge their own needs, and to take care of the men, whose role as combat soldiers was valued more highly than that of nurses or other "support" personnel. The dangers women faced, and the fact that nurses were killed and wounded in Vietnam, did not change this perception. Marshall explains, "They were used to being minor characters, even in their own lives."<sup>3</sup>

The lack of interest in the women who served in Vietnam, and the ultimate indication of their invisibility, is the fact that there are no hard and fast statistics on how many women served in Vietnam: different sources publish different figures, and the army itself is "guarded in its statistics about women who enter any war zone."<sup>4</sup> The Department of Defense lists 7,500 American military women in Vietnam, but the Veterans Administration lists 11,000 women. There are no official numbers for civilian women, who worked in large numbers for the Red Cross or such organizations as the International Voluntary Services. According to independent surveys, the total number of women who worked in Vietnam during the war is between 33,000 and 55,000.<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Marshall, author of *In the Combat Zone*, states:

No one seems to have an accurate count. This apparent lack of data on the part of the Department of Defense and the State Department both serves as a reminder of government mishandling of information during the Vietnam War and points to the more general belief that war is men's business.<sup>6</sup>

Eighty percent of women in the military were nurses, but women also served as clerks, air traffic controllers, in the Army Signal Corps, and Military Intelligence. The Walker and Marshall volumes contain the oral histories of two women who worked in non-nursing military positions. Doris Allen, a black career noncom who worked in Military Intelligence in Saigon, predicted the Tet Offensive of 1968. She explains that "a lot of people couldn't believe, or didn't want to believe, that a woman could actually be making decisions or analyses—and their being correct."<sup>7</sup> The second woman, who worked as a decoder, says that the army "decided that women could carry more mental stress than males, so...they decided to try to get women decoders in the Army Security Agency."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the American military women working in Vietnam, American civilian women with the Red Cross worked directly with the military in the Supplemental Recreation Activities Overseas (SRAO) program. Commonly called "donut dollies," their job was to bring some home cheer to the troops on the front line. Some of the women with the SRAO were "choppered" to heavy combat areas on an almost daily basis.<sup>9</sup> Civilian women also worked in Vietnam as journalists, and for

## UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 35

organizations such as International Voluntary Services (IVS), Catholic Relief Organization, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), American Friends Service Committee, and for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>10</sup> The oral histories include the stories of some of these women.

All the American women who served in Vietnam were “volunteers.” People who volunteered for service in Vietnam were often criticized after the war; were called “fools” for volunteering. But many women’s stories show that “volunteering” was not always a matter of free choice. They went to Vietnam for economic or moral reasons, or because they had been, from childhood, prepared for service to their country. Lily Adams, an Asian-American veteran, went into nursing in a three year degree program because she couldn’t afford college. When an Army recruiter showed up at her nursing school, she thought “that was the answer to a lot of my needs. Financial for one. And for another, I could fill the needs that I wanted to fill for John F. Kennedy. He really inspired me at an early age....”<sup>11</sup> Adams “felt very guilty that the guys had to deal with these decisions—major decisions in their lives—and that girls didn’t. Yeah, I felt very guilty that a lot of guys I knew got drafted and that girls didn’t.”<sup>12</sup> Adams, however, did not realize that she would be going to Vietnam when she enlisted: “...when the recruiter said that women never got sent to Vietnam unless they volunteered, I believed her. That was the first—but not the last—time the Army lied to me.”<sup>13</sup>

Grace Barolet O’Brien also speaks of joining the army for economic reasons:

When I finished the two years at junior college, I wasn’t really sure how I would get the money to complete my education. One day my brother said, “Grace, I think I found the way for you.” He was reading an Army magazine about helicopters, and there was something in it about the Army student nurse program.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar instance, Laura Radnor graduated from a three-year nursing program<sup>15</sup> and realized that her education limited her. She explains, “I was still a diploma graduate, so my prospects for promotion were not great....And then one day I saw an ad on TV about wanting nurses in Vietnam.”<sup>16</sup>

Career choices were limited for women in the 1960s, as Kay Johnson Burnette explains: “This was still a very sheltered time, and I can remember my guidance counselor saying, ‘What do you want to be, a nurse, a teacher, or a secretary?’ I came from a small town and pretty much took the man’s word. I picked nursing.”<sup>17</sup> Nurse, secretary or teacher? The oral histories make it clear that those three choices were all that were offered to women who wanted to pursue professional careers. Among those who chose nursing were women whose capabilities far exceeded the jobs that their training prepared them to hold. They were bored, and the army provided an economically feasible and challenging alternative.

## 36 VIETNAM GENERATION

The notion of service figures heavily in the decisions of the women—military and civilian—who volunteered with the specific intent of going to Vietnam. Christine McGinley Schneider, an army nurse whose mother had been a Navy nurse in World War II, says, “Then when you come out of school, you kind of feel like you want to do something to save or help the world.”<sup>18</sup> Cherie Rankin, a Red Cross worker, explains:

I did have a sense that the war was wrong. But I couldn't get away from the feeling that there were guys over there like my brother—guys who grew up with apple pie and country, guys who did what they were told and didn't question it. I didn't want to support the war, but I wanted to support those guys...I wanted to go. I wanted to find out for myself what was going on, and I wanted to help if I could. I also wanted the adventure.<sup>19</sup>

No matter what feelings these women had about going to Vietnam, none of them were prepared for what they found when they arrived. Leslie McClusky, an Army nurse, describes her experience:

I was assistant head nurse in a surgical intensive care unit and had had three years of real critical care experience. I'd taken care of a lot of trauma from automobile accidents, stabbings, and things. Little did I know that did not prepare me in the least for Vietnam....The first guy that I saw wounded was a kid who had had his leg blown off. He had shrapnel everywhere, too. I had never seen shrapnel wounds, just like I had never seen a traumatic amputation. You know, I'd seen normal amputations under sterile conditions. But I had never seen a guy with big, black pitted holes everywhere and a makeshift tourniquet over the amputation site. He was conscious, too. A sweet young kid. I had no idea what to say.<sup>20</sup>

McClusky's experience is representative of the initiations into the Vietnam experience that nurses describe. No matter what their civilian experience had been, the nurses were not ready for the sheer number of casualties, nor the horrible nature of the wounds. Christine McGinley Schneider describes the emotional impact of her own initiation experience:

I had worked a year in the emergency room on the jail ward, but nothing could prepare you for the horrible things you saw....He was a really good-looking boy...with blond hair, and half of his face had been blown away, and the first thing the nurse said to me was, “Cut off all his clothes....” I remember...the horror of taking one of his boots off and his foot still being in the boot....After I drew the blood he said, “Please don't leave me.” I said, “I just have to run across the hall to the lab. I promise I'll be right back.” I was right back, and he had died in the time that I had left him alone....And I never forgot that. I never again left anyone.<sup>21</sup>

# UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 37

Civilian women, too, were underprepared. Julie Forsythe, a volunteer in a rehabilitation unit run by the American Friends Service Committee, explains:

I wasn't prepared for a lot of things I saw....But the kids were the worst...because the kids are the ones who take the ducks out and take the water buffalo down to the river. And some yo yo leaves a landmine in the path and—pop! That's it. No, I wasn't prepared for how many kids were so badly damaged.<sup>22</sup>

Red Cross workers, like other civilians, were not taught what they really needed to know before they arrived in Vietnam. Many of them describe the experience of coming from sheltered backgrounds and being naive when they entered the Red Cross. Red Cross training consisted mainly of indoctrination into how to be “ladylike,” rather than teaching women to cope with war and soldiers. Cherie Rankin says:

So we went to what I call boot camp in Washington, D.C. There they taught us how to do these programs we'd be doing over there. But we didn't get any political orientation. We didn't get any idea of the realities per se. All we were taught was what our job would entail.<sup>23</sup>

Jeanne Bokina Christie puts it another way: “Going over we were all still in la-di-da land....We hadn't the foggiest idea of what we were doing or what we were getting ourselves into.”<sup>24</sup>

Being underprepared could be extremely dangerous. Lily Adams' plane arrived in Vietnam under heavy fire. The male passengers all hit the deck, and Adams realized she had no idea what to do:

And at that moment I realized that these men were trained to survive in a war zone but that I was not—that I could get killed. And that if I died it was going to be the Army's fault. The Army never taught me anything—I mean anything. Nothing.<sup>25</sup>

In Vietnam there were no front lines, and some women were frequently exposed to combat situations. In all the oral histories and personal narratives of military and Red Cross women there are descriptions of situations in which they were under fire. Rose Sandeck's story is not an uncommon one: “I remember once in Cu Chi they got us all up in the middle of the night and were really not sure what to do with us because we were being overrun.”<sup>26</sup> As “noncombatants,” women were not supposed to carry weapons, but sometimes they found themselves in dire situations. Anne Simon Auger, an Army nurse stationed in Chu Lai, relates the following story:

...my corpsman on the ward was a conscientious objector, so he wouldn't handle any firearms. I remember I had to grab the M-16 and stand guard after I had locked the doors. I didn't even

## 38 VIETNAM GENERATION

know how to fire the damned thing!...Once again, I had the preconception that women were supposed to be taken care of, and it seemed like I was doing all the taking care of.<sup>27</sup>

Maureen Walsh, a Navy nurse stationed in Da Nang, saw her corpsman killed as he stood next to her:

Shrapnel came in the door—went right by me, under my legs. Another piece came in as I was counting narcotics for one of the corpsmen at the medicine cabinet next to the door. The shrapnel went through his head, went through the medicine cabinet, exited through the unit on the other side, and lodged in the wall.<sup>28</sup>

Pinkie Hauser, a personnel sergeant in Long Binh, saw a woman colonel killed by shrapnel in her quarters: "I mean, those things have points on them like needles....It comes to a point and it had this woman pinned in her wall. I guess she was standing up when it came in and she was pinned against the wall with this metal in her."<sup>29</sup>

Red Cross workers flew out to firebases in helicopters that were often shot at. They also travelled by jeep, and occasionally got caught in firefights. Judy Jenkins conveys the double bind that combat situations placed women in vis-a-vis male soldiers: "The whole time the police chief was firing back—I was lying there on the floor of his jeep—he kept saying, 'What's going to happen to my career if a woman gets killed in my vehicle?'"<sup>30</sup> Jenkins goes on to describe her reaction to this and similar experiences:

We women, you know, were noncombatants in a place where we could have gotten killed just as easily as the men. Only we couldn't shoot back. We never had the chance. So what do you do with all your fear and anger? You internalize it. You just absorb it. Because you have a job to do, and that job involves taking care of people.<sup>31</sup>

Jenkins puts forward the paradoxical position of women in the Vietnam war. Women suffered the same dangers as men did, but they were additionally required to serve men selflessly. Their role as caretakers forced them to subordinate their own needs to the needs of others. Though they clearly acted as participants in the Vietnam war, they were only recognized as observers and supporters, assisting men who attend to the "real work" of the war.

Most of the oral histories and narratives contain at least one passage which illuminates this theme. Lt. Col. Ruth Sidisin (USAF, retired) puts the problem of women's participation in the war succinctly:

The gist of it is that I'm so glad they're finally recognizing that there were women over there. And that the women saw as much as the guys did, but in a different way. This should finally end



# UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 39

the idea that a woman is supposed to give and give and give, and make everything nice-nice, and be an Earth Mother and console everyone all the time without receiving emotional support themselves. Because if you don't believe women need to be replenished, you're a fool. That kind of thinking is just a bunch of garbage.<sup>32</sup>

Unable to officially recognize the service of women in Vietnam because of regulations which required that women serve in noncombat areas, the military maintained the myth that women served a support function and were not really "in" the war. Thus, women who showed courage under fire were never honored for their actions. Lynda Van Devanter tells the story of a nurse who ran back to a burning helicopter to rescue a wounded man, just seconds before the vehicle exploded in flames:

The head nurse in the ER [emergency room] put Coretta in for a Bronze Star with a 'V' device for valor. When it came a month later, it was missing the 'V' device. The head nurse was furious and demanded to know what had happened. She was told by the C.O. [commanding officer] that they didn't award things like that to nurses.<sup>33</sup>

Karen Bush, an Army nurse stationed in Pleiku, tells a similar story:

Some of the nurses had wanted to get combat medic badges, not just the medical badge. But in order to do that, you had to spend two weeks on a fire base. So we said we wanted to go out to a fire base to spend two weeks. The administrators said "no" and I asked "Why?" They said, "Well, you might be killed;" and I said, "That's not the reason. What's the reason?" "Well, we don't want you to get captured." They said it would be impossible to negotiate. And that the men wouldn't put up with it because I was a woman.<sup>34</sup>

The attitude of male soldiers toward female soldiers can give insight into the nature of the male war experience. The experience of war grants men special privileges. They have undergone a rite of passage which is traditionally unavailable to women. It is a measure of our cultural blindness that men serving in Vietnam could not see that some women were taking the same risks and making the same sacrifices as they were. The combat experiences of male soldiers were valorized, and the experiences of female soldiers were diminished or repressed. Masculine images of women in war did not include that of a woman who did a vital job and risked danger herself. Men saw women as being present for male benefit—as caretakers—and not as direct participants in the war. Thus, women's jobs were often forced into the background, while the emotional demands of men took center stage. Rose Sandeck, a former Army nurse and current veterans' activist, explains:

## 40 VIETNAM GENERATION

You also learned that you became almost like a commodity because you were a woman. After working twelve-hour shifts with all the blood and gore, you would change into a civilian dress to go to one of the local officers' clubs....There would be one guy after another coming up and more or less doing his number on you: "I haven't seen a round-eye in six months. Would you dance with me?" You'd say, "No, I'm tired. I just want to sit and put my feet up." They wouldn't take no for an answer and would play this guilt thing like, "God, you don't know how bad I'm feeling...." If you stayed back in your hooch by yourself or stayed and talked to a couple of the other nurses, you were accused of being a lesbian....<sup>35</sup>

The dual burden of women soldiers was built into the military system, into the structure of the war itself. Col. Eunice Splawn (USAF, retired) explains her double bind:

I was dating a guy from the Jolly Greens [a helicopter pilot]....When I would get angry at him, I'd want to say, "Hey look—go away and leave me alone and never come back." But I knew that if I really said this and then he went out and got shot down, I'd have to live with the guilt.<sup>36</sup>

For Red Cross workers, the emotional burden was even more difficult. Though Red Cross rules explicitly stated that sex was not part of the comfort that Red Cross workers were to provide, their role was clearly to cater to the emotional needs of men, to be "mother, sister, girlfriend." Some soldiers believed that it was the duty of these women to cater to their sexual needs as well. Cherie Rankin says: "There were so many rumors. Millions of rumors about the Red Cross women—every guy claimed he had it [sex] with one of us....I did have guys come up to me with money in their hands and say, 'Here—how much are you getting now?'"<sup>37</sup>

Male expectations could be more than simply annoying; they could be physically as well as emotionally dangerous. Rankin describes her reactions to a situation where she nearly escaped being raped by two American soldiers:

Now here's the conflict: you're supposed to be nice to the guys. You never know if you're the first American woman they've seen, so you always tried to be friendly. So when they stopped again and asked if I wanted a ride, my instincts told me not to get in the truck, but my professional self said, "Now what are you supposed to be doing here in Nam?"<sup>38</sup>

Rankin's sense of duty as a professional "helpmate" led her to do something that is dangerous, against her better judgment, and in denial of her own self-interest. After a great deal of internal conflict, she decided not to report the incident: "My reason for wanting to report it was so that,

# UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 41

if these guys were dangerous, the same thing that happened to me wouldn't happen to another woman. Or to me again....But if they weren't dangerous, I didn't want to do anything to screw up what was already a bad experience for them."<sup>39</sup> The fact that Rankin has herself had a "bad experience" does not—cannot, by the rules of the game, enter into her deliberations.

The pattern of subordination of women's needs to men's demands is repeated in contemporary treatment of women Vietnam veterans. After the war, women veterans made no impression on the public consciousness, and were ignored or deprecated by their male peers. Linda McClenahan, a WAC working at United States Army, Republic of Vietnam (USARV) headquarters in Long Binh, had a dream that captures the invisibility of women veterans:

I had a dream that I got on a bus....The door opens, I'm handed an M-16, I step off the bus, and I'm back in Vietnam—and I'm in the middle of a firefight, you know, combat—people are dying all around us...and I got hit!...I saw the helicopters coming to pick us up, and when they did, they picked up everybody but me. They just left me! And I remember yelling, "Don't leave me! I hurt too....Don't leave me! I hurt too!"<sup>40</sup>

McClenahan's dream is a graphic and accurate metaphor for the fate of women Vietnam veterans. Male veterans could find their identities with traditional veterans' organizations, or with Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) if they were antiwar. Women who had served in Vietnam, however, were not welcome in any of these groups. Lynda Van Devanter joined the VVAW when she returned home from her tour of duty. She describes her experience at a demonstration in Washington, DC:

I took a place near the front. However, one of the leaders approached me. "This demonstration is only for vets," he said apologetically.

"I am a vet," I said. "I was in Pleiku and Qui Nhon...." "Well," he said uncomfortably, "I...uh...don't think you're supposed to march."

"But you told me it was for vets."

"It is," he said. "But you're not a vet."<sup>41</sup>

Ann Powlas, a former Army nurse, joined the American Legion, hoping to find other vets to talk to, but her experience has been less than positive:

A few weeks ago at a ball game one of them [the veterans] even asked me if I was using my husband's card. I said, "It says 'Ann Powlas'—how can that possibly be my husband?" And he said, "You're a member of our post?"...The Legion just does not believe women Vietnam veterans are really veterans—the older

## 42 VIETNAM GENERATION

vets have no respect for any women vets. What they don't understand about Vietnam, though, is that there was no rear—the VC was everywhere, even in the hospitals. But a lot of people feel like, well, if you weren't out in the bush fighting you're not a real veteran. And, for a long time, that was how I felt about myself.<sup>42</sup>

Some male veterans hid their identity as veterans because public opinion had turned against the Vietnam war. Among women veterans, concealing their military service seems to have been the prevailing trend. Isolated from each other, these women feared disapproval, contempt, or abuse from nonveterans and male veterans alike. Women who had served in Vietnam as civilians were even less likely to be accepted by male veterans, even in the relatively sympathetic environment of the veterans' rap group. Red Cross worker Jeanne Christie went to a rap group with a male veteran friend:

So we opened the door and started to walk in. The team members who were on duty that night got up and started toward us. They pointed at Peter and said, "He can come in but she can't!" I was gone—totally demolished. They had leveled me right there. Fortunately, Peter said, "What do you mean? She was there. She was in Nam."...after a few minutes the team members and the rap group decided to let us stay.<sup>43</sup>

Christie is completely erased from this scene; she loses the power to speak for herself, and her entrance to the group was secured only after a male veteran spoke for her and attested to her veteran status. Red Cross workers doubted their status as legitimate veterans, and often downplayed their suffering, as Cherie Rankin describes: "I had always minimized my experience in Vietnam. I always told myself, 'Hell, you weren't a guy. You weren't fighting. How can your experience have been so tough? You don't have any right to feel that way.'<sup>44</sup> It was only after she became involved in a network of women civilians who had served in Vietnam that Rankin started to call herself a "civilian veteran—something I never felt entitled to call myself before."<sup>45</sup>

Entitlement is an important issue for women veterans, both civilian and military. A strong body of evidence about women's experiences in Vietnam exists in the oral histories and personal narratives that have been published in recent years. Both military and civilian workers served under fire. In the hospitals, medical personnel suffered the trauma of viewing horrible wounds, and of bearing responsibility for making life and death decisions. Red Cross workers wrote last letters home for dying men. Women, like men, were witness to the civilian casualties of the war—especially the wounded children. Women served as caretakers for soldiers, who often unburdened themselves—leaving their surrogate "mother, sister, girlfriend" with a burden of vicarious grief and pain.

# UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 43

The picture that emerges from these oral histories about American women in Vietnam is one of almost unrelenting trauma and repression. Many women describe their symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder—emotional numbing, nightmares, depression. The women who tell their stories in these books remained isolated until recently, when they experienced some turning point—the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington, DC, or the discovery of the story of some other woman vet. Several women describe the experience of coming across an interview with Lynda Van Devanter, or reading *Home Before Morning*. Leslie McCluskey says, “...every time I read a page I’d start to see things and start to cry. I kept saying to myself, ‘I can’t believe this. I can’t believe someone else is feeling the same things I am.’ Because all those years, I’d thought I was the only one.”<sup>46</sup>

The Veterans Administration did not acknowledge that women veterans also suffered from post traumatic stress disorder until 1982, when it set up a Working Group on Women Vietnam Veterans. Shad Meshad, the Vietnam veteran and counselor who pioneered rap groups for veterans, acknowledges that for women, PTSD may be even more acute than for men, “since they usually do not feel free to express their anger and frustration and instead compound the stress by holding in their rage and behaving in an ‘appropriate’ manner.”<sup>47</sup>

Women veterans did not seem to find the women’s movement supportive of their cause, either. Jill Mishkel, a former Army nurse who was stationed at Long Binh, said she “got involved in the Women’s Movement and became a radical feminist. The women in my rap groups all knew I’d been to Vietnam, but we never talked about it—we were too busy talking about the terrible things our mothers did to us when we were three.”<sup>48</sup> Van Devanter, seeking funds for the Women’s Project of the Vietnam Veterans of America, was told by “one of the foremost women’s groups in the country that women veterans were not enough of a cutting edge feminist issue.”<sup>49</sup>

In the 1980s, the appearances of *Home Before Morning*, oral history collections, personal narratives, newspaper and magazine articles, TV news reports, and *China Beach* have helped to make the image of American women in wartime Vietnam more familiar. Still, as Carol Lynn Mithers points out, the accounts of women veterans “have never really penetrated the public consciousness.”<sup>50</sup> Mithers claims that women have been excluded from the popular perception of the Vietnam war because while “there has always been a place for women to serve in war...there is not a place for them in its mythology.”<sup>51</sup> Mithers concludes:

To admit that women serve and suffer in war is to destroy the claim to special male knowledge and all the privileges it brings....Within the myth of war, a man who kills, who holds “the power of life and death,” can imagine himself a god. The woman who knows that in the end war comes down to blood, pain and broken bodies can only remind him that he is not.<sup>52</sup>

## 44 VIETNAM GENERATION

Though not all male veterans who write about the war find glory in it, some certainly do (not coincidentally, it is more often people of color and working-class whites who write about the war without nostalgia). The appeal of the war for men is reflected in passages such as the following, which is excerpted from Philip Caputo's bestselling memoir, *A Rumor of War*:

I had never experienced anything like it before. When the line wheeled and charged across the clearing, the enemy bullets whining past them, wheeled and charged almost with drill-field precision, an ache as profound as the ache of orgasm passed through me. And perhaps that is why some officers make careers of the infantry...just to experience a single moment when a group of soldiers under your command and in the extreme stress of combat do exactly what you want them to do, as if they are extensions of yourself.<sup>53</sup>

There are no analogous passages in any of the narratives by women veterans. Women do enjoy the power and competence that their wartime experiences provide, but these pleasures are never removed from the knowledge of the price that is paid by the victims:

I was seeing things, doing things that I never imagined could happen to anyone. I had to do a lot of things on my own, making snap decisions that could end up saving someone or costing him his life.<sup>54</sup>

None of the narratives suggest that women can separate, even for a moment, the sense of personal power that their wartime roles granted them from the cost of the war in terms of human suffering.

Even women who did not become antiwar are terribly aware of the pointless suffering, ugliness, and destruction which is the result of combat. This consciousness is shared by nurses and Red Cross women and comes partially as a function of their jobs, but also as a result of the caretaking role assigned to women by our culture. These women veterans' narratives show us the cultural contradiction produced by women's participation in war—contradictions that forced these women to deny, up until now, their status as veterans. The telling of their stories is an attempt to win the respect now given by American society to their male counterparts. The writing and telling of these stories work to ameliorate the very cultural problem they describe: the silencing and erasure of women. It remains to be seen how successful they will be.

<sup>1</sup> Kay Johnson Burnette, from Keith Walker, *A Piece of My Heart: The Stories of Twenty-Six American Women Who Served in Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio) 1985: 165.

<sup>2</sup> Walker: 2.

# UNTIL I SAW THE WALL 45

- <sup>3</sup> Kathryn Marshall, *In the Combat Zone: Vivid Personal Recollections of the Vietnam War from the Women Who Served There* (New York: Penguin) 1987: 12.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Marshall, 4.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Walker: 253.
- <sup>8</sup> Marshall: 8.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 206.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 207.
- <sup>13</sup> Marshall: 207.
- <sup>14</sup> Walker: 135.
- <sup>15</sup> Nurses can be certified in a nursing school, which issues a diploma, or they can go to a four-year college and get a Bachelor's degree. The Bachelor's degree is generally considered the more prestigious.
- <sup>16</sup> Dan Freedman and Jacqueline Rhoads, eds., *Nurses in Vietnam: The Forgotten Veterans* (Austin: Texas Monthly) 1987: 130.
- <sup>17</sup> Walker: 148.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 37.
- <sup>19</sup> Marshall: 62-63.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: 53-55.
- <sup>21</sup> Walker: 39.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 171.
- <sup>23</sup> Marshall: 65.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 171.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 213.
- <sup>26</sup> Walker: 12.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 81.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 211.
- <sup>29</sup> Marshall: 46.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: 131.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 132.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 33.
- <sup>33</sup> Lynda Van Devanter, with Christopher Morgan, *Home Before Morning* (New York: Warner) 1983: 229.
- <sup>34</sup> Freedman and Rhoads: 87.
- <sup>35</sup> Walker: 10.
- <sup>36</sup> Marshall: 100.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 69.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: 68.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 70.
- <sup>40</sup> Walker: 19.
- <sup>41</sup> Van Devanter: 271.
- <sup>42</sup> Marshall: 125-126.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: 185.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*: 77.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 78.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 60.
- <sup>47</sup> Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow) 1988: 212.
- <sup>48</sup> Marshall: 144.
- <sup>49</sup> Van Devanter: 345.
- <sup>50</sup> Carol Lynn Mithers, "Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam," *Cultural Critique* 3 (1986): 83.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: 84.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 90.
- <sup>53</sup> Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Ballantine) 1977: 254.
- <sup>54</sup> Freedman and Rhoads: 19.

# INTERVIEWS WITH TWO VIETNAM VETERANS: WELCOME HOME

## DAVID M. BERMAN

The interviews which shape this article are the stories of two women who served tours of duty in Vietnam. Lois Shirley was a medical-surgical nurse at the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon during 1967 and 1968, leaving the country two weeks before the 1968 Tet Offensive. Lois worked in a tropical medicine unit, supervised both a medical ward and a convalescent ward, and, as a head nurse, also served in triage. Her story provides the perspective of a career officer in the Army Nurse Corps and paints a stark picture of the organization of hospitals and the movement of casualties between hospitals, all to prepare those hospitals closest to the field to receive more casualties.

Kathie (Trew) Swazuk served as a medical-surgical nurse at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh for thirteen months during 1969 and 1970, one of those very young nurses just out of school (as Lois describes them) who left the service shortly after the end of her tour. Kathie served four months on a surgical ward followed by nine months on a medical ward, and her portrait is of the life and death responsibility which was thrust upon her treating battlefield casualties received by her hospital.

Welcome home.

## Lois Shirley

LS: If you tell anybody under the age of 25 that you've been in Vietnam they're fascinated. I have a nephew who is a junior in high school. He wants to hear about it continuously, and if I ever meet any of his friends, I'm always introduced as, "This is my aunt, she was in Vietnam," like I'm some kind of freak or something.

DB: *Are there any particular images which come to mind, which capture the experience of being in Vietnam?*

I remember once that we got seventeen soldiers into the emergency room at one time who had white phosphorus wounds, and the white phosphorus was dropped by our own people. And that was the first time I had seen anything like that. I could just not comprehend that there would be a weapon that awful, that we would put people through that torture. And I can remember putting the dressings on the patients, and two days later, taking the dressings off, and the damn things started smoking again.... Those people were in agony. And we thought about these people, because they were our troops, and because they had been accidentally



## WELCOME HOME 47

injured, but it made you sit there and think of how many people were out there, innocent people who have had this stuff dropped on them.

*Describe your responsibilities.*

I was stationed in the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon. When I first went over, I worked as a staff nurse in tropical medicine, about a fifty-bed medical unit for patients with tropical diseases, infectious diseases. And there were a lot of very, very sick patients with malaria, bad hepatitis, scrub typhus, diseases like that, and a lot of very, very bad dysentery. I was seeing diseases I had never heard of before. And you know, you learned everything you needed to know in three days' time. Most of those patients didn't die.... They tended to be very young, the people whom you expected to be the young troopers coming right out of the field, the grunts. They were very sick, but once they got in the hospital and were treated tended to get better rapidly. Most of them got sent back to duty.... Then I was promoted and became the head nurse on the medical ward.

In Vietnam, there were actually three types of hospitals: the surgical hospitals or the MASH hospitals which were supposedly mobile, the evacuation hospitals, and the field hospitals. The MASH hospitals usually have only about sixty beds and their main focus is immediate surgical care of patients. They might keep a patient three or four days at most. They would get the patients, treat them, and almost immediately air evac them out so that they always had empty beds. And these hospitals theoretically should be closest to the fighting, although this doesn't work in Vietnam because the fighting was all over the place.

The other category of hospital you had were the evacuation hospitals.... They usually had about six hundred beds, could go up to a thousand, and again, would get their patients in, operate on them, keep them a couple days, stabilize them, and probably every single day, had a whole group of patients evac'd out to Japan. They would go to Cam Ranh, or to Tan Son Nhut, and would be staged there by the Air Force, and then sent to Japan, occasionally to the Philippines, but most went to Japan—moved along the chain.

Then you had the field hospitals. The field hospitals in Vietnam were run more like a fixed facility, essentially like a medical center, with no pressure to get our patients out. And we inherited a lot of patients from the other hospitals.

*Describe a day in the life of a nurse in Vietnam.*

Mostly you get up at six, go to work at six-thirty, work a twelve hour shift five or six days a week, depending on what staff we had, sometimes seven days a week. Technically we didn't get air evacs. We didn't have choppers landing all the time. We didn't have a chopper pad when I was working there. They had to land at Tan Son Nhut which was about a mile and a half away, so we weren't on the direct reaction team. But, in

## 48 VIETNAM GENERATION

reality, we were because the surgical hospitals and evac hospitals had to keep emptying out, they had to have empty beds, so three, four, maybe five times a week we would get the word coming down to us we're getting patients. We never knew when we were gonna get the big push.... You know, if you have 25,000 troops out in an operation, for every thousand men who are going to be committed to the battle, you know you're going to get "X" amount of casualties. There's a factor, a formula they figure out. So every day, as the evac hospitals from around the country were choppering their patients into the clearing station, they would start accumulating patients in the early afternoon, and they would get up to about 400 or 500 patients sometimes, so every day we inherited patients. Some days we got a lot more than other days, and they tended to come late in the afternoon because that's when the hospitals up-country would have had a chance to make rounds, and get the transportation arranged. Now if they suddenly got inundated with patients, getting a whole lot more than they thought, then they started moving them out fast. And that's when we started getting them at night, late in the evening. But for the most part, it always happened in the late afternoon. We worked very, very hard. We were busy all the time.

When there's a major operation and an evac hospital can't handle the flow, that's when it got really, really busy.... They would triage them, stabilize them, and move them on, put them right back on the chopper. What happens, especially with patients who need surgery, you can stabilize them, and you can hold off doing the surgery for so many hours, but when you get to the point where you still have fifty people that need surgery, and you know each case is going to take at least two hours, and it's totally impossible, somebody has to make a determination that it's got to be safer to put this guy back on a chopper, take him for an hour chopper ride, than it is to let him stay and wait for surgery.

The nursing department would just put out the word—that "X" number of casualties were coming in, and they're going to be here in twenty minutes. Essentially, we just stripped the wards of personnel, just put the ward on hold, and everybody went down to our triage area. We had teams, there would be one doctor, one nurse, a 91-Charlie, or a 91-Bravo, and each team had two or three little areas and as they unloaded the patients, they would put them down and prioritize them.... You go down there and they still have their uniforms on, they still have their boots and their fatigues on...but they had never gotten to the point where anybody had gotten them undressed, they'd probably never even left the litter. But they had started IVs on them, and given them blood, whatever they needed to do for emergency purposes.... I think we had about four ORs [operating rooms] so once you sent four people into surgery, then everybody else had to wait. You tried not to send a patient into surgery who's going to tie up an OR for eight, nine hours. You want to try to get the ones you can do in the shortest amount of time.

# WELCOME HOME 49

The movement of patients was a massive operation, and the object of all the moving around was for any hospital located near a big operation to always have empty beds.... So if this particular evac hospital is appointed to this division, and this division is starting a big push, you can't call up the brigade commander and say, "If you got any casualties, send them somewhere else, we're full".... They had certain criteria to determine which patients got moved, but they knew they had to have a certain number of empty beds, so the regulator people would then determine which hospital they would get moved to. They may have gone to some other evac hospital, but more likely, they got sent out of the country, but a lot of them came to the 3rd Field because we weren't usually getting direct casualties.

*What was the atmosphere like at times when you were getting casualties from the battlefield?*

Very organized and very calm. And that just comes with practice.... With the trauma patients, you were so busy trying to do what you needed to do to keep them from going into shock and stabilize them and get them into surgery, you didn't have a lot of time to think.... After you've been through it a couple of times, you realize that you were very efficient at doing it.... Sometimes there could actually be some humorous moments. The way we staffed our emergency room, all the head nurses had to take turns working a week at a time, the night shift, seven to seven. I remember one night we got a call we were getting some patients. They had brought a whole squad in on a chopper, except six or seven of them were dead, and we got the one patient who was hurt really bad, and the one who didn't have a scratch on him, he happened to be the medic. They had been on patrol someplace close by and ambushed and machine-gunned and the medic, he was far enough back, I guess, that they missed him. All the others were killed and this guy was just sprayed with machine gun bullets and the medic managed to keep him alive long enough for the chopper to come and pick him up and he was...it was like...bullet wounds all the way down, right across him. The place was awash in blood. I never saw so much blood in my life, and we gave that guy 78 units of blood I think before we moved him from the emergency room into the operating room suite. And besides having all these wounds and everybody jumping on him trying to keep him alive, he had these grenades hanging on his belt, and when one of the grenades fell off, there must have been fifteen people working on this guy, and when that thing hit the ground, I didn't know people could move that fast.... Obviously it didn't explode so somebody went back in and picked it up and went back out again, and we all went back in and started working on the patient again.

# 50 VIETNAM GENERATION

*Did he make it?*

He made it, and you know those are the type of patients you wonder about—you wonder whatever happened to that guy and did he really know what happened. And you wonder, does he know that that medic saved his life.

*What kind of casualties did you have, what kinds of wounds?*

Everything. Most of the gunshot wounds.... We got everything, a lot of orthopedic patients, a lot of amputees, and just any kind of general surgery patient.... It was overwhelming.... It didn't dawn on you how many amputees there were until you went into the [orthopedic] ward. You could look down this ward, and this was probably a forty-bed ward, and you could see all these beds down there in a line, and they all had traction on and weights hanging off the bottom of the bed, when it suddenly dawned on you that all those tractions were tractions on stumps. It wasn't traction on a leg, you know, because when they have an amputation they put a pin through there and put a traction on it to keep the person from getting a contracture, so you could go in there through the door, and look down the hall, and see thirty weights hanging off the bottom of those beds. Then it would dawn on you, "That's thirty legs that aren't there."

I was probably there a couple of months and for some reason or other, I had occasion to go over to Tan Son Nhut. We were driving down the street in a jeep and all of a sudden I could see all the traffic in all directions come to a stop at a crossroads. People got out of their vehicles and were standing there saluting.... And then a truck came by pulling a flatbed trailer, and it was full of coffins and it was going from the mortuary to the flight line, and that's the first time I think it really dawned on me how many people were getting killed.

*Did you ever run into any of your patients?*

No.

*What kind of war was it?*

Well, they don't really prepare you at all for going over there.... After basic training, many of the people that were in my class went straight from there to Vietnam. So we had these people, very young nurses, many of them had just graduated from nursing school, just got their license, their first job ever as a registered nurse was in the Army.... They had an education commitment. They came in, went down to Fort Sam for Basic [Training], and went right to Vietnam. So they were very young, very immature, had not developed in their role as registered nurses, and then

all of a sudden they have to also learn how to be a military officer, and they're doing all this under hostile conditions. Most of these nurses came out of diploma programs so they were, most of them, around 21 years old. And the bulk of the patients were very intensive cases. So they had heavy conflicts going on.... It takes you a long time to really learn your role and become comfortable in it. I was 26 years old when I went over, and I had five to six years nursing experience before I went into the Army. I'd been around, so I didn't have that same conflict.

Listen, we never even went out to the firing range. They did take us out in the country where we sat on some bleachers and someone gave us a demonstration.... We went to the firing range and we never fired a weapon.... I knew absolutely nothing.... When I got orders to go to Vietnam, I didn't have the faintest idea where Vietnam even was.... I found out a little about it in Basic, but I certainly was not prepared.... The majority of nurses were in the same situation. And at one time I think, in the hospital where I was, I know we only had one doctor in the whole building who was a regular Army person. Everybody else was a draftee, and probably seventy percent of the nurses were on their initial tours. They were right off the street in this war.

*What would you have done if you had been attacked?*

I don't have any idea.... The whole time I was in Vietnam, I never even had a flak jacket or helmet... I left about two weeks before the Tet Offensive. I'm sure it changed after that.

*Do you have any parting words?*

I never had to deal with "Why am I over here?" I never had any doubt at all. You didn't think about fighting Communism and all this kind of stuff. I knew what my mission was. My mission was to take care of the wounded they pushed through that door. That was it. You did it very well. You worked really hard, and you were very, very proud of what you did... Well, sure you felt cheated. Look at all these young guys who were killed and maimed, but you didn't carry it to the higher level, "Why is this happening?" It was, "This guy has a mortal wound, but we'll do what we can for him..." I learned more in that year than I learned any other time in my life, professionally and personally.

I read this article about a teacher who wrote to people all over the country for their ideas on what to teach about Vietnam to his students. I was very, very disturbed because there wasn't one female interviewed. We're talking about fifty percent of the population of the United States, many of whom had some involvement in the Vietnam war, whether they were opposing it, supporting it, sending a father, a son, or a husband off to war. And this man did not feel that he had to get input about the war from one female.... I just could not believe this man was so unperceptive.

## 52 VIETNAM GENERATION

There's got to be one female somewhere in the United States who has enough stature to whom he could have said, "Give me your opinion about the war...."

*Lois Shirley, R.N., B.S.N., M.Ed; Medical-Surgical Nurse, Army Nurse Corps, 3rd Field Hospital (Saigon), 1967-1968. Lois recently retired as a Lieutenant Colonel after 22 years with the Army Nurse Corps and is presently teaching in the associate degree nursing program at the Community College of Allegheny County, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.*

### **KATHIE (TREW) SWAZUK**

KS: I guess my most vivid memory was the burn patients...treating burns from white phosphorus, flamethrowers, a lot from chopper accidents.... I think I can smell the smell and I can see the crust and the skin and it's a very visual picture I have of what I did day after day...just peel the skin off of burn patients. That's the picture I have.

DB: *What was your role in Vietnam?*

When I first went over, I was a surgical nurse and I spent four months on a surgical unit or ward. The last part of my tour was on an intensive medical unit which included all forms of malaria and tropical fevers and the really sick medical cases. They were two very different experiences....

On the surgical unit, one wing was pretty much gunshot and shrapnel wounds, one wing was all the burn cases (burns of thirty percent or under, that could be managed on a ward). And then one wing, they tried to keep for the Vietnamese families who were injured...and the other wing was for venereal disease, a great combination.... We did all the debriding of the burn patients, passing medications, changing dressings.... And oftentimes the physicians were so busy performing surgery, and doing triage when casualties came in, that if an emergency on the ward came up it had to be one of us who handled it. I can remember one night, I had a guy who was fresh from surgery that day with shrapnel wounds of the leg and was losing a significant amount of blood at a rapid pace. And I couldn't get hold of the surgeon when I needed him, a night when there were all kinds of mass casualties coming in. I felt that I had to do something to stop the bleeding and I literally opened the wound up and clamped off the bleeder myself.... I did what had to be done. We were doing things that we would never do in the States, that would've never fallen into the hands of a nurse, and had responsibilities that we never, never encountered.... I have to keep remembering how young I was, right out of nursing school. I was 21 years old.

# WELCOME HOME 53

*Could you describe your nursing background in the States, how it was you entered the service and became an Army nurse?*

I was a graduate of the three-year diploma nursing program, and at that time the Army took diploma nurses into the Nurse Corps. If you signed up in your junior year they gave you a stipend in your senior year and you owed them two or three years of active duty. For me at that time, I saw it as a way to travel and see the world. No one ever said you were going to Vietnam.

I got to Basic in February of '69, and they told us by the end of the year, if not by the end of Basic, eighty percent of us would have our orders for Vietnam. By then we were in, and at that point, I thought it was something that I could do for my country.... I ended up for six months at Walter Reed [Army Hospital] in their intensive care unit.... Then in October of '69, I left for Vietnam.

*Did the Army prepare you for the working conditions, the living conditions, the combat conditions?*

There was nothing on the kind of medical or surgical problems that you would encounter, that I can recall clearly. So, the answer is that no, they did very little. I guess ignorance is bliss.

In Basic, we fired a .45, once. But as far as combat...no, nothing. And I've told people this a lot, we were so young and naive and "pie-in-the-sky".... I was like right out of nursing school. I was 21, and was still kind of wet behind the ears. Whatever they told me I just believed. This was my country. They weren't going to let me down. They were going to take good care of me. I didn't ask a lot of questions either. Maybe I didn't know enough to ask.

I think that one of the places the Army fell very short was they didn't teach us how to be an officer.... I was just a young girl with lieutenant's bars on my shoulders and I didn't understand.... Medically, it was an experience of a lifetime. I'll never, even if I live to be a thousand years, see the kinds of things, or take care of the kinds of things I took care of. I think the medical care was exceptional. It was quite an eye-opener, in all kinds of ways.

*Do you remember when you first arrived in-country?*

The first thing I remember is that we couldn't land because Bien Hoa was being rocketed, so we had to circle a few times. And then the intense heat when you got off the plane, and dust—lots of dust.... I got the lovely opportunity of flying over in cargo planes.... I think there were two females on the plane, two nurses on the whole plane....

*What were your quarters like?*

## 54 VIETNAM GENERATION

There was one nurse BOQ. There were probably twenty or thirty nurses. They were just wooden buildings with very small rooms off of each side. We did have our own room, which was nice. Each of us had a little refrigerator, so I'm sure according to what the guys experienced, we lived like kings and queens. We had a cupboard for clothing; everybody fixed their own place up. We had orange crates; you make do, and some people had ordered from Spiegel and Sears, and put some curtains and stuff up.... But they were pretty crude, and there were cockroaches everywhere. I can remember the cockroaches. They were huge. You could hear them walking down the halls at night.

And there were showers, a couple showers per each wing of the BOQs.... There were flush toilets. There were stalls with doors.... Long Binh had a swimming pool, which we called Palm Springs East or something like that. Working twelve hour days, you would get an hour break sometime during the day, and we used to run up there and go swimming for an hour and then come back. And that was nice because it got us out of that atmosphere.... But if there was a need we worked however long it took.... If we had mass casualties come in and you were needed, you just stayed, so that some days ended up to be fourteen, sixteen hours, and then you came back in the morning.... But there was a great feeling and pulling together at those times. There was a kind of closeness with the people you worked with.... The people became very important because that was all you had....

*What were your responsibilities, what was a typical day in the surgical unit?*

We would come on duty at seven, and take the vital signs of all the patients. Then medications. And you would make rounds on everybody to check all the dressings to make sure there was no bleeding. Then once we got the initial medications passed out, it was time to take care of the burn patients. They were maintained on sterile sheets and bedding to prevent any infection with their burns—it was like keeping Vietnam clean, which was almost a joke. They were all treated with Sulfamyolon which was a real thick sulfa-antibiotic cream that was placed on the burns. Twice a day that had to be completely scrubbed off, and then all the skin that was encrusted or was ready to be pulled off, where the skin had healed, you needed to debride, so we had to medicate these patients because it was very painful. Then we would peel off all this skin that was ready to be peeled, and reapply the Sulfamyolon cream and change all their sheets and sterile dressings. When you figure you had probably ten or fifteen beds on each side of the ward to do, maybe thirty patients, that in itself took a good part of the day. They'd be in these rows with the sterile sheets, all one color, kind of a water green. They were lined up and all white because the medication would kind of cake onto them and it's white. So you'd walk down there, and I guess it was the visual picture.... It was a horribly painful healing process.... The burns were everywhere,



## WELCOME HOME 55

backs mostly. I remember a lot on the backs and the abdomen, but they were everywhere, the arms, legs. The white phosphorus ones were bad because they would burn so deeply. They were usually on doorgunners; they'd get them on the extremities. Those were bad burns, the crater type. They could look small, but the damage to the tissues was extensive because they were so deep....

The other wing had the gunshot wounds. There were a lot of automatic weapons wounds...a lot of shrapnel, a lot of mine injuries. A lot of times those were orthopedic or intensive care.... Not only was that twice a day changing the burn patients' dressings and the gunshot wound dressings, but medications usually fell every six hours, so that every four to six hours you were interspersing passing medications for those who needed antibiotics, and the doctors would make rounds in between. So you were always doing something, three things at once.

But I think the most vivid thing I remember about it was taking care of the burn patients. I had never seen burn patients like I saw over there, and we saw all kinds—napalm, and white phosphorus, and you name it, we saw it. I've worked here in the States now, years in the emergency rooms, and I've never seen burn patients like these. So it was a big deal...for me.

*Was your ward usually full?*

Almost always...in fact, that's why the air evac plane left everyday at eleven so that we could clear out those whom we knew weren't going back to duty. We cleared them out so that we'd have room for the incoming casualties. Very rarely was there a real decrease in the census. I can't remember not being on the run the whole time.... It was constant, just in and out, in and out, in and out....

It was strictly a continual flow, and you were always expectant. I mean, you were always waiting for the hammer to fall, the call to come and say, "Clear out so many beds." So it was just a steady stream, a steady stream of patients and paperwork and medications. It was constant.

*So you moved from the surgical ward to the medical ward....*

On my medical unit there were 88 patients, and I know we had 88 beds because they were all malaria, and I would have to come in every morning and mix 88 IV bottles. We had to mix enough for three shifts of bottles. They got eight-hour bottles, so we had to mix so many bottles a day for 88 beds.... These guys, when they first came in, they were very sick. You could tell what kind of malaria it was by their temperature spikes. So they would go from walking in, with perfectly normal temperatures, to having these horrible shaking chills and temperatures of 104° or 105°, where you'd have to put them on a cooling blanket and quickly bring their temperature down to some safer limit. We were constantly monitoring

## 56 VIETNAM GENERATION

fever, and fever charts, and charting temperature spikes. You could almost predict when the temperature would shoot back up. These guys were sick.... You'd have to feed them and force fluids on them, and then they'd get better. You'd see them starting to get better.

You name it, they had it. Vivax and Falsip Malaria, patients with diarrhea, with typhoid fever and dengue fever, lots of dehydration, and shaking chills. That's a very vivid picture. I listened to those little metal cots literally rattle because they would have such shaking chills with some of these fevers. And that was like torture, putting them on these cold blankets to bring their fevers down. That was awful, sometimes, at night, just to listen to those sounds and be always vigilant for somebody who was spiking a fever.

*Was the medical ward usually full?*

Oh, always. We double-bunked patients, so we had cots one on top of the other.... I can remember one night on the medical unit that bodies were coming in so fast that they were bringing them in on litters and leaving them. Not only was every bed filled but we had litters with patients between every bed.... There was always this stress—Did I do everything? Did I remember everything?—particularly with the malaria patients, because they were on such regimented time-frames with their medications and their temperature spikes.... That night was crazy. They just kept lining them up.... I don't remember the details.... I just remember them opening the doors and bringing the litters in. Sometimes I think I blocked a lot out. I don't remember details terrifically. I'm probably remembering more than I have for a long time.

*What was it like at the end of the day after treating 88 plus malaria patients?*

Sometimes you just wanted to eat and sleep. I can remember just being tired a lot. One of the things you'd look forward to was a shower, to get cleaned up. Mostly I just hungered for friends and we'd gather in somebody's room and we'd talk or, in the nurses quarters.... There'd be music.... Credence [Clearwater Revival].... I can remember this one tape of "Willie and the Poor Boys." I have this one tape of everything we ever listened to over there.... People were very important, so it was always a need to find your group of friends and at least touch base with them. I felt like I needed some human contact, somebody not sick to talk to, or something to remove you from the hospital setting. Sometimes you would walk back on the ward and you'd make sure that everything was okay, like you couldn't get enough of it.

*You spent 13 months there? Then what?*

# WELCOME HOME 57

I came back to Pittsburgh, and then I got married not long after that. I married a guy I met over there.... I have two children now. I divorced him and came back to Pittsburgh, so I've been back here since 1976.... I was young, and I quickly got caught up in the fantasy of a wedding, planning to move. I just kind of kept moving.... I don't know that I've stopped moving since then. Everyone complains my big problem is that I can't relax, and I can't stop. I'm constantly on the go. I was sort of on a fast track and I just functioned. I don't remember having any major adjustment problems.... I think the one thing that made it a bit easier is that my husband still had six months at Fort Riley, so we ended up back in a military environment which was much more comfortable for me than meeting people who were non-military. Most of the guys were just back from Vietnam or going to Vietnam. There was always a common denominator.

I did feel awkward going back to work though. I went into a medical doctor's office in Manhattan, Kansas, and having come from Vietnam where I was making life and death decisions and starting IVs and reading EKGs and passing medications and knowing what to do for all these terrible traumas, going in there having to ask permission.... It was sort of like the *Twilight Zone*.

It was strange. There was no one to talk to. So basically I never talked to anyone about Vietnam for years and years and years. It's only been recently, and then I don't feel very many people want to hear about it. I think the "in" thing to do is acknowledge that "oh, you were a Vietnam vet," but I don't think anybody really wants to know about it. It's something that you kind of locked up, at least that's what I did. I don't know if that's normal but I didn't talk about it very much.

*Do you think much about Vietnam now?*

I think a lot about it....

*What is it you think about?*

I don't think I've ever not thought about Vietnam. I just know I never expressed it. I think a lot about Agent Orange because we undressed these guys right off the field with all the dirt and whatever and you wonder if you had any exposure to the toxins. I remember dirt. There was always dirt, dust. I remember how dirty they would be when they would come in from the field, and sometimes bathing them because they were too sick to bathe themselves.... So those kinds of things.

*Do you think about the work that you did?*

I'll tell you what. It's the most "needed" I've ever felt in my life.... I mean, I really felt like whether I believed in why we should be there or not had nothing to do with it.... It was the only time I know that what I did there

## 58 VIETNAM GENERATION

helped save lives and helped get some of these guys back in one piece. I feel like the medicine that I saw practiced over there was phenomenal for the conditions and for the flow of patients. I felt more needed, or more useful, there than I ever felt in my whole life. Really I did. It's sort of a letdown when you come back and nobody ever really knows.... It's kind of feeling that you have reached a certain level where you can make decisions and you are respected. It's as if nobody wants to know you really did all this. Nobody wants to know about Vietnam.... You just hide it or you just bury it or you keep it from everybody else.... I had enough times where I thought somebody wanted to hear about Vietnam, and I started to talk about it and quickly realized that all they wanted was to ask the question and they really never wanted to know about the experience. You know, midway through the conversation, the body language would tell me that "Hey, I don't really want to be in this heavy-duty conversation here." I would catch myself getting emotional in trying to express it, and I just realized it's not worth it. Nobody really wants to know.

*Do you ever think about the men you treated, the casualties?*

A lot, and part of that is because you never know what happened to them.

*You've never run into any of them?*

No, sad to say. I don't remember a lot of names or anything. But I can't watch anything with the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial] Wall, or the war.... My kids always say, "You're crying again, Mom. Please don't cry."

*Kathie (Trew) Swazuk, R.N., B.S.N., CRNP; Medical-Surgical Nurse, Army Nurse Corps, 93rd Evacuation Hospital (Long Binh), 1969-1970. Kathie is the Clinical Coordinator for the Pittsburgh Laser Center at St. Francis Medical Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

The interviews contained in this article were edited for purposes of publication in this journal. The author would like to express grateful appreciation to Marge Van Tassel, Laraine Kuchma, and Betty Diskin, Department of Instruction and Learning, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, for their assistance in transcribing and typing these interviews.

# MAKING SENSE OF VIETNAM AND TELLING THE REAL STORY: MILITARY WOMEN *IN THE COMBAT ZONE*

CHERYL A. SHELL

Until 1982 very few people knew that thousands of women had served in the Vietnam War. No one really knows why it seems to have been a kind of secret, but some speculate that it was shameful in some way to our patriarchal society. Women are not supposed to serve where they could get killed; women are supposed to be safe, back in the rear areas, away from combat. But because of the nature of the war in Vietnam there was no really safe place, no rear area. Therefore, we could not comfortably admit that women had been there, living and working in the midst of combat; we could not admit that we had failed to protect them.<sup>1</sup>

As Cynthia Enloe contends, women Vietnam veterans “have suffered from their invisibility. They have been pushed to the back of the bureaucratic filing cabinet.”<sup>2</sup> Even as she was writing, however, women were moving forward. A nurse who had served in Vietnam had begun organizing other veterans and speaking out. Lynda Van Devanter is considered by many writers on the subject of American women in Vietnam to be the pioneer in getting recognition for female veterans. In 1983 she published her memoirs from her year as an Army nurse in the 71st Evacuation hospital at Pleiku, thereby permanently opening for discussion the issue of women in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

One of the people influenced by Van Devanter’s work is Kathryn Marshall. In 1987 Marshall published *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975*, a compilation of first-person narratives from women who had served in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> Marshall implies that she wrote the book to show the American public that women had served in Vietnam, and to help us understand what that service had been like. Though Marshall is not a Vietnam veteran, she lived through the war period that for her came to seem like surrealist fiction: “There was no organizing principle, no discernible narrative—instead there was a web of stories, each as confused as my life was.”<sup>5</sup> In writing her oral history, then, Marshall seems to have an additional, more personal aim: to make that confused story of the Vietnam war years into something that makes sense, that follows a familiar narrative line, that ultimately has meaning for the women, veteran and non-veteran, who lived through that time. But Marshall cannot achieve both

## 60 VIETNAM GENERATION

her purposes. By making the Vietnam war make sense, she and the twenty women who relate their war experiences through her book must inevitably fail to reveal what those experiences were really like. *In the Combat Zone* achieves the most important goal of many survivors of the Vietnam era—that of making meaning.

In his book, *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*, Philip Beidler, a Vietnam veteran, talks about the importance of making meaning. The Vietnam war was different from our other wars, he says. Like Marshall, he speaks of the unreality:

In the large view or in the small, there was no real beginning and there was no real end to anything having to do with the war. It just went on.

It went on, moreover, for many Americans at least, in a strange, remote midworld where visitations of the absurd and unreal nestled with sinister ease amidst a spectacle of anguish, violence, and destruction almost too real to be comprehended.<sup>6</sup>

What made Vietnam different from other wars also made it more difficult for us to fit into a pre-constructed social or psychological niche—there was nothing in the American myth of wars and heroes that could encompass the experience that was “the ‘Nam.” Those who came back alive made whatever adjustment they could to a world that seemed insane next to the reality of the Vietnam war.<sup>7</sup> Beidler asks the question: “How, then, might one come up with some form of sense-making for this thing?”<sup>8</sup> And he answers that it is Vietnam writers who must make sense of Vietnam, by “endowing it with large configurations of value and signification. In this way, what facts that could be found might still be made to mean, as they had never done by themselves, through the shaping and ultimately the transforming power of art.”<sup>9</sup>

The writers of Marshall's *In the Combat Zone* are the twenty women who tell their stories. After the book's brief introduction, the collected narratives are simply presented—evidence of “how it really was.” And yet, while it would seem that the compiler is giving us “just the facts,” those facts have been carefully chosen and arranged, enhanced or possibly contrived, either by the narrators themselves (each was allowed to review and revise her manuscript before publication) or by the editor. Such “facts” are memories, really, and memories are subject to all sorts of metamorphoses over the course of twenty years. And even memories accurately reported may be altered by the editorial decisions or unconscious biases of the interviewer. These, of course, are the dangers inherent in the very process of composing an oral history, and such conditions have made oral history controversial as historical evidence. But, says Ronald Grele, “the historical profession has not yet come to terms with the implications of this kind of material”—oral history can provide us with answers to questions about the process of history as well as the facts of history.<sup>10</sup> Studs Terkel asserts that “[t]he

interview...is a record of what people think and how they feel," and thus tells us about a person's values and beliefs, as well as the behaviors shaped by those values and beliefs.<sup>11</sup> When we gather together many interviews, we may learn something about a particular society—it's myths and constructs. As Grele aptly puts it: "The past comes to us encumbered with feelings and perceptions that derive from an individual's cultural experience as well as his unique engagement. Sometimes consciousness of cultural experience is articulated. More often it lies buried deep within a stream of words and their accompanying gestures."<sup>12</sup>

In Marshall's collection of stories from the past, each of the tellers, we must believe, wants to render the truth about what she experienced in Vietnam. But that truth may ultimately be a truth that has nothing to do with the simple recording of events. Paul Thompson says in his most recent introduction to oral history, that "stories are also commonly used in the telling of individual lives, in order to convey values; and it is the symbolic truth they convey, and not the facts of the incident described, which matters most."<sup>13</sup> The cultural experience—laden with values and symbolic truths—is conveyed along with the actual experience. Thus oral history can take up the powerful sword of art, shaping and transforming the mass of disconnected events, individuals, and perceptions of the Vietnam war into a story that makes sense. Beidler, in discussing earlier oral histories of the Vietnam war,<sup>14</sup> identifies the "uncanny literariness" of such documentaries:

If they seemed noteworthy for their projection of a sense, as one writer observed, of a decisively truth-burdened immediacy one associates with the most accomplished examples of experiential witness, they also seemed to suggest at the same time an equally important quality of sense-making achievement in their recurrent, almost startlingly routine demonstration of clearly "aesthetic" attributes of focus and design, point, coherence and closure.<sup>15</sup>

What Beidler sees in the oral histories collected by Santoli and Baker can also be seen in Marshall's anthology. Each of the contributors to *In the Combat Zone* seems to be making a story of Vietnam—each creates a beginning, a middle and an end for her journey. Only the most significant, the most powerful anecdotes are chosen for inclusion, and they seem carefully constructed to elicit a response. Commentary seasoned by distance and the passage of time is added, giving the narrative perspective and depth. Each real experience is offered by a person who has had years to think about it, to struggle to fit it into her life, into her sense of self. Each of the women, if we can judge by the narratives, has succeeded in that struggle. Their success is due in part, I believe, to their use of cultural experience in transforming the confusion of the past into an integrated, coherent memory. A cultural experience that all the contributors have in common is that of being a woman in 20th century America. Some of the contributors share a more specific cultural experience: the experience of being a military nurse.

## 62 VIETNAM GENERATION

Eighty percent of all active-duty American women and approximately forty percent of all American women in Vietnam were military nurses.<sup>16</sup> They staffed the many hospitals, surgical units, transport planes and convalescent centers that cared for the hundreds of thousands of sick and wounded of the Vietnam war. Out of the twenty personal narratives that make up *In the Combat Zone*, nine are from military nurses. But although these nurses all served in different settings or different locales or different time periods, their stories sound very much the same. Many of the same issues are raised; remarkably similar experiences with the vast number of the wounded and dying are related. Even the women's backgrounds, upbringing, and values seem the same. They tell Marshall how they came to be nurses, and how they got to Vietnam. They give vivid, detailed descriptions of wounds, of horrible suffering, of constant danger. They discuss various treatment settings: a burn ward, a surgical unit, a tropical diseases ward—each is distressingly similar. They also relate the almost universally devastating experience of returning to "the World" of the United States where they were simply ignored. And throughout, they try to explain their feelings.

Often their feelings are of powerlessness and guilt. The immense destruction they encountered seemed to negate all hope of helping in any significant way. Each nurse recounts the tale of one horribly wounded patient, beyond repair, who eventually died. Each describes her irrational feelings of guilt and helplessness at being unable to keep that patient alive. What these nurses were trained to do—facilitate the healing process both physically and mentally—seemed impossible. Mary Stout speaks of emotions common to all the nurses interviewed when she tells about a particular patient:

Like this one guy who had been in an APC [armored personnel carrier] and they hit a mine and the gasoline exploded. He was the only one who came out of it alive. But he had terrible burns. We expected him to die, waited for him to die. He was right across from my desk—we always kept the worst ones near the nurses' desk—and just looking at him I felt so helpless. I knew we couldn't evac him because he'd go into shock, and I knew I couldn't talk to him because there was nothing I could say. And he was conscious. I felt so guilty. Even after I got back I felt guilty about that guy.<sup>17</sup>

Stout's guilt over this soldier's death might have had less to do with the futility of wartime nursing than it had to do with society's definition of the ideal military nurse. Cynthia Enloe addresses this issue of cultural definition and its effects on military nurses in Vietnam:

Because they were women and because military nursing was defined in feminized terms, they were not allowed even to show their anger....They were supposed to soothe and comfort, not display anger and certainly not go crazy with fury as did so many



male soldiers...Because women are brought up to nurture and protect others, many nurses felt like failures because, no matter what they did, the GIs kept dying.<sup>18</sup>

But a GI's death was not the only guilt inspiring event in a military nurse's career. The nurses report feeling guilty when men lived, but went home maimed; guilty that they themselves were relatively safe and whole; guilty when they began to develop feelings of hatred toward the Vietnamese, both allies and enemies, for whom they were frequently asked to care; guilty when they deliberately allowed some hopelessly mutilated soldier to die; guilty when they self-medicated themselves with alcohol or marijuana to numb their psychic pain.

Yet behind all the stories of anguish and sorrow over one or another "sweet young kid" who had been blown to bits,<sup>19</sup> there lurks a small note of pride. Pride would certainly be justified under the circumstances: over the fourteen years that Americans fought in Vietnam, over 360,000 servicemen and women were wounded, yet only some 58,000 died—there was a survival rate of almost 85 percent for wounded soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Although it could be argued that some of the wounded were so damaged that they would have rather died, still such figures testify to the skill and dedication of all the medical personnel who served in that war.

None of the nurses in Marshall's collection mention any of their patients who lived to go back to the war, and yet there must have been many. Only one or two nurses express pride at doing her job well, like Saralee McGoran: "We were so damn good at what we were doing, we could save anybody."<sup>21</sup> Yet even this pronouncement is quickly followed by a guilty negation.

For a woman, openly admitting to skill or competence does not fit in with our culture's image of the perfect (female) nurse, embodied by the mythologized Florence Nightingale. Enloe speaks of Nightingale's influence: "In Europe and North America the role of both military and civilian nurses was shaped by the Victorian ideas of class and gender articulated by Nightingale: deference of women to men; the superiority of bourgeois educated women over either poor or aristocratic women; women's natural inclination to self-sacrifice and nurturing."<sup>22</sup>

The feelings and behaviors the nurses of *In the Combat Zone* ascribe to themselves are self-sacrifice, compassion, nurturing, understanding, humility—comfortable "female" responses. They speak of working steadily, relentlessly through immense fatigue, depression, rage, illness, and occasional mortar attacks. In addition to administering necessary physical treatment to patients who had extremely serious injuries, these nurses all report administering psychological and emotional treatment as well. They consider it to have been part of the job and the nursing process. Supportive treatment sometimes took the form of mothering. Ruth Sidisin, called "Mom" by the Security Police who guarded their hospital perimeter, recalls how her brave young patients

## 64 VIETNAM GENERATION

gave her and the others strength: "And those boys were some of the best patients in the whole world....thinking about those dear, sweet boys got us through some of the worst."<sup>23</sup> Although Sidisin at 39 may have been old enough to be a mother to her patients, Lily Adams, at the time only 21, was certainly not. Yet Adams relates wanting to protect her patients from the pain of a "Dear John" letter: "Yeah, I was really angry at the women back home that they would destroy the guys like that."<sup>24</sup>

The female nurses also played the role of sweetheart to the injured young men, flirted with them, and were flattered by their attention. In order to please them, they wore pretty hair ribbons and perfumes. "If the guys asked you to stand on your head, you would have stood on your head for them," says Lily Adams. That kind of devotion is also part of nursing: "When you work with badly injured people...you've got to push them on so they don't give up and die. And doing this involves a lot of touch and a lot of energy."<sup>25</sup> But there was little real intimacy between nurse and patient; the "courtship" stayed within the confines of the hospital ward. Adams explains, "They would never even have dreamed of talking about sex or any of that."<sup>26</sup> Nurses saw their role playing as part of their job.

Through it all, the women tried to maintain strict control over their emotions, especially in front of the patients. They insulated themselves from the frustration, the anger, and the grief. McCluskey describes this process: "A total emotional numbing sets in. I did my job well and was able to show compassion, but I worked hard at not feeling compassion."<sup>27</sup> Sidisin claims she hid her emotions for the sake of the patients: "[Y]ou just couldn't have let them see it...you smiled and smiled while you were taking care of them."<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes the role of caregiver proved too difficult to play. Almost every nurse said there were times she would take her negative emotions to her room or to the local club where she would drink or cry or do both at the same time. Most of the women admit to crying at one time or another in Vietnam, occasionally in view of patients; some of them admit to drinking heavily (but never to drinking on duty); one confesses to marijuana use. Sex with other hospital personnel is seldom even hinted at as something the interviewee herself indulged in, and the question of sex with hospital patients is never raised. It seems unlikely that all nine of these nurses went through an entire year of immense stress without any kind of sexual release. What is more probable is that any stories of sexual relationships are conveniently forgotten by the storyteller, or simply self-censored. There is, in general, a downplaying of the less socially acceptable urges one might expect a comparable group of military men to indulge. Ruth Sidisin goes so far as to assure the interviewer that the other nurses were as virtuous as she herself was: "Now, there were, of course, some of the people who drank, but I think most of us just sort of got by by sharing with one another."<sup>29</sup> The interviewees insist that they resisted all (or most) of the temptations of alcohol, marijuana, and sex, in spite of extreme emotional and physical stress.

Women returning to the U.S. after serving a tour of duty in Vietnam reported many of the same symptoms of alienation and disorientation that male combat veterans described. Putting the pieces back in place necessitated finding a framework that would fit the experience. For the nurse, that framework was the wartime nursing tradition. By containing the jumble of perceptions of, emotions about, and experience in Vietnam within a simple cultural construct labelled "nursing," a woman could give her service there some meaning.

The same story may be contained within different frameworks. Van Devanter's personal narrative, co-authored with Christopher Morgan, is written in traditional "female" style, as the following passage amply demonstrates:

What we did need was love, understanding, friendship, and companionship; the things that would keep us human in spite of all the inhumanity being practiced around us. Carl and I filled many of those needs for each other. He was patient and gentle, giving freely of himself and making our limited time together more natural than I would have ever imagined. We talked easily and laughed a lot. When he would hold me and kiss me softly, I felt protected. We spent precious hours together comforting one another and leaving the war outside the hooch.<sup>30</sup>

We could be reading any book of "women's" fiction about two lovers making the best of desperate circumstances. But Van Devanter's style and tone are vastly different in another essay, included in Al Santoli's anthology—a book clearly geared to a more masculine audience:

Vietnam was the first place I delivered a baby by myself. It seemed like a Saturday afternoon. It might have been, I don't know why, but for some reason it seemed like a Saturday afternoon. It was very quiet. There were no other patients around. I was feeling very depressed and this lady came in. I got pissed off at first, because we were supposedly there for taking care of military casualties. We were only supposed to take care of civilian situations if we possibly had the time.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps Van Devanter and Morgan felt that the kind of prose illustrated by the first passage would make a Vietnam nurse's story more interesting and acceptable to the general public. Certainly it would make it more marketable than the plainer, more realistic style of the second passage. Van Devanter's dual presentation of her story can give us a clue about the way that an American woman military nurse in Vietnam perceives herself in the context of cultural expectations.

Van Devanter's narrative, and the oral histories collected in Marshall's anthology reinforce all our stereotypes about war and nurses. They reflect our expectations about the way women feel in wartime, the way women act in trying circumstances, the way that nurses care for

## 66 VIETNAM GENERATION

their patients. There in the narratives are all the brave, broken boys humbly, weakly begging for a sip of water and the cool touch of a gentle nurse's hand. And there, too, are all the beautiful, gentle nurses giving the water, touching the hand, smiling for the brave boys and weeping softly for them under the cover of night.

Timothy Lomperis believes, along with Philip Beidler, that Vietnam writers must ultimately make sense of the Vietnam war. But, he says, "although I admire and commend all those who have written about, reported, recorded, analyzed, and filmed the Vietnam War, I nevertheless think that it is by reading the fiction...that the essential truth of the Vietnam war can be understood."<sup>32</sup> Personal narratives cannot provide all the information we need about American women in Vietnam, and certainly do not represent the complexity of their Vietnam experience.

Kathryn Marshall has helped the women who contributed to her volume tell us a new story about Vietnam. Yet her goal of helping us gain a greater understanding of women's experiences in war has not been reached. Though military nurses are more visible than they once were, they may be almost as poorly represented as Vietnamese women (depicted as beautiful, brave freedom fighters falling in love with doomed warriors, or as dissipated, angry prostitutes who secretly support the National Liberation Front). We saw Hollywood's version of American nurses and Doughnut Dollies reenact the terror and romance of Vietnam on the recent television series *China Beach*. These weekly episodes reflect the trivial plots and stereotypical characters of daytime drama, the mainstream doctor series *St. Elsewhere*, and the conventions of the romance novel. The male experience in the Vietnam war has been strongly portrayed through fiction, but women Vietnam veterans have yet to find their voice.

<sup>1</sup> Keith Walker, *A Piece of My Heart: The Stories of 25 American Women Who Served in Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press) 1985: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston: South End) 1983: 109.

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Van Devanter, with Christopher Morgan, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (New York: Beaufort Books) 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Marshall, *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975* (Boston: Little, Brown) 1987.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

<sup>6</sup> Philip D. Beidler, *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam* (Athens: University of Georgia Press) 1982: 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, second edition (Chicago: Precedent) 1985: 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 8.

- <sup>13</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1988: 140.
- <sup>14</sup> Al Santoli, *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-Three American Soldiers Who Fought It* (New York: Random) 1981; Mark Baker, *Nam* (New York: William Morrow) 1981.
- <sup>15</sup> Baidler: 197.
- <sup>16</sup> Enloe: 109.
- <sup>17</sup> Marshall: 85.
- <sup>18</sup> Enloe: 110.
- <sup>19</sup> Marshall: 55.
- <sup>20</sup> *Reader's Digest 1982 Almanac and Yearbook* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Association) 1982.
- <sup>21</sup> Marshall: 249.
- <sup>22</sup> Enloe: 98.
- <sup>23</sup> Marshall: 31.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 219.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 215.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*: 221.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 56.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 29.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 29.
- <sup>30</sup> Van Devanter: 109.
- <sup>31</sup> Santoli: 162.
- <sup>32</sup> Timothy Lomperis, "*Reading the Wind:*" *The Literature of the Vietnam War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press) 1987: 153.

# THE TELEVISION WAR: TREATMENT OF GENDER AND THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE IN NETWORK TELEVISION DRAMA IN THE 1988-89 SEASON

**M. ELAINE DOLAN BROWN**

The United States is at long last coming to grips with its Vietnam experience. American involvement in Southeast Asia has received renewed scrutiny of late whether in the form of new national war memorials, new course offerings on the subject available on our college campuses, successful box office films, or inclusion in the prime-time schedule on television. As the U.S. slowly integrates the Vietnam experience into its cultural heritage, popular images of the war and its aftermath, and increasingly popular images of the female experience in and after Vietnam have exploded into the American consciousness.

Portrayals of women and the Vietnam experience in television drama generally fall into one of two categories; those plotlines or characters associated with the war itself, and those which focus on the ramifications the war had for its survivors.

This critique will examine the ways in which these images are treated in current network television dramas, both in prime-time programming as well as in daytime drama storylines. In shows that deal with the war itself, the focus will be on patterns in attitudes toward the war, types of characterizations of American men and women in a foreign and hostile environment, portraits of the Vietnamese, male and female, and cultural interaction in general. In those programs with contemporary settings which deal with the war's aftermath, the Vietnam veteran's readjustment to American society, and the different rates of success experienced by men and women in that process, as well as the portrayals of Vietnamese refugees and Amerasian children are the predominant themes.

Vietnam was, and is an increasingly popular topic in network daytime drama. In fact, the dramatization of Vietnam reached a high water mark in the 1989 season when all of the NBC soap operas had a Vietnam-related storyline.

NBC's *Days of our Lives* is the most recent daytime drama to include a Vietnam-related storyline. Diana Colville and Roman Brady (one of the show's popular "super couples") had set their wedding date. But like all of soap opera's super couples, they must overcome a series of obstacles before they can be united. (This is a stock formula of the

genre.) Their latest problem is Diana's ex-lover, Cal Winters, who has just returned to the US after having spent many years as a POW in Southeast Asia. Like many popular culture portrayals, he returns only to find disappointment and a world that has changed, unconcerned with the sacrifices and the hardships this lieutenant may have been forced to endure. Cal requires constant psychiatric treatment, yet this serves only as a vehicle for the audience to learn of his undying devotion to Diana, despite her more recent commitments.

Thus, in *Days of our Lives*, the portrayal of the veteran and his Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) serve only to perpetuate the classical daytime drama device—the love triangle. Cal's psychological problems are minimized, and are acknowledged only to the point that they serve the audience and the love triangle theme; a sympathetic, or even believable treatment of the veteran is totally lacking. The female character, Diana, has little sympathy for the plight of her lost lover. However, despite her indifference, when forced to choose between the two she instigates a shooting, defending the veteran, but ruining her own life in the process. This is a crude portrayal of the woman as the character ultimately unable to cope with the effects of the war. The opportunities to explore the complex interplay between gender and war in the context of Vietnam are foregone in favor of more traditional (and simplistic) plot devices.

Where *Days of our Lives* molds the treatment of gender and the Vietnam War to fit a tried and true soap opera formula, a second NBC daytime drama, *Another World*, has at least partially fleshed out and developed the ramifications of the Vietnam war experience and the cost of the war for two characters. One plotline was resolved in late 1988, and the other is ongoing. Kris, a secondary character in the series in the fall of 1988, lost her child in the war in Vietnam. She was never able to cope with the tragedy, and as a result she progressively became crazed. Her mania culminated in hallucinations which caused her to kidnap the child of a prominent family on the show; because of her delusions, she thought the child was her own. The young child was eventually rescued, and subsequently and surprisingly, the other characters treated Kris with sympathy. She was last seen in a sanatorium undergoing therapy and has since been written out of the series.

The story of Kris is interesting when juxtaposed against that of John Hudson, a major character on the series, a man emotionally scarred by his experiences in Vietnam. John suffers from PTSD, which manifests chiefly in the form of flashbacks. These flashbacks are unpredictable and their recurrent image is a scene of small Vietnamese children in an orphanage screaming while under attack. Although he has this problem, John's work and social life are unaffected and he is able to cope, leading a relatively normal life. Unlike Kris, John's normal routine is unaffected by his experiences in Vietnam, and we have no reason to believe that his veteran status endows him with any special strengths or weaknesses. As characters, both Kris and John reflect a

## 70 VIETNAM GENERATION

broader but still shallow depiction of Vietnam and its impact on society. Nonetheless, the male role is stronger and the character is unencumbered by the past; rather, he is shown as strong *despite* the experience.

Perhaps the most well-developed Vietnam storyline dealing with the gender issue was on the 1988 season of the NBC soap opera *Santa Barbara*. In this daytime drama Cain Garver, a Vietnam veteran, disgusted with the failure of Veterans Administration hospitals to help him, isolated himself in a shack in the Rocky Mountains. His illness made him unable to cope with the world. He, too, suffered from PTSD, but in his case the syndrome was sufficiently serious to prevent him from normal social interaction. His connection to Santa Barbara was his rescue of the series' heroine, Eden Capwell, after her plane had crashed in the mountains.

Cain's personality was complex; he alternately suffered from fits of violence and alcohol abuse because of his Vietnam experience. Like the character John Hudson, Cain suffered from flashbacks, but the depiction of his illness was more three-dimensional. He is unable to communicate his pent-up anguish and frustrations; only the audience is aware of the relationship of his flashbacks to his asocial behavior.

Cain was traumatized by the death of his Vietnamese lover Su Li, blaming himself for the tragedy. His commanding officer, Major Philip Hamilton (another character in the series) also blamed Cain. Both men had been in love with Su Li, and after the war most of the Major's time was spent plotting revenge against Cain in Santa Barbara. In a particularly twisted plot, with incestuous overtones, the Major arranged for a young, destitute Amerasian woman, Ming Li, to come to the US and pose as Cain's daughter. Cain accepted the woman as his child. The Major then threatened Ming Li under pain of deportation to lure Cain to bed. The Major also routinely abused and threatened a young Vietnamese man, Kai, whom he employed as his housekeeper. Unsuccessful in these attempts to destroy Cain, the Major went on to try to frame his enemy as a rapist, and when caught and questioned by the authorities, the Major blamed his wartime experience for his evil actions.

The Major, like Cal in *Days of our Lives*, is not intended to evoke a sympathetic response in the viewer; rather, he is a trendy vehicle used to continue the classic daytime drama plot device—jealous plotting for revenge. Unlike the Major, Cain emerged as a heroic figure and was ultimately rehabilitated through his own efforts, with no help from the mental health establishment. His story represents a more modern, generous view of the Vietnam veteran, recognizing the Vietnam veteran as a unique type, with weaknesses and strengths which are the product of a unique and unpleasant experience. Thus, the trend continues: the male is presented in the context of the Vietnam war only to highlight his inner strength, and the woman (here Ming Li) is a weak, two-dimensional representation exploited for the purposes of the plot.

Fascinating patterns emerge from the examination of these daytime dramas. First, it is now generally acknowledged, albeit only



superficially, that there were women in Vietnam who did suffer. Portraying the Vietnam war and the ramifications of that experience for its survivors is a relatively new phenomenon on television; portraying women who were involved in the war is even newer. Second, it is important to note that the most common legacy of the Vietnam war as depicted in daytime drama is its manifestation in mental—not physical—illness. Furthermore, mental illness is almost exclusively portrayed as a conquerable illness for men, and an insurmountable obstacle for women. Physical war wounds are seldom, if ever, mentioned; people regularly return whole. We see no wheelchairs, no amputees. No one suffers from exposure to Agent Orange. Remarkably, especially in comparison with the prime-time treatment, few references to drug abuse associated with the Vietnam war are made on daytime television. Instead, the war's overwhelming effect is almost always seen as psychological—a mental struggle in which men triumph and women are defeated.

The emphasis in prime-time television initially appears to be quite different. Daytime dramas deal with how characters cope in the present; prime-time shows are set during the war. Close examination, however, reveals that the strength and weakness of characters are still based in gender.

Two major prime-time series set in Vietnam are CBS's *Tour of Duty* and ABC's *China Beach*. The 1988-89 season was the second for *Tour of Duty*, which returned to the prime-time schedule after a warmly received first season. *Tour of Duty* is built around the experiences of one platoon; perhaps in an effort to boost its sagging ratings (and following the lead of *China Beach*) the most obvious change in its second season is the inclusion of female characters on a regular basis, most notably the character of reporter Alex Devlin. Indeed, all of the ads promoting the show last fall urged viewers to tune into the series because now "It's Hot!" In its opening credits this season, not only do we see the customary scenes of war, but also we briefly pan to a partially clad woman's body.

Yet for all its new emphasis on sex and rock'n roll, *Tour of Duty* makes an earnest attempt at both realism and depth in its characterizations. In most episodes opposing attitudes toward the war are brought out, and American policy is often examined critically. Gender is often given a complex treatment. For example, one storyline featured Quakers who were aiding all civilians regardless of their allegiance. The focus of this episode was on a Quaker woman. Although the woman-as-pacifist is consistent with the general portrayal of women as the weaker sex, this character lent strength to the pacifist position, and to the debate. She stood up to soldiers, fortified only by her beliefs. In another episode, a commanding officer, after being doggedly pursued by a female American journalist, acknowledged that the press was often deceived about body counts and American losses. In yet another story, a platoon member who inadvertently killed a Vietnamese child wondered whether he would bring the same disregard for human life back to the U.S. with him when he returned.

## 72 VIETNAM GENERATION

The characters on *Tour of Duty* have a rich and varied background. As mentioned previously, women now have more substantial roles, notably as reporters, medical personnel, or wives and lovers of the members of the platoon. Of particular interest is the inclusion of Vietnamese women, usually as GIs' wives or lovers, and more commonly (and stereotypically) as prostitutes. However, some Vietnamese women are also portrayed sympathetically as caring mothers, fighting against the odds against disease for their children's survival. The platoon itself is ethnically diverse, with black, white, and Latino men all represented. The particular cultural baggage associated with traditional male roles is often explored.

*China Beach*, the other major prime-time series set in Vietnam, is flashier and more controversial than *Tour of Duty*. Indeed, it was one of the most talked about programs when it made its debut in the spring of 1988. Like *Tour of Duty*, it takes as its theme a sixties hit record, in this case the Supremes' "Reflections of the Way Life Used to Be." Unlike *Tour of Duty*, the focus is primarily on the women who serve at the R&R facility on the ocean—a sort of Club Cam Ranh Bay. The regular female characters are a group of Red Cross workers, army nurses, an aspiring reporter, a disc jockey, and an American prostitute. (A Vietnamese woman plays a secondary role as the lover of a black soldier named Sam Beckett.)

Unfortunately, the writers of *China Beach* have routinely exploited the tried and true television formula of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The love lives, or more particularly the sex lives, of the major characters are of paramount importance in the storylines. For example, a recent episode was devoted to the efforts of the local American prostitute, KC, to keep her home and "business" right on the base. Another episode highlighted her heroin addiction and withdrawal. And in every episode the viewers can rock and roll themselves through Vietnam by listening to the 1960s tunes the disc jockey spins, or the songs belted out by the Red Cross entertainers. This tendency reached its most ludicrous crescendo when in one episode the residents of China Beach held their own high school style prom. Such misplaced emphases trivialize the Vietnam war, and perpetuate hollow 1950s stereotypes into the 1980s.

Many of the serious themes which the show attempts to deal with are degraded by comic treatment, perhaps because the writers feel that a depressed audience equals bad ratings. For instance, McMurphy, main character and army nurse, in an episode entitled "Psywars," tries to come to grips with her lover's having been shot down by the enemy. She suffers from flashbacks of their last days together as well as hallucinations that he is with her. Her turmoil is interspersed with Warner Brothers cartoons featuring Coyote chasing Road Runner (which she had earlier watched on the base) and are presumably to serve as some sort of metaphor for her mental state. Although the writers perhaps intended the cartoons to be interpreted as McMurphy's coping mechanism, one unintentional result is the reinforced notion that women are childish.

The writers of *China Beach*, sensitive to the charges of triviality levelled against the show, have made an effort to mitigate such criticism. In a particularly serious episode, one of the primary characters—a Red Cross worker—was killed in the Tet Offensive, and at the end of the show the audience was told of the women who really lost their lives in the war. In an even greater departure from the series' established format, one segment presented real military nurses recounting their wartime experiences followed by clips from previous episodes of the program in an effort to demonstrate that the themes dealt with on *China Beach* are genuine and that suffering was not bound by gender. While such efforts are to be applauded, until the writers abandon the predictable (and saleable) format, the show is doomed to be dismissed as a typical exploitation series.

Although the Vietnam war and all of its attendant imagery has splashed onto both the daytime and prime-time schedules, it is predictably not immune to the molding and shaping forces of Hollywood. The plight of the Vietnam veteran is routinely subsumed by the conventions of soap opera. The war appears in daytime drama in the form of flashbacks, and the use of PTSD as a device has been embraced wholeheartedly, although the television version of the disease is neither as terrible nor as common as the real thing. PTSD is a convenient vehicle for the circumstance of melodrama, and it is now both a popular and recurrent theme, illustrating its centrality to the media portrait of Vietnam's legacy. And, perhaps most important, the close observer cannot help but conclude that the television version of the psychological scars of war seem to heal leaving men whole and women crippled.

Other issues also suffer distortion: prostitution is not portrayed as a degrading condition suffered by Vietnamese women seeking to survive, but as a high fashion occupation on *China Beach*; drugs are not shown as a costly outlet for troubled GIs, but as a recreational aid and an alternative source of income for entrepreneurs; and, on the prime-time portraits, the war is too often made to appear a stage for youth at play, rather than a nightmare setting for youth in terror.

The current presentation of Vietnam in television drama is a mixed bag of morals and messages. Daytime drama is increasingly recognizing the effect of the war on the fabric of everyday American life—perhaps the soap opera distortions of the Vietnam war are in keeping with their distortions of American society in general. However, despite increasingly responsible storylines, traditional gender roles too often confine the characters and the scripts. The trend in prime-time drama is even more disturbing. Although *Tour of Duty* showed great initial promise, since the arrival of *China Beach*, both series have trivialized the Vietnam experience and its resulting cost to American society with the introduction of seemingly inescapable prime-time ingredients—strong men and simple women, popular music, sexual suggestion, and homage to a society of self gratification.

# VISIONS OF VIETNAM IN WOMEN'S SHORT FICTION

## SUSANNE CARTER

During World War II, British Writer Elizabeth Bowen recognized the short story as the "ideal prose medium for war-time creative writing." To her it seemed the only genre "capable of conveying the immediacy of her experiences." Both a novelist and a short story writer, Bowen discovered the "disjointed nature of wartime experience was exhilarating for the short story writer" while it "created serious impediments for the novelist who wished to portray these years in fiction." The short story seemed better suited than the novel to capture the "fragmentary and abrupt quality of life" characteristic of wartime.<sup>1</sup>

The Vietnam war fictional writings of contemporary women authors would seem to corroborate Bowen's assertions, for the majority of these women have elected the short story genre to express their individual interpretations of the Vietnam experience rather than the novel form, although there are noteworthy exceptions in Jayne Anne Phillips' *Machine Dreams*, Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's *The Healer's War*, Patricia Walsh's *Forever Sad the Hearts*, and Susan Schaeffer's *Buffalo Aftersnoon*. Bobbie Ann Mason has bridged both genres with her novel *In Country* and short story "Big Bertha Stories."<sup>2</sup>

During the 1970s, following the American defeat in Vietnam, "the war seemed to disappear below the surface of a country that wanted only to forget it."<sup>3</sup> Veterans returning to "the World" from the unreal, almost surrealistic nightmare that was the war in Vietnam were sentenced to silence by an American public largely unsympathetic with their losers' plight. During the 1980s, however, the Vietnam war resurfaced, this time gaining recognition as an "experience, one unique in the annals of American war narratives."<sup>4</sup> Many members of the Vietnam generation, separated by class distinctions, differing self-definitions, and conflicting ideologies during the 1960s, have united in a common search for comprehension.<sup>5</sup> As novelist Robert Stone explains, the pain of the Vietnam war may be arrested, but it will never be fully erased:

It's like a wound covered with scar tissue or like a foreign body, a piece of shrapnel, that the organism has built up a protective wall around, but it is embedded in our history; it is embedded in our definition of who we are. We will never get it out of there. I don't think it is a mortal wound for this society, but I think it is a very, very painful one.<sup>6</sup>

A "cathartic flood" of literature aimed at some kind of understanding and resolution of our longest war and a definition of who

we are in relation to that war experience saturated a receptive public during the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Especially responsive was the Vietnam generation of Americans, now in their 30s and 40s, still trying to place Vietnam in some meaningful context in their lives, still mourning the 58,132 names etched in black granite on the Vietnam memorial wall in Washington, DC, still trying to resolve so many lingering uncertainties. The Vietnam war was such an illusive experience writers have found it difficult to translate into literary form. "The place became its own bizarre, hermetic mythology," writes Philip Beidler in *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*, the war a "mixup of American mythic consciousness and realized experiential fact so dense and entangled from the very beginning there would never be any real hope of sorting it out."<sup>8</sup> The most common element of Vietnam fiction, writes Stephen McCabe in his essay "The Literature Born of Vietnam," is the "abundance of senselessness—meaninglessness—that provides a strong unifying theme...."<sup>9</sup> Beidler views the role of the Vietnam writer as a creator of meaning where meaning never previously existed through artistic interpretation:

It would become the task of the Vietnam writer to create a landscape that never was, one might say—a landscape of consciousness where it might be possible to accommodate experience remembered within a new kind of imaginative cartography endowing it with large configurings of value and signification. In this way, what facts that could be found might still be made to mean, as they had never done by themselves, through the shaping and ultimately the transforming power of art.<sup>10</sup>

In the fiction written about the Vietnam war during the past two decades the war has emerged as a "story of universal victimization" affecting both men and women of a variety of ages and cultural backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> This broader scope of the war experience has attracted more contemporary women to enter the traditionally male arena of war writing. By adding their impressions of the Vietnam experience to the rapidly mushrooming new genre—still continuing to grow and mature—these women have expanded the scope of the traditionally romanticized, and often didactic war story of the past in favor of short fiction that depicts war's special brand of horror and shows how it affects both veterans and civilians, often the overlooked indirect victims of war.

Most women writers who have contributed short stories to the new canon of Vietnam war literature have used the techniques of realism, viewing the war as outsiders from a female perspective, in contrast to male writers (many of them combat veterans) who tend to relate their war experiences from an internal viewpoint. Perhaps because most American women's experience with war has been largely external, and only partial, the short story seems a more logical representation for expression than the longer novel form. Women's fiction emphasizes the war's sociological effect on male-female

## 76 VIETNAM GENERATION

relationships and family unity. Some women have deviated from this pattern, however, experimenting with form and perspective, to add to the diversity of short stories about the Vietnam experience, both realistic and innovative, offered by women writers. Kate Wilhelm reenacts the My Lai massacre in "The Village," but this time the tragedy takes place on Florida soil. A woman discovers an inner strength never before realized when both her husband and son are believed to be MIA in Maxine Kumin's "The Missing Person." The war becomes a disturbing interference in the lives of a new generation of children oblivious to the Vietnam war except through their veteran fathers in Bobbie Ann Mason's "Big Bertha Stories" and Linsey Abrams' "Secrets Men Keep." Joyce Carol Oates enters the confused mind of a paralyzed veteran, mentally aware enough to realize how thoroughly he has become "out of place" in American society. And, in Emily Prager's bizarre satire, "The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device," the Vietnam war is fought once again, this time with female prostitutes in combat, armed with most unusual feminist weaponry.

In this study of Vietnam war short fiction written by contemporary American women, the stories are classified and analyzed according to theme and mode. In the traditional mode of realism—by far the most prevalent vision of the Vietnam war writers—are short stories with these recurring themes: the American experience in Vietnam and male-female relationships; the American experience in Vietnam and the family; and, the American experience in Vietnam and the veteran. Naturally, some of these short stories overlap in categorization and thus, have been included in more than one thematic section. "Big Bertha Stories" belongs in all three, for it is equally a story of a disintegrating marital relationship, a story of the stress placed on a family by the problems of a troubled veteran, and the story of a veteran haunted by guilt and regret, struggling to readjust to civilian life. Favoring a more innovative mode, other women writers look either into the future or the past, and reconsider the significance of the Vietnam war and the consequences of the repetition of that tragic event with a different sort of vision.

### IN THE TRADITION OF REALISM

#### **"Walking Time Bombs:" THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN VIETNAM AND MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS.**

The stress the American experience in Vietnam has placed on male-female relationships is the central focus of several short stories by American women. During the early 1970s, many American women unsuspectingly "snuggled next to walking time bombs" when their lovers returned as strangers from Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> One wife of a Vietnam veteran reflected: "We knew the veterans were not heroes even before they did, but we were not sure just what they were....We refused to allow them to defuse. We didn't know how to hear men cry...."<sup>13</sup> Many women, like the character of Jeannette in "Big Bertha Stories," were dismayed to find their lovers obsessed by "another woman" they could scarcely comprehend

much less hope to compete with: "Her name is Vietnam. She is ugly and battle scarred, but her power is great. Somehow this 'other woman'—Vietnam—still controls the men who knew her."<sup>14</sup>

In Susan Lowell's short story, "David," the male-female relationship never develops because the female narrator senses her potential lover is destined never to return from his assignment in Vietnam. A series of letters from Vietnam to Canada and back chronicle the relationship of a veteran and his lover in Margaret Gibson's "All Over Now," their last remaining tie severed when Calvin's letters continue to arrive, but his body does not. Relationships are strained, some to the breaking point, when veterans return as strangers to their wives and lovers and cannot readjust to civilian life, vividly represented in Maxine Kumin's "These Gifts," Bobbie Ann Mason's "Big Bertha Stories," and Julia Thacker's "A Civil Campaign."

Laurie Albert, "Veterans," in Joe Bellamy and Roger Weingarten, eds., *Love Stories/Love Poems* (San Diego: Fiction International) 1982: 56-64. The unnamed narrator of "Veterans" feels intensely jealous of the "other woman" who lingers in her lover's mind, representing a history he has experienced but she, as a woman, has been denied. She and Stefan are hopelessly out of accord, she overzealously trying to penetrate his barrier of silence in a futile attempt to vicariously experience the war, while Stefan internalizes his war wounds and refuses to express whatever anger or guilt or sense of loss he feels. "I don't have answers for you," he says, continually refusing her questions in an effort to protect his past.<sup>15</sup> The attraction between the two eventually dissolves, the narrator admitting to herself, "I have no time for Stefan. For him there is no time."<sup>16</sup> The story offers perceptive insight into the frustration of a woman, longing to penetrate the forbidden territory of the male domain of war and touch the most enigmatic and well-guarded part of her lover's psyche, and a veteran who needs the intimacy of a relationship but refuses to let anyone break down the wall he has carefully erected around his Vietnam experience.

Margaret Gibson, "All Over Now," *Considering Her Condition* (New York: Vanguard) 1978: 53-67. This epistolary story is composed of letters to and from a soldier in Vietnam and his civilian lover in Canada. The story is written from the vantage points of both a male insider, who wages war with his own identity and values (as well as with an elusive enemy), and a female outsider, who longs to join him, "trudging, wading through the muck, a gun slung over my shoulder, wondering like you if the thunder, the bomb thunder would ever stop."<sup>17</sup> The two attempt to maintain their intimacy through shared confidences and a strong bond of memories, but Clare comes to accept that her relationship with Calvin is "all over now" when his letters keep arriving but his body lies missing somewhere in Vietnam.

Shirley Ann Grau, "Homecoming," *The Wind Shifting West* (New York: Alfred Knopf) 1973: 41-54. In this piece of short fiction a mother attempts to fabricate a relationship that never existed between a daughter and a

## 78 VIETNAM GENERATION

Vietnam casualty so that she can relive her own tragic, historical drama when her own husband was killed in the Korean War. The story examines the conflict between the daughter's honest feelings—that Harold was only a casual date, a “poor bastard” whom she pitied more than admired, not worth the effort of mourning—and the hypocritical displays of emotion expected of her by her mother and neighbors who expect her to play the role of the bereaved widow. The telegram announcing Harold's death becomes an excuse for a social gathering during which the attending members of the World War II generation relive their individual moments of glory during a war remembered as far more honorable than Vietnam. The story illustrates how attitudes toward war can dramatically change during the span of one generation, and how war can create familial conflicts even among non-participants.

Maxine Kumin, “These Gifts,” *Why Can't We Live Together Like Civilized Human Beings?* (New York: Viking) 1975: 75-84. The youthful marriage of high school lovers does not survive the changes rendered by Neddy's Vietnam experience. While he is fighting half a world away, Sheila is formulating her identity as an adult individual. Neddy returns, “a daring boy the war reduced to a dreamlike state,” so passive at times he reminds his wife of a turtle in winter hibernation.<sup>18</sup> Sheila emerges as the stronger of the two, a woman who would rather face life alone than cope with her husband's post-Vietnam war estrangement and withdrawal. This story depicts the consequences of a relationship severed by the experience of war, one partner continuing to grow and self-actualize, the other frozen in time.

Susan Lowell, “David,” *Southern Review* 7 (1971): 254-264. “David” is the story of a wistful relationship that never has the chance to develop because the narrator convinces herself that David, a drifter who enlists in the Marines, will never return from his tour in Vietnam. “He is Hamlet and Huckleberry Finn and Lucifer flaming on his way to hell,” concludes the narrator, as she envisions him on a self-created, tragic mission of demonic futility.<sup>19</sup> “I am in love with David in a temporal way, and he is going to die. The end is inescapable.”<sup>20</sup> Lowell constructs the emotional defense of a woman who finds it safer to resist the start of a relationship than to allow herself to become involved and live with the uncertainty of the return of the naive young David. Lowell's characterization of the narrator, Susan, is an effective contrast to many of the youths of Kennedy's Camelot years who were reared on romanticized images of warfare, who envisioned their country (and themselves) as invincible, only to become severely disillusioned at the lack of romantic adventure and proliferation of death and defeat awaiting them in Vietnam. Susan portrays the opposite end of that idealistic spectrum in her cynical view of the Vietnam war.

Bobbie Ann Mason, “Big Bertha Stories,” in Reese William, ed., *Unwinding the Vietnam War* (Seattle: Real Comet Press) 1987: 121-134. Donald is so obsessed with reliving his Vietnam experience, his vision narrowed by a combination of regretful hindsight and overbearing guilt, that his wife is convinced “there must be another woman, someone that large in his



mind.”<sup>21</sup> Despite her attempts to understand the complexity of Donald's psychological dilemma, hampered by her impatience and frequent indifference (“Wasn't Vietnam a long time ago?” she continually asks), Jeannette slips comfortably into the single parent role when Donald admits himself to a Veterans Administration Hospital for an undetermined length of stay. Her epiphany—the realization that she has thought of Donald as husband, father, and provider (and found him equally deficient in all three roles), but never really thought of him as an individual, never attempted to look deep inside of him—comes too late, for not only has her marriage disintegrated, her dreams have become disquieting nightmares of the same haunting variety that disturbed Donald's sleep. Involuntarily, Jeannette has become another noncombatant victim of the Vietnam experience, and her marriage a casualty.

Judith Rascoe, “Soldier, Soldier,” *Yours, and Mine* (Boston: Little, Brown) 1969: 164-179. Contrary to the theme of many short stories which point to the Vietnam experience as the cause of the breakdown of a relationship, in this story Nicholas' experience in Vietnam is what attracts war-resister Nola to him. One of the few young men in their community who returns from Vietnam, Nicholas becomes an object of curiosity. Has he changed? Is he corrupted? Is he homosexual? Nola finds his mysterious mannerisms and unpredictable intentions intriguing. Like Clair in “All Over Now,” and the narrator of “Veterans,” she is eager to vicariously experience the realities of war denied to most women because of their gender. “What's it like to hold a rifle?” she wonders. Nicholas' undisclosed experiences in Vietnam form the basis of Nola's attraction to him and her willingness to begin a relationship with uncertain direction.

Julia Thacker, “A Civil Campaign,” in J. Laughlin, ed., *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* 44 (New York: New Directions) 1982: 83-88. Leah must cope with one of the most difficult psychological problems faced by the female protagonists in these stories—the potential impotence of her veteran partner—yet she emerges as one of the strongest female characters with the most realistic possibility of an enduring relationship, despite the stress caused by wheelchair-bound Gus' handicaps. As Gus becomes more withdrawn and reclusive with his war wounds, Leah becomes more disgruntled and impatient with his “hollow” existence. Their relationship assumes an awkward, polite distance, bland and stagnant. In a passionate confrontation that shatters the distance separating them and nearly climaxes in violence, Gus takes his first decisive action since his homecoming. Leah humbles herself in deference to his unexpected assertiveness, and their relationship begins to assume balance and vitality once more. This story depicts in detail the veteran who returns from Vietnam but withdraws from society where he can hide his incontinence and accept his impotence in solitary security. It is also a character study of a woman assertive enough to risk challenging her lover's dormancy rather than allow him to vegetate in self pity or abandon him to confront his condition alone. “A Civil Campaign” is also a study of the delicate equilibrium of the sexual battlefield, upset by the experiences of one partner on a strange and distant military battlefield.

# 80 VIETNAM GENERATION

## WAR'S OTHER VICTIMS: THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE AND THE FAMILY

The repercussions of the Vietnam experience for the veteran's family are explored in several short fictions written by women. It is not only the veteran who has suffered from his service "in-country," but the significant others in his life as well—"an army of millions" who have involuntarily become direct victims of war although they have never experienced combat.<sup>22</sup> Two stories, Maxine Kumin's "The Missing Person" and Leslie Silko's "Lullaby," contrast different mothers' acceptance of the reality that their sons will not return from Vietnam. Three other stories—Stephanie Vaughn's "Kid MacArthur," Laura Kalpakian's "Veteran's Day," and Maura Staunton's "Oz"—focus on brother-sister relationships altered by the war. The psychological problems of the Vietnam veteran are sometimes internalized by his children, who become unwilling, innocent victims of war by virtue of association. These children often show signs of low self-esteem, aggressiveness, developmental delays, and difficulties with social interaction.<sup>23</sup> Some children, similar to Rodney in "Big Bertha Stories," even exhibit behavior aberrations (such as recurring nightmares) quite like those of their veteran fathers. Many report feeling responsible for their fathers' emotional well-being.<sup>24</sup> The short fiction pieces "Big Bertha Stories" and "Secrets Men Keep" show how the readjustment difficulties of veterans can adversely affect their children's lives. In all of these stories it is clearly apparent that the Vietnam experience make unalterable changes in the family that often necessitate rebuilding and restructuring, or the unity of the family is placed at risk.

Linsey Abrams, "Secrets Men Keep," *Mademoiselle*, August 1985: 144-146+. At six years old, Jeffrey has undergone counselling for two years in an attempt to cope with his father's Vietnam war injury. Jeffrey has built an irrational fear of all men who can walk, originating from his father's paralysis, and tries to counteract his own fear that he will "get caught like Daddy was" by creating his own introverted fantasy world where he has convinced himself if he remains as "silent as an Indian" and avoids contact with adult males, no one will ever be able to "deadend his legs."<sup>25</sup> This story illustrates how fears related to war can become disproportionate and very inhibiting in the mind of a sensitive child.

Laura Kalpakian, "Veteran's Day," in Michael Blackburn, Jon Silkin & Lorna Tracy, eds., *Stand One* (London: Victor Gollancz) 1984: 9-30. When Walter Sutton returns from Vietnam as the stereotypical "disturbed" veteran—unpredictable and volatile—he begins to distribute long nozzled gas masks to protect innocent citizens against the government's conspiracy to pollute the environment with "killer enzymes and radio carbons" destined to reduce "everyone's brain to tapioca pudding."<sup>26</sup> Although his crusade is interrupted several times with temporary incarcerations in the State Loony Bin, his sister maintains her confidence that he is sane and will "outsmart them all. He's not crazy," she

maintains. "He never was."<sup>27</sup> In her rationalization of her brother's bizarre fantasies and defense of his irrational fears, Walter's sister becomes an indirect victim of the Vietnam war as she develops the same paranoia and post-Vietnam dementia that plague her brother. Although she did not fight in the war, she has allowed herself to become an accomplice in Walter's private war against governmental authority, a war in which both of them will ultimately be losers. Watching the late-night television news, she slips on one of Walter's masks and relishes a moment of calm serenity and temporary relief from her growing paranoia: "It's real quiet inside that gas mask. I can hear myself breathe and I know if I wear it enough they'll never get me."<sup>28</sup>

Maxine Kumin, "The Missing Person," Joyce Carole Oates, ed., *The Best American Short Stories 1979* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1979: 234-242. The disappearance of both her son in Vietnam and her husband on a busy city street one night evokes a surprising source of strength in Ellie, the protagonist of this short story. "The Missing Person," is a story of a woman's moment of crisis when she is presented with the choice of either acting decisively or succumbing to stress, not altogether unlike the psychological demands placed upon a soldier in combat. Although portrayed as dependent and fragile, Ellie discovers an inner fortitude that surfaces spontaneously and allows her to respond rationally when her husband suddenly vanishes. It is as if her son's disappearance in Vietnam subconsciously provides her with a reservoir of emotional strength which can be tapped to endure crucial situations.

Bobbie Ann Mason, "Big Bertha Stories." Donald's young son already shows signs of emotional disturbance in "Big Bertha Stories." When his part-time father unexpectedly appears, Rodney is caught between the urge to run and hug his father's knees or hide in the closet (he does both). He draws disturbingly violent pictures illustrating the "Big Bertha" stories his father tells and experiences nightmares with frightening images similar to those that torment his father. It is only when his father commits himself to a Veterans Administration hospital that Rodney's pictures assume a more peaceful imagery and his nightmares gradually subside. This story illustrates how even the occasional presence of a troubled father can have detrimental effects upon an impressionable young child.

Leslie Silko, "Lullaby," Martha Foley, ed., *The Best American Short Stories 1975* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1975: 254-262. In this story an aging Navajo mother wraps herself in her youngest son's army blanket—all that she has left of him—and huddles against the cold with memories of her three children, all taken by white men in khaki uniforms whose language she could not comprehend. Two of them had infectious diseases during childhood, and Jimmy was taken by the Vietnam draft. This is a tragic example of American Indian stoicism, a defense built gradually in response to learned powerlessness. The Vietnam war claims yet another son of a mother who has sacrificed her third and last child to an unknown cause.

## 82 VIETNAM GENERATION

Maura Stanton, "Oz." *The Country I Come From* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions) 1988: 25-35. This story, set in the Midwest, draws a symbolic comparison between a family seeking safety against the imminent danger of an approaching tornado, and the inevitable departure of one of their sons for the equally turbulent war in Vietnam. The physical and emotional closeness of the family members huddled together in their basement shelter (not unlike the World War II bomb shelters remembered by the mother) makes the unspoken absence of the recently drafted son awkwardly conspicuous. The recorded sensations of the sister-narrator, who leaves the safety of the basement to hunt for the family's missing cat and witnesses the full fury of the storm, resemble the impressions that might be expected of a sensitive soldier experiencing his first vivid and terrifying impressions of war: "I felt dizzy, as if I had been spinning and spinning. This must be like the future, I thought. Your past did not blow away. It was you who blew away. You looked out the window and everything was different."<sup>29</sup>

Stephanie Vaughn, "Kid MacArthur," in William Abrahams, ed., *Prize Stories 1986: The O'Henry Awards* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) 1986: 226-244. The brother-sister relationship in this award winning story is strengthened by the Vietnam war which he fights and she protests. Once the war ends, MacArthur's sister becomes the only family member who can relate with her brother's isolationism, vegetarianism, and *laissez faire* attitude toward the future. She becomes the sole intermediary between her brother, who has chosen to live a solitary existence in a rural farmhouse, and his estranged parents, bitterly disappointed that MacArthur has rejected the military career they always envisioned for him, even as he was named at birth. Although MacArthur's life seems defined by negatives—"no job, no college, no telephone, no meat"—his sister accepts his solitary lifestyle and peculiarities without judgment, continuing to remain his one assured link with the outside world. Although their methods of expression may differ, this brother and sister both rebel against their representative military upbringing and its corresponding set of rigid values. The Vietnam experience draws them closer as siblings who share a common rejection of their family's regimented, hawkish traditions.

### "OUT OF PLACE": THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE AND THE VETERAN

Although the stories written by women about the Vietnam experience usually emphasize a female perspective, many of these stories also address the unique psychological difficulties experienced by veterans who went to Vietnam so young, and returned old before their time—many of them victims of post traumatic stress disorder. In *Vietnam Wives*, Aphrodite Matsakis characterizes the Vietnam veteran with PTSD as a "case of unwept tears, unsuffered suffering, a numb heart full of pain, subject to unwanted rage reactions which express not only a deep sense of betrayal and alienation, but a profound sense of grief, hopelessness, self-pity and self-hate as well."<sup>30</sup> The description seems

appropriate for a number of Vietnam veteran characters in women's short fiction: Neddy ("These Gifts"), Walter ("Veteran's Day"), Donald ("Big Bertha Stories"), Gus ("A Civil Campaign"), Stefan ("Veterans"), and MacArthur ("Kid MacArthur"). Still other veteran characters suffer related maladies. In "All Over Now" Calvin doubts both his masculinity and his sanity while serving in Vietnam. The protagonist of Joyce Carol Oates' "Out of Place" returns from Vietnam horribly disfigured, haunted by frequent flashbacks, and unsure of his identity. In Ethel Yates' "Seeds of Time" Harry attains the "height of manhood" at 17 when he joins the male ritual of battle, but returns from Vietnam less than the intact hero he envisioned himself to be.

Laurie Alberts, "Veterans," in Joe Bellamy and Robert Weingarten, eds., *Love Stories/Love Poems* (San Diego: Fiction International) 1982: 56-64. Stefan represents the veteran who is protective of his Vietnam experience, unwilling to share his memories of war or his accompanying feelings about war with anyone, not even those with whom he is most intimate. Clues in the story, such as his violent/pacifist tendencies (he cries at the thousands of toads squashed by cars each spring, but hurls dishes across the kitchen in an angry rage), his inability to express his feelings, his abrupt emotional swings, and his preparation for the inevitable nuclear war (a sailboat and a rifle), suggest that Vietnam is still an existing, if not an interfering wedge of influence in his life. Yet his Vietnam experience remains a mystery he will reveal to no one, even if the price of secrecy is the loss of intimacy. Stefan lacks structure, direction, and, often, a reality base in his life. For Stefan, as for so many Vietnam veterans, "there is no time," so out of place is he.

Margaret Gibson, "All Over Now." A former mental patient, Calvin volunteers for service in Vietnam to prove to himself he is capable of "pulling the trigger." Once engulfed in the miasma of death and destruction, Calvin not only doubts his masculinity but his sanity as well. He helps a Vietnamese woman sort through a heap of bodies in search of her lost children. He witnesses soldiers "drawn to death" who throw down their guns and run, screaming into enemy fire, "their screams almost a shout of joy."<sup>32</sup> "I'm afraid and I'm afraid to be afraid," he confesses in a letter to his lover, Clare. "I am a Columbus who has rediscovered madness."<sup>32</sup> Calvin's life is cut short before it is apparent how his tour in Vietnam might have changed his character, but the contents of the letters indicate his mental stability was already growing more uncertain as the war progressed, and with it, the outcome of his own private battle with his insecurities and fear of death.

Laura Kalpakian, "Veteran's Day." Walter Sutton stands as the most disturbed and violent veteran characterized in these short stories written by women. A juvenile delinquent, he is "sentenced" to Vietnam by a judge who is hopeful military training "would still make a man of him," but "the Army spits him back like he was a slug we'd tried to slip in the juke box," his sister recalls.<sup>33</sup> Walter suffers from paranoid delusions that the government is "putting chemicals everywhere so they can putrefy our

## 84 VIETNAM GENERATION

brains and we'll obey them and not have a single thought of our own. They're controlling us just like they controlled all those boys who went to Vietnam."<sup>34</sup> He wages his own war against the government (wearing a gas mask for protection) when he is not serving time for terrorism or theft in the State Loony Bin. This story points to the fallacy of using the military for rehabilitation, for in Walter's case, his military experience in Vietnam only exacerbates his psychological problems.

Maxine Kumin, "These Gifts." Neddy is the numbed victim of Vietnam warfare who remains in an almost catatonic state (even after electroshock therapy), so passive he reminds his wife of a turtle whose heartbeat has slowed, decelerating for winter hibernation. He would rather hide from the world around him than attempt to interact with it. Only when Sheila's life is suddenly placed in danger is Neddy "roused from his torpor." But it is too late. Sheila has realized she can actualize her life without Neddy, who is more of a parasite than a companion. Like many estranged veteran husbands, Neddy is left alone to confront his inability to adjust to life after Vietnam.

Bobbie Ann Mason, "Big Bertha Stories." Donald's stress disorder derives from his combined infatuation with the gentle Vietnamese people and their country's awesome beauty, his guilt over the role he played as an accomplice ruining the Vietnamese landscape, and his obsessed conviction that the war in Vietnam could have been won if only the Americans had employed the power of more "Big Bertha" machines. He fails as husband, father, and financial provider for his family. He finds he can only play the cultural roles expected of him part of the time, retreating into seclusion periodically. This story presents the dilemma of the veteran who attempts to readjust to civilian life but discovers too many insurmountable hurdles blocking his way.

Joyce Carol Oates, "Out of Place," *The Seduction and Other Stories* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow) 1975: 154-164. Narrated from the viewpoint of a veteran paralyzed and grossly disfigured by the Vietnam war, so tormented by flashbacks he is unsure of his own name (although he is certain he is *not* the same individual who served in Vietnam), this story portrays the pathos of a veteran who realizes his painful appearance and vacillating mental clarity render him "out of place." He accepts without protest his ostracism from a family that appears too superficially positive in his presence and a society that is so blatantly obvious in its rejection of the Vietnam war veteran.

Julia Thacker, "A Civil Campaign." This story examines a veteran's emotional response to the reality that his sexual life is permanently altered by a wound acquired in Vietnam. Gus copes with his wheelchair-bound, incontinent, possibly impotent post-Vietnam condition, like many veterans, by withdrawing from the world, hibernating in his apartment refuge. He and his partner's lives have become a "set score, a familiar record one puts on because he knows the lilt and crescendos and can listen without particularly hearing anything."<sup>35</sup> It is only when Leah confronts him with the challenge to face the world, to "do anything to show you're still a man," that Gus' lethargic trance is broken with an

outburst of passionate rage at her that can be interpreted as a positive sign that the withdrawal phase of Gus' post-Vietnam recuperation may be coming to an end, and his relationship sustained.

Stephanie Vaughn, "Kid MacArthur." MacArthur represents the Vietnam veteran who withdraws into a self-imposed solitary confinement in his search for a meaning to his life after Vietnam. To his military family, MacArthur's life as a vegetarian pacifist is a disappointing enigma "defined by negatives." MacArthur is one of the rare Vietnam veterans characterized in these stories who seems content in his role as exile, fulfilled in his chosen lifestyle of organic simplicity with minimal contact with the outside world. His family members who anticipated a military hero, cannot adjust to the reticent antihero who returned from Vietnam instead.

## INNOVATIVE VISIONS

Innovative writers search beyond the limitations of traditional fiction for a more expansive mode of representation (although some admittedly abandon representation altogether) to reflect their impressions of the Vietnam experience. For innovative writers, non-traditional literary forms may offer the closest interpretation of a war that continues to remain as elusive and ambiguous as the American war in Vietnam. Jerome Klinkowitz discusses the effect of the Vietnam war on contemporary fiction in his essay "Writing Under Fire: Postmodern Fiction and the Vietnam War": "Vietnam affected our literary imagination in ways that no other war has, and the result has been a body of fiction that relies on various innovative formal devices, similar to the experimental features that characterize other postmodern fiction, to capture a sense of that war's assault on language and our sense of reality."<sup>36</sup>

From the content of the innovative short stories discussed here, it is obvious these authors have broken with the tradition of realism in content as well as form. These writers often abandon the woman's traditional external vision of war in favor of an internal perspective usually associated with male writers.

Margaret Gibson, "All Over Now." The letters which comprise this story follow an emotional chronology that is cyclical rather than the traditional linear progression usually associated with the epistolary form, an innovation which shows the influence of contemporary psychology in the short story form. Readers follow the psychological changes Clare undergoes as her lover departs for Vietnam, experiences the atrocities of war, begins to doubt his own sanity, and then becomes one of the war's casualties himself. The story begins—and ends—at the same point (Clare standing on a subway platform screaming at her dead lover, at last able to release her repressed emotions) with flashbacks in letter form providing the narrative structure of the story.

## 86 VIETNAM GENERATION

Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Word for World is Forest," in Harlan Ellison, ed., *Again, Dangerous Visions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) 1972: 28-118. This novella is set in a future century and depicts the destruction of another planet very similar to Vietnam, and the disruption of its peaceful inhabitants by invading American troops. Although Vietnam is never mentioned specifically, the parallels between planet Atshe and Vietnam are obvious. The invading Americans are led by a captain who regards the Atsheans as subhuman and believes "the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man."<sup>37</sup> American soldiers are supplied with drugs and prostitutes. Numerous land mines and underground tunnels mar the landscape, helicopters continuously comb the sky, and monstrous, oversized weaponry shipped to the planet from Earth prove as worthless for fighting on the Atshe terrain as they were a century before in the jungles of Vietnam. Writing in the science fiction genre, Le Guin launches a fictional protest against the war that serves as an ecological and humanistic admonition to Americans.

Emily Prager, "The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device," *A Visit from the Footbinder* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 1982: 130-180. This macabre postmodern feminist satire proposes an alternate history. As the failure of American troops in Vietnam is acknowledged, female troops (former prostitutes programmed into a troop of emasculators eager to wield their vaginal wrenches with a degree of viciousness no male ever imagined) are dispatched to Vietnam to test their experimental weaponry against the Vietcong. These women go armed with ingenious, sadistic vaginal inserts guaranteed to inflict instant death on penetrators. This story is a sustained lampoon, countering the absurdity of war with an equally absurd solution. Writing from a radical feminist point of view, Prager employs both the comic and ironic modes of fiction in a combination that examines war in a cerebral and humorous light. Her story has a lingering, satirical bite.

Kate Wilhelm, "The Village," *The Infinity Box* (New York: Harper & Row) 1975: 277-287. This short piece of speculative fiction simulates a reenactment of the 1969 My Lai massacre, which killed 347 Vietnamese civilians, most of them women and children. This time American troops are ordered to murder *en masse* unsuspecting small-town Southerners trapped "when the wrong village and the wrong war meet."<sup>38</sup> The speculative mode allows Wilhelm to juxtapose the casual routines of the townspeople with the aggressive march of the infantrymen, callously programmed only to carry out orders as served. While Mildred Carey argues with the local grocer over the price of tomatoes, one of the soldiers *en route* to the village expresses his indifference to the task ahead: "One fucken village is just like the others."<sup>39</sup> Fantasy distorts the situation just enough that the imagined atrocity becomes more shocking than a graphic narration of the gruesome event might have been, similar to the technique used by Shirley Jackson two decades earlier in her short story "The Lottery." Like "The Word for World is Forest," this story stands as a potent reminder of the tragic consequences of unchecked aggression and the dehumanization of the military system.



## CONTINUING VISIONS: WOMEN WRITERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This collection of short stories reinforces Elizabeth Bowen's assessment of the potential of the wartime short story. Although their perspectives and writing styles may vary greatly, these women have found the short story genre to be brief enough to coincide with the disruptions and uncertainties of life during (and after, in the case of the long, slow recovery period of Vietnam) wartime but long enough to offer a representative depiction of how the Vietnam war has affected the lives of women—whether they grow more independent as a result of the experience, as in "The Missing Person"; more assertive, as in "A Civil Campaign"; more paranoid, as in "Veteran's Day"; or more militant, as in "The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device." As a collective unit, these stories stand as proof that the "gender gap" of war writing is indeed narrowing. Novelist Marge Piercy points out in her essay "Of Arms and the Woman" that women have always "experienced" war, even if they have never seen combat:

Bombs do not fall only upon men from the ages of eighteen to forty-five. They kill and maim women, old people, children, babies, cats, dogs, tigers, and water buffalo; birds, reptiles, and the landscape and future of a place. Women experience wars even when they do not fight in them; and not infrequently, women end up fighting, if not in the official armies, in the unofficial armies that have been part of every war in the second two thirds of this century.<sup>40</sup>

Now, in greater numbers, women are translating those experiences into literature that reflects a broader perspective of war experience. The content of these short stories indicates that the concept of the traditional war story has indeed expanded far beyond the romantic and didactic modes popular in past wars. The images in some of these stories—American raping Americans before the massacre in "The Village," a soldier helping a Vietnamese woman sort through a pile of bodies in "All Over Now," feminists eager to wage war in "The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device"—are haunting reminders of war's brutal nature. Other images—Clare's emotional outburst at her dead lover while she stands on a subway platform in "All Over Now," an Indian woman wrapped in an Army blanket in "Lullaby," Jeannette's dream of bouncing on a pile of stringy bodies in "Big Bertha Stories"—lament war's far-reaching, detrimental effect upon women, even if the war is half a world away. Still other images—Rodney's violent nightmares in "Big Bertha Stories," and Jeremy's irrational fears of ambulatory men in "Secrets Men Keep"—point to a war that has affected not only the Vietnam generation, but generations to come as well. These visions of Vietnam and its still unresolved aftermath are at once disturbing, sobering, enlightening and, above all, symbolic of an era of social and political unrest that

## 88 VIETNAM GENERATION

united many of the Vietnam generation in mutual mistrust of authority and a desire for peace. Underlying all of these stories is the common, if not always overt, quest to come closer to comprehending this still mystifying war experience in the hope that understanding the past may represent the first step toward the prevention of future conflict. The collective vision of Vietnam represented in these stories is also one of reconciliation as women attempt to survive the postwar stress of Vietnam in individual ways and regain a semblance of normality. They endeavor not to bury the Vietnam experience, but to reach a point where it might continue to influence their vision while no longer dominating their lives.

The long-lasting, far-reaching effects of the Vietnam experience as one of "universal victimization" have expanded the boundaries (if indeed there are any left) of war fiction to the point where male and female, traditional and innovative writers alike find room for literary expression. This body of short fiction represents a significant contribution to the still-expanding Vietnam genre and the short story achievement of contemporary women, many of them members of the Vietnam generation.

<sup>1</sup> Heather Bryant Jordan, "The Territory of Elizabeth Bowen's Wartime Short Stories," *Library Chronicles* 44 (16 September 1988): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country* (New York: Harper & Row) 1985; Jayne Anne Phillips, *Machine Dreams* (New York: Pocket) 1984; Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, *The Healer's War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) 1988; Susan Schaeffer, *Buffalo Afternoon* (New York: Knopf) 1989; Patricia Walsh, *Forever Sad the Hearts* (New York: Avon) 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Lynn Mithers, "Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam," *Cultural Critique* 3 (1986): 79.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1987: 219.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 220.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Shroeder, "Two Interviews: Talks with Tim O'Brien and Robert Stone," *Modern Fiction Studies* 30 (Spring 1984): 135-164.

<sup>7</sup> Mithers: 79.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Beidler, *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam* (Athens: University of Georgia Press) 1983: 13, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen McCabe, "The Literature Born of Vietnam," *The Humanist* (March-April 1986): 30.

<sup>10</sup> Beidler: 16.

<sup>11</sup> Elshtain: 218.

<sup>12</sup> Aphrodite Matsakis, *Vietnam Wives* (Kensington: Woodbine House) 1988.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: xii.

<sup>15</sup> Alberts: 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: 64.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson: 28, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Kumin: 83.

<sup>19</sup> Lowell: 255.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: 254.

- 21 Mason: 207.
- 22 Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday) 1984: 264.
- 23 Matsakis: 343.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Abrams: 283.
- 26 Kalpakian: 24.
- 27 *Ibid.*: 30.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Stanton: 35.
- 30 Matsakis: 3.
- 31 Gibson: 64.
- 32 *Ibid.*: 65.
- 33 Kalpakian: 20.
- 34 *Ibid.*: 24.
- 35 Thacker: 86.
- 36 Jerome Klinkowitz, "Writing Under Fire: Postmodern Fiction and the Vietnam War," in Larry McCaffery, ed., *Postmodern Fiction: A BioBibliographical Guide* (New York: Greenwood Press) 1986: 79.
- 37 LeGuin: 81.
- 38 Wilhelm, "Introduction": 12.
- 39 *Ibid.*: 277.
- 40 Marge Piercy, "Of Arms and the Woman," *Harper's*, June 1987: 30.

# "GOING TOWARD WAR" IN THE WRITINGS OF MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

JAMES R. AUBREY

Maxine Hong Kingston's 1989 novel *Tripmaster Monkey* opens with a meditation on suicide by her title character, Wittman Ah Sing. As he imagines putting a pistol to his head and pulling the trigger, the narrator explains that he is not making plans to do himself in. "He was aware of the run of his mind, that's all," and by the end of the first paragraph, Wittman's mind has pondered various techniques for jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge and two articles he has read in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, one about a failed suicide pact and the other describing how "a Buddhist had set fire to himself and burned to death on purpose; his name was Quang Duc. Quang Duc. Remember."<sup>1</sup>

Most people old enough to remember 1963 have not forgotten the image of Quang Duc, sitting calmly as flames engulf him before a crowd of surprised onlookers. Before the memorable photograph was taken, Quang Duc had sat down on the asphalt at an intersection in what was then Saigon, had been doused with gasoline by another monk, then had struck a match to immolate himself. Quang Duc's suicide was a protest over the shooting several weeks earlier by soldiers in Hue of nine Buddhist demonstrators who had been marching to protest South Vietnamese President Diem's pro-Catholic, anti-Buddhist policies. The picture of Quang Duc became one of those media representations which, for many Americans, contributed to a changed understanding of events in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> *Time* carried the photo, and *Life* magazine enlarged it so that the figure of the burning monk filled the eleven-inch page.<sup>3</sup> Among the Americans affected by Quang Duc's suicide were U.S. government policy makers, whose loss of confidence in Diem led to his overthrow and to a succession of weak governments, which in turn led to the ultimately disastrous increase of American involvement. Even though Wittman Ah Sing cannot know any of this when he reads the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1963, Kingston-as-narrator knows and urges us, "Remember."

*Tripmaster Monkey* is full of allusions to American mass culture, but this opening reference to Vietnam is noteworthy because Kingston's book is, in one important sense, about the impending war there. The book's major plot development is Wittman's successful stage production of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In this Chinese war epic, "battles are lost and won; kingdoms rise and fall."<sup>4</sup> The military lore is so extensive, Kingston points out, that it has been a text at West Point, and

was the favorite reading of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>5</sup> For Wittman, however, the lesson is not how to fight but not to fight:

He had made up his mind: he will not go to Viet Nam or to any war. He had staged the War of the Three Kingdoms as heroically as he could, which made him start to understand: The three brothers and Cho Cho were masters of war; they had worked out strategies and justifications for war so brilliantly that their policies and their tactics are used today, even by governments with nuclear-powered weapons. And they lost. The clanging and banging fooled us, but now we know—they lost. Studying the mightiest war epic of all time, Wittman changed—been!—into a pacifist.<sup>6</sup>

As a novel examining this change, *Tripmaster Monkey* is simultaneously about war and against war, in that respect like *Catch-22* or *A Farewell to Arms* but, instead of being set in a war zone, set on the “home front” in the San Francisco area, under the specter of a looming war. A reader’s awareness of the consequences of such events as the suicide of Quang Duc can help to create sympathy for Wittman’s evolving pacifism within the imaginative world of the novel.

The specter of the Vietnam war in *Tripmaster Monkey* illustrates a tendency in Kingston’s writing to deal with war, which is evident in all three of her previous books: *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), and *Hawai’i One Summer* (1987). War seems to have been a central concern for her long before Vietnam provided a specific focus for her fears. She opens the “Brother in Vietnam” chapter of *China Men* with a childhood memory of a violent scene in a war movie, which she reacts to with such terror that her mother takes her outside, to “divert” her from the vision of war, as Kingston puts it.<sup>7</sup> She goes on to describe her other, earliest childhood memories, each of which she says “has to do with war”—from a glimpse of blood during the birth of her brother to blackouts, war cartoons, and parades.<sup>8</sup> She notes in *The Woman Warrior* that she was “born in the middle of World War II” and remembers watching airplanes in fear that the Japanese might be attacking.<sup>9</sup> In *China Men* she recalls that in the 1940s “all the talk was about war and death,” though her family tried to keep the worst horrors from the children.<sup>10</sup> “For the Korean War,” she adds, “we wore dog tags and had Preparedness Drill in the school basement.”<sup>11</sup> She describes a classroom epiphany of the 1950s in a one-sentence paragraph: “‘The War,’ I wrote in a composition, which the teacher corrected, ‘Which war?’ There was more than one.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Tripmaster Monkey* Wittman, hallucinating on *cannabis*, watches the snow on a television screen and imagines nuclear detonations, then human mutations, then EC comic book grotesqueries.<sup>13</sup> His thought that “those comic books were brainwashing us for atomic warfare”<sup>14</sup> nicely conveys both the paranoias of drug trips and of Cold War attitudes. If Kingston retained any naive illusions about war into

## 92 VIETNAM GENERATION

the 1960s, the Vietnam conflict must have dispelled them for her—as it is sometimes said to have done for American culture as a whole.

Kingston is not unaware that war recurs as a theme in her work, having told an interviewer in 1980, “I look at my writing to see where it is going, and it keeps going toward war.”<sup>15</sup> Her self-critique seems less that of a woman who sees herself consciously choosing to write about war than of an agency through whom war gets written about, almost inevitably—as if she cannot *not* write about war. She seems less than perfectly comfortable in the role. In a 1986 interview for the American Audio Prose Library, Kingston was asked when she first discovered the metaphor of herself as woman warrior. Her answer was surprising:

I don't know that I ever really identify myself completely with the woman warrior. My editor said to name my book *The Woman Warrior*; about a year later he said, “You know that that's you.” My reaction was negative to that. I don't feel that she's me.... I don't really like warriors. I wish I had not had a metaphor of a warrior person who uses weapons and goes to war. In the style, there's always a doubt about war as a way of solving things.... The pen is always problematical, always on the verge of not winning. It's a frustration I feel. Writers have the power to change the world only a little bit at a time; we maybe conquer a reader at a time. We change the atmosphere of the world and we change moods here and there; whereas the people who have the guns and the bombs have so much direct power. We're using images and words against bombs. If only the word had as much power.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of Kingston's disclaimer, *The Woman Warrior* reads like a feminist autobiography in which Kingston learns to wield her pen like a weapon. At the conclusion of the chapter “White Tigers”—named after the symbol for the female principle in Chinese philosophy<sup>17</sup>—the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan calls herself “a female avenger” and, Kingston observes, “The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar.”<sup>18</sup> So the editor's association of Kingston with the idea of a woman warrior is by no means far-fetched. It is apparently Fa Mu Lan's violence which Kingston is trying to distance herself from in the interview, much as she takes pains to distance Wittman from the military spectacle of his dramatic production in her conclusion to *Tripmaster Monkey*.

Not just war in general but the Vietnam war in particular is a presence in all four of Kingston's books. She explains that she worked on the first two, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, at the same time, originally having conceived them as one large book, and that the first part she wrote was the chapter for *China Men* called “The Brother in Vietnam.”<sup>19</sup> This chapter tells of her brother's enlistment in the Navy in hope of avoiding the alternatives of Canada or combat, only to find himself on an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin.<sup>20</sup> Kingston points out that, for the ship's crew, it must have taken “intelligence and imagination

to think that they were in Vietnam in the middle of the heaviest American bombing” when all they could see was water, but her brother does realize that he is not avoiding the war.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the chapter, he has lost his appetite, but “he had not gotten killed, and he had not killed anyone.”<sup>22</sup> His survival story contrasts with the martyrdom of a pacifist in the preceding chapter of *China Men*, “The Li Sao: An Elegy.” Its hero, Ch’u Yuan, a minister of state, advises his king not to fight a popular but a losing war and finds himself banished; when he realizes that he can neither return nor be happy away from his homeland, Ch’u Yuan drowns himself and earns the epithet “the incorruptible” in the last sentence of his chapter.<sup>23</sup> By preceding “The Brother in Vietnam,” “The Li Sao: An Elegy” can be said to introduce the other chapter and, rather than make the Vietnam brother seem unprincipled in contrast with himself, Ch’u Yuan makes the efforts of Kingston’s brother to avoid combat seem less futile by associating them with a long antiwar tradition.

Since Kingston wrote *The Woman Warrior* after she wrote this section of *China Men*, the Vietnam war must still have been on her mind. Its presence is less prominent in *The Woman Warrior*, but Kingston refers to the war in “White Tigers,” where she contrasts herself to her brother:

I went away to college—Berkeley in the sixties—and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy. I would have liked to bring myself back as a boy for my parents to welcome with chickens and pigs. That was for my brother, who returned alive from Vietnam.

If I went to Vietnam, I would not come back: females desert families.<sup>24</sup>

Kingston will strive to be a warrior in her own way. In Kingston’s version of the Classical Chinese chant, Fa Mu Lan confronts a fat baron who has drafted her brother, has committed crimes against the women of her village and—not realizing that Fa Mu Lan is a woman disguised as a male warrior—tries to justify what he has done by quoting to her the antifeminist “sayings that I hated” such as “girls are maggots in the rice.”<sup>25</sup> Fa Mu Lan takes off her shirt, revealing herself to be a woman at the same time that she also reveals a list of grievances her father has carved onto her back—then beheads the baron.<sup>26</sup> Kingston’s aim seems to be to turn Fa Mu Lan’s violence to nonviolence, her sword into words—even into the book we are reading. When Kingston announces that “the swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar,” she goes on to invite this meta-reading:

What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for *revenge* are “report a crime” and “report to five families.” The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—“chink” words and “gook” words too—that they do not fit on my skin.<sup>27</sup>

## 94 VIETNAM GENERATION

As in the case of the baron, the injustices are involved with the language of discrimination. In the same chapter, Kingston has recounted her refusal to work for a white racist employer who uses the word “nigger” and who enjoys subverting a CORE-NAACP boycott.<sup>28</sup> And we are reminded with the reference to “gook’ words” that the war in Vietnam has its racial dimension. Although Fa Mu Lan tells the baron that she is “a female avenger,” *The Woman Warrior* is a book-report meant to avenge wider, systemic injustices which include not only unjust treatment of women or racial minorities but also, by implication, an unjust war in Vietnam.

In *Hawai'i One Summer*, Kingston recalls that she and her husband had left Berkeley in 1967, “in despair over the war.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of escaping the war, however, they found themselves at a crucial transshipment point between the USA and Southeast Asia. “We should have thought of it—hardware and soldiers were sent to Hawai'i, which funnelled everything to Vietnam.”<sup>30</sup> As her brother and Ch'u Yuan had discovered, you cannot remain in your homeland and avoid its war. So Kingston worked against the Vietnam war at a Hawai'ian sanctuary where “the peace people drilled the AWOL's in history while from outside came the voice of an Army chaplain on a bullhorn, asking them to give themselves up.”<sup>31</sup>

Kingston's commitment to the antiwar movement may have led her to create the hero of *Tripmaster Monkey* as an artist-turned-pacifist. Wittman's resemblance to her “brother in Vietnam” suggests that the novel is, like her other books, written in the autobiographical mode Kingston seems to favor, and this attraction to both fiction and autobiography may in turn relate to her typical blurring of the traditional distinction between art and life. Kingston once observed that there's “something about life that's like a theater,”<sup>32</sup> and in *Tripmaster Monkey* she makes the same point when she presents Wittman's staged war as if the fireworks have ignited the Chinatown theater and created four-alarm pandemonium:

The audience ran out into the street. More audience came. And the actors were out from backstage and the green room breaking rules of reality-and-illusion. Their armor and swords were mirrored in fenders, bumpers, and the long sides of the fire trucks.<sup>33</sup>

In this description, the boundary between stage and audience seems to disappear, but Kingston as narrator reestablishes the illusion of reality as the novel's last chapter begins:

OF COURSE Wittman Ah Sing didn't really burn down the Association house and the theater. It was an illusion of fire. Good monkey. He kept control of the explosives, and of his arsonist's delight in flames. He wasn't crazy; he was a monkey. What's crazy is the idea that revolutionaries must shoot and bomb and kill, that revolution is the same as war.<sup>34</sup>



## “GOING TOWARD WAR” 95

Revolutionary theater, Wittman seems to be demonstrating, can and should take the diverse, even anarchic materials of a culture at war and shape them into art which embraces everything and is meant to liberate everyone.<sup>35</sup> Wittman reworks violent materials for a peaceful end: the transformation of a community.

Kingston puts her readers through an experience comparable to the one undergone by Wittman's audience and, within the more private relationship between novel and reader, Kingston may be hoping to effect a similar transformation of her community of readers. As her dislike of “guns and bombs” sets her mind to working on the materials of war, however, her opposition to war may actually be attracting her to the subject. Wittman's production of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for example, is full of violence:

At the climactic free-for-all—everybody fights everybody everywhere at once. The hundred and eight bandits and their enemies (played by twenty-five actors) knock one another in and out all entrances and exits, sword-fighting up and down the stairs and out amongst the audience, take that and *that*, kicking the mandarin-duck kick, swinging the jeweled-ring swing, drums and cymbals backing up the punches.<sup>36</sup>

Even though war and peace may serve to define one another, and even though this representation of violence is ultimately in the service of undoing violence, Wittman's play tends to glamorize violence as it proceeds.

Part of Kingston's attraction to the subject of war may be a recognition that the subject matter is inherently interesting. “It's more difficult to make peace than war,” Wittman tells the audience for his play,<sup>37</sup> and it is no doubt more difficult to write an interesting book about peace than war. Her books recount exciting war narratives, many of them from Classical Chinese literature, and the female warrior figures Kingston depicts are especially admirable characters whose stories could easily subsume any pacifistic agenda. Fa Mu Lan takes her father's place in battle, fights gloriously, and returns to settle in her village.<sup>38</sup> In *Tripmaster Monkey* Lady Sun—a beautiful princess with red hair, blue eyes, and an armory for a bedroom—has beaten all of her father's and brother's knights using their choice of weapons; so she marries an old warrior in order to gain combat experience as she helps him.<sup>39</sup> How can readers not admire these characters in spite of their violent behavior? Kingston acknowledges the dilemma in the last chapter of *Tripmaster Monkey*:

Tolstoy had noted the surprising gaiety of war. During his time, picnickers and fighters took to the same field. We'd gotten more schizzy. The dying was on the Asian side of the planet while the playing—the love-ins and the be-ins—were on the other, American side. Whatever there is when there isn't war has to be invented. What do people do in peace? Peace has barely been thought.<sup>40</sup>

## 96 VIETNAM GENERATION

By suggesting that *War and Peace* is mostly about war, that peace seems to exist as war's absence or war's contrary rather than a state of being in its own right, Kingston expresses awareness and concern that readers may identify with her martial heroes and heroines, may be captivated by the "gaiety" and the fascination of war.

Kingston evidently hopes to use the appeal of violence, not be used by it. At the conclusion of *The Woman Warrior*, Ts'ai Yen is first described as an effective woman warrior who can "cut down anyone in her path during the madness of close combat."<sup>41</sup> When she is held captive in the land of barbarians, Ts'ai Yen at first believes that her captors' only music was the sound of death that the whistles on their arrows produced. However, eventually, as she listens to the sound of their flutes, she finds herself affected and composes her own song to accompany the music. Ts'ai Yen later brings that song back "from the savage lands" to her native Chinese culture where, according to the last sentence of the book, "It translated well."<sup>42</sup> Having heard the United States described elsewhere in the book as a land of ghosts and barbarians, a reader again senses an identity between Kingston and her woman warrior. Like Ts'ai Yen, Kingston has found her own voice as a writer in what had seemed to her as a child to be two radically different cultures, Chinese and American. But part of the satisfaction and sense of closure a reader feels at the end of *The Woman Warrior* also depends on the fact that Ts'ai Yen has changed from a warrior to an artist, has recognized in the materials of violence and conflict the possibility of peace. Kingston's representations of warfare thus become emblems that teach how to change war into peace, how to transcend conflict through narratives about conflict.

Not only peace, then, but also art is an alternative to war. In *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* art tends to be the self-liberating, liberal-humanist vision of the High Modern Artist. *The Woman Warrior* is Kingston's portrait of the artist as a young woman, confident in the power of art to transcend local conflict, to "translate well," as she says of Ts'ai Yen's song. *Tripmaster Monkey*, on the other hand, is Postmodern, more like Pynchon than like Joyce, full of local details and references to popular culture, working with the material of the Classical Chinese epic toward a less private, more participatory end. Kingston might be describing her own book when she describes Wittman's play: "To entertain and educate the solitaries that make up a community, the play will be a combination revue-lecture. You're invited."<sup>43</sup>

If Kingston's view of art seems to be evolving, her interest in warfare has remained a constant in her work. It seems also to have been constant in her life or, at any rate, in the personal history she remembers and writes about. In *China Men* she begins the chapter about the brother in Vietnam with one of her earliest recollections, of seeing a war movie when she was a child:

My mother holding my hand, I went through a curtain into a dark, out of which came explosions and screams, voices shouting

## “GOING TOWARD WAR” 97

things I did not understand. In a rectangle of light—which grew and shrank according to how close or far away I thought it—men with scared eyes peered over the top of a big hole they were in.... Everyone wore the same outfits. The color had gone out of the world. I stumbled tangle-legged into my mother’s skirt and the curtain and screamed with the soldiers.<sup>44</sup>

Kingston goes on to describe her later realization that she had been taken to a war movie as a child, but the passage conveys something of the nightmare-like terror she felt. “I had seen a vision of war,” she comments, and it came from behind a curtain. Kingston uses a related image to represent thresholds between worlds in *The Woman Warrior*: Kingston as a child imagines passing through a screen of clouds to become young Fa Mu Lan,<sup>45</sup> and at school she puts layers of chalk or black paint over her drawings—an act which worries her teachers but which she thinks of as “making a stage curtain.”<sup>46</sup> In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Wittman’s television screen is a similar curtain that conceals to reveal, but the important recurrence of the motif in the novel is as literal stage curtains, which frame Wittman’s theatrical vision of transformation of kingdoms at war into a peaceable kingdom.

The curtain metaphor seems to represent for Kingston a distinction between art and life similar to that between dreaming and wakefulness—a distinction that helps to clarify her understanding of the role of art. Like a dream, art is part of a deeply important psychological process, with tremendous capacity for revealing and for healing. One may fall asleep into a nightmare of war as readily as into a dream of peace. Also like a dream, however, an artist’s executed vision is of distressingly limited force in the world of power relations.

Another way to understand Kingston’s “going toward war” as she writes is to imagine that her awareness of analogies between war and other kinds of conflict makes the subject irresistible for the fund of metaphors it provides. She often gives war a metaphorical dimension when she writes about it, so one attraction of war may be the vividness with which it can represent other kinds of conflict important to her. If *The Woman Warrior* is indeed an autobiographical memoir, as the subtitle *Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* announces it to be, Kingston has felt engaged with conflicts throughout her life—not only the political-military conflicts of World War II, the Cold War, the confrontations at Berkeley, and the Vietnam war, but also—and probably more important to her artistic development—the inevitable conflicts of her daily experiences as she grew up Chinese-American in a national culture dominated by non-Chinese Americans, speaking a different language at school from the one she spoke at home.

More important yet, perhaps, she grew up female in a world where both the dominant and subordinate cultures privileged the male sex. Searching for her personal identity inevitably put her in conflict with traditional ideologies of both Chinese and American culture.

## 98 VIETNAM GENERATION

Kingston's way of dealing with this conflict is like her approach to dealing with military conflict: she takes the materials of conflict and shapes them artistically to subvert or improve the conditions which led to conflict in the first place. She tells stories of race, gender, culture, or military conflict in order to resolve such conflicts. Sometimes she uses one kind of conflict as a metaphor for another, as when she appropriates traditional Chinese literature for feminist purposes by borrowing an incident from the story of the male warrior Yueh Fei, whose mother carves words on his back,<sup>47</sup> to make her female warrior Fa Mu Lan an avenger for her sex—a rhetorical move which makes fairly explicit what Kingston elsewhere has called “the feminist war that’s going on in *The Woman Warrior*.”<sup>48</sup> In both instances she mixes the language of gender conflict and of military conflict.

Using war metaphors to discuss sexual difference is not a new rhetorical strategy, as the “battle of the sexes” indicates in *Lysistrata* or in *The Rape of the Lock*. Martial language can also be useful in discussing relations between cultures, as when Kingston uses the word “aggressive” to describe the relationship Chinatown must maintain with white America to survive.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Michel Foucault has suggested that the language of war describes all power relations:

The role of political power...is perpetually to re-inscribe this relation [of forces] through a form of unspoken warfare; to re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and everyone of us.<sup>50</sup>

Kingston's attraction to narratives of war may be due partly to her instinctive recognition of this idea, which makes discourse of war and peace available as rich metaphorical discourse about other conflicts between cultures or, within cultures, between competing ideologies about gender.

Kingston may also enjoy retelling stories of women warriors because they represent women in conflict with male-dominant cultural norms, both of Classical China and of contemporary America. Because “woman warriors” are redefining their gender as they fight, the very existence of woman warriors affects discourse of war in a way feminists generally approve.<sup>51</sup> In *Tripmaster Monkey*, when Wittman explains to Tanya her part in his play, how Lady Sun will join her husband in battle “fully armored, silver from head to toe,” Tanya gets “feminist ideas to apply to his backass self” from the story; having saved Wittman from the draft by marrying him, she describes herself with irony as “your beloved lady in shiny armor.”<sup>52</sup> For a woman to adopt military dress, then, is to cross a boundary into a domain defined as male by traditional discourse of warfare, and her act increases female participation in the circulation of power. Kingston's woman warriors do not dress as males just in order to succeed as men, however. In *The Woman Warrior* Fa Mu Lan also must wear male battle dress in order to disguise the fact that she is female, but

## “GOING TOWARD WAR” 99

the important outcome is that she changes the nature of warfare. Led by a woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan's army is significantly different from male-led armies, as she explains: “My army did not rape, only taking food where there was an abundance. We brought order wherever we went.”<sup>53</sup>

The worst aspects of warfare, Kingston implies, are the result of male exclusivity, defined in part by a masculine code of dress. These codes can, perhaps, be unlearned, but they are deeply ingrained. Fa Mu Lan's son is not too young to be impressed with her armor,<sup>54</sup> and in *China Men*, even Kingston's pacifist brother admits that dropouts who return to high school in uniform “looked more substantial, taller, smoothed out, as if some sort of potential had been fulfilled.”<sup>55</sup> In *Tripmaster Monkey* Kingston implies that war may be partly the result of such encodings and ideologies: “Women get their wish: War. Men, sexy in uniform, will fight and die for them.”<sup>56</sup>

At her most pessimistic, Kingston seems to imagine that such gender-linked attitudes toward war are inscribed almost beyond hope of change. Wittman proposes cutting off of boys' trigger fingers, not just as a technique for avoiding the draft as it was used in China during World War II<sup>57</sup> but as an antiwar, cultural ritual:

Cut off the trigger finger instead of circumcision for all the boy babies, and all the girl babies too. Chop. I'll volunteer to have mine done first. On the other hand, the people who love shooting, they'll use their toes, they'll use their noses. It's more difficult to make peace than war.<sup>58</sup>

Like the male impulse toward state violence, or war, a similar impulse toward violence against women promises to be just as difficult to repair: even Kingston confesses to feeling an occasional “urge to destroy nests and females” before coming back to her senses.<sup>59</sup> But she will work on the problem, as she puts it in her interview, “a reader at a time.”

Kingston seems more hopeful in her books than in her interviews or articles about the possibility of resolving conflicts between men and women, minority and majority cultures, or nations. Her books tell stories of war with peaceful outcomes. In *The Woman Warrior* Fa Mu Lan establishes social order and justice for females, and Ts'ai Yen transcends cultural boundaries with her artistic vision. *China Men* opens with a description of The Land of Women, where there are no wars, like the state of the Tao where “wars were laughable.”<sup>60</sup> In *Tripmaster Monkey* Kingston compares the attractions of war to the attractions of reading and notes that Wittman, “our monkey, master of change, staged a fake war, which might very well be displacing some real war.”<sup>61</sup> If taken as a comment about art, generally—which it seems to be—Kingston evidently hopes that her writings about war will serve as artistic displacements of actual wars, as celebrations of peace for her individual readers the way that Wittman's play is for the community of his audiences.

# 100 VIETNAM GENERATION

Kingston's faith in the power of art to liberate individuals from oppressive violence is nowhere more concisely stated than in the conclusion to her travel piece for *Ms.* magazine in 1983:

Our planet is as rich and complex as a Balinese painting, which is covered every inch with life. To stop the bombs, to free ourselves—we are nations of hostages—we continue dancing, painting, telling stories, writing....<sup>62</sup>

The power of literature may be limited to affecting one reader at a time, but if a writer has a large readership, and those readers "remember," her art may bring improved order and justice to cultures too often made up of contesting subcultures, prone to oppression of females and to the glorification of violence—prone, in short, to war.

<sup>1</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey : His Fake Book* (New York: Knopf) 1989: 3-4. Hereafter, *Tripmaster*.

<sup>2</sup> The Associated Press copyrighted the photo, which was distributed widely. Another well known representation is the photo of the Saigon chief of police holding a pistol to the head of a Viet Cong prisoner whom he is about to execute during the 1968 Tet Offensive. It is easy to imagine that these images, helped to inspire the "Russian-roulette" scenes in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, which serve as a visual metaphor for U.S. political self-destruction in Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> "An Angry Buddhist Burns Himself Alive," *Life* (21 June 1963): 24-25; "Trial by Fire," *Time* (21 June 1963): 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Tripmaster*: 172.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: 340.

<sup>7</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Knopf) 1981: 264. Hereafter, *China Men*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: 263-267.

<sup>9</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Knopf) 1976: 93, 96. Hereafter, *Woman Warrior*.

<sup>10</sup> *China Men*: 268.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 276.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Tripmaster*: 96-98.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 98.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Pfaff, "Talk With Mrs. Kingston," *New York Times Book Review* (15 June 1980): 27.

<sup>16</sup> Kay Bonetti, "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston," *The American Audio Prose Library*, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Charles W. Moore, et al., *The Poetics of Gardens* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 1988: 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 53.

<sup>20</sup> *China Men*: 283, 296.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: 297.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 304.

# "GOING TOWARD WAR" 101

<sup>23</sup> *China Men*: 256-260.

<sup>24</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 47.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*: 35, 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 53.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 48. (CORE stands for Congress on Racial Equality; NAACP is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.)

<sup>29</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *Hawai'i One Summer: 1978*, woodcuts by Deng Ming-Dao. (San Francisco: Meadow Press) 1987: 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 15.

<sup>32</sup> Bonetti.

<sup>33</sup> *Tripmaster*: 303.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: 305.

<sup>35</sup> Wittman Ah Sing's name may be an homage to Walt Whitman, also a revolutionary in art, whose "Song of Myself" begins with an echo of epic invocations, "I...sing," and which similarly celebrates community in diversity. [Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Salley Bradley (New York: Norton) 1965: 28.]

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 301.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 335.

<sup>38</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Tripmaster*: 172.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 306.

<sup>41</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 208.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Tripmaster*: 288.

<sup>44</sup> *China Men*: 264.

<sup>45</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 165.

<sup>47</sup> *China Men*: 56.

<sup>48</sup> Bonetti.

<sup>49</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, "San Francisco's Chinatown," *American Heritage* (Dec 1978): 39.

<sup>50</sup> Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Colin Gordon, ed. and trans., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Random) 1980: 90.

<sup>51</sup> For a contemporary American woman to be a warrior would be a violation not only of cultural norms but also of the laws and related policies known collectively as "the combat exclusion," designed to keep military women out of jobs that would place them in danger—or in a decisively powerful position. For a description of the law, its origins, and the problems it poses for women see Lori S. Kornblum's "Women Warriors in a Men's World: The Combat Exclusion," in *Law and Inequality* 2.35: 353-445. For an argument in favor of an even more rigorous exclusion of women from combat see Brian Mitchell's *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway) 1989.

<sup>52</sup> *Tripmaster*: 175.

<sup>53</sup> *Woman Warrior*: 37.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: 45.

<sup>55</sup> *China Men*: 279.

<sup>56</sup> *Tripmaster*: 296.

<sup>57</sup> *China Men*: 269.

<sup>58</sup> *Tripmaster*: 335.

<sup>59</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, "Reservations about China," Ms. (Oct 1978): 67-68.

<sup>60</sup> *China Men*: 1-2, 95.

<sup>61</sup> *Tripmaster*: 306.

<sup>62</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, "A Writer's Notebook from the Far East," Ms. (Jan 1983): 86.

# As SOLDIER Lads MARCH By

ALAN FARRELL

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye,  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.  
—Siegfried Sassoon<sup>1</sup>

Hey. I'm dozing through one of the endless seminars we foist off as the "life of the mind" out where I teach. Shafts of afternoon sunlight drifting lazily through the high window. Eerie shadows under the varnished vaults of the library. *I'm in a state of grace.* Through and beyond my revery an intense and voluble young woman is expatiating on Uncle Toby. Remember him from *Tristram Shandy*? The one with the "groin wound," as I think it was nicely called. To this deathless image she adds that of Jake Barnes, who has become a "steer," as a result of what the British name the "unmentionable wound." And now, of course, she reminds us of Nick, the guy from *The Big Chill* who, in a narcotic stupor, must refuse the advances of a female friend, saying: "Did I ever tell you what happened to me in Vietnam?" "This," she summarizes, with the adamant righteousness of youth and to the ineffable joy of her teacher and coach, "is the legacy of Vietnam: *impotence, sterility, inadequacy.*"

Come on people. Is this debate really going to turn on my little wee-wee?

There is at least some serious suggestion that it is. I can recall posters I saw upon my return assuring me that "Girls Say Yes To Boys Who Say No." A recent, quite sober history of Europe has this to say about war: "Women's ability to bear children may have led to a male need to achieve and create in an area where men were clearly superior to women. No area of human endeavor provides this so fully as...combat. The root...of warfare may be men's need to act in an area in which their superiority to women and necessity to society were paramount."<sup>2</sup> I don't know about that. I do know, I think, that war as an event and the Army as an institution are tribal things, and as such undelimited by the rationalization recent years have tried to impose on their organization and, I fear, by the rationality you hope to apply to an analysis of them. "The Army," says the French poet Alfred de Vigny, "is a sort of male religion, a cult without symbols or icons, without dogma or priests, or any written laws."<sup>3</sup>

I am interested in the Army and the Academy. And there is evidence that other people are as well. Listen to this guy, confessing



# AS SOLDIER LADS MARCH BY 103

publicly in *The New York Times*. The statement is so extraordinary that I cite it at length:

I thank my gods I didn't go to Viet Nam....But I am far more ambivalent about not having served in the armed forces...as I 'survey' friends...who have served I notice something disturbing...they have something we haven't got. It is, to be sure, somewhat vague, but nonetheless real, and can be embraced under several headings: realism, discipline, masculinity...resilience, tenacity, resourcefulness....There is something missing in my generation...It has to do with camaraderie, shared purpose, and self-transcendence.<sup>4</sup>

I am not certain what I got out of the Army. I was an infantryman but no fool; a volunteer, but no patriot; a combatant, but no hero; a vet but no martyr. Yet I was one of *them*. And now I'm one of *you*.

"Think first, fight after. The soldier's art," said Browning. "One draught of earlier, happier sights/Ere fitly I could hope to play my part."<sup>5</sup> He states, if he does not resolve, the great conundrum of the profession of arms. The fact is that you must think either before or after you fight, because as any combat veteran will tell you: there is no thinking while you fight. Thinking before you fight, we call strategy; thinking after we call mercy. In this way there is no divorce between reason and action, but there is a priority.

As members of the Academy, we look to the light of reason, the comfort of order; we enlist the devices of what we like to call logic against the primal chaos into which things threaten to dissolve if we do not impress upon the random array of objects and events the stamp of intellect. The notions "soldier" and "war," on the other hand, conjure up images at odds with such aspirations: *obedience, cowardice, ritual*. The thought of obedience without the right to question, challenge, modify, accuse, recuse terrifies intellectuals and represents one of the great threats held out by military service; cowardice offers the unsettling possibility that despite our efforts the body might not in the end serve the will; ritual summons up all sorts of somber visions of the state from which we have so laboriously and at such price disengaged ourselves, largely through the ministrations of reason, who now sees herself menaced by a retreat to earlier, darker times and ways.

"Go, Stranger, tell the Lacedaemonians that we lie here obedient to their wishes," says Herodotus. But I say that in *disobedience* is the root of what we mean by a soldier, what we ask of a soldier, that the paradox of the soldier is precisely that his role is conceived in disobedience; that the ultimate loyalty of him whom we send out to represent the multitude is disloyalty to that multitude and a new loyalty forged under the circumstances of his ostracism.

Now, when I say soldier, I mean the one of us who has no stake in the army save under the immediate menace of war, a simple citizen and no professional. The thought of exacting death from citizens as the

## 104 VIETNAM GENERATION

price of the social contract has not made even the greatest and most farsighted of political thinkers blanch. A citizen will fight for the nation. For Plato, at least, "all education and the pursuits of war and peace are to be in common."<sup>6</sup> Women, too. Plato thought the oligarchy inefficient because it is "incapable of waging war," since "either the [oligarchs] arm the multitude and then are more afraid of them than of the enemy; or, if they do not call them out in the hour of battle, they are oligarchs indeed, few to fight as they are few to rule."<sup>7</sup> Homer observes quietly that the elders of Troy, "because they are old do not engage in the combat, but talk about it instead."

But the question of individual choice really doesn't come up till the Eighteenth Century, with its national conscriptions. This is the *levée en masse* issued by the French Committee of Public Safety in 1793: "The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge weapons...the women shall make tents and clothes; the children shall make linen into bandages; the old men shall...rouse courage...."<sup>8</sup> Montesquieu describes obedience in a "moderate monarchy," where the will of the prince comes up against honor (called by Vigny "*la puduer virile*"), which being the guiding principle of the state, in theory at least, cannot really interfere with its welfare, although there are, he says, "necessary modifications to obedience" on account of honor, because honor is "necessarily subject to 'bizarceries', and obedience follows them all."<sup>9</sup>

So in the end the dilemma of selective or suspended obedience to the grander aspirations of a state is imposed not collectively but particularly on a relatively small segment of that state. Yes, but with what expectations? With what consequences? This is SLA Marshall, writing in *Men Against Fire*:

The army cannot unmake man; he comes from a civilization in which aggression, connected with the taking of life, is prohibited and unacceptable. The teaching and ideals of that civilization are against killing....The fear of aggression has been expressed to him so strongly and absorbed by him so deeply and pervadingly...that it is part of the normal man's emotional make-up. This is his greatest handicap when he enters combat.<sup>10</sup>

So that obedience to the nation's call is necessarily disobedience to elements which form the social bond in the first place. A fragile and irrational equilibrium.

"Only the cowards come back from a war," writes Jean Giraudoux in *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, an ageless and unspoken reproach to returning soldiers.<sup>11</sup> The Greeks called him "*rhipsaspis*," or "the guy who throws down his shield." Archilochus, Alcaeus, Horace, not only threw down their shield, but then boasted of the fact. "You can have this shield," says Archilochus, "I'll go find a better one."<sup>12</sup> Cowardice is, of course, the following of one's quite normal and natural instinct to be elsewhere than at the point of impact when the grief comes in despite Reason's enjoinders to stay and do one's duty, whatever that is.

# AS SOLDIER LADS MARCH BY 105

L-F Céline, a French soldier severely wounded in combat and awarded his nation's highest medal, recounts in his *Voyage to the End of Night*:

You bet I'm a coward! I say no to war and everything about it. I don't deplore it....I don't resign myself to it....I don't cry about it...and if there were nine hundred ninety-five million people who think the other way and me all alone on my side, then they're the ones wrong and I'm still right, cause I'm the only one who knows what I want: to stay alive.<sup>13</sup>

Throwing away one's shield implies an authority of participation, albeit brief. The *rhapsaspis* stayed in the fight until the last minute, at least. He was there and lays claim to the authenticity lent by immediacy. And, as Professor Frye points out, he is, by his act of confession, invulnerable to deflation or insult.<sup>14</sup> He has taken this act upon himself and disarmed, in the twin senses of that word, his adversaries. "My urge downwards," confesses T.E. Lawrence, was "in pursuit of the safety which can't fall further."<sup>15</sup> Céline goes on:

...while this humiliation was under way, I could feel my self-respect slowly leaving me, fading out, abandoning me once and for all, officially so to speak...it was a sweet moment. Since then I have become for all time infinitely light and free....From that day on I have never needed any other weapon....<sup>16</sup>

The coward is simply more human, therefore less rational, than his interlocutor, less intimidating than heroes who remind the reader who *he* is, inferior to that observer, not threatening to him, therefore lovable. We like having a coward around. Makes us feel better. Heroes make us uneasy.

Ritual and reintegration. For Northrop Frye, the real sense of the terms "tragic" and "comic" is the degree to which a protagonist or hero is successfully or unsuccessfully reintegrated into the circle of society at drama's end. What happens to a citizen-soldier outside the social circle? What does the hierophant within the new and ritual circle stake out as the limit of his conduct? We have seen that the fundamental premise of his service, his "life-sentence," as one writer has said,<sup>17</sup> is an exceptional license to disobey the laws and taboos of his world, for a time. But he acquires new ones, and a new hieratic structure, and a new ontology, even a new rhetorical period to intone.

In the simplified social order of the Army, one's identity is construed by one's function, inversely to all the tenets of what I guess we would call existential ideology: one does not do on account of one's nature; one does not do in order to fabricate one's nature; one does what an 11-Bravo does, and no more. It must be so, because outside what 11-Bravos do is what 13-Alphas do and what 05-Charlies do, and on and on. One lives within a circumscribed and sacrosanct circle, the bounds of which countless generations of proselytes have tested and probed and

## 106 VIETNAM GENERATION

found solid: in the center, safely, one is FD, "For Duty." All along the periphery are the various states which constitute exemption from that condition: AWOL, Absent without Leave; LBJ, Long Binh Jail; MIA, WIA, CIA, or KIA, which we called in Vietnam TYT, "Take Your Time"; FUO, Fever Unknown Origin, Malaria; NSU, Non Specific Urethritis, also called Clap.

The business of tampering with individual identity, however, is a deeply complex business. Most men come to the Army in adolescence, when vague stirrings and yearnings for identity, atonement with Father, and all that Freudian doo-wop are a freshly if thinly-lacquered fixture of the psyche. And it is in the Army that we all saw our first *Man*: virile, commanding, physical, scarred. Not at all like that broken, sagging, menopausal specter who limped back into our family living room after each day at work. In the Army, your identity is written not on your soul but on your shirt. Where you have been—and therefore what you are—is sewn across your chest, for everyone to see. Not medals; no one ever sees those in the Army, but what we call rightly or not "scare badges," signs of pains endured, like the ritual scarification or passage rites in primal cultures. Not stripes, which convey only temporal authority and often represent, as such signs do in our world, only longevity. Pathfinder, HALO, SCUBA, Master Parachutist, CIB, Ranger. Nobody ever said "Ooooooooooh" to my Phi Bet' key. And I never would have considered risking my life to earn one. But I sure did risk it collecting my scare badges. And was as surprised to find myself doing it as you might be. And no more susceptible to the game than you. How many of you can truly say that in your moment of ontological disarray, as Sartre called it, and the occasion presenting itself to fill that existential void with something, you would not have seized it? "I am..." "I am..." "I am...a Marine." "I am...a Paratrooper." And in belonging to that group one inherits the collective virtue—and vice—of the group.

Now in this non-rational universe, there is no need for persuasion, since force and authority are virtually absolute. That makes for changes even so subtle as the periodicity, the rhythm of language. Language is conservative in the trade of arms: men wear "trousers"; a hat is a "cover"; tardiness or absence is "failure to repair." There is a technical fidelity, an ageless respect for the objects within the ritual amphitheater, which are few enough: "The pistol, US, caliber .45, Model of 1911, A1 modification, is a magazine fed, recoil-actuated, self-loading sidearm"; "ventral parachute pack opening spring band secured to dress-maker's eyelet." And on and on. Notice that none of the hypotactic apparatus of what we should call conventional language appears: no subordination, no attenuation, none of the devices of persuasive speech. No need. The cadence is that of command with its rising preparatory intonation—"Attenuuuuuuuuuuu..."—and its falling tonality of execution—"shun," spelled, by-the-by, "s-h-u-n" in FM 22-5, the Army manual for Drill and Ceremonies.

Yet, given that initial exemption from the social contract, how easily can a soldier's behavior be reprogrammed to order, and how

# AS SOLDIER LADS MARCH BY 107

strictly can it be limited? That is the paradox of military service: that in separating members of the society from the collective corpus toward the common good, the social order alienates those same members, sometimes permanently. It is the constant tension, the paradox of one's adherence and yet one's separation which transports all issues related to it into an arena other than rational, since the goal in war is to impose will on events and objects. It has long been known that reason is no foil to the momentum of events or the ineluctability of physical law, but that sheer human pertinacity, doggedness, *will*, in short can in fact overcome inevitability. Combat is will over geometry, and will, I tell you, is not rational. At least not as you understand it. But the ritual separation renders reintegration of the divorced member difficult and the maintenance of contact otherwise improbable.

If the soldier is isolated, by class or caste, through a disenfranchisement from the moral imperatives of his conditioning, by the nature of his endurance in battle, he is nonetheless absorbed into another and smaller world, a microcosm, a community of his peers, his "buddies," that "mysterious fraternity born out of smoke and danger of death,"<sup>18</sup> and for whom he fabricates bonds of remarkable durability. This is Erich Fromm, speaking of that group:

The narcissistic image of one's own group is raised to its highest point, while the devaluation of the opposing group sinks to its lowest. One's own group becomes a defender of human dignity, decency, morality, and right. Devilish qualities are ascribed to the other. It is treacherous, ruthless, and basically inhuman.<sup>19</sup>

But this group psychology does not direct itself wholly at the adversary in battle; it directs itself at the citizens which do not "share...agonies" which they regard with "callous complacency" and which "they do not have sufficient imagination to realize."<sup>20</sup> Or understand. These others remain outside the circle. Paul Fussell has said that since 1945 he has thought of himself as a "pissed-off infantryman,"<sup>21</sup> disdainful of those who were not ritually initiated into the circle. And like all outsiders, this constituency fears and scorns what may lie inside. A classic example of exiles having formed a world from which they now exclude their former caste-mates. This is Alfred de Vigny, a soldier in the Nineteenth Century, speaking of the "modern" army of his time:

[It]...is...a body separated from the great body of the nation, like the body of an infant, or at least infantile in its intelligence, and forbidden to grow up. The modern Army, when there is no war, becomes ashamed of itself and cannot decide what it is or what it should do...the soldier is a disreputable hero, victim and executioner, scapegoat sacrificed to and for his people, a martyr at once ferocious and humble....<sup>22</sup>

The precarious imposture of bringing order to events has never really appealed to the Academy. The elusive randomness of actual

# 108 VIETNAM GENERATION

reality presents a test to the grandest schemes which can throw them into appalling confusion and disorder. The nightmare of reason. And in no enterprise is power more nakedly menacing or reason so thoroughly at risk than war. Curiously enough, as at least one commentator has pointed out, the soldier's art may yet be the purest application of reason:

The soldier must engage in ethical action. He must willfully carry out the obligations, and he must know why it binds. The soldier must exercise ethical judgment. He is engaged in the rational action of discerning why one obligation binds more than another. The last refuge of the bureaucrat is to execute rules as a means of escaping responsibility...[the soldier] can never escape responsibility for his judgments.<sup>23</sup>

So...

Let's run Old Glory  
To the top of the pole;  
And we'll all re-enlist  
...in a pig's ass-hole.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (London: Faber & Faber) 1983: 119.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Our Own* (New York: Harper & Row) 1983: 13.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred de Vigny, *Servitude et grandeur militaires* (Paris: Gallimard) 1950 : 236. Translation my own.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," found in J.H. Buckley and G.B. Woods, eds., *Poetry of the Victorian Period* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman) 1955: 253.

<sup>6</sup> Scott Buchanan, translator, *Plato* (New York: Viking) 1948: 585.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*: 597

<sup>8</sup> Walter Mills, *Of Arms and Men* (New York: Putnam): 47.

<sup>9</sup> Vigny: 76.

<sup>10</sup> S.L.A. Marshal *Men Against Fire* (Gloucester: Peter Smith) 1978: 13.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Giraudoux, *La Guerre de Troie Naura pas lieu [The Trojan War Will Not Take Place, sometimes and wickedly translated as Tiger at the Gates]* (Grasset: Paris) 1935: 35. Translation my own.

<sup>12</sup> HD Rankin, *Archilochus of Paros* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press) 1977: 42.

<sup>13</sup> L-F Celine, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Paris: Gallimard) 1952: 88.

<sup>14</sup> Northrop Fry, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1957: 68.

<sup>15</sup> TE Lawrence, *The Mint* (Garden City: Doubleday) 1957: 29.

<sup>16</sup> Celine: 121.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred M. Hale, *Memoirs*, cited in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press: New York) 1975: 312.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Holmes, *Acts of War* (New York: Macmillan) 1985: 31, citing Stephen Crane.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Holmes: 50, citing Erich Fromm

<sup>20</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin) 1957: 213.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Boy Scout Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1982: 254.

<sup>22</sup> Vigny: 31.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Gabriel, *To Serve with Honor* (New York: Praeger) 1987: 39

<sup>24</sup> John Dos Passos, *Nineteen Nineteen* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin) 1946: 28.

# SEXIST SUBSCRIPT IN VIETNAM NARRATIVES

## NANCY ANISFIELD

Doc says, "Sometime a dude got plenty of brains for dealin on dinks, but he loses his powers when applying it to pussy."<sup>1</sup> Although this particular Doc appears in John DeVecchio's *The Thirteenth Valley*, many Docs and many grunts appearing in Vietnam war narratives profess similar ideas through similar language. The idea—that the savvy which ensures success in combat doesn't ensure success with women—is one worth contemplation, but the language chosen to express it demands immediate attention. The in-country jargon of "dinks," "dudes," and "dealin" is characteristic of the Vietnam war infantry experience. The term "pussy" is characteristic of the sexist language used in America before, during and after the Vietnam war.

Many Vietnam war novels and personal narratives contain glossaries, a phenomenon previously peculiar to science fiction texts. These glossaries are indicative of the amount of attention paid to the language and lexicon of that war. George Cornell terms this speech "slanguage" and describes it as an "urgent" language, one through which the American troops took out some of their frustrations and sense of futility. According to Cornell, the military slang, pidgeon French and Vietnamese, drug lingo, acronyms, in-country terminology, and pervasive obscenity "constituted a response to the control and domination of the military machine."<sup>2</sup> There is some truth to this claim, but in the grunts' use of language, the primary system for counterbalancing control and domination is one operating on the basis of gender discrimination, which is neither new nor unique to the Vietnam war.

In his study of the "Paradoxical Paradigm of Nomenclature," Owen W. Gilman, Jr. refers to "the radical newness of language found swirling in the fiction of Vietnam."<sup>3</sup> He discusses this nomenclature in terms of coinage and innovation; however, there is little actual coinage in the language of this war. Words like "gookhoppers" or "short-timers" are the result of compounding. "Fragging" and "souvenired" were created by functional shift. Imitation and blending generated many new words, but outright coinage—making new words out of unrelated, meaningless elements—is virtually nonexistent. Instead, what sets this lexicon apart from others is its size and the constancy with which it appears in the writings about the war. Hence, the language found in Vietnam war narratives may contain characteristic words and word usage that readers would not uniformly find in any other group of narratives, yet that language is not radically new.

Glancing beyond the vocabulary itself will show even more clearly that the language of Vietnam war narratives is not unique. It does

not even constitute its own dialectal community. Whereas the vocabulary may differ from that found back in *The World*, pronunciation and grammar are not consistently different. In-country, for example, midwestern accents remained midwestern and the grammatical structures found in Black English were left intact. Along with these linguistic consistencies, the androcentric gender discrimination which has a firm grasp on Americans' word choice and usage also persists in the language of the Vietnam war and its narratives. Whether unconscious of sexist language, or conscious of it but striving to "tell it like it was," both male and female writers of Vietnam war narratives cannot claim that their language exposes the uniqueness of the Vietnam experience when it rests on the same sexist constructs as language that preceded the war.

Before examining the sexist language inherent in the Vietnam war narratives, it is necessary to establish the danger of such a mode of expression. Though the Sapir-Whorf "linguistic relativity hypothesis"<sup>4</sup> (attesting that a particular language imposes a particular perception of reality upon its speaker) is no longer accepted *carte blanche*, it is generally agreed that the language an individual speaks will facilitate particular ways of thinking. Anthropologist Peter Woolfson writes:

Why are habitual patterns of expression so important? We all have approximately the same set of physical organs for perceiving reality....Reality should be the same for us all. Our nervous systems, however, are being bombarded by a continual flow of sensations of different kinds, intensities, and durations. It is obvious that all of these sensations do not reach our consciousness; some kind of filtering system reduces them to manageable proportions. The Whorfian hypothesis suggests that the filtering system is one's language. Our language, in effect, provides us with a special pair of glasses that heightens certain perceptions and dims others.<sup>5</sup>

If, in using a particular mode of expression, individuals filter their reality through a lens which discriminates against one sex or stereotypes gender roles, assumptions of sexual inequality will be reinforced. Gender-biased language, then, broadly influences cultural behavior, contribution, and social control.<sup>6</sup>

In boot camp, where young men and women are ostensibly stripped of their individual identities and retrained into a collective identity, language is saturated with words whose connotation and denotation are derogatory towards women. Applying these words to the new male recruits is designed to shame them into attaining a stronger sense of masculine values. Jacqueline E. Lawson refers to this language as "emasculating rhetoric" and notes that "boot camp served as a personal test of individual mettle, a proving ground for one's adolescent machismo."<sup>7</sup>



# SEXIST SUBSCRIPT 111

The first thirty pages of Gustav Hasford's *The Short Timers* focuses on Marine Corps basic training on Parris Island. In this section, the nine referrals to the troops as "ladies" occur sprinkled among other addresses such as "amphibian shit," "maggots," and "scumbags," setting them all on equal ground, equating the female identity with the subhuman.

On Hasford's Parris Island, as in other boot camps, weapons are quickly given female names. After singing "I don't want no teen-aged queen; all I want is my M-14," the drill sergeant tells his new recruits to name their rifles:

This is the only pussy you people are going to get. Your days of finger-banging ol' Mary Jane Rottencrotch through her pretty pink panties are over. You're married to *this* piece, this weapon of iron and wood, and you will be faithful.<sup>8</sup>

Women are discussed only in sexual terms, and fidelity to a military tool is given status over any association with women. This, however, is not the full extent to which female objectification is carried in this instance. When trainee Leonard Pratt prepares to murder Sergeant Gerheim, he first field strips his rifle, whose name is Charlene, saying, "This is the first time I've ever seen her naked." Protagonist Joker thinks about having sex with his girlfriend back home while Leonard "inserts the metal magazine into his weapon, into Charlene."<sup>9</sup> This association between women (passive sexual objects) and weapons is reinforced by the dual use of the word "piece" to refer to male-female sexual relations, as in "knock off a piece for me,"<sup>10</sup> and to refer to a gun, as when Joker hears incoming rounds and tells Rafter Man to "Get your piece."<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the man masters the object—the soldier is trained to use his instrument with authority, putting him not only in control, but also in a position of power.

In the language of the Vietnam war narratives, the majority of references to sexual intercourse are expressed in terms of objectification, dominance or abuse. Joker wants to "slip his tube steak" into Cowboy's sister, and when he thinks about Vanessa he thinks of "fucking her eyes out."<sup>12</sup> Animal Mother almost "gets...some eatin' pussy," and judges a girl's suitability as a sexual partner with the aphorism: "If she's old enough to bleed she's old enough to butcher." In addition, the officer who reprimands Animal Mother for attempting to rape a Vietnamese girl is considered a "poge" (a weak, lazy rear echelon soldier—not particularly masculine).<sup>13</sup>

Dominance and abuse rest more easily on the speaker's conscience if they follow objectification and distancing. Women are usually identified by men in metonymical and synecdochic terms, as "blondes," "cunts," "a set of tits," or "a piece of ass." Even the women in Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's *The Healer's War* refer to themselves as "round eyes."<sup>14</sup> Derogatory terms proliferate in William Pelfrey's *The Big V*, where

## 112 VIETNAM GENERATION

protagonist Henry Winsted and his friends never use the word “woman” and only say “girl” three or four times in the entire novel. The character Fi Bait’s pen-pal is exclusively referred to as “the French bitch,” and the Vietnamese women are never called anything other than “gook bitches” or “gook whores.” Other words used to denote women include “fuck,” “babe,” “broad,” “pig,” and “pussy.” Conversely, consistent use of the words “man,” “officer,” “troop,” and “GI” create an asymmetrical labeling pattern, one that goes beyond gender marking into female gender derogation. What is additionally revealing is that the night before a major operation, when the members of Henry’s squad are particularly nervous and fearful, their usual teasing about the “French bitch” turns “suddenly obscene.” At this point their habitual verbal patterns no longer offer solace in the face of forces over which they have absolutely no control.<sup>15</sup>

Male Marines often think of themselves as brothers and refer to each other by that name. There are “man-to-man friendships” and respect for other male grunts, even North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. On the other hand, the “sister services” are characterized in several novels as having relationships based on rivalry, conflict, and stealing.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the ultimate gesture of friendship in many novels appears in the form of a male humorously offering his sister or mother as a sexual object. The drill instructor in *The Short-Timers* tells Joker, “I like you. You can come over to my house and fuck my sister,” and Joker’s ongoing negotiation with Cowboy deals with what Cowboy will take in trade from Joker for Cowboy’s sister.<sup>17</sup> In this way, female familial bonds are subverted for non-familial male relationships.

The ubiquitous use of the pseudogeneric masculine pronoun and false generic “man” warrants little discussion other than to note that even the novels that probe the philosophies of conflict remain bound by sexist constructs. For example, in *The Thirteenth Valley*, variations on “man” range from “Mangod” to “pre-men men” to “mankind” to a reference to the “Creator” as “He.” Similarly, Kitty McCulley, in *The Healer’s War*, uses the pronoun “he” in generic reference to patients at the same time that she is preoccupied with one particular case—a Vietnamese girl.<sup>18</sup> Lt. Brooks, a character in DeVecchio’s novel, sincerely ponders the causes and solutions to conflict in a long thesis on human nature. He writes about giving “the man-in-the-street, a new freedom to participate in the flow of history, in the direction of his nation’s policies, in the humanity of mankind.” Ironically, he also notes the importance of language in influencing interpersonal and international conflict, but he again uses the discriminatory—and therefore conflict generating—pronominal form: “Let us develop a new mode of thinking which is more closely tied to reality than our present mode. A mode where every man is independent because his language allows him alternatives.”<sup>19</sup> Linguists Frank and Treichler point out that such “so-called generics...frequently and inaccurately imply a white male norm; and that satisfactory stylistic alternatives, many within the prescriptive

tradition, are increasingly plentiful.”<sup>20</sup> Finding lexical or syntactical alternatives seems particularly significant when the narrative voice switches from informal to formal, as in the device of Brooks’ thesis, and when issues central to conflict are being examined.

In-country, in combat, women are associated with weakness, and female identifiers are used to condemn cowardice. The word “cherry,” used to signify a new soldier who hasn’t experienced combat, picks up on the negative charge of the slang term for virgin. In *The Short-Timers*, Rafter Man hugs his cameras as if they are babies and his inexperience is characterized by the fact that he writes a letter to his mother. Cowboy insults Joker’s prowess as a soldier by saying, “the Crotch [Marine Corps] ought to fly your mom over here so that she can go into the bush with you.”<sup>21</sup> Joker complains about the ease of his job in the rear, noting, “A high-school girl” could do it, and the South Vietnamese soldiers are referred to in derogatory feminizing terms: “An Arvin infantry platoon is about as lethal as a garden club of old ladies throwing marshmallows.”<sup>22</sup>

If women are associated with inexperience and cowardice, experience and bravery are described in hyper-masculine terms. When *The Big V*’s Henry Winsted sets a battalion record for kills on his second day in the bush, Sergeant Kell says, “Feels like you’re nine feet tall with a hard-on, don’t it Henry boy?” This is a relief to Winsted, no doubt, since he was called a “pussy” the day before when he became exhausted and frustrated on his first jungle patrol.<sup>23</sup> Tracing such usage, Mark Gerzon writes:

To lose one’s “reputation as a man among men” means to be identified as a coward or, more explicitly, as a woman....[T]o become the Soldier, the real leader for whom the armed services are so desperately advertising, the boy must reject his mother’s voice (“Don’t hit, Johnny!”), reject his (woman) teacher’s voice (“Stop that fighting, boys!”) reject his (effeminate) minister’s voice (“Thou shalt not kill!), and identify with that all-male voice of the drill sergeant (“Kill! Kill! Kill!”)....But what exactly does the epithet “woman” signify? When the Soldier blurts it out venomously, it means that he is without fear, while women are fear-ridden: that he is strong, while women are weak; that he has courage, while women are cowards.<sup>24</sup>

The American male soldier’s sense of distance from and superiority over the Vietnamese is often acknowledged, but their sense of superiority over all women (as expressed in their language) is taken as a given in the military arena. Portraying females as passive and ineffectual serves the purpose of enhancing an aggressive, soldierly mindset or evoking feelings of camaraderie. This image is carried off the battlefield when, after the war, soldiers’ stories reinforce the discriminatory pattern of gender differentiation.

# 114 VIETNAM GENERATION

The overriding irony in the use of sexist language by soldiers is that it gives them an illusion of control when, in fact, the opposite is true. Individuals responding to military domination and the war's arbitrary forces may feel empowered by language biased in their favor, but, as Gerzon concludes in his discussion of the masculine warrior image, "our language is misleading. The Soldier is not in control. On the contrary, he is controlled by his conditioning."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, many writers of Vietnam narratives precondition their representations of the war not only by employing sexist constructs, but perhaps also by relying too heavily on language and lexicon to distinguish Vietnam from other wars. Readers of the war's literature should keep a keen eye on the subtleties of its language and should not underestimate the importance of deeper linguistic characteristics. If America's perception of the war and its participants remains filtered through the same lens as wars preceding Vietnam no accurate image can be attained, no clear understanding achieved.

<sup>1</sup> DelVecchio, John. *The Thirteenth Valley* (New York: Bantam) 1982: 103.

<sup>2</sup> Cornell, George. "GI Slang in Vietnam," *Journal of American Culture* (1981 Summer): 196.

<sup>3</sup> Gilman, Owen W. Jr. "Paradoxical Paradigm of Nomenclature," in William Searle, ed., *Search and Clear* (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press) 1988: 72.

<sup>4</sup> Woolfson, Peter. "Language, Thought, and Culture," in V. Clark, et al, eds., *Language* (New York: St. Martins) 1981: 45.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 46.

<sup>6</sup> See Frank, Francine Wattman, and Paula A. Treichler. *Language, Gender, and Professional Writing* (New York: MLA) 1989: 3-25; 123-126.

<sup>7</sup> Lawson, Jacqueline E. "'Old Kids': The Adolescent Experience in the Non-Fiction Narratives of the Vietnam War," in William Searle, ed., *Search and Clear*: 29.

<sup>8</sup> Hasford, Gustav. *The Short-Timers* (New York: Bantam) 1979: 12, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 27.

<sup>10</sup> Pelfrey, William. *The Big V* (New York: Avon) 1972: 129.

<sup>11</sup> Hasford: 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann. *The Healer's War* (New York: Doubleday) 1988: 28.

<sup>15</sup> Pelfrey: 95.

<sup>16</sup> DelVecchio: 469; Pelfrey: 116.

<sup>17</sup> Hasford: 4, 20, 40, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Scarborough: 25.

<sup>19</sup> DelVecchio: 560.

<sup>20</sup> Frank and Treichler: 142.

<sup>21</sup> Hasford: 42.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 49.

<sup>23</sup> Pelfrey: 34, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Gerzon, Mark. "The Soldier," in Reese Williams, ed., *Unwinding the Vietnam War* (Seattle: Real Comet Press) 1987: 149-150.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 153.

# BACK AGAINST THE WALL: ANTI-FEMINIST BACKLASH IN VIETNAM WAR LITERATURE

LORRIE SMITH

While America's current fascination with the Vietnam war may stem partly from an earnest desire to come to terms with its effects, more pernicious cultural forces are at work as well. Most popular treatments of the war—for all their claims to “tell it like it was”—reveal more about the cultural and political climate of the 1980s than about the war itself. In a recent overview of movies and television shows about the Vietnam war, John Demeter suggests that in current depictions of the war, “the lessons remain buried, insights are narrowed,” and there is “a retreat from history to a ‘me-decade’ personalizing of the Vietnam experience.” We must therefore recognize that “what is hidden by the films is almost as striking as what is revealed.”<sup>1</sup> Most written and mass media versions of the Vietnam war repress the realities of racism within American ranks and towards the Vietnamese, objectify the Vietnamese as faceless “gooks,” omit the antiwar movement, and rationalize American atrocities. The current re-scripting of history hides those realities by foregrounding the individual (white) soldier's *angst* and setting the war in a political vacuum that ultimately inhibits a full understanding of the complicated events surrounding US intervention in Indochina. The illusion of political neutrality in most works about the war in fact masks agendas driven by the conservative politics of the eighties.

What is *not* hidden—in fact, what seems so natural in stories of war that it usually escapes notice—is the misogyny which is a mainstay of popular Vietnam war literature and film. The very *visibility* of oppression of women, both American and Vietnamese, suggests that reading and viewing consumers of the eighties not only permit but expect it.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the women's movement, an atmosphere of social and political backlash against women prevails. Its most obvious manifestations include the increasing incidence of rape, the desiccation of abortion rights, the feminization of poverty, the absence of child care support for working women, and the weakening of affirmative action and anti-discrimination legislation. Against this backdrop, the Vietnam war is being reconstructed as a site where white American manhood—figuratively as well as literally wounded during the war and assaulted by the women's movement for twenty years—can reassert its dominance in the social hierarchy. Using Vietnam as the stage and the veteran as the main character, popular discourse on the war is desperately attempting to reclaim masculine power.<sup>3</sup> Although the drama is played out in

personal terms, it is embedded in a political power struggle within the culture at large. At the heart of much Vietnam War literature is fear that the whole system of patriarchy which gives men power and gives war validity has been weakened (as indeed it has) by a two-headed monster: feminism and defeat in Vietnam. Yet few writers who reach popular audiences use these fears to question the premises and values of patriarchy itself; on the contrary, their work reinforces those premises and values with a vengeance.

Feminist scholars have begun to mine the field of Vietnam literature (blowing up as well as digging) for its insidious messages about gender roles and relations in post-war America. In this endeavor, it is important to re-historicize and re-politicize the war in relation to the women's movement. As Demeter puts it, "Historical veracity, rendered by male veterans...takes as much direction from contemporary attempts to neutralize the challenge of a social movement that questioned not only women's roles but the origins of machismo-driven policy as well."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many male writers deliberately or unconsciously link the Vietnam war and feminism (or female power and autonomy) in ways that reveal anxieties which operated during the war and which continue to influence constructions of gender. Because of their mass appeal, these representations not only reflect but feed the anti-feminist backlash of the eighties.<sup>5</sup>

## REVISIONS

Two recent commentaries on the war, from opposite ends of the political spectrum, make explicit connections between the Vietnam war and the women's movement and articulate their historical observations in terms of gender tensions in the eighties. Their phallogentric attempts not only to neutralize but actually to appropriate feminism mirror the political subtexts of popular film and literature of the war. In his study of the coming of age of the Vietnam Generation, *Touched by Fire*, John Wheeler argues for the interconnectedness of all the social movements of the sixties. However, his efforts to reinstate the Vietnam veteran as a masculine hero and to invest the war with patriotic meaning in a postfeminist world results in strained logic. In his chapter "Separations: Woman from Man," Wheeler claims that "the Vietnam war was the primary catalyst of the upheaval of the sixties." He then constructs a shaky syllogism which he never bothers to prove, even emphasizing his point in italics: "...the Vietnam War was the proximate cause of women's equality in America. This is a redemptive aspect of the war. If the war had been over quickly and been won, the women's protest movement would not have flourished. *The protracted, tangled war formed the great land bridge in American woman's Exodus.*"<sup>6</sup> Taking a typical conservative line on the war, Wheeler had previously castigated the protest movement (which he views as one symptom of the "feminization" of American culture during the Sixties) for holding back the military and extending

## BACK AGAINST THE WALL 117

the war; he then turns the war into a "redemptive" force, the cause and impetus of feminism. Wheeler's assumptions—that "women's equality" has been achieved and that the war furthered that achievement—are never proven. In the absence of reason, he appeals to emotion. Lest we take his gift for granted, he underscores its cost: "There is a certain sense in which the women's movement sped to fulfillment across the backs of the American men in Vietnam. But for our presence in battle, their protest would have died."<sup>7</sup>

Intellectual and savvy, Wheeler does not outright recuperate the old roles as, for instance, the Rambo films, *Platoon*, and many novels and memoirs attempt to do, nor does he deny the validity of feminism. Rather, he tries to coopt "liberated" women into a new alliance defined in his own terms and framed in the language of Ollie North patriotism and Harvard Business School organizational behavior theory: "The most severe anger and denial among women regarding these issues is aroused by the idea that the Vietnam veteran has been a proximate instrument of the fulfillment of their dreams. This may be misinterpreted. My hypothesis does not diminish the resourcefulness of women leaders. The important result is the signal creativity of America in fashioning a true partnership between woman and man."<sup>8</sup> Wheeler does not offer evidence for the equality of men and women except, perhaps, within his professional class. (His wife is an Episcopal minister and half of his classmates at Yale Law School were women.) The ideal dialogue he imagines would "generate a healthy readjustment of societal concepts about masculinity and femininity."<sup>9</sup> Healthy for whom? Readjusted to what?

It is tempting to say that such patronizing sophistry is a product of New Right moralism, Republican conservatism, or Hollywood sensationalism (all three conveniently embodied by Ronald Reagan, who told us in the eighties we could finally be proud of our Vietnam war and maybe even try it again in Central America). But in fact, the backlash against women is appearing in even the most traditionally enlightened liberal arenas. Robert Bly, a poet active in the antiwar movement and now in what he calls the men's movement, claims "women came out of the sixties and seventies with considerable confidence in their values, but men lack this clarity and belief." This "erosion," he asserts in aptly military language, is caused by "the attacks launched against men by the separatist part of the women's movement and the Vietnam War."<sup>10</sup> Bly dispatches feminism in a paragraph which retells an allegory about "the transformation" of the "ugly dragon man called the Lindworm" and his "bride":

After he has removed all seven skins, he lies helpless and white on the floor. She then whips him with whips dipped in lye, then washes him in milk, and finally lies down in the bed and holds him a few minutes before falling asleep. Connie Martin, the storyteller, has suggested that women in the seventies got the whipping part down well, but did not wash the man or hold him. They were too tired after the whipping to do the last two steps.<sup>11</sup>

## 118 VIETNAM GENERATION

Without commentary and without apparent awareness of the irony of his whipping metaphor (perhaps the quintessential symbol of racist and sadomasochistic violence), Bly then shifts suddenly to his main subject: "the Vietnam War and its influence on men's confidence." The bulk of his essay actually reminisces about his own "good war" and decries the betrayal of younger men sent by their elders to an immoral, unwinnable war in Indochina. One senses in Bly's lament, as in Wheeler's, nostalgia for a simpler time when fathers could teach their sons the noble military arts and "clarity and belief" resided in traditional identities: male warriors and female nurturers.

By mentioning the women's movement with a passing jibe and directing his rancor at the corrupt old men willing to have young men "pay any price" in Vietnam, Bly evades the stickier, more frightening question of how feminism contributed to a crisis of masculinity. He conveniently (and with implicit homophobia) targets supposedly hostile separatists as destructive for all men, but implies that feminism itself has fostered "considerable confidence" for all women. Both claims are inflated, and, as anyone familiar with the evolution of the women's movement knows, such a distinction is misleading and simplistic. Like Wheeler's, Bly's "argument" begs more questions than it answers: Are male and female values essentially and necessarily different? Are the differences based in biology or culture? Precisely which "truly masculine values" do men lament losing and which "female values" do women supposedly feel confident about? Exactly how do feminist separatists launch their attack on men and how do they relate to the movement at large? What precisely have women gained since the sixties? Both Wheeler, from the Right, and Bly, from the Left, attempt to tame the women's movement and inscribe it within their own agendas—reappropriating male power by rewriting history.

In the more coded ideology of literature and film, writers have used a variety of strategies for suppressing (often punishing) the feminine and elevating (often glorifying) the masculine; outright exclusion, derogatory slurs and stereotypes, scenes of violent rage and aggression. The women's movement is sometimes a clear target, sometimes a shadow hidden by the foregrounded drama of men at war. For some writers, the war is perceived as a refuge from a world where women were attacking patriarchal values and social structures, often in the context of the antiwar movement (which did, as Wheeler points out, have moral and ideological connections with the women's movement). Other writers blame women or the women's movement for the suffering men endured in Vietnam and reclaim their "clarity and belief" within a reconstructed system of patriarchal values and identities. The Vietnam war turns out to be the ideal screen on which to project anxiety about the power and position of white American manhood in the eighties.



## RETREAT

Paradoxically, the war is often portrayed simultaneously as a site of unspeakable horror and the source of orgasmic thrill, a world of hurt and a welcome refuge from a domestic front where men and women were engaged in their own painful battles. This retreat is facilitated, of course, by the fact that war is traditionally perceived (and portrayed) as an all-male domain. In *Platoon*, Oliver Stone presents Chris' apotheosis as a miracle comparable to the immaculate conception: he is "born of two fathers" after his manly baptism by fire. As Susan Jeffords points out, this is not an androgynous synthesis of masculine (Barnes) and feminine (Elias), but an appropriation of the feminine into the patriarchal codes Chris reproduces.<sup>12</sup> In the male sanctum of war, women aren't even necessary for procreation. Besides, there will always be enough "gook" women around to take care of the more pressing need for sex, to judge by the ubiquity of racist violence and rape in the literature and memoirs of the war. Though "round-eyed" women remain the fantasy objects of choice, story after story also expresses outright nostalgia for a world without bra-burning libbers, peacenik coeds, and deceiving girlfriends. (That Jane Fonda, sexpot of *Barbarella* fame, actually *followed* men to the war zone made her "treason" that much harder to take.) The difficulty so many veterans had readjusting to life at home must be attributed at least in part to the changes wrought by the women's movement while these men were in Vietnam.

In a more subtle but no less revealing manner, Philip Caputo narrates what amounts to the archetypal story of retreat, at least for those who willingly enlisted to go to war. Describing himself as "a restless boy caught between suburban boredom and rural desolation,"<sup>13</sup> his fantasy escape pits wilderness (where heroes are made) against civilization (where men are domesticated): "I would dream of that savage, heroic time and wish I had lived then, before America became a land of salesmen and shopping centers. That is what I wanted, to find in a commonplace world a chance to live heroically. Having known nothing but security, comfort, and peace, I hungered for danger, challenges, and violence."<sup>14</sup> In the early sixties, the Vietnam war offered just such an escape for young men. Caputo's parents, having worked hard to give their son the suburban comforts which caused his malaise (and perhaps remembering their own war), couldn't understand his desires: "Their vision of my future did not include uniforms and drums, but consisted of my finding a respectable job after school, marrying a respectable girl, and then settling down in a respectable suburb."<sup>15</sup>

Though he never explicitly ties his prewar *ennui* or his postwar rage to the women's movement, Caputo's narrative patterns and images link him to a long tradition in American literature in which male initiation takes place beyond the binding, civilizing influences of women. Ahab heads for sea, Huck Finn heads for Indian territory, and baby-boomers head for the quagmire. In a major break from the tradition,

## 120 VIETNAM GENERATION

however, Caputo's chronicle of war leaves him at the end with plenty of "danger, challenges, and violence," but without the counterbalancing heroism and glory his culture had promised. Neither respectable nor heroic, Caputo is left with a confused sense of what it means to be a man in postwar America. His sense of betrayal turns out to be just as emblematic as his initial retreat.

### Redoubt

The crisis in male confidence Robert Bly describes does indeed find frequent expression in literature and film of the Vietnam war. The sense of betrayal by older men is a pervasive theme, and loss of masculine power is often tied metonymically to the impotence and frustration American men felt in a guerrilla war they had no chance of winning. Losing the war, despite an unprecedented show of military might, dealt a severe blow to the military's collective male ego as well as to the youthful illusions of the men who fought. In addition, beneath much of the rage and macho posturing which runs through the war's literature lies deep anxiety about masculinity in an age when women have asserted power in previously male-dominated realms. Both the war and the women's movement gave the lie to our culture's most fundamental assumptions about the omnipotence of the American male and, by extension, the American military. Unfortunately, many writers direct their anger and resentment towards American and Vietnamese women. The more men suffer, it seems, the more women are to blame.

Consider, for instance, the work of Steve Mason, praised by both Caputo and Oliver Stone, and dubbed "Poet Laureate of the Vietnam Veterans of America." Hawking his work on the veterans' memorial circuit and sounding like a cross between Chuck Norris and Rod McKuen, Mason's lugubrious ramblings have little to offer the serious reader. His work is significant, however, because as a slick commodity of popular sentiment, it gives expression to some of our culture's more inchoate anxieties about men, women, and war. The following passage explicitly links the pain of losing a war and the pain of losing power to strong women:

All American men my age  
suffered the bad luck and ill-timing  
of drawing Vietnam and women's lib  
in the same ten years!

Sort of like getting hit by a truck  
the same day they told you  
about the stomach cancer.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, we are meant to smile wryly in sympathy, but the female reader (excluded from most war texts and assaulted by many) can only wonder if she is the truck or the tumor. Like Bly and Wheeler, Mason

# BACK AGAINST THE WALL 121

generalizes about "all American men," stating his assumptions as if they were historical fact rather than subjective feelings.

Mason's brand of misogyny is almost a cartoon. More troubling are the many writers who lay claim to serious artistic vision. Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" (originally published in the glossy men's magazine, *Esquire*) contain scenes of graphic atrocity committed by men as payback for American losses. In each case, the atrocity takes form as hostility against women. As with much of the "realistic" literature of the war which depicts brutality without providing a clear framework for judging it, the reader is not sure how to take these scenes. On the one hand, these writers tell us, war is hell, men become brutes, normal rules are suspended. On the other hand (the hand that holds the pen/penis), something beyond verisimilitude is served by a scene such as the bone-chilling gang-rape in *Paco's Story* or the slow torture of a helpless water buffalo (later dumped, symbolically, into a well) in Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story." The line between titillation and condemnation is thin, indeed. The very argot of war, as many have pointed out, suggests that military atrocity is simply an egregious expression of the misogyny and violence which define patriarchal culture. Long before the rape scene in *Paco's Story*, the grunts are described as "busting jungle and busting cherries...humping and *hauling ass* all the way."<sup>17</sup> Yet male writers appropriate this language with no apparent awareness or critique of the cultural assumptions which give it meaning.

Paco's extended flashback of the horrific rape scene is triggered by his frustration at having to listen to Cathy, "the prick tease from down the hall," taunt him by "honey-fucking the everlasting daylights out of some guy...teasing that gimp."<sup>18</sup> The omniscient, voyeuristic ghost narrator takes the reader back and forth from Cathy's room to Paco's room. The narrator builds sympathy for Paco, using imagery reminiscent of Bly's whipped Lindworm and sadistic woman, but his appeal clearly excludes the female reader:

By this time Paco's cock is iron hard and feels as big as a Coke bottle. And he's just a man like the rest of us, James, who wants to fuck away all that pain and redeem his body. By fucking he wants to ameliorate the stinging ache of those dozens and dozens of swirled-up and curled-round purple scars, looking like so many sleeping snakes and piles of ruined coins. He wants to discover a livable peace...<sup>19</sup>

This fantasy of redemptive, nurturing sex is undercut by the abrupt intrusion of memory: "He...suddenly remembers the rape of the VC girl, and the dreams he has had of the rape....He winces and squirms; his whole body jerks, but he cannot choose but remember."<sup>20</sup> This juxtaposition is significant, for Paco's flashback in effect punishes Cathy, the insensitive bitch, just as the rape had punished the Vietcong

## 122 VIETNAM GENERATION

woman, who had ambushed a “night listening post” (paralleling Paco’s present vulnerable position) “and shot two of them dead.” Present and past then collapse: while Cathy and Marty-boy “are still fucking up a storm an arm’s length away,” Paco, who “cannot help his hard-on,” remembers the rape. The reader is placed in the role of unwilling spectator and treated to the grisly details of the rape-murder. The narrator pointedly emphasizes the importance of gender difference in a long, parenthetical “what if”: “You’ve got to understand, James, that if the zip had been a man we would have punched on him, then killed him right then and there and left him for dead.”<sup>21</sup> But because “the zip” was a girl of fourteen, Gallagher “commenced to fuck her, hard, pressing his big meaty hand into the middle of her back....And when Gallagher finished, Jonesy fucked her, and when Jonesy was done, half the fucking company was standing in line and commenced to fuck her ragged.”<sup>22</sup> When the men had had their fill, “Gallagher squeezed off a round. Boom.”<sup>23</sup>

The narrator does judge this action: “We looked at her and at ourselves, drawing breath again and again, and knew that this was a moment of evil, that we would never be the same.”<sup>24</sup> But he never develops a context for understanding the genesis or implications of the evil, beyond the fact that shattered men will suffer guilt and flashbacks for the rest of their lives. The sympathetic center of the book is Paco, the ultimate veteran victim. (The flashback focuses on Gallagher and only implies Paco’s participation). It is *Paco’s* pain which matters, not the Vietnamese woman’s. The men are granted an emotional rationale for their violence (revenge); she is not. The book develops no moral or political framework within which to judge this evil. Nor is there any movement towards reconciliation. Heinemann leaves us, at the end of the chapter, with an image of hopeless division between men and women: “Cathy lounges on her bed, murmuring. Paco lies on his bed with his eyes closed, but awake, daydreaming....”<sup>25</sup>

A similar narrative ambiguity informs Tim O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story.” The story, which moves back and forth from remembered war stories to a framing narrator’s metafictional meditations on his craft, climaxes and hangs upon the resonance of one drawn-out, dirty word—“cooze”—which is applied to two different women and which appears in both the war stories and the commentaries. The word is first attributed to Rat Kiley (but spoken by the narrator), who writes a heartfelt letter to the sister of his best friend, who was killed. “So what happens?” the narrator tells us, “The dumb cooze never writes back.”<sup>26</sup> O’Brien then uses this word as the jumping-off point for a meditation on the amorality of war:

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things they have always done....As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war

# BACK AGAINST THE WALL 123

story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil. Listen to Rat Kiley. *Cooze*, he says. He does not say *bitch*. He certainly does not say *woman*, or *girl*. He says *cooze*. Then he spits and stares. He's nineteen years old—it's too much for him—so he looks at you with those big gentle killer eyes and says *cooze*, because his friend is dead, and because it's so incredibly sad and true: she never wrote back.<sup>27</sup>

One of the stories within the story ("what actually happened") centers on Rat Kiley's immediate reaction to his friend's death: he slowly and deliberately tortures a baby water buffalo to death in an act of purely gratuitous vengeance and violence. The troop's reaction echoes the epiphany of Paco's companions: "The rest of us stood in a ragged circle around the baby buffalo. For a time no one spoke. We had witnessed something essential, something brand-new and profound, a piece of the world so startling there was not yet a name for it." One of the men comments, "Well, that's Nam...Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin's real fresh and original."<sup>28</sup> As in *Paco's Story*, this evil is presented as an ineffable, inevitable given of war.

O'Brien's insight is valuable, as far as it goes: "Send guys to war, they come home talking dirty." Like Heinemann, he recognizes the ambiguity of war—its horror and its allure, its fear and its acts of courage. But why should this ambiguity lead away from judgment and toward "the æsthetic purity of absolute moral indifference?" Why should men do "the things they have always done?" And why should women be blamed? At the end of the story, the narrator aligns himself with Rat Kiley, attacking those non-initiates (always women) who would presume to find a moral and a meaning in war stories. The narrative repeats its dirty word to underscore the parallel between "sisters who never write back and people who never listen":

Now and then when I tell this story, someone will come up to me afterward and say she liked it. It's always a woman. Usually it's an older woman of kindly temperament and humane politics. She'll explain that as a rule she hates war stories, she can't understand why people want to wallow in blood and gore. But this one she liked. Sometimes, even, there are little tears. What I should do, she'll say, is put it all behind me. Find new stories to tell.

I won't say it but I'll think it.

I'll picture Rat Kiley's face, his grief, and I'll think, *You dumb cooze*.

Because she wasn't listening.<sup>29</sup>

Neither O'Brien's nor Heinemann's story is gung-ho; in fact, they are deeply moving witnesses to the pointlessness of war, the bankruptcy of traditional notions of heroism, and the continuing suffering of the Vietnam veteran. Yet the compensation for these losses is inevitably

## 124 VIETNAM GENERATION

anger directed at women, who are not only excluded from the male domain of war, but punished for their absence.

### RETURN

Before the initiation into battle (and for some hard-core POW-rescue types, after the return home), Vietnam is an imagined place where the male codes of honor and brotherhood still presumably work, where a rifle is still for killing and a gun is still for fun. But of course, as Caputo and many others found out, these codes no longer worked in the real war, and the soldier found anything but "clarity and belief" once he actually experienced combat. The clash between fantasy (nourished by John Wayne movies and JFK speeches) and reality (learned quickly once the soldier was in-country) does much to explain why so many narratives of the war are confused, paradoxical, and pathos-ridden. Unprepared by the culture to deal with the new demands made by women, and equally unprepared for the kind of war they were asked to fight, men were thrust into a void where none of the old codes of masculinity worked. Robert Bly is right to locate men's rage in a sense of betrayal. But in excoriating men like Rostow, McNamara, Rusk, and Westmoreland, he stops short of placing blame where it really belongs—not on the fathers themselves, but on the whole system of patriarchy that perpetuates the acceptability of war. At the core of all the bitter narratives of the war—from the anguished anger of Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* to the sardonic cynicism of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (an interpretation of Gustav Hasford's novel *The Short-Timers*)—is a loss of power which had been an assumed privilege of white American manhood.

That the most prevalent reaction to this loss would be backlash against women rather than an attack upon the culture that sent them to war is ironic, but not surprising. Ironic, because until his recent reconstruction in Washington and Hollywood, the veteran shared with women a place on the margins of mainstream culture. Like women, veterans after the war were both part of the system (soldiers, of course *were* the war) and excluded from it, ironically acting in history but muted, for ten years, in the official discourse about that history. Like minority women, the male veteran suffered a double objectification by the patriarchy. As a soldier, he was the visible hero and defender of the system which defined his identity and granted him power (especially if he was white). But he was also manipulated by an impersonal, omnipotent military; he was converted, by the end of basic training, into a numbered body which was "shipped," "inserted," "replaced," "greased," "zapped," "wasted," "dusted off," "fragged," "tagged," "bagged," or, if he was lucky, "discharged." (As a corollary, think of all the things verbs do to women's bodies in our language.) Once converted by the military into a fighting machine (a transformation recorded in countless war memoirs and novels), he returned to a society which rendered him mute and invisible—and hence, in the symbolic order of patriarchy, un-male—

# BACK AGAINST THE WALL 125

with its apathy, amnesia, and distaste for unhappy endings. Stereotyped as victim, scapegoat, guilty survivor, Rambo extremist, druggie, baby killer, walking time bomb, and crazy motherfucker, the veteran was for a decade the reminder of all the chaos, fear, embarrassment, and failure which we associated with the war. He was emasculated by the very system that created him and sent him to war.

The veteran's powerlessness and silence paralleled for a time the role of Other in patriarchy. A marginal position *could* serve, as it has for women and minorities, as the locus for a transformation of the dominant culture and a redefinition of identity, an entry point for a revolutionary disruption of the patriarchal values which failed him. But the cultural and political conservatism of the eighties has allowed the veteran to be reintegrated into the mainstream and has recruited him for the general assault on women. Feminism has succeeded in changing some of the more blatant expressions of sexist inequality, but the oppressive structures, language, and hierarchy of the system itself remain intact. Hence, while many popular writers and filmmakers have explored the veteran's pain and anger as dramatic material, none that I know of has gone so far as to expose the root causes of betrayal: a patriarchal system which rests upon violence and aggression, which enshrines battle as the ultimate rite of passage into manhood, and which condones the violent oppression of women, minorities, and Third World peoples. As long as we recreate Vietnam as the staging ground for war between men and women, we keep the system running.

<sup>1</sup> John Demeter, "(It's) *Good Morning Vietnam!*" *Radical America* 22:1 (Jan/Feb 88): 8.

<sup>2</sup> For a penetrating study of how violence against women in non-fiction narratives of the war is symptomatic of deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes, see Jacqueline Lawson's "'She's a Pretty Woman... for a Gook:': The Misogyny of the Vietnam War," forthcoming in *Journal of American Culture*. Also forthcoming (reprint) in Philip Jason, ed., *Landing Zones: Approaches to the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press) 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Jeffords has elaborated this process, which she calls one of debridement and resurrection, with reference to Vietnam war films in "Debriding Vietnam: The Resurrection of the White American Male," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (Fall 88).

<sup>4</sup> Demeter: 15.

<sup>5</sup> In tracing out this neutralizing project, I have chosen to focus on works produced by white men and available to a mass audience. Though black men make appearances in many films and novels, they are almost always assigned token roles to fill out the affirmative action ranks. Wallace Terry's *Bloods* (New York: Random House, 1984), a collection of oral histories by black veterans, is the only mainstream text to my knowledge where black men are central subjects. The backlash I refer to encompasses racist as well as sexist attitudes.

For the sake of my argument, I am making the somewhat misleading distinction between popular and high art. These realms are clearly intertwined, especially in this field, but I think it is fair to say that there are literary texts which do not reach a wide popular audience. Though I cannot present an argument

## 126 VIETNAM GENERATION

here, my sense is that the more popular genres of fiction, film, and oral history (all narrative) differ mainly in the degree to which they buy into the patriarchal order, while the less marketable, inherently more subversive and semiotic genres of poetry and drama are better equipped to resist the status quo. I develop these ideas in "Resistance and Revision in Poetry by Vietnam Veterans," Philip Jason, ed., *Landing Zones: Approaches to the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press) forthcoming; and "Disarming the War Story," in Owen Gilman and Lorrie Smith, eds., *America Rediscovered: Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War* (New York: Garland) forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> John Wheeler, *Touched with Fire: The Future of the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Avon) 1985: 140.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: 141.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: 145.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 148.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Bly, "The Vietnam War and Erosion of Male Confidence," in Reese Williams, ed., *Unwinding the Vietnam War: From War into Peace* (Seattle: Real Comet Press) 1987: 162.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 163.

<sup>12</sup> See Susan Jeffords, "Born of Two Fathers: Gender and Misunderstanding in *Platoon*," in William Searle, ed., *Search and Clear: Critical Responses to Selected Literature and Films of the Vietnam War* (Bowling Green: Popular Press) 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Ballantine) 1977: 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: 7.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Mason, *Warrior for Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster) 1988: 93.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Heinemann, *Paco's Story* (New York: Penguin) 1987: 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 173.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 174.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: 177.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 180.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: 181.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 184.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 185.

<sup>26</sup> Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story," *Esquire* (Oct 87): 208.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 210.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 214.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 216.



# **HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN MILITARIZED MOURNING AND CEREMONIAL VENGEANCE:**

## **TOWARD A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF COMBAT AND MANHOOD IN AMERICA, PART III**

**CHAIM F. SHATAN, M.D., C.M.**

“Do unshed tears shed blood?”

### **INTRODUCTION—TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF COMBAT AND MANHOOD IN AMERICA**

“Be this the whetstone to your sword,  
Let grief convert to anger.”<sup>1</sup>

A bumper sticker proclaims: “My dog, yes, my wife, maybe, my gun never!” This suggests that guns are as American as Mom, apple pie, the Mah-rines and John Wayne. John Wayne recruited many men—including psychoanalysts—into the Marines. We should be curious about the powerful attraction exerted by such elite groups.<sup>2</sup> What do they offer in exchange for their ability to enforce servitude?

Let’s begin by examining the connection between organized killing and male character development in the Marines.

The unhappy odysseys of Vietnam vets, American troops in the Philippine wars, and wounded soldiers on Civil War battlefields, have given me hunches about the common experience of the U.S. warrior. So have totems like the emblem of “Savage Arms,” a Springfield, Massachusetts rifle factory<sup>3</sup>. (See Figure 1) This totem, a giant target of an Indian chief, tells us that the biggest game in America was the MANHUNT. And the victim became the hunter’s totem.

The Beatles’ song “Happiness is a Warm Gun” was highly popular among American troops in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> John Lennon took the song’s title from a National Rifle Association slogan, itself adapted from the 1968 Broadway show *Peanuts*. But in the comic strip show, the slogan was “Happiness is a warm puppy.”

I have a hunch that the popularity of the song throws light on the impact of basic combat training (BCT) and counter-guerrilla training (CGT) on millions of malleable adolescents. I will analyze the effects of BCT and CGT with the following goals in mind:

1. To rearrange some central myths about manhood, such as the John Wayne image;

**FIGURE 1**



2. To examine how young men are militarized into combat teams in the Marines;
3. To explore the transmutation of "*impacted*" combat grief into ceremonial vengeance and combat; and,
4. To speculate about new masculine initiation rites and new bereavement rituals.

Let's examine how the Marines turn adolescents into combat teams, how young recruits are militarized. How do the Marines tie in with myths and rituals of male identity, with unfinished mourning, with manhood and vengeance?

## **I. THE MARINES**

In "looking for a few good men," the Marines exemplify how the military affects our national life. Marine Corps training is based on mass surrender, not on elite status. Its ceremonies are deceptions which cloak this imposture.

Let's look at six aspects of basic Marine training:

- A) Combat Training and Combat;
- B) Erotization of Violence;
- C) Bogus Manhood;
- D) Ambush and the Embrace of Death;
- E) Homecoming; and,
- F) Impacted Grief and the John Wayne Myth.

First, I'll summarize:

### **A) Basic Combat Training and Combat**

I have described this process in detail in my paper "Bogus Manhood, Bogus Honor: Surrender and Transfiguration in the U.S. Marine Corps."<sup>5</sup> The paper tries to convey the impact of a third of a century of modern, industrialized combat training, capped by counter-guerrilla warfare. It underpins my impression that enduring personality changes were wrought in millions of malleable adolescents during the Vietnam decade.

Basic combat training constitutes a massive intervention in the social process by which values are formed and transmitted. It is replete with serious, sometimes fatal, training “accidents.” Although called accidents, they are never described in the training manuals, and are usually hushed up. I suggest that they are unwritten, vitally important aspects of “training.” They are allowed to continue so that BCT will be more “realistic.”<sup>6</sup> As one paratroop sergeant said, after a training accident, “that’s what we joined for, that kind of risk.”<sup>7</sup> Or, as one general said, in supporting combat training for women, “after all, combat is a fact of life.”<sup>8</sup>

Basic Training includes:

1. De-individuation;
2. Identification with the Drill Instructor (DI);
3. The rewards of surrender; and,
4. The Military Reality Principle.

## 1. Loss of Individuality

The Marine Corps pursues three *totalitarian ideals*—uniformity, pursuit of maximum bodily fortitude—“guts”—and the rewards of surrender. Men on horseback tingle at the swarms of naked, bald bodies being examined and inoculated “on the double,” like newborns or death camp inmates—the first step in de-individuation.<sup>9</sup>

Recruits are rebuilt into fighting men by the Drill Instructor, who relentlessly “degrades, sanitizes, immunizes, clothes, equips, pains, trains, scolds, molds, and polishes” them.<sup>10</sup>

Once their identity has been smashed and recast, the masses of men move as one man; they *uniformly* perform extravagant acts of endurance on command. The swarm, the mass, has become a *Combat Unit*.

## 2. Identification with the Aggressor, the Drill Instructor<sup>11</sup> (see Chart I)

Like orchestra conductors, DIs change their fatigues many times a day to look crisp and dominating in front of the wilting, raw recruits. Manhandling by a feared, admired Super-Sergeant appeals to seventeen-year-olds who are having trouble with adult male identity.<sup>12</sup> The tyranny and cruelty of basic training *transfigure* personality.<sup>13</sup> Young men identify with the aggressors who train them, and surrender their former civilian identity. They emerge as champions of a new *military* identity, *reborn in uniform*. The world of *military reality* has replaced civilian reality. The military code of conduct, with its rigid standards, takes the place of everyday personal ties and civilian rights.

## 3. The Rewards of Surrender

The DI provides the classic sadistic dividend—the rewards of surrender. In return for total submission, the warriors earn the right—the duty—to manhandle the “enemy” just as they themselves are manhandled in training.<sup>14</sup> Destruction and killing are legitimated as “combat.”

# 130 VIETNAM GENERATION

## CHART I.

### IDENTIFICATION WITH THE AGGRESSOR IN VIETNAM COMBAT TRAINING

OFFICER :	TRAINEE ::	GI :	"GOOK"
Basic Combat Training	<i>transfiguration of personality</i>	combat zone	Counter guerrilla Warfare

In Basic Comat Training, the Officer (aggressor) treats ( :) the Trainee in the same way in which he wants ( :: ) the GI, in the combat zone, to treat ( :) the "Gook." The resultant "transfiguration of personality" prepares the future soldier for Counter guerrilla Warfare.

Authoritarian reflexes, peer pressure, and obedience to authority replace doubt. Responsibility is spread up and down the Chain of Command. This is a handy institutional arrangement for *relieving superego scruples*. Officers act like priests, assigning guilt or absolution. The goal is to create soldiers with little empathy, quick to violence, and under constant pressure to act.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The Military Reality Principle

As personality is reintegrated, recruits evolve a new "*combat personality*."<sup>16</sup> A combat personality judges events through the *military reality principle* with its new styles of affect, cognition and action. The military reality principle embodies the siege mentality and the paranoid position of combat: permanent hypervigilance, reflex obedience, and instant tactical response—to any threat, real or imagined. Combat vets walk on the inside of a park path "not to be seen.... Any man who's been on patrol knows that."<sup>17</sup> This is how soldiers learn to survive when reality is linked with death.

As for *affect*, Basic Training discourages tenderness and grief,<sup>18</sup> for these feelings promote neither a unit's survival, nor its fighting strength.<sup>19</sup> The impact of this aspect of combat training on relations between men and women brings us to sexuality and combat training, to the *erotization of violence*.

#### **B) Erotization of Violence**

The harassed troops become a *combat unit*—a group with an unstable group superego which succumbs to its dreaded, admired Super-Sergeant, and is ready for instant violence. Like a cult, a combat unit has primitive beliefs and rewards. The leader's promise is viewed as magical, especially if he has been properly "blooded" in Vietnam. He is believed to be immune to destruction, giving his men a charmed life, as well as protection against retaliation and against superego pressures.

The attractiveness and softness of women are risky to the military. Tender feelings are the most anti-martial of sentiments: they may

disrupt combat training and combat. To harness youthful male sexuality for killing, the “John Wayne” mystique mandates *total separation from women* for six to ten weeks. On this glory road, the man waves goodbye to his girlfriend, while kissing his horse. He needs his horse for combat, but not his girl.

When killing is legitimated, sexual imagery becomes sadistic and pornographic. One vet said: “Combat feels like subjugating women. Combat feels like you’re fucking like gangbusters, macho-mean, like you’re punishing the woman—or the enemy.”<sup>20</sup> A Navy vet said: “A ship is at a big disadvantage against a shore battery. When seen from shore, a ship sticks out like a virgin in a whorehouse.”<sup>21</sup> And another vet said: “I’d like to love the way I learned to hate in the ‘Nam. But love’s a pretty heavy word.”<sup>22</sup>

Automatic weapons symbolize both merciless conquest and the squandering of virility in masturbatory fashion. Eroticism and destruction are blended in an orgasmic thrill of violence. “Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.” (Apocryphal saying attributed to Henry Kissinger).

The dynamic energy of sex is linked to the Pentagon ideal—addiction to violence, killing and combat. *Sexual pleasure* at owning a weapon is joined with its preternatural destructiveness. During weapons training, the DI points to his M-16 and then to his genitals, and chants: “This is your rifle, this is your gun. One is for killing, one is for fun.” This becomes a refrain, like the taunting of bayonet practice. A bedtime ritual is praying “God bless the Marines. God bless my sergeant. Pray for war,” then sleeping with your rifle. All this was echoed in the Beatles’ song, “Happiness is a Warm Gun.”<sup>23</sup>

Philip Caputo, in his novel *Indian Country*, presents an eroticized image of a rifle: “To stifle his longing to rush out and touch her,...he fondled the carbine, its steel so cold and stern, and formed a mental blueprint of its inner parts....”<sup>24</sup>

Marines are trained to be “*fag-baiters*.” After ten weeks without women, they regard women—especially foreign women—as vessels for their lust. Affection towards women imperils obedience and “discipline.” Only discipline earns the Commander’s praise. Only obedience turns you into his power appendages, manipulated by him and sharing morsels of his might—sharing in that magical thrill of destructive power over life and death which relieves fear.

Some instances of eroticized violence in Vietnam were:

- a) Helicopter door gunners with erections while firing;<sup>25</sup>
- b) Rangers on ambush ejaculating at the sight of an enemy “exploding;”
- c) Paratroopers ejaculating while jumping;<sup>26</sup>
- d) Exploding detonation caps inside the genitals of captured North Vietnamese Army nurses; and,
- e) Stuffing enemy genitals in the mouths of dead Americans or dead Vietnamese.

# 132 VIETNAM GENERATION

## Specific Vietnam Examples

### I. "Albany George"

After years of high altitude bombing, "Albany George" was switched to close ground support. His initial mission involved machine gunning "gooks" and seeing his targets. The first "gook" got away after George's bullets kicked up some sand around his feet. The second "gook" was wounded, and the third blew up. George was horrified to find that he had developed an erection. He went to his flight surgeon to resign his commission. The flight surgeon said his reaction was very common, and he'd get used to it. But George argued that eroticized killing was foreign to his religious upbringing, and resigned his commission.<sup>27</sup>

### II. "Frank"

"Frank" got an exalted feeling of fearlessness and almightiness from using his M-60 machine gun. He felt like a "real man" when "parts of bodies flew all over the place." The excitement felt like ejaculation. His greatest thrill came from having intercourse while firing bursts from his machine gun.<sup>28</sup>

## Here are Three World War II Examples:

I. The pilot who dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima named the plane after his mother, "Enola Gay." Momma, like a gigantic rifle, gave birth to an immensely destructive bullet. The bomb was called "Big Boy." The bomb dropped on Nagasaki was called "Fat Man."

II. "An A-bomb...dropped on...Bikini" was wrapped in the famous black lace photo pin-up of "The Great American Love Goddess," Rita Hayworth.<sup>29</sup>

III. Tailgunners on World War II bombers often developed erections while firing.<sup>30</sup>

## **C) Bogus Manhood**

Separation from women helps channel the unfocused sexuality of young recruits into *bogus group manhood*, ready for split-second violence without compassion. "Shoot first and investigate afterwards." You feel big and strong at the expense of the defeated. The "potency" is bogus: it depends on subjugating the victim. The "product" is bogus: savage strings of Vietnamese ears are as dehumanized as lampshades made of Jewish skin. Vietnam films like *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Basic Training*<sup>31</sup> show that the central ingredients of bogus manhood entail readiness to act, with instant violence and without compunction. These ingredients facilitate the "natural dominance of the psychopath" in modern warfare.<sup>32</sup>

Still widely used in schools is that classic of pap, *Through Basic Training with Walter Young*—a book designed to "get them before they are twelve."<sup>33</sup> It focuses on "building men" through humiliation, public degradation and submission. Then, as one raw recruit said: "I was chewed up by the Vietnam war machine and spit out unfeeling to become the finger that pulled the trigger." Like Custer and John Wayne, these men lost touch with their tenderness and their ability to mourn.

# HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN 133

Informal Nazi-style trappings reached a peak of death worship among crack killer squads who called themselves "Bloodhounds," "White Warriors," "Wolves," "Skulls," or "Dealers of Death." They wore SS Death's Head regalia, and left calling cards with the Ace of Spades or the Skull and Crossbones after their "visits." One Ranger group's motto was: "If you kill for money you're a mercenary, if you kill for fun you're a sadist, if you kill for both you're a Ranger!"<sup>34</sup> And "Standing on Other Men's Graves" gave the illusion of omnipotent power over death, of *symbolic immortality*.<sup>35</sup> No wonder one vet wrote:

Yea as I walk through the valley of death  
I shall fear no evil  
For the valleys are gone  
And only death awaits

And I am the evil<sup>36</sup>

## D) Ambush and the Embrace of Death

The average Vietnam ambush, lasting 15-30 seconds, conveys the true psychotic reality. The darkness and silence are annihilated by foreboding, by flashes of light, explosions, floods of startled and startling sensations, spasms of fear, and feverish sweating while shivering and cold to the bone. Something is beating a deafening rhythm in the jungle: you realize that it is your own heart pulsating against your rib cage. "Time is compacted" and refuses to move on. There is no past, and no future. Each second feels like a separate parcel of time. In that moment, the membrane of *old* reality is torn asunder, leaving no boundaries and no guideposts. Now it is *you* who feel unreal. Death is the reality now. Death comes from everywhere and nowhere. To live, you must learn to embrace the everpresent nature of death by wrapping it in yourself like a new "introject," a reservoir of evil and destructiveness. Only then can inner and outer reality feel at one again. Otherwise, you are maladapted to the vast web of suffering in which you are enmeshed. Otherwise, you will succumb to sensory dislocation, death or mutilation.

All that in 15 seconds....<sup>37</sup>

## E) Homecoming: "Back Through the Membrane of Reality"

With brutal suddenness, Vietnam warriors were rotated home over a one to three day period, rarely with buddies, creating not only jet lag, but "time lag." After this bludgeoning shock, it is hard for the veteran to recapture his repressed and regressed civilian identity, and to return to his eclipsed civilian reality principle. Through an inner struggle, he feels the acute personal loss of his *sympiotic combat unit*, while remaining attached to bogus manhood, the "tough guy" mythos of the warrior cult. Meanwhile, there is no one to talk to, no kindness or gentleness, no respect. There is also guilt feeling about the distress of family members who don't know what happened to him, but only that he seems somehow

## 134 VIETNAM GENERATION

permanently changed. He feels ashamed over upsetting them and they feel afraid of him.<sup>38</sup>

In the present, both military and civilian time frames exists *at once* [see Chart II], like a double exposure.<sup>39</sup> I call this simultaneous existence in both time frames "*perceptual dissonance*." A Vietnam veteran called it "living in a split time zone." After the initial triumph of survival is over, a wide spectrum of post-combat phenomena may emerge. Called "symptoms," this array includes: restlessness, guilt feelings, indiscriminate rage, startle reactions, "flashbacks," sensory disorientation, combat nightmares, and anguished doubts about regaining feelings of love and trust for others.

How long will it last? Do you have to grow "scar tissue" to get over it? Some take years, some bleed indefinitely. There's no answer, certainly not right after homecoming.

"Flashback," or partial dissociation, is the most dramatic of post-military phenomena. Niederland has called it "hypermnesia," the polar opposite of amnesia<sup>40</sup>.

I speculate that flashback is related to an alarm reaction on the part of the neuro-endocrine system, followed by long-term autonomic and neuro-endocrine adaptation to combat stress. It would fall within the category of Mardi Horowitz's "disorders of the stress response."<sup>41</sup> Standing with one's back to the wall is a portable aspect of siege mentality.

### "Highway One:" An Extreme Case of Flashback.

A truck driver drove Vietnam's Highway One "like a bat out of hell" for a year. Seven years later, he became a copper mine truck driver. The one-lane, snaking dirt road felt like Highway One. Soon, he began to see a split image in his rearview mirror: on one side, Highway One, on the other, the copper mine road. He knew that Highway One was in the past, yet he was panic-stricken and shaking at the end of each day from his struggle to avoid a crash. His new job recapitulated his military job, and carried him back to Vietnam just as surely as seeing NVA troops might have.<sup>42</sup> We do not know whether living in a split time zone led him to accept this job.

"Coming home, there was no homecoming."

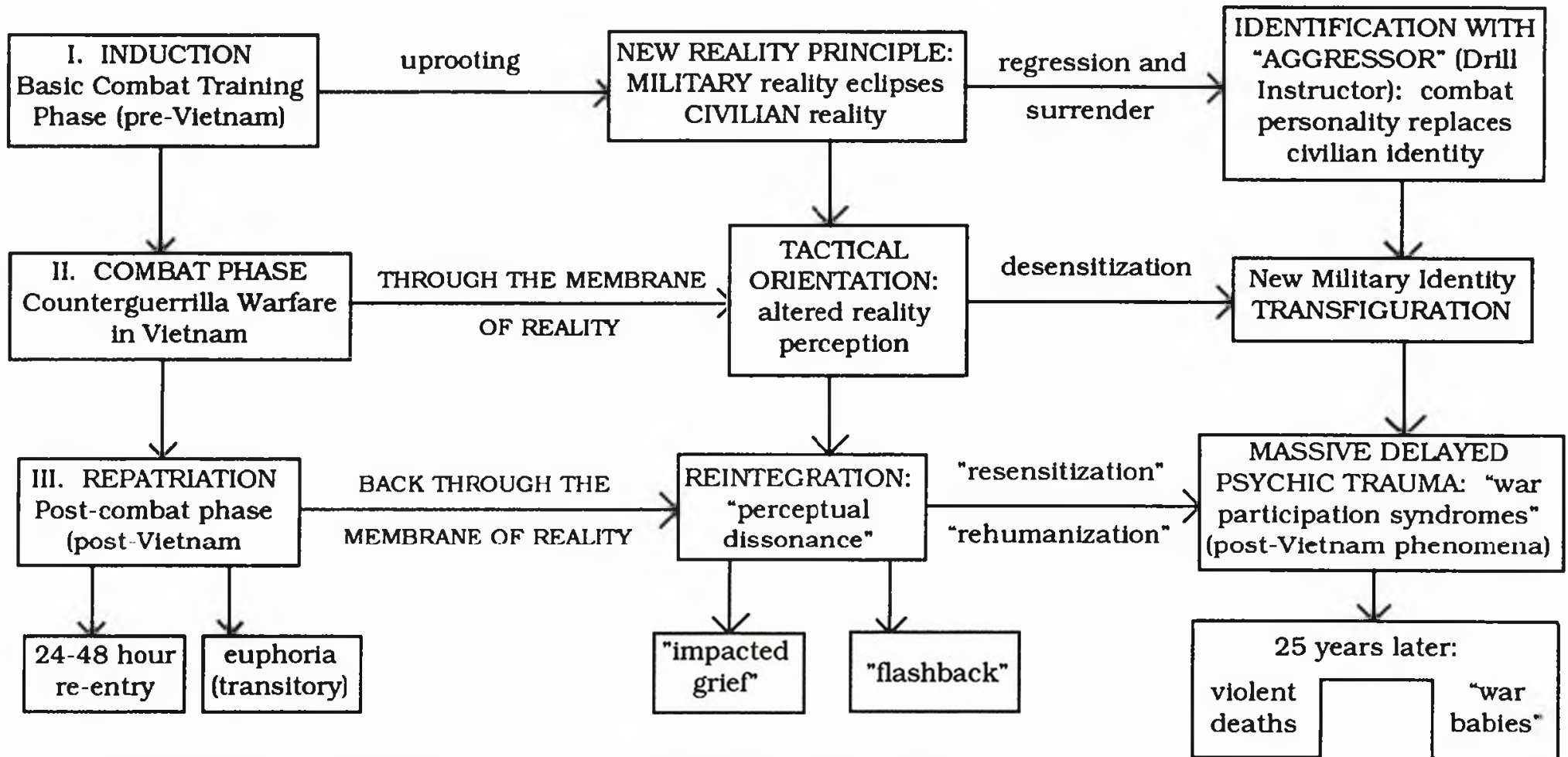
### **F) Impacted Grief and Bogus Manhood: The John Wayne Myth**

In war, destruction and killing relieve the tensions of the loss of buddies and of the paranoid combat stance. Civilian life demands that these seething impulses be restrained and sealed over. Yet the need to grieve collides with the terror of "appearing weak." This conflict threatens the enduring military identity, yet presses constantly for utterance. Such a clash leads to unfinished or "*impacted grief*" in which an encapsulated, neverending past robs the present of meaning. Unconsummated or impacted grief may prevent intimacy, and can produce other "symptoms" and "syndromes."



## CHART II. THROUGH THE MEMBRANE OF REALITY

**PHASES OF TRANSFIGURATION AND REINTEGRATION BEFORE (I), DURING (II), AND AFTER (III) COMBAT.**



I am grateful to Steve Seid, Vietnam veteran, for his help in revising this chart.

# 136 VIETNAM GENERATION

When grief becomes impacted, the soldier's sorrow is unspent, the grief of his wounds is untold, his guilt is unexpiated. If this process does not lead to depression or flashback, its affective energy can still be *militarized* and turned into *addiction to combat*.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the erotization of the combat unit can be converted back into combat or *combat surrogates*. These surrogates include mercenary enlistments, re-enlistment ("re-upping"), police work, security work, or compulsive or fugue-like re-enactments of combat situations.<sup>44</sup>

After discharge, the vet still clings to his conviction that the "heroic" John Wayne image will see him through, that its bogus military "glory" will maintain his personality, and that *ancestor worship* will be life sustaining. A secret hope remains that the counterfeit ideal of warrior manhood can be embraced once more. The symbolic immortality of the undying combat unit asserts the triumph over death of "all who have gone before and all who will come after."<sup>45</sup>

Despite the Marine mythos, *loss and change*—the two faces of bereavement—remain core experiences which demand consummation and resolution. Combat training and combat may suppress—but not eradicate—human mourning. This brings us to the relationship between grief, myths of manhood, and vengeance.

## II. MANHOOD AND VENGEANCE—A Hypothesis

"Dispute it as a man" or  
"Feel it as a man"?<sup>46</sup>

Since antiquity, Western male childrearing has embodied ideals of *hypermasculinity*. While women are viewed as carriers of emotion, men have been programmed to detach themselves from emotional expression: dependency, nurturing and caregiving are defined as the province of *women* and children. The warrior ideal is the extreme. To promote this ideal, men are reared to progressively separate themselves from sentiments of attachment and loss, leaving the language of affect, ritual and expressive movement to women. Male grief is "hardened" into ceremonial vengeance: scapegoating supplants mourning and unshed tears shed blood.

Grief and intimacy, dependency and mourning—bonds and broken bonds—are viewed as unmanly. They interfere with combat effectiveness. To limit the growth of tender bonds, *male character development is crystallized around active aggression, around aggressive impulses and aggressive behavior*.

The breaking of pair-bonds is the central issue in bereavement.<sup>47</sup> As we have seen, modern combat training assiduously discourages intimate attachments. Since love may end in broken bonds, in loss and grief, "trainers" fear that the death of a beloved buddy will render a soldier useless for combat.<sup>48</sup> Instead, training fosters "antigrief"—soldiers are absorbed into the corporate entity of the immortal legion<sup>49</sup>. This meta-organism concentrates on maintaining the symbiotic "virility" and

collective survival of the combat unit, transcending the existence of its individual members.

Let's examine three aspects of this masculine evolution:

- A) The subversion of the adolescent superego;
- B) Rebirth in uniform; and,
- C) Militarized Grief.

## **A) Subversion of the Superego**

The armed forces know why combat training must begin with early uprooting from home and separation from women. The age of seventeen, eighteen, or nineteen provides the last best chance to effectively reorganize aggressive impulses in young men. The fluidity of adolescent superego development permits personal boundaries to dissolve, *subverting one of civilization's foremost achievements, the superego*. It is replaced by *automatic obedience* to authority instead, by identification with the aggressor—the DI—and with the Corps.<sup>50</sup> The code of conduct of the Corps, with its own standards and its own ideals, replaces civilian inner direction.

## **B) Rebirth in Uniform, the Core of the Warrior Ideal**

In the militarized personality, aggression diverts loss and mourning into *ceremonial vengeance*. Scapegoating replaces grief, *unshed tears shed blood*. Men focus on *rebirth in uniform*—on the trading floor, the assembly line, or the Army. A *uniform* is the emblem of a *single* function, obedience or destructiveness. Reincarnation as legendary warriors *promises collective rebirth* to all who have died for the Corps. Command over the death of others asserts that *sowing* death can *triumph* over change and death, and provide *symbolic immortality*.<sup>51</sup> It erases "*feminine*" feelings of *vulnerability* aroused by the death of comrades, and replaces those feelings with worship of the changeless and uniform legion.

The DI's insults are a message that *loving, caring feelings endanger "virility"*—a message that affection transforms men into women or gays, objects of contempt: "ladies," "pansies," "fags," "fairies," "slits," "girls," "limp dicks."

Or: "If you don't stop giggling, bending your wrists, and blowing each other, I'll make you wear panties, bras, and Kotex under your uniforms."<sup>52</sup>

Such insults redirect emotional and erotic attachments away from women, especially mothers—away from Mah-Mah, to the Mah-rine Corps, a substitute *corporate entity* (see Ma Bell, etc.). Men are expected to cradle their *weapons* in their arms, rather than embracing their babies or their loved ones.

## **C) Militarized Grief and Ceremonial Vengeance**

Militarized grief and ceremonial vengeance are widespread in war and peace. There are many literary, historical and clinical records of militarized mourning, both civilian and military. To be the bearer of bad news has been a thankless task since history began. I shall give

## 138 VIETNAM GENERATION

examples of militarized mourning and ceremonial vengeance from combat, literature and civilian life.

1. The My Lai massacre is a byword, a paradigm of war atrocity. It illustrates militarized mourning in wartime.<sup>53</sup> It began when Lt. Calley's commander, Capt. Medina, was eulogizing a beloved sergeant killed in ambush. Suddenly, Medina turned the memorial into a vengeance-ridden pep talk and a call to arms.<sup>54</sup> Charlie Company, smarting from collective wounds, became galvanized for the slaughter of the innocents—the My Lai massacre. In an act of militarized grief and symbolic repair, its unshed tears shed blood. Women, children, old men and livestock were blamed for the death of comrades.<sup>55</sup> All of them became dehumanized as “gooks” and were massacred by the surviving soldiers. These combat survivors denied their own mortality by dealing death. Such denial of death is celebrated in Western literary epics since the *Iliad*.

2. In literature, ceremonial vengeance is a perversion of mourning. The *messenger of grief* may be scapegoated, even killed for bringing evil tidings.<sup>56</sup> Shakespeare and the 19th century Russian cavalryman and writer, Lermontov, offer vivid images of mourning transmuted into ceremonial vengeance

a) Shakespeare's scapegoats—*Macbeth*

“Dispute it like a man”  
or “Feel it as a man”?

Many of Shakespeare's heralds of doom fear for their safety, if not their lives. *Macbeth* provides a notable exception in the character of Macduff. Macduff leads the plan to unseat the assassin, Macbeth. When Macduff leaves Scotland to join the opposition in exile, Macbeth exterminates his entire family. When Macduff learns this, he suffers a paroxysms of grief. He cries out in agony, “All my pretty ones? did you say all?”

The lords and cohorts urge him to “dispute it as a man.”<sup>57</sup>  
But Macduff responds:

I shall do so:  
But *I must also feel* it as a man:  
I cannot but remember such things were  
[That] were most precious to me.<sup>58</sup>

Crown Prince Malcolm is eager to put the bereaved and weeping Macduff into a fighting mood. He spurs him on to:

*Make us med'cines of our great revenge,  
To cure this deadly grief....*<sup>59</sup>

Macduff agrees that he will no longer “*play the woman with mine eyes,*”<sup>60</sup> but will turn his grief into “valor against the tyrant.” “This time goes *manly,*”<sup>61</sup> exults Malcolm.

“Revenge to cure this deadly grief” wins out so that Macduff now “disputes it as a man.” This transition from “feeling it as a man” turns grief outward as combat. As Malcolm says: “Be this the whetstone to your sword; let grief convert to anger...blunt not the heart, enrage it.” By slaying the enemy, he inflicts grief on others, and denies the inevitability of mortality and bereavement.

However, Macduff also consummates his grief personally, as part of his own being and purpose. And so, the messenger goes unharmed, despite his terrible burden. In fact, surgeons tend his wounds. Is it possible that Macduff requires no scapegoat because he allows his bereavement full expression?

Yet in this Renaissance play, there is still a conflict. Only minutes before he calls tears feminine, Prince Malcolm urges Macduff to “Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it break.”

Elsewhere, Macbeth asks his aide, Seton, “What was that sound?” The reply, “It was the cry of *women*” is taken as sufficient.<sup>62</sup> For the militarized Macbeth, the cry of women is synonymous with the wail of mourning. What has become of “feeling it as a man” for Macbeth? Without feeling, he is dehumanized and descends into animality.

King Lear, wandering alone on the heath, meets the blinded Duke of Gloucester. Lear cries out to him, “You see how this world goes?” And Gloucester—blind—rejoins, “I see it—*feelingly.*”<sup>63</sup>

## b) Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* (1840)<sup>64</sup>—Anti-Grief

In *A Hero of Our Time*, Lermontov—a Tsarist officer—describes a deep and loving friendship between two soldiers—a young cavalryman and an old captain. Their perfunctory reunion, years after their separation, pains the captain. As the young soldier gallops off, he throws his literary notebooks to the old soldier, who busies himself with his horse to avoid tearful farewells. But the narrator sees that the old officer’s eyes are moist and asks him, “What will you do with the notebooks?” The captain’s voice breaks as he chokes back his tears and replies gruffly, “Oh, perhaps I’ll use the paper from the notebooks to stuff cartridges.” *He aborts his grief by converting his friend’s intimate farewell gift into a weapon of war.* Despite his pervasive sorrow, he copes with his “unmanly weakness” by falling back on vengeful antigrief, on the military mode of fighting off loss and injury. Like John Wayne, he, too, tends to his horse, and represses his tender—his so called “womanly”—feelings.

c) Here's a case of militarized mourning in civilian life: shrines and cartridge cases:

A 23-year-old man, who lost his father as a boy, creates a new home for his family. In three years, his mother lies dead from cancer. He joins a rifle club. After target practice, he feels rejuvenated, and lovingly stores his weapons in his mother's room. He is unaware that, except for target practice, all his warlike actions—tenderly dismantling, cleaning and oiling his guns—take place in the repository once used by the dead—her room. The room is arranged like a shrine, spare and dark, devoid of the furnishings of everyday life.

He denies all grief for his mother, but “suddenly” becomes a racist—ready to drive the rising flood of blacks and Hispanics out of his city. In analysis, he finds that he unconsciously equates these “foreign elements” with the surging alien feelings of grief which he is struggling to control. He yearns to inflict the wounds of grief on symbolic others rather than experience them himself.

His shrine holds empty ammunition canisters and leather cartridge cases—“just the right size” to store his dead parents' papers: birth, marriage and burial records, love letters, rent receipts, doctors' bills yellow with age, and old photos. These are his holy writ, scrolls and icons—all contained in cartridge cases and canisters.

Only when he works through this material in therapy does he recognize that his military ceremonials serve to fight off his mourning for and hatred of the parents who abandoned him through death. Only then is he able to excavate his frozen, “impacted” grief and to permit his life to go forward. Aware of the tie between shooting and bereavement, he loses all interest in guns, and stops scapegoating minorities. He becomes pacific, even compassionate.

### **III. DISCUSSION: GRIEF, “MILITARIZED MOURNING,” AND MANHOOD**

Human grief wears many mantles: among these are

- A) “Normal” grief;
- B) “Militarized Mourning;” and,
- C) Symbolic Wounds.

#### **A) “Normal” Grief**

At one time, mourners used to sob, beat their chests, wring their hands, tear their hair, rip their clothes, and even rend their flesh—age-old bereavement behavior. However, the affective aspects of the grief reaction have become largely internalized, especially in men. Conflicts

about grief, about separation or parting from the lost person or lost ideal, take place deep within the psyche. "Normally," the bereaved do not hit out.

After the Exodus, Moses commanded the Israelites to adopt new bereavement rituals. One striking rule forbade self-inflicted *wounds* when mourning the dead. Instead of self-mutilation, the bereaved were told to rend their garments<sup>65</sup>—a *symbolic* substitute for the psychic damage of bereavement.

Such a radical change in emotional expression, in affecto-motor behavior—from concrete to abstract *substitute activity*—must entail new and greater *internalization* of the conflicts aroused in all of us by the death of near ones. We are entitled to assume that Moses had to enunciate this new commandment because self-mutilation was standard in historically earlier bereavement practices.

A century ago, Sioux women would often chop off a finger joint after a close male relative was killed in battle.<sup>66</sup> (Contemporary anthropological evidence informs us of cultures which still observe such self-mutilation rites, as in New Guinea.)

"The work of grief" consummates this newly internalized process. But in *pathological* grief, tearing of the flesh may erupt from the unconscious. A young sculptor "accidentally" severed part of his thumb while welding his first sculpture after his father's death from cancer.<sup>67</sup>

In *melancholia* (or pathological grief), there is an *excessive* internalization of the real or symbolic loss. This prevents recovery from, or adaptation to, the wounds of grief.<sup>68</sup>

## **B) "Militarized Mourning"**

Militarized mourning (MM) is one form of pathological grief. It may develop after the fading of the initial triumph at living when so many have died. It *externalizes* the vast emotions of survival guilt, shame and aggression felt towards the dead for "abandoning" the living, and towards the living for surviving.<sup>69</sup> After massive *manmade* disaster, such guilt and rage may be deflected and redirected, *allegedly* to "honor" the "sacred" dead. The targets of this ceremonial vengeance are *substitutes* for the departed, scapegoats for the *damage* done to the group. What is the damage in need of repair? It is the breaking of an attachment or of a social bond, a wound to the body politic, losing a war, the wiping out of a family or military group.

The survivor may feel tortured by his failure to prevent all those deaths—whether of 60,000 or 6 million. He may identify himself with the destroyers of the deceased, as Sgt. Dwight Johnson did.<sup>70</sup> He may, at worst, believe that he himself was one of the destroyers, whether of his own comrades in battle, of the "enemy," or of other inmates in the KZ camps. Of course, much of this is repressed.

In militarized manhood, Macduff's ideal of "feeling it as a man" is replaced by a caricature of male character development, *built upon legitimized violence*. This caricature separates intimacy from male

## 142 VIETNAM GENERATION

identity. It plays down the “soft” emotions of love, lament and support. It emphasizes “hard” attitudes: duty, obedience, fighting and winning. In short, character and adaptive lifestyle are permanently changed in both war and peace. A significant feature of this change is the inability to grieve completely.

Reunions of elite combat groups have been flourishing. They go beyond swapping war stories. Often, they stage realistic combat engagements, old and new. They draw upon the largest number of unemployed combat veterans since the U.S. Civil War. Recruiting of mercenaries is routine at these get-togethers—for Angola and Northern Ireland and Nicaragua, for El Salvador and, formerly, for Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). One reunion sponsor is *Soldier of Fortune*, the disturbingly successful magazine for mercenaries.<sup>71</sup> Publisher Major Brown, U.S. Army (Ret.) was Commandant of the Army Disciplinary Barracks in Milwaukee, Wisconsin early in the Vietnam war.

Of course, I wonder about the “Delta Group” which finances *Soldier of Fortune: The Journal for Professional Adventurers*. But more significant is its blossoming circulation. As a thin quarterly it began with about 15,000 copies. By the second year it doubled in size, came out eight times a year and sold 125,000 copies per issue. As a monthly, it sponsors an annual convention, revels in destruction, links pornography with Nazi symbolism and violence, and used to openly recruit for the old Rhodesian Army on its back cover.

Should we be on the lookout for the development and growth of such social groups which practice militarized mourning? Should these phenomena be viewed as early warning signals, or beacons, forecasting the initiation or resumption of calls for violence, or for combat, perhaps even of calls for authoritarianism and war?

### C) Symbolic Wounds, Symbolic Losses

Should we be on the lookout for *people who cannot mourn fully*? They remain dependent upon, and *attached to*, the lost object or lost cause.<sup>72</sup> Inability to confront the torment and suffering of bereavement is not limited to any clinical category. Rosenbaum reported a patient who showed “no...grief or mourning when faced with an important loss, but rather developed a paranoid state”<sup>73</sup>—the type of paranoid transformation at the core of militarized mourning.

Since we are symbol-making animals, perhaps the most fundamental losses are “symbolic” wounds. Many veterans felt that their belief in the value system of the United States had been wounded. Others experienced defeat as serious blows to their manhood, their honor, and their competitive strivings.

Given the right conditions, can processes akin to militarized mourning occur on a group or national scale? Can the loss of territory (the Rhineland, Danzig), the loss of empire or the loss of six million be perceived as symbolic traumata which stimulate large scale vendettas?<sup>74</sup> This would parallel the experience well known to combat soldiers—that



often only combat relieves their tension, their depression, their loss, their need to “pay their dues” by getting hurt, their need to strike out at others—or at themselves.<sup>75</sup> The combat response persists *after* the combat setting no longer exists externally: it persists because alternative ways of purging these emotional tensions are not available, so that the psychotic experience of combat remains internalized.<sup>76</sup>

I have described how BCT and CGT *discourage* compassion and grief. Instead they promote a paranoid posture like that of Rosenbaum’s patient, with its vengeful hunt for targets, external or internal.<sup>77</sup>

*Meanwhile*, public and private ceremonials are still needed to facilitate the *closing* of communal ranks, the *healing* of the wounds of grief. The atrophy of such psychosocial customs prevents groups and nations from dealing with these essentials.

Three hundred and fifty years ago, Sir Francis Bacon, Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth I, proposed specific discharge rituals for disbanded armies, rituals to prevent demobilized soldiers from creating civil strife.<sup>78</sup> “A few remembrances and some hospitals for maimed soldiers” were, he asserted, insufficient. He recommended that European rulers resurrect the ancient Roman pageants, “the triumphs, the great laudatives and donatives.”<sup>79</sup> After Vietnam, only the returned prisoners-of-war, and some missing-in-action whose remains were recovered, received comparable public acknowledgment.

Vietnam veterans were forced to create their own anti-heroic war memorial in Washington, D.C. They bore the entire cost. The U.S. government gave no funds. For thousands of veterans and their families, the unveiling of this monument became their long-delayed homecoming—a profoundly therapeutic event. The President of the United States was conspicuously absent from Washington throughout the entire dedication.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS—AMERICA IMAGINES MANHOOD: MILITARIZED MOURNING, CEREMONIAL VENGEANCE, AND COMING OF AGE AS A MAN

“And then there’s that whole *mourning strain*...  
In America we rarely talk about World War II.  
They [the Russians] talk about that war as if it  
happened yesterday.”

Larry Rivers,<sup>80</sup> 1977

### A) Bogus Manhood and Militarized Mourning—The John Wayne Myth

Militarized mourning is a *substitute emotional satisfaction* or compromise formation, rooted in the *denial* of grief. It is not a sublimation. At its peak, the individual or the collective can feel relief, transports of joy, intoxication, even almightiness. However, as psychoanalysts know, substitutions can bring only temporary comfort from lament denied. Such “pay as you go” security must be repeated and expanded to sustain the illusions which fill the gap and provide relief. It

## 144 VIETNAM GENERATION

does not heal the narcissistic wounds of grief, old or new, any more than pathological depression heals wounds. "Only the mourning for what was missed, *missed at the crucial time*, can lead to real healing."<sup>81</sup>

What *was* missed at the crucial time? Nurturing and thoughtfulness, vulnerability and compassion, are shunted aside and atrophy. They are replaced by the development of a parody of toughness, molded into the "power-junkie" of bogus manhood. Violence and power are maximized while affection and grief are soft-pedalled. Unfinished or impacted grief turns into revenge.<sup>82</sup> In a nutshell, soldiers coming out of "Today's Action Army" have trouble with grief and intimacy due to:

1. De-individuation and identification with the DI (the aggressor);
2. The rewards of surrender;
3. The legitimation and erotization of violence;
4. Separation from women;
5. The paranoid posture of combat; and,
6. The mystique of ancestor worship.

These processes percolate into society at large and promote the militarization of character. One example of *militarization of feeling* is found in civilian life when a man compliments a woman with what he feels is the highest accolade: "You think like a man." By this he means the ability to absorb statistics, numbers, data and body counts without emotion, to deal only with "the facts." Such men have been socialized to avoid the fact of emotion.<sup>83</sup>

### **B) Alternative Models of Male Emotionality—From "Any Boy Can Win" to "Any Kid Can Play"**

Let me return to the psychohistorical problem I posed earlier. The increasing legitimation of violence as an ingredient of bogus manhood has grave implications for the "engineering" of social control and consent. If we are disturbed by this engineering, we need to study what promotes successful resistance against psychosocial indoctrination during male development. Early formative tasks include the integration of adolescent initiation rituals and illusions, the integration of inchoate infantile and sexual fantasies, of wishes and needs.

Do we have any choice about the diversion of male character away from "soft," tender and nurturing impulses towards "hard" orientations which center on aggression? How did expressiveness and tenderness become the province of *women*? Can we foster models of male development which facilitate tenderness and feeling? Can we learn from the sharing of feeling states between men who have followed different paths toward manhood in different societies? Perhaps this can throw light on the fate of *feelings* in men.

#### Model 1. United States: "Any Boy Can Win"

In the United States, winning is a central theme in the making of a boy's self image. Boys learn early that "Any boy can win." Corporations

# HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN 145

love coach Lombardi's motto: "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."<sup>84</sup> This shows up in drag races, on the commodity exchange, in street fights, in airlines advertising.

## Model 2. Scandinavia: "Any Kid Can Play"<sup>85</sup>

In 1976, a Norwegian-American camp director told me he had replaced the theme "Any boy can win" with "Any kid can play." He abolished competitive games and scorekeeping. Girls and boys played baseball together.

Swedish psychologists and political scientists were amazed when I asked them how Sweden had become peaceful and noncompetitive. They said, "It's our history." Yet only two hundred years ago, Swedish armies swept across Europe. This shows that social change can foster changes in emotional development. Not all male-female emotional differences are inevitable.

In 1983, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a German poet who had lived in Sweden, wrote: "The [Swedish] state has...governed in a...tidy fashion. The bureaucracy may be overly enthusiastic, but it is not corrupt. And, for as long as Swedes can recall, the *state has abandoned a sport...still common [elsewhere]:... the armed manhunt.*"<sup>86</sup>

In 1989, the *New York Times* quoted Moses J. Stewart "whose 16-year-old son, Yusuf K. Hawkins, was surrounded by a gang of young whites a month ago and shot to death." The *Times* stated that Mr. Stewart's "immediate aim is the harshest possible penalty for the seven defendants accused in his son's killing.... But the larger goal of Mr. Stewart's cause, he said is 'making black people aware that *we are open game* and must be prepared to protect ourselves.'"<sup>87</sup>

This hints at the interweaving of psychic and social fabrics.

Now, back to manhood in America.

## Model 3. United States: Manhunt and Conquest

The "Father of our Country" gave birth to it through war. Since *de Toqueville*, the armed manhunt and the lust to conquer the virgin frontier have impressed foreign observers as U.S. male traits.<sup>88</sup> The manhunt went beyond vigilantism. In 1908, newspapers described the killing of "miserable Digger Indians" by San Franciscans out shooting as part of regular Sunday recreation.<sup>89</sup> In 1988, four New York cops shot a woman to death for running a red light, and not stopping.<sup>90</sup>

The first A-bomb explosion began the conquest of space.<sup>91</sup> Its father, an all-male collective, cabled President Truman: "Baby is born." Since baby has no mother, he's a *tough boy* and now lives underground in a "crib." With this kind of mystique, it's not surprising to hear a man say, "I was falling in love as fast as a bomb comes from an F-15."<sup>92</sup>

## Model 4. Fighting for Power—"A Son of a Gun" or "Why Can't My Boy Learn to Fight?"

To Imperial America, Vietnam was "she." "She" had to show that our leaders had "guts" and "balls." Lyndon Johnson said, "I've got his pecker

## 146 VIETNAM GENERATION

in my pocket” to show that someone was in his power.<sup>93</sup> Our actor-president said, “America is standing tall again”—a John Wayne posture. The Philippines were “screwed,” in both senses, by Teddy Roosevelt’s successors for fifty years.<sup>94</sup>

Why should this concern us? It should concern us because not all Western cultures share identical images of manhood and power. The French find it natural that intellectuals can exercise power, and that power can be intellectual. Russians assume that prolonged, intense mourning is a male trait.

Our playing fields provide gore and glory. Our boxing champions are *World Champions*. The baseball season ends with the *World Series*. Super Bowl players want to “tear opponents’ heads off” for putting their “cleats in our chests.” These attitudes can turn into *failed adolescent initiation rites*, involving brutality and self-destruction.<sup>95</sup>

From 1949 to 1953, I and other psychiatrists worked with adolescent males at Hillside Hospital, a psychiatric hospital in New York City. Every visiting day mothers—as often as fathers—besieged us with the demand, “*Why can’t my boy learn to fight?*” Since boys in the U.S. are expected to prove their masculinity through violent aggression at an early age, these parents felt that their sons had failed their adolescent masculine initiation rites.

### **SUMMARY: “SONS OF GUNS” AND “THE GREAT SHOOT-OUT”**

Within the limits of heredity and history, I feel that psychosocial choices *can* be made about individual emotional development and against indoctrination. Choices can be made about *social* forms of coping with attachment, intimacy and loss. We *can* design and introduce new adolescent male rituals, new masculine initiation rites, and new bereavement customs. Choices are even now being made which bridge the gap between realms of feeling traditionally assigned to *one sex* and *denied* to the other, between woman as *feeling* and *nurturing*, woman as the traditional keeper of the emotions, and man who shows “*grit*” instead of *pain* and *need*. Just before World War II, boys in a Montreal high school studied Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, while girls studied *As You Like It*. During the same period, in the Soviet Union, boys focused on the war sections of *War and Peace* while girls concentrated on the peace sections.<sup>96</sup>

Violent *competition* is supposed to promote male maturity in America. Men often feel complimented when they’re called “real sons of guns.” Then they can join John Wayne in what Karl Menninger called the “Great Shoot-Out.”<sup>97</sup> John Wayne died of cancer from shooting a film in a Utah canyon which had been rendered radioactive by atomic tests. However, *Hollywood’s* John Wayne is alive and well in the heart of every “big, bad-ass Super Sergeant,” and in his methods of discipline—including forbidding all bowel movements for the first week of Marine boot camp.

I have described some of the thrills which authoritarian leaders long for. They are fascinated by cruel relationships. Tyranny’s death-grip can

# HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN 147

be imposed, not only on the "Master Race," but on many of us. Much has been made of the Marine Corps' sense of community: it provides a home and roots for men who feel confused. But the Marines' community demands that each worshipper be ready to dissolve his identity into the bodysoul of the charismatic DI.<sup>98</sup> The Marine Corps offers its members a bond, an oath that—if they shed their individuality—they will become *emanations* of, one with, the Supreme Legion. This transformation is based on the sexualization of destructive power and on the rewards of surrender.<sup>99</sup>

The dissolution of identity is not community, though it can relieve loneliness. Its success is due to the recruit's ability to regress to an earlier stage of development, in which he is again an unseparated appendage of the domain ruled over by the Giant and Giantess, the DIs of the nursery. That kingdom reflects some laws of our social structure. That social structure may carry in its womb some seeds, not only of bogus manhood, but of militarist totalitarianism, where happiness is a warm gun.

Happiness is a warm gun  
(Mah-Mah, bang-bang, shoot-shoot)  
Happiness is a warm gun  
When I hold you in my arms  
And I feel my finger on your trigger  
I know no one can do me no harm  
Because happiness is a warm gun  
(Mah-Mah, bang-bang, shoot-shoot)<sup>100</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, a play. Cited from *Poems and Plays of William Shakespeare*, Nelson and Hill, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin) 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Bogus Manhood, Bogus Honor: Surrender and Transfiguration in the U.S. Marine Corps," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 64.4 (1977) and in *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Aggression*, G.D. Goldman and D.S. Milman, eds. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt) 1972, 1978. See also, David Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, in *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones—Two Plays* (New York: Penguin) 1978, 1983. Drill Sergeant Tower states in this play: "There's nothing in the world lower than trainees except civilians. And we hate them all. *All!!!*." And see, F. Redl, "The Superego in Uniform," in *Sanctions for Evil*, C. Comstock and N. Sanford, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Springfields, named after the city where they were made, were standard Army rifles from the Civil War (1861) until World War I (1917).

<sup>4</sup> Tim Riley, *Tell Me Why* (New York: Vintage/Random) 1989: 268-271.

<sup>5</sup> Shatan: 585-610.

<sup>6</sup> E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Viking) 1963: 183-141.

<sup>7</sup> "Stirring Spirit Lifted Higher," *Life Magazine*, (30 July 1956).

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, c.1983. Exact date unavailable.

<sup>9</sup> "Immediate and effective domination and demoralization of the victim is achieved by depriving him/her of clothes." Dick Francis, *The Danger* (New York: GP Putnam) 1984: 222. Immortalized by Leni Reifenstahl, Hitler's ubiquitous protégé, in her electrifying film, *Der Triumph des Willens* (*The Triumph of the Will*). See also Susan Sontag's brilliant analysis of the films of Reifenstahl in *New York Review of Books* (6 February 1975).

# 148 VIETNAM GENERATION

- <sup>10</sup> Commandant R.N. Pate (Former Head, U.S.M.C., *New York Post* (7 May 1956).
- <sup>11</sup> Henry Allen, "The Corps: The Marines Build Men and a Certain Beauty," *Washington Post* (5 March 1972); Martin Russ, *The Last Parallel—A Marine's War Journal* (New York: Rinehart) 1957.
- <sup>12</sup> S. Opotowsky, *New York Post* (4 May 1956), quoting Marine Colonel Sam Shaw.
- <sup>13</sup> Shatan: 585-610.
- <sup>14</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "The Subversion of the Superego: Uses of Identification with the Aggressor in Basic Combat Training." Paper presented at the Fifth Annual Conference of the Council of Psychoanalytic Psychologists, New York (30 April 1972).
- <sup>15</sup> Peter Bourne, "From Boot Camp to My Lai," in *Crimes of War: A Legal, Political and Psychological Inquiry*, Richard Falk, Gabriel Kolko and Robert Lifton, eds. (New York: Random House) 1971.
- <sup>16</sup> *New York Post* (24 July 1956).
- <sup>17</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Through the Membrane of Reality: 'Impacted Grief' and 'Perceptual Dissonance' in Vietnam Combat Veterans," *Psychiatric Opinion*, 11.6 (1974): 6-15. Translated as "'Zivile' und 'militärische' Realitätswahrnehmung. Über die Folgen einer Absurdität." *Psyche*, 6.XXXV (Frankfurt am Main, 1981): 557-572.
- <sup>18</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Afterword—Who Can Take Away the Grief of a Wound?" in *The Vietnam Veteran Redefined: Fact and Fiction*, Ghislaine Boulanger and Charles Kadushin, eds. (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum) 1986.
- <sup>19</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Entrails of Power: Bogus Manhood and the Language of Grief," in *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power*, Hiller and Sheets, eds. (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press) 1976.
- <sup>20</sup> M.G., veteran, to author (1977).
- <sup>21</sup> G.M., veteran, to author (1989).
- <sup>22</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "The Emotional Context of Combat Continues," in *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans*, Charles Figley, ed. (New York: Brunner/Mazel) 1978.
- <sup>23</sup> Riley: 268-271.
- <sup>24</sup> Philip Caputo, *Indian Country* (New York: Bantam) 1987.
- <sup>25</sup> L.A., Vietnam veteran, to author in personal interview with the author at First National Conference on Emotional Problems of Vietnam Veterans, St. Louis, MO (1973).
- <sup>26</sup> Tom Snyder, host, *The Tomorrow Show*, Channel 4 (NBC-TV, New York). Program on mercenaries, featuring Chaim F. Shatan with the editor of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine and two mercenaries (1976).
- <sup>27</sup> G.A., Air Force Vietnam veteran, in personal interview with the author in-flight from New York City to Albany, GA (April 1976).
- <sup>28</sup> K. Hausman, "Review—The Vietnam Vet," *Psychiatric News* (13 June 1983). Review of *Frank: A Vietnam Veteran*, a videotape by Fred Simon, presented at American Psychiatric Association, Annual Meeting, New York, 1983.
- <sup>29</sup> Alvin Krebs, *Berkshire Eagle* (16 May 1987), Rita Hayworth obituary.
- <sup>30</sup> Leonard Rittenberg, M.D. Lecture notes to U.S. Army medical officers, Selfridge, MI (1944). By kind permission of Lucy Rittenberg.
- <sup>31</sup> Fred Wiseman, *Basic Training*, a film shown on National Educational Television (4 October 1971); and on WNET-TV, New York (9 October 1971). Produced by Zipporah Productions: Boston, 1971.
- <sup>32</sup> W.B. Gault, Jr., M.D., "Some Remarks on Slaughter," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 128. (1971): 450-454.
- <sup>33</sup> Mel Cebulash and John Gruen, *Through Basic Training with Walter Young* (New York: Scholastic Book Services) 1968.
- <sup>34</sup> Larry Rottmann, Jan Barry & Basil Paquet, eds., *Winning Hearts and Minds: War Poems by Vietnam Veterans* (New York: First Casualty Press) 1972: photograph on page 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Peter Neumann, *Other Men's Graves—Diary of an S.S. Man* (New York: Weidenfield & Nicholson) 1948. Published in French as *S.S.* (Paris: Editions France, Empire) 1958.
- <sup>36</sup> Stan Platke, "And Then There Were None," in *Winning Hearts and Minds*: 101.
- <sup>37</sup> Shatan, "Through the Membrane of Reality."
- <sup>38</sup> *Vietnam Veterans: Coming Home There Was No Homecoming*, radio program on WBAI-FM, New York, with Chaim Shatan, Nick Egleson, and Vietnam veterans (4 January 1974). The show was the 1st Prize Winner, Armstrong Award, Community Service Category (1975).

# HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN 149

- <sup>39</sup> Shatan, "Through the Membrane of Reality."
- <sup>40</sup> W.G. Niederland and H. Krystal, eds. *Massive Psychic Trauma* (New York: IUP) 1967; W.G. Niederland, workshop presentation on "The Guilt and Grief of Vietnam Veterans and Concentration Camp Survivors," Fourth Annual Psychoanalytic Forum, New York (28 September -2 October, 1972), Chaim F. Shatan, Chair.
- <sup>41</sup> Mardi Horowitz, *Stress Response Syndromes* (New York: Jason Aronson) 1976.
- <sup>42</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Have You Hugged a Vietnam Veteran Today? The Basic Wound of Catastrophic Stress," in *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the War Veteran Patient*, William Kelly, ed. (New York: Brunner/Mazel) 1985; *The American Journal of Social Psychiatry* 5.1 (Winter 1985).
- <sup>43</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D., "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re-enactment, Re-victimization and Masochism," *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 12.3 (1989).
- <sup>44</sup> When two of his buddies were re-interred in a cemetery opposite a police station, Staff Sgt. Coughlin "flashed back" to the ambush in which they were killed. During the night, he stole back into the tall "jungle grass" next to the two graves and began firing at the police station. His unconscious wish was to join his buddies by having the "Vietcong" (police) shoot him down. Fortunately, one of the police officers was sensitive to Vietnam veterans and investigated before shooting back. (*The Boston Globe*, 18 June 1980.)
- <sup>45</sup> "What Makes A Marine," (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Defense) c.1960, U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Pamphlet.
- <sup>46</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.
- <sup>47</sup> Sir Francis Bacon, "Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates," in *The Essays of Francis Bacon*, C. Northrup, ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin): 100. The essay was originally published in 1622.
- <sup>48</sup> J.E. Taylor, E.R. Michaels, and M.E. Brennan, *The Development and Implementation of the Experimental Volunteer Army Training Program* (Alexandria, VA: Humro) 1971.
- <sup>49</sup> E.J. Lieberman, "War and the Family: The Psychology of Antigrief," *Modern Medicine* (19 April 1971): 181-183.
- <sup>50</sup> H.W. Baldwin, "The 'Cain Mutiny' Issue," *New York Times* (21 Mar 1954).
- <sup>51</sup> Neumann.
- <sup>52</sup> Pat Conroy, *The Lords of Discipline* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1980.
- <sup>53</sup> E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Random House) 1975.
- <sup>54</sup> Mary McCarthy, *Medina* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) 1973.
- <sup>55</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "The Grief of Soldiers: Vietnam Combat Veterans' Self-Help Movement," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 43. (1973): 640.
- <sup>56</sup> I plan to discuss the "Messenger of Grief" in a separate paper.
- <sup>57</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>58</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>59</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>60</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>61</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>62</sup> All emphases by author.
- <sup>63</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, a play. Cited from *Poems and Plays of William Shakespeare*, Nelson and Hill, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin) 1957. All emphases by author.
- <sup>64</sup> M. Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, 1840 (New York: Vintage) 1968.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Holy Bible* (Old Testament): Book III, Leviticus, Chapter 21, Verses 1-5. Authorized King James Version (New York: Oxford University Press) nd.
- <sup>66</sup> Evan Connel, *Son of the Morning Star—Custer and the Little Bighorn* (San Francisco: North Point Press) 1984.
- <sup>67</sup> a) Shatan, "Have You Hugged a Vietnam Veteran Today?" b) Konner describes the behavior of head-hunting tribes in New Guinea as intimately connected with loss and grief. He points out that a head-hunting expedition is almost invariably preceded by a "bereavement mood" on the part of the warriors. After the loss of a child, a spouse, or a sibling—especially a brother—they "expiate" the grief through head-hunting. (Konner and Melvin, "Towards a Natural History of Violence," presented at Symposium on Rage, Power and Aggression, Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training, New York (14 Oct 1989).
- <sup>68</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 1912, in *The Standard Edition of the*

# 150 VIETNAM GENERATION

*Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth) 1957: 243.

<sup>69</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Militarisierte Trauer und Rachezeremoniell" ["Militarized Mourning and Ceremonial Vengeance], in *Krieg und Frieden aus Psychoanalytischer Sicht* [War and Peace from a Psychoanalytic Viewpoint], Passet and Modena, eds. (Zurich: Stromfeld/Roter Stern) 1983. Presented at International Psychoanalytic Conference on War and Peace, Zurich (1983).

<sup>70</sup> J. Nordheimer, "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero," *New York Times* (26 May 1971): 1. See also, Tom Cole, *Medal of Honor Rag*, 1973, in *Coming to Terms: American Plays and the Vietnam War* (New York: Theater Communications Group) 1985: 119-150. Performed at the Theatre de Lys, New York; on National Educational Television (WNET-NY) 1981.

<sup>71</sup> *Soldier of Fortune: The Journal of Professional Adventurers* (Boulder, CO: The Omega Group, Ltd.) since 1974.

<sup>72</sup> A. Mitscherlich and M. Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn* (New York: Basic) 1976.

<sup>73</sup> Milton Rosenbaum, "Interruption of Psychotherapy—Continuation by Long Distance Telephone," *American Journal of Psychiatry* (1973).

<sup>74</sup> After the 1948 independence of Israel, its army goosestepped for several years—another instance of "identification with the aggressor"?

<sup>75</sup> Shatan, *Militarisierte Trauer un Rachezeremoniell*."

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Genocide and Bereavement," in *Genocide in Paraguay*, Richard Arens, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 1977. See also, G. Gorer, "Death, Grief and Mourning," in the *Death and Dying* series, R. Kestenbaum, ed. (New York: Arno) 1977.

<sup>78</sup> Bacon, "Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates."

<sup>79</sup> H.H. Scullard, "Part III: Triumphs, Ovations, and Funerals," in *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press) 1981: 213-221.

<sup>80</sup> Larry Rivers. Cited in E.C. Baker, "Larry Rivers and George Segal: Back in the U.S.S.R.," *Art in America* 65. (Nov 1977): 104-112. All emphases the author's.

<sup>81</sup> A. Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic) 1981: 43. Originally published by Suhrkamp, Frankfurt-am Main, West Germany in 1979 as *Das Drama des Begabten Kindes*.

<sup>82</sup> Shatan, "Militarisierte Trauer und Rachezeremoniell."

<sup>83</sup> On October 14, 1989, at a symposium on aggression, Melvin Konner described a New Guinea tribe which treats pre-pubertal boys in the following way: a) The boys are separated from their mothers and are placed in special houses with other prepubescent boys and with men; b) These boys are not allowed to have any contact with women; c) They are inculcated with a highly sexist, dominating and insulting attitude towards women. He pointed out that, in both this tribe and in an African tribe he had studied, this situation led to relative isolation. The isolation, or deprivation of social experience, helped to induce a hyper-aggressive state in the young males. It's unlikely that the Marine Corps is familiar with these tribes. However there are striking parallels between Marine combat training and the acculturation of boys to hyper-masculinity in these tribes. (Konner, Melvin, "Towards a Natural History of Violence.") Leonard Rosenblum has studied the social order of non-human primates intensively. He points out that, in various groups of South American monkeys, close camaraderie develops between pre-adolescent males. The arrival of a female on the scene "disrupts this male-affiliative behavior." Rivalry over the female interferes with the bonding between the males. This is a psychobiological clue to the need to avoid contact with women in the creation of a symbiotic combat unit. (Leonard Rosenblum, "Position, Power and Prerogatives: A Primate Perspective," presented at the Symposium on Rage, Power and Aggression, Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training, New York (14 Oct 1989).

<sup>84</sup> "Winning Isn't Everything," brochure distributed by TWA to airline passengers (1976).

<sup>85</sup> Einar Aas, personal communication, Stockbridge, MA (1975).

<sup>86</sup> H.M. Enzensberger, "Schweden—Ein Modell?" ["Sweden—a Model?], *Der Stern*. Heft 13. (24 Mar 1983): 72-84.

<sup>87</sup> All emphases the author's.

<sup>88</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835 (New York: Knopf) 1945.

<sup>89</sup> N. Sanford and C. Comstock, eds., *Sanctions for Evil: Sources of Social Destructiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass) 1971.

<sup>90</sup> *New York Times* (July 1988): exact date not available.



# HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN 151

<sup>91</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "The A-Bomb as Progress, or Totem, Taboo and Myth," presented at Symposium on Nuclear Numbness, Union of Concerned Psychoanalysts and Psychotherapists, Physicians for Social Responsibility, New York (1985).

<sup>92</sup> "This Wrong Number Rang the Right Bell," *The Berkshire Eagle*, Pittsfield, MA (2/19/89).

<sup>93</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House) 1972

<sup>94</sup> Paul E. Kaunitz, "Initiation Rites in Adolescent Males," *American Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* (1955).

<sup>95</sup> Dwight MacDonald, in *Politics* 3. (1946).

<sup>96</sup> Karl Menninger, M.D., response to Special Distinguished Psychiatrist Award, American Psychiatric Association, Annual Meeting, Toronto (1977).

<sup>97</sup> Chaim F. Shatan, "Rebirth in Uniform," presented at the Annual Convention, Illinois Vietnam Veterans Association, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (1974).

<sup>98</sup> P. Kingry, *The Monk and the Marines* (New York: Bantam) 1974: 105-106.

<sup>99</sup> John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "Happiness is a Warm Gun," from *The White Album* (Los Angeles: EMI Records) 1968.

# POINT BLANK: SHOOTING VIETNAMESE WOMEN

SUSAN JEFFORDS

The single most popular image of women in combat available in contemporary U.S. dominant culture is that of Vietnamese women in Hollywood films about the Vietnam war.

There are four general characterizations of Vietnamese women combatants<sup>1</sup> that are specific to the issue of women and combat: one, they are single combatants; two, they do not fight by the rules of war; three, they do not accomplish large-scale missions; and four, they mutilate male bodies.

As distinct from representations of men as combatants, Vietnamese women are depicted as single rather than group combatants. The saboteur in *Apocalypse Now*, the snipers in *Full Metal Jacket* and *Paco's Story*, Rambo's guide, or the NVA informant in "Tour of Duty" all fight alone.<sup>2</sup> This is in keeping with Judith Hicks Stiehm's description of the general situation of women in the U.S. military: "With the abolition of the separate or semiseparate women's corps,... [women] no longer have organizations and commands of their own; they no longer have their own official network; often they both live and work apart from other women. Enlisted women are 'unknowns'—even to each other."<sup>3</sup> The primary contrast here is not simply one woman against groups of men, but of masculine bonding versus feminine isolation.<sup>4</sup> Since the bulk of recent reworkings of the Vietnam war in dominant narrative are motivated by efforts to insure such bonding, it is all too logical that women should be depicted, not simply as being excluded from combat, but as being excluded from its most basic experience as well. As William Broyles, Jr. says, men "loved war for many reasons.... The best reason we loved war is also its most enduring memory—comradeship."<sup>5</sup> Again, because it is through combat that men transcend the "circumstances" that usually divide them—race, class, age, etc.—by depicting women's combat as separate (separatist?) women are logically (apparently by their own "choice") denied access to such transcendences.

Such isolation has logical force when understood within the ethic of visibility that cloaks the vulnerable male body. Though these women often refuse to reveal their own bodies, or are disguised, they are, in these narratives, always "discovered." When this happens, their isolation becomes a detriment rather than an asset to their survival, for they are generally "found out" by a group of men who proceeds, as in Larry Heineman's *Paco's Story*, to punish them brutally. By fighting alone,

women are shown to become vulnerable—not simply to individual men—but, more importantly, to masculine bonding, the primary mechanism whereby the male body is preserved and defended in mainstream culture.

Second, women are depicted as not following the accepted “rules” or codes of combat as practiced by men. Specifically, the most typical role for combatants, that of a sniper, seems to go against codes of masculine warfare as visibility, and of the male body as visible. It is not simply that women have failed at these codes (there are numerous examples of men who cannot meet the rigors of masculinity—from *The Deer Hunter* to *Missing in Action*), but that women combatants seem to show disdain for them. The sniper in *Full Metal Jacket* aims to mutilate, not to kill, the first shot being aimed directly at male genitals.

The failure of women to abide by the codes is described best by *The 13th Valley's* Doc, who concludes, “Women. They all the time doin somethin jus so you can't expect why.... They figure out what you expects then they do jus the opposite.”<sup>6</sup> Men, in contrast, embody consistency and predictability, in other words, knowing and maintaining the codes of warfare, as if by instinct:

The lessons were there in Egan's mind, there from almost eighteen months of combat duty, there from his heritage as an American, as a man, as a human being. All that need be done was to relax, allow the mind to shift, to tap the data banks of 10,000 years of human warfare perhaps 100,000 years perhaps for the entire age of man perhaps earlier.... And his enemy...would bring the collective lessons of tens of millions of men from tens of thousands of years of fighting...the enemy had a mind-set developed by tens of billions of man-years of war.<sup>7</sup>

Using deception as a tactic—“they figure out what you expects then they do just the opposite”—seems to be the hallmark of women's difference as combatants.

The third way in which Vietnamese women combatants are depicted as different from men is that they are not shown as accomplishing any large-scale missions, in other words, that *they* will not win a war. The primary way in which this is accomplished is to depict women's battles as divorced from explicitly nationalist or political struggles and instead link them to more short-term, self-contained, even personal activities. So, for example Co Bao's political motivations for working against a communist Vietnamese government in *Rambo* are explained through her continuation of her father's work, not out of any conclusions she might have drawn herself about political relations. Additionally, the work of a sniper can be only immediate and, to a degree, personal. As a military strategy, sniping can at best delay, disrupt or distract group military activity; it cannot decisively determine a battle's outcome or often effectively combat technological superiority. In such terms,

## 154 VIETNAM GENERATION

characterizing women as snipers necessarily constrains their role to one of limited achievement. And because sniping works as an attack on one individual at a time, it carries the connotations of personal rather than impersonal shooting (i.e. you must decide who you are going to shoot).

In his summary of the most widely held views on "Women as Terrorists," Daniel E. Georges-Abeyle concludes that there is a belief that

many, if not most, of [women terrorist's] acts are emotive rather than instrumental, i.e., emotional rather than well-thought-out acts with a rational program of action not tied to a love interest.... Social-control personnel often state that female terrorists are more likely to engage in acts of senseless or non-goal-oriented violence than are their male counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

By portraying women's combat as "senseless and non-goal-oriented violence," these narratives question the overall effectiveness of women combatants' actions, specifically, that their actions lead to anything more than immediate and short-term destruction. In such terms, the deaths they are shown to cause seem a senseless waste rather than a noble sacrifice. Women combatants' actions by no means carry the weight of other single combat, such as the classic sacrifice in U.S. narratives of one group member who chooses to stay and fight the enemy so that others can escape (as in William Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed*) or the single remaining combatant who represents all those who have died or who yet will come to fight (*Bataan*). Such characters gain their heroism through their affiliation with and sacrifice for a group, a feature denied women combatants.

Unlike Rambo, Colonel Braddock (Chuck Norris), or other heroes of Vietnam war films (*Uncommon Valor*, *Green Berets*) who rescue groups of men or save bases or villages from destruction, women combatants are shown not to "save" anything at all, but only to destroy, and their single object of destruction seems to be the male body.

That victimization is visually and viscerally marked through the final characterization of Vietnamese women combatants: these women are shown to be mutilating the male body, the body that has been revealed as "natural" (Rambo's body blends in with and is protected by the nature that surrounds him), coherent, and important. Distinct from the more straightforward killing that is so much a part of masculine representation of warfare in U.S. culture (think of the Western showdown), in which death is often accomplished by one clean shot (as in Rambo's exploding arrow that kills the single Vietnamese soldier pursuing him), Vietnamese women are depicted as shooting deliberately *not* to kill, but to mutilate, and to do so repeatedly.

The sniper in *Full Metal Jacket* shoots at Eightball's genitals, then fingers, legs, arms, all in exaggerated slow motion camera. The opening shot of this sequence is a long shot of the squad from the point of view of the sniper. The audience sees the shots hit the soldiers

frontally, again from the position of the sniper, not from the viewpoint of the U.S. soldiers. The elegance of the slow motion shots holds these male bodies as if in a dance movement, offering the audience pleasure in witnessing pain translated into aesthetic production (or aesthetics as pain production).<sup>9</sup>

The scene immediately prior to this one shows a series of journalistic interviews with the soldiers, asking them their opinions of the Vietnamese. The answers are without exception disparaging, racist, and stereotypical. It is part of Kubrick's satire that viewers are to recognize the inadequacy of these comments as a way of understanding the war. Coming into this sniper scene, viewers have then a distance from the soldiers, have been invited to view them and their attitudes toward the war critically. So when the audience watches these men from the viewpoint of the sniper, the camera is accurately representing the attitude Kubrick has constructed for his viewers, one of "sniping" at U.S. soldiers, or, more precisely, at male bodies in combat.

The slow motion sequence thus succeeds in shifting the subject of the narrative from a satiric reading of the war to a straightforward visualization of masculinity as mutilated and victimized. Margaret Morse discusses the use of slow motion in televised sports, suggesting that

the figures in slow motion are as machine-like as if animated by some supernatural agency rather than human willpower and technology. They possess the deliberate slowness which is the attribute of perfect machines, automatons and robots which are doubles of and exchanged for the human body.... In addition, slowness increases the scale of the bodies on screen to tremendous size and hence power.<sup>10</sup>

But the dynamic of the male body as machine that she correctly analyzes as operating in televised sports gets altered slightly when that same body, made "perfect" by slow motion, is shown to bleed, fall, and be "imperfect" in war narratives.<sup>11</sup>

Far from "machine-like" and "perfect," these bodies appear instead to be faltering, like marionettes whose strings have been cut. The bodies gush blood, recoil, and fall. While it could be argued that Kubrick is employing the slow-motion sequence here precisely to undercut the sensations of power and invulnerability usually accomplished through slow-motion, the effect of the scene is equally to disassociate this injured body from any *real* body. The slow motion shots make possible then the preservation of the invulnerability of a male body that does not look like this one, a body that still moves "naturally."

For these specific bodies, the slow motion works as well to sever them from the individual characters they portray in the film. Because they seem so unnatural, they seem to have become, as Morse suggests,

## 156 VIETNAM GENERATION

inanimate,<sup>12</sup> and therefore seem not to be shots of individual men dying as much as visions of mutilated "imperfect," male bodies. At the moments of impact, the bodies cease to belong to individual soldiers and become instead larger than life images of masculine mutilation. The shots of mutilation draw audience attention away from the individual characters that these men portrayed in their interviews to the male bodies they inhabit. As aesthetic objects, the bodies cease to be those of racist or ignorant men and become instead essentially physical entities. The audience watches these bodies being maimed, decimated, exploded into fragments, in other words, being treated only as bodies. In fact, this is the function of the sniper—to recognize these men as *only* bodies (and therefore as only and all male).

In such terms, it is extremely important that the sniper be revealed as a woman, corroborating the emphasis on these exaggerated bodies as absolutely male, being mutilated by a female body. If the sniper were male, the visual concentration upon the male body as the focus for anxiety would be defracted as combat between individual men, the conflict would be made "personal." But, again, these narratives need to insist that the only "personal" treatment of combat is made by the marginal female body, for it is only through the "impersonal" male body that a death within masculinity can be resurrected.

The first (camera) shot of the sniper is now from the point of view of the U.S. soldiers, specifically, that of Joker, the audience's expected focus throughout the film. And that first shot is of her taking a shot at Joker. The distanced satire of the soldiers' racism is released through the aesthetics of male mutilation so that the re-identification as Joker can be firmly fixed as unjustifiably and now "purely" victimized. As she shoots at Joker, she shoots at the audience. Simultaneously, the audience sees that the sniper is she/sees that she is the enemy/sees that she is shooting at us. And because she fires at Joker/the audience, she fires at masculinity, requiring the audience to be that masculinity and to feel that threat and to identify that threat as a woman with a gun. What might have been a display of the vulnerability of the male body is translated into fear of a woman with a gun.

The single most despised action in Vietnam narrative, and the one against which the harshest retaliation is taken, is, I think, not the numerous scenes of rape (in *Platoon* or *Casualties of War*, for example), of torture (in *Green Berets*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Hanoi Hilton*), of betrayal (in *Rambo*), or even of combat (in *Hamburger Hill*), but the action of a single Vietnamese woman. In *Apocalypse Now*, during a fight between U.S. helicopters and Vietnamese gunners, a single helicopter lands to pick up U.S. wounded. While on the ground, a woman who had formerly been seen ushering a group of schoolchildren into a bunker suddenly appears as if from nowhere and tosses a hand grenade into the pausing helicopter. It explodes, killing the wounded and the helicopter crew. She is immediately pursued and gunned down by another helicopter crew.

This is an action seemingly without explanation. While the film can imagine the reasons why Vietnamese men would fire on helicopters, or why U.S. men would fire on a Vietnamese village, it seems not to be able to see why a single woman would want to kill already wounded men. Her act appears to be purely and unnecessarily malicious, not even graced with the perverse rationality that initiates the U.S. attack, wanting to find the best surfing beaches in Vietnam.

Coppola constructs the scene in such a way that this saboteur's act is foregrounded as disturbing.<sup>13</sup> Placed toward the close of the battle, after the artillery fire has been destroyed, her act takes on a more powerful disruptive force. When the music, narrative, and audience expectations are constructed toward a closure of the battle, she enters the scene. Not only does her act seem contradictory of western military ethics (not to kill the already wounded), it negates viewer satisfaction in the resolution of the scene. If the same shot had been cut into the midst of the battle scene, it would not, I think, have carried such power.

Additionally, the scene functions to redeem the technology and military that had been portrayed as so idiosyncratically destructive. The very helicopters that had been portrayed with the aura of invulnerability and ascendancy as they rose over the trees to the strains of Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries" now seem smaller and less sufficiently powerful. And the men who had been portrayed as ruthlessly selfish and ignorant are now seen to be unwitting victims of a breach of the codes of warfare. In this single act, then, an isolated woman combatant is able to withdraw some of the harshness and irony that had almost overwhelmed the earlier scenes of the film and brought it to a halt. She is made to prepare the ground for Willard's final redemption in her prefiguring of a combatant who had gotten "off the boat," who, like Kurtz, had gone too far and broken too many rules and who, like Kurtz, would deserve what she got.

Two other scenes hold similar forcefulness. In both *Full Metal Jacket* and *Paco's Story*, Vietnamese women snipers are brutally punished after methodically and effectively wounding and killing entire squads of U.S. soldiers. In *Full Metal Jacket* it is a sign of the hero's capacity for mercy that he murders, at point blank range to the head, the wounded sniper who had devastated his squad (she even asks him to do it: "G.I. Shoot me," she whispers); other soldiers want to leave her to be eaten by rats. And in *Paco's Story*, the sniper is bound, her arms hoisted over a rafter, and then dispassionately gang-raped by an entire company; afterwards, she is shot, again at point blank range in the head.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to recognize the weight these images carry in Vietnam war representation. To be clear, to the best of my knowledge, *there is not a single similar image of a Vietnamese man being shot in the head at point blank range,*<sup>15</sup> certainly not an image of a Vietnamese man being treated with similar brutality, and not a narrative in which the murder of a man is witnessed and condoned by so many. Consequently,

awe with which these heroes are viewed by other men within the same films.

In such terms, it is indeed safer—for all the protected needs of masculinity—that the male body not be the visible target of other male shooting.

During the gang-rape of the Vietnamese sniper in *Paco's Story*, Paco speculates about how a male sniper would have been handled differently:

If the zip had been a man, we would not have bothered with the motherfucker, you understand that, don't you?... That cocksucker would have been pounded on till his face was beat to shit; till our arms were tired.... Jonesy would have flicked that [pearl handled straight razor] open with a flashy snap, showing that puffy-eyed, bloody-faced zip four inches of the goddamndest Swedish steel he's likely to come across, and then just as slow and calm and cool as you'd have a melon, James, Jonesy would have slit that zip's throat from nine to three.... The razor cut would have bled horrible abundance, the zip's life gushing from his neck in terrific spurts, with him watching it.... You've got to understand, James, that if the zip had been a man we would have punched on him, then killed him right then and there and left him for dead.<sup>17</sup>

Though not at a distance, this Vietnamese sniper (only hypothetical, still keeping the possibility of such activity at a remove) is killed, but only after he has been made unrecognizable—his face “beat to shit” and “puffy-eyed, bloody-faced”—only after he has been effectively feminized—“four inches of the goddamndest Swedish steel he's likely to come across”—and still he is not shot, but his throat slit and “left for dead.” As even Paco knows, killing a man and killing a woman are two different things. The man can be killed only after his body as a man has been altered so that it is unrecognizable to the men who will kill him. (Can this help to explain the sometime castration of the enemy—reportedly, on both sides—in the Vietnam war, cutting off a man's genitals and then putting them in his mouth either shortly before or after he died?) The dead body *cannot* be a man's. In such terms, death is itself a form of castration, or, more accurately, death is accommodated as castration, i.e. if he had been a real man he would not be dead; if he is dead, he must not have been a real man.

Men can shoot women at point blank range then for two mutually-confirming reasons: the dead body is not a man's, and the female body must be dead. Though slitting the male sniper's throat will certainly kill him, he is only “left for dead”; the men do not see him die. For the female sniper, the story is very different:

Her head was so close to the hooch that we heard the shot simultaneously with the clack and clatter of bone chips against



## 160 VIETNAM GENERATION

the brick and stucco.... Just that quick there was blood all over everything and everyone, and splinters of bone and brick stuck to our clothes and the bare skin of our arms and faces. And the girl was dead in that instant (and we mean *stone* dead, James) and lay in her own abundant blood.<sup>18</sup>

Not only is she dead “in that instant,” but each of the men around feels her death, the sound of the pistol “a sound you feel in every bone of your body from the marrow out,”<sup>19</sup> and participates in her death, not just visually but viscerally, “there was blood all over everything and everyone.”

As Mady Weschler Segal reminds us, in the U.S. military, “Women are currently excluded from operating offensive *line-of-sight* weapons and from other jobs in units that use such weapons.”<sup>20</sup> Line-of-sight weapons—those in which one can see the opposition while firing: rifles, pistols, armored vehicles, and tanks—are prohibited to women as *offensive* weapons in most western militaries,<sup>21</sup> though women in those same militaries are trained to use such weapons defensively.<sup>22</sup> One might well speculate that the use of the line-of-sight weapon as the discriminating barrier for women serving in ground combat units is related to this issue of visualizing the male body as the object of one's fire. Such visualizations require the recognition that body is in fact vulnerable to one's weapon.

Why do women shoot at men from a distance? Of course, for a lone combatant, generally the lesser armed, sniping is a safer and more viable form of combat. But we must remember that these images of women as snipers are produced by and within the framework of a masculinist aesthetic of warfare, so the question must be rephrased from how women shoot at men to “Why do dominant culture (masculinist) narratives want to depict women as snipers?” Much of the answer has to do with the ethic of visibility that underlies the masculine logic in warfare—standing and facing an opponent to shoot him.<sup>23</sup> In such terms, any failure to disclose the body in combat is characterized as feminine (a frequent characterization of U.S. enemies) and therefore a betrayal of the codes of warfare.

The best contrast for depictions of Vietnamese women as snipers is, to say the least, the figure of Rambo. Oddly, he shares many of the features that distinguish women combatants from men: he fights singly, he kills off the enemy one by one (in *First Blood* especially, mutilating the male body), and he camouflages his body. Yet each of these features is altered in his case: he fights alone *by choice*; and he mutilates male bodies so that they will live and tell of his prowess, not so that they will die painfully and draw others in to die with them. But most important in this context, though Rambo may camouflage his body by hiding behind or as trees, water, or earth, he *always reveals his body before he kills*. He discloses himself as he confronts his enemies, whereas in *Full Metal Jacket*, it is not clear until almost the end of the scene that the sniper is even a woman at all. In such terms, for these narratives, women

shoot at men from a distance because it is only from a distance that they can prevent disclosure of their bodies, can hide that they are women, can, perhaps, put forth an illusion that they are men.<sup>24</sup>

In this logic, women are snipers for two reasons: one, that they can "take shots" at men with less risk to themselves (here, at least until recently, sniping acts as a metaphor for the legal system, suggesting that women here used the legal system to achieve their goals, rather than confronting men directly); and two, that they can play at a man's game only by failing to fulfill one of its chief requirements—that one first prove that he is a man.

The answer to the fourth question follows quickly upon the heels of the third. Why do women not shoot other women? Because there is nothing there worth shooting—the "point" is "blank." More precisely, because women are worth shooting only if they shoot men, where is the interest in women who shoot other women? But perhaps more to the "point," women shooting at other women would yield a stage on which the male body would no longer be the visible focus. Whether as hero or victim, in dominant culture war narratives, the ethic of visibility is in force because it insures that we *always* see the male body. Though denied to military women in war narratives, the male body is *always* in our line-of-sight.

It is not difficult to draw conclusions about the constructed threats posed to masculinity by women in combat from the four features here ascribed to Vietnamese women combatants—isolation, breaking codes of warfare, the failure to accomplish any mission, and the mutilation of male bodies. There are several implications that can be drawn from these characteristics. One, that because she fights alone, a woman combatant is seen to have no larger, shared interests behind her battles, no "goal" to her destruction (while masculine destruction seems always and already to be justified by a goal).<sup>25</sup> No one else will stand with her (so unlike the many masculine bonding action films in which a man whom his enemies believe to be alone is suddenly and even unexpectedly joined by other sympathetic men); her cause is individual, even, these narratives hint, petty and vengeful. Two, her actions are futile; there is no possibility that they might "win" any of these battles, only that she can prolong male agony as she loses. Three, in the context of the most well-known Vietnam war narratives, in which veterans rescue POWs still held in Vietnam, these women combatants must, I think, be read as having no similar task to perform, in other words, there are no women to rescue, only men.

It is in this way that these narratives speak most directly to characterizations of the feminist movement in the United States. Though the features of isolation, mutilation, and not playing by the rules underlie a masculine response to feminist alterations in social relations, the test of having no "mission" to accomplish bears the greatest burden here. Feminist women (combatants) in the U.S. have, in such a scenario, only the (petty) goal of harassing masculinity by "sniping" at its most

## 162 VIETNAM GENERATION

vulnerable bodies (the men of the Lusthog squad are crossing an open and barren square, fully exposed to all sides). They have no women behind them because their goals are individual and, need it be said, selfish. And, most important to this logic, there are no women to rescue, i.e. women are no longer society's "victims" that need defending.<sup>26</sup> Instead, in these terms—close-up and in slow motion—it is men.

The greatest threat to masculinity is that posed by a collective of women combatants, a body that operates by its own codes of warfare, and accomplishes a "mission" to destroy the body of masculinity. In these terms, any depiction of women with weapons would invoke the anxieties of such a scenario (why Bonnie had to be linked with Clyde, why the media wanted to believe that Patty Hearst was brainwashed, and so on). But such threats could be posed theoretically by any woman combatant. What function is served by these women being Vietnamese, perceived as not only nationally but racially different? What, in other words, is the connection between gender and race in these cultural narratives?

At its most direct, images of women combatants as racially separate from a dominant white male point of view work to defer any threats posed by the representation of women combatants, simply because the women who are mutilating and destroying men are not generally the women who live in white men's homes (at least not as their spouses, mothers, daughters, or partners), and are women over whom white men generally have other kinds of control—economic, institutional, religious, etc. Such a situation enables U.S. culture to maintain the illusive distinction between the relative "safety" of the home against the threats posed by an "outside world." If women combatants perceived as racially distinct can be shown to be "outside," then the white U.S. home—the model for U.S. domesticity—can be made to appear all that much safer.

Representations of Vietnamese women combatants work also to preserve a certain self-projection of dominant white culture as morally superior, principally through the status of women as embodying a set of moral and ethical values that men presumably fight wars to protect: notions of a nuclear family, of a type of domesticity, of racial purity, of a kind of innocence and virginity, of dependence—what Jean Bethke Elshtain calls the "Beautiful Soul" syndrome.<sup>27</sup> As Segal puts it, "Excluding women from combat may help to ensure the preservation of certain aspects of our stereotype of the ideal woman.... Excluding all women from combat roles can be seen as one way to ensure that some members of society will retain these characteristics...: warmth, nurturance, helpfulness, passivity, sensitivity, compassion, submissiveness, dependence, understanding, gentleness."<sup>28</sup> Because that role of "ideal woman" in the West is specifically linked to racial features, suggesting that women marked as racially different fail to fulfill these roles may reinforce a cultural perception that such "ideal" notions are still fulfilled by whites. Consequently, depicting a racially "different"

society as encouraging its women to stray from maintaining such roles may enable an internationally destabilized U.S. to maintain certain images of cultural superiority.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, and in a somewhat more complex fashion, a racial difference of women is used to negotiate racial differences among men. There is a constant tension in U.S. war films between the illusion of collectivity established during wartime and the hierarchical differences existing in the culture at large among men,<sup>30</sup> chief among such differences in the Vietnam war and the decades following it being the difference perceived as race. To the extent that women can be shown to maintain certain racial boundaries, it is possible for groups of men to be shown as disregarding those same boundaries. Women in these terms become the repository for forms of difference that are not negated but merely deferred in the negotiation of a masculine collectivity.

Judith Hicks Stiehm insightfully explains the importance of warfare to arguments of gender by recognizing that the role of warrior is the only remaining role in Western culture that is exclusively masculine: "The only unique role men have had in society is a social one—that of warrior—a role that is risky, unpleasant, and often short in duration. During peacetime modern men lack a specific way of proving that they are men."<sup>31</sup> Such a rationale would go a long way toward explaining the excessive violence with which women combatants are met in U.S. representations of the Vietnam war, forms of violence that frequently, as in those passages in *Paco's Story*, are enacted in ways that reinscribe gender difference as sexual difference. By narrating the elimination of combatants who are women of color, white men can be reassured about the gendered and raced hierarchies that structure their relations of power.

Perhaps more problematic though are the possible relationships women spectators and readers may have to these narratives. White women are encouraged to read women of color through the interpretive frame of a dominant (white male) perspective, so that the differences between women are emphasized at the same time that similarities between men are underscored. Women of color are being invited to see themselves as "snipers," lonely combatants in a war *they* will never win. There is equally a dual configuration of women's relationship to the role of combatant. On the one hand, they are asked to read racial differences between women through the vector of "the only unique role men have"—the warrior—so that differences among women are read through the single role that supposedly collapses difference among men. On the other hand, women are, I think, encouraged to reject the image of themselves as combatants, first because women combatants are so brutally and consistently punished, and second, because women who become warriors are somehow "other,"<sup>32</sup> not sharing positions with women—whether white or of color in the United States. The twofold goal of these films can be then: to encourage men to see women, particularly women of color, as "snipers" at *their* bodies; and to suppress any

## 164 VIETNAM GENERATION

interests women may have in becoming snipers, particularly against the bodies of white males.

Let me return for a minute to *Full Metal Jacket*. When the sniper shoots at Eightball, a black man, the camera positions the audience to share the sniper's point of view. When he is shot, the camera sees him, not from the point of view of any of the men in his squad, but only from a closer and more detailed viewpoint that is aligned with the sniper's. But later, when the sniper shoots at Joker, a white man, the camera stands in his position, so that she shoots at the audience as the white man. Sequentially, the audience is invited to reject as its possible bodies in the film that of a black man—Eightball's mutilation—and that of an Asian woman—the sniper's death—and to *come to rest* in the body of a white man.<sup>33</sup> That the rejected bodies are both people of color is important, and might lead to a reading of the film as racially emphatic. But the audience positioning in relation to these bodies prevents such a reading. When the black male body is rejected, it is from the point of view of a female body of color, a position not at rest for the bulk of U.S. filmgoers, a position of bodily discomfort (the slow-motion camera helps here to make her vision more uncomfortable). It is as well a body that is quickly rejected by a point of view that is the focus of the film's attention and from which its resolution stems—that of a white male. Consequently, the film comes to rest only after the brutal elimination of the body and audience position of a woman of color.

To tease out the threads of race and nation, we must ask the question, Is this film about an Asian woman? When the sniper first fires, and for several minutes after, her body is not identified. Her identity is not revealed *until she shoots at a white man*. If her identity were hinged upon firing at U.S. soldiers, her status as Vietnamese fighting in a political war would be enhanced. But that her identity is withheld until she fires at a white man, more importantly a white man whose antiwar attitudes have been pronounced throughout the film, pressures this scene to be read as more race and gender motivated than as nationally and politically written.

As it currently stands, fighting in the military in the U.S. is grounded upon a willingness to defend white masculinity, specifically masculinity as defined in relation to the power interests of the white male. Therefore, the chief question about whether women should enter into combat is not one of physical strength, emotional stability, fraternization, or even military cohesiveness—it is, I would offer, whether women would be willing to defend masculinity. Consequently, I want to suggest this argument as specifically addressing, not the status of Vietnamese women, or the abilities or interests of Vietnamese women combatants, but the circumstances of U.S. women, specifically, U.S. women of color, and the anxieties presented by the image of such women firing at white men, anxieties that films and narratives like Kubrick's are asking U.S. audiences to share.

The representations discussed here are then only very confusingly “about” Vietnamese women. Additionally, they are about the perceived threats posed by women—particularly women of color—to the positions of (predominantly white) U.S. men. More pointedly, Vietnam war narrations are “about” the woman depicted in *Apocalypse Now*, about women who would throw a grenade into a helicopter of wounded men, about women who would deliberately harm men who are already “down,” about women snipers, about violent women and passive men, about “male-bashing”—about women and combat and the men they would fight.

<sup>1</sup> There are other narratives that present images of women in the U.S. as combatants, particularly those of Israeli and Iranian women, though the images of Vietnamese women remain the most prominent. There have been a few film narratives as well of women as terrorists, particularly *The Little Drummer Girl*, *The Raid on Entebbe*, and the dramatizations of and accounts about Patty Hearst’s kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army. But these narratives of terrorism have been displaced recently by focuses on terrorism in the Middle East, in which terrorist groups are depicted as exclusively male, a possible reflection of the degree to which the U.S. and many European nations have come more acutely to define terrorist activities—both in perception and in practice—in terms of a combat of masculinities (focusing on individual male terrorists or leaders—Abu Nidal, Muḥammad Kaddāfi, and others; speaking of terrorist attacks by both state and non-state agencies in terms of “strengths,” defiances, etc. rather than any political issues). These images are the subject of my book-in-progress, *They Shoot Women, Don’t They?*

<sup>2</sup> The only exception I can think of to this is Emily Prager’s provocative short story, “The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device,” a narrative of a U.S. combat unit of women who use seduction, coupled with a lethal device inserted into their vaginas, as combat weaponry. Even here, though they are assigned and trained as a unit, they still work individually in the act of seduction. In Prager’s story, the women are by and large incapable of carrying out their assignments and are finally killed by suspicious U.S. male soldiers. Before she dies, one woman hands over the device to a Vietnamese woman.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Hicks Stiehm, *Arms and the Enlisted Woman* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 1989: 12.

<sup>4</sup> In this way, gang-rape takes on a metaphoric relationship to gendered relationships of warfare as a whole. For specific discussions of the use of gang-rape in the Vietnam war, see Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 1975. See as well Jacqueline Lawson’s work on rape, “She’s a pretty woman...for a gook’: The Misogyny of the Vietnam War,” forthcoming, in *Journal of American Culture*.

<sup>5</sup> William Broyles, Jr., *Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Knopf) 1986: 273

<sup>6</sup> John M. Del Vecchio, *The 13th Valley* (New York: Avon) 1982: 103.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: 179.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel E. Georges-Abeyie, “Women as Terrorists,” in Lawrence Zelic Freedman and Yonah Alexander, eds., *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources) 1983: 78.

## 166 VIETNAM GENERATION

<sup>9</sup> Robin Morgan suggests that in a masculinist philosophy, "What is beautiful must be transient, something to be valued because it is already lost or will be. Aesthetics is in a continual state of perceptive mourning." [Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover* (New York: Norton) 1989: 111.]

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Morse, "Sport on Television: Replay and Display," in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute) 1983: 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> Contrary to their self-proclaimed sensitivity and disinclination to contribute to sensational imagery, sports broadcasting's decision in 1987 not to replay scenes in which players are injured works more effectively to maintain an invulnerable image of the male body.

<sup>12</sup> In such terms, it is not whether the bodies are perfect or imperfect that matters, so much as that in both cases they are inanimate, and then the uses to which that inanimation is put.

<sup>13</sup> I want to thank Rob Kirsch for suggesting this interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> We might think here as well of the murder in *Platoon*, where Sergeant Barnes kills, at point blank range to the head, a Vietnamese woman he believes to be Viet Cong.

<sup>15</sup> The only scene I can think of that is similar is that in *The Deer Hunter*, when Michael turns the Russian roulette pistol from his own head to that of a Vietnamese gambler and fires. But this scene lacks the deliberation and control of the scenes with women. The attention of the scene is that Michael and Nick may lose their own lives in the process, whereas these other scenes depict men who are not at all threatened by the women they shoot.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Avon) 1978: 71.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Heinemann, *Paco's Story* (New York: Penguin) 1986: 176-7

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Mady Weschler Segal, "The Argument for Female Combatants," in *Female Soldiers—Combatants or Noncombatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Nancy Loring Goldman, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press) 1982: 268.

<sup>21</sup> Denmark and Canada, militaries in which women are in combat, are exceptions here.

<sup>22</sup> The only defensive line-of-sight weapon women in the U.S. military are currently assigned to use is air defense artillery, as were women in the British, Soviet, and Germany armies during WWII.

<sup>23</sup> It is in this way that a film like *Platoon*, which is often read as "antiwar," recapitulates the visible masculinity made popular in the Western. Sergeants Barnes and Elias face off as if they were in the O.K. Corral.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel E. Georges-Abeyie, in his essay on "Women as Terrorists," in Lawrence Zelic Freedman and Yonah Alexander, eds., *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc.) 1983: 71-85. Georges Abeyie includes among the "known variables associated with female terrorist behavior" (81), that "Contemporary female terrorists are likely to exhibit male personality or physical traits" (82).

<sup>25</sup> As a four-year old friend once described the difference between "good guys" and "bad guys," "They both kill people, only the good guys always say something afterwards."

<sup>26</sup> John Wheeler, in his *Touched With Fire: The Future of the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Avon) 1984, best articulates this logic when he declares that "the

Vietnam veteran was the nigger of the 1970s" (p.17), and that women were the "niggers" before them.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Segal: 282.

<sup>29</sup> This strategy was certainly at work for Germany during World War II. When 100,000 Russian soldiers were captured early in the war, the Germans were horrified and referred to these women as *Flintenweib* ("musketwomen" in English). German women, especially those serving as civilians in the auxiliaries, were constantly cautioned against becoming like these Soviet women. Jeff M. Tuten, "Germany and the World Wars," in *Female Soldiers*: 55.

<sup>30</sup> For a fuller discussion of these issues, see "Things Worth Dying For": Gender and the Ideology of Collectivity in Vietnam Representation," *Cultural Critique* 8 (Winter, 1987-1988): 79-105.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Hicks Stiehm, *Bring Me Men and Women: Mandated Change at the U.S. Air Force Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1986: 296. William Gibson, in "Paramilitary Culture" (*Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6.1 (March 1989): 90-4) applies this concept to contemporary fascinations with paramilitary culture in the U.S.

<sup>32</sup> Julie Wheelwright makes this point in *Amazons and Military Maids: Women who Dressed as Men in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (Boston: Pandora) 1989, where she examines the stories of women who have disguised themselves as men to fight in battle. In discussing the case of Flora Sandes, Wheelwright concludes: "Her status as an exception rather than the forerunner of a trend, ensured that a heroine unmasked...could become a celebrity and her feats exaggerated.... But since she remained unique, imbued with fantastic qualities or infantilized, assuming the role of mascot, the radical potential of her actions was undercut": 82.

<sup>33</sup> This is, for example, the difficulty felt by many white viewers of a film like *Do the Right Thing*, where the white body never comes to rest.



# VIOLENCE, DEATH AND MASCULINITY

ERIC J. LEED

My thinking on the issue of war and gender, like that of most people, has been fundamentally shaped by the scholarship which has issued from the women's movement in the last two decades. In general this work has addressed issues of direct concern to women, and yet it has had the effect of liberating all—men and women—to regard history through the lens of gender. I think that Joan Scott is correct when she insists, in her keynote essay in the important anthology *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*,<sup>1</sup> that to use gender as a "category of analysis" rather than as a template of sensitivities or a battle-cry, has the potential to rewrite history itself and to reorient the channels of mainstream history. It is clearly impossible, any longer, to read history as the history of humanity, for it—like art, mathematics, politics, war, and much else—is done by men and is largely reflective of their concerns. The revelation of the gender-specific nature of history, while humbling, is also liberating. It frees us to read the evidence for clues no longer about the nature of a totality (humanity) but about a partiality—masculinity. The following remarks and observations are an attempt to follow through on this possibility, and to contemplate the role which violence has played in engendering the male persona within Western cultures. It attempts to suggest a reading of Western war literature for evidence of the process by which Man is produced and images of manhood generated.

In thinking about war and gender we are examining the role which violence plays as a "gendering activity," which it clearly has been in the history of the war-making cultures of the West. The editors of *Behind the Lines* suggest this as a point of departure: "War must be understood as a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of society."<sup>2</sup> At the very beginnings of Western war literature, in what remains the most detailed representation of a warrior culture, in the *Iliad*, violence is clearly used to delineate the activities proper to men and women. When Diomedes wounds Aphrodite in the wrist with his spear on the Plains of Ilion, making her Ichor flow and causing her much pain, he is thrusting home a gendering point:

"Daughter of Zeus," he cried, "be off from this battle and leave war alone. Is it not enough for you to set your traps for feeble womenfolk? If you persist in joining in the fight, you will be taught to tremble at the very name of war."<sup>3</sup>

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 169

Lest she, or ourselves, miss the point Father Zeus explains why he allowed a mortal to commit an act of sacrilege upon the body of an immortal. It was to teach her a lesson: "War is not for you, child. Lend yourself to sighs of longing and the marriage bed."<sup>4</sup> This act which violates the boundary between the profane and sacred world is permissible because it demarcates and sacralizes yet another even more culturally definitive boundary between the world of love, seduction, and childbirth—the female provenance—and the male world of violence in which males project their identities upon men of other stock, losing themselves and finding themselves in battle.

In this text it is clear that war is not just one gendering activity among others, but that it is a *particularly* gendering activity, one which marks the boundaries between the genders and sets the limits at which differences meet but do not mesh. Violence, as Randall Collins recognizes, is a primary boundary-making and boundary crossing activity in historical societies.<sup>5</sup> Those most human (if inhumane) forms of violence—torture, terror, summary executions, mutilations, ritual slaughters and manhunts—are primary ways in which the proper objects of violence are defined, as those outside the boundaries of the group, or those "below" the standards and norms which define the group. Collin's essay is a bold analysis of the phenomenon which is obvious in history but still requires an explanation—through violence men (primarily) have created the boundaries of groups and communities, walled and defended them. This historical fact Leo Tolstoy regarded as the product of a moral "error" which he found in all political doctrines.

The error of all political doctrines without exception, from the most conservative to the most progressive, the error which has brought men to their present calamitous predicament, is essentially this: the men of this world have thought it possible, and still think it possible, to unite people by violence in such a way that they will all, without resistance, submit to the same order of life and to the same rule of conduct following from it.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, men throughout history have been capable of forcing others, with varying amounts of resistance, to submit to the same order of life and rules of conduct. The wounding of Aphrodite by Diomedes is a representation of this fact, for it is the act constitutive of the band of male warriors, just as it identifies the female as seductress and child-bearer. The reservation to men of arts of violence as an activity engendering the masculine is highly significant, for in appropriating the means of violence men take unto themselves the chief means by which communities, domains, spheres of activity, places, have been delineated—a signal power which contains all others.

It is important to understand that when one speaks of gender and the role which violence plays in genderization we are talking about the symbolic significance of the activities and accoutrements of war in defining a species of social being. We are not speaking about the causes

## 170 VIETNAM GENERATION

of violence or its experiential continuations in memory, text, history, fiction, myth. This is Alfred Vagt's point in making a distinction between the "military way"—which is a technological spirit seeking for the best possible way to attain particular objectives with the least expenditure of blood and treasure—and "militarism": all of those activities, weapons, rituals, costumes, manners which define the "being" and identity of the warrior. All of the paraphernalia of militarism are tools by which war becomes a gendering activity, and a gendering activity is any which carries a specific symbolic "wattage" over and above any instrumental purpose the activity may have, a wattage illuminative of a certain kind of identity.

"Gender" itself is a category of social being which—like class or race—derives from nothing more substantial than the mutual recognitions, categorizations and identifications in which people habitually engage. Gender is a form of identity which proceeds from the observation of superficial sexual differences which are then collated and structured into oppositions and antitheses, ultimately becoming templates of behavior and categories of mind. Many<sup>7</sup> have suggested that genderization takes place through "pairings," "twinships" of male and female identities and that gendering itself seems to be an inherently dialectical process. There is no Father without the Mother, no Knight without the Lady, nor warrior without his concubine (witness Achilles' long sulk when deprived of his). One may use the wounding of Aphrodite by Diomedes as an example of this dialectical process of identity formation in which the male is mirrored in a complementary female form, for in their confrontation Diomedes in recognizing the nature of the "other" and constituting his own as well as enforcing a nature upon the other. The process of gendering is interesting because it seems to be paradigmatic of the process of identity formation in general, and exemplifies the truth that, at bottom, there is no "self" without the "other." It is all done with mirrors, and begins with the fact that "we are but nature given eyes."<sup>8</sup> From our recognitions and observations of others are created categories, simplifications, rigidities, masks and veils without which we may not identify what is seen. I have to admit to feeling nothing but unease before this subject, for gender, like all social being seems to be something, a reality, which grows out of nothing. But such we must recognize when we look for the source of social reality and social power which seem to be generated purely in and through the relations of individuals to each other and in the reflections set up by those relations.

To make the point even finer, then, in studying the question of war and gender we are examining the ways in which violence governs mutual recognitions and identifications out of which structures of identity are crystallized and from which societies take their form as articulations of differences. In this sense, society consists of little more than fixed images of identity which structure and explicate human relations. The role which violence plays as a medium of recognitions is

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 171

best approached from the insight of Hegel, who regarded war as the origin of relations of dominance-submission, the master-slave relationship. In asking why men fight each other, and how male relationships and consciousness are mediated through the reality of violence, Hegel proposed the operation of a "necessity," the necessity of the "confirmation" of the male self.

They must enter into this struggle, for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of an objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well. And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence. The individual who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person: but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps men "must" enter this struggle, too, because the language of violence is a preemptory language, the first act of which forces the other to reply in kind or lose "certainty of self," "face" status. But it is an open question why men (rather than women) require this confirmation of themselves and feel this need to acquire a "certainty" of self as an "objective truth" acknowledged by a defeated "other" whose own identity might be cancelled in this operation. History offers a wealth of examples of men who have been willing to risk the very condition of identity (life) in the affirmation of an identity superior to "bare existence" and biological necessity, trading life for glory, death for fame. This would seem to be an irrational choice and one requiring explanation. Mysterious too is this notion of the essence of the male identity proven in battle as "freedom." "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained." By what necessity is this assertion of freedom made, this declaration of liberty from "mere" existence implicit in the risks of battle?

Hegel proposes that we regard war as a process of "identification," or as a "change" of character of a particular sort. It is a "trial," a testing and "proving" which adds nothing new to the self-consciousness engendered in battle, but which reduces the self of the warrior to an identifiable and characteristic essence, to an irreducible form and individuality. It is thus that in war a putative identity is asserted by the process of having everything unessential to that character stripped away. In this sense the "trial by battle" resembles what Kenneth Burke has spoken of as a "fictional death." The fictional death is fictional rather than "real" because it uses death as an assertion of self, character, identity, thereby denying the reality of death as a dissolution of form and a solvent of identities. The *topos* of the fictional death is prominent in funeral orations, in the narration of epic and heroic journeys as well as in war literature, where it is presumed that the "true" and genuine self is tried, proven, reduced to its essence by the journey through the "valley of death." What men often experience in war is the disillusionment of

## 172 VIETNAM GENERATION

hopes and expectations keyed to the image of the fictional death, learning that death is the negation of consciousness, the revelation of the pure materiality of the body. "In this experience self-consciousness becomes aware that *life* is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness."<sup>10</sup> It is only after a war that the "fictions" which promote it are slowly reconstituted in the conditions of peace until men must again engage in the reality of violence in order to free themselves from the horrors and hopes invested in its imaginings.

Hegel's description of war as the source of the master-slave relationship is interesting, as is his entire discussion of the unfolding of consciousness, because it describes a structure of desire which, in psychoanalytic terms, must be described as narcissistic. In war the warrior seeks confirmation of a projected self-image as an "objective" truth upon an opponent's body, and through his triumph confirms this self-image, often at the cost of the destruction of the "otherness" and the life of his enemy. The "minimal" self confirmed in war and death is a peculiarly "social" self, "fame," name, reputation, the self whose continued existence assuages Hector's grief at the certainty of his own mortality. As he explains to his wife:

I see you there in Argos, toiling for some other woman at the loom or carrying water from an alien well, a helpless drudge with no will of your own. "There goes the wife of Hector," they will say when they see your tears. "He was the champion of the horse-taming Trojans when Ilium was besieged." And every time they say it, you will feel another pang at the loss of the one man who might have kept you free.<sup>11</sup>

The continuation of Hector's fame, signed and symbolized in the person of his wife, is some compensation for the death of his body, and his grief for his wife is peculiarly an extension of his grief for himself.

Those who would examine the warrior mentality and the psychosocial structures characteristic of warrior cultures would do well to look into the literature on narcissism. Warrior societies are significant historically in providing the soil of aristocracies. With the territorialization of nomadic peoples the image of the warrior is idealized, "and when there were local agriculturists to dominate, this type could develop into that of the aristocrat or noble."<sup>12</sup> Increasingly it appears that the normative persona general within the modern West—the image of the autonomous, free, armed, mobile individual—is derived from the self-image of the nobleman, the lord. Warrior cultures and the aristocracies which issue from them are constructed—Gonzalez-Reigosa and Kaminsky argue—upon narcissistic channeling of libido. Homoerotic libido was a central force in the culture of the gymnasium, in the formation of the image of the warrior-citizen, in the Greek Miracle, the discovery of philosophy in the West, which was essentially "related to the cognitive desire of the mind to possess itself as an object, a relationship we understand in terms of the Freudian concept of narcissism...."<sup>13</sup> In the Freudian

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 173

conception the narcissistic object-choice is the choice of an object which acquires libidinal significance insofar as it is a projection and mirror of self. As Socrates observed of the beloved in the *Phaedrus*, "the lover is his mirror in whom he is beholding himself but he is not aware of this." The structure of libido characteristic of warrior cultures is explicated in the first notions of romantic love as an homoerotic love which eschews sexual consummation. The most interesting implication of Gonzalez-Reigosa and Kaminsky's theory is that by identifying the wellsprings of romantic love in narcissistic libido one may dispense with the idea that the prohibition upon consummation of romantic desire is a result of "repression." This attenuation of the desire short of possession is implicit in the very narcissistic character of the first explications of romantic love in the West.

[D]esire for a self-projected image of the self is desire for an unattainable object, hence interminable desire, and object of such desire must tend always to appear as a transcendent ideal. In this sense the Western ideal of romantic love pitched to an unrealistic height and taken as an absolute value in the individual's life is fundamentally narcissistic, inasmuch as it aims at an unattainable object and is therefore a projection of self-love.<sup>14</sup>

Plato's prohibition upon sexuality in the ideal relations of lovers was a prohibition on the appropriation of the sexual object. The discountenancing of consummation is an attempt to perpetuate the conditions of desire, and it is this which makes romantic love an ideal peculiar to the West. Any appropriation of the object through sexual intercourse or through killing (killing is an ultimate form of appropriation) is the destruction of that object, just as Narcissus shatters his beloved image reflected in the pool with his touch.

Notions of romantic love inherited from the Classical world and repackaged in Christianity were heterosexualized in the Middle Ages, and yet the codifications of romantic love one finds in courtly literature remain significantly narcissistic and self-referencing. To be a knight, the mounted man whose calling was arms had to be in love with a lady, and yet, in Diaz de Gomez' explanation of why this was necessary, it becomes clear that the lady is not so much the object of the knight's sexual desire as the frame, mirror and stimulus of his characterizing passion.

Likewise they know that for love [of women] do they become better knights and acquit themselves more magnificently, that they achieve prowess and great labours of chivalry, whether in arms or in sports, that they are set forth on great adventures to do them pleasure; and to go into strange realms bearing their devices, seeking chance encounters and encounters in the lists, each praising and exalting his mistress. Moreover, they make about their ladies and for the love of them gracious songs, most

## 174 VIETNAM GENERATION

pleasant declarations, notable sayings, ballads, songs, roundelays, lays, virelays, complaints, tales of dreams and sonnets, and allegories where each declares himself in words and makes the most of his passion.<sup>15</sup>

The "love," the encounters and adventures, the equipment and behaviors of the chivalric character are all self-referencing, done to no other purpose than to reveal the individual doing these things as a true and genuine knight, exemplary of the normative "free" person, the one identity presumed to exist outside social categories and above the "commons." This image—as it is appropriated by artisans, clerks, men of mere property and by women after 1789, always exists in conjunction with ideals of romantic, that is to say, narcissistic love, which acquires a hegemonic reality in the industrial age.

Always, in contemplating an apparently complete socio-psychic structure which persists as an ideology, one must deal with the historical origins of that structure. One can do no better than follow out the implications of K.J. Dover's suggestion that the open approval of pederasty in Greek culture was a result of constant warfare.<sup>16</sup> This thesis is perhaps derived from Aristotle who noted, in general, that warfare eroticized society. "Indeed, it seems as if there was a rational basis for the myth of a union between Ares and Aphrodite: certainly all soldiers have a strong urge towards sexuality, whether directed towards the male or the female."<sup>17</sup> Aristotle also noted, significantly, that the open approval of male homosexuality in warrior societies was a "corrective" to the power which women assumed over property and marriage in societies where men were often away fighting. Aristotle did not approve of the dominance of women which he saw in Spartan and Cretan societies, though, he noted, this dominance, "is a common state of affairs in a military or warlike community, though not among the Kelts and other peoples among whom male homosexuality is openly approved."<sup>18</sup> The grouping of men and women into separate sodalities within which homosexuality is tolerated or openly approved, the structure found in ancient Sparta, is most often interpreted as a "primitive survival."<sup>19</sup> And yet when we see this "primitive survival" reappearing again and again in societies that go to war one must suspect that it is the product of a force which operated in the past as it does in the present—the force of war. In general when we see human cultures removed in time, separated by space and constituted of very different human materiel, evidencing the same structure we might presume these similarities are a product of a common force, just as the force of waves reduces stones of differing mineral content and configuration to a common rotundity and complementary form. In order to prosecute this thesis we would have to show how normally peaceful societies which go to war evidence the same "gender structure" characteristic of warrior societies and societies dominated by war. One would have to ask of all wars the question which Joan Scott asks of World War I: "Was the gender system transformed or

reproduced in the course of the extraordinary conditions generated in wartime?"<sup>20</sup> The evidence of modern war literature compels one to conclude that the conditions of war change the "normal" gender structure, setting aside, for the duration, the conditions and terms of patriarchy. Sandra Gilbert, in a superb article on the war experience of British literary men and women, notes that the war experience of men was very different from that of women. For men war was an experience of mortality and the decimation of a generation. For women it was an experience of improved health,<sup>21</sup> expanded power and effectiveness. This suggests to Gilbert, "that the most crucial rule that the war had overturned was that of patrilineal succession, the founding law of patriarchal society itself."<sup>22</sup> There is a widespread sense, in the expectations of those who go to war, that warfare transmutes the structures of patriarchy into something else. The question is: "What is this something else?"

War removes men and women from the patriarchal family and sets aside the patriarchal family as the chief "gendering institution." In war men and women encounter each other directly and in generalized, uniformized figures as men are mobilized, massed and uniformed, and women—also uniformed—flood into the public sphere the men have vacated. One finds abundant evidence that war generates solidarities which are perverse in patriarchal circumstances. Nina Auerbach insisted that, "union among women...is one of the unacknowledged fruits of war."<sup>23</sup> David Mitchell observed that with the demobilization of 1919, many women "wept at the ending of what they now saw as the happiest and most purposeful days of their lives."<sup>24</sup> In war too, men learn to love each other, forming solidarities and brotherhoods which have always astonished those who regard the phenomenon of war from the outside, as an event purely of enmity and hatred. The literature of war is replete with testimony about the ways in which men, through common violence, cross the boundaries which have separated them into different classes, nations and races. But also crossed are those hedges and barriers set up between men in their normal competition for women, the vehicle of patriarchal continuities. Perhaps the most defining condition of patriarchy is that men mediate their relations to other men through women, becoming to each other individual brothers, sons, brother-in-laws, fathers. So too, under the conditions of patriarchy, the relationship of women to women within other households is mediated through the agency of men who occupy, define and confine them within the boundaries of the private sphere. With the outbreak of war, this engendering through the "other" undergoes fundamental mutations. In war men encounter as familiars those who have been made strange by the boundaries of privacy, nation and manhood which have separated them. So too, women learn their inherent similitude to each other independently of the mediations of the "other," the male. This is to say that in setting aside the chief engendering institution, the patriarchal family, warfare engenders the genders homoerotically and narcissistically.



## 176 VIETNAM GENERATION

It is also apparent on the surface of things that with war the chief “gendering activity” within patriarchy—biological reproduction—is bracketed out for the duration. In war, the genders map their relations to the “other” along an erotic-aggressive continuum, relating to each other through non-reproductive sexuality (“sex” proper) or through the reigning gendering activity—violence. Susan Gubar’s essay on the images of women in the literature and propaganda of World War II details this transformation, as women are figured as booty and objects of male sexual appropriation.<sup>25</sup> So too Klaus Theweleit’s study of male fantasies in the *Freikorps* literature, thoroughly examines the erotic-aggressive relations between the soldier-male and the seductive woman (as booty and betrayer).<sup>26</sup> The common military-male fantasy of wallowing in dismembered female flesh combines the hostility of unified men against the opposite sex with a pornographic attitude towards the female body. Pornography is, in this instance, what Susan Sontag (*On Pornography*) described long ago; the objectification and dismemberment of the sexual object, its disarticulation into “arts” which implicitly denies the unity of those parts, the “person” constituting the whole. In the conditions of war the “integrity” of the male body is posed against an “enemy” intent upon violating that integrity, and this integrity is also defined against the image of woman, now a creature outside the domain of battle, whose touch may despoil with pollutions the sacrality of the male who had dedicated himself to violence. The boundaries which war sets up between the sexes are often revealed in their violations, as in Ernst Von Salomon’s description of his encounter with Berlin prostitutes while fighting against the Spartacists in 1919.

With their aura of unalterable strangeness, they would throw themselves at us as we lingered for a short break in the shelter of the houses, still in the grip of the laws of turbulent battle, the enemy still fixed in our sights. It wasn’t their whispered propositions that seemed so intolerable: it was the easy matter-of-fact manner in which they grasped our bodies, bodies that had just been exposed to the ravages of machine-gun fire.<sup>27</sup>

The sacralization, the “setting apart” of the male from the female through the instrumentalities of violence contributes to the sense of the “unalterable strangeness” of women and to the sense of violation by their “matter-of-fact” and knowing touch. But such violations of the closed and integral male body are abundant in war with its pollutions and penetrations, wounds and dislocations. The conditions of violence which set apart women and men also create the conditions of a promiscuous familiarity. Just as Vera Brittan, who served as a nurse on the Western Front during World War I, was grateful to war for her knowledge of men: “Towards men...I came to feel an almost adoring gratitude...for the knowledge of masculine functioning which the care of them gave me.”<sup>28</sup>

## VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 177

At least in these two ways—by setting aside the patriarchal family as the chief gendering institution and biological reproduction as the chief gendering activity—war creates a gender structure which contrasts markedly with patriarchy, and might be called a “sororial-fratriarchal” gender structure. Societies marked by protracted war present an image of organized cohorts of women without men and men without women.<sup>29</sup> One also finds this structure explicated in many ancient myths and legends. During the long Second Messenian War (600-640 BC) the many children born to Spartan women during the war (called *Parthenoi*, or products of “virgin births”) were repudiated by the men at the end of the war and sent away to found the colony of Taras (Tarentum) in southern Italy, the only colony the normally non-imperialistic Spartans were known to have founded. According to another version of the legend the Spartan women sent a delegation to the army protesting the length of the war and the depopulation resulting. The army picked its best young men and sent them home to procreate. The outcome, however, was the same: the progeny of these unions were accused of plotting with the helots, rounded up and sent abroad. It was this arrangement which Plato sought to institutionalize in the marriage practices and mating lotteries of his guardian class. One also finds this structure of opposed male and female sodalities which meet periodically to procreate in the myth of the Amazons who were paired with the male tribe of Gargarensians. On Midsummer’s Eve the two tribes met in the meadows atop the Caucasus mountains to mate. The product of such unions, if male, were placed with the Gargarensians, while the girls had their right breast seared to facilitate the drawing of the bow and were installed among the Amazons. Structurally, the Amazons functioned as the mirror-image of the warrior-male cohort. Mythically, they functioned as an obligatory test of all men who would be heroes, existing to be conquered by all who would claim a lasting fame, as they were by Heracles, Jason, Theseus, Dionysus. The force which war exercises upon the productive strategies of war-making societies might also be seen in the first landfall of Jason and his Argonauts upon the island of Lemnos where the women had killed their husbands. “For they hated their lawful wives, and yielding to their own mad folly, drove them from their homes; and they took to their beds the captives of their spear, cruel ones.”<sup>30</sup> The men preferred the women who were after all the “possessions” of the men who had captured them, to those wives who enjoyed the power characteristic of women in warrior societies. The women of Lemnos asked Jason and his men to settle and repopulate the island but he, driven on by “grievous trials” and the ultimate goal of the golden fleece of the Amazon women, demurred, only allowing his men to go ashore to the Lemnian women, “in order that Lemnos might be again inhabited by men and not be ruined.”<sup>31</sup> In all of these instances war is obviously the force which shapes the outline of the genders, effecting their meetings, forming the antipathies and connective between them.

## 178 VIETNAM GENERATION

It is an open question whether this alternation between patriarchy and sororial-fratriarchal gender structures in the transition from peace to war is a change conserving the structures of patriarchy or transformative of them. There are many who would argue that this change is a "structural" rather than an "historical" transformation, a switch of codes resident in established cultural patterns which is often repeated in history rather than a unique and irrepeatable alternation of those patterns. Those who have studied the alterations within gendering caused by modern wars have consistently argued that the freedom and power of women, their consecration to larger public functions within an expanded "home" were alterations which were temporary and for the duration of hostilities. With the return of peace in 1918 and 1945 men and women flocked to the reconstitution of the patriarchal family, consecrating themselves anew to the disciplines of motherhood or fatherhood. And yet this conservative estimation of the power of war to change the very terms in which identities are defined neglects the to and fro of history, the way in which war inalterably transforms the affections and the fears of those who experience them, at home or at the "front." Many, in their experience between the lines of domesticity and on the peripheries of nations, cannot easily forget the selves adapted to those circumstances, even when they once more retreat behind the lines. In general it is my feeling that prevalence of "total" war in the first half of the twentieth century explains many of the features regarded as characteristic of modernity: the liberation and power of women, the demise of patriarchy, the heating up of the battle of the sexes, the public eroticization of gender relations and the use of "sex" as a social cement, the obsession with violence as a marker of moral boundaries.

The point of the foregoing remarks is to suggest that there is a specific socio-psychic structure characteristic of war-making societies and evident when societies make the transition from peace to war. It is a structure which differs in significant ways from patriarchy in that gender relations are not individualizing and particularizing as they are within the patriarchal family, but generalizing and universalizing of "masculine" and "feminine" characters, writ large in literature, propaganda and myth. Gendering, in war, is done narcissistically, through the projection of male and female ideals which focus self-love. The injuries, psychic and physical, incurred in war are often the injuries which Sandor Ferenczi found in his ward for shell-shock victims, which he interpreted as "wounded self-love," as damaged narcissistic ego, which retreats from a violent world of war, and seeks confirmation in veterans' movements, searches for compensation and recognition from society. The "force" of war must be regarded as a primary "cause" of this narcissistic gender structure and a primary factor in its pathologies, a force which cuts across differences of era, language, culture. I am a presentist in that I believe that the forces we observe in operation around us—of statusing, reproduction, production, violence, capital accumulation and consumption—are the forces at work in history which

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 179

have shaped historical formations. The primary value of this view is that it integrates the observational (anthropology, sociology, political science, economics) with the historical sciences. If war is viewed as a force constitutive of particular social and psychic structures, we might examine these not only historically and through texts, but in our witnessings of our own time, our observation of ourselves, in considering the role which violence has played in creating one's own manhood, shaping the defenses and distortions characteristic of the gender.

What remains is a closer consideration of the role which violence plays in historical definitions of masculinity and in the relations which men fashion to each other. War is a language in which human relations are fashioned and explicated. It is a reality which has shaped men's relation to other men and to themselves. At the very outset this goes against the common usage in which violence means the absence of human relations or their severance and a self-destructive relationship to the self. Many sociologists would prefer to exclude the relations of violence from those exchanges at the basis of social reciprocities, expunging "the result of physical coercion from the range of social conduct encompassed by the term 'exchange.'" <sup>32</sup> Others, notably Georg Simmel, Leo Tolstoy and Clausewitz, have insisted that the reciprocities set up by violence make it a source of human relations. For Georg Simmel, violence is an instrument of "sociation" which serves to "resolve divergent dualisms, it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even though it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties."<sup>33</sup> Clausewitz's conception of war was distinguished by an awareness of the way its reciprocities lead to a maximization of violence. "War is a constant state of reciprocal action, the effects of which are mutual."<sup>34</sup> Though students of trench warfare have noted the way in which the reciprocities of violence act to minimize risk of life.<sup>35</sup> From quite another point of view Tolstoy noted that the reciprocities of violence are rooted in the injuries caused by it, and that violence is almost invariably justified in terms of defense or as retaliation for an injury done. He argued, following the brilliant solution of Christ, that it was only by denying the right to self-defense that the cycle of violence might be broken, asserting that the act of self-defense is no more "moral" than the initial violence to which the victim is responding. Such a denial is present, too, in Camus' succinct statement that "suffering gives no rights."<sup>36</sup> In short, it is only by denying the right to violent self-defense that the cycle of violence is broken. By denying the rights incurred by injury the injury is laid to rest.

The conflict is traditionally the source of two species of human relations, relations of dominance-submission and relations of equality and independence. The defeat of one party by another is the inaugurative act of relations of dominance and subordination and is the apotheosis of the identity of the victor as it is the annihilation of the identity of the defeated. Inconclusive conflict or a draw may provide the foundation for a mutual recognition of autonomy, respect, friendship, or alliance on the terms of equality. The violent encounter is a way of measuring the

## 180 VIETNAM GENERATION

“strength” of the parties involved, and this strength comes down to an ability to administer and endure pain. It is the “disparity” in this ability which provides evidence for superiority and which thus is the focus of much communication and symbolization in war. The disparity of strength measured in battle justified, according to the Greeks, the dominance of one city or individual over another. As the Athenians explained to the islanders of Melos just before they conquered the city, killing all the men and enslaving the women and children: “Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men leads us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, it is through war that one discovers what one can rule. Since it is the disparity of strength, the excess in the ability of one party over the other to endure or administer suffering, which generates the evidence justifying “rule” and dominance, this is the chief focus of representations and demonstrations of force. The slaughters conducted by the Portuguese in their efforts to control trade in the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century were calculatedly “excessive.” Francisco Almeida, the first Portuguese governor of India, blew captured natives from the muzzles of his cannon before Conanor, saluting the town with fragments of the bone and flesh of native fathers, husbands, and sons. Albuquerque, the second Portuguese governor of the Indies, was particularly brutal in his treatment of the townsfolk of Kuryat, south of Muskat near the Gulf of Oman, whom he executed in great numbers, women and children included, mutilating others. “He ordered also that they should cut off the ears and noses of the Moors who were captured there, and then sent them away to Ormuz to bear witness to their disgrace.”<sup>38</sup> When Albuquerque retook Goa in 1510 he put to death all of the Moors—men, women and children—whom he found in the city to the number of six thousand, winning the fear and obedience but not the love of peoples along the shore of the Indian Ocean from Ormuz to the Malaccas. But one suspects that this excess of cruelty was a compensation for an actual inferiority of men and supplies. By conscientiously transgressing the “norms” of violence the Portuguese represented themselves as men from whom scarcely imaginable horrors might be expected and who should, thus, be obeyed. Conquest is a form of armed travel usually undertaken by an expeditionary force against a much more numerous people, and thus a form of war which often uses the language of cruelty in the effort to over-match the often superior resources available to native populations. Such captains as Cortez, Pizarro and Pedro de Alvarado, the conqueror of Guatemala, all considered terror to be an essential resource of conquerors. In justifying his decision to burn at the stake those chiefs of the Quiche Indians who resisted his conquest of the city of Tulatan, Alvarado wrote to Cortez in a language perfectly understood by both.

And seeing that by fire and sword I might bring these people to the service of His Majesty, I determined to burn the chiefs who, at the time that I wanted to burn them, told me, as it will appear

in their confessions, that they were the ones who had ordered the war against me and were the ones also who made it.... And this I did so that I could...strike terror into the land.<sup>39</sup>

Of course neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish invented the techniques of terror, or were the first to discover the efficacy of the preponderance of force in working upon the imaginations of those they would conquer, for the imagination is, in this instance, the crucible of political power, the means by which force is translated into rule. Thus, while violence is by no means unknown to other species, it is the human animal that has specialized in the most "communicational" modes of violence, torture, terror, execution, mutilation.

Torture and mutilation...are distinctively human acts; they are indeed advanced human acts. The boundaries between human groups are involved, making possible the detachment that allows (and motivates) a free use of cruelty; but there is a skill at empathizing across the boundary, enough to be able to gauge the effects of cruelty upon its victim. This distinctively human violence becomes symbolic; torture and mutilation are above all forms of communication usable as threats and supports of complete domination.<sup>40</sup>

The torturer, detached from his victim, may imaginatively share the pain he administers but does not feel, and this constitutes a bond between himself and his victim while at the same time asserting his liberty—as torturer—from pain and death, the same liberty which is a part of the innocent sadism of children. In war, torture, the administration of terror, sado-masochistic relations in general are the norm, not the perversion they are in normal circumstances.

However lamentable and morally reprehensible, the techniques of violence used in all societies are evidence of the extent to which violence is not simply a destructive but also an ordering reality, constituting relations between human beings where none have existed before. Internally, violence integrates the group, by the expulsion of anomalies to that group, an act by which "the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified."<sup>41</sup> One may draw many examples of this function of violence from off the slaughter-bench of history, but two telling examples of ritualized internal violence are supplied by Sir Francis Drake and Magellan on their respective voyages around the world. Both Drake and Magellan executed members of their expeditions at the same place—in the Bay of St. Julian in the Straits of Magellan—and at roughly the same time of year. Magellan's execution of his mutinous captains occurred on March 31, 1520, after he ignored (and not for the first time) the will of the majority of his followers that the fleet return to winter in the more salubrious climate of the Rio de la Plata. The majority of the captains, too, preferred the easy and known route to the Malaccas East, around the horn of Africa, to the route west across the

## 182 VIETNAM GENERATION

Pacific with its unknown dangers and hazards. In the Bay of St. Julian this quarrel came to a head and the expedition fissioned. Three of the five ships drew away from Magellan's flagship, anchored in a far corner of the bay and refused messages from the commander. Magellan blocked the exit of the bay and undermined the fragile federation of captains opposed to him. He succeeded in killing the most formidable of his opposition, Captain Alonzo de Mendoza, and in suborning another. His punishment of the mutineers was exemplary. The body of Mendoza was drawn and quartered, its parts hung from four gibbets on the shore which were still standing when Drake visited the place. Gaspar Quesada was beheaded by his secretary in exchange for a pardon. Juan de Cartagena, because of his excellent connections in the Spanish court, was marooned in Patagonia along with a quarrelsome pilot.

Fifty-eight years later, at this same boundary line between oceans, Sir Francis Drake executed Thomas Doughty in an act which had a more sacrificial and less political complexion than Magellan's punishment of his rebellious captains. Doughty was a pious underling, apparently an unpleasant man, whom everybody disliked and who was often guilty of presumption before his betters. He was removed from the command of his ship for allegedly accepting bribes from prisoners taken with a Portuguese vessel near the Cape Verde Islands. While a semi-prisoner on the admiral's ship, Doughty was "thought to be too preemptory and exceeded his authority, taking upon himself too great a command."<sup>42</sup> Francis Fletcher, one of the chroniclers of Drake's expedition thought that Doughty deserved his fate, and that he "had conspired, not only the overthrow of the action, but of the principal actor also."<sup>43</sup> William Sloan, another of the chroniclers, was not so sure, and described Doughty as a martyr rather than a rebel. "Long before his death he seemed to be mortified and ravished with the desire for God's kingdom."<sup>44</sup> Doughty himself seems to have assumed the passivity and resignation of a designated victim. Given the choice of being beheaded on the spot or returned to England for execution he chose the former and was beheaded on the beach before the assembled crews. Francis Fletcher was aware of the parallels between these two incidents. The execution of Doughty

...left unto our fleete a lamentable example of how a goodly gentleman, who in seeking advancement unfit for him, cast away himselfe; and offered unto posteritie [an example] of a fatall calamite, as incident to that port, and such like actions, which might happilie afford a new paire of parallels to be added to Plutarch's: in that same place, neere about the same time of yeare, witnessed the execution of two gentlemen: suffering both for the like cause, employed both in the like service, entertained both in great hopes, endowed both with excellent qualities, the one fifty-eight years after the other.<sup>45</sup>

But there are deeper parallels. In both instances the expulsion of "anomalies" from the travelling society clarified the order, the relationship

between leaders and led, from which the victims were excluded. The sacrifice of a victim at the boundaries between worlds has been customary since Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter before embarking for Troy and in general we might regard the spilling of blood, the sacrifice of a victim, as a boundary marking and boundary-crossing activity.<sup>46</sup> Violence, here, is unifying because it is an act which all, leaders and followers, have an interest in representing as an act of justice. Here the act of execution performs a number of functions: It is exemplary representing what happens to those who are "out of place," it rids the group of troublemakers and silences dissenters; it assures those who accede to the sacrifice of their own innocence, rectitude and righteousness, creating a uniform conscience which appears to be a psychological necessity within social groups, particularly those undertaking risky and uncertain actions.

Violence is a way of marking boundaries, a method of articulating the structure of groups but it is also a connective, a link, a means of crossing boundaries. If we think of this dual property of violence as a method at once of distancing and connection (regarding that which distances as also that which connects) in a psychological rather than a purely geographical sense we may see the ways in which violence is an activity which men use to assert their integrity and autonomy, to boundary themselves, to invade the precincts of the "other" man and to penetrate him. The cult of the wound, the delectation of wounds, the peculiarly precise depiction of woundings and blood-lettings which one finds in war literature may thus be read as evidence of connections made and integrities violated. War literature is a peculiarly masculine and sado-masochistic form of pornography which delectates the opening of that which is made mysterious by the cult of honor, the integrity of the male person, defended and maintained by force and law. With the wound, the mysterious interiors of the male are revealed, the mask of masculinity is penetrated. The masculine cult of wounds and pain is evidence of a peculiarly male sexuality often exercised in war and we might gain some insight into this form of sexuality by using Wilhelm Reich's insights into the masochistic character. Reich learned, in his analysis of the dreams of his masochistic patients, that the most common dream of masochists was the dream of puncture and blood-letting. He also found that masochists did not enjoy pain, as was popularly thought, but that they were willing to tolerate the displeasure of pain for the pleasure of release from inner tensions. But it was the release, not the pain which was sought.<sup>47</sup> Thus violence figures as a mechanism both of repression and release. "The specifically male relation to sexuality is that of sublimation, the symbolism of honour tending at once to refuse any direct expression of sexuality and to encourage its transfigured manifestation in the form of manly prowess."<sup>48</sup> The masculine social being—"honour" for short—is closely bound up with the body, just as to "lose face" is to lose honor, to touch the head or bow it a sign of honor given, a public blow delivered an act which



## 184 VIETNAM GENERATION

dishonors the integrity of the male body. A man is thus responsible for avenging insults and assaults upon the integrity of the body and, traditionally, loses honor by going to the public authorities with the request that they avenge insults to that integrity.

A man is therefore always the guardian of his own honour, since it relates to his own consciousness and is too closely allied to his physical being, his will, and his judgement for anyone else to take responsibility for it.... The ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence.<sup>49</sup>

If we regard "honour" as a traditional and moral term for accumulated repressions, for body-armor, then violence is a means by which these repressions, this self is maintained and also a way in which the repressions may be dismantled through the agency of another. The spectacles of destruction we find in war, depictions of machines being blown up, men pulled apart, dismembered and dismantled, is enjoyable and pleasurable not because it expresses a "death-wish" but because it specifies the dismantling of repressions, the collapse of rigidities, the release from tension of that machine, man, "an arrangement of opposed parts so constructed as to transform energy into work."

The actual workings of the sexuality which men have invested in violence and its sado-masochistic structure within the male group might be clearly seen in the march of Lope de Aguirre and his men through the Amazon basin in 1560. Aguirre was a long-service sergeant in the conquest of Peru who had been on the losing side of the many revolts of the conquistadors against the governors appointed by the Spanish crown. The expedition, searching for El Dorado, was a way of ridding the colony of an unruly, disruptive and "anomalous" element. At the mouth of the Putumayu near the village of Machiparo, Aguirre led a mutiny against the appointed leader of the expedition, Pedro de Ursua. He justified this rebellion in curious terms, accusing Ursua of sleeping too much with the lady he had brought with him. He also charged that Ursua, "always made his hut apart from the rest of the army, when he ought to be its center, because he detested the company of soldiers...."<sup>50</sup> When Aguirre and his followers elected a new king, Don Fernando Guzman, they drew up a document legitimating the overthrow of the old leader. Aguirre signed his name to the document, "Lope Aguirre, traitor," insisting that this act had put himself and the men *together* outside of the law. "Yes we have all killed the governor, and the whole of us have rejoiced at the act; and if not, let each man lay his hand upon his heart, and say what he thinks. We have all been traitors, we have all been a party to mutiny."<sup>51</sup> Aguirre used this technique, periodically killing a member of the group, to solidify the men behind him. He killed and disemboweled Doña Inez and her maid in a way which shocked even the toughened consciences of these veterans of the conquest, "either because he did not like the woman, or that he was jealous that anyone should

have a female companion," for the women had found new protectors among the men of the expedition. When Aguirre killed a priest, the "king" and his entire suite at a place on the Amazon river still known as the "village of butchery," he told his men that they should not be alarmed at these killings because "such were the natural consequences brought on by wars, and that war could not be called by that name if such acts did not take place...."<sup>52</sup> It is obvious that killing was a way of unifying the men behind him through "crimes," but one may suspect that the motive operative in the repetitions of violence was the one admitted to by a soldier on Quiros' expedition who, when asked why he shot a native with no provocation "replied that his diligence was to kill because he liked to kill."<sup>53</sup> In any case, Aguirre's followers noted that he often became morose and depressed when it had been many days "since an occasion had offered to kill again."<sup>54</sup> After deposing their elected prince Aguirre named himself not king or general but "powerful chief" and his men began to call themselves the "Maronones" after the river they travelled. They reached the sea on July 1, 1561, at the mouth of the Orinoco and laid siege to the island of Margarita. Now the crimes that Aguirre had committed with the tacit consent of his men became the cement which he used to bind them to him.

So now you must open your eyes, and see each for himself. Be not deceived by any vain confidence: for having committed so many, and such grave and atrocious crimes, be ye sure that ye are not safe in any part of the world, excepting with me.... Thus I counsel you not to leave me...to sell your lives dearly when the occasion offers, and to let all be of one mind; for against such a union, all the force that may be sent against you will be of little avail.<sup>55</sup>

By their crimes these men had placed themselves outside of the laws, and this bond held Aguirre's force together until they met a substantial royal army in New Granada. On the occasion of one of Aguirre's numerous executions—the execution of his Mayor del Campo for treason—he accused another of his closest followers, one Llamaso, of disloyalty. In a particularly graphic performance of the rite which bound this party of men to each other, Llamaso threw himself upon the body of the man who had been slain.

Shouting "curse this traitor, who wished to commit so great a crime. I will drink his blood!" and putting his mouth over the wounds in his head, with more than demonic rage, he began to suck the blood and brains that issued from the wounds, and swallowed what he sucked, as if he were a famished dog.... Aguirre was satisfied at his fidelity, and so it turned out, for there was no one who sustained him, until his last hour, like unto this Llamaso.<sup>56</sup>

## 186 VIETNAM GENERATION

This graphic rendering of the contagion of identities through the exchange of blood is too shocking to suggest the question it answers: How is it that the men of this world have found it possible to unite people by violence in such a way that they will submit to the same order of life and follow the same path? But in what way is the cannibalism of a Llamaso and the repetition-compulsion that drives Aguirre different from Drake's execution of Doughty? Both have the same form and differ only in Aguirre's repetitions, and in the fact that Drake, by his execution of the victim, solidified his following around an act of "justice," while Aguirre united his following through repeated acts of "injustice." But violence, as Aguirre never tired of insisting, was the act which linked the band of warriors. It is only that in his expedition the evil is pressed beyond banality to an extreme where it can be recognized.

By what necessity does male libido traditionally flow through the channels of violence? Why is it men rather than women who seek "certainty of self" and connections to other men through the medium of violence? In what ways does war, the encounter with death, confront men with their essence—freedom? War is an assertion of male potencies. What does it reveal about the nature of these potencies? Mary O'Brien suggests an answer to these questions which needs to be considered.

Potency is a masculine triumph over men's natural alienation from the process of reproduction.... [It] is the name men have given to their historically wrought success in mediating experienced contradictions in their reproductive consciousness.<sup>57</sup>

Men's participation in biological reproduction is only for the briefest moment of ejaculation, itself often experienced as a death, a wasting and loss of substance. After this they are superfluous unless they create their own necessity. In war, in the defense of women from men much like themselves, they find this necessity. The classical myths and legends which narrate the founding of a world-order as a product of masculine potencies are thus both charters of patriarchal institutions and revelations of the contradiction at the heart of male participation in species-reproduction. "The fact is that men make principles of continuity because they are separated from genetic continuity with the alienation of the male seed."<sup>58</sup> The strenuously maintained fiction of paternity, paternal love, the ceremonial complexes concretizing male gods and male power may thus be read as a complex denial of a fundamental estrangement rooted in the gender. This "alienated" relation to the means of biological reproduction also charter, O'Brien observes, the relations of men to each other. "Relations between men have an objectively casual base; they are relations of those who are forced to be free...."<sup>59</sup> It is only that men make a virtue of this estrangement and call it freedom, making death rather than the reproduction of life their chosen field for the generation of identities. "In a very real sense, nature is unjust to men. She includes them and excludes them at the same

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 187

moment."<sup>60</sup> Historically men have been compensated for this injustice with "undying" fame, honor, reputation and recognition, kula shells, medals, monuments. It is perhaps thus, as a version of the reproductive scene, that the "fictional death," the wastings and reductions of self through the frictions of war and travel, represents a truth. Men become what they are, realizing a masculine character and a "strength" through what they lose rather than what they gain, and this loss reveals the irreducible core of masculinity as "alienation" and "freedom."

There is an extreme point at which poverty always rejoins the luxury and richness of the world... This is the only meaning which I can accept of a term like "stripping oneself bare." "Being naked" always has the associations of physical liberty, of harmony between the hand and the flower it touches, of a loving understanding between the earth and men who have become freed of human things.<sup>61</sup>

Here is a positive evaluation of the strippings and wastings implicit in the fictional death. For a negative evaluation one might go to any number of laments, descriptions of the losses of battle and the annihilation of futures in war. And yet when something is the same, regardless of whether it is viewed positively or negatively, one must suspect that here lies a truth. Gender is a fate, or rather the elaboration, legitimation, justification of a fate rooted in the realities of biological reproduction, realities only recently attenuated by a new technology of reproduction. The "injustice" at the root of this fate, the superfluity of men and their alienation from biological reproduction, might be seen as the "injury" which becomes the identity of the warrior, and the "cause" of subsequent aggressions. We see the aggression but not the injury which causes it.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Scott, "Rewriting History," in *Behind the Lines*, M.R. Higonnet and J. Jenson, et al., eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press): 19-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 4.

<sup>3</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, E.V. Rieu, trans. (New York: Penguin) 1987: 101.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 123.

<sup>5</sup> Randal Collins, "Three Faces of Cruelty: Towards a Comparative Sociology of Violence," *Theory and Society*, (1974): 415-440.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Tolstoy, "The Law of Violence and the Law of Love," 1908, in J. Edie, J. Scanlon and M.B. Zeldin, eds., *Russian Philosophy, Vol. II* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books) 1965: 215.

<sup>7</sup> See particularly Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Wilner, *Shekhinah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1986.

<sup>9</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, J.B. Baillie, trans. (New York: Harper & Row) 1967: 232-233.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 235.

<sup>11</sup> *Iliad*: 129.

# 188 VIETNAM GENERATION

- <sup>12</sup> Fernando Gonzalez-Reigosa and Howard Kaminsky, "Greek Homosexuality, Greek Narcissism, Greek Culture: The Invention of Apollo," *The Psychohistory Review*, 17.2 (1989): 156.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 162.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 161.
- <sup>15</sup> Butierre Diaz de Gomez, *The Unconquered Knight. A Chronicle of the Deeds of Don Pero Nino, Count of Buelna*, J. Evans, trans. (London: Routledge) 1928: 45.
- <sup>16</sup> K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage) 1978.
- <sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics* (New York: Penguin) 1979: 85.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Paul Cartledge, "The Politics of Spartan Pederasty," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 207 (1981): 17-36.
- <sup>20</sup> Scott: 26.
- <sup>21</sup> See also Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 1986.
- <sup>22</sup> Sandra Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," in *Behind the Lines*: 207.
- <sup>23</sup> In *Ibid.*: 204.
- <sup>24</sup> In *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Susan Gubar, "This is my Rifle, This is my Gun': World War II and the Blitz on Women," in *Behind the Lines*: 227-259.
- <sup>26</sup> Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 volumes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1989
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 65
- <sup>28</sup> In Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart": 211.
- <sup>29</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: Sex Changes* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1989.
- <sup>30</sup> Appolonius of Rhodes, *The Argonautica*, R.C. Seaton, trans. (New York: Macmillan) 1912: 59.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 61.
- <sup>32</sup> Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: John Wiley) 1964: 91.
- <sup>33</sup> Georg Simmel, *Conflict*, Kurt Wolff, trans. (London: Collier-Macmillan) 1964: 22.
- <sup>34</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*: 401.
- <sup>35</sup> See Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (New York: Holmes & Meier) 1980; and, Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in WWI* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1979.
- <sup>36</sup> Albert Camus, *Notebooks, 1935-1942* (New York: Knopf) 1963: 28.
- <sup>37</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Penguin) 1986: 404.
- <sup>38</sup> W. de Gray Birch, trans. and ed., *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalboquerque*, 3 volumes (New York: Burt Franklin) 1970: I, 71.
- <sup>39</sup> Pedro de Alvarado, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524* (New York: The Cortez Society) 1924: 62-63.
- <sup>40</sup> Collins: 422.
- <sup>41</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Penguin) 1970: 50-51.

# VIOLENCE, DEATH & MASCULINITY 189

- <sup>42</sup> Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed* (London: Hakluyt Society) 1854: 63.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 68.
- <sup>46</sup> See the many examples given by H. Clay Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant* (New York: Charles Scribner) 1896.
- <sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Reich, *Selected Writings* (New York: Noonday Press) 1961.
- <sup>48</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1977: 92.
- <sup>49</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, L.B. Peristiany, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1966: 28-29.
- <sup>50</sup> Father Pedro Simon, *The Expedition of Pedro de Ursua and Lope Aguirre in Search of El Dorado and the Amagu, 1560-1561*, William Bollaert, trans. (New York: Burt Franklin) 1971: 37.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: 48.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 94.
- <sup>53</sup> Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, *Voyages, 1595-1606*, 2 volumes, Clement Markham, trans. (Mundeln, Lichtenstein: Hakluyt Society) 1967: 25.
- <sup>54</sup> Simon: 78.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*: 136.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*: 147.
- <sup>57</sup> Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1981: 49.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*: 55.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*: 60.
- <sup>61</sup> Camus: 57.

# FEMINIST CRITICISM AND THE LITERATURE OF THE VIETNAM COMBAT VETERAN

KALÍ TAL

For years I have been both a student of feminist critical theory, and a reader of Vietnam War literature by combat veterans. The two pursuits seem to have little in common, and, although I believe that I always read as a feminist, I could not connect my interest in Vietnam War literature to my interest in feminist criticism. In fact, I often puzzled over my seemingly paradoxical fascination with the malest of male literature; I am rarely attracted to other fictions by white men, but there was always *something* about literature by veterans that captured my interest and imagination.

The first clue to the mystery appeared when I began to read critical interpretations of Vietnam War literature, and to use the tools of feminist theory to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those interpretations. Critical preoccupation with “reality” was immediately apparent: reviews and articles and major critical studies often stressed the “gritty realism”, “authenticity,” and “power” of these books; their ability to portray “Nam—the way it *really* was.”<sup>1</sup> There seemed to be a symbiotic relationship between author and reviewer (man-to-man) which was predicated on the reviewer’s acceptance of the author’s objectivity or “knowledge”. The only way the reviewer could know whether the author’s tale was authentic was if the reviewer had, even vicariously, experienced war. By confirming the “truth” of the tale, the reviewer places himself in the club of men who have survived war. The few women who review Vietnam War literature are placed in an awkward position. They can choose to work within the framework generated by writers and the male reviewing establishment; however, they are, by gender, excluded from the club though they may speak admiringly of “realistic characters,” “gruesome descriptions of combat, moving dialogue, and...effective recounting of the tension and the moral dilemmas of facing men in combat.”<sup>2</sup>

An alternative to working within the masculine framework has been generated by some feminist scholars, among them Jean Elshtain, whose *Women and War* contains a striking analysis of the audience for Vietnam narratives, and in which she suggests that “the Vietnam vets’ struggle for self definition emerges as a form of individual and collective *therapy*, a public and private discourse.”<sup>3</sup> Also working outside the

traditional critical framework is Jacqueline Lawson, whose paper, "*She's a Pretty Woman...for a Gook: The Misogyny of the Vietnam War*"<sup>4</sup> offered a radical critique of military and social attitudes toward women. But, for the most part, feminist scholars do not seem interested in working with Vietnam War literature. This may be due, in part, to the fact that few genres apart from violent pornography offer such negative images of women.<sup>5</sup> It may also result from their belief that work with Vietnam War literature does not offer any great opportunities to further develop their critical techniques and strategies.

I would, however, like to make a case for intensive feminist study of Vietnam War literature based on the assumption that its primary interest is as literature of *trauma*.

An author has a special psychological involvement in the creation of a narrative born out of traumatic experience. This involvement has been well documented in studies such as Eric Leed's *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Gerald Lindeman's *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, Arthur Egenorf's *Healing from the War (Vietnam)*, Robert J. Lifton's *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, and Victor Frankl's *From Death Camp to Existentialism*.<sup>6</sup> Each of these works points to the intimate relation between the traumatic experience and the symbols generated by that experience. An understanding of the psychological effects of trauma can serve as a tool for interpreting literature by combat veterans. Recent analyses have incorporated many of the issues discussed in the psychiatric literature describing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association formally acknowledged the existence of the disorder by including it in the new edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III*. According to the APA, PTSD is a series of symptoms which follows a trauma "generally outside the range of usual human experience".<sup>7</sup>

The characteristic symptoms include autonomic arousal, which is often manifest in panic attacks or startle reactions; a preoccupation with the traumatic event in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, or persistent thoughts about the trauma that intrude into everyday affairs; and a general dysphoria, a numbness that takes the meaning out of life and makes it hard to relate to other people. In [some] cases...the symptoms manifest themselves after a latency period of several years or...alternate with apparently asymptomatic periods that, on closer inspection, turned out to be periods of denial.<sup>8</sup>

Official recognition of PTSD was granted by the (mainly male) APA in response to public outcry about the disorder in Vietnam veterans (most of whom are also male). But the "unveiling" of PTSD may prove useful to feminist critics, who have searched for new ways to understand and interpret women's experience, and the inscription of that experience



## 192 VIETNAM GENERATION

in women's literature. Along with combat, violent crime, natural and man-made disasters, and industrial accidents, rape and incest are considered to be causes of PTSD.<sup>9</sup> The claims of a large number of American women to diffuse sets of anxiety-related symptoms have often been treated in an offhand manner by establishment psychiatrists. Women complaining of symptoms which are now recognizably signs of PTSD have historically been treated with tranquilizers (laudanum, valium, atavan), dismissed as neurotics, or hysterics, and frequently ordered by members of the medical establishment to come to terms with their femininity (ie., get married, have children, be a better mother, etc.).<sup>10</sup> The naming of PTSD as an illness with a specific cause may provide us with a new analytic tool for the study of women's psychology and history, and give us insight into the nature and purpose of women's writing.

There is a striking similarity between Audre Lorde's explanation for why she writes, and John Ketwig's inscription in the prologue of his narrative, *...And a Hard Rain Fell*, though Lorde is a black, lesbian feminist and Ketwig is a white, male Vietnam combat veteran. "I write," says Lorde,

for myself and my children and for as many people as possible who can read me, who need to hear what I have to say—who need to use what I know....I write for these women for whom a voice has not yet existed, or whose voices have been silenced. I don't have the only voice or all of their voices, but they are a part of my voice, and I am a part of theirs.<sup>11</sup>

Ketwig's words are an uncanny echo:

I wanted my wife to know all I was feeling. I hoped someday my kids would read it and understand....This story became a book simply because so many Vietnam vets pleaded with me to make it public. Many are still searching for words. Our families and loved ones have waited so long for an explanation of the enormous changes the war crafted into our personalities....I don't want my children to see the world I have known.<sup>12</sup>

Critic Alice Jardine, characterizing feminist texts, asserts that "struggle" necessarily differentiates the feminist text from all others: "The *inscription* of struggle....whether written by a man or a woman—it was this that was found to be necessary. The *inscription of struggle*—even of *pain*."<sup>13</sup> Jardine suggests that the *struggle itself* marks a feminist endeavor—though a struggle's result might certainly be an antifeminist text.

The inscription of struggle and pain is essential in feminist literature, and there are strong indications that feminist literature may also be examined as literature of trauma. The struggle and its painful nature are necessary precursors for the new knowledge that makes

feminism possible—all feminist writers, in Jardine's estimation, have suffered, and then have struggled to express, trauma.

Trauma has played a formative role in the lives of many, if not most American women. Though the APA states that the trauma which causes PTSD is "generally outside the range of usual human experience," it is clear, in this case, that "usual human experience" means usual white *male* experience. Based on 1973 figures, the FBI estimated that in the U.S., a forcible rape occurs every 10 minutes.<sup>14</sup> But it is generally acknowledged that official statistics are low, and authorities estimate that between 70 and 95 percent of all rapes go unreported.<sup>15</sup> Thus, "*actual numbers* of sexual assault on females of all ages may reach half a million or more a year, or at least one every two minutes."<sup>16</sup> It is quite clear that the number of women who have undergone traumatic experiences far exceeds the number of men who have survived combat.

Ntozake Shange has explained that her writing is based on her personal attempts to deal with a particular problem or issue; catharsis, she claims, is at the heart of her writing:

Obviously, I think it's important not to abort an emotional breakthrough....Aborting emotional breakthroughs allows one to keep one's decorum at all moments. Our society allows people to be absolutely neurotic and totally out of touch with their feelings and everyone else's feelings, and yet be totally respectable. This, to me, is a travesty. So I write to get at the part of people's emotional lives that they don't have control over, the part that can and will respond. If I have to write about blood and babies dying, then fine, I'll write about that.<sup>17</sup>

Catharsis is also crucial to the healing of veterans with PTSD. Egendorf, Lifton, and others insist on the importance of the reclamation of emotion in the process of overcoming the alienation characteristic in the disorder.

Based on impressions from our research, a significant minority of Vietnam veterans have had moments of enlightenment, conversions, and other crucial points at which they turned traumatic experiences into sources of renewal. A review of veterans' writings yields a similar impression. Most memoirs and novels deal with the war experience or with unsettling, if not traumatic, homecomings. A few accounts, however, focus on the struggles of healing, demonstrating that some portion of the veteran population knows what it means to turn suffering to joy.<sup>18</sup>

"I write," said Adrienne Rich, "for the still-fragmented parts in me, trying to bring them together. Whoever can read and use any of this, I write for them as well."<sup>19</sup> The theme of drawing together fragments into a whole is found again and again in the literature of trauma; re-piecing a shattered self. Vietnam veteran Stephen Wright's award-winning

## 194 VIETNAM GENERATION

novel, *Meditations in Green*, turns on the metaphor of (literal) fragmentation: "I had an amber vial then (50 DIAZEPAM Take As Required) in which I kept my fragments, my therapy....I gathered lost cinders of shrapnel that rose surfacing in the milky pool of my thigh like broken bits of sea coral."<sup>20</sup> Each piece of shrapnel represents the surfacing of some repressed memory or idea; this is the true therapy, and it is fitting that Wright's protagonist places the fragments in a vial which once held anxiety-suppressants.

Do not be taken in entirely by the similarity of theme in feminist literature and literature by Vietnam veterans. There is a crucial difference between the trauma of warriors and the trauma of rape and incest victims—the peculiar position of power of the warrior before, during and after his traumatic wartime experience. Though subordinate to his military superiors, and frequently at the mercy of his enemies, the soldier still maintains a life-or-death power over other people's lives.

While victims of rape and incest experience violent injury, they are rarely in a position to do violence themselves. The soldier in combat, however, is both victim and victimizer; dealing pain as well as receiving and experiencing it. Much recent literature—popular, clinical and academic—places the soldier simply in the victim's role; helpless in the face of war, and then helpless to readjust from the war experience upon his return home. Feminist critics should be quick to voice their disapproval of an interpretation so drastically at odds with reality: soldiers carry guns; they point them at people and shoot to kill.

"Soldier as victim" representations depend upon the invisibility of the soldiers' own victims (Vietnamese soldiers and civilians), and create for the soldiers a convincing victimizer (in this case, inept or evil commanding officers, back-stabbing politicians, a traitorous Fourth Estate, and a callous and hostile American public). The purveyors of this myth have successfully peddled their wares to the moviegoing public in the form of violent retribution films (*Rambo*, *MIA*, and the like), and sensitive coming-of-age stories (*Platoon*). Many of the most popular Vietnam novels also reflect this attitude. James Webb's *Fields of Fire* blames the victimization of soldiers upon the antiwar movement, personified by effeminate intellectuals and faithless women.<sup>21</sup> John Del Vecchio's *The Thirteenth Valley* describes soldiers as mere pawns in the games of nations, fighting for their lives against nameless "enemies."<sup>22</sup> The general acceptance of this revision is apparent in public praise for the "healing" effect of the Vietnam War Memorial wall in Washington, DC—which includes the names of the American soldiers killed in Vietnam and excludes the names of any Vietnamese soldiers—and the proliferation of "homecoming parades" in the months following the dedication of the DC memorial.

A crucial aspect of the soldier's reality in Vietnam was the knowledge of the power he wielded: firepower, the power to bring death raining down in the form of bullets from his gun, fragments of his hand grenades, explosions from the mines he had set, and airstrikes called in

to drop napalm, white phosphorus, and conventional bombs. Many personal narratives and novels feature a moment of epiphany, when the protagonist describes his realization of, and glories in, his godlike power over life and death:

He felt like Jehovah Himself, sitting on the bluff, calling down fear, death, and destruction on the poor dudes in the valley....Between explosions he could hear the poor dumb fuckers on the other side going nuts, calling for their mothers, pleading for medics, cursing and shouting and trying to get their shit together...."I love it!" he half-shouted over the crash of incoming shells. "Artillery is a beautiful thing once you learn to appreciate it."<sup>23</sup>

Women, by contrast, almost never control the tools of violence. Their traumatic experience—rape, incest, battering—is the most extreme form of the oppression visited on them by a society designed to reduce them to perpetual victims. And herein lies the most important difference between the trauma of the warrior and the trauma of the woman victim: the woman must view her trauma as a natural extension of her powerlessness, while war forces the warrior to realize the uselessness of everything he has ever considered power.

The Western male consensus seems to be that power does, indeed, come from the barrel of a gun. One of the vital American myths is that good guys with guns can defeat bad guys with guns. But in Vietnam, surrounded by his weapons, the soldier came to realize that the combination of guns and conviction was not enough. Again and again in Vietnam novels, the protagonist/narrator emphasizes the impossibility of detecting the enemy. His desire to survive forces him to identify all Vietnamese as the enemy, and, for the first time, the soldier is confronted with the reality that violence is a useless tool when everyone is your enemy; when the structure of the world you inhabit leaves you no place to hold and defend. Notions of power are reversed: although Americans still have technology and firepower at their disposal, real power lies in the Vietnamese Communist's ability to pick the time and place of a battle, to hold the territory, and to blend back into the landscape of which they are a part, but in which the Americans are an alien and unwelcome intrusion. Individual soldiers react to this shock to expectation not with the self-condemnation and resignation of the victim, or with the anger of the oppressed person fighting against victimization, but with a profound sense of betrayal. This was not the way it was supposed to be. Narratives and novels by combat veterans emphasize the profound shock of the soldier's realization that expectations about "war" had failed to prepare him for the reality.

Ron Kovic, a marine who was paralyzed from the chest down in Vietnam, described the trauma of shattered expectations in his memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Kovic frequently used the third person to tell his own story, perhaps because the revelations were less painful when

## 196 VIETNAM GENERATION

distanced in that manner. In one instance, he writes about the accidental murder of one of his own men:

I killed him, he kept thinking, and when I wake up tomorrow, he thought, when I wake up tomorrow it will still be the same. He wanted to run and hide....He would wake up with the rest of them the next day. He would get up and wash outside the tent in his tin dish, he would shave and go to chow. But everything would not be all right, he thought, nothing would be all right at all. It was starting to be very different now, very different from what he had ever thought possible.<sup>24</sup>

“What we call traumatic responses,” asserts Egendorf, “are the new strategies we concoct after being shocked into realizing that life doesn’t play by our rules. When we can no longer pretend that life confirms our favored identity, we take on a negative version of our old self.”<sup>25</sup> Feminist theorists have posited similar constructions. Many early feminist texts focused on women’s need to overcome negative self-images generated by the inability of the individual woman to live up to an impossible social standard.<sup>26</sup> Much of the work in the women’s movement of the 1960s was directed at overcoming our culturally inculcated negative self-image, reclaiming anger and proclaiming our self-worth. We learned that even if we bought the myth of the “good girl,” our favored identity would be betrayed at every turn.

Powerlessness, in Western culture, is most often equated with the feminine. Women are subject(ive); men are object(ive). The universal “he” is exactly that: a universal *he*. God is unquestionably male, as are all figures of authority (except mothers, whose authority is outgrown, and always superseded by that of the father). To be a man is to be strong, in control of one’s destiny; to be a woman is to be weak, to need guidance, to need protection. These gender roles, though based on sex, are not finally determined by it. A man can lose his “manhood” if he can be forced into submission, as black men were oppressed under slavery.<sup>27</sup> The soldier loses his manhood in boot camp, where he is disempowered, thrust into a subordinate role, until he completes the rites which win him a place in the masculine community of soldiers, purged, apparently, of the last vestige of womanliness.

But the soldier in Vietnam was thrust into a traditionally “feminine” role, powerless against an enemy who could strike when and where he wished. Masculinity once more under attack, most combat soldiers reacted by retreating even further from any indications of “femininity” in their own characters—repressing emotions other than anger, avoiding close relationships which required caring or nurturing, cultivating a callous attitude toward the feelings and humanity of others. The threat to male identity combined with the natural tendency of trauma victims to distance themselves from their emotions, resulting in extreme alienation from self and others. This alienation was further encouraged by the military system, which had established a training

program geared to enhance combat effectiveness by reducing intimacy and grief of soldiers: "Both anti-grief and anti-intimacy were expressed by calling men who cried, or showed other signs of mourning, 'girls', 'women', 'ladies', or 'hogs'. Men who showed intimacy to each other were often called 'fags.'"<sup>28</sup>

Soldiers valorized the trappings of masculinity which they had learned to equate with their pre-war position of power, prided themselves on how "hard" they were, and articulated their alienation in the repetition of the phrases "it don't mean nothin'" and "there it is." Corporal Joker, in Gustav Hasford's powerful novel *The Short-Timers*, reveals the depths of his alienation, self-hatred and pain:

Doing my John Wayne voice, I tell the squad a joke: "Stop me if you've heard this. There was a Marine of nuts and bolts, half robot—weird but true—whose every move was cut from pain as though from stone. His stoney little hide had been crushed and broken. But he just laughed and said, 'I've been crushed and broken before.' And, sure enough, he had the heart of a bear. His heart weighed half a pound....The world would not waste the heart of a bear, he said. On his clean blue pajamas many medals hung. He was a walking word of history, in the shop for a few repairs. He took it on the chin and was good. One night in Japan his life came out of his body—black—like a question mark. If you can keep your head while others are losing theirs perhaps you have misjudged the situation. Stop me if you've heard this...."<sup>29</sup>

As feminist critics we must certainly not make the mistake of simplifying the soldiers' response to trauma. Women, after all, react to pain and oppression on many levels (and some of our reactions are contradictory); there is no reason to think that soldiers are less complex. It seems safe to assume that at the same time that the repression of the feminine was a denial of the soldiers' disempowered position, the bonding of soldier to soldier ("brotherhood") served as a method of creating community in a hostile world. Philip Caputo wrote of the "intimacy of life in infantry battalion, where the communion between men" is more profound than any between lovers and asserted that:

It does not demand for its sustenance the reciprocity, the pledges of affection, the endless reassurances required by the love of men and women....[I]t was a tenderness that would have been impossible if the war had been significantly less brutal. The battlefields of Vietnam were a crucible in which a generation of American soldiers were fused together by a common confrontation with death and a sharing of hardships, dangers, and fears. The very ugliness of the war, the sordidness of our daily lives, the degradation of having to take part in body counts made us draw still closer to one another. It was as if in comradeship we found an affirmation of life and the means to preserve at least a vestige of our humanity.<sup>30</sup>

## 198 VIETNAM GENERATION

The brotherhood of which almost all vets speak, the bond which holds the men who served in war together, is an uncanny reflection of the feelings of sisterhood often described by feminists. For soldiers, and later for veterans, this bonding was a way of coping, of creating a safe place in a hostile world; turning to each other for understanding and support. For Caputo to profess that the relationship he had with his men in wartime was more profound than any relationship he has ever had with a woman is unsurprising, given the state of gender relations in Western culture. What is fascinating about Caputo's claim is his description of men sharing tenderness and intimacy. Degradation and powerlessness seem to be the forces active in generating and shaping the relationships between soldiers. The act of caring functions as "the means to preserve...a vestige of our humanity."

Not only did veterans face some of the same problems of poor self-image and perceived powerlessness as women traditionally face; they also recognized that healing, for them, would involve some new understanding of masculinity and femininity. It is no accident that the self-therapy rap groups started by Vietnam veterans in the late 1960s and after were modelled on the consciousness raising groups of the women's movement. Egendorf comments:

We had come home weary, wanting to be taken care of, and women were no longer waiting as they had before. Many of the women we met—on campuses, in demonstrations, and through friends—were locked in battles of their own, campaigning for new rights, against exclusive male prerogatives....Although we needed women more than ever, and feared them more as well, we looked to them for leadership in a way that would have been unthinkable a short time before. We had the women's movement as a constant example, with their use of consciousness-raising groups as a major organizing tool. In the way we described them, the veteran rap groups were clearly inspired by women's group....<sup>31</sup>

While women were working on reclaiming anger and learning to assert themselves, Vietnam veterans were working hard at discovering within themselves the capacity to be gentle, supportive, and caring.

I do not mean to suggest that Vietnam veterans were intent on revising gender roles; nor do I intend to make any case that these veterans are or were feminists. One need only read the literature of the Vietnam War to be convinced that veterans are no more likely to have enlightened attitudes about women than are any other class of men. I do want to point out, however, that the process which these men were going through on the way toward healing and reintegration is a similar process to feminist consciousness-raising, and that the similarity is born, I would assert, out of the commonality of trauma.

Teresa De Lauretis insists that the redefinition of the boundaries of the political is at the heart of the difference between feminism and

other modes of critical thinking. Feminism "defines itself as a political instance...a politics of experience, of everyday life, which later then in turn enters the public sphere of expression and creative practice, displacing aesthetic hierarchies and generic categories, and which thus establishes the semiotic ground for a different production of reference and meaning."<sup>32</sup> The mixing of personal and political is also a crucial aspect of the narratives of Vietnam veterans. But for the veterans who write these narratives (white males, for the most part) the trick is in mixing the political with the personal, rather than the other way around. Unlike women, American men have never been herded out of the political sphere; it is, in fact, their natural environment; they are used to maintaining an authoritative relationship to the political. Vietnam War trauma was exacerbated, for soldiers, by their sudden, uncomfortable realization of just how personal politics could get, as their own politics (or some other white man's) sent them off to fight and die for their country. The radical nature of this new understanding was apparent as Vietnam veterans began organizing to protest the war.

Using personal experience as political condemnation, some veterans began displaying their wounded bodies at antiwar rallies, rejecting the medals and commendations of the military, and publicly testifying to atrocities they had witnessed or committed in Vietnam.<sup>33</sup> These men were attempting to retell the past, "to inscribe into the picture of reality characters and events and resolutions that were previously invisible, untold, unspoken (and so unthinkable, unimaginable, 'impossible')." <sup>34</sup>

Integration of the personal and political for men requires the displacement of the locus of power. Through bitter experience many Vietnam veterans now know that the man with a gun can be painfully weak. And some veterans, in their journey toward healing from the war, have begun to understand the drawbacks of a society based upon the use of violent, coercive power.

"Healing," states Arthur Egen Dorf, "occurs through an alternative expression of power, one that creates empowerment."

To empower means to enhance another's power, something that happens as others come to see themselves as competent, as not missing anything essential, as already intact. Bringing people to this view is possible only if we already see them that way. Empowerment begins and ends with seeing others as already able and whole.<sup>35</sup>

As a feminist, I am fascinated by the decision of some veterans to renounce their inherited white male power, and to embrace a strategy of empowering others. And in this study I have discovered the connection to feminist theory which I was seeking. We search for, always, new ways to empower women, and at the same time we seek to redefine power. We struggle for power, not over others, but over ourselves. Those who



## 200 VIETNAM GENERATION

already have power must take a different path to wholeness; one which begins with the realization of the limits of power, and the consequent decision to relinquish it. We mirror each other, twin efforts, moving in opposite directions, and headed right for each other.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2 for an outline of the critical strategies of the four major Vietnam War literature critics: James Wilson, Philip Beidler, John Hellman and Thomas Myers.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Puhr, "Four Fictional Faces of the Vietnam War," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3.1 (Spring 1984): 104.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1987: 220.

<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline Lawson, "'She's a Pretty Woman...for a Gook': The Misogyny of the Vietnam War," paper presented at the Popular Culture Association Conference, New Orleans (March 1988). Forthcoming in *Journal of American Culture*. Reprint forthcoming in Philip K. Jason, ed., *Landing Zones: Approaches to the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press) 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Kali Tal, "The Mind at War: Images of Women in Vietnam Novels by Combat Veterans," *Contemporary Literature* (Fall 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Eric J. Leeds, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1979; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1975; Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press) 1987; Arthur Egeendorf, *Healing from the War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1985; Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House) 1968; Victor Frankl, *From Death Camp to Existentialism* (New York: Beacon) 1959.

<sup>7</sup> American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edition (Washington, DC: APA) 1980: 236.

<sup>8</sup> Ghislaine Boulanger, et al. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Valid Diagnosis?" in Boulanger, ed. *Vietnam Veteran Redefined: Fact and Fiction* (New York: Erlbaum) 1986: 25.

<sup>9</sup> J. O'Connor, "Conference on Posttraumatic Stress Covers Effects of Combat, Crime, and Sexual Abuse," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 36 (1985): 309-319.

<sup>10</sup> See the excellent collection edited by Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers At Work* (New York: Continuum) 1983: 104.

<sup>12</sup> John Ketwig, *...And a Hard Rain Fell* (New York: Pocket) 1985: xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Alice Jardine, "Men in Feminism: *Odor di Uomo* or *Compagnons de Route*?" in Jardine and Smith, eds. *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen) 1987: 58.

<sup>14</sup> Sedelle Katz, Mary Ann Mazur. *Understanding the Rape Victim* (New York: John Wiley) 1979: xi.

<sup>15</sup> Menachem Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1971: 27.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Gager, Cathleen Schurr. *Confronting Rape in America* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap) 1976: 1.

- <sup>17</sup> Tate: 156.
- <sup>18</sup> Egendorf: 193.
- <sup>19</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Blood, Bread and Poetry: The Location of the Poet," *Massachusetts Review* (1984): 540.
- <sup>20</sup> Stephen Wright, *Meditations in Green* (New York: Bantam) 1983: 322.
- <sup>21</sup> James Webb, *Fields of Fire* (New York: Bantam) 1978.
- <sup>22</sup> John DeVecchio, *The Thirteenth Valley* (New York: Bantam) 1982.
- <sup>23</sup> Ken Miller, *Tiger the Lurp Dog* (New York: Ballantine) 1983: 224-225.
- <sup>24</sup> Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: Pocket) 1976: 189.
- <sup>25</sup> Egendorf: 159.
- <sup>26</sup> See Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectics of Sex* (New York: Morrow) 1970; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage) 1974; and self-help texts such as *The Assertive Woman*. Other excellent examples of this kind of writing can be found in some of the early collections of essays by women of color, including Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table) 1981.
- <sup>27</sup> See John Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, revised and enlarged edition, 1972 (New York: Oxford University Press) 1979; WEB DuBois, *The Negro*, 1915 (New York: Oxford University Press) 1970; Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 1972 (New York: Vintage) 1974; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 1971 (New York: Oxford University Press) 1977.
- <sup>28</sup> Chaim Shatan, "Afterward," in *Vietnam Veteran Redefined*: 175.
- <sup>29</sup> Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* (New York: Bantam) 1979: 94.
- <sup>30</sup> Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Ballantine) 1977: xvii.
- <sup>31</sup> Egendorf: 130.
- <sup>32</sup> Teresa DeLauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1986: 10.
- <sup>33</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War. *The Winter Soldier Investigation: An Inquiry into American War Crimes* (Boston: Beacon Press) 1972.
- <sup>34</sup> DeLauretis: 11.
- <sup>35</sup> Egendorf: 224-225.

# MOON LANDING: A MEMORY

REBECCA BLEVINS FAERY

*To question everything. To remember what it has been forbidden even to mention. To come together telling our stories, to look afresh at, and then to describe for ourselves, the frescoes of the Ice Age, the nudes of "high art," the Minoan seals and figurines, the moon-landscape embossed with the booted print of a male foot, the microscopic virus, the scarred and tortured body of the planet Earth.*

—Adrienne Rich

The night is one I remember well. I remember, oddly, even the texture and taste of it, as if it weren't all those years away. A monument night, one of those moments destined to etch themselves into the collective consciousness and to make all of us remember always where we were then and what we were doing. Even who we were at the time.

I was in the mountains of New Hampshire that July in 1969, spending the month in a vacation house perched on a steep hill above a lake. A neighbor and I had brought our toddlers out of the steamy Boston summer to the desolate peace of the countryside. The days were bright and warm, the nights cool and very dark, except for the moon. The men came out from the city on weekends to join us. It was a peaceful time, especially the dense calm of weekdays. With the men away, we didn't cook much. We took the children to the lake in the mornings to swim. They slept in the afternoons, and I read or returned to the lake for solitary swimming, far out in the cold deep water, far past where I could go when my small daughter and son tethered me to the shoreline. After a quick supper, I read to the children, all four of them, for a long time. Then they slept again, and we, the mothers, were released to read or go to bed early. Often I sat outdoors alone on the balcony in the moonlight. The trees were black against the silver of the lake; the face of the moon shone in the lake's surface, caught in all its brightness as in a mirror.

Free of the routine demands of domestic life, our time there seemed looser somehow. But a vacation with four toddlers isn't exactly free of paraphernalia, so the house was cluttered with familiar objects: favorite blankets, dolls, stuffed animals, a stack of diapers for the youngest of the crew, books and books, juice glasses on every table top, popsicle sticks in the ashtrays. Baby toothbrushes, tiny beachcoats and

hairbrushes were everywhere; damp bathing suits draped the balcony rail; Lego rocket ships, matchbox cars and trucks punctuated the floor space. The house was a kind of satellite of the duplex we all shared in Boston. But there was no television, and no telephone. My neighbor and I took turns walking the mile down the dark road to phone the men back home, to say things were fine, and would they please remember to bring two more quilts, a quart of spaghetti sauce from the freezer, and the cough syrup on the shelf in the kids' bedroom. Still, even tied as we were by dependencies of both matter and spirit, the time away seemed like an escape—for me, from the emotional clutter and confused passions of a marriage gone awry. The weeks were a respite, but more, a venture into a space empty of routine associations. It was a time of reflection.

The peaceful scene had a turbulent backdrop. A bitter war waged on the other side of the planet, a war which mirrored the one within my marriage. I was a passionate opponent; in a few weeks the man I had married would leave again, for a second tour of combat duty in that war. Meanwhile, at home, another battle had been waged, this a technological one, a race against the clock to fulfill the promise made by Jack Kennedy as President, that we would land an American spacecraft on the moon before the decade was out. To the amazement of nearly everyone, that hour approached. A fantasy was about to be realized.

It was my turn to trek to the telephone for the mid-week report. Across the distance, my husband answered. "Bring a television set with you when you come," I said. "I want to watch the moon landing."

The night came, and after the spaghetti sauce was wiped off the hands, faces, and shirts of the toddlers, I overruled my husband's order that the children go straight to bed; I insisted that they be allowed to stay up to watch the first human being set foot on the moon. Since my two were to stay up, of course the other two couldn't be put down. So the eight of us sat in the dark room, illumined only by the silver screen of the small portable television. Four of the eight romped and screeched, paused occasionally to stare at the set, then resumed the battle for possession of the wicker basket chair which hung suspended from the ceiling with a chain. I helped all four into the chair at once, hoping the chain would hold, and stood in front to prevent spills, gently swinging them to and fro. The toddlers were overexcited from staying up too late, but overtired too, so were lulled into momentary stillness and silence, huddled together in the chair like puppies in a basket. They stared at the silver blur of the screen. The chair swung gracelessly in an elliptical loop, an orbit of its own.

We waited and waited. At last I gathered my two babies into my lap and wrapped them in pajamas, then held them against me, one in each arm. Feisty even in their drowsiness, they engaged each other in foot combat, sole to small sole, and pushed and kicked for control. Then the moon lander's camera began transmitting: the scene was grainy and jerky, astonishingly primitive, but finally we figured out that we were

## 204 VIETNAM GENERATION

seeing a large boot descend a ladder. The foot fell, and Neil Armstrong's voice came across the great distance: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." ("Humankind! Humankind!" I cried inside my skull.) The children stared in silence as I tried to tell them what they were seeing. They weren't impressed. They lived in a world where cows jumped over the moon, where the moon was a man with a face, so they were immune to actual wonders. I carried them upstairs to their beds and kissed them to sleep. It only took a minute.

I paused outside the bedroom door, on the indoor balcony which overlooked the large living room, still lit with silver from the screen. The scene was repeated in a reflection in the glass which separated the living room from the outdoors. Standing above the others, separated from them for a moment, I looked out at the fat, full moon shining above the dark trees, its ripe face shining again on the surface of the lake. My throat constricted with wonder, and I walked down the stairs and outside onto the balcony and looked up, wishing I could see dark silhouettes of the ship and tiny men who trod the moon's face with their outsized boots, just to prove it was true. On the other side of the glass sat two friends and a man I once had loved, near me now, yet as far away as the moon.

The moon. Diana, the warlike maiden with her bow and arrows, archetype of the Amazons, the women who amaze. The force of the moon, pulling and pushing the ocean tides, pulling and pushing the tides of my own body. The water of the human body has almost exactly the same saline and mineral content, the same specific gravity, as that of sea water, I had read. We are all creatures of the sea, I thought, but women especially, marking time by the moon's phases. The moon was the cool and quieter light, showing herself at night, offering satellite homage to the gravitational pull of Earth, offering Earth the reflected light from the burning, manly sun. Once a month she effaced herself and hid in shame. But once a month she glowed a full circle of momentary glory. I knew, I thought, what it was to be a satellite, with an orbit defined by someone or something else. I thought I also knew what it must be like to have a boot in your face.

And now the moon was claimed and conquered, or so we thought. The masculine territorial impulse had extended out so far. I thought of my great-grandfather in Tennessee. He had been born in 1881, so had been twenty-two, a man grown, when the Wright brothers had lifted off at Kitty Hawk. Now he was eighty-eight, and undoubtedly was watching that evening as his fellow creatures represented the race in its great adventure. I thought of what his life had spanned. I thought, too, of what his reaction to the moon landing had probably been: a repeated "hunph," half laugh, half grunt of disbelief. If there had been a telephone nearer than a mile down a dark and empty country road, I would have called to tell him how much I loved him. But everything was too far away.

The moon landing, in the next month, faded to a memory in the flurry of departures. The man I had married left, was lifted off to descend once again into the jungles of Vietnam, booted and suited for war. The

ties which had held us together weakened more perceptibly. Within the year, Kent State happened, and the peace march on Washington. And the invasion of Cambodia, which my husband, as his division's operations officer, planned and executed. Alone with my small children, I began to feel stronger, began to imagine a new life for myself in a new sphere, a new kind of space. I almost began to believe I could have an orbit of my own. It was a beginning. And the war wound on, driving a wedge into the heart of the nation, dividing us from each other.

Months after the moon landing, my father told me of a conversation he had had with an old farmer in a peanut field in southside Virginia. "It was a great trick," the man had said. "Those fellers wasn't on the moon. They was in the desert out in Arizona. They just wanted us all to think we had sent men to the moon. Naw, sir. We're stuck right here, stuck right here, and we ain't never gonna get off. Never. Better learn to make the best of it."

But he was wrong. Win or lose, he was wrong.

You are joyfully invited to  
attend the 'burial  
of  
**CREEPING WOMANHOOD**  
who passed  
with  
a  
sigh  
to her Great Reward  
this year of the Lord  
1968  
after 3000 years of  
bolstering the egos of the  
warmakers  
and  
aiding the cause of war...



New York Radical Women's "invitation" leaflet at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade March, Washington, DC, January 15, 1968. Designed by Shulamith Firestone. Outside cover. Courtesy of the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

## Don't Bring Flowers...

Do be prepared to sacrifice your traditional female roles. You have refused to hankly-wave boys off to war with admonitions to save the American Mom and Apple Pie. You have resisted your roles of supportive girlfriends and tearful widows, receivers of 'regretful' telegrams and worthless medals of honor. And now you must resist approaching Congress playing these same roles that are synonymous with powerlessness. We must not come as passive supplicants begging for favors, for power 'cooperates' only with power. We must learn to fight the warmongers on their own terms, though they believe us capable only of rolling bandages. Until we have united into a force to be reckoned with, we will be patronized and ridiculed into total political ineffectiveness. So, if you are really sincere about ending this war, join us tonight and in the future.





# **THE DAY THEY BURIED "TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD": WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE PROTEST\***

**RUTH ROSEN**

## **THE BURIAL OF TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD**

On January 15, 1968, a remarkable thing happened. A group of young women symbolically buried "traditional womanhood." A large coalition of women's peace groups, loosely organized as the Jeanette Rankin Brigade, traveled to Washington, DC to present a petition to the United States Senate and to stage a peaceful march and rally that called for the immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. The coalition included such traditional women's peace groups as the Women Strike for Peace (WSP) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The style and discourse of the demonstrators reflected American women's traditional participation in antiwar campaigns: they carried banners and gave speeches emphasizing women's special nature and ability to create, rather than destroy life. Sprinkled among the coalition, however, were small contingents of young feminists who, in a rebellious and controversial act, carried a dummy of a passive woman to Arlington Cemetery and there buried "Traditional Womanhood."

This ritual was hardly spontaneous. A group of New York radical feminists had spent "a lot of energy and a good few months of our early formation period preparing an appropriate action for the Brigade peace march."<sup>1</sup> After months of consciousness-raising, they had come to disagree with a women's demonstration that played "upon the traditional female role...as wives, mothers and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears."<sup>2</sup> As one of the first women's liberation groups in the nation, they were especially fueled by new revelations of their subordinate status. For weeks, the women threw themselves into building a larger-than-life dummy on a transported bier, "complete with feminine getup, blank face, blonde curls, and candles. Hanging from the bier were such disposable items as S&H

---

\*The author gratefully acknowledges a grant from the William Joiner Center of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, a Rockefeller Foundation Gender Roles Fellowship and a faculty research grant from the University of California, Davis, all of which helped support this project. Todd Gitlin offered challenging suggestions, editorial advice, and inspired encouragement during the development of this paper.

Green Stamps, curlers, garters, and hairspray. Streamers floated off it and we also carried large banners, such as 'DON'T CRY: RESIST!'"<sup>3</sup> The funeral entourage sang songs specially written for the occasion, accompanied by a drum corps with a kazoo. A long funeral dirge, written by Peggy Dobbins, lamented "woman's traditional role which encourages men to develop aggression and militarism to prove their masculinity." To the other 5,000 women of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade, they issued black-bordered invitations, "joyfully" inviting them to join the torchlight burial of Traditional Womanhood, "who passed with a sigh to her Great Reward this year of the Lord, 1968, after 3,000 years of bolstering the ego of Warmakers and aiding the cause of war...." Their invitation was snubbed. Later that evening, 500 young women split off from the main convention and held a counter congress, which, lacking direction and coherence, they later judged a failure. Though they failed to gain many new recruits, the counter congress helped consolidate and publicize the rapidly expanding women's liberation groups from cities across the nation. At the same time, the militancy, theatrical antics and separatism of the young women enraged quite a few older peace activists.<sup>4</sup>

Kathie Amatniek (who later renamed herself Kathie Sarachild), a member of the New York group, wrote and delivered a Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood. It is worth examining in some detail, for her rhetoric and concerns reveal some of the underlying reasons these early feminists departed from traditional women's peace discourse.

Amatniek's oration begins with a critique of the Feminine Mystique of the 1950s, the unquestioned belief that women's biology destines them to devote their lives exclusively to the care of husbands and children.

You see here the remains of a female human being who during her...lifetime was a familiar figure to billions of people in every corner of the world. Although scientists would classify this specimen within the genus of homo sapiens, for many years there has been considerable controversy as to whether she really belonged in some kind of sub-species of the genus. While the human being was distinguished as an animal who freed himself from his biological limitation by developing technology and expanding his consciousness, traditional womanhood has been recognized, defined and valued for her biological characteristics only and those social functions closely related to her biological characteristic.<sup>5</sup>

As daughters of the 1950s, these young women felt particular hostility towards domestic life,<sup>6</sup> and had already discussed their anxieties of being trapped by traditional marriage and childcare. Fearing an adult repetition of their own childhood experience, they insisted that "Our children will not become victims of our unconscious resentments and out displaced ambitions." Determined to avoid the plight of their

## 210 VIETNAM GENERATION

mothers, these women had largely avoided marriage and modeled themselves after their male counterparts.

Who were these young women? Like their male counterparts, they were the best educated generation in American history, brought up by families who expected both their daughters and sons to receive a college education. At the same time, they had one foot rooted in the fifties, a decade that taught young women to find fulfillment exclusively within marriage and motherhood. Many had rebelled. As veterans of the civil rights and antiwar movements, they had gained considerable experience and skills as organizers. From these movements they had learned to question received authority, traditional hierarchies, and to decipher how the powerful exploit the oppressed. They had also learned how the subordinate internalize negative images of themselves. Sexism within the movement, however, had often excluded them from leadership, occasionally kept them from being heard, and sometimes treated them as revolving bodies in male leaders' beds.<sup>7</sup> Their break from the New Left would come later, in fits and stages. Meanwhile, new women's liberationists organized their groups at the same time they continued to participate in antiwar activities. In their group, they had questioned the sexual revolution and criticized men's treatment of them as sexual toys even as they prepared to participate in the Jeanette Rankin Brigade.<sup>8</sup>

Born during the peak of the Vietnam war, the women's liberation movement frequently combined a radical critique of America's involvement in the third world along with their analysis of women's subordinate position in society. At the time, these young women could not have imagined how much their feminism would influence future women's peace movements. In 1979, NATO decided to deploy U.S. cruise and Pershing II missiles in several European countries during the 1980s, igniting resurgent women's peace movements in both Europe and in the United States.

After fifteen years of feminism, women now possessed a greater self-consciousness on how to publicly engage in peace protest. The women's movement was an irreversible and incontrovertible fact of history and women now had a clear choice about whether to reject or incorporate a feminist critique of society into peace protest. During the 1970s, moreover, feminists had questioned their original ideal of equality, that is, being treated as if they were men. They had celebrated their difference as women, and even advanced the provocative thesis that men should reassess and adopt women's experiential history of preserving, rather than destroying the race. It was in such an atmosphere of reconsideration and reassessment that the women's peace movement of the late 1970s and 1980s was conceived, amidst the realization that to imitate men, their institutions, and values, was wrong-headed, and that "women's values" needed to transform the culture.

Women moved in many directions to stem the rise of militarism and the nuclear threat. In most cases, the Vietnam experience—especially women's subjective experience of the "movement"—remained

the frame of reference. Many women, for example, after a decade of separatism, now felt the time was ripe to rejoin men in what feminists called "mixed" movements. Reports of these efforts were also "mixed." At feminist meetings in Europe and the United States, women publicly described their disappointment and disgruntlement. Men still claimed automatic leadership and women still did the routine and invisible maintenance that sustained peace organizations. Other women joined organizations that, avoiding the legacy of Vietnam, also tried to avoid feminism's criticism. Instead, they resurrected an idealization of women's role as mothers, or some form of Traditional Womanhood. Still other women, especially those in direct action groups and peace encampments, took up the symbolic and countercultural politics of the Vietnam era and, in a dramatic feminist critique of society, tried to demonstrate what they had learned about women's values since the late 1960s.

## THE VIETNAM ERA

The Burial of Traditional Womanhood expressed the rage of civil rights and antiwar activists who had gradually come to realize the power men held over their lives. The funeral oration, filled with anger, expressed the power male approval still exerted in these women's lives:

For some reason, man said to woman: you are less sexual when you participate in those other things, you are no longer attractive to me if you do so. I like you quiet and submissive. It makes me feel as if you don't love me, if you fail to let me do all the talking...When you confront the world outside the home...the world where I operate as an individual self as well as husband and father, then for some reason, I feel you are a challenge to me and become sexless and aggressive.<sup>9</sup>

Note their recognition—and fear—of the penalties of trespassing appropriate gender boundaries. This masterful voice then points out that if he is turned off, he'll simply find another woman—leaving yet another woman divorced, without a man, and almost certainly with children. Sadistically, he describes her descent to poverty as she attempts to live on "women's wages." The fear of appearing uppity, silly and unattractive haunts these young women. The need for female solidarity, not surprisingly, is forthrightly yoked to the need to organize any woman who might become a "scab" and replace an uppity woman: "We women must organize so that for man there can be no 'other woman' when we are expressing ourselves and acting politically, when we insist to men that they do the housework and child-care, fully and equally, so that we can have independent lives as well."<sup>10</sup>

Having played out future possibilities, the oration then moves onto the subject of women's false consciousness, a common theme in the women's liberation movement.

## 212 VIETNAM GENERATION

And so traditional Womanhood, even if she was unhappy with her lot, believed that there was nothing she could do about it. She blamed herself for her limitations and she tried to *adapt*. She told herself and she told others that she was happy as half a person, as the "better half" of someone else, as the mother of others, powerless in her own right.<sup>11</sup>

Rejecting "the so-called power of wives and mothers," the oration insists upon women's autonomous right to act for themselves, as well as against the war.

It was no easy matter to bring up women's subordinate position in society in the midst of a shooting war. These women knew their issues would be ridiculed by men in the antiwar movement. Anticipating critics' trivialization of their feminist issues, they preemptively ask: "Why should we bury traditional womanhood while hundreds of thousands of human beings are being brutally slaughtered in our names...when it would seem that our number one task is to devote our energies directly to ending this slaughter or else solve what seems to be more desperate problems at home?" Their answer is that women's problems are not merely personal, but social and political. "We cannot hope to move toward a better world or even a truly democratic society at home until we begin to solve our own problems." Peace without sexual equality, they insist, will only be temporary.

If men fail to see that love, justice and equality are the solution, that domination and exploitation hurt everybody, then our species is truly doomed; for if domination and exploitation and aggression are inherent biological characteristics which cannot be overcome, then nuclear war is inevitable and we will have reached our evolutionary dead end by annihilating ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

The oration ends with an explanation and a plea for a new beginning:

And that is why we must bury this lady in Arlington Cemetery tonight, why we must bury Submission alongside Aggression. And that is why we ask you to join us. It is only a symbolic happening, of course, and we have a lot of real work to do. We have new men as well as a new society to build.<sup>13</sup>

Embedded in this funeral oration are some of the most basic assumptions and premises of the early women's liberation movement. Apprehension, even terror, of becoming victims of the *Feminine Mystique*, is the key to their thought. The ghost that haunts them wears an apron and submissively serves a husband and children. Fear that men won't like such uppity women, that feminists will be replaced by more compliant women, is a pervasive and, as it turns out, wholly justifiable anxiety. Rejecting the biological determinism of the 1950s, they assume that men and women are more alike than unlike and that traditional

manhood, like traditional womanhood, can be buried along with aggression and submission.

During the first years of the women's movement, 1967-1971, most young feminists, in their early twenties, tried to articulate ways in which women resembled rather than differed from men. Partly because of their youth and their fear of being trapped in a domestic future, they renounced their moral superiority as mothers (which most weren't) and proclaimed an independent right to denounce the American government's role in Vietnam. Like their male counterparts, they would fight against war with strength and might, not with the tears and weakness of traditional women.

No doubt they were influenced by the growing militancy of the antiwar movement, which, since the fall of 1967, had frequently renounced nonviolence in favor of "shutting the system down" by any means possible. As the antiwar movement moved from protest to resistance, the macho style of both GI antiwar and Black Power activists prodded young men and women to step up their militancy.

No longer, then, would young women encourage men to make war, nor fight against war as the relatives of men. As they buried Traditional Womanhood, they declared their right to resist war as autonomous beings, not merely as contingent appendages of men. As we shall see, this position was not to last very long.

## MOTHERHOOD AND THE AMERICAN WOMEN'S REFORM TRADITION

When young feminists buried traditional womanhood, they probably knew too little history to realize how far they had strayed from two centuries of the American women's reform tradition. It had been motherhood that had always justified women's desire to advance their rights, as well as their public efforts to reform society. After the American revolution, women had used the need for an educated Republican Motherhood to support their demand for female education. In their campaigns against prostitution, liquor, and other assorted vices, nineteenth century women had always protested that, as mothers, they had a special right and responsibility to protect their families and homes. During the Progressive Era, female reformers justified their public campaigns for women's suffrage, prohibition, child labor laws and peace by arguing that their mothering and housekeeping skills should be extended to the public arena.<sup>14</sup>

Women's use of "motherist" rhetoric to justify their engagement in reform, then, has a long and honorable tradition in American history. In 1915, when Carrie Chapman Catt and Jane Addams founded the Woman's Peace Party (which subsequently merged into the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), they also argued that women's special morality—derived from their life-giving and preserving role as mothers—provided them with a unique capacity to join women all over the globe in seeking disarmament.<sup>15</sup> Until the Vietnam war, in

## 214 VIETNAM GENERATION

fact, American women (with the exception of those attached to Socialist or Communist parties) had traditionally based their opposition to war—and nuclear weapons—on their biological difference as mothers. Claiming a special aversion to violence, they emphasized their biological specificity as a way of legitimizing their participation in public protest and peace organizations.

### **THE WOMEN STRIKE FOR PEACE: A RECENT EXAMPLE OF A "MOTHERIST" MOVEMENT**

The Women Strike for Peace in 1961 is exemplary of such motherist peace efforts. As a radioactive cloud from a Russian nuclear test hung over the United States, fears of nuclear fallout intensified some citizens' desire for a test ban treaty. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, an estimated fifty thousand women in over sixty cities walked out of their kitchens in a one-day nation-wide strike on November 1, 1961. The group had been organized by five women who had met in SANE, grown weary of that group's ineffective bureaucratic and lobbying tactics and determined to take direct action against the nuclear threat. They spread the word of the strike through female networks: local PTAs, the League of Women Voters, WILPF and ANE, even Christmas card lists.<sup>16</sup>

After a decade of containment and cold war, with dissent silenced by McCarthyism, the Women Strike for Peace stunned the nation. Where had they come from? Who had organized them? What sinister force did they represent? They looked so deceptively commonplace. As *Newsweek* explained, the strikers seemed like "perfectly ordinary women, with their share of good looks, the kind you would see driving ranch wagons, or shopping at the village market, or attending PTA meetings." Their slogans, moreover, sparkled with motherist rhetoric designed to appeal to ordinary women. Worried about Strontium 90 contaminating their children's milk, the women carried placards demanding such modest goals as "Pure Milk, Not Poison," and "Let the Children Grow." From the neck of a little girl in a baby buggy hung a sign expressing the motherist beliefs of the strikers: "I want to grow up to be a mommy some day."<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the strikers were not as innocent as they looked. Some had been members of the Communist Party, radicals, fellow travelers, union sympathizers or peace activists in the forties. At the very least, they constituted a relatively liberal, educated, and civic minded group of women who had absorbed the Feminine Mystique, left jobs or educational dreams to raise their children throughout the 1950s, but retained an interest in civic affairs. Over 61% worked as housewives; most still had children at home.<sup>18</sup>

The WSP's maternal imagery was extremely effective. During the 1950s cold warriors had argued that America needed to protect women's domestic role in the home. Patriotism became equated with The

American Way of Life, which specifically included traditional gender roles.<sup>19</sup> Now, the WSP women used the same domestic imagery as a basis for making a radical critique of the cold war, nuclear tests and the madness of cold war containment. They impressed many people, including President Kennedy. At a 1962 press conference, he recognized their sincerity and praised them for their work. Shortly before his assassination, he made an appeal for more such maternal activism: "The control of arms is a mission we undertake particularly for our children and our grandchildren, and they have no lobby in Washington. No one is better qualified to represent their interest than the mothers and grandmothers of America."<sup>20</sup> Jerome Wiesner, Kennedy's science advisor, later "gave the major credit for moving President Kennedy toward the limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, not to arms controllers inside the government but to the Women Strike for Peace, SANE and Linus Pauling."<sup>21</sup>

The WSP women made every effort to avoid framing their strike in terms that challenged traditional gender relations. Dagmar Wilson, who became the spokesperson for the strike, described herself as a housewife, even though she was employed as a successful freelance graphic illustrator. To a reporter from the *Baltimore Sun*, Wilson reassured the public, "Our organization has no resemblance to the Lysistrata theme or even to the suffragettes. We are not striking against our husbands. It is my guess that we will make the soup that they will ladle out to the children on Wednesday [November 1, 1961]."<sup>22</sup>

Amy Swerdlow, the historian who has studied the WSP in greatest detail, argues that WSP women chose to use a simple language, "the mother tongue," because they believed in their motherist ideals and also because they wanted to avoid imitating male forms of political discourse. "Convinced that professional politicians, scientists, and academics were, for the most part, leading the world to extinction, they gloried in their own exclusion from the system," argues Swerdlow. They gloried in the purity and saintliness of their status as mothers. Swerdlow also explains that most WSP women simply were "unable to offer a feminist critique of the bomb and the war. We in WSP, and I include myself, had neither language nor the analytical tools to make a connection between woman's secondary status in family and political powerlessness or between domestic violence and state violence."<sup>23</sup>

Such maternal purity, however, did not prevent HUAC from investigating WSP one year later. Refusing to grant the investigation legitimacy, the women brilliantly employed a politics of "humor, irony, evasion and ridicule." They brought cribs, suckled babies, and did everything possible to emphasize that *their patriotism*, the defense of children, was far superior to the cold war arms race. Their effective but unconventional organization turned HUAC's inquiry into a circus. Opposed to membership lists, central organization or hierarchical leadership, the WSP quickly made HUAC's arcane search for leadership and communists an exercise in futility. The press, sympathetic to the



## 216 VIETNAM GENERATION

WSP, turned the inquiry into a battle between the sexes, which the WSP won decisively.<sup>24</sup>

In many ways, argues Swerdlow, the motherist campaign of SWP was superbly effective:

It helped to change the image of the good mother from passive to militant, from silent to eloquent, from private to public. In proclaiming that men in power could no longer be counted on for protection, WSP exposed one of the most important myths of the militarists, that wars are waged by men to protect women and children. By stressing international cooperation among women rather than private family issues, WSP challenged the key element of the feminine mystique; the domestication, privatization, of the middle-class white housewife. By making recognized contributions to the achievement of a test ban, WSP also raised its participants' sense of political efficacy and self esteem.<sup>25</sup>

Swerdlow also adds that in creating a non-hierarchical, decentralized, participatory, and playful style of politics, the WSP also prefigured the political culture of the New Left and the radical wing of the young women's liberation movement.

Only seven years later, as we have seen, young women rejected the motherist rhetoric of the WSP for a discourse that attempted to ignore biological difference and especially women's role as mothers. By then, some WSP women were also ready to exchange motherist rhetoric for the language of a radical feminism that proclaimed women's independent right to oppose war. This is not surprising. As we shall see, women's peace discourse has often mirrored, consciously or not, the feminist or antifeminist atmosphere of the period in which it is conceived.

### **THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT REDISCOVERS "DIFFERENCE"**

Like other revivals of feminism, the women's movement had to confront a serious ontological conundrum: the problem of defining woman's nature, position and condition in a society dominated by male perspective and experience. In her brilliant explication of this ontological problem, Simone de Beauvoir described woman as the "other;" she used the term "otherness" to describe woman's social and cultural marginality. It is precisely women's otherness that sets the intellectual agenda of any feminist revival. It sets the agenda first, because women must address maleness as the norm; and secondly, because women must analyze their own position, as well as the society in which they live, from the distinct perspective of the "other."<sup>26</sup> In this way, both the perspective and nature of the questions raised by feminists are profoundly influenced by women's otherness. The feminist discourse of the late 1960s and 1970s then, can be understood as a sustained confrontation with how women resembled or differed from the normative ideal of maleness.

The ghost of the *Feminine Mystique*, the 1950s emphasis on biological determinism, the widespread acceptance of Freudian psychology—all influenced early feminists to move in a direction that stressed similarity rather than difference. From the beginning, women in NOW, a more traditional civil rights group, committed themselves to formal legalism, maintaining that women gained far more from stressing women's resemblance to men rather than their difference. Thus, they advocated legislation that provided women with the same rights and responsibilities as men, sometimes forcing women to squeeze their biological experience and cycle into a male model of success. Biological difference, argued NOW advocates and attorneys, had too long been used as a basis for exclusion. Younger radical feminists similarly tried to underplay the significance of difference. Shulamith Firestone even went so far as to suggest that women free themselves from the material oppression of bearing children by having them born in test tubes.<sup>27</sup>

By the mid-1970s, however, the atmosphere in the younger and radical part of the movement began to shift. The growth of the draft resistance and GI movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s gradually shifted antiwar work to men and excluded grassroots participation from large numbers of female activists (except in GI coffee houses). The macho style of the GI movement turned off many feminists who were criticizing the growing violence and combativeness of the antiwar movement itself.

As the war began to wind down, many women entered the women's movement without having had prior involvement in either the civil rights or antiwar movements. Concern over race, American imperialism or the third world were not part of their political background. The trendy human potential idea that one had to change oneself before changing the world, moreover, justified women's exclusive focus on themselves. Many feminists, therefore, became absorbed in discovering and battling the many hidden injuries and problems experienced by women—rape, sexual harassment, battering, incest, and the medicalization of women's natural bodily processes. The list seemed infinite. The focus on women's problems inevitably challenged the idea that women were indeed so similar to men. Some writers and activists toyed with the ideal of androgyny. But increasingly, radical feminists began exploring, even celebrating, women's difference.<sup>28</sup> There are many reasons for this shift of emphasis, only some of which I can discuss briefly here.

From the beginning, the civil rights movement exerted an enormous influence on the radical wing of the women's movement. The pull towards separatism and the search for a separate women's culture, therefore, had its seeds in the black power and black nationalism movements of the late 1960s. Efforts to change men, to convince them to see the political dimensions of personal life, had largely failed. Movement men trivialized and ridiculed feminist demands and in so doing, often became identified as the "enemy." To be like men, then,

## 218 VIETNAM GENERATION

implied adopting the very privilege and arrogance that feminists condemned. As in the civil rights movement, integration—this time with men—seemed a hopeless task. In a separatist mood, lesbian and other feminist separatists began creating a vibrant women's culture—coffee houses, bookstores, musical festivals, rural communes—which they associated with the superiority of women's values. Like advocates of black nationalism, they stressed the cultural heritage of women, a heritage that now seemed filled with rich experiences that men had devalued.

By the late 1970s and 1980s a burst of feminist scholarship and polemic had launched a fairly devastating critique of the "male culture" that produced the institutions, values and attitudes under which women had lived. Feminist intellectuals began reevaluating women's experience from a female perspective. Adrienne Rich distinguished between the patriarchal institution of motherhood and the actual joyful process of creating and preserving life. Carol Gilligan reassessed women's moral values, while Susan Griffin and Carolyn Merchant compared male and female attitudes towards nature. Sara Ruddick and other feminist theorists reconsidered the value of "maternal thinking," a cognitive style that stemmed from the experience of preserving rather than destroying life. Evelyn Fox Keller analyzed the ways in which scientific knowledge mirrored men's attitudes toward thought and emotion. Mary Daly reinvested positive meaning in the spinster, the crone, the hag. An endless list of authors tried to resurrect mythical matriarchies in which women, as peaceful nurturers, had reigned before the onslaught of "patriarchal barbarism."<sup>29</sup>

Personal experience also drove radical feminists to reconsider the value of their "difference." As young feminists aged, the terror of the 1950s retreated and their respect for motherhood grew. As some feminists entered male professions, they also discovered, with considerable disappointment, a world shaped by men's biological rhythms, linguistically depicted by *their* bodily metaphors, described by mystified abstractions, and enacted in an adversarial and combative interpersonal style. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild criticized academic life for maintaining a tenure cycle that ignored women's need to bear and raise children during their intellectually formative years. Feminist lawyers complained of the adversarial nature of their profession and argued for better means of conflict resolution. Legal scholars like Catharine MacKinnon persuasively argued that the law, like the rest of society, simply didn't fit women's needs. When feminist lawyers argued women's causes on the basis of protectionism, they created precedent for exclusion. But to argue cases based on women's similarity with men meant ignoring important female biological differences, especially those associated with pregnancy and maternity.<sup>30</sup>

Increasingly, the dominant tone in the movement—with the exception of NOW and other mainstream civil rights organizations—reflected a search for a "woman-centered" approach that could challenge

the normative values of a patriarchal culture. How, such feminists asked, can we achieve a kind of equality that incorporates difference? The answer, increasingly voiced, was that only a critical mass of women—and men—could successfully challenge the assumptions, premises and values of the culture, and that such a critical mass had not yet surfaced. A perfect example: It was one thing to force men or institutions to provide childcare. It was quite another matter to invest such work with prestige and reward it with decent monetary compensation.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF THE WOMEN'S PEACE MOVEMENT IN THE 1980s**

As the need for a renewed peace effort resumed in the late 1970s, women once again, as during the Vietnam war, entered and indeed often led resistance to nuclear employment in Europe.

Women's efforts to join mixed groups in both the United States and Europe reminded many of their experiences during the Vietnam war. They complained of the bureaucratic and abstract wrangling in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, of men's combative style in the Livermore Action Group. They watched men obey the letter but not the spirit of feminist process. Unlike the WSP women just emerging from the 1950s, women who joined mixed groups no longer lacked a language with which to express their resentment. Whether they chose to use it was quite another matter. Thus, when they entered mixed peace groups, they did so with apprehension, but with the hope or belief that mixed groups provided the most effective and strategic means for mobilizing people to protest the bomb, war, or interventionism.<sup>32</sup>

## **MOTHERIST CAMPAIGNS**

In addition to joining mixed groups, some women revived "motherist" campaigns for peace. But few really tried to resurrect the Traditional Womanhood that young feminists had buried in 1968. Some used motherhood tactically, believing that women as mothers, rather than as feminists, held greater legitimacy. Some members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the WSP had never relinquished their belief that women ought to organize as mothers.

Motherist campaigns or rhetoric had considerable appeal. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, after all, had scored important victories. In the United States, groups like Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), founded by Helen Caldicott, happily exploited Mother's Day and other symbols of motherhood to promote women's organization for peace. In Germany, Petra Kelly, a leading figure of the Greens, held a placard which read "Father State Makes Mother Earth Kaput" at a blockade of US army bases. In San Diego, Mothers Embracing Nuclear Disarmament (MEND), founded in 1986 by Linda Smith, adopted motherist rhetoric and drew on the traditional respectability of mothers

## 220 VIETNAM GENERATION

to organize women against the nuclear threat. Mother's Day became an annual occasion for mothers to gather at the Nevada test site to protest nuclear weapons. In general, those movements that wholly or occasionally employed motherist rhetoric, tried to avoid associating their goals with a feminist critique of women's condition or of patriarchal structure in general. Women for Survival, for example, scrupulously avoided all association with the women's movement. In the Age of Reagan, with the defeat of the ERA in 1982, feminism had become another f-word, better left unsaid.<sup>33</sup>

Another reason women found motherist campaigns appealing is that a variety of maternal protests in the 1970s proved effective in challenging established authority and focusing world attention on the madness of violence and the violation of human rights. In Argentina, the Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* demonstrated enormous courage when, in 1977, they began invading the traditional masculine space of the government plaza every Thursday. Silently they circled the plaza, demanding information about their missing children.<sup>34</sup> Wearing scarves on their heads, they signaled their acceptance of their subordinate role, but inverted the symbol by embroidering the names of the disappeared on the cloth. Around their necks they hung photos of their children. Nonviolence, they argued, was essential. Even their use of silence, they felt, was an accusatory, not passive statement.<sup>35</sup> In South Africa, motherist groups played an important role in nonviolent resistance. South African Women's Resistance to Pass Laws cast their opposition in terms of the laws' infringement of their rights as mothers.<sup>36</sup> In August 1976, when Irish violence resulted in the killing of three small children, a group of housewives, later called the Irish Peace Women, instigated a movement of Protestant and Catholic mothers who staged a peaceful and nonviolent march of 10,000 women to protest the violence that was decimating whole families. For their effort, they would win the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>37</sup> In 1979, Danish and Finnish women, sitting around the perennial kitchen table that looms so large in the histories of women's peace movements, formed Women for Peace, in recognition of the fact that mothers all over the world would care about their children's future. Demanding "Food Instead of Arms," they managed to gather half a million women's signatures on peace petitions. In 1981 they staged a dramatic peace march from Copenhagen to Paris, where the press either ignored them or interviewed the few men who accompanied them.<sup>38</sup>

### THE WOMEN'S DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT AND PEACE ENCAMPMENTS

In the 1980s, other women moved in a third direction, one that integrated feminist analysis with nonviolent protest of the bomb and war. These were groups of women who adopted a specifically antimasculinist discourse and proclaimed their unique moral claim as women to protest violence and the nuclear threat. Their campaigns

included an acknowledgment of the importance of mothers, but more significantly, emphasized the moral superiority of women *per se*, and revived—even invented—female cultural rituals for protesting world violence. Among these groups were the Women's Pentagon Action in 1980 and 1981, the Greenham Women's Encampment (1981 to the present), the Seneca Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice (1982 to the present) and the Puget Sound Encampment in Seattle (1983 to the present), as well as various women's peace encampments and movements in Italy and Australia.<sup>39</sup>

Consider how far these feminist groups had moved away from the young women who, in 1968, thought they had buried Traditional Womanhood. At the Women's Pentagon Action, for example, posters decried male violence, and called for women to "disarm the patriarchy." One of the most popular placards urged women to "Take the Toys Away from the Boys."<sup>40</sup> The protest, designed as a four-part theater piece, gloried in enacting rituals that distinguished women from men. The protesters began mourning, chanting and weeping (something Kathie Amatriek swore women would never again do). Next, the women entered into a period of rage, denouncing male violence against women and the planet. During the third stage, in an image meant to convert domesticity into defiance, the women spun yarn across the doors of the Pentagon. In the fourth and final stage, called an encirclement, women used scarves to form an interweaving web encircling the five points of the Pentagon. At the Seneca and Puget Sound encampments, such four-part outpourings of emotion became a tradition.

The Women's Pentagon Action typified the atmosphere and discourse of peace encampments. Once again, women reveled in using symbols that declared their pride in the moral superiority of being women. Indeed, the camps themselves were supposed to provide a prefigurative peek at how a cooperative, nonsexist, nonhierarchical society could be run without violence. During the late 1960s, many activists in the antiwar movement had believed that people must live "as if" their goals had been achieved. This emphasis on cultural politics had deeply influenced the women's movement throughout the 1970s. At the camps, women shared the endless chores required to maintain the camps, and stressed participatory democracy and consensus as the only means to reach decisions. During acts of civil disobedience, they festooned the fences surrounding missile silos with flowers, pictures of their children or female lovers, and spun yarn and scarves to "reweave the web of life" all over the world.<sup>41</sup>

Like the explicitly motherist groups, the Women's Pentagon Action and the women's peace encampments implicitly presumed the moral superiority of women. The difference was that they de-emphasized motherhood and contrasted women's intrinsically peace loving, life-preserving, nonviolent manner against men's violent, exploitive and plundering nature. (One possible reason for the relative lack of motherist rhetoric is that the participants, many of whom were young and/or lesbians, were not (yet) mothers.) At the Pentagon Action, for example,

women raged against those men “who destroy our lives,” and declared “A Feminist World is a Nuclear Free Zone.”<sup>42</sup>

The Women’s Pentagon Action grew out of an April 1980 conference at Amherst, Massachusetts entitled “Women and Life on Earth: Eco-Feminism in the 1980’s.” Eco-feminism does not necessarily promote “essentialism,” that is, the belief in innate differences between men and women. Simply put, eco-feminism argues that the particular patriarchal culture which has developed in the West, has been characterized by a mind/body split that associates men with spirit and rationality and women with nature and intuition. Men, who have held greater power in this culture, have had the power to develop patriarchal culture, along with its exploitive views of nature and women, and violent responses to conflict and difference. The dangers of this world view are clear: violence against both women and nature and the terrifying prospect of ecological or nuclear disaster. Both men and women have colluded in this construction of reality and both remain responsible for creating a new vision of harmony with nature, equality between the sexes and global cooperation. Present differences between the sexes are regarded as the result of men and women’s different historical and social experiences. Virginia Woolf’s conviction that men’s mental liberation from daily cares (housekeeping and childcare) is dangerous and makes them too detached from the facts and exigencies of life is often quoted to support this point of view.<sup>43</sup>

Yet in practice, the eco-feminist discourse—symbols, slogans and protests—at least as expressed by separatists of peace encampments—often implies that men are the violent partners of the species. Participants portray women as the saviors of the earth, the caretakers of the planet, while men destroy the earth through ecological rapaciousness and nuclear weaponry. The “Unity Statement” written for the Pentagon Action, for example, sentimentally describes how “The earth nourishes us as we with our bodies will eventually feed it. Through us our mothers connected the human past to the human future.” Rejecting the liberal feminist idea that women should join the military, they explicitly state, “We do not want to be drafted into the army. We do not want our young brothers drafted. We want *them* equal to us.”<sup>44</sup>

Women in effect have a moral responsibility to wrest control of the earth from men. At Greenham Common, a similar perspective presided. “For many women,” explained two participants, “the issue is about reclaiming power for ourselves, and not remaining victims of a male-defined world characterized by violence.”<sup>45</sup> At the Seneca Encampment the women created a new pledge of allegiance that emphasized their view of the earth as a female living organism: “We pledge allegiance to the earth, And to the life which she provides, One planet interconnected, With beauty and peace for all.”<sup>46</sup> In visual terms, the participants compare the planet to a woman’s body, repeatedly raped and plundered by male violence. Male violence toward women and the threat of nuclear holocaust are seen as originating from the same source:

a patriarchal culture that devalues nature and employs violence at every turn. In *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence*, a popular collection of essays, such articles as "Patriarchy: A State of War," "Patriarchy is a Killer: What People Concerned About Peace and Justice Should Know," "The Future—If There Is One—Is Female," and "Fear of the Other: The Common Root of Sexism and Militarism," contrast men's violent and aggressive culture with that of women's nonviolence.<sup>47</sup> The Unity Statement of the Puget Sound Encampment explicitly states that, "We are ordinary women: mothers, daughters, sisters and workers who see the relationship between use of U.S. militarism and the violence women experience on the street, on our jobs and in our home." Both domestic violence and war, they argue, legitimize "use of violence to resolve conflicts....A nonviolent, feminist way of living seeks cooperation, not domination, and includes respect for peoples' physical and spiritual well-being and a love of the earth and her creatures." Men's use of weapons is likened to their need to dominate, master and control those around them, whether it be women or other nations. To make these connections, for example, some of the women at Puget Sound distributed leaflets against pornography to try to link exploitation and degradation of women with male plundering of the planet.<sup>48</sup>

The idea that men make war on women—and the world—had its roots in the women's movement of the mid-1970s. Susan Brownmiller's influential *Against Our Will* (1975) convinced many feminists that rape, an act of terror against women, exerts enormous social control in keeping women in their place. A 1976 poster from the American women's movement stated in no uncertain terms: "RAPE IS WAR!" The following explanation appeared below:

It is the tradition of the patriarchy to conquer and possess. The capacity for dehumanization, the equation of manhood with the domination of another's body, is carried over from sex into war. War is the ultimate act of coercion inflicted on a people and a country. Rape is the ultimate act of coercion inflicted on women by men. Rape is war.<sup>49</sup>

To counter the influence of patriarchal culture, peace encampment participants valorize everything female. Emotionality—excessive displays of weeping, raging, chanting, and mourning—are honored and favorably compared to men's sublimation of feeling into violence. Traditions inherited—or newly invented—from women's past are used to glorify women's magical healing powers. Wicca practices, worship of various goddess figures, new feminist spiritualist rituals, and Gaia (Earth) Consciousness have all, at one time or another, appeared as ritualistic observances.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of the web, reweaving the seam of life, gradually took on symbolic importance in the peace encampments. It was not a new idea and had its roots in the women's movement of the late 1970s. In 1976,



## 224 VIETNAM GENERATION

feminists in Amherst, Massachusetts celebrated International Women's Day with a poster that compared women to spiders, who, by creating a world-wide web, could "entangle the powers that bury our children."<sup>51</sup> To those who participated in the peace encampments, weaving of webs became symbolic of women's potential power to enforce peace, to tie together women's protests—from the Boeing Aerospace construction site in Puget Sound, to the nuclear depot at Seneca, to the actual missile silo at Greenham Common. As the authors of *Greenham Women Everywhere* explain,

Each link in a web is fragile, but woven together creates a strong and coherent whole. A web with few links is weak and can be broken, but the more thread it is composed of, the greater its strength. It makes a very good analogy for the way in which women have rejuvenated the peace movement. By connections made through many diverse channels, a widespread network has grown up of women committed to working for peace.<sup>52</sup>

But peace is not simply the absence of war. For women in the peace encampments and their sympathizers, a redefinition of peace, security and defense are all necessary. "To oppose nuclear weapons requires a fundamental change in our attitude to life." Imagination, suggests one Greenham participant, is essential. "What we want to change is immense. It's not just getting rid of nuclear weapons, it's getting rid of the whole structure that created the possibility of nuclear weapons in the first place. If we won't use imagination nothing will change. Without change we will destroy the planet. It's as simple as that."<sup>53</sup> At Puget Sound, the women made the connection between male supremacy and war explicit:

Feminism implies a total world view rather than simply positions on traditional women's (biological/reproductive) issues....The Feminist resistance to war and nuclear weapons challenges the system of male supremacy at least as fundamentally as these struggles. War is a structural aspect of male supremacy, and a particularly deadly one. Since war is one of the areas in and through which men have most effectively consolidated and extended their power over the world, challenging militarism is essential for a feminist revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike motherist groups, women in peace encampments encountered considerable derision and ridicule. During the first months, Greenham Common women received some positive press. Soon, however, critics chastised women who had left their husbands and children to join the peace encampment, calling them neglectful mothers and wives. Eventually, those women who were most free to remain at Greenham or other peace encampments tended to include young lesbians whose commitment to a countercultural women's community was essential. Hence, they had little interest in seeking male approval. Their independent

and feisty spirit, their disregard for feminine demeanor or clothing, threatened local townspeople and even generated violence against them. The consequences of invading conservative small towns could be serious. At Seneca, marchers were stopped by local men wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the slogan, "Nuke the Dykes." Their "press," to put it mildly, was largely hostile, except in Seattle, where some liberal journalists treated the peace camp with greater respect. In England, journalists repeatedly discredited them as "strident feminist," "burly lesbians," "hefty ladies," "the harridans of Greenham Common," and "Amazon waifs and strays."<sup>55</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WOMEN'S PEACE PROTEST?

How one argues for peace matters. Discourse not only shapes strategy but reveals participants' construction of reality, sense of purpose and projected identity. In the late 1960s, in the midst of the Vietnam war's slaughter, the young feminists who tried to bury Traditional Womanhood understood their personal stake in antiwar discourse. In the 1980s, the possibility of apocalyptic war now forced women to consider how best to preserve peace.

Women peace activists sometimes know this and are currently debating how women should advocate peace. Some radical feminists, for example, have written diatribes against the peace encampments, arguing that the peace movement has drained feminist energies away from the more important peace project of ending male violence against women.<sup>56</sup> Other radical feminist have argued that women's issues are simply too petty to consider when compared with the immediate threat of nuclear war. Women in mixed groups have expressed considerable discomfort with the moral superiority expressed by both motherist groups and women's encampments. Separatists have argued that only women can make peace; motherist campaigns have carefully skirted feminist issues that otherwise effect their lives.

Let us take a brief look at some of the social implications of women's peace protest. The advantages of motherist campaigns are easy to spot. They receive great press, appeal to women who fear being associated with feminism and are perfectly suited to a patriarchal culture that welcomes women's efforts to seek change in the name of their traditional status as mothers and their maternal right to protect their children. In other words, in the short run, motherist campaigns have considerable potential to attract a sympathetic audience. As Amy Swerdlow and others have argued, moreover, motherist campaigns can alter women's consciousness. As mothers engage in public protest, they often perceive ways in which their power as women is limited. They also gain valuable political experience. Over time, motherist campaigns can therefore radicalize women into demanding rights for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Because the short term effects are so obvious, advocates of motherist campaigns sometimes ignore the long term disadvantages of

## 226 VIETNAM GENERATION

maternal protests. In the long run, motherist campaigns may reinforce the culture's gender system by reifying women's biological role as mothers. Further, motherist rhetoric no longer accurately reflects the complexity of women's lives. In 1961 it did. In the 1990s, the vast majority of women will be doing many other things in addition to mothering. It might help if men also argued against nuclear weapons or war as fathers. But usually they don't. When they *do* speak of future generations and emphasize their paternity, their words do not carry the same social significance as motherist campaigns. In short, they don't reinforce a societal belief that men's lives should be shaped by their biological capacity to father. By emphasizing mothers' moral superiority, moreover, motherist rhetoric tends to place women on pedestals, where, as feminists have long observed, women are worshipped but rarely granted equal rights. In other words, a conflict of interest may exist between the strategy of using motherist rhetoric and the feminist goal of transcending an exclusively biological role. The women who tried to bury Traditional Womanhood in 1968 thought so. Were they then, overall, right?

The peace encampments also have some advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, they are among the few strains of the peace movement to make connections between a feminist critique of the culture and militarism. Their expressive politics suggest an alternative way to resolve conflict; their "bearing witness" draws attention to the production, storage and presence of missiles, making the abstract idea of nuclear holocaust more concrete.

Strong criticism can also be made of the peace encampments. Some feminist peace activists argue that separatists may in fact reinforce the gender system.<sup>58</sup> By emphasizing women's culture, peace encampments reify traditional gender roles. The logic of their biological determinism can also lead to political paralysis. If men are so hopelessly violent, then why bother to protest at all? Why not go home and simply live out one's remaining days as comfortably as possible? Further, the emphasis on male violence demonizes and alienates most men, who, in the final analysis, truly do have the power to make peace. Because lesbians and feminist separatists have so dominated the encampment movement, they have strengthened the association of feminism with exotic rituals and alternative lifestyles. As a result, they have frightened local townspeople and often alienated the very public they wish to convert. They receive a great deal of press, but most of it is negative.

### **THE VIETNAM LEGACY AND THE WOMEN'S PEACE MOVEMENT**

In many ways, the women's peace movement is one of the most profound legacies of the Vietnam war. Although women's peace protest began long before the 1960s, the introduction of feminist consciousness into peace protest forever altered the frame of reference for women involved in peace movements.

Yet two decades after the women's movement began, women in the 1980s still face the same conundrum that is an integral problem of feminism itself: the fact that women's discourse about themselves—and peace—inevitably turns on how much women do or do not resemble men. That this has been a problem during all feminist revivals is well understood by historians.<sup>59</sup> What historians have ignored, however, is that female peace activists face the same dilemma, though not always with the same intellectual self-consciousness. The central problematic is that, within a male dominated culture, men remain the frame of reference and women have not successfully moved beyond this limitation. Either they emphasize the similarity of the sexes—thereby negating their special needs and biological processes—or they emphasize their difference and claim a moral superiority based on maternalism and relative powerlessness. In either case, they remain the “other” and their intellectual discourse about themselves—and peace—remains imprisoned within a paradigm that fails to transcend women's contingent relationship to men. This was true during the Vietnam war; it remains true today.

Thus, within this very brief history of women's peace protest, we have seen women swing back and forth between these two tendencies. One emphasizes women's difference, and condemns the world men have made. A common feminist adage best expresses this position: “The woman who strives to be equal to man lacks ambition.” The other tendency emphasizes men and women's similarity, knowing that difference has too often been used as the basis of exclusion. During the Vietnam war, Betty Friedan, like the women who buried Traditional Womanhood, argued that “My own revulsion toward the war in Vietnam does not stem from the milk that once flowed from my breast, nor even from the fact of my draft-age sons, but from my moral conscience as a human being and as an American. A few years before her death, Simone de Beauvoir expressed her firm conviction that “women should desire peace as human beings, not as women. And if they are being encouraged to be pacifists in the name of motherhood, that's just a ruse by men who are trying to lead women back to the womb. Besides, it's quite obvious that once they're in power, women are exactly like men. Women should absolutely let go of that baggage.”<sup>60</sup>

To expand a discourse that is limited by, refers to, and is judged by a dominant patriarchal culture is no easy task. Still, now there are some female peace activists attempting to create a feminist, rather than feminine analysis of and protest against war, the bomb, and interventionism in the third world. Around the globe there are signs that a variety of individuals are trying to make feminism, or human social welfare, but not women's special nature, the basis of peace protest.

One example of this tendency in the United States is the effort to educate more women in the technical language of arms control and weaponry or to achieve peaceful change through the electoral process. Sometimes the goal is to put more women, not always or necessarily a new world view, at the negotiating table. Whatever its limitations in

## 228 VIETNAM GENERATION

promoting feminist concerns, and they are sometimes considerable, such efforts succeed in creating an important female presence within mainstream discourse and politics. *Women for a Meaningful Summit*, which grew out of the 1985 U.N. Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi, has attempted to infuse summit meetings with women's voices thoroughly informed about "throw weights, verification and security issues." Trying to create and document a gender gap about war and military expenditures provides women with potential political clout. Such disarmament specialists as Alva Myrdal and Randall Forsberg have promoted important and viable negotiating formulas adopted by political constituencies. Forsberg's role in creating the Nuclear Freeze, to cite just one example, was instrumental in creating a national movement. Weapons and arms control experts such as Mary Kaldor and Jane Sharp have helped transform strategic debate. Attacking the military budget, as Sheila Tobias and others have done, is another tactical way of demonstrating that national security involves meeting women's and children's needs.<sup>61</sup>

Elsewhere, women are searching for ways of transcending the "sameness/difference" limitations of their peace discourse. Senator Susan Ryan, the Australian Minister of Education, expressed this vision in 1982:

The biological imperative alone is not enough to defeat militarism. Rather than assuming that women as women will end war, I suggest that it is the relationship between feminism and disarmament that provides hopes for change....Contemporary feminism, whose ideology includes the replacing of aggression, authoritarianism, discrimination with reason, democracy, tolerance and an acceptance of all possibilities in life for women and men provides the best starting point for a popular and effective disarmament movement.<sup>62</sup>

In Italy, one group of feminists, trying to link the "micro" level of women's lives to the "macro" level of international conflict have argued that they are pacifists not because they are women, but because they are feminists. Feminism, they argue, unmasked the fragility of women's "security" and men's protection when it exposed domestic violence and rape. In the same way, feminism can unmask the fragility of a security built on mutually assured destruction, as opposed to security built on mutual cooperation.<sup>63</sup> In a similar vein, Sister Julianna Casey, IHM, a member of the *ad hoc* Committee to draft the US Bishop's pastoral letter on nuclear war, criticized what passes for normal discourse on nuclear arms from a feminist perspective:

One has only to listen carefully to the language used to speak of the nuclear reality to realize that abstract theories and pronouncements cover up death-dealing facts. The testimony of experts and of former and present governmental and military officials...brought this home to me in brutal ways. I learned

about "anticipatory retaliation" and "serendipitous fallout"....Perhaps most telling was the number of times disarmament or nuclear freeze were referred to as the "emasculinization" of American defense policy....As women we are painfully conscious of the power of language and of abstract rationalization to oppress, to hide, to make invisible. It has happened to us....<sup>64</sup>

Carol Cohn, in her brilliant deconstruction of defense language, similarly concluded that "the dominant voice of militarized masculinity and decontextualized rationality speaks so loudly in our culture, it is difficult for any other voice to be heard." Still, she called for a reconstructive effort:

We must recognize and develop alternative conceptions of rationality, we must invent compelling alternative visions of possible futures, and we must create rich and imaginative alternative voices—diverse voices whose conversations with each other will invent a future in which there is a future.<sup>65</sup>

Can feminism provide one of those "rich and imaginative alternative voices?" The feminist project of renaming, redefining and deconstructing the dominant culture has been immensely successful. What women used to call, with a sigh, "life," is now correctly labeled rape, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and wife battering. The most successful aspect of the feminist movement, in fact, has been to expose and rename experiences that once remained carefully guarded private secrets. What was once considered "natural" has been redefined as acts of exploitation and domination, incompatible with peace, equality, and justice.

The burial of Traditional Womanhood offered women a vision of an autonomous moral right to criticize the culture and its dominant discourse about war. The effort was premature. Women had not yet gained the economic independence for making such autonomous moral pronouncements. Twenty years later, many more have the means, however meager, to make their voices heard.

The strength of feminism grew from women's willingness to derive simple truths from personal experience, and the bold willingness to puncture truths accepted as received wisdom. Just as feminism helped redefine women's lives, can it help unmask the euphemisms, mystifications and paradigms that rationalize a planet threatened by nuclear destruction and gasping from ecological devastation? What voice will best advance the interest of *both* women and peace? Put another way, can feminism help inform the way we think about peace, how we go about arguing for disarmament, how we imagine a global community that respects, rather than seeks to dominate and conquer difference?

And what would such a feminist discourse sound like? It is premature to know, and particularly difficult to imagine at a time when

## 230 VIETNAM GENERATION

pronatalism and antifeminism have regained cultural dominance. Among feminist peace activists, moreover, there is also a great divide between those who stress equality and those who emphasize female difference. One can imagine, however, that such a discourse could go beyond the presumption of female superiority implicit in both the motherist and peace encampment movements, thereby creating an inclusive atmosphere that can embrace men's participation. It might also incorporate the values promoted by eco-feminist theory, thereby including a feminist critique of the culture's relation to the environment. As an expanding global feminism encounters an expanding global militarism, disparate voices are suggesting that the feminist vision of an egalitarian and nonviolent society—one that refuses to demonize men, gives up the presumption of female moral superiority, respects the need to live in harmony with nature—*may* challenge and redefine some of the dominant culture's most deeply held beliefs about *peace, security and defense*.<sup>66</sup>

Already, such voices can be heard. In *Rocking the Ship of State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics* (1989), a group of feminist activists and theorists, many veterans of the Vietnam era movements, point to new ways of making feminism the basis of peace protest.<sup>66</sup> But can an autonomous feminist discourse ever compete for legitimacy or gain a hearing? Can a critique and vision that cuts so deeply to the core of the culture be anything more than a utopian fantasy? Historians are neither soothsayers nor theorists. They know only that the future, in its predictably inscrutable way, will somehow be shaped by the past. The history of women's peace protest, as we have seen, reveals a few surprises, but has been largely limited by women's contingent relationship to men. Jeanette Rankin, who outraged her male colleagues by voting against both world wars, once wisely observed that

The individual woman is required...a thousand times a day to choose either to accept her appointed role and thereby rescue her good disposition out of the wreckage of her self-respect, or else follow an independent line of behavior and rescue her self-respect out of the wreckage of her good disposition.<sup>67</sup>

As women's lives continue to change, however, they may discover a new language that reflects the greater complexity of their lives. They may also discover that the Burial of Traditional Womanhood, a seemingly trivial event in the midst of a shooting war, helped free women to discover feminism as the basis for peace protest.

<sup>1</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" in *New York Radical Women, Notes from the First Year*, June 1968: 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Gerda Lerner, personal interview with the author in Berkeley, California, 15 March 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Kathie Amatniek, "Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood," reprinted in *Notes*: 24.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Kathleen Gerson, *Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1985; and, Ruth Rosen, "Daughters of the Fifties," Chapter Three in *The Second Wave* (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage) 1980—makes these points in her analysis of the origins of the women's movement.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with members of New York Radical Women, by the author between 1985-1987.

<sup>9</sup> Amatniek, "Funeral Oration": 24.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 26.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Barbara L. Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press) 1981; Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Powerful Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 1981; Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) 1982, for just a few of the dozens of books and articles that have explored this tradition. I also want to thank Kathryn Sklar for providing me with part of her unpublished manuscript on the life of Florence Kelley, which eloquently describes this female political tradition in the United States. See also her article "Jane Addams' Blessings as a Peace Activist, 1914-1922, are What Women Peace Activists Need Today," Keynote Address to the Women and Peace, An International Conference at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, March 13, 1989. For an analysis of the trajectory of women's peace activities and ideologies in California, see Joan Jensen, "Helen Marston and the California Peace Movement, 1915-1945," *California History*, June 1988.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Linda Shott, "The Women's Peace Party and the Moral Basis of Women's Pacifism," in a special issue on Women and Peace in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 8 (1985): 18-25; Jill Conway, "The Women's Peace Party and the First World War," in *War and Society in North America*, J.L. Gramatstein and Robert D. Cuff, eds. (Toronto: Thomas Nelson) 1971: 52-65; Barbara Steinson, "The Mother Half of Humanity: American Women in the Peace and Preparedness Movement in World War I," in *Women, War and Revolution*, Carol Berkin and Clare Lovett, eds. (New York: Holmes & Meier) 1980: 259-84; Marie Louise Degen, *The History of the Women's Peace Party* (New York: Garland) 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace Versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies* 8 (Fall 1982): 493-521.

<sup>17</sup> Swerdlow, "Ladies," quoting *Newsweek*, 13 November 1961: 21.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Swerdlow, "Pure Milk, Not Poison: Women Strike for Peace and The Test Ban Treaty of 1963," paper presented to the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Wellesley College, June 1988; Boulding, Elise, *Who Are These Women?* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Conflict Resolution) 1962.

<sup>19</sup> This analysis is brilliantly made in Elaine May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic) 1988, forthcoming. I thank Elaine May for allowing me to read the unpublished manuscript.

<sup>20</sup> Swerdlow, "Ladies": 497, quoting "Transcript of the President's News Conference on World and Domestic Affairs," *New York Times*, 16 January 1962: 18.



## 232 VIETNAM GENERATION

- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting *Science* 167 (13 March 1970): 1476.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting *Baltimore Sun*, 29 October 1961.
- <sup>23</sup> Swerdlow, "Pure Milk": 16.
- <sup>24</sup> Swerdlow, "Ladies": 505.
- <sup>25</sup> Swerdlow, "Pure Milk": 17.
- <sup>26</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage) 1974; and Ruth Rosen, "Reclaiming the 1970s: Feminist Intellectual History Revisited," paper presented to the Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Smith College, 3 June 1984.
- <sup>27</sup> Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectics of Sex* (New York: Morrow) 1970.
- <sup>28</sup> This shift in intellectual orientation is documented in Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston: GK Hall) 1983. For the development of a women's culture, see Gayle Kimball, *Women's Culture: The Women's Renaissance of the Seventies* (New Jersey: Scarecrow) 1981.
- <sup>29</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: WW Norton) 1976; Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon) 1976; Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row) 1978; Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon) 1978; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row); Evelyn Fox Keller, "Gender and Science," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 1:3 (1978): 409-43; Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality," in Hester Eisenstein & Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press) 1986: 274-818; Charlene Spretnak, ed., *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (New York: Anchor) 1982. For the best overview of debates on the issue of difference see *The Future of Difference*, mentioned above.
- <sup>30</sup> See, for example, Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Boston: Harvard) 1987.
- <sup>31</sup> This is especially evident in Lynn Jones, ed., *Keeping the Peace: A Women's Peace Handbook* (London: Women's Press) 1983, which contains articles on women's groups for peace in various parts of the world.
- <sup>32</sup> For critiques of mixed movements see, for example, Birgit Brock-Utne, *Educating for Peace: A Feminist Perspective* (New York: Pergamon) 1985; Alice Cook & Gwen Kird, eds., *Greenham Women Everywhere: Dreams, Ideas and Actions from the Women's Peace Movement* (London: South End) 1984: 44; Interview with Barbara Harber, member of Livermore Action Group, Berkeley, CA, by author March 1988 in Berkeley, CA.
- <sup>33</sup> William Droziak, "West German Protesters Blockade United States Bases," *Washington Post*, 2 September 1983; Hugh Mehan & John Wills, "Mend: A Nurturing Voice in the Nuclear Arms Debate," paper presented at IGGC conference on "The Discourse of the Nuclear Arms Debate," Ballyvaughn, Ireland, 9-16 August 1987; Lynne Jones, ed., *Keeping the Peace*: 4.
- <sup>34</sup> Brock-Utne, *Educating for Peace*: 50.
- <sup>35</sup> Agosin & Marysa Navarros, "The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: A New Form of Politics in Argentina," paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Wellesley College, June 1988; Marjorie Agosin, "Metaphors of Female Political Ideology: The Cases of Chile and Argentina," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10 (1987): 570-577.
- <sup>36</sup> Julie Wells, "An Infringement on Motherhood: South African Women's Resistance to Pall Laws," paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Wellesley, June 1988.

<sup>37</sup> Brock-Utne, *Educating for Peace*: 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: 48. For a more theoretical and historical analysis of motherist campaigns, see Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Barcelona Case, 1910-1918," *Signs* 3 (1981): 545-566.

<sup>39</sup> Some of the sources I found most useful for these actions and encampments are Brock-Utne, *Educating for Peace*, chapter 2; *Greenham Women Everywhere*; Caroline Blackwood, *On the Perimeter: A Vivid Personal Report from the Front Line of the Anti-Nuclear Movement* (New York: Penguin) 1984; Tacie Dejanikus & Stella Dawson, "Women's Pentagon Action," in Frederique Delacost & Felice Newman, eds., *Fight Back/Feminist Resistance to Male Violence* (Minneapolis: Cleis Press) 1982: 282-291; Ann Snitow, "Holding the Line at Greenham," *Mother Jones* 10 (February 1985): 30-47; Grace Paley, "The Seneca Stories: Tales from the Women's Peace Encampment," *Ms.* (December 1983): 54-62; Mima Cataldo, Ruth Putler, Byrna Fireside, Elaine Lytel, *The Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University) 1987. Two collections that have important descriptive and analytic essays on these events are Cambridge Women's Peace Collective, *My Country is the Whole World: An Anthology of Women Work on Peace and War* (London: Pandora Press) 1984; Lynne Jones, ed., *Keeping the Peace*, especially Ynestra Kind, "All is Connectedness: Scenes from the Women's Pentagon Action USA": 40-64.

<sup>40</sup> The Auouon Archive: An Archive of Community Political Posters, Berkely, CA. Poster undated from the Women's Pentagon Action. I want to thank Michael Rossman, the curator of this archive, for giving me access to the collection and spending months analyzing the posters with me.

<sup>41</sup> For pictures, slogans, and discussion of the encampments see books and article mentioned above.

<sup>42</sup> The Auouon Archive. Poster from the Women's Pentagon Action, undated.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, Susan Griffin, by author on 30 March 1988, in Berkeley, CA. Interview, Irene Diamond, by author on 16 March 1988, in Berkeley, CA. "The Artist and Natural Imagery: An Intimate Discussion of Eco-Feminism," by Susan Griffin and others, San Francisco, CA, 10 April 1988. It is in particular Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press) 1937, that is so often quoted in article and books on women and peace. Also see Ynestra King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," *Win*, February 1983, No. 19: 11-15; Michael Zimmerman, "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* (Spring 1987) 9:1; Karen Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connection," *Environmental Ethics* (Spring 1987); Jim Cheney, "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* (Summer 1987) 9:2.

<sup>44</sup> Leaflet of Women's Pentagon Action reprinted in Cambridge Women's Peace Collective, *My Country is the Whole World*: 242.

<sup>45</sup> *Greenham Women Everywhere*: 87.

<sup>46</sup> Cataldo, *Women's Encampment*: 29.

<sup>47</sup> Pam McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society) 1982.

<sup>48</sup> Participants of the Puget Sound Women's Peace Camp, *We Are Ordinary Women: A Chronicle of Puget Sound Women's Peace Camp* (Seattle: Seal Press) 1983: 33.

<sup>49</sup> Auouon Archive. Poster is from Women's Graphics Collective, Chicago, 1976.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Epstein, "Feminist and Direct Action Groups," presentation at conference on Gender, Science, and Technology at University of California at Davis, 10 April 1988.

## 234 VIETNAM GENERATION

<sup>51</sup> Aouon Archive. Poster from Amherst, MA, 8 March 1976.

<sup>52</sup> *Greenham Women Everywhere*: 126.

<sup>53</sup> Lesley Boulton, June 1982, *Greenham Women Everywhere*: 127.

<sup>54</sup> *We Are Ordinary People*: 17.

<sup>55</sup> *Greenham Women Everywhere*, quoting the British press; *We Are Ordinary Women*: 45, 96; Cataldo, *The Women's Encampment*: 71, 87.

<sup>56</sup> Brenda Whisker, Jackie Bishop, Lillian Mohin, & Trish Longdon, *Breaching the Peace* (London: Women Only Press) 1983.

<sup>57</sup> Swerdlow, "Pure Milk," and Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness" mentioned above are just two of the many historical works that are currently reassessing motherist campaigns in the past. A panel devoted to this subject appeared at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Wellesley College, 8 June 1988.

<sup>58</sup> See Swerdlow, "Pure Milk" for a statement of these arguments. For a more positive view of the Greenham project, see Ann Snitow, "Holding the Line at Greenham," *Mother Jones* (Feb/Mar 1985).

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University) 1987.

<sup>60</sup> Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life*: 101; Alice Schwartz, "Simone de Beauvoir Talks About Sartre," *Ms.* (August 1983): 37.

<sup>61</sup> Suzanne Gordon, "From Earth Mother to Expert," *Nuclear Times*, May 1983; Sheila Tobias, "Toward a Feminist Analysis of Defense Spending," *Frontier* 7:2 (1985); "Women Convene Peace Summit," *New Direction for Women* 17:2 (Mar/Apr 1988); Galia Galen, "Israel's Gender Gap," paper presented at International Congress in Women, Dublin Ireland, Summer 1987; Marjorie Lansing, "The Gender Gap in America on the Force Dimension," Department of Political Science, Eastern Michigan University.

<sup>62</sup> Brock-Utne, *Educating for Peace*: vi.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Addis and Nicolette Tiliaca, "Conflict, Fear and Security in the Nuclear Age: The Challenge of the Feminist Movement in Italy," *Radical America* 20: 7-15.

<sup>64</sup> Mary C. Segars, "The Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace: A Feminist Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 11 (Fall 1985): 632.

<sup>65</sup> Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age, 1987: 34.

<sup>66</sup> In addition to the Italian and Australian examples mentioned above, two other feminists reconsider the presumption of female moral superiority. Michaela di Leonardo, "Review Essay: Morals, Mothers, and Militarism: Antimilitarism and Feminist Theory," *Feminist Studies* 121 (Fall 1985): 598-617; and, Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic) 1987. One very important example of women creating a feminist discourse about peace, emphasizing women's needs, but not their moral superiority, is "Israel Women Alliance Against the Occupation," Dr. Lillian Moed, PO Box 4319, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Josephson, *Jeanette Rankin: First Lady in Congress*, Prologue, and Chapter 8, 1974.

# TAKING IN THE IMAGES: A RECORD IN GRAPHICS OF THE VIETNAM ERA SOIL FOR FEMINISM

**KATHIE SARACHILD, with documents from the REDSTOCKINGS WOMEN'S LIBERATION ARCHIVES**

The Women's Liberation Movement that revived at the height of the Vietnam War era militantly challenged rather than celebrated any traditional association between women and peace (or conversely, men and war).

"Women for Peace" groups in existence at the time were playing for effect on women's traditional role—as the "Bring the Boys Home for Dinner" cartoon (below) from the Women's Strike For Peace cookbook *Peace De Resistance* (not to mention the cookbook itself) so graphically and wittily demonstrates, albeit with good humor. (Some Women's Strike for Peace activists may have seen themselves as covert feminists, but



From *Peace de Resistance Cookbook #1*, published by Women's Strike For Peace, Los Angeles, mid-1960s. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives

Le Thi Tuyet, a deputy leader of a guerrilla detachment somewhere in central south Vietnam, once killed ten enemy soldiers and wounded two—with a total of just 12 bullets. (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi.) Courtesy of the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



how far away the idea of an overt feminist challenge was can be seen in the cookbook's introduction: "My place is in the home, but... it's on the peace line, too!"

In stark contrast, the media, both "Establishment" and "underground," were beginning to carry jolting photos of women guerrilla combatants among our Vietnamese "enemy"—captured and being guarded by American servicemen, or perhaps even *capturing* a serviceman, most likely an American bomber pilot shot down over North Vietnam. These were images that certainly played their part in "violating the reality structure,"—to use a movement phrase of the era—and challenging cultural norms about "gender," not to mention much other conventional wisdom (also challenging, for instance, the U.S. interventionists' claim to the war's justice and democratic purpose.) The images suggested an undeniable reality to the Vietnamese revolutionaries' proclaimed new liberation strategy of "people's war."



Chinese paper cut of woman and man fighting alongside each other in a "people's war" of national liberation. Published in the *Guardian Radical Newsweekly*, New York City (8/16/72). Courtesy of the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



North Vietnamese postage stamp, 1967. Militawoman and captured U.S. bomber pilot. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

North Vietnamese photograph of militia woman with a captured U.S. airman. It is said to be the most popular photo in a war exhibit in Hanoi. The photo was originally released by Hanoi in January, 1967. *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES: A Journal of Female Liberation* (No. 5), July 1971. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



The Vietnamese woman guerrilla with a gun almost became a stock symbol in the antiwar movement's widely circulating underground press. In many cases, the same (predominantly male) editors of the underground press who adored Third World women with guns 10,000 miles away, still preferred "Women for Peace" to "Women's Liberation" at home—as the following spoof of a lonely hearts column in the Women's Liberation Movement's first national newsletter shows:

Dear John,

I've always been a good provider. We have a lovely home in the suburbs and my wife has an unlimited charge account at Marshal Field's. I've always encouraged her to take night courses in art history and French cooking, so you can see I'm in favor of improving her mind.

She joined the League of Women Voters and I nodded my approval. She even started picketing with Women for Peace and I said yes. I agreed that it was good for women to question their government as long as dinner was on time and my shirts were ironed. However, now she's gone too far. She talked to this radical who convinced her that she ought to define herself, and some nonsense about liberating herself.

Now I believe in humoring women, but I'm sick of TV dinners and wrinkled collars. Can I convince her true happiness is found in a well-done cheese souffle?

Larry Liberal

Dear L.L.,

Your wife has obviously lost confidence in your manhood since she seeks fulfillment elsewhere. You must try to convince her that it is exciting to be part of your world—have you tried MAN TAN?

Dear John,

I used to be a movement bureaucrat and do city wide co-ordinating. My chick was always with me and a great help since I don't type, and she was much better on the phone asking for money and favors. Then I decided that

in order to be more effective I should broaden my experience. I decided to organize a working class neighborhood. Fortunately, my chick had no political disagreements with me so she came along. For a while we were doing great. My chick would go into a local bar and start up conversations with some of the guys. Then I would come in shortly after and join in, talking political stuff.

But lately, my chick has started hanging around grocery stores. If she does come into a bar, she just talks to the women and doesn't help me to get to know the guys. Now that's the important issue, the way she is messing up our organizing. But also she's talking about women's liberation stuff and refuses to cook all the time (although she's the better cook) and insists I learn to type.

How can I get her back to using her best talents in everyday tasks and being a good organizer?

Disorganized

Dear Disorganized,

Perhaps you could analyze women's liberation as counter-revolutionary and re-enlist her support. If you do come up with such an analysis, please send me a copy as I have many readers with similar problems.

John Magnus Fallus

There seemed no end to the visual evidence of "our" men, "our" country, as more the oppressor than the victim, as more the invader than the defender. So when radical women began exploring what seemed to be the deep connection between "gender and war," as Peggy Dobbin's leaflet "Liturgy for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood" shows, it also meant examining, not evading, the possibility of a female, "womanly" share of responsibility for war—and of "traditional womanhood's" share in the benefits of war's aggrandizement.

---

\* "Dear John: Women for Peace—Yes, Women's Liberation—No!" from *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* (June 1968). Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

## LITURGY FOR THE BURIAL OF TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD

Chorus:

Oh women of Chalcis and Argos  
Of Manhattan and Chicago  
For 3000 years of western wars  
In submission  
We have sinned  
Bemoaning death  
HYPOCRISY (response)  
Affirming life  
COMPLICITY (response)  
Where have we stood to turn the tide  
Of civilization  
OF PACIFICATION (response)  
Of civilizing ourselves  
OUR MEN (response)  
By war.

I.

Oh women  
YOUNG WOMEN (response)  
Civilized women, we have sinned.  
We have sinned to the trill of martial  
trumpets  
And patriotic hymns  
For the thrill of pride and power  
And to glory in lusty men  
We cheered and waved and goaded  
Our men to murder and maim  
For heroic virility in our eyes.

Chorus:

Oh women from forests to Savannah  
From tribes to urban centers  
For 10,000 years of human wars  
In submission we have sinned  
Bemoaning death....

II

Oh women  
WIVES AND MOTHERS (response)  
Civilized women, we have sinned  
Since the first expulsion from Eden  
Since the sexes were spit asunder  
And we lay with belly bulging  
Licking our sleek skin and learning  
That Adam would forage still further  
And to bring more back than he  
needed would kill  
As long as we kept the immortality  
Of our shared species to ourselves.  
Primary division of labor  
Destruction of our intellect and  
courage  
Fair exchange for denying gentleness  
to men.

Preening, posing, and prodding  
Adam to forage still further  
To bring us furs, kelvinators, and empires  
With the bribe that we might let him back  
Into our warmth and with him share  
The glories of our births.  
Women, widowed by sin  
Simpering and spineless now  
The blame is ours if they heed only  
The wit and power of general's glory  
And seek warmth in the comradeship of  
war.

Chorus:

Women of Cleveland and Baltimore  
Of Philadelphia and Newark  
How many more years of human wars  
In submission shall we sin  
Bemoaning death....

III

Oh women  
WOMEN TODAY (response)  
Civilized women, we sin.  
Wiser than virgins awed by important men  
Hearts stronger than ambitious wives  
Who use men and children to gain their  
ends.

Women unabashed of feelings

Loving peace  
And lively bodies  
More than efficiency  
And exigencies  
Of war.

We also

We have sinned  
Aquiescing to an order  
That indulges peaceful pleas  
And writes them off as female logic  
Saying peace is womanly.  
We sin with brimming hearts conceding  
Our arguments are filled with feeling  
And feeling must give way to legalese.  
We sinned today  
If we indulge our hearts  
And leave thought and action to men.  
We sin tomorrow  
If cool computators act out their parts  
Blameless, if we cannot find our minds  
and courage  
To force rediscovery of heart.

—Peggy Dobbins



# pilgrim's progress

OR: NEW LEFT NANCY AND LIBERATION LINDAS

A serialized morality play (in the style of the early thirties)

by Naomi Weisstein

Start Here



Nancy chaws herself to Jim, and they get arrested at the induction center

LET NO PIE FALL THESE CHAINS ASUNDER!

KICK STOMP

GO AWAY, DADDY, I HAVE IMPORTANT POLITICAL THINGS TO THINK ABOUT— ORGANIZING, DEMONSTRATING, PUTTING MY PERSONAL SOME ON THE LINE

TALK TO ME ABOUT THEM, I DO IMPORTANT POLITICAL THINGS, TOO

WHE, DUDE, BABY

YOU'RE BEING UNFAIR

YOU'RE CUTE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY



Later that day:

I WENT INDUCTED, I'M DEAF IN ONE EAR

OH, BABY

WHAT?

OH BABY!



NANCY SCRATCHES HER HEAD: CAN THIS BE RIGHT? DOES JIM HAVE MORE IMPORTANT POLITICAL THINGS TO DO THAN SHE DOES? SHOULD SHE TELL HIM TO GO F\*CK HIMSELF? IS SHE CUTE WHEN SHE'S ANGRY?

READ NEXT THRILLING INSTALLMENT

Weisstein

Cartoon by Naomi Weisstein, *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, (October 1968)  
Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

The association of one gender with peace was the other side of the association of the other gender with war. The Vietnamese "enemy" had already challenged both these associations with their rhetoric and the reality of a people's war. The other side of a people's war, of course, would be a people's peace.

One of the most illuminating contradictions radical women faced and began to understand in a new way in the crucible of the times was

that their automatic exclusion from the draft was maybe not so “lucky,” after all—that it reflected a second class position in society for which there was a stiff price to pay for a lifetime. Rather than being a source of power for women as young antiwar activists, it was a source as well as an emblem of their powerlessness compared to the men of their generation—as their “No” to the war lacked the strength the men’s had of being able to say “We won’t go”—and highlighted their more powerless and auxiliary position in the rest of society, as well. (For a version of this discovery, see the Naoimi Weisstein’s cartoon on the preceding page.)

There have been victories for women’s liberation and equality between the sexes as well as for peace since radical women in the United States came to their conclusion that part of the power to stop the war lay in having the power to participate in war, and that there couldn’t be a fully powerful “People’s Resistance” to the war until women had full power as people.

By the mid-70s, all U.S. troops were out of Vietnam, and the draft had been ended. U.S. imperialist interventionist policy in the Third World had been considerably curtailed by popular opposition at home and resistance abroad (although there is still a huge military budget that is terribly costly to the American people, and continuing covert intervention—reflecting the reality that many of the questions of the Vietnam war have never been fully settled in our country and many of the attitudes and interests behind the policy are still in place among those whose wealth gives them disproportionate power to start pressing their course again.). At the same time, a massive feminist movement for equal rights for women has developed in the country from the women’s liberation organizing and consciousness-raising started in the 1960s Vietnam generation, and it has won many reforms—including considerable freedom from the forced childbearing mandated by the old laws against abortion.

Vast social and cultural changes have taken place, too—partly as a result of the spread of feminist consciousness. Among them has been a tremendous growth in the number and percent of women in the armed forces. Today, more than twenty years later, a military correspondent of the *New York Times* writes that “The United States relies on women in the military more than any other nation, Israel and the Soviet Union included. Women constitute over 10 percent of the enlisted force today” (Richard Halloran, *New York Times*, book review section, Sep 3 1989).

Even though there are quotas on the numbers of women, and women are formally barred from combat duty (in what is currently, and hopefully forever, a peacetime army with a volunteer force), this is still a major break with tradition and history. Women have undoubtedly been going into the armed services, so newly opened to them to any significant degree, for a variety of reasons, including economic benefits like job opportunities and the various veterans’ benefits that have long drawn men into the military—especially into peacetime service. They

have undoubtedly been going in for feminist reasons also, as they are still challenging eons of “gender and defense” tradition, and every woman who is doing it is to some extent a pioneer asserting women's right to equality with men.



The Women's Strike for Equality, August 26, 1970, New York City. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

There is much to be said for the view that a lot of what led the United States into Vietnam still holds sway, and as long as that's true, peace may very well not be long lasting, and the kind of war our soldiers are likely to be sent to is not going to be the kind of war that any American—male or female—ought to be fighting (voluntarily or involuntarily).

Even if this is true, however, and there is considerable danger that it is, it's also true that the same factors, considerations and paradoxes that existed then and led to the revival of feminism are also still in place. For the sake of women's liberation and a more democratic, equal and overall fair society—for all people, in every area of life—and even more for democracy and equity in the military and for greater power to end war itself, gender equity in the military, as in the rest of society, needs to continue to advance.

As the radical women found in 1968, although some didn't take it so far then, military duty was and is a power, not just a burden. It's a two-edged sword—power to stop a war (although all the teach-ins and war protests helped in this, too) by refusal of military duty. And power in the hands of the people in grim, extreme situations to throw off an oppressor or occupier, to throw out an invader, as the Vietnamese were doing. The right to participation in the military can be used to oppose a war that lacks democratic wisdom and purpose; and it was. A short while before President Lyndon Johnson's announcement that he would

not run for another term, Walter Lippman, as quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale's book *SDS*, wrote:

The President is confronted with the resistance, open or passive, of the whole military generation, their teachers, their friends, their families. The attempt to fight a distant war by conscription is producing a demoralization which threatens the very security of the nation.

Of course, the problem wasn't only "distance;" Americans had fought at quite a distance when we had fought the Nazis, and the Japanese fascists. The problem was the war's injustice. The problem was that the war's democratic wisdom, principles, and even legality were, at the very least, in serious question—in a situation whose gravity demanded no question, or at least less question than we had.

When President Carter issued his call in 1980 for registration for a draft once again (although there was not a draft, and no war, needless to say, only a slightly more credible threat of one) he included women in the call for draft registration. The proposal was another first in U.S. military history.

For a brief while, for better or worse, it looked from the climate of things—the Equal Right Amendment (ERA) had recently been extended for three more years, after a massive march on Washington—that the step of a truly universal draft registration would actually be taken.



Peggy Averill, Liberation News Service cartoon, Delaware Alternative Press, Newark, DE (April, 1980). Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



Peggy Averill, Liberation News Service cartoon, Delaware Alternative Press, Newark, DE (April, 1980). Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

The apparently imminent prospect conjured up whole new and uniquely powerful, inflammatory images of what a new resistance to an unjust war might be like under the new conditions—as the cartoons by Peg Averill of Liberation News Service illustrate. (Liberation News Service is one of the still living “counter-institutions” from the Sixties.)

In one, a spirited young woman of draft age—and now draft potential—in pants and long, free-flowing natural hair, holds a sign that reads, “I’m not gonna be cannon fodder—how about you?” This shows how far the consciousness and condition of women and the rest of society had come since the days of “Bring the boys home for dinner.” It also suggests some of the bittersweet reasons for the transition—the hard struggles of the sixties, the lessons learned from them, and the spirit created. Though the thought that young people are worried enough about becoming cannon fodder to be motivated to get out the signs and start planning the resistance, the fact that there is a widespread political consciousness and movement ready to spring into action against a draft and a war is also evidence of the distance travelled since the early days of the sixties.

A new version of the “Bring the boys home” sign—this time carried by both parents—might be “Keep the boys and girls home,” or “Keep the kids home!” And for the potential draftee or soldier organizing in the resistance, what about “Cannon fodder of both genders unite!”

It was just speculation, however. The combination of both proposals created an emotional and political storm, and when the storm settled Congress had voted down the provision for women, but had passed the measure for draft registration itself—for young men only. The opponents of equality and proponents of increased war preparation and

spending won the day—the war measure was won and the equality measure was lost.

Along with the movement in the direction of war readiness, came the return of the “men’s army,” at least as far as the draft registration was concerned. Apparently, it was the sense or desire of Congress that the new idea of a people’s army with growing equality between the sexes was well and good for peacetime, and a peacetime army, and a volunteer army. But not for a wartime army. Or not right for a draft.



---

A sequel to this article will appear in a future issue of *Vietnam Generation*, and will also be available from the Redstockings Women’s Liberation Archives.

# WOMEN FOR PEACE OR WOMEN'S LIBERATION? SIGNPOSTS FROM THE FEMINIST ARCHIVES

## JENNY BROWN FOR REDSTOCKINGS

Understanding the essence of what makes a good political organizer is especially vital to feminists at a time when our most basic demands are under attack. If we are going to advance again, rather than continue to cut our losses, we need to know why we are slipping backwards now, losing victories such as abortion which were won by a movement which started more than 20 years ago.

As a young woman who first started asking questions about feminism just a few years ago, I can say that my first impression of feminism was a distorted, watered-down facsimile which explains a lot of why women are in the position we are in today. I can also say that the lessons I later learned from the history of the rebirth years of feminism (1964-73) are a body of essential experience which we must uncover if we are to move toward the goals of equality and liberation for all, making militantly sure women are included in the "all."

Although reform feminism perseveres, exemplified by NOW, there is no longer an active, widespread left feminist alternative informed by the basic lessons learned in the radical movements of the Sixties. We will not be able to rebuild a radical movement for women's liberation or the liberation of anyone else until we uncover the foundations of radical organizing in our own history and experience. This history encompasses a key body of social change activist experience (i.e. revolutionary "practice")—with successes and failures to analyze—on the political questions of "gender and war." Feminism, after all, revived in the United States and spread like wildfire under the new name "Women's Liberation" during the height of the Vietnam War and of a very militant upsurge in the African-American liberation struggle. Then, questions of both armed self-defense and struggle (for both men and women) and nonviolent resistance (for both men and women) were immediate practical issues of daily life.

If this history and experience strikes others as it has struck me, it can provide solid footing among the shifting sands of current feminist thought.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, is the short course on why I believe feminists need—as we shall see—virtually to repeat history and escape once again from what I will call "peace-woman" organizing.

---

*The inspiration for this paper came from working this past summer to help organize the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives with the Archives Project Director, Kathie Sarachild. All the pamphlets, papers, leaflets, cartoons, etc. that I cite in the paper or which are used as illustrations are in the Archives collection.*

## "FEMINISM"—18 YEARS AFTER BURYING TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD IN ARLINGTON CEMETERY

In 1986 when I was 20 I joined an organization calling itself the "Feminist Task Force," a group of women within a statewide peace and justice coalition I had become involved with through my work against U.S. intervention in Central America. I joined with a vague sense that feminism was good and that I wanted to learn more about it. I felt that NOW was not demanding enough fundamental changes—I wanted something more "radical"—and assumed that the Feminist Task Force would be a left feminist alternative.

"In recognition of the correlation between the oppression of women and the violence of militarism and the relationship between feminism and nonviolence, the [Feminist Task Force] was formed with the following goals in mind:" begins a letter laying out the objectives of the group, listed below:

1. To infuse a feminist perspective within the work of the Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice [the parent group].
2. To promote feminist process, i.e., the redistribution of power within the peace movement to create the future now through cooperative, non-hierarchical forms of decision making.
3. To address the many ways institutionalized violence and social violence occurs in women's daily lives including poverty, the military budget, rape and incest, and physical and emotional battering
4. To encourage women to explore the oppression that they have internalized and to encourage men to examine enculturated sexism that they have internalized
5. To explore the unique experience of Southern women as it relates to feminism and militarism
6. To move back to a feminist way of living in harmony with our planet. <sup>2</sup>

The underlying philosophy of the group was basically this: Women are more peaceful and nonviolent than men because women are more closely connected to the production and care of future generations and the planet. Women should therefore work nonviolently to end war and all other violence, which is the root of all injustice.

I was aware that there was a tradition of women opposing war as women, since I was familiar with such groups as Women Strike for Peace and Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. What I didn't know was the history of *opposition* to this method of organizing, nor did I know that the Women's Liberation Movement, which was responsible for reviving the term feminist in the first place and whose organizing actions had won so many important victories for women by 1973, came out of a radical line which specifically rejected an appeal to women's nonviolent, passive nature.



## 248 VIETNAM GENERATION

Radical women rose up against the peace-women formation in one of the first public organizing actions to revive feminism. Shulamith Firestone, a founder of Redstockings and soon to be the author of *The Dialectic of Sex: A Case For Feminist Revolution* (1970), reported on New York Radical Women's participation in the Jeanette Rankin Brigade's January 1968 march on Washington, D.C., in the Women's Liberation Movement's first theoretical journal, *Notes From the First Year* (June, 1968).<sup>3</sup>

...The Brigade was a coalition of women's groups united for a specific purpose: to confront Congress on its opening day, Jan. 15, 1968, with a strong show of female opposition to the Vietnam War.

However, from the beginning we [New York Radical Women] felt that this kind of action, though well-meant, was ultimately futile. It is naive to believe that women who are not politically seen, heard, or represented in this country could change the course of a war by simply appealing to the better natures of congressmen. Further, we disagreed with a woman's demonstration as a tactic for ending the war, for the Brigade's reason for organizing AS WOMEN. That is, the Brigade was playing upon the traditional female role in the classic manner. They came as wives, mothers, and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the action of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.<sup>4</sup>

New York Radical Women (which was soon to organize a protest of the Miss America Contest and give birth to Redstockings and other radical feminist groups) demonstrated their opposition the Brigade's march by "joyfully" inviting the participants to a "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" held that evening in Arlington National Cemetery. The black-bordered invitation read, in part:

Don't bring flowers...do be prepared to sacrifice your traditional female roles. You have refused to hanky-wave boys off to war with admonitions to save the American Mom and Apple Pie. You have resisted your roles of supportive girl friends and tearful widows.... And now you must resist approaching Congress and playing these same roles that are synonymous with powerlessness. We must not come as passive suppliants begging for favors, for power cooperates only with power. We must learn to fight the warmongers on their own terms, though they believe us capable only of rolling bandages.<sup>5</sup>

The "invitation" leaflet then went on to predict: "Until we have united into a force to be reckoned with, we will be patronized and ridiculed into total political ineffectiveness...." The action hit a responsive chord among women at the convention. Five-hundred joined a counter

congress to discuss the issues brought forward, overwhelming the original "burial" organizers, who, according to Firestone, were unprepared at the time to take the next step.

Moreover, the leaflet's prediction of ridicule was accurate, and the ridicule came from the Left. An article about the Jeanette Rankin Brigade entitled "Woman Power" in *Ramparts* "amounted to a movement fashion report"<sup>6</sup> according to one of the letters of protest that "poured in from women in radical groups around the country."<sup>7</sup> The condescending coverage simultaneously put women down and extolled the peace-woman approach, an unsettling combination which gave weight to New York Radical Women's critique. Lynn Piartney responded to the *Ramparts* coverage in a letter which was reprinted in *Notes From the First Year*:

Besides the reactionary political approach, the [*Ramparts*] authors make a historical blunder. HUAC, they say, was dealt its death blow in 1964 [*sic*] when Dagmar Wilson (leader of Women's Strike for Peace) presented flowers to its committee members. In fact, the Berkeley eruptions of 1964 [*sic*]<sup>8</sup> were far more significant.... The only reason the story was brought up was to demonstrate how "cute" women can be when dealing with the government. The authors applaud Wilson's use of the traditional concept of Womanhood as being passive, and gentle. By presenting flowers to the men, she made them realize that women in this country were incapable of posing any serious threat to the system; the case against Women's Strike being dismissed immediately thereafter.<sup>9</sup>

It may have been true in the early sixties that women were not in a position to launch a direct attack on HUAC or male supremacy, but by 1968 many of the experienced veterans of the Civil Rights and Anti-war Movements were women. One such veteran was Kathie Amatniek (later Sarachild) who laid out some of New York Radical Women's analysis of women's condition in a speech to the main body of the Brigade convention:

We have a problem as women all right, a problem which renders us powerless and ineffective over the issues of war and peace, as well as over our own lives.... We must see that we can only solve our problem together, that we cannot solve it individually as earlier feminist generations attempted to do. We women must organize so that for man there can be no "other woman" when we begin expressing ourselves and acting politically, when we insist to men that they share the housework and child-care, fully and equally, so that we can have independent lives as well.... We want our freedom as full human beings....<sup>10</sup>

## 250 VIETNAM GENERATION

### TOUGH DEMANDS REPLACE SOFT PLEAS

The impulse for an independent women's movement came as a negative reaction to the second-class, restricted, exploited, unequal conditions of women in and out of left groups. The positive analysis was informed primarily by the revolutionary dynamite of black consciousness, brought to bear on the woman question by women in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements. The militancy began to express itself in the form of various critiques of too moderate and defensive an approach in women's workshops and caucuses within SDS, the Black Liberation Movement, and the peace movement. In Astoria, Oregon, Gloria Martin wrote a powerful letter to the editor of *The Movement*, November 1967—one of the earliest examples of the rising militancy on the written record:

#### WOMEN, ORGANIZE YOUR OWN FIGHTING FORCES!

To the Editor:

It is of tremendous interest to me, a woman, that the Western Black Youth Conference will have a workshop on the role of women in the movement. In a sense this question is a soul-chilling one, because it should need no discussion in special sessions. This is very much like debating the rights of black people with a group of southern whites. The rights of women and black people should not, in fact cannot, be negotiated or bargained for; as we are finding out, they must be taken. The so-called role of women should be the same as the role of men in the movement, as in everyday life . . .

It is tragic indeed that we have this ever-present problem, the problem which has been like a rapier thrust into the living flesh of militant women in every walk of life. Radical women, women in the Civil Rights movement, the Freedom Workers in the south, all have felt the sting of oppression and discrimination. All have had to fight for independent political identity. They have been laughed at, jeered at, and used as bed partners, but one way or another they have met with defeat. Women are, at the very least, victims of grave humiliation and bitterness in this society . . .

The black liberation movement has been learning and growing day by day. The development of theory and practice is remarkable. The consciousness of the people is growing, very largely due to these struggles. Poor whites are finding that they have no power. Women must realize that they too must take their place alongside the men, as equal partners. This may very well mean a desperate struggle within the movement, as well as full scale all out war with the power structure. Every movement for women's rights has been diverted into other struggles which have appeared more urgent at the time. THIS MUST NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.<sup>11</sup>

In Chicago, Sue Munaker wrote "A Call for Women's Liberation," an article for *The Resistance*, January 1968, in which she traces how the rising feminist consciousness of women derived from the particular paradoxes and contradictions encountered by women working in the anti-Vietnam War movement, particularly in draft resistance. This took place under the historic conditions (still with us) when it was only men who had to face the personal conflicts and agonizing decisions around draft resistance to an immoral and unnecessary war.

As I understand the Resistance, its genesis grew from men attempting to live out—on a day-to-day basis—those assumptions about the kinds of lives they wanted to live. If they were working to build a society in which all people would be free, they had to begin by liberating themselves from the Selective Service System, that part of the military which serves to control, through threat and fear, the lives of American young men. While the draft has become an impenetrable block to the freedom of many young men, to women the draft symbolizes women's relationship to men both within the movement and within American society.

Men are drafted; women can counsel them not to go. Men return their draft cards; women sign complicity statements. That is, men take the stand, women support them . . .

A new consciousness is developing among women. Out of the frustration of trying to find our place in the anti-draft movement, we have come to realize that our total lives have been spent defining ourselves in relation to men . . .

The time has come for us to take the initiative and organize ourselves for our own liberation. If we are seriously talking about radical social change, we must begin by living . . . those assumptions upon which our future society should be based. We must come together, share our experiences and our expectations. We must make women a vital and a revitalizing force in the movement.<sup>12</sup>

In June of 1968 (the same month *Notes From the First Year* was published by New York Radical Women) a groundbreaking critique of women's strategy within Students for a Democratic Society was written by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown in Gainesville, Florida. Jones used the "Women's Manifesto" produced by the female caucus of SDS at the summer 1967 convention as a springboard to launch an attack on male supremacy and SDS women's inadequate response to it. Again the more advanced work of the Black Liberation Movement provided a reference point by which women could judge our own political situation.

For a middle-aged female accustomed to looking to militant youth for radical leadership it was a shock to read the Women's Manifesto which issued from the female caucus of the national SDS convention last summer. . . Here were a group of 'radical women' demanding respect and leadership in a radical

# DISARM RAPISTS



# SMASH SEXISM

Reprint from *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES: A Journal of Female Liberation* (Boston), No. 5 (July 1971). Graphic by Betsy Warrior. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



"Someone has updated a great Irish slogan," wrote Jane Barry in *Meeting Ground* (No. 3, September 1977) about some graffiti a friend had seen scrawled on a wall in Derry. "The beauty of 'Women Unfree Will Never Be At Peace' is that it's a feminist slogan and a nationalist one, scoring against the Peace women on both counts." The original slogan comes from a speech made in 1915 by Patrick Pearse at the grave of Fenian leader, O'Donovan Rossa, which ended, "The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!—they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace." The slogan "Fight On, Sisters" comes from a songbook of the same name by Carol Hanisch. (Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.)

organization and coming on with soft-minded NAACP logic and an Urban League list of grievances and demands. One need only substitute the words 'white' and 'black' for 'male' and 'female' respectively, replace references to SDS with the city council, and remember all the fruitless approaches black groups made and are still making to local white power groups to realize how ludicrous this manifesto is.

To paraphrase accordingly:

1. Therefore we demand that our brothers on the city council recognize that they must deal with their own problems of white chauvinism in their personal, social, and political relationships.
2. It is obvious from this meeting of the city council that full advantage is not being taken of the abilities and potential contributions of blacks. We call upon the black people to demand full participation in all aspects of local government from licking stamps to assuming full leadership positions.
3. People in leadership positions must be aware of the dynamics of creating leadership and are responsible for cultivating all of the black resources available to the local government .

And so on. The caucus goes on to charge New Left Notes with printing material on the subject, developing bibliographies, and asks the National Council to *set up a committee to study* the subject and report at a future date!<sup>13</sup>

In hindsight I see a certain similarity between the Women's Manifesto and the Feminist Task Force "encourag[ing] women to explore the oppression that they have internalized" and encouraging men to "examine enculturated sexism that they have internalized" produced by "feminists" 20 years later. Being soft and soft-minded would seem to be "in" again—under clever cover of the formerly harder and more tough-minded term "feminism."

## RESURRECTING TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD

But is the Feminist Task Force a fair example of what is called feminist on the left nowadays, or is it unusual? Going through my files I found many more examples of the peace-woman position than I had remembered. The Green Movement, for example, promulgates a debilitated view of feminism in its literature, as in this article by Dee Berry, Clearinghouse Coordinator for the Greens Committees of Correspondence.

With the advent of what we call civilization about 7,000 years ago, a profound transformation occurred on the planet. Most scholars now believe that the hunter-gatherer cultures that predate civilization were female-centered and matrilinear. However, between 5,000 and 3,000 B.C. a male-dominated, control-oriented thrust began. Male-oriented thought patterns have dominated human societies ever since.<sup>14</sup>

## 254 VIETNAM GENERATION

Whether the history is reliable or not, Berry's take on it leaves women with no possibility of an accessible record of past experience to draw from, no successes and mistakes to analyze. Everything is going to have to be a complete break with the intervening 7,000 years of historic civilization that followed the female-centered prehistoric age. Virtually everything is going to have to be completely "new." Berry continues:

To liberate ourselves from a system that has pervaded everything we have thought and done for the last 5,000 years will not be an easy task. Power over others will not be given up without a struggle. Old habits are hard to break and require more than intellectual exercises. There is no one way nor are there easy answers. We will have to try many approaches. We will need to experiment together—to chant and sing and dance, to write new stories and rituals, to build support systems and communities as we struggle to free ourselves from patriarchal bondage.<sup>15</sup>

Berry's prescriptions leave the queasy feeling that we are forging ahead towards a destination that may not exist, using a boat that may not float, leaving behind the charts drawn up by people who have gone before.

Also, according to these prescriptions, feminism is somehow supposed to be the whole solution, nullifying not only feminism (since it is everything and therefore nothing), but eliminating a radical economic class and race analysis as well. In reading feminist writings from 1967-69 I was surprised to discover that the Women's Liberation Movement did not come as a complete rejection of radical thought, but rather as a deepening and augmenting of it. In the Feminist Task Force scheme of things all thoughts by men are tainted, Marx was a man . . . you can imagine the rest.

American Peace Test, an otherwise fairly reasonable group which is working to enact a comprehensive test ban treaty has this paragraph in one of their civil disobedience handbooks:

Because patriarchy supports and thrives on war, a feminist analysis is crucial to effectively change militarism. The view of women as the other parallels the view of our enemies as non-human, available targets for any means of destruction or cruelty. In fact, U.S. foreign policy often seems like the playing out of rigid sex roles by men trying to achieve and maintain power through male toughness. How can cooperative, humane public policy be developed by people who have been socialized to repress emotions, not to cry, to ignore their own needs to nurture children and others?<sup>16</sup>

Of course, if wars are not fought just because men are socialized wrong, and are instead fought for actual material interests, then this "feminist" analysis is not going to take us very far on road we want to

travel either. But a look at the twists and turns of history shows that it isn't a feminist analysis. Due to the popularity and power of the feminist insurgency, what might rather be called a *feminine* analysis is confusing itself and confusing others by calling itself "feminist."

Trying to squeeze the attack on all the burning issues of the world under the rubric of feminism ends up weakening the attack on all of them—and misrepresenting feminism, undermining its specific thrust.

A 1987 leaflet from The Fund For the Feminist Majority claims as feminist issues opposition to Contra aid, cutting the military budget, and not cutting spending on social programs.<sup>17</sup> The Fund uses the peace woman tradition in an attempt to inspire coalitions in electoral politics.

Feminists have a long tradition of fighting for equality, social and economic justice, and peace. The 19th Century feminists, led by Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony fought for women's suffrage and equality, for social reforms such as the elimination of child labor, the promotion of temperance, public education, health care, human services and the abolition of slavery and the end of racism . . . in the tradition of this proud feminist history, organizations and groups continue to press the feminist agenda of equality, non-violence, and peace today.<sup>18</sup>

The real basis for a coalition could be a common enemy or a common goal, but I daresay Harriet Tubman fought for the emancipation of black people not because she was female and therefore had a more caring heart, but because she was black. Furthermore the record fails to turn up a tradition of "non-violence" in Harriet Tubman's liberation tactics. Tubman was a pioneer of non-traditional womanhood. She *fought*. She carried a gun when she led slaves to escape to freedom. A Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) African American history "Freedom Primer" written in 1965 gives this description of Harriet Tubman: "Sometimes she had to be hard with the people she was leading, not everyone was as strong and brave as Harriet Tubman. . . She always carried a gun with her. One time a man was very tired, he said he couldn't go any further. Harriet pointed the gun at him and said, "Dead folks tell no tales, you go on or die." So the man went on to freedom . . . With the Civil War Harriet did not feel that her job was done and that the war was for men only. She served . . . as a spy for the Union Army."<sup>19</sup>

### NONVIOLENCE: A MANDATE FROM THE MASSES?

Nor is there any evidence the feminist insurgency of 1960s was dedicated to nonviolence. Karate demonstrations for women's self-defense pepper the Women's Liberation conference agendas of the late 60s and early 70s. A report of what was going on in the movement, given in a speech by Kathie Sarachild, reflects a very different mass feminist sentiment on the question of whether women are nonviolent and passive



## 256 VIETNAM GENERATION



19th century woodcut. Harriet Tubman, holding her gun—outside the tents of the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. Courtesy of Restockings Women's Liberation Archives.

## THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S ALLIANCE



Cover of an informational handout (tabloid size) of the Third World Women's Alliance National Office in New York City, 1971. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

by nature. In a speech at the Women's Strike March, August 26, 1971 entitled "Going for What We Really Want," Sarachild said:

I was visiting a consciousness-raising group on Long Island of mostly so-called middle class, suburban, married women, and they were mad at the Women's Political Caucus for not being radical enough when the caucus kept saying we're not going to be like men, we're going to be nonviolent. I heard about a speech Martha Shelley gave once which she opened by asking, "Who says women are nonviolent?," and then she pulled out a rolling pin and held it over her head....<sup>20</sup>

Rather, what both the rise of feminism and the reality of women's armed participation in the National Liberation Movement of Vietnam (and elsewhere) showed was that contrary to myth women longed for freedom as much as men did, and would *fight* for it (i.e. violently) if need be. Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh's famous revolutionary slogan—"nothing is more precious than freedom and independence"—was true for women as for men. The slogan "Women unfree will never be at peace," which Irish-American women's liberationist Jane Barry reported a friend finding scrawled on a wall in the midst of the Northern Ireland uprising, far better captures the spirit of the feminist insurgency than "women for peace."\*

## WAR, REVOLUTION, AND FEMINIST GAINS

How has it been possible to maintain this image of women as nonviolent and passive in the midst of television and newspaper photographs of women bearing arms in revolutionary and rebel movements all over the world? One myth which has been used to lend weight to the peace-woman position is that women have won feminist advances nonviolently in the past. Some who make this argument also like to invoke the successful nonviolent resistance tactics of the Civil Rights Movement as the inspiration of the feminist revival. Yet it can be argued that the Civil Rights Movement would not have been possible without Mau Mau and the many other armed freedom struggles in Africa. No African colonial state gained independence without an armed struggle.

The oft-made point that women in England and the United States may have won the vote as a reward for halting their militant suffrage agitation and backing their government's involvement in World War I suggests that this victory, too, rested to a certain extent on violent struggle, albeit indirectly, by proxy. Similarly, a look at chronology as well as public opinion artifacts of the time suggests that victories for women's suffrage agitation in the United States and England may have come also partly as a result of the threat which the Bolshevik revolution represented to capitalist Europe and the U.S. A 1919 poster issued by the Massachusetts Public Interests League of Anti-Suffragists, entitled

---

\*See Kathie Sarachild graphic essay this issue.

## 258 VIETNAM GENERATION

“DO YOU REALIZE That In Every Country Woman Suffrage and Socialism Go Hand-in-Hand?” called attention to the Soviet position on women: “In REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA 26,000,000 women can vote. Russian Socialism is the most fearful menace to the civilization of the world today.”

Additionally, the campaign which suffragists in England launched between 1907 and 1914, and then halted during World War I, included the cutting of telegraph wires to London, the slashing of art exhibits, arson, the destruction of mail, and the smashing of windows which saw 200 arrested for conspiracy, after which Emmeline Pankhurst declared “We have made more progress by breaking glass than we did when we allowed them to break our bodies.”<sup>22</sup>

That some movements have the ability to advance without violent struggle is a luxury built on the struggles of those who maintained and continue to maintain that threat. But while the myth of peaceful women persists, women such as Margaret Thatcher, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Corazon Aquino, and Benazir Bhutto are being used to provide a moderate, “non-macho” veneer to violent, repressive policies.

If one looks at history, it seems that as many, if not more feminist advances have been made in times of war or its aftermath as in times of peace. In fact, women have often advanced into new areas of economic and political independence during wars (both of the national liberation and imperialist kind) only to lose ground again in times of peace.

As a general rule, it seems dangerous—inviting further repression, exploitation and oppression—for those who are oppressed to bind themselves to an absolute principle and policy of peace and nonviolence. Fidel Castro noted in a recent speech, “there are two kinds of survival and two kinds of peace . . . the survival of the rich and the survival of the poor; the peace of the rich and the peace of the poor . . . That is why the news that there may be peace, that there may be detente between the United States and the Soviet Union, does not necessarily mean that there is going to be peace for us.”<sup>23</sup>

It may be true for women, too, that peace will not lead to justice.

### **THE TIP OF THE ARCHIVES**

We have to alert our sisters to the vital radical storehouse in the feminist tradition and get our movement going in a direction which will actually win some of the things we need before the reforms which were won in the rebirth years are completely rolled back. Fortunately I don't think it requires too much chanting or ritual-writing to go from peace-woman to radical feminist. (This is not to suggest that peace women as a group are necessarily as good a pool of potential feminists as, say, secretaries.) I do think it will take some consciousness-raising and some uncovering of the written record. The first thing that was shoved under my nose (by a pushy member of Gainesville Women's Liberation) was the Florida paper, followed by Redstockings' *Feminist Revolution*.

After some exhuming of history, we will find there are many lessons that can inform our strategy in the fight for the liberation of women as well as the general movement for equality and freedom. Here I've just mentioned a few of the insights contained in the rich written record of our own movement's experience. The feminist archives include documentary evidence of the most priceless and irreplaceable of lessons, hard-won victories and edifying defeats, which can be used again to advance us further towards our goals.

I've experienced changes in my own organizing from the revelations contained in the lessons I've given a taste of here. The knowledge of this history has made me wary of throwing myself into *noblesse oblige*-type organizing out of some imposed mandate to mother humankind and instead has caused me to work to achieve "selfish" freedom and justice goals such as abolishing abortion law restrictions, demanding equal pay, and achieving complete social sharing of the costs of child-rearing. It also made me examine what my stake is in organizing around certain issues and not others, and made it possible for me to explain to other women, as never before, why they should join the fight.

This is not to say that women should not fight on many fronts, even ones that are not specifically feminist. But if we fight on issues that affect us because we are humans, or workers, rather than because we're specifically women, we have to watch out that we're not using the peace-women appeal. For example, in fighting against carcinogens in food, we could use the appeal to women's traditional role as cook (the Housewives for Healthy Hotdogs approach.) But we don't want to continue to be isolated in the kitchen so we shouldn't make demands on that basis. Mothers Against Drunk Driving? What about fathers? Don't they mourn their children killed and maimed in alcohol-caused car accidents? If they don't mourn equally, we need to fight to make parenthood equal, not let them off the hook by organizing in segregated groups.

The record shows that the Black Power militants in SNCC were right when they told the white civil rights workers to "go fight your own oppressors." And what Beverly Jones said in the Florida paper was true: "People don't get radicalized (i.e. engaged with basic truths) fighting other people's battles."<sup>24</sup> We have been better organizers and more effective fighters when we fight on our own behalf and in our own interests, and when we consult our own experience of oppression and exploitation, than if we try to fight battles in which we don't see that we have an interest. If we fight battles in which we have not established a real stake in winning, we are just playing at social change until we become "engaged with the basic truths" of our own lives.

Finally I should mention that it makes me angry that we still have to repeat these fundamental lessons in the third decade after the rebirth of feminism. I'm angry that the hard work that women did before us can be so thoroughly buried that we have to fight the same battles over and over again, walk up the same blind alleys and even some new ones for the lack of a knowledge of history that is rightfully ours. Not only the

## 260 VIETNAM GENERATION

history and experience itself but the *idea* that we should use our history and experience has been buried. As an antidote, I hope that we can uncover enough of these lessons to construct a vibrant new offensive on the side of freedom and equality.

- <sup>1</sup> Many of the documents cited can be obtained as photocopies of the original, by mail order from the "Archives for Action" catalog Redstockings has just produced. This catalog, available for a stamped, self-addressed envelope plus 50¢ (in coins or stamps) covers the selected materials Redstockings currently has the resources to make publicly available. It is the beginning of a larger project to compile a chronological bibliography of all the public materials of the "the rebirth years." As resources grow, Redstockings will be able to make more and more of the collection available. Write: Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives, 255 Ft. Washington Ave., #33, New York, NY 10032.
- <sup>2</sup> March 31, 1988 letter from the Feminist Task Force to the author.
- <sup>3</sup> Jeanette Rankin was the first woman elected to Congress, from Montana, in 1919. She was a pacifist and the only Congressperson to vote against World War I — also voting against World War II 24 years later. (C. Andrew Sinclair, *The Emancipation of the American Woman* (New York: Harper & Row) 1965: 330).
- <sup>4</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" *Notes From The First Year*, (June 1968).
- <sup>5</sup> Invitation to "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" distributed by New York Radical Women, Jan 15, 1968. Designed by Shulamith Firestone.
- <sup>6</sup> Lynn Piartney, "A letter to the editor of Ramparts Magazine," *Notes from the First Year*: 22.
- <sup>7</sup> Firestone: 19.
- <sup>8</sup> The sit-in disruptions of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings in San Francisco were in May 1960. Dagmar Wilson's presentation of flowers to the HUAC investigators who subpoenaed her was in 1962.
- <sup>9</sup> Piartney: 23.
- <sup>10</sup> Kathie Amatniek (Sarachild), "Funeral Oration For The Burial of Traditional Womanhood" *Notes From The First Year*.
- <sup>11</sup> Gloria Martin (Astoria, Oregon) "Angry Black Woman Speaks Out," *The Movement*, San Francisco, (November, 1967).
- <sup>12</sup> Sue Munaker, "A Call for Women's Liberation," written for *The Resistance*, Chicago, (January, 1968).
- <sup>13</sup> Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, *Toward a Female Liberation Movement*, (widely called the 'Florida Paper'), Gainesville, FL, June 1968: 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Dee Berry, "Beyond Patriarchy," *Palmetto Post*, St. Petersburg, Florida (March 1989): 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Berry, *Ibid*.
- <sup>16</sup> American Peace Test, "Feminism (expanded from an article by Starhawk)," *Reclaim the Test Site Action Handbook*, Salem, OR, (March 1988).
- <sup>17</sup> Fund For the Feminist Majority, "Feminists Are the Majority," 1987 leaflet, Washington, DC.
- <sup>18</sup> Fund For the Feminist Majority, "The National Feminist Agenda," 1987 leaflet, Washington, DC.
- <sup>19</sup> Bobbi & Frank Cieciora, *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer*, published by *The Student Voice* (Atlanta: SNCC) 1965.
- <sup>20</sup> Kathie Sarachild, "Going For What We Really Want," speech at Women's Strike March, August 26, 1971, in *Feminist Revolution*, 1975 (New York: Random House) 1978, .
- <sup>21</sup> Jane Barry, in a letter printed in *Meeting Ground*, Carol Hanisch, ed. New Paltz, NY, (September 1977).
- <sup>22</sup> Both the 1919 poster and the Pankhurst quote are from Faye Levine, "The Truth About the British Suffragettes," *Feminist Revolution*, 1975, 1978.
- <sup>23</sup> Castro in a speech before Gorbachev's December 1988 visit to Cuba, reported in *The New York Times*, (11 Jan 1989).
- <sup>24</sup> Jones & Brown: 2.

# NUCLEAR DISCOURSE AND ITS DISCONTENTS, OR, APOCALYPSE NOW OR NEVER

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

Human beings think most often in images; a terrible or delightful picture comes into our minds and then we seek to find words to express it, to capture it, to make it somehow manageable. Thus it is with the possibility of nuclear war. Our images are fixed. The scenes of utter destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki; two cities laid waste; people disappeared, remaining as shadows on cement or persisting in a terrible and painful twilight zone of lingering death from radiation. Or, even years later, moving through the world carrying within them a perceived taint, a threat to themselves and others: "I am one who has been touched in the most frightening way by the most horrible sort of weapon."

I taught a class at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst for five years called "Issues of War and Peace in a Nuclear Age." Inevitably, we would arrive at the section of the course that required a discussion of the dropping of the atomic bombs in World War 2. By that point the students realized that hundreds of thousands of people already had been incinerated in the fire-bombings of Dresden, Hamburg, and Tokyo. So they knew that body counts could mount up to almost unimaginable figures with so-called conventional weapons. But the notion of nuclear war and nuclear weaponry and its use is somehow different. The damage persists, carried literally in the bodies of survivors, encoded, if you will, in human tissue itself. Using Michael Walzer's book *Just and Unjust Wars*,<sup>1</sup> we discussed the distinction he makes between the *justice* of strategic bombing of German cities in World War 2 and the *injustice* of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I am not interested in pursuing how or why he makes that distinction so much as I am interested in alerting the reader to the discussion that took shape as this question was taken up by students.

One particular semester, there was a group of students who saw in the use of nuclear weaponry an extension of conventional war-making. They recognized, of course, the long-term threat to individuals and the environment that nuclear devastation carries, but they argued that it was but another weapon, a horribly destructive weapon, to be used, as it was in this instance, to end a horribly destructive war. They spoke in what Freeman Dyson would call the *rhetoric* of the warriors or would-be warriors. This is a world that gives rise to its own discursive style. The world of the warriors, Dyson notes in his book *Weapons and Hope*, promotes a style that is "deliberately cool, attempting to exclude overt emotion and rhetoric...emphasizing technical accuracy and objectivity."<sup>2</sup> This world of the warrior domain is male dominated and, interestingly, all of the students who spoke out in favor of the use of

## 262 VIETNAM GENERATION

atomic weapons in World War 2 were young men. A number of them had fathers who fought in the Pacific theater in World War 2. It is likely that there were young women who shared this perspective but who felt inhibited in speaking out or endorsing nuclear weaponry.

A second voice emerged in the course of the discussion, the one that Dyson calls the voice of the victims or would-be victims. This rhetoric of the victims is “women and children dominated.” Even as the warriors’ world describes the outcome of war “in the language of exchange ratios and cost effectiveness, the victims’ world describes it in the language of tragedy,”<sup>3</sup> frequently laced with eschatological fears. More and more victims, or those who see themselves as potential victims, peer over the edge of the abyss and come back convinced that an apocalypse looms soon. The students who expressed this anticipation or fear were those who were harsh in their condemnation of the United States for having introduced the nuclear threat into the world of war and states.

One young woman, a Japanese exchange student, having listened patiently for several days to the young Americans, to the discourse of the warriors and the victims, raised her hand slowly but deliberately. The class quieted down. She spoke hesitantly, she had difficulty with the language, and then she said, “What happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not war, it was something else.” Class ended at that moment, although we had fifteen minutes left in the period, because all of us were too stunned to speak. What was that ‘something else’ she referred to? My hunch is that we all have a sense that a nuclear weapon is not war but is something else. Even the warriors realized that some extra step was taken with the use of this weaponry.

Here we are, forty years plus after the dropping of the atomic bombs; they have not been used since save in testing situations, and we are still struggling with ways to deal with our apprehensions, to deal with the proliferation of nuclear technology, to deal with the recognition that at least one of our would-be enemies has a nuclear potential equal to our own. We live in a postwar world that has been defined by the term deterrence and the advocates of deterrence would say that it has obviously worked: the proof is in the pudding, there has been no nuclear war. I’m not interested in debating deterrence in this essay. But I am interested in taking a good look at the different discourses that have emerged around nuclear realities, or, perhaps better put, the discourses we have available to us to deal with the reality of nuclear weapons. I’m interested in rhetorical practices. How do we come to grips with the dangers and possibilities of the present historic moment as these revolve around war and rumors of war of a potentially nuclear sort?

I suggested in my recent book, *Women and War*, that there are currently three primary clashing discourses: the *strategic*, the *psychological*, and the *apocalyptic*.<sup>4</sup> These are dominant voices that vie for our attention where nuclear war, nuclear weapons, and nuclear dangers are concerned.

The strategic voice is preeminently that of Dyson's warrior: cool, objective, scientific, and overwhelmingly male. But more women aim to get in on this strategic enterprise, to certify female voices as authoritative spokespersons for and of this world of knowledge and power. The cool, in command strategic voice talks in the language of cost benefit, control, and crisis management. Since 1982 women's leadership conferences on national security have been held with the aim of devising ways for women to become equal partners in the discussion and formulation of national security policy. Women too would speak in the voice of the knowing insider. There is a problem here—for this strategic discourse is often strangely disassociated.

To understand the contemporary discourse of the warriors, of those who have what it takes to deal with notions of megadeaths and nuclear exchange, we must go back to the discourse of realism in international relations and in the study of international relations. Those who locate themselves within contemporary realist discourse trace their roots to Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars* and the so-called Melian dialogue in which the Athenians proclaimed to the hapless citizens of Melos that might is the right that reigns, to Machiavelli and his *Prince*, to Hobbes and his nasty, brutish, short state of nature, and to other sources leading into the present and culminating in the emergence of the discursive hegemony of realism, *realpolitik*. Realism, in turn, became professionalized. It got located in the academy, and the way in which students of international relations have been taught the discourse is often by pitting realism against something that the realist calls *idealism*; that is, alternatives to realism are evaluated *from the standpoint of realism*. Hence the bin labeled idealism which for the realist is more or less synonymous with dangerous, if well-intentioned, innocence concerning the world's ways.

Realism is based on two primary and quite simple principles: we live in a dangerous world that no one can fully control; and, we must assume that others, if they have the power, will be prepared to use it against those who have less power if their interests are at stake. The realist also emphasizes that the causes of war are inherent, that they are a constitutive feature of an international system in which the nation state remains the arbiter of its own interest and the judge of the means by which its security is best assured.

Historic realism, molded into a discursive tradition, involves a way of thinking, a set of assumptions about the human condition, and a potent rhetoric. The great strength of thinkers located in the canon as realist forefathers is their historical perspicuity, their willingness to deal with the problem of "dirty hands;" their boldness in offering an orientation to the question of collective violence; and their insistence that the limits, as well as the uses, of force be treated explicitly, preferably in a mood shorn of crusading enthusiasms, universalist aspirations, and triumphalist trumpeting. But something happened when realism got pinioned within the academy; it became palpably less realistic, less



## 264 VIETNAM GENERATION

attuned to the political and historic landscape than in its classical formulations. Encumbered with technical jargon, specialists in this discourse all too often began to speak to or at one another or to their counterparts in government. Unabashedly male dominated, oriented to state sovereignty, presuming unitary notions of power and national interest, practitioners of the discourse of realism got caught up in a wider quest for a scientific language that came out in such forms as game theory and other abstract models that would, so the story went, work if one could just get the parameters right.

Characteristic of the modern, professionalized discourse of international relations in its most recent incarnations then, is a proclamation of scientific knowledge—that cool, objective warrior language that Dyson talks about, a presumption that politics can be reduced to questions of security, conflict management and damage control; a patina of ahistorical and anodyne terminology (window of vulnerability, collateral damage, crisis management, escalation dominance), and a pronounced insouciance concerning the will to power embedded in the concepts and metaphors that comprise the discourse in the first place.

Although particular forms of this quest for scientific certainty come and go, the dangers inherent in professionalized warrior rhetoric remain. I have no better word for what I have in mind here than disassociation. For although the specialist as a constructor of abstract scenarios, cloaked in the mantle of scientific study, presents himself as one who describes the world as it is, he is in fact presuming that we have control over events when in fact we often do not. This prompted Hannah Arendt to argue in 1969 that scientifically-minded brain trusters bustling about in think tanks, universities, and government bureaucracies should be criticized harshly not because they were thinking the unthinkable, as some of them liked to boast, but rather because they did not think at all.<sup>5</sup> The cool language of strategy, having become disassociated, more and more removed from its subject matter and from events that it conjures with, prompts a modern *classical* realist, Michael Howard to state:

When I read the flood of scenarios in strategic journals about first strike capabilities, counter force or countervailing strategies, flexible response, escalation dominance, and the rest of the postulate of nuclear theology, I ask myself in bewilderment, this war they are describing, what is it about: The defense of Western Europe, access to the Gulf, the protection of Japan? If so, why is this goal not mentioned and why is the strategy not related to the progress of the conflict in these regions? But if it is not related to this kind of specific object, what are they talking about? Has not the bulk of American thinking become exactly what Clausewitz described, something that, because it is divorced from any political context, is pointless and devoid of sense?<sup>6</sup>

That women have been pretty much excluded from this enterprise is not its most obvious flaw and it is one that can be remedied. Women can engage in the activity even if representations of women and the sphere with which they have been historically linked remains an absence that helps to make possible the much cherished parsimony of the preferred model or simulation or analysis in the first place. So professionalized strategic discourse, located either in the academies or government bureaucracies, including the Pentagon, whether as abstract strategic doctrine advertising itself as realism brought up to date, or as alternatives that would somehow take us beyond realism into ever more scientific realms of discussion, seems to me one of the most dubious of the many dubious sciences presenting truth claims that mask the power plays embedded in the discourse and the practices it legitimates.

But I can't simply leave it at that. The warrior's voice cannot be wholly discredited. We have too many examples historically of instances in which failure to prepare for the onslaught of devastation from a determined foe in fact lead to greater loss of life and to a more prolonged struggle than would have been the case had those under attack thought in more strategic terms, thought in the language and through the presumptions of the warriors in order to prepare themselves. Is there any way to reclaim the assumptions of the realist and the warrior, to strip them of their claims to dominance, and to see within these inherited discourses something we can draw upon to help situate us in a world of nuclear threat? These are questions that a few of those speaking on and through strategic discourse have themselves attempted to confront in recent years (Kennan and McNamara, for example). By softening the presumptions of the strategic voice and by insisting that in fact ethical and moral dimensions *must* be brought to bear in strategic thinking, the purveyors of strategic discourse and its attendant rhetoric give a tacit, if not explicit, bow in the direction of the discourse of the *victims*.

For example: Joseph Nye, author of *Nuclear Ethics*, insists that moral reasoning about nuclear weapons is inescapable in democracies. He acknowledges that many practitioners of strategic discourse have ignored ethics even as many moral absolutists opposed to nuclear weapons refuse to tolerate nuclear weapons at all and that, too, he finds unrealistic in a world in which nuclear weapons are here to stay. He acknowledges that "strategists tend to live in an esoteric world of abstract calculations and a belief in a mystical religion called deterrence which is invoked to justify whatever is convenient. Strategists would do well to realize that there are no experts, only specialists on the subject of nuclear war and to listen more carefully to the moralists' criticisms."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, however, even those who would inject ethics into strategic discourse wind up endorsing and calling for the maintenance or managing of a situation which those who embrace either a *psychological* or an *apocalyptic* voice find unacceptable, even reprehensible; that is, they continue to insist that the United States must maintain a credible nuclear deterrent, that, in the words of Allison, Carnsdale, and Nye, authors of *Hawks, Doves, and Owls*:

## 266 VIETNAM GENERATION

to avoid war it is necessary, though not sufficient, to maintain the capability of our military forces and the credibility of our military intentions and resolve. Our nuclear arsenal continues to play an important role in deterring aggression against the territory of the United States, our allies, and other areas of vital interest to us....There seems little doubt that deterrence of deliberate nuclear or conventional attack on the American homeland is effective, robust, and stable....Our suggestions for actions to be taken and actions to be avoided are designed to ensure that Soviet leaders see no advantage in the balance of nuclear forces and to maximize the credibility of our nuclear deterrent.<sup>8</sup>

How is it then that this more modest deployment of strategic discourse and rhetoric is found *wholly* objectionable by the other two primary voices in the contemporary debate, the psychological and the apocalyptic? I will turn first to the voice of psychological discourse on nuclear weaponry or, as the practitioners of this discourse call it, nuclearism.

This alternative language is more readily available to ordinary citizens than the cooler, technical language of strategic discourse. Living as we do in an era in which every issue quickly becomes one for therapy and gets turned into a psychological problem, it is perhaps not surprising that nuclear weapons and war have been psychologized and that psychological discourse should proliferate on war and peace questions. The practitioners of psychological discourse claim that we must all feel dread in our current situation and that if we are not suffering nuclear nightmares, this is additional proof that we are infected with nuclearism, that is, a massive denial of the reality and threat that nuclear weapons present to our own survival and that of our children and their children.

It is interesting that many fewer specialists in national security are pessimistic about our future prospects than the general public. The general public, more caught up in either the psychologistic or the apocalyptic mode or some combination of the two, is far more pessimistic about the prospects of a major nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union before the end of the century. So the discourses that most proliferate in our public debate as non-specialist voices are those most convinced that we are in a terrible danger zone, if not doomed. In surveys on the question: how likely is a major nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union before the end of the century, one finds that nearly half the general public say nuclear war is likely, but specialists' answers cluster between about one in one hundred to one in one thousand who find it likely. Not too much is proven by this sort of finding, but it does indicate that those who specialize in the study of nuclear deterrence and the study of the risks of nuclear war, and have a language that they can bring to bear that makes that threat seem more manageable, are more hopeful about our

# NUCLEAR DISCOURSE 267

prospects than those who not only do not share that language but who eschew its use as either amoral or immoral.

Psychological discourse about nuclear weaponry is one variant of the discourse of victims. The reigning assumption is that we have all been made ill by nuclear weapons, that there is the bomb out there, but there is also a bomb in us, that we are corrupted by the disease of nuclearism. Those most corrupted are those who preach and practice nuclear deterrence and speak in the language of strategy. Psychologicistic nuclear discourse often condemns the motivations of those who traffic in nuclear issues even as it challenges the rest of us to bring our suppressed fears to the surface.

Psychologicistic discourse does more than simply warn us. It chastises and judges, dividing the world up into three categories: those who are knowingly corrupted, namely, the traffickers in strategic nuclear discourse; those who are unknowingly corrupted, namely, those who claim that they are not frightened to death by the prospect of nuclear war because they do not believe it is the central danger that we, "the benumbed," face; and a third and preferred category, those who have stripped off the numbness, who have rid themselves of symptoms of the pathology of nuclearism and who, facing the dangers straight on, are part of what these rhetoricians hope will be a growing movement to obliterate the nuclear disease. The metaphors deployed are those of disease, of pathology, of malignance.

There is much to be said for the warnings that these rhetoricians utter. It is the case that, confronted with horror or the prospect of something horrible, we tend to stick our heads in the sand and avoid facing that which should be faced. They are right to express moral anguish. My concern is that the metaphors with which they work and the rhetoric that encapsulates those metaphors do not take sufficient account of the constraints of the world in which we all exist. For example: Even as the practitioners of this discourse argue for the elaboration of a *transnational* self, a *species* identity, the world in which we actually live is one in which *the self* is more and more defined by national and religious identifications. What we see happening is not so much a new internationalism as a resurgence of militant nationalisms. It doesn't seem very helpful, given this potent development, to argue that this is further symptomology, a spreading disease, and that only physicians who have understood the nature of the disease can cure us.

Vaclav Havel, the great Czech playwright and political essayist, tells stories of earnest and sincere western peace activists journeying to central eastern Europe, making contact with dissidents, refusniks, political rebels in these societies, including Czechoslovakia, and he indicates that he finds it very difficult to explain to them why he does not sign petitions for immediate nuclear disarmament. For we citizens of central eastern Europe, he argues, that is not the central danger, not the most immediate threat to our lives, to our culture, and to our existence. And he indicates that what, to him, seems a rather remote prospect,

## 268 VIETNAM GENERATION

whereas imprisonment for conscience is an immediate one, doesn't seem to carry much weight with Westerners. They, he insists, can concentrate on the nuclear question precisely because they do not face certain immediate threats. He is sad that they do so in a way that gives them a moralistic language that labels those who disagree with them as corrupt or evil.<sup>10</sup>

Drawing categories from individual psychology and putting them to work to cover complex structural realities and determinants sanctions an overpersonalizing of important political realities. Take, for example, the rhetoric of Helen Caldicott, a medical doctor and leader in raising alarms about a nuclear disaster she finds imminent. She writes of missile envy as a *psychopathology of men* or a particular group of men. She describes the planet as an organic entity that is "terminally ill, infected with lethal macrobes that are metastasizing rapidly the way cancer spreads in the body."<sup>9</sup> The problem with the cancer metaphor is that one cuts a cancer out or irradiates it into oblivion, if it is found in the human body. The equivalent, presumably, would be nuclear disarmament and the destruction of stockpiled weapons. But when the analogy gets pressed between the structural realities of international politics and individual psychopathology, the inadequacies of this discourse become clear. In Caldicott's argument women get dubbed with the rescue mission because they *innately* understand conflict resolution, being "nurturers born with strong feelings for nurturing given their *anatomies* and *hormonal* constitutions. Males having an excess of the hormonal output of androgen are bound to deploy these deadly toys."<sup>11</sup> One variant, then, on this discourse is the presumption that if many of us are ill, men are, by definition, hopelessly infected by nature. This formulation does not seem terribly helpful. Males are always going to have an excess of androgen, and it's an excess, of course, only if one sets up the female as the single human norm. So the upshot is that males need to be remade. No scheme that calls for the remaking of human nature as a precondition for a better world has ever panned out. Indeed, it seems politically naive, and the organic and psychological metaphors potentially dangerous, in terms of the sorts of interventions that they may invite.

But it would be inappropriate to end on this note. Just as the practitioners of strategic discourse point to important realities in our situation, the practitioners of psychologistic discourse alert us to certain discomfiting facts. It is the case that most of the time we refuse to confront that which we do not understand, or that which seems unbearably grim. And this fatalistic outlook may, in the words of Robert Lifton, bind our eyes and minds tightly closed with a message of helplessness.<sup>12</sup> Although I am strongly convinced that there is a more specifically civic discourse better able to rouse us to appropriate and critical action than psychologistic analogizing, there is a truth here that cannot be entirely gainsaid: the world inside and the world out there are in fact related, and human beings are constituted, in part, in and

through the ways in which they introject or internalize the outer and the ways in which the inner is projected into the outer.

With that, let me move on to the third of the three discourses that dominate our thinking about war and peace—the apocalyptic. The apocalypticist assures that we are doomed. There are several examples of the genre, from Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, to the practitioners of so-called end time fundamentalism. Each issues dire warnings that we are lost. In Schell's case, we are lost unless we move to put an immediate end to that which plagues us and guarantees utter destruction. He posits his argument in absolutist either/or's. At the end of his book he insists that: "two paths and two paths only lie before us, one leads to death, the other to life." If we choose the first path, if we

numbly refuse to acknowledge the nearness of extinction, all the while increasing our preparations to bring it about, then we, in effect, become the allies of death and in everything we do our attachment to life will weaken, our vision, blinded to the abyss that is open to our feet, will dim and grow confused, our will, discouraged by the thought of trying to build on such a precarious foundation anything that is meant to last will slacken and we will sink into stupefaction as though we were gradually weaning ourselves from life in preparation for the end.<sup>13</sup>

There is a powerful hortatory flavor to apocalyptic rhetoric, whether in its secular form, as in Schell's sustained and dire prophesy, or in its explicitly religious manifestations.

Paradoxically, central to this posture is a mode of reasoning that is also favored by many contemporary "disassociated" realists, proliferation of so-called worst-case scenarios. The rhetorical ante gets upped and stays at fever pitch in apocalyptic argumentation. What one finds in the feminist practitioners—just one among a vast array of feminist voices—is the claim that war is threatening disorder; peace is healing order; war is human bestiality (male and male only); peace is human benevolence (female and female alone). The present world of war and preparation for war flows directly from a male ontology of absolute discordance which will be supplanted at some happy point by a world of peace and nurturing which flows, or will, from an ontology of concordance that is specifically or exclusively female.

For the apocalypticists, peace is a utopian dream, a fullness of being, that evokes images of celebration and understanding where all the barriers between peoples have been melted away. This notion of peace traffics in binary opposites. As I indicated the choices are presented in stark either/or's. So we find the contrast between masculinism, patriarchy, violence, disorder and matriarchy, non-violence, harmonious order. Here are just a couple of recent examples, and one can proliferate them almost endlessly. I draw these from a book called *Reweaving the Web of Life*.<sup>14</sup> One writer says wars are nothing short of tools for organized killing presided over by men deemed the best, and in fact they are.

## 270 VIETNAM GENERATION

Missiles and nuclear weapons are extensions of the male self which is capable of little but violence. If a passion for life is to flourish, women are the bearers of this life loving energy, writes another. Feminism and non-violence see power only in its healthy form, leading naturally to cooperative and nurturing behavior necessary for a harmonious existence.<sup>15</sup> This apocalyptic, cosmic feminism is animated by a quest for attunement with some higher unity, often a benevolent view of nature which then gets contrasted to the despoilations of modern nuclear culture.

One of the practitioners of this apocalyptic mode insists that the only route to transformation would be for women who “bear a different relationship to children than men do and are more connected and empathic with the environment than men are,”<sup>16</sup> to gain absolute power over the process of reproduction and, in a situation utterly free of any male influence, go on to reduce the number of men in the human population to an ideal of ten percent. This alone guarantees continuing and everlasting peace on earth. The writer claims that this ratio could be achieved in one generation if half the population reproduced in the normal manner, and one half by ‘ovular merging’—that is, the combination of two ovum to create a female person. We have here a very extreme version of the insistence that we must literally transform human beings—in this case create females and eliminate males—in order to ensure peace or the possibility of peace and destroy nuclear weapons.

But the dominant apocalyptic voice in the population at large, though heard less by those of us in the academy, is that which flows from fundamentalist and religious end timers who *anticipate* a nuclear holocaust. This is for them a source of joy, a sign that the ‘rapture’—the divine rescue of true believers from the holocaust—is drawing nigh. Just before the earth gets devoured in an orgy of destruction, true believers will be lifted up and drawn to God as promised in the Book of Revelation. Apocalyptic warnings are balm to the spirit of many, rather than a way to strike terror. Writes A.C. Mojtabai, author of *Blessed Assurance, At Home With the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas*, in a recent essay:

...people coming to the Bible belt to speak out against the nuclear arms race ought to be forewarned. The Physicians for Social Responsibility worst case blast conflagration scenario for nuclear war is so familiar it's almost cozy. It is part of the script for the tribulation that is coming soon to winnow the earth in preparation for the triumphal second coming of Christ. And the message is not prevention but exemption. The message is you've been warned. Declare for Jesus while there is yet time.<sup>17</sup>

Mojtabai notes that the Doomsday clock of the Union of Concerned Scientists, telling us how few minutes are left until nuclear midnight has been reached, “has been used by revivalists for centuries in the harvesting of souls. The message is *beating* the clock, not turning it back....The message is, ‘Are you ready? It's going to happen any moment.’” All this is normal fare: apocalyptic anticipations, terrors, and yearnings are

nothing new, but there is a new element here and that is our ability to "bring down the show ourselves."<sup>18</sup> Majtabai describes the fundamentalist habit, which is to reduce alternatives to exclusive disjunctions, all or nothing, absolute good or absolute evil, black or white. And that, I have already indicated, is a characteristic of apocalyptic thinking in general, whether in its secular versions or, here, in the end time version.

The religious apocalyptic version taps more Americans than either the strategic or psychologistic voices, for the fundamentalist mode extends well beyond the American Bible Belt. A Nielson survey released a couple of years ago indicated that over 60 million Americans, about forty percent of all television viewers, regularly listened to preachers who tell them that we can do nothing to prevent nuclear war in our lifetime. A 1984 Yankelovitch poll revealed that four out of ten Americans believe that when the Bible predicts that the earth will be destroyed, it's telling us about nuclear war. And, according to Mojtabai's study, the Citizen's Network report documented that of four thousand evangelical fundamentalists who attended the annual national religious broadcasters convention, an estimated three thousand are dispensationalists. Dispensationalism is a doctrine that goes back to the 19th Century; it reduces the Bible to a single basic plot: God puts man to the test and man fails. And within the dispensationalist mode, which has different stages, we come to the age of the Kingdom which is on the horizon, which will bring the sorry history of humankind on earth to a close. The view, again, is that those who have been saved will be raptured, will be drawn up as the tribulation spreads and the vial of wrath is poured into the air and the earth itself destroyed. This message of doom *and* hope, of promised eternal redemption, goes out over fourteen hundred religious stations in the United States.

Is there any way out of or through these rhetorical practices, if each has the weaknesses that I have cited along with some very specific strengths? A language in and through which to express the sentiments of civic life and the dangers and possibilities of the present moment: that is the challenge. But what might that language be and how might we come to it, recognizing, of course, that transformations in the way in which we think about things and the rhetoric we deploy will not in itself suffice to bring about the ends we seek. At the conclusion of *Women and War*, I talked about breaking the deadlock of war's mobilized language. Perhaps I should have said the mobilized language of war and peace, for a good bit of the rhetoric that I have elaborated is a language that looks to peace, but only through the most terrible and extreme imagery of war. Ryszard Kapuscinski, in an essay called "1945," wrote the following:

What does it mean to think in wartime images? It means seeing everything as existing in a state of extreme tension, as breathing cruelty and dread. For wartime reality is a world of extreme Manichean reduction which erases all intermediate hues, gentle, warm, and limits everything to a sharp aggressive counterpoint, to black and white, to the primordial struggle of two forces, good



## 272 VIETNAM GENERATION

and evil. Only the good, in other words us, and the bad, meaning everything that stands in our way, which appears to us and which we lump into the sinister category of evil. And it is curious and disheartening that much of the language of peace is cast in the language of war, that peace people think in wartime images, that is, in a struggle of good versus evil.<sup>19</sup>

This mobilized language is infused within the metaphors and tropes of everyday discourse. We are weaned on such opposites as good versus evil, peace versus war, just versus unjust. To deflect this way of thinking is impossible so long as we remain enthralled by grand teleologies of historic winners or losers, or of bad war people versus good peace people; so long as our identities are laced through with absolute moralisms; and so long as we seek or require on this earth a unifying experience of the sort that total war or perpetual peace alone seems to promise.

To appreciate the relativity of all antagonisms and friendships, to see in others neither angels nor demons, puts one on a track different from that laid down by those who would organize and systematize reality in some of the relentlessly total ways I have here been describing. The discourse I am calling for as an alternative to the nuclear discourses that have thus far prevailed eschews all-or-nothing pronouncements of utopian and apocalyptic prophets, seeking instead to articulate the limits of the world in which we live, yet to sustain space for meaningful action, for what Hannah Arendt called new beginnings. Unlike the practitioners of strategic discourse at its most unrelenting, the voice I call for infuses an *ethical* dimension devoid of sanctimony. Unlike psychologistic discourse at its most extreme, the voice I call for rejects handy labels that some of us can use to tag the others of us pathological or ill. Unlike the apocalyptic voice, the voice I call for is attuned to the provisional nature of enmities and friendships in politics, aware of the fact that those who are foreign will always present us with a situation of estrangement but this need not become the occasion for enmity.

I would call this the voice of the hopeful, anti-utopian citizen who acknowledges a world of bewildering diversity in which we are nonetheless invited to search for commonalities as cherished achievements. After all, we are all mortal, we all fear for our children's future, we all breathe the same air, and we must all confront, at this point, the possibility of a similar and terrible fate. Although we may never know the new heaven and the new earth promised in the Book of Revelation, and we shall not achieve a world in which there shall be neither mourning nor crying nor pain, there is the possibility that we can begin to take action and to think and act in ways that Abraham Lincoln once called "disenthralled." We require a discourse that draws upon the strengths, but rejects the excesses of the strategic, the psychological, and the apocalyptic voices that I have here elaborated.

# NUCLEAR DISCOURSE 273

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books) 1977.
- <sup>2</sup> Freeman Dyson, *Weapons and Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984): 4-5.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books) 1987.
- <sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harvest) 1969.
- <sup>6</sup> Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University) 1984: 139-140.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Nye, *Nuclear Ethics* (New York: Free Press) 1986: 11.
- <sup>8</sup> Graham T. Allison, Albert Carnsdale and Joseph Nye. *Hawks, Doves and Owls* (New York: WW Norton) 1985: 224.
- <sup>9</sup> Helen Caldicott, *Missile Envy* (New York: Bantam) 1985: 1, 316-317.
- <sup>10</sup> Vaclav Havel, "Peace: The View from Prague," *New York Review of Books* (21 November 1985): 28-30.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 316-317.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Future of Immortality* (New York: Basic) 1987.
- <sup>13</sup> Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Knopf) 1982: 231.
- <sup>14</sup> Pam McAllister, ed. *Reweaving the Web of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers) 1982.
- <sup>15</sup> Donna Warnock, "Patriarchy is a Killer: What People Concerned About Peace and Justice Should Know," in *Reweaving the Web of Life*: 20-29.
- <sup>16</sup> Barbara Zanotti, "Patriarchy: A State of War" in *Reweaving the Web of Life*: 16-19.
- <sup>17</sup> AG Mojtabai, "Fundamentalism and Nuclear Threat," in *Proceedings of the Center on Violence and Human Survival*, May 1987. (New York: John Jay College) 1988: 38.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 39.
- <sup>19</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski, cited in Elshtain, *Women and War*: 256.

# A Bibliography of UNUSUAL SOURCES ON WOMEN AND THE VIETNAM WAR

This bibliography contains a sampling of sources which are not cited in the notes of the articles in this journal. We provide this list as a resource for scholars, and to serve as a reminder that we have barely scraped the surface of the literature in the field. There is still much work to be done.

## HOME FRONT

- Byrd, Barthy. *Home Front: Women and Viet Nam* (Berkeley, CA: Shameless Hussy) 1986.
- Clecak, Peter. "The Movement' and Its Legacy," *Social Research*; 1981; 48(3): 521-556.
- Costello, John. *Virtue Under Fire: How World War 2 Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes*, (Boston: Little, Brown) 1986.
- Daniell, Rosemary, *Sleeping with Soldiers: In Search of the Macho Man*, (New York: Warner Books) 1986; c1984.
- Joesting, J.; Joesting, R., "Attitudes about Sex Roles, Sex, and Marital Status of Anti-War Demonstrators," *Psychology Rep*; 1972 October; 31(2): 413-414.
- Joesting, J.; Joesting, R., "Attitudes about Sex Roles, Sex, and Marital Status of Anti-War Demonstrators: Further Study," *Psychology Rep*; 1973 June; 32(3): 1182.
- Trimberger, Ellen Kay; Dennis, Peggy, "Women in the Old and New Left: The Evolution of a Politics of Personal Life," *Feminist Studies*; 1979 Fall; 5(3): 432-450.

## MEDICAL PERSONNEL

- Bernadette Marie, Sister, "Sisters Escalate Service in Vietnam," *Hospital Prog*; 1967 June; 48(6): 28-30.
- Boulton, T.B., "Nurse Anaesthesia in South Vietnam," *Anaesthesia*; 1970 Oct; 25(4):469+.
- Browne, Corinne. *Body Shop: Recuperating from Vietnam* (New York: Stein & Day) 1987.
- Devitt, H.E., "Nursing in a Vietnam Village," *Nursing Outlook*; 1966 Dec; 14(12): 46-49.
- "Forgotten Women," *Washington Post*. Washington, DC; 1981 March 25.
- Gierman, F.L., "Two Medals for Heroism," *Amer Journ of Nursing*; 1972 Oct; 72(10):1810+.
- Gonzalez, A.F. Jr., "America's Grandmother of Medicine in Vietnam: Dr. Smith Brings Help to Vietnamese Natives," *Bedside Nurse*; 1970 January; 3(1): 22-25.
- Harrison, M.S., "Nurses at Pleiku," *Indiana Nurse*; 1967 March; 31(1): 21-22.
- Hawkins, E., *Vietnam Nurse* (New York: Kensington) 1984.
- "In Vietnam—SCF in Action," *Nursing Times*; 1971 September 16; 67(37): 1158-1159.
- Lafferty, M., "Operation Orphan," *Australian Nurses Journal*; 1975 November; 5(5): 24-30.
- Lynn, B., "Good Samaritan in Vietnam: Red Cross Girl," *Ebony*; 1968 Oct; 23: 179-180+.
- Martin, L.G., "Angels of Vietnam," *Today's Health*; 1967; 45: 17-22.
- "Mercy Mission to Saigon," *American Journal of Nursing*; 1970 Sep; 70(9): 1946-1949.
- Mithers, Carol, "Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam," *Cultural Critique*; 1986 Spring; (3).
- Moore, B.B., "Vietnam: Nursing Challenge," *Amer Ass of Indiana Nurses Journal*; 1967 May; 15(5): 15-16.
- Morris, V.; Traber, W., "After the Battle," *Amer Journ of Nursing*; 1972 Jan; 72(1): 97-99.
- "Navy Nurse: On Vietnam Duty," *Registered Nurse*; 1968 November; 31(11): 56-51.
- Potter, J., "Australian Nurse Improves Vietnamese Child Care," *Australasian Nurses Journal*; 1974 January; 2(30): 6.
- Racz, M., "AID to Vietnam," *American Journal of Nursing*; 1967 February; 67(2): 281-283.
- "Salute to Our Chief Nurse in Viet Nam: Colonel Althea E. Williams," *Washington State Journal of Nursing*; 1968 March; 40(2): 1+.
- Tsuda, S., "Vietnamese Evacuee Camp: Learning Environment," *Nursing Outlook*; 1975 September; 23(9): 562-565.

## PERSONAL NARRATIVES

- Baker, Mark. *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Worlds of the Men and Women who Fought There* (New York: William Morrow) 1982.
- Bean, Sarah. *Rags and Jewels* (Paris: Handshake Edition) 1980.
- Coburn, Judith, "Losing Vietnam, Finding Vietnam: Sketches from a Traveler's Return," *Mother Jones*; 1983 Nov: 19+.
- Dickens, M.L., "Very Few Dull Moments in my Unforgettable Two Years as AID Nurse in Da Nang," *Weather Vane*; 1968 Aug; 37(4): 3-4.
- Gehan, J.B., "One Woman's War," *Nursing Care*; 1973 August; 6(8): 15-9.
- Kirk, D., "It Was 2:00 A.M. Saigon Time," *Amer Journ of Nursing*; 1965 Dec; 65(12):77-79.
- Kramer, S., "Peace to You Too, Butch," *Registered Nurse*; 1970 Mar; 33(3): 48-50.
- Macaulay, D., "Year in Saigon," *Midwife Health Vlsit*; 1970 Aug; 83(991): 256-258.
- McKay, A., "Civilian Assignment," *American Journal of Nursing*; 1968 Feb; 68(2): 336-338.
- McKeon, W.B., "Back from Vietnam," *Amer Journ of Nursing*; 1967 Oct; 67(10): 2120-2123.
- Miller, Carolyn Paine, *Captured!* (Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books) 1977.
- Palmer, F., "New Zealand Nurse in Vietnam," *New Zealand Nursing Journal*; 1975 Jul; 69(7): 13-14.
- Polauf, H., "One OR Nurse in the Undeclared War," *American Operating Room Nurse Journal*; 1972 May: 54-59.
- Snyder, S.S., "Letter from Vietnam," *Bedside Nurse*; 1968 Sep; 1(5): 25-26.
- Snyder, S.S., "Letter from Vietnam," *Bedside Nurse*; 1968 Nov; 1(6): 24.
- Sohn, Y.S., "My Experience in South Vietnam," *Korean Nurse*; 1965 Dec; 4(6): 32-36.
- Thomas, Liz, *Dust of Life* (New York: EP Dutton) 1978.
- Trudel, P., "From the Arctic to the Tropics," *Canadian Nurse*; 1968 Feb; 64(2): 46-47.
- Tuxen, P., "Helicopters, Heat, and Holding the Hands of the Dying," *California Nurse*; 1983 Nov: 6-8.
- Whincray, M., "Letter from Vietnam," *New Zealand Nursing Journ*; 1970 Jun; 63(6): 25.
- Whinceray, M., "Two Years Later.....," *New Zealand Nursing Journ*; 1973 Feb; 66(2): 25-26.

## PTSD

- Adamson, Beth. "Perspectives of a Pastoral Counselor," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 101-106.
- Brende, Joel Osler, M.D.; Parson, Erwin Randolph. *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery* (New York: Signet Books) 1986; c1985.
- Brown, Laura S., "From Alienation to Connection: Feminist Therapy with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 13-26.
- Carroll, Edward M. [and others], "Vietnam Combat Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Analysis of Marital and Cohabiting Adjustments," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*; 1985 Aug; 94(3): 329-337.
- Chung-Park, M.S., "Sharing: Long Way Home," *Nursing*; 1983; 13: 80.
- Clark, Michelle, "Alcoholism First," Special Issue: A Woman's Recovery from the Trauma of War. *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 71-76.
- DeFazio, Victor J.; Pascucci, Nicholas J., "Return to Ithaca: A Perspective on Marriage and Love in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*; 1984 Spr; 14(1): 76-89.
- Dewane, Claudia J., "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Medical Personnel in Vietnam," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*; 1984 Dec; 35(12): 1232-1234.
- Early, P., "Nurses Haunted by Memories of Service in Vietnam," *Amer Nursing*; 1982; 14(8).
- Fox, Jamie Elaine., "Stress for Female Vietnam Nurses: Views from One Evacuation Hospital," *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*; 1986 May; 14(1): 39-42.
- Greenberg, Jerrold S., *Stress and Sexuality* (AMS Press) 1986.
- Harris, Martha J.; Fisher, B.S., "Group Therapy in the Treatment of Female Partners of Vietnam Veterans," *Journ for Specialists in Group Work*; 1985 Mar; 10(1):44-50.
- Hill, Marcia., "Reflections of an Experiential Feminist Therapist," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 27-32.

# 276 VIETNAM GENERATION

- John, Karen, "The Diagnostic Approach: The Usefulness of DSM-III and Systematic Interviews in Treatment Planning," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 91-99.
- Klein, Binnie C., "A Piece of the World: Some Thoughts About Ruth," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 33-40.
- Leavitt, M., "Debriefing as Primary Prevention in Unusual Life Events: Operation Babylift," *Journal of Psychiatric Nursing*; 1976 Sep; 14(9): 9-19.
- Livingston, Joy A.; Rankin, Joanna M., "Propping up the Patriarchy: The Silenced Soldiering of Military Nurses," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 107-119.
- Ott, J., "Women Viet Nam Veterans," in Sonnenberg, S.M. [and others], eds., *Trauma of War: Stress and Recovery in Vietnam Veterans* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press) 1985.
- Paul, Elizabeth A., "Wounded Healers: A Summary of the Vietnam Nurse Veteran Project," *Military Medicine*; 1985 Nov; 150(11): 571-576.
- Ratha, N.K., "Comprehensive Care for the Victim of Sexual Assault," *Military Medicine*; 1983; 148: 796-799.
- Resick, Patricia A., "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in a Vietnam Nurse: Behavioral Analysis of a Case Study," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 55-65.
- "Ruth: A Case Description," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Sp; 5(1): 7-11.
- Ryberg, Amy B., "The Interplay of Individual Psychodynamics and the Female Experience: A Case Study," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1): 77-89.
- Sarrel, L.J., "Perspective of a Sex Therapist," *Women and Therapy*; 1986 Spr; 5(1):67-69.
- Stretch, Robert H.; Vail, J.D.; Maloney, J.P., "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among Army Nurse Corps Vietnam Veterans," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*; 1983; 53: 704-708.
- Tanay, E., "Dear John Syndrome during the Vietnam War," *Diseases of the Nervous System*; 1976; 37: 165-167.
- Van Devanter, Lynda M., "Unknown Warriors: Implications of the Experiences of Women in Vietnam," in Kelly, W.E., ed., *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the War Veteran Patient* (New York: Brunner/Mazel) 1985.

## VIETNAMESE WOMEN

- Bergman, Arlene, *Women of Viet Nam*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: People's Press) 1975.
- Borton, Lady. *Sensing the Enemy: An American Woman Among the Boat People of Vietnam* (NY: Doubleday) 1984.
- Brown, Holmes; Luce, Don. *Hostages of War: Saigon's Political Prisoners* (New York: Southeast Asia Resource Center) 1973.
- Heiman, E.M.; Cao Van Le, "Transsexualism in Vietnam," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*; 1975 Jan; 4(1): 89-95.
- Hutchins, N., "Vietnamese Nurse Studies with LPNs," *Journal of Practical Nursing*; 1966 Jul; 16(7): 24-5.
- Lang, Daniel, *Casualties of War* (New York: McGraw-Hill) 1969.
- Lang, Daniel, "Reporter at Large: Soldier Government Witness in Court-martial Proceedings Against Four American Soldiers in Rape-Murder Case," *New Yorker*; 1969 Oct 18; 45: 61-64+.
- McLanahan, A., "Notebook of Vietnamese Refugee Girl," *Manas*; 1981 May 20; 34(20).
- Minett, N., "Day Care Expansion in Vietnam," *Health Education*; 1976 Sep; 7(5): 20-21.
- Nguyen Thi Dinh, *No Other Road to Take: Memoir of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Dinh*, Elliott, Mai V. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asian Program).
- Stanford, D., "Little Miss Tiger," *Redbook*; 1968 June; 131: 141-164.
- Taylor, P., "ANA Works to Bridge Gap for Viet Nurse Refugees," *American Nursing*; 1975 Nov 28; 7(12): 5.
- Williams, H.W., "Nursing Profession in South Vietnam," *International Nursing Review*; 1970; 17(4): 328-336.
- Williams, H.W., "Nursing Profession in South Vietnam," *Nursing Times*; 1971 February 25; 67(8): 237-240.
- Women of Vietnam*. 39 Hang Chuoi, Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam: Vietnam Women's Union; 1973, monthly.

## WAR CORRESPONDENTS

- Elwood-Akers, Virginia, ed., *Women War Correspondents in the Viet Nam War, 1961-1975* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press) 1988
- Hammer, Ellen, *Struggle for Indochina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press) 1954.
- Hammer, Ellen, *Vietnam Yesterday and Today* (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston) 1966.
- Hammer, Ellen, *Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (NY: EP Dutton) 1987.
- Krich, Claudia, "Viet Nam: Another View," *Progressive*; 1974 November.
- Krich, Claudia, "Vietnam Journal: Witness to the War's End," *Ms.*; 1976 July; 5: 108.
- McCarthy, Mary, *Hanoi* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World) 1968.
- McCarthy, Mary, *Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World) 1967.
- Sontag, Susan, *Trip to Hanoi* (New York: Farrar Strauss & Giroux) 1968.

## WOMEN IN THE MILITARY AND WOMEN VETERANS

- Adams, Virginia. "Jane Crow in the Army: Obstacles to Sexual Integration," *Psychology Today*; 1980 Oct 14: 50-65.
- Andrews, Walter. "Army Eases Restrictions on Jobs for Women after 'Better Analysis,'" *Washington Times*. Washington, DC; 1983 Oct 21.
- "Army Strategy for Women a Winner." *Atlanta Constitution*. Atlanta, GA; 1983 Oct 19: 20.
- Binkin, Martin; Bach, S.J. *Women and the Military* (DC: Brookings Inst.) 1977.
- Binkin, M.; Eitelberg, M.J., "Women and Minorities in the All-Volunteer Force," Bowman, W., ed., *All-Volunteer Force After a Decade* (DC: Pergamon-Brassey's) 1986.
- Cordry, Charles W., "13 Army Jobs Reopened to Women," *Baltimore Sun*. Baltimore, MD; 1983 October 21.
- Defleur, L.B.; Warner, R.L., "Socioeconomic and Social-Psychological Effects of Military Service on Women," *Journ. of Political and Military Sociology*; 1985 Fal: 195-200.
- Early, Pete, "Army Urges Rise in Jobs for Women," *Washington Post*. Washington, DC; 1983 Oct 18; A: 3.
- Eisenhart, R.W., "You Can't Hack it Little Girl: A Discussion of the Covert Psychological Agenda of Modern Combat Training," *Journ. of Social Issues*; 1975; 31(1): 13-23.
- GAO, *Actions Needed to Insure that Female Veterans Have Equal Access to VA Benefits* (Washington, DC: Government Accounting Office) 1982 Sep 24.
- Goldman, N.L., *Female Soldiers: Combatants or Noncombatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press) 1982.
- Holm, Jeanne, "Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution (Novato, CA: Presidio Press) 1982.
- Marron, J., "A Woman Veteran Speaks Out," *Vet Reporter*; 1983 Winter.
- McVicker, Sara J., "Invisible Veterans: The Women Who Served in Vietnam," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*; 1985 Oct; 23(10): 12-19.
- Midwest Committee for Military Counseling, *Fighting Back: Help for Lesbian and Gay Draft, Military and Vets Cases* (421 South Wabash, Chicago, IL 60605: Midwest Committee for Military Counseling).
- Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff of Personnel, *Women in the Army Policy Review* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army) 1982.
- "Panel Rejects Female Figure for U.S. Memorial," *New York Times*. NY; 1987 Oct 25.
- Park, L., "Women Vets Fight for Recognition," *Air Force Times*; 1981 Sep 21; 42(9): 45.
- Rustad, Michael, *Women in Khaki: The American Enlisted Woman*, (NY: Praeger) 1982.
- Segal, Mady Wechsler; Segal, David R., "Social Change and the Participation of Women in the American Military," in Krierberg, Louis, ed., *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press) 1983; 5.
- Sweetman, S., "Women Veterans: Different Road Home from Vietnam.," *Christian Science Monitor*; 1981 July 16.
- United States v. Fallon. 407 F.2d 621 (7th Cir.): cert. denied. (1969).
- Wilson, George C., "Army Programs for Women Falter During Fiscal-Year Test," *Washington Post*. Washington, DC; 1979 April 23; A: 6.
- Woelfel, John C., "Women in the United States Army," *Sex Roles*; 1981 Aug; 7(8): 785-800.
- "Woman Takes Command," *New York Times*. New York; 1987 August 3.
- "Women in the Armed Forces," *Newsweek*; 1980 February 18: 34-42.

# NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

**NANCY ANISFIELD**, editor of *Vietnam Anthology: American War Literature*, teaches contemporary war literature courses at the University of Vermont.

**JAMES R. AUBREY** is an Associate Professor of English at Metropolitan State College in Denver. He has published articles in *Bucknell Review* and *Studies in Philology*. Two other essays on war literature are scheduled to appear in 1990, one about *The Laotian Fragments in Conradania*, and another about *Catch-22* in *Studies in Contemporary Satire*. He is a contributor to the MLA's forthcoming *Approaches to Teaching The Woman Warrior*.

**DAVID M. BERMAN** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Instruction and Learning, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, with an interest in teaching Vietnam at the secondary level. He served in Vietnam during 1968-1969 and was twice a patient in the 71st Evacuation Hospital, Pleiku.

**JENNY BROWN**, 23, a member of Gainesville Women's Liberation, which was founded in 1968, the first Women's Liberation group in the south. She is also co-editor of *The Iguana*, a progressive monthly newsletter in her hometown of Gainesville, FL. She has been active in disarmament, Central America solidarity work, Stop Child Sexual Abuse, and restarted a Campus NOW chapter at the University of Florida where she is a political science undergraduate. Most recently she donated a summer to work with Redstockings in New York City.

**M. ELAINE DOLAN BROWN** is a media critic and an Assistant Professor of English at the New York Institute of Technology, Old Westbury, New York.

**SUSANNE CARTER** is the Microforms Supervisor at Southwest Missouri State University Library, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Masters Degree in Education with special emphasis in English. Her special interest is in contemporary women's fiction.

**RENNY CHRISTOPHER** is in the Ph.D. program in Literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She is writing her dissertation on representations of the Vietnam war in American popular culture.

**JEAN ELSHTAIN** is a Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of *Women and War* (Basic Books, 1987).

**REBECCA BLEVINS FAERY** teaches writing at the University of Iowa. She has published essays, poems and literary criticism in a number of books and magazines. She is currently working on a collection of personal essays based on her experiences as a military wife during the Vietnam war.

**ALAN FARRELL** is a Professor of French at Hampden-Sydney College, Virginia.

**J. William Gibson** wrote *The Perfect War* (Vintage, 1988) and co-edited *Making War/Making Peace: Social Foundations of Violent Conflict* (Wadsworth: 1989). This essay was written with assistance from the Harry Frank Guggenheim and John D. and Catharine T. MacArthur Foundations. Gibson teaches sociology at SMU in Dallas, Texas.

**SUSAN JEFFORDS** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Washington. She is the author of *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Indiana University Press, 1989).

**JACQUELINE LAWSON**, the Special Editor of this issue of *Vietnam Generation*, teaches English and American literature at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. She has articles on Vietnam veterans' narratives appearing in *Journal of American Culture*, and in collections published by The Popular Press, Garland Publishing Company, University of Iowa Press, and the Modern Language Association. She is writing a book on war and male violence, *The Misogyny of War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Culture*. She is the Vietnam Area Chair of the Popular Culture Association.

**ERIC LEED** is a Professor in the History Department at Florida International University, North Miami. He is the author of *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 1979). He received his Ph.D. in European cultural and intellectual history at the University of Rochester in 1972.

**RUTH ROSEN** is Professor of History at the University of California at Davis and Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California at Berkeley. She is Editor of *The Maimie Papers* (Indiana University Press) and the author of *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press). This paper was originally presented at an international conference on peace and security sponsored by the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at Ballyvaughan, Ireland, August 1988. She is currently writing a history of contemporary feminism and American culture.

**KATHIE SARACHILD** is currently Director of the "Archives for Action" project of Redstockings, the women's liberation think tank that published, among other things, the anthology *Feminist Revolution*, to which she contributed as an editor and author. When a student in college and the lone woman on the Editorial Board of *The Harvard Crimson* from 1962-64, under the name then of Kathie Amatniek, she was the resident writer in opposition to the growing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. She was a civil rights volunteer on a SNCC project in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign and in 1968, a leader of the "consciousness-raising" branch of radical feminism. She works in the New York City film industry and edited the film *Women in Arms: The Nicaragua Case*.



## 280 VIETNAM GENERATION

**CHAIM SHATAN**, M.D., C.M., is a Clinical Professor, training analyst (formerly clinic co-director), Postdoctoral Psychoanalytic Training Program, New York University. In 1970, he organized a panel of 40 volunteer therapists to work with the "rap group" and self-help program of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He has written and lectured on combat training and its aftermath, the homecoming of POWs and concentration camp survivors, as well as emotional problems in children of war veterans. His war crimes testimony has been presented to Congress, the Pentagon, at courts-martial, and through the news media here and abroad. His *NY Times* Op-Ed article helped spark an informal veterans' self-help movement, culminating in the Post-Vietnam Clearinghouse (Milwaukee, 1972), the 1st National Conference on Emotional Needs of Vietnam Veterans (St. Louis, 1973), the National Veterans' Resource and Research Projects (NYC, 1973), the introduction of PTSD into DSMIII, and the Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program of the VA. Other interests include group therapy, hypnotherapy, stagefright, gambling, nonverbal communication. He received the *First Annual Holocaust Memorial Award* in 1974 for "Bogus Manhood, Bogus Honor: Surrender and Transfiguration in the US Marine Corps," and the *Armstrong Award* in 1975 for the best public radio program: *Coming Home, There Was No Homecoming*.

**CHERYL A. SHELL** is in the English Department of the University of California at Davis.

**LORRIE SMITH** teaches American Literature at St. Michael's College in Vermont. She writes about contemporary poetry as well as literature of the Vietnam war, and she has recently co-edited, with Owen Gilman, *America Rediscovered: Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War*, forthcoming in 1990.

**KALI TAL** is the General Editor of *Vietnam Generation*, and is currently struggling to finish her Ph.D. in American Studies at Yale University despite the unbelievable load of managing and publishing an academic journal. Optimistic by nature, she is sure she can handle it.

# VIETNAM GENERATION

## VOLUME 1

**NUMBER 1: THE FUTURE OF THE PAST: REVISIONISM AND VIETNAM**

**NUMBER 2: A WHITE MAN'S WAR: RACE ISSUES AND VIETNAM**

**NUMBER 3-4: GENDER AND THE WAR: MEN, WOMEN AND VIETNAM**

