



THE FRIEND OF MY ENEMY IS A BUSH.

Signs of Tropicality in American popular culture in the
years following the Vietnam War (1980s-2010s).

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Summary.

This thesis studies how American creators chose to depict nature in their own version of the Vietnam War. The method used for analysing these depictions is Tropicality. The Anglophone idea of Tropicality was developed from Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Its use comes from its ability to detect underlying meanings and mentalities behind certain depictions of Tropical nature. Tropicalized nature can be seen as depictions of conflicting nature, nature harming people, and nature being used as a tool for harm.

The approach is to investigate the decades of the 1980s-2010s and the Tropicalization that occurred during this period. The depictions of Tropicalization from this period will be compared to how the international relations between the United States and Vietnam were in each decade in order to link changes in international relations to changes in depictions.

This thesis concludes with the fact that the amount of Tropicalization and style of Tropicalization that is occurring does seemingly have a connection to international relations. This is apparent by the fact that when the United States and Vietnam are getting along, the harshness in the Tropicalization decreases and so does the amount of it. What is furthermore discovered is that there are many causes for this, and this thesis is one approach to answering why Tropicalization happens.

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And not to be forgotten, the History track at the University of Utrecht which has provided me the skill set that I need in order to write this thesis to the standard that it is.

Preface.

Born in Norway in 1997, my experience with how the Vietnam War impacted society at the time is non-existent. I was not there during the Summer of Love in 1967, nor was I drafted to go to the Vietnam War. I did not watch it on the news or read it in the newspapers, and I certainly did not vote for who should be in the Oval Office. Yet, Norway, like many countries, has been influenced by American politics, culture, and material goods. I have grown up in the 21st century with decades of material on the Vietnam War having already been produced and more being released every year.

By watching films, such as *Good Morning, Vietnam* starring Robin Williams or playing *Battlefield Bad Company 2: Vietnam* I have been influenced by the varying types of American popular culture from different decades. Most of them have one common factor, they are American.

I, therefore, find it important to disclose, that although Norwegian and much younger than those who were there in the 1960s, I have been exposed to the same content as Americans have. Having been so, I might have some ideas and thoughts that would not have existed if not for these American exports.

Introduction.

"Get your hands down! Do not salute me! There are goddamn snipers all around this area who'd love to grease an officer."¹

-Lt. Dan in *Forrest Gump* (1994).

Differing landscapes, rivers as the enemy, trees as bombs and bushes as spies, these are the true yet exaggerated assumptions that lie at the heart of this thesis. The quote above is the first sentence Forrest Gump and Benjamin Buford Blue (Bubba) heard on arriving at their units U.S. Military camp in Vietnam. Thereby setting, from the very beginning, the tone for their stay there.

Forrest found himself in a war that lasted from November 1st, 1955 to- April 30th, 1975 (The United States officially joined the war on March 8th, 1965). The war was between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. The Communist North had the support of the Soviet Union and China, while the South had the support of the United States and other anti-communist nations. A result was that the United States failed to achieve any meaningful progress in the war which led to a series of upheavals in America during the 1960s, birthing an anti-establishment counterculture, which potentially affected the depictions in the sources.²

This thesis aims, by use of selected media and secondary literature, to establish a cause as to why there have been changing representations of the Vietnamese tropical landscape/geography in the late 20th and early 21st Century popular culture, since the end of the Vietnam War.

In doing so, addressing the background of the content creators and the development in international relationships will aid the understanding of why these depictions occur. At this point, the varying depictions of nature will be possible to analyse alongside improving relationships and content creators to answer the main research question.

¹ *Forrest Gump*, streaming, directed by Robert L. Zemeckis (1994; United States: Paramount Pictures, 1994).

² Benjamin T. Harrison, "Roots of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement," in *The Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, ed Walter Hixson (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 49.

Each chapter introduces a new decade, three primary sources of American popular culture, their creators, and the condition of the international relations at the time. These sources will show depictions of the ongoing Tropicalization and Militant Tropicalization. The ongoing international relations between the United States and Vietnam will contextualize the depictions. The international relationship plays a vital role in shaping the depictions of nature.

The method used to show that Tropicalization is ongoing is to depict the stark contrasts of Vietnamese nature in the individual source, such as it being hot and cold. A bomb in a tree is an example of Militant Tropicality. Militant Tropicality is particularly relevant to the Vietnam War as it was a Guerrilla War. Militant Tropicality establishes that one might begin regarding nature as dangerous, leading more people to believe that all Vietnamese trees might contain bombs. These depictions of Tropicality and Militant Tropicality will be analysed by comparing them to the condition of each decade's international condition. By using a decade-on-decade approach the decreasing amount and types of Tropicalization can be credited to the improving relations between the two nations.

What can be agreed to be Tropicality, as well as, how to analyse Tropicality in accordance with previous works, is a dilemma for this paper. Still, in its practical infancy, Tropicality has yet to have an abundance of earlier works that have used analysing techniques, as such, a more simple approach of contradictions to the more temperate North, itself, and how it is portrayed as violent or used for violent purposes will be the main analytical point of view.

Before the sources and analysis are addressed, a chapter on how Tropicality came to be, and how it works will grant readers the ability to understand why these seemingly harmless depictions have deeper meanings. The final part of this thesis is the conclusion.

There are some other factors that play a part in why the depictions of Tropicality change over time. These factors might be an awareness of stereotypes, or an aim for a more realistic/nuanced film, or simply that the creators did not want to include nature. Many conclusions are plausible as Tropicality is still in its practical

application infancy. This thesis intends to contribute by stating that international relations do have a say in the matter.

The reason for this approach to this thesis is that Tropicality ought to be used more frequently in academia. Long has Orientalism been used to try to understand varying topics from a Eurocentric point of view. It has also been criticized by others who feel it does not fit their needs. By using a twist on Orientalism this thesis will have provided a significant contribution to the limited work done on Tropicality. This has the potential to encourage others to adopt this way of approaching the tropics, to inspire other ways of looking at different parts of the world and draw similar conclusions of Eurocentric representations of other geographical locations.

The motivation behind this thesis is that being somewhat unknown Tropicality has yet to be mentioned during the history classes at Utrecht University. It is research like this that takes contemporary popular-culture themes, combines them with discourses that will give insight into what once went unquestioned, and in the end grants a deeper understanding of contemporary ideas towards varying themes. This grants an understanding of how people think of things they have never seen or experienced. Tropicality is merely one of these discourses and will give insight into Western representations of Vietnamese nature over the decades.

Captivatingly, like all wars are, creators depicted the war in a way that emphasised their take on the events unfolding. The sources this paper employs are *Chickenhawk*, *The Things They Carried*, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967*, *The Lotus Eaters*, *Platoon*, *Forrest Gump*, *Rules of Engagement*, *The Post*, *Conflict in Vietnam*, *SEAL Team*, *Line of Sight: Vietnam*, and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. These products of popular culture depict specific scenes, comments, and actions that often have an unintentional meaning behind them. The reason they were included in this thesis is that they were all well-received, either evident in winning awards, a positive box office income, or for being a production of some renowned company. Most importantly, is that they are part of popular culture. They are cultural devices that are enjoyed by ordinary people rather than simply the educated elite. Lastly, they all have signs of Tropicality, a theory that seeks to explain the underlying

meanings of Western depictions of Tropical nature. This will be further explained and expanded upon in the following chapter.

This list of sources ranges from the 1980s to the 2010s, and they are chosen specifically to highlight the changes that occurred over this specific timespan. Unlike the mediums of street art or YouTube, these books, videogames, and films have publishers who are willing to spend large sums to get their product to the masses. In doing so they by default enforce a certain depiction of Vietnam upon others.

These three media types are also somewhat similar in demand, measured by their 2018 market value, books drew in \$143 billion,³ films \$136 billion,⁴ and videogames made \$138.7 billion.⁵ This is important to note as it would be rather redundant to have chosen a media type with a small capability to reach a large audience.

This thesis spreads across four decades, excluding the 1970s. The cause for this is that war was still ongoing during this decade, this might have caused different kinds of depictions and there were only a few years left of the decade at the end of the war. Sadly, this means that many Vietnam War film enthusiasts will miss out on *Apocalypse Now* being included in the research. The reason for choosing these as primary sources is because these videogames/films/books were created/written/produced by American companies/authors/directors, this helps to demonstrate that these sources are meant to convey American mentalities over the tropics of Vietnam. Furthermore, the choice of sticking to 12 sources is necessary as not only is it hard to gain access to the majority of B-films, Indie videogames, and lesser-known publications on the Vietnam War, but the sheer amount of available sources is so overwhelming that one needs to stick to a specific number, meaning that one source for each media of popular culture for each decade, resulting in three per decade. The sources derive from American

³ “Global book market valued at \$143bn,” [tnps](https://thenewpublishingstandard.com/global-book-market-valued-at-143bn/), accessed November 27, 2019, <https://thenewpublishingstandard.com/global-book-market-valued-at-143bn/>.

⁴ “Global Movie Production & Distribution Industry – Market Research Report,” IBISWorld, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.ibisworld.com/global/market-research-reports/global-movie-production-distribution-industry/>.

⁵ “The Business of Video Games: Market Share For Gaming Platforms in 2019 [Infographic],” Forbes, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinanderton/2019/06/26/the-business-of-video-games-market-share-for-gaming-platforms-in-2019-infographic/#4bf185367b25>.

creators, as anything else would impact the end results as intentions and meanings differ between nations, much like an Asian videogame might have an Asian market in mind. Lastly, the exclusion of Vietnamese sources, like Bao Ninh's famous book, *The Sorrow of War*, is because the focus of this paper is the American mentalities shown in the primary sources, making Vietnamese sources redundant.

The first chapter will delve into *Orientalism*, John Kleinen's approach to Vietnam, and further expand upon Orientalism in order to connect it to the concept of Tropicality.

1. Approaching the Tropics.

Tropicality is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “The state or condition of being tropical; the extent to which something is characteristic or reminiscent of the tropics.”⁶ Tropicality, however, is much more than merely a condition or a term used to specify certain characteristics, it carries larger implications.

Tropicality, like Orientalism, hints towards the fact that there are underlying meanings to be found in various sources. Having derived from Orientalism, Tropicality takes on many of its characteristics, but there are fundamental differences. Edward Said’s theory, *Orientalism*, depicts an act where European/Western representations of ‘the Orient’ follow stereotypical lines based on a Western-centred world view, which in effect distorts the perspectives of those experiencing it second hand. Said based this upon Foucault’s idea that language can be used to express power over people and combined it with Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony over the subaltern. This means that the elite (in our case the American producers/publishers/directors), can control the masses. Said, by creating *Orientalism*, also created a binary between ‘the West’ and ‘the Other.’⁷

Said’s use of the notion in 1978 opened a new path towards studies of non-Western societies. Within this framework of domination, Orientalism occurred “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it: in short, [Said sees] Orientalism as a Western way of dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁸ The West made a mental image of what a location should look, feel, and act like that was separate from what it was, its use was simply to make it less alien to them.

Academics have used Said’s method and applied it to various locations from different perspectives. However, there have been critics. John MacKenzie highlights that Said neglects to make a distinction between what he considers to be popular culture and high art. Said claims to have not seen large discrepancies between the two. In doing so Said limits himself to ‘high culture,’ while other forms

⁶ “Tropicality,” Lexico, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/ngo>.

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 31-37.

⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

like films and music get overlooked.⁹ According to Arjun Appadurai, these days the distinction between who consumes and produces ‘high culture’ and popular culture is blurred, due to the fact that the world economy is more integrated.¹⁰ This means that what is considered to be popular culture finds its place as a source that can be drawn upon by works regarding Orientalism, much like John Kleinen does with films in: “Framing ‘the Other’. A critical review of Vietnam war films and their representations of Asians and Vietnamese.”

It is this tie with popular culture that enables John Kleinen to tie Vietnam War films to the concept of Orientalism. In his work, he looks at how Vietnam War films were shaped and went on to shape how the West perceives the Vietnamese. He drew upon the ‘yellow peril’ which was when a large group of Asians migrated to the United States in the 19th century, taking jobs for lower wages. This led to the American Unions to become proponents of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1882. With the slow decline of hostility towards the Chinese during the Second World War, the post-war Communist victory in China subsequently led to ‘the red menace.’ Americans feared that millions of Communist Chinese would invade, leading to “racist portrayals of China and the Chinese as inscrutable, untrustworthy, and as a people of ruthless killers.”¹¹ He highlights these as clear indicators of varying factors contributing to the production of a certain representation of Asians, where distinctly the Vietnamese are reduced to stereotypes of the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese Army, and other Asians are almost always given a role to contrast the white protagonist.¹²

Although extensive in explaining the Orientalist representations that are to be found in Vietnam War films, John Kleinen neglects to draw upon a large variety of popular culture and in doing so he limits himself to whatever film style was popular at the time of those films. He also focuses solely on orientalism, rather than employing a larger selection of representations. By including videogames

⁹ John MacKenzie, *Orientalism, History, theory and the arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 20-71.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990): 295-310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>.

¹¹ John Kleinen, “Framing ‘the Other’. A critical review of Vietnam war movies and their representation of Asians and Vietnamese,” *Leidschrift* 19, no. 2 (September 2004): 5-8.

¹² Ibid.

and books this thesis will potentially fill the void in the primary sources, and tropicality will help expand this field of representations.

The term Tropicality was coined by Pierre Gourou during his extensive works on the tropics, being particularly known for *Les Pays Tropicaux* (1947). In this novel, Gourou differentiated between different geographical regions but still generalized ‘the tropics’ as a whole. Like many others in his time, Gourou had a pessimistic view of the tropics which was still pervaded with the naturalism of the tropical world. “These countries with their retarded civilisations and economies’ are, he considers, hampered by the physical environment, presented as far more disadvantageous than that of temperate areas (insalubrity, poor soils).”¹³ However, in later years he revised his work with a less pessimistic conclusion and in his even later works was rather optimistic. Yet, he still did not establish a form of methodology for Tropicality as he was much more interested in the statistics and data.¹⁴

David Arnold further developed Gourou’s work and in 1996 had developed it into an individual field of geographical and historical inquiry. In “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950,” David Arnold traced negative representations of the tropics by the Western world. What had been considered to be a natural food basket and exotic was replaced by the fears and frustrations of colonizers and their growing realization that developing the tropics would be an almost impossible undertaking.¹⁵ Using Pierre Gourou’s text as the embodiment of accumulated pessimism towards the tropics, caused predominantly by the colonial administration there, it is obvious that although regions were distinctively different from others, the tropics as a whole were considered to be an impoverished region. It was not suited for people of Northern climates and was not receptive to white settlement and agriculture. Simultaneously the tropics also relied on outside influence in order to develop. The tropics according to David Arnold came to be seen as a primitive world compared to ‘the West’ and came to represent the geographical location of those

¹³ “Pierre Gourou,” *Hypergeo*, accessed November 25, 2019, <http://www.hypergeo.eu/spip.php?article638>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ David Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840–1950,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00060>.

with negative morals, poor materials, and was home to uncivilized races, in stark contrast to the Northern temperate zone.¹⁶

Further expanding Tropicality, Daniel Clayton and Gavin Bowd argue that the concept of Tropicality has regional differences within ‘the West’ and is not simply one universally agreed-upon method, or if there even is a coherent method at all. Looking into Francophone Tropicality and Anglophone Tropicality the authors highlight some of the differences. Focusing on the Anglophone Tropicality as the sources used are American will explain why these depictions of nature can be seen. Anglophone Tropicality, unlike Francophone, does not draw upon many works done in different languages and in doing so overlooks most of the extensive works by Pierre Gourou (which were mostly on gathering data on the Tropics and compiling them into some form of overarching understanding). This can be viewed as a failure to notice on their part but has also granted them a clean slate which the Francophone Tropicality users did not have. As a result, they tied Gourou’s work into Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and focused on placing it in a wider discursive context, which in this case started with the negative representations ‘the West’ has of the Tropics.¹⁷ This is of little relevance to the reader who is unaware of the nuances, but relevant to those who know the differences as neglecting to do so leaves the paper open for criticism.

Daniel Clayton further expanded upon the historiography of Tropicality by introducing the term *Militant Tropicality*. In the post-war era of decolonization, there was an increasing Western image of the tropics as militant and revolutionary, mostly because the battles fought there were often guerrilla warfare by nature. This was sparked by the ongoing conflicts in Vietnam and Cuba. Militant Tropicality can be spotted when there are negative representations of nature where those representations can, for example, afflict harm.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid, 6-9.

¹⁷ Daniel Clayton and Gavin Bowd, “Geography, tropicality and postcolonialism: Anglophone and Francophone readings of the work of Pierre Gourou,” *L’Espace géographique* 35, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 208-221, <https://doi.org/10.3917/eg.353.0208>.

¹⁸ Daniel Clayton, “Militant tropicality: war, revolution and the reconfiguration of ‘the tropics’ c.1940-c. 1975,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 1 (2013): 180-192.

The subsequent chapters will be divided into the chronological decades that followed the end of the Vietnam War.

2. Fresh Memories and Low-Resolution: the Vietnam War in the 1980s.

In the 1980s the memories of the war were still fresh, leading to intense portrayals in varying media. Tying these representations of the environment to the ongoing international relations will show that when relations are rather negative, the depictions shown reinforce a specific reality in accordance with these relations.

The war officially ended on the 30th of April 1975, as a result of the Paris Agreement. The Americans had in fact pulled out two years prior to this, meaning there was time for some progress before the start of the new decade. This progress came in the late 1970s (77-78), when President Jimmy Carter attempted to normalize bilateral relations with the reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Failing to do so, Vietnam entered into a security pact with the Soviet Union while America joined ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in isolating Vietnam.¹⁹

The relationship between the two nations steadily improved through the 1980s. Yet, there were negative signs to come from the capital Hanoi. By 1987 the Vietnamese government had determined that the United States had met too few of their demands and so reverted to its previously held stance of no negotiation with regards to the MIA (missing in action) soldiers. This stance proved to be brief as President Ronald Reagan met with Vietnamese leaders and secured some tremendous results. Although not fully what the Vietnamese were hoping for, which had been economic aid and war reparations, the incident did mark the first time the United States had offered anything in return for Vietnamese cooperation.²⁰ With improving relations, the people's perception of the other should improve. Lagging behind a few years is understandable, as such, the 1990s should depict improved representations of the Vietnamese landscape and wildlife.

¹⁹ "Timeline: US-Vietnam Relations," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, no. 3 (2010): 351.

²⁰ Beth Castelli, "The Lifting of the Trade Embargo Between the United States and Vietnam: The Loss of a Potential Bargaining Toll or a Means of Fostering Cooperation?," *Penn States International Law Review* 13, no. 2 (January 1995): 297-328.

The book *Chickenhawk* (1983) is the first primary source for the 1980s and was written by Robert C. Mason (1942-). Robert C. Mason is a Vietnam War veteran and an author of several books, some of which are memoirs. As an Army Warrant Officer, he served a one-year tour in Vietnam as an operational Helicopter pilot, flying ‘Hueys’ on a variety of missions, covering assault, medical evacuations, and resupply. He went on to have a troubled life after the war, being repeatedly arrested.²¹

The director of the second primary source, *Platoon* (1986), Oliver Stone (1946-) is known to provoke his audience with his films. “Displaying radical ambitions, many of his films present an admirable but overwrought attempt to address the role of masculinity and violence amidst the political upheavals of post-1960s America.”²² He served in the Vietnam War from 1967-1968, which is reflected in his later works. He was taught by Martin Scorsese at New York University Movie School after the war. *Platoon* moved him into widespread prominence after winning a slew of Academy Awards. He drew upon his own experiences and presented a grunt’s (U.S. Army slang from Infantry soldier) view of touring in ‘Nam. The film has few political dimensions to it but does highlight the class and racial exploitations of ordinary soldiers. The overarching theme of the film is to portray the senselessness of the whole conflict.²³

The third primary source for this decade is the videogame, *Conflict in Vietnam*. The creators of the videogame were Bill Stealey (American) and Sid Meier (Canadian-American). In 1982 they founded an American videogames company called MicroProse Software Inc. *Conflict in Vietnam* was made in 1986 and reflected the style of games they developed, mainly vehicle simulations and strategy games.²⁴ The game is rather limited due to the level of videogame technology at the time. It focused on creating a single map layout with round-based actions that are rather limited due to the low number of pixels. Although

²¹ Robert C. Mason, *Chickenhawk* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), chap. 14, Rakuten Kobo.

²² “Oliver Stone,” in *The Wallflower Critical Guide to Contemporary North American Directors*, ed. Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 444.

²³ Ibid, 444-446.

²⁴ “Special Christmas Shopping Guide,” Computer Gaming World, cgwmuseum, November 1987, accessed December 5, 2019, http://www.cgwmuseum.org/galleries/issues/cgw_41.pdf.

limited, it is important to include the videogame of the 1980s, as an uneven number between decades might affect the results. Additionally, it is to show that even with limited resources an image of Vietnamese nature was created, giving a view, however small, into some American mentalities.

The method for analysing the primary sources will be by dividing the representations into Tropicalization and Militant Tropicalization. Tropicalization in this instance means any depictions that contradict themselves or ‘the West.’ Militant Tropicalization is how nature seemingly can harm, intends to harm and how it is used to harm. Both forms of Tropicalization are important as they give a slightly different perspective to this thesis and shows that although one type of Tropicalization can decrease, the other might stay the same.

Without the extensive amount of description and quotations in each chapter, the examples and analysis would rely too heavily on the assumption that the reader has read/watched/played the same primary sources. Being aware that this is unlikely, it is important to include some of the highlights of nature and wildlife that is being depicted in these sources in order to convincingly tie them to Tropicality.

In *Chickenhawk* the author describes Vietnam as being hot and moist. The ridges of the mountains are covered in lush jungle and banana tree hills, while the sky is blue with puffy white clouds. It is this land that camouflaged the Viet Cong and the wildlife. Vietnam was also covered in rice paddies, elephant grass, and coconut trees that gave clearings between the dense jungle overgrowth. It rained enough there to flood the landscape. Some areas were flat, while others were hilly or had sharp-edged ravines. The nights were completely dark, except for the light from the moon. There are conflicting descriptions of the landscape as while moist and full of life it is also barren, where the dust storms are fierce enough to blow down tents.²⁵ On a trip into the ‘Happy Valley,’ Robert (the main character) states that “It was hot and muggy in the valley and it looked like rain.”²⁶ In Vietnam the rains come with the monsoon heat and humidity, quite a contrast to cold autumn and winter rains of the Northern hemisphere. There is such a thing as seasons and varying weather, however, this does not negate the fact that within

²⁵ Robert C. Mason, *Chickenhawk* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), chap. 1-13, Rakuten Kobo.

²⁶ Ibid, chap. 4, Rakuten Kobo.

a few hundred pages the reader absorbs the idea that there are such vast differences in weather and locations that alternating weather patterns are a cause for caution. This stark contrast in weather is a very subtle sign of Tropicalization that one might not notice as it takes place over many pages. Nevertheless, it reads as one piece where the reader learns that nature can be contradicting and difficult to predict.

In the film *Platoon*, the weather is portrayed similarly to the weather in *Chickenhawk*. On the one side, there is lush overgrowth as far as the eye can see (with what looks to be non-tropical trees), where the hilly terrain has rivers and loose rocks strewn about, weakening the soil to the point of being hazardous. The wildlife comprises of ants, leeches, deer, and snakes that intermingle with the people. On the other side, there is the dusty landing strip and the dry landscapes where the American soldiers set up camp. During an aerial view from a helicopter, you spot brown ridges where there are openings in the forestation and seemingly dehydrated trees.²⁷ The film uses the same tropes as the book and the outcome is the same.

Videogames in this decade had limited memory so their landscape choices were very deliberate. *Conflict in Vietnam* shows an orange landscape with intertwining rivers throughout. There are a series of brown mountain looking pixels spread over the map and trees that are a light green colour. The map style only changes once, which is at night. Here the orange map turns black while the other pixels maintain their original colour.²⁸ This is like *Chickenhawk*'s comment on the night being pitch black. The game seemingly tries to mix the two contrasts of wet and dry in one frame. This is seen by the background appearing dry, as it is brown, and there being green trees and rivers running throughout the map. Tropicalization is seemingly capable of being portrayed in a single frame.

Militant Tropicalization is evident in two of the three sources of this decade. In *Chickenhawk*, there were snakes emerging from tree stumps, insects in the mud, and mosquitos flying around at all times. The reason for showing the dangerous

²⁷ *Platoon*, streaming, directed by Oliver Stone (1986; United States: Orion Pictures, 1986).

²⁸ MicroProse Software Inc, *Conflict in Vietnam*, MicroProse Software Inc, Commodore 64, Atari 8-bit family, Apple II, PC Booter, 1986.

and irritating wildlife of Vietnam is likely to show that the wildlife there is different. It is to be considered more wild, dangerous, and imposing upon a person, compared to the calm and nonthreatening animals of ‘the West.’ When it comes to nature itself, Robert, on several occasions, mentions that Vietnamese nature is a disadvantage when in helicopters: “No trees or foothills this time; it was all cleared land, dry rice paddies, and sandy weed-patched fields. It was difficult to believe that a company of VC could be hidden there.”²⁹ “There were thousands of men down there among the bushes and tree clumps, over their heads in elephant grass (...).”³⁰ Both quotes indicate that nature was seemingly used as a path taken by the enemy to go unnoticed and left the helicopter out in the open. When in a firefight the U.S. soldiers often found themselves firing at the plants rather than soldiers, “[b]ullets came from the bushes, from behind paddy dikes, from hidden trenches.”³¹ “Our door gunners were firing over the prone grunts at phantoms in the trees.”³² Militant Tropicalization is evident throughout the book as the plants and animals there were seemingly against them, rather than being a neutral spectator.

Second, for Militant Tropicalization is the film *Platoon*. The main protagonist, Chris (Charlie Sheen) is seen screaming “Ants. I got ants all over my neck.”³³ While desperately trying to get the red ants off as they were biting him. The other soldiers laughingly state that he should be somewhat lucky they are not black ants. This suggests that no matter what happens there is always something worse. “A gook (racist slur used for Vietnamese people) could be standing three feet in front of me, and I wouldn’t know it.”³⁴ The heavy rains were also a tool for the enemy to use, as the combination of dense overgrowth and rain hid them from sight. Even the drinking water, which people from Northern hemispheres take for granted to be somewhat clean, was bad for you. “Don’t drink that,

²⁹ Robert C. Mason, *Chickenhawk* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), chap. 4, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁰ Ibid, chap. 5.

³¹ Ibid, chap. 4.

³² Ibid, chap. 5.

³³ *Platoon*, streaming, directed by Oliver Stone (1986; United States: Orion Pictures, 1986).

³⁴ Ibid.

asshole. You're gonna get malaria."³⁵ Something considered to be the liquid that gives life is something that can give you a deadly disease in Vietnam. It also demonstrates an uneducated fear as Malaria comes from mosquito bites, water can give you many things, but not malaria. The conversations between the soldiers regarding the way the Viet Cong used nature to their advantage were on some occasions tactical, and others were a mere rumour, likely sprung from fear. "Charlie (slang for 'enemy') had claymores strung up in the trees."³⁶ Sgt. Barnes is heard saying this in a conversation regarding as to why another platoon will not be meeting up with them. The conversations based on fear were exaggerated: "You hear that story about the gooks putting chemicals in the grass so we don't fight, so we become pacifists?"³⁷ In the years prior to the plot of the film, and during its release year, there were major demonstrations against the war by pacifists. The director potentially drew upon this as he possibly saw a distinction between himself as a Vietnam War veteran and those who were against the war and those part of the anti-establishment counterculture, making them seem unnatural and influenced by Vietnam itself.

Lastly, the videogame did not contain any signs of nature being harmful or it being used in any way. In the beginning, there is a short summary of the history of the Vietnam War, otherwise, all text is limited to game options. The 1990s videogame will be more detailed and enable deeper analysis.

The 'Othering' caused by Tropicalization is evident in the cases where it is portrayed as dusty, hot, and dry while also being wet, full of life, and moist. Nature is seemingly more violent and wild, unpredictable in its changes, and ferocious in its consequences, unlike the temperate North. This is evident in the film and the book, whereas it is not evident in the videogame at this stage.

Militant Tropicality implies that nature is presented in such a way as to highlight the dangers of nature in Guerrilla warfare.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

"From our vantagepoint Vietnam looked very big and very green with its thick covering of Jungle. It looked like a great place to have a guerrilla war, if you were going to be the guerrilla."³⁸

Almost every piece of nature was in some way damaging to the soldiers that were there. From malaria in the water and explosives in the trees to bullets flying from the bushes. It is unsurprising that nature, which these American creators are portraying in their products, is viewed negatively. This goes on to strengthen stereotypes of Vietnam's deadliness and that nature is to be feared by those who are not its inhabitants. The highly developed West has seemingly either developed past being able to handle these primitive ways of doing warfare, or they were unprepared for this style of warfare. "Shit, he even went to jungle school in Panama. If anybody's be able to get away, it'd be Richards."³⁹ Their nature is seemingly not nature, it is something else.

The 'Othering' that is occurring creates a divide between what acceptable nature should be like (which is what exists in the West), and what nature should not be like (the type portrayed in Vietnam). These negative connotations will fester themselves to their audience and breed a chain of 'Otherness' that would not have been there if they were to visit themselves. Many know that Oliver Stone and Robert Mason were in the war and this gives these portrayals even more credibility, making other opinions by those who were not there seem less trustworthy.

The situation with Vietnam in the 1980s was one of the causes of the portrayals above, however, it was not the sole cause. The relationship between Vietnam and the United States was not good, yet it was steadily improving toward the end of the decade. However, the impact international politics have on a country's population tends to take a while. The main factor for the representations being the way they are is because the director and author were both active in the Vietnam War. With memories still fresh they recreated their experiences in the format of their choice and while doing so consciously or unconsciously created these negative representations of Vietnamese nature. Whichever it is, they went

³⁸ Robert C. Mason, *Chickenhawk* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), chap. 3, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁹ Ibid, chap. 5.

on to influence their audience in such ways as to make some sort of template as to how nature should look.

3. Representations and Memories: the Vietnam War in the 1990s.

The 1990s saw continuing improvements in the relationship between the United States and Vietnam. In April 1991 the United States presented Vietnam with a roadmap for a quid-pro-quo normalization between the two nations with hopes of settling their embargo problems. From 1991-1993 Vietnam actively cooperated in implementing the “Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict,” officially ending the Cambodia-Vietnam war (1978-1989). In doing so, Vietnam showed that they were not interested in conflicts abroad any longer. In 1993 a favourable report by the U.S. Senate Select Committee on the POW/MIA affairs in Vietnam made it possible for the Clinton Administration to convince the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to start lending money to Vietnam in order to rebuild their economy. Following this upwards trend, in 1994, President Bill Clinton removed the trade embargo on Vietnam which also further aided their crippled economy. It was not until July 11th of 1995 that a normalization of relations was announced, leading to embassies being opened in both countries. With the gradual improvements, the sources should reflect this.⁴⁰

As with the previous chapter, and those to come, a briefing on the creators of the sources is necessary in order to better analyse the causes of Tropicalization. The author of *The Things They Carried* (1990) is Tim O’Brien (1946-), yet another Vietnam War Veteran. He served as an infantryman during the Vietnam War and went on to work for *The Washington Post* after having graduated from Harvard. His service was from 1969-1970 in the 3rd Platoon, this being even in the same unit that committed the My Lai Massacre a year prior.⁴¹ After *If I Die in a Combat Zone* was published, he became established as one of America’s leading writers of his generation. *The Things They Carried* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and went on to win the National Magazine Award. It was also selected to be included in John Updike’s *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*.

⁴⁰ "Timeline: US-Vietnam Relations," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, no. 3 (2010): 352.

⁴¹ D. J. R. Bruckner, “A Storyteller For the War That Won’t End,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1990, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/09/20/specials/obrien-storyteller.html>.

The following source is considered by many to be an all-time best film, *Forrest Gump*.⁴² Tom Hanks recently received the Cecil B. DeMille Award at the Golden Globes for his outstanding career. This award is given to those who have greatly contributed to the world of entertainment. One of the scenes in his award ceremony montage was from *Forrest Gump*. It was directed by Robert Zemeckis (1952-) in 1994, who went on to win the Academy Award for Best Director for it. Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson consider it to be *the Baby Boomer film*. It was also the most commercially successful film of its year. It features a clean canvas Gump partaking in all the major US incidents of his time. It is critiqued for crafting a revisionist history designed to promote a 'God Bless America' ideology, although this argument is debatable. The film also seems to suggest that American citizens will believe anything because of its appearance, illustrated with the scene where he is running across America for no reason and yet people follow him.⁴³

Lastly, taking a more active role, is the videogame. The 1990s saw videogames transcend into movable figures on a screen. *SEAL Team* (1993) was created by Electronic Arts, a company known for its long history of contributing to the gaming industry. It was founded by Trip Hawkins in 1982 (an American entrepreneur and previous Director of Strategy and Marketing at Apple Computer), who was later succeeded by Larry Probst in 1991 (An American businessman).⁴⁴ Videogame technology still has another decade to go before getting to the same story-telling quality as films and books, but these games are the roots of these shooting style games (FPS). It is a good indicator of how they thought nature could be placed and used during the battles in Vietnam.

Following the pattern of starting with the standard Tropicalization, the descriptions of nature made in *The Things They Carried* are no exception to this theory. Like *Chikenhawk*, there are colliding descriptions of the weather conditions. On one occasion it is raining for a week without stop, causing the rivers to overflow their banks ultimately flooding large areas. In another scene, it

⁴³ "Robert Zemeckis," in *The Wallflower Critical Guide to Contemporary North American Directors*, ed. Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 582-584.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Fleming, "We See Farther - A History of Electronic Arts," accessed December 18, 2019. https://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/130129/we_see_farther_a_history_of_.php?print=1.

is so hot that there are rice paddies that are so dry they cannot grow anything. The heat of the day would plummet at night making the soldiers require both light and heavy-duty clothing to survive. There are mountains that go up into the clouds where it is constantly foggy, deep jungles with multilayered canopies that let no light through, and muddy rivers. They traverse this differing terrain while dealing with a multitude of bugs, particularly the mosquitos that carry malaria.⁴⁵

Looking at the film, *Forrest Gump* is not a traditional Vietnam War film, as only one scene depicts the war. This forces the director to present the essence of the war in a short time span. On Forrest's helicopter ride he sees the flat grasslands with rivers scarring the earth and what looks to be a forest in the distance. He and the other soldiers find themselves walking along gravel roads with palm trees on the side, the sun glaring down at them. In another scene, they are walking through wet paddy fields which leads straight into a night scene in which they are wading through chest-high waters in the pouring rain. The last nature scene pictures them passing through the thick jungle to emerge in a clearing.⁴⁶ Lasting a fraction of the length of the film, Robert Zemeckis still managed to portray Vietnam as a country of drastically differing climates and terrains.

The first Vietnam War game with a moveable character is *SEAL Team*. The opening screen depicts Vietnam on a map as a light green colour. The options screen depicts brown rocks and brown grass, and the game's mission screen shows a dry landscape with blue skies. In the gameplay, the terrain is a jungle with a swamp with dark green grass, dark waters, palm trees, and what looks like banana trees. Toppled trees lay strewn around on the short-grassed ground. Bats/birds can be seen flying in the sky.⁴⁷ Like the previous game, there is Tropicalization occurring, however, it is rather minor. It is evident that the creators were influenced by the idea that Vietnam is somehow a wet and dry country and chose to depict this.

Focusing now on the Militant Tropicality, *The Things They Carried*, in similarity to *Chickenhawk*, mentions the nature and animals of the country, but the author

⁴⁵ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (London: Flamingo, 1991), chap. 1-22, Rakuten Kobo.

⁴⁶ *Forrest Gump*, streaming, directed by Robert L. Zemeckis (1994; United States: Paramount Pictures, 1994).

⁴⁷ Electronic Arts, *SEAL Team*, Electronic Arts, MS-DOS, 1993.

puts a lot less focus on the way the enemy interacts with nature, only mentioning that they called them ghosts. "The way he came out at night. How you never really saw him, just thought you did. Almost magical – appearing, disappearing. He could blend with the land, changing form, becoming trees and grass."⁴⁸ This quote illustrates the Viet Cong's ability to merge with the land around him and by doing so creates an ever-dangerous presence during the night. The enemy would also plant landmines in the grass causing U.S. soldiers to be blown up and cover the trees with their remains. The author gives a colourful example of how out of the ordinary the wildlife of Vietnam is compared to more temperate climates. This unique wildlife made some soldiers paranoid. "Talking about bugs, for instance: how the worst thing in Nam was the goddamn bugs. Big giant killer bugs, he'd say, mutant bugs, bugs with fucked up DNA, bugs (...)."⁴⁹ the author continues to emphasize how nature affects the soldiers rather than how it aids the enemy. "They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself- Vietnam, the place, the soil- a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces."⁵⁰ It's interesting how soldiers that are on the ground in Vietnam become increasingly cautious towards otherwise harmless creatures, like small bugs. Their twisted mentalities towards the wildlife distorts the potential reality of the bug, making it more than just a bug. Admitting that the bug is natural would mean that a U.S. soldier could not withstand an insect.

Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks) is portrayed as a simpleton and has not much to say regarding the nature of Vietnam. Rather it is Lt. Dan who gives out warnings to his new recruits, like while standing in their camp "Get your hands down. Do not salute me. There are goddamn snipers all around this area who'd love to grease an officer."⁵¹ Having arrived by helicopter, where the scenic background was wet marshes and a forest in the far distance, it is somewhat strange that the Lieutenant would worry about getting shot. He was likely referring to the ability of

⁴⁸ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (London: Flamingo, 1991), chap. 20, Rakuten Kobo.

⁴⁹ Ibid, chap. 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid, chap. 1.

⁵¹ *Forrest Gump*, streaming, directed by Robert L. Zemeckis (1994; United States: Paramount Pictures, 1994).

the Viet Cong to seemingly merge into the environment around them, making every location a potential threat. He also mentions the brutality of nature directly “[The] Mekong [river] will eat a grunts feet right off his legs.”⁵² Making it evident that it is not only how the enemy interacts with nature that is a threat, but nature itself. There is also the scene where Forrest gets shot in the butt and at first thought he believed it to be an insect bite, meaning that there was already an underlying thought that a Vietnamese insect is capable of biting as hard as being shot in the butt. Lastly, in the same scene as being shot, it is the trees that are shooting them, or at least that is what the director is trying to convey by not showing the enemy at all, in doing so he created a scene where it is the very nature of Vietnam that the U.S. soldiers are fighting against.⁵³

The videogame does not have a lot to offer regarding Militant Tropicality, likely as it is still an early stage of game development, but there is one sentence “Attack the VC bush!”⁵⁴ which although brief gives a prime example of what mentalities were connected to the nature of Vietnam.

The ‘Othering’ done to the scenery has still the same impact of those that were occurring in the sources from the 1980s, however, there are seemingly more infrequent signs of Militant Tropicality. The nature is still hot and cold, wet and dry, barren and lush, continuing the same depiction of a bipolar nature. The Militant Tropicalization is evident, it comes forward pretty clearly in the scene in *The Things They Carried* where two grunts were simply having fun and one accidentally stepped on a landmine and got blown up, literally into a tree of all things, making for an even more gruesome depiction of the landscape.

The wildlife and diseases, yet again, play a role in one of the sources. There is now an even longer list of how small and invisible things cause harm to the soldiers. The decades so far have found it important to highlight that the visible aspects of nature are not what tends to harm you most, it is the things you cannot see. This makes it impossible for outsiders to gain an image of a safe space in Vietnam as everything can harm you independent of location.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Electronic Arts, *SEAL Team*, Electronic Arts, MS-DOS, 1993.

The only person who was in the Vietnam War was the author. Evident in the details included on how nature looks and works in Vietnam, there being an ever-present emphasis on how dangerous it is. A noticeable difference is also that the details of how the Viet Cong interacted with nature are rather scarce, this could either be due to that he did not come across as many instances as perhaps Robert C. Mason did. It could also be that public interest has switched from how the Viet Cong were doing things to a stronger focus on the American experience of it all. This is also somewhat true for the film as one does not see the enemy at all in *Forrest Gump*, simply how the Americans interact with nature, so nature was an enemy and a tool used by the enemy, but now in the 1990s it is being portrayed as increasingly less of a tool and more as an enemy and a hindrance.

This can be explained by the state of the international relations between the two nations at that time. In the 1980s there was an improving trend in their relationship, and this progressed further in the 1990s. The author was in the war and included a lot of gruesome ways that nature can harm, but in contrast, both the videogame's and the film's depiction of nature is a lot milder.

It becomes evident in the examples presented from the 1990s sources that the Tropicalization of nature can change. Suggesting perhaps that if there is a continuously improving relationship between the countries, we should discover either more favourable treatment of nature or less emphasis on nature as the main antagonist in the following decades.

4. A Shift in representations and the Dawn of Advanced Videogames: the Vietnam War in the 2000s.

The United States – Vietnam relations started the new millennia on a positive note. President Bill Clinton became the first president to visit a unified Vietnam in the year 2000, shaping a good start to their relations for the millennia to come. The following year the United States granted funding to the Vietnam Education Foundation. Regarding their developments in military actions, it was not until November of 2003 that the USS *Vandergrift* became the first U.S. Navy vessel to make a port call to Ho Chi Ming City since 1975. Although there were many upsides there were also several downsides. For example, in 2004 the United States through its Religious Freedom Act viewed Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern as determined that the Vietnamese government was violating human rights. However, this was clearly not too big of an issue as the label was removed two years later and they assisted Vietnam in becoming an official member of the World Trade Organization. Throughout the decade Vietnam and the United States had a variety of meetings and they all contained talks of cooperation and assistance, meaning that the whole decade showed signs of improvements.⁵⁵

Although there were improvements from the start of the new millennia, the world of popular culture did not forget the Vietnam War, producing new depictions. The book, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967* (2004) was written by David Maraniss (1949 -). He is a New York Times bestselling author and associate editor at *The Washington Post*. His hard work has made him a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize three times, and one-time winner.⁵⁶ He is also a fellow in the Society of American Historians.⁵⁷ Unlike the authors before him, he did not serve in the military.

The film, *Rules of Engagement*, was directed by William Friedkin (1935 -). He played a big role in the transformation of Hollywood in the 1970s. He was regarded as arrogant and confrontational as he was renowned for a volatile and

⁵⁵ "Timeline: US-Vietnam Relations," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, no. 3 (2010): 353-354.

⁵⁶ "David Maraniss," David Maraniss, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://davidmaraniss.com/>.

⁵⁷ "David Maraniss," The Washington Post, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/david-a-maraniss/>.

dictatorial approach on set, which some might say helps infuse his films with their bitter edge and cold cynicism. *Rules of Engagement* was one of his commercially successful films. It is a military courtroom drama concerning the increased military presence in the Middle East. Its link to the Vietnam War is that Col. Childers (Samuel L. Jackson) had served in the Vietnam War many years prior and is now being put on trial for his actions in the Middle East. Friedkin wanted this film to also bring some form of closure to the Vietnam War by depicting a scene between Col. Childers and a former Viet Cong officer saluting each other.⁵⁸

The videogame company, *N-Fusion Interactive*, is an independent video game development studio located in New Jersey. It was founded by Jeff Birns in 1997. He had previously worked at different game companies, such as New Realm Entertainment, American Laser Games, and COLECO.⁵⁹ The reasonably small crew went on to produce *Line of Sight: Vietnam* (2003), which was a lot more advanced than the previous games, enabling better analysis of how games are Tropicalizing Vietnam.

Looking at standard Tropicalization, the book, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967*, mentions the monsoon weather where it would rain for a week and flood areas, making the paths difficult to traverse. There are also a lot of comments on sunlight and dust throughout the book.⁶⁰ Unlike other authors, David Maraniss did not mention Vietnam's cold season. He did specify that Vietnam is significantly hotter than America and that the air feels thick. "The October sun pounded down on them and the temperatures shot to ninety-four."⁶¹ The character sees rice paddies, dikes, forested mountains, and overgrown canopies while the land is also dusty and dry on occasions. "The trees in the jungle beyond the draw were about 120 feet tall at the highest and at places formed a complete canopy overhead. The marshy soil underfoot, littered with deadfall brush and trees, made for slow moving."⁶²

⁵⁸ "William Friedkin," in *The Wallflower Critical Guide to Contemporary North American Directors*, ed. Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 188-190.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Yanes, "N-FUSION'S JEFF BIRNS ON FOUNDING A STUDIO, SHIFTING TO MOBILE, AND DEUS EX: THE FALL," last modified April 18, 2014, <http://www.gamesauce.biz/2014/04/18/n-fusions-jeff-birns-on-founding-a-studio-shifting-to-mobile-and-deus-ex-the-fall/>.

⁶⁰ David Maraniss, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), chap. 1-28, Rakuten Kobo.

⁶¹ Ibid, chap. 12.

⁶² Ibid.

In the film, *Rules of Engagement*, there is a short scene where Samuel L. Jackson is partaking in the Vietnam War in 1968. William Friedkin would have to depict Vietnam within a short time period, as was the case with *Forrest Gump*. The soldiers can be seen walking through a dense, green, overgrown, jungle containing a variety of flora, where the dense canopy and the overhanging clouds cause a lack of penetrating sunlight. The humid conditions are causing moss and mushrooms to grow on trees and watery swamp areas to be produced. One group of soldiers is seen wading through a swamp. The other group is in a hilly area covered in bushes.⁶³ This is the first film with a one-dimensional scenery regarding the weather there, whilst other films have had wet and dry scenes this one only depicts the wet climate, making the Tropicalization more subtle.

The videogame, *Line of Sight: Vietnam*, also has a one-dimensional view on Vietnamese nature. Whereas the missions alternate between day and night, raining and non-raining, the landscape itself remains the same. The terrain is hilly and mountainous with a series of assorted trees, including palm trees that reach ridiculous heights. The daytime sky is either clouded, blue or orange and features a constant lingering of fog in the distance. Several of the missions feature waterfalls next to tall weeds and rivers in ravines covered by steep cliff sides. The sounds are a mixture of birds chirping, insect buzzing, and frog noises.⁶⁴ All of this contributes to creating a sense of dense jungle terrain that is extremely difficult to navigate.

The book has one real action scene where the Viet Cong is taking advantage of the nature around them, making it a clear depiction of Militant Tropicalization. This scene is when a few of the VCs decide to secure themselves up in the trees while the remainder were dug in, in covered trenches. The two-tier attack was effective until the VCs in the trees were spotted and being without any solid cover were swiftly taken care of. There was some real concern regarding the wildlife, such as the abundance of ants and malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and in particular, the tree leeches, where an entire section of the book was dedicated to

⁶³ *Rules of Engagement*, streaming, directed by William Friedkin (2000; United States: Paramount Pictures, 2000).

⁶⁴ nFusion Interactive, *Line of Sight: Vietnam*, nFusion Interactive, Microsoft Windows, 2003.

how they irritated the soldiers.⁶⁵ “And there was the patient with cerebral malaria, a virulent form of falciparum malaria, which unlike the more common vivax malaria was prevalent in North Vietnam and resistant to the pills passed out by the U.S. military.”⁶⁶ This demonstrated that even when considered prepared, Vietnam’s nature will still manage to cause harm. Even diseases that should have been commonly incapacitated by taking medication are a major threat to lives. Even more interesting is that the author phrases a lot of the horrors of Vietnam as ‘hear-say,’ such as the scene where before the soldiers were shipped out to Vietnam they were told about the “poisonous snakes and plants, mysterious diseases, leeches, chiggers, ticks, tigers, contaminated water.”⁶⁷ “[the] men heard stories about soldiers stepping on punji sticks laced with human feces, and about puddle jumper bugs that bit out chunks of human flesh, and about the three-step viper, a snake that bites you and three steps later you’re dead.”⁶⁸ Hinting towards some form of conscious Tropicalization done by the author to indicate just how exaggerated some of the ideas of how Vietnamese nature are. The author is emphasising that a lot of the events that did occur within Vietnam are fabricated.

In the film, there is a brief encounter with Militant Tropicalization which occurs after the soldiers split up into groups. The soldiers toss a coin to see who will go through the swamps and who will go up the hill. Those that walked through the swamp were targeted by Viet Cong soldiers peering out of hatches in the ground, as well as being targeted by VCs from behind the treeline. The other group goes up a hilly area and hear soldiers speaking Vietnamese in the bushes ahead.⁶⁹ It is clear that the intention was to highlight that the Vietnamese were everywhere and could hide anywhere. The only subtleties that would give away their position were the sounds made whilst speaking, as the ones quietly hiding in the swamp were never discovered.

⁶⁵ David Maraniss, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), chap. 27, Rakuten Kobo.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, chap. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid, chap. 3.

⁶⁹ *Rules of Engagement*, streaming, directed by William Friedkin (2000; United States: Paramount Pictures, 2000).

Following the trend of increasingly intricate signs of Tropicalization in videogames, *Line of Sight: Vietnam* depicts the VC as wearing black shirts that blend into the night missions while the NVM (North Vietnamese Army) are wearing green to merge with the jungle. The only distinct mission that was different was when the PMC (Player Main Character) had to clear out some tunnels the enemy had dug out in the mountainsides. It is important to note that this is the first-time game developers were starting to integrate more vocal storytelling into their videogames. While still mainly in brief cutscenes or monologues (rather than interactive conversation) the PMC gives a few monologues at the beginning and end of every mission “(...) came across swarms of VC and NVA in the jungle. It seemed like every tree had a rifleman behind it.”⁷⁰ Giving a sense that you are always outnumbered as the trees count as potential enemies.

Along with gradually improving international circumstances, there has been a shift in the ‘Othering’ done to the nature of Vietnam. What was once depicting sharp contrasts of wet and dry, cold and hot, pretty and unsettling has now become more monogamous with its representations (the exception being the book where there are a few contrasts, however, even here it is toned-down). The videogame and film depict a single landscape where there are minor changes in nature, a stark contrast to the 1980s where one film would try to depict every possible scene of nature in one instance.

Militant Tropicality as a concept aims to show that during guerrilla warfare the nature of an area becomes hostile. While there were incidents such as Viet Cong hiding in trees and bushes and mosquitos carrying strains of malaria, the exaggeration of the damage that can be caused is often reduced to ‘hear-say’ rather than being depicted as a natural circumstance to be expected in Vietnam.

With a clear reduction in harsh representations of ‘Othering’ that is taking place, we must look as to why this is occurring. There are two factors contributing to this. First, is the ongoing trend of improving relationships between the two countries. No longer do the horrors of the Vietnam War loom in the background of popular culture creations, which affects the second factor, the creators. None

⁷⁰ nFusion Interactive, *Line of Sight: Vietnam*, nFusion Interactive, Microsoft Windows, 2003.

of the creators were active participants in the Vietnam War. The thoughts and experiences in their works are second-handed, potentially by some of the works earlier mentioned.

5. Signs of Change: the Vietnam War in the 2010s.

Many might have come across a few of the three upcoming sources, as they are the most recent. With the improving relations and the decreasing amount of Tropicalization occurring so far, are there still any negative meanings behind these sources?

The 2010s compared to the other decades has had fewer improvements. That is not to say that things have gotten worse, merely that with many years having passed since the war there are not too many major issues left to resolve. This decade rather sees the United States improving on already mended issues and aiding in other non-war related matters. For example, the United States has been aiding Vietnam in modernizing its renewable energy sources.⁷¹ In 2014 the United States approved a relaxation of its arms embargo on Vietnam, and in 2016 President Obama, on an official state visit, announced to be fully lifting the embargo.⁷² And although there might have been international condemnation towards Vietnam's breaking of the Human Rights Laws in 2017, President Trump neglected to mention this when he visited the nation, which was plausibly done in order to maintain such relations.⁷³

The final three sources for Tropicalization begin with the book *The Lotus Eaters* (2010). Tatjana Soli is an American novelist and short-story writer. The book won the Hames Tait Black Memorial Prize and was also a New York Times Bestseller. Born in 1963 she certainly was not in the Vietnam War but did spend almost a decade researching Vietnam and the war before writing and publishing her book.⁷⁴

The final film is Steven Spielberg's *The Post*. It stars Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks. It is based on a true story on the work done by journalists at *The*

⁷¹ Pham Trong Thuc, Rena Bitter, "US to lend Technical Help to Vietnam in Renewable Energy Sector," last modified February 21, 2014, <https://news.biharprabha.com/2014/02/us-to-lend-technical-help-to-vietnam-in-renewable-energy-sector/>.

⁷² "Obama lifts US embargo on lethal arms sales to Vietnam," BBC News, last modified May 23, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36356695>.

⁷³ "The Trump administration fails to call out Vietnam on its dismal human rights record," The Washington Post, last modified June 23, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-trump-administration-fails-to-call-out-vietnam-on-its-dismal-human-rights-record/2017/06/22/fc7a316e-574e-11e7-b38e-35fd8e0c288f_story.html?noredirect=on.

⁷⁴ "Bio," Tatjana Soli, accessed November 22, 2019, <http://tatjanasoli.com/bio/>.

Washington Post and their efforts to publish the Pentagon Papers (which are about the 20-year involvement by the US in Vietnam). Steven Spielberg (1946-), along with a few others, is credited with “rescuing American cinema from the commercial doldrums of the 1960s.”⁷⁵ He is also accused of reducing the artform of Hollywood cinema to a ‘merchandise-friendly’ beacon for dominant values.⁷⁶

The last game is *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, a part of the famous Call of Duty (CoD) series developed by Treyarch. It was developed by Treyarch (an American game developer) and published by Activision (an American game publisher). Further, it is owned by Activision Blizzard (an American holding company). Activision was founded by David Crane, who along with Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller, and Bob Whitehead, left Atari after being treated unfairly for what they believed was their creative property. They later joined up with Jim Levy who helped them get the capital required to start producing their own games. Jim Levy later went on to become the CEO.⁷⁷

Standard Tropicalization is still ongoing in this decade. Evident in *The Lotus Eaters* as it has contrasting depictions of Vietnamese nature and geography. It is dry, wet, cold and hot, there are also mountains and ravines.⁷⁸ However, compared to the others, it is noticeable that the amount of contrasting geography mentioned has decreased significantly.

The film, *The Post*, sticks to a one-dimensional portrayal of Vietnam. Steven Spielberg chose to represent Vietnam as wet and muddy. In the camp you see puddles and when on patrol in the dark it is raining. There are also no portrayals of the wildlife and even the amount of nature shown is kept to a minimum. The reason for this is that the entire scene is focused on the preparation of the troops and the fight they find themselves in. The film does not necessarily even attempt to portray Vietnam, seemingly due to the location no longer being of relevance to the storytelling.⁷⁹ The scene is significantly shorter than other feature-length films,

⁷⁵ “Steven Spielberg,” in *The Wallflower Critical Guide to Contemporary North American Directors*, ed. Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 515.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 515-519.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Fleming, “The History Of Activision,” accessed November 22, 2019, https://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1537/the_history_of_activision.php?print=1.

⁷⁸ Tatjana Soli, *The Lotus Eaters* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), chap. 1-20, Rakuten Kobo.

⁷⁹ *The Post*, streaming, directed by Steven Spielberg (2017; United States: 20th Century Fox, Universal Pictures, 2017).

however, that does not discredit it as a source, much like *Forrest Gump* it forces the director to represent Vietnam in a very short timeframe.

The last source, the videogame *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, has a Vietnam War mission where Vietnam is depicted as dry and full of dust, which is somewhat standard for most of the U.S. bases that are depicted in varying sources. Yet, like in *The Post*, there are puddles to be seen on the ground. When approaching the mountains surrounding the valley the PMC is in, you notice dry trees, dry grass, and other bleak plants.⁸⁰ There has been a development in the way the nature of Vietnam is being depicted. Meaning a decrease in the amount of Tropicalization throughout the sources and also a decrease in the amount of times contrasts and negatively loaded words are mentioned.

Nevertheless, there is still Militant Tropicalization ongoing, for example, in *The Lotus Eaters*: "Watch for obstructions such as large stones on a path or fallen logs or broken-down wheelbarrows. Keep an eye out for any unnatural appearances in fences, paint, vegetation, dust. Most of the men refused to use the outdoor latrines out of similar fears. After enough time, even the palm fronds waving in the wind came to look like razor-sharp knives."⁸¹ The description in the book confronts the reader with the idea that the landscape itself is comparable to that of weaponry and things that can harm. "They were dropped into this mudhole, didn't know that the dry area on the map became a lake at the wrong time of the year, heavy and thick like quicksand, and they were stuck; when the bullets started flying they realized they had been ambushed; sitting ducks, the whole unit wiped out minutes off the plane."⁸² Being a common natural phenomenon, the locals took this into consideration, which the U.S soldiers did not, leading to their downfall. The blame was on their own poor preparation. The book rather makes it seem as if it was nature's fault that they ended up in a situation that cost them their lives.

Reading the book, the number of accounts that seem to depict nature as negative was not only different than many before (like the lack of diseases, insects, and

⁸⁰ Activision, *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, Activision, Microsoft Windows, Nintendo DS, PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, OS X, 2010.

⁸¹ Tatjana Soli, *The Lotus Eaters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), chap. 6, Rakuten Kobo.

⁸² Ibid, chap. 5.

animals that are causing harm), but also that the overall number of times nature is being portrayed negatively is lower. However, it still has a long way to go before there is none: "At six o'clock they broke through the jungle and found themselves on dry ground again. They had not encountered a single enemy soldier, yet it seemed the land itself, inhospitable and somber, was their enemy, bristled at their trespass, wore down their spirits."⁸³ Whereas there has been a decrease in Tropicality since the 1980s it seems that a book where nature is not defiled and rendered to a mere device to harm its foreign visitors has yet to come.

The Militant Tropicality in *The Post* is shown as a tree blowing up and gunfire from the treeline, while never seeing the actual enemy. This scene, like the one in *Forrest Gump*, substitutes the enemy with the trees and nature itself.⁸⁴

Call of Duty: Black Ops, unlike many other sources, sticks mainly to a dry and flat depiction of Vietnam without interacting with the jungle. Here the flat dry terrain becomes the enemy. Although a player can destroy many enemies, owing to how flat the terrain is, the enemy can re-enforce with hundreds of soldiers and tanks with ease due to this.⁸⁵ This is completely different from the usually hidden enemy in the bushes. But even in taking a different approach, nature is still something that aids the enemy and never the U.S soldiers.

It is evident that there is somewhat of a difference in the way Tropicality and Militant Tropicality is occurring in the 2010s compared to the decades before it. What is also evident is the decreasing amount it is occurring. The 2010s saw the standard form of Tropicalization occurring on occasion, however, it was the decade with the least amount overall. With regards to the Militant Tropicalization that is occurring there were a lot less than other decades, there are no insects unlike most other decades and the effects of diseases were hardly mentioned at all.

⁸³ Ibid, chap. 6.

⁸⁴ *The Post*, streaming, directed by Steven Spielberg (2017; United States: 20th Century Fox, Universal Pictures, 2017).

⁸⁵ Activision, *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, Activision, Microsoft Windows, Nintendo DS, PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, OS X, 2010.

6. Conclusion.

There has been an improvement in the international relations between the United States and Vietnam since the war. This has had an indirect influence in several sectors, such as trade and military cooperation, as well as popular culture.

There was a slow decrease in extreme depictions of Vietnamese nature over the four decades. This is evident by the fact that there was on average fewer comments on how nature was harming people and less contradicting nature(s). It was increasingly not cold and hot, or wet and dry within proximity of each other, either geographically or timewise. While the 1980s *Platoon* would have Charlie Sheen drenched in rain and in the next scene completely dry in a dusty camp, the 2010s depiction where it was simply wet throughout *The Post*.

There was also a slow decrease in violent depictions of Vietnamese nature. The 2010s depicted Militant Tropicality as more the fault of, and mentalities of, the Americans involved rather than that nature is either being used against them or is an entity that seeks to destroy them. Contrast this to the 1980s where nature was depicted as a tool employed by the Vietnamese to hide themselves in, to fire bullets from, and to disguise bombs in, as well as, the fact that nature itself was considered to be sending insects and snakes against the U.S soldiers to spite them. Showing that there is a difference in the way Tropicalization and Militant Tropicalization was occurring and that there was a decrease over time.

This gradual change from the 1980s to the 2010s can be ascribed to the fact that in this time span there has been an improving relationship between these two countries. Their relationship went from gradual improvements, such as improving the work effort of finding the MIA soldiers, to a sitting U.S. President visiting a unified Vietnam. The creation of a bilateral relationship has immensely benefitted them both, and in doing so has indirectly influenced these sources. According to the evidence found within this research the thoughts and mentalities the American creators have towards Vietnam improve when there is an improvement in the (political) relationships between the two nations. A by-product is that there is a decrease in intentional or unintentional negative representations of each other. Another important aspect is that with time there were increasingly fewer

creators that were directly involved in the war, these creators have a second-hand relationship with the war and as such might not have the animosity that their Veteran counterparts might have.

What has become evident while investigating Tropicality is that the limited sources that were implemented are indeed, limited. The results would potentially be different if other, or more, sources were implemented in the research, this is not to claim that the work so far has no merit in explaining the changes over time and why they occur, but rather that a more detailed overview of the changes would be possible. There is also the fact that with Tropicality being in its practical infancy there was a rather large lack of analytical tools available for the research, making it somewhat simple. I, however, would argue that it is an important first step in opening up the long theoretical historiography of Tropicality to a more practical field.

The theoretical works by my peers, of which this practical text is based, are lacking in the most important of ways. These works are unable to give a clear and practical method to detect Tropicality. Using the broad terms of Tropicality and Militant Tropicality, where one looks for negative and contradicting connotations in the varying depictions, is as mentioned, a good start.

With my own work completed, I would like to take this opportunity to mention other areas where, not only this paper's research but Tropicality in general, can be extended to. Within this paper, some important factors mentioned are the backgrounds and mentalities of the creators. International relations seemingly influence the way Tropicalization is depicted throughout the decades, however, this is not necessarily the only answer as to why these changes have come to pass. Depending on what the individual creators deem to be important to depict will influence and change those very depictions. There is a high likelihood that a decrease in interest of the Vietnam War, potentially shaped by not experiencing the war, contributed equally as much to the way nature is depicted. There is also the increased awareness of stereotypical depictions, and the creators, wanting to depict a more realistic or nuanced Vietnam War, actively avoided some of these portrayals. A plan for future research might be to take a deep dive into the

mentalities and upbringing of the individual creators and in doing so unlock the cause for showing nature the way they did.

Tropicality in general however, needs to branch out and go further-afield than my popular culture narrative, it should extend into sources such as educational books and tourism pamphlets. Tropicality is more than just the negative, it is a way of seeing certain narratives. Pamphlets tend to romanticize local nature and it would be interesting to see how the choice of the photograph was decided and why.

As fun an endeavour as this thesis has been, it has also taught me a lot about how to approach a topic that has few earlier works. I found this an important experience. One that in the future will serve me well should I find myself working with a new topic no one else approached. Having the tools required to research a new field is equally, if not more, important than efficiently being able to apply someone else's.

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