

# Political Discourses on the Vietnam War as seen through American Movies

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**POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE VIETNAM  
WAR AS SEEN THROUGH AMERICAN MOVIES**

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POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH AMERICAN MOVIES

Diplomski rad

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Zadar, 2023.



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Zadar, 15. prosinca 2023.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, American cinema has aimed to depict war conflicts. That kind of screen display goes back a hundred years and continues to this day. During this period, Hollywood tried to interpret and give its judgment to war narratives. While in most cases the movie celebrated American victories and heroes, the Vietnam War brought special changes. With the USA experiencing great shame and its first real defeat on the battlefield, Hollywood went in a different direction. American victories and battles were no longer celebrated, but the focus shifted to war veterans and their experiences from that war. There is a political line that aims to analyze how correct and justified the American intervention in Vietnam was. Therefore, these movies are very different from those of previous periods, considering that the directors decide for the first time to question the decisions of the American governments.

My analysis will be focused on how selected movies perceived the Vietnam War and how they present segments relevant to the political discourse on the Vietnam War. At the very beginning of the work, the situation in the society in the USA during the war will be presented. While the war was being waged on a distant territory, the USA had even greater difficulty in securing peace within its own borders. This is where the protests of students, women and African Americans stand out. Furthermore, the paper will analyze how the theme of war was presented in the past and what turn happened with the appearance of films about Vietnam. In the next chapter, I will present the main elements and parameters that characterize films about the war in Vietnam.

After that I will start with the analysis of the selected movies. The first movie to be analyzed is *Deer Hunter* from 1979 directed by Michael Cimino. The plot of the film follows three friends who enjoy life before going to Vietnam and experiencing the horrors of war. The next subject of analysis will be Francis Coppola's movie *Apocalypse Now*, which deals with the character of Captain Willard, whose mission is to go to Vietnam and find the crazed Sergeant Kurtz. Furthermore, the paper will analyze George P. Cosmatos' masterpiece *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, where the focus is on John Rambo's return to Vietnam. Finally, Oliver Stone's film *Platoon* will be analyzed. The movie follows the character of Chris Taylor and his unit during his stay in Vietnam.

The main goal of my paper is to show important segments, that stretch through all the movie, have an influence in shaping the discourse about the war in Vietnam. Firstly, through characters' actions and thoughts I will show what the war meant for the people, especially soldiers. Moreover, I will try to explain the main problem in government's treatment towards veterans and ordinary soldiers. It will be shown how an individual copes with the burden of war and how he tries to overcome all the difficulties that the new post-war life brings. Considering that men were shamed during the war, each movie introduces an element of masculinity. The goal is to present how each film analyzes male characters and their personalities as well as their changes through Vietnam. Male-female relationship will also be analyzed, considering that it was an important instrument in remasculinization. Furthermore, the element of masculinity is important for the formation of the nationalist spirit. This segment supposed to unite american citizenry in the depressive post-Vietnam period. Through some instances and quotes, patriotism will be analyzed. This paper will also analyze the portrayal of the Vietnamese in American films. Through certain scenes and quotes, the perspective that the Americans had about Vietnam and their culture was created. In general, all the segments that will be analyzed served the directors in shaping their opinion and evaluation of the American intervention in Vietnam. Therefore, the following analysis will help to give a final verdict on the political connotations of a particular movie and to assess how much certain movies try to convey a deeper message.

## 2. WAR AND SOCIETY

The period of the Vietnam War is a controversial period in American history. While the war was going on far away from the homeland, the situation in the country was simmering. The reason for this can be found in the past. While the USA was presented as the protector of freedom, democratic rights and liberal ideas in many previous cases, this war has completely turned that story around. Because of this, doubts began to arise among the people about the correctness of their government and its decisions. The first sign of this was the draft of soldiers, which caused resentment and rebellion within society. Although at the beginning of the war the number of troops was limited and the number of recruitment was small, the need to win the war led to changes. Dissatisfaction with the people's choice grew because of its unfairness. This was reflected in the fact that people of poorer financial status were forced to go to the battlefield. The absurdity was that drafted people were more involved in fighting with the enemy than the soldiers themselves. All this led to a large protest against the draft, which resulted in an increased number of those who avoided military service.

The already mentioned protests were one of the signals that the American government made a mistake in the intervention in Vietnam. The protests themselves were started by students who represented a generation unprepared for war. Their youth and potential should not have been wasted on the war years. They wanted to be free and to establish their own life-style what is the opposite of government's decision. The early years of the war were marked by popular support for President Johnson in his decision. „At the start of 1965, a poll had shown that only about 40 percent of Americans supported the policy of Lyndon Johnson's government of becoming more involved in Vietnam, Despite protests during the spring, the number actually rose. By the summer, two-thirds of Americans said that they backed the government's approach.“(Cooke 15).

At that point, the students were lonely and in the minority as far as opposition to the war was concerned. Therefore, they decided on different tactics to bring a larger mass of people closer. As time went on, discontent grew to the point where the USA suffered the embarrassment of the Tet Offensive. This was the trigger for large protests across the country. The result of this was the intervention of the state apparatus, which tried to pacify the protestors



including using violent methods. The students themselves were not a strong enough group that could form a strong opposition to the state intervention in the war. Therefore, the civil rights organization led by Martin Luther King played a major role in the antiwar movement. Their resentment derives from the fact that Johnson's policy stipulated that African-Americans must be selected before white people. The result was that African Americans were the dominant group in the US military in Vietnam. The vast majority of society was divided. People with a better status advocated ending the war because they wanted to return to the comfortable pre-war situation. They belonged to the left political options. On the other hand, the more right-wing options are more connected to the rural areas, and they believed that the intervention was justified and that it was necessary to defend against the coming wave of communism.

Along with students and African-Americans, one group stands out as an influential current in American society and protests against the war, and that were women. At the very start, their attitude was not against the war. The reason for this can be found in the fact that the history of feminism dictates the establishment of a democratic system with equal rights for all. Therefore, insufficiently strong democracy in South Vietnam was a factor that initiated the support war of women in the USA (Jeffreys-Jones 145). However, as the war continued and began to create many victims, women began to form an antiwar attitude. Considering that a large number of children were going to the battlefield, fear arose among them for their children and their fates. The dominant statement provided by feminists was that war is a means for men to establish their dominance. Therefore, their rebellion against the war was driven by the desire to establish more equal relations between men and women. The prolonged war and the chaotic situation in the USA do not contribute to the establishment of more democratic gender relations.

After the war was over, people tried to get over it and forget it in all kinds of ways. However, the position of war protesters who performed on American soil with the aim of stopping the war and those who truly felt the atrocities of the war are different.. It can be said that the American reality of their exceptionalism has changed a lot and started a new chapter of their history. The Vietnam War gave birth to a new generation of soldiers and people who had to struggle independently with internal difficulties after the war. After going through all kinds of experiences in Vietnam, ordinary soldiers should have returned to their daily routines quite normally. This caused their alienation from society and overcoming mental disorders. However,

as time passed after the war, there was a change of attitude among those in power who began to care more about and honor Vietnam veterans. As one of the mainstream instruments for the transmission of content to the audience, Hollywood grappled with the topic of Vietnam and began to create content dealing with the Vietnam war experience.

### **3. HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD AND WAR**

Throughout the past, Hollywood has played a significant role in promoting the theme of war and warfare on the global film scene. This influential movie center not only depicted heroic stories and dramatic conflicts, but also deeply embedded the image of war in the collective consciousness of the audience. Due to the great influence of Hollywood on the consciousness and views of citizens, the USA can be called a cinematic society. Most Hollywood movies created in periods of war danger have the intention of showing the battles, the horrors of war and the violence that encapsulates the whole picture of the war experience. The growth of Hollywood war movies is closely related to the growth of American military power. In this way, celebrating war victories and battles through TV signifies pride and a sense of nationalism for American society. Unlimited power in all spheres needed to be legitimized and monitored, and the best apparatus for this is media culture. Most movies made during World War I, World War II, and other early periods reflect the nation's opinion of American foreign policy and military interventions.

Movies about war usually portray American soldiers as heroes, which can be especially highlighted in movies about World War II where that war is portrayed as a "good war" that symbolizes American pride and victory (Boggs 53). The first connection between Hollywood and war content is visible during World War I. Already during the war, movies tried to idealize war experiences, service to the country and similar propaganda. However, as society demanded pacifism and avoidance of involvement in war, filmmakers reduced war themes in movies. In that period, one of the first influential war movies, *Birth of a Nation*, appeared, with the theme of the growth of the Ku Klux Klan in America. With the end of the Great War, movies appeared that tended to portray the war as horror.

In parallel with that, the growth of the Western genre and comedy takes place. The end of the 1930s was greeted with a minor number of war-themed movies, especially because of the great danger that America would not engage in a new unnecessary world conflict. However, the involvement of the USA in World War II also marks a new change on the Hollywood scene. After Pearl Harbor, the nationalist and patriotic spirit reigned and this was reflected in film production. Even today, World War II is a symbol of American glory, and every movie with

that theme awakens positive feelings in ordinary citizens. Generally, movies during this period depicted Nazis and fascists as evil. ...“warfare is shown to be a struggle between good and evil, between the forces of civilization and barbarism, where the (idealized) American cause must prevail over the ruthless goals of unspeakably demonic enemies...”(Boggs 69).

As the war ended, there was a rise in nationalist and patriotic feelings, which were quickly extinguished by the beginning of the Cold War. Likewise, World War II gave rise to some new themes to cover since the war was marked by the bombing of cities and the use of the atomic bomb. In that period, after the beginning of the Cold War, film noir was developed. These movies, through their dark depiction of society, bring a more pessimistic view of the population alienated from reality, the appearance of corruption and a different view of politicians. As tensions between the USA and the USSR grew, there was a real fear of the start of a nuclear war. Therefore, the film industry, as a propaganda apparatus of the state, should have defended the idea of possessing nuclear weapons.

The film industry produced numerous war movies during the first half of the 20th century and the beginning of the second half of the century. The background story of those movies is a description of the USA, which mostly emerged victorious from those wars. The first great shame of the USA and the first appearance of criticism of society and politics occurred after the American intervention in Vietnam. Films before the Vietnam War differed significantly from those that followed, both thematically and stylistically. Key characteristics of these movies include a romantic and idealistic image of America, emphasizing traditional values, family, and the American dream. Movies of the time were often in black and white, with linear narratives and strong moral messages. Popular genres include musicals, Western movies, film noir, and war movies that focus primarily on heroic stories from World War I and World War II. Actors like Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne became icons of Hollywood's Golden Age, and some movies remain classics and essential for collective memory of this era. These movies reflect the social context of the times and provide insight into the cultural values and expectations of American society in the face of the turbulent changes that the Vietnam War would bring.

## 4. WAR IN TELEVISION

Movies have always been dependent on ideology. This was especially pronounced in the period after the Second World War. Their task was to send messages to the audience that reflected the general opinion in society. American movies usually have a positive connotation among American society and signify the pride of the American nation. Nevertheless, one part of the movies tend to criticize the American intervention and portray the American expansion negatively, namely the films about the Vietnam War. There are some general differences between the movies made about World War II and Vietnam. The first difference is the depiction of war veterans. While earlier movies characterized veterans in a normal state, the depiction of Vietnam veterans symbolizes the Americans' point of view about the war itself and its meaning. Another difference can be seen in the understanding of the military community. While in World War II films, conflicts between soldiers warn viewers that only the community can defeat the enemy, the narrative of Vietnam War films indicates that conflicts result in death, thus emphasizing pessimism among society.

Hollywood as the main media and apparatus of the state played an interesting role during and after the war. While the war was going on, projections that kind of criticized the American intervention in Vietnam. However, a turn in politics in the 80s brought changes in the film industry, so movies were often made promoting the conflict in Vietnam. „They have on the whole been permeated with macho-warrior and racist ideology, reaffirming a neo-Cold War perspective of the world and depicting radical and liberal-minded people as weak and deviant“ (Dittmar&Michaud 20). Although there were movies that did not emphasize American correctness, their intention was not specifically to portray an antiwar attitude.

Hollywood movies of the post-war era mostly portray the war as an American experience full of suffering and disappointment. It shows typical American soldiers fighting far from their home and trying to survive in that wilderness. Vietnamese as adversaries are portrayed stereotypically as villains and the embodiment of evil. Majority of the movies try to explicitly show the horrors of the war itself and create an impression among viewers about the

experience of soldiers in Vietnam. However, most films do not attempt to put the narrative into historical context and question America's position and responsibility in the war.

After losing the war, Americans lost confidence in institutions and their government. Therefore, it was necessary to create movies that somehow return America to where it was and establish the old relationship of power. One of the main factors in this is the hero in the film, who must reflect the masculinity and strength of the ideal American soldier. The person who tried to form a national identity is American President Ronald Reagan. He was an icon of popular culture and the creator of a new path for America. „He is an icon of the New Right and a Hollywood star...“(Jeffords 6). In the 1960s, the role of men weakened due to various factors such as the feminist movement and the Vietnam War. Such a trend continued in the following century. Nevertheless, with Reagan's coming to power, a new generation of men was created and the masculinity reappeared in Hollywood movies.

Another important aspect of movies about the Vietnam War is the depiction of the very horror experiences of the soldiers from the war. Even movies whose subject matter criticizes the American intervention in Vietnam, try in some way to mask the atrocities committed by the USA. Each of the films does not attempt to explicitly show what was happening within the borders of Indochina itself. Therefore, in a large number of cases, scenes of carpet bombing and environmental disasters that destroyed the landscape are excluded. The intention of the directors of those movies was to convey to the American audience what the Americans experienced during the war itself. Although some movies implicitly draw conclusions about how the war harmed American society, each of them has one perspective, and that is American. Nowhere is the life of the Vietnamese and Cambodians and the terror these peoples experienced. There is an attempt to interpret the Americans as victims. Although the desire of the film directors was to approximate the true terrors of the war itself, none of them captures the whole truth of that war. „Everything that took place in Vietnam was systematic, planned and murderous, the product of seemingly irrational but nonetheless deliberately harmful geopolitical ambitions embraced by U.S leaders. In none of these enlightened, critically minded combat movies do we grasp even a hint of this reality“ (Boggs 101).

One important aspect of movies about Vietnam is the portrayal of the adversary, that is, the Viet Cong. The main characteristic of the Asian antagonists in all the movies is that they

are the opposite of the Westerners. This is reflected in their depiction as a barbarian and uncivilized community. The intention of this was mostly to justify American intervention because Western norms are correct and should be instilled in that society. In movies, this depiction is manifested in stereotypes as the dominant idea for justifying the subjugation of the Vietnamese. Stereotypes also managed to provide a commonality and identity to American soldiers who were vastly different from members of their adversaries. Their prevailing stereotype was that they were depicted as "yellow peril". As Gina Marchetti states, ". . . the yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East. . . . The yellow peril has contributed to the notion that all nonwhite people are by nature physically and intellectually inferior, morally suspect, heathen, licentious, disease-ridden, feral, violent, uncivilized, infantile, and in the need of the guidance of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants" (Woodman 45).

Movies about the Vietnam War are mostly centered around Vietnam veterans and their experiences. Given that the USA experienced great shame, it had an impact on the citizens and the veterans themselves. Often the films concentrated on the portrayal of individual veterans, their internal struggles during and after the war. This kind of narrative is closely related to the Vietnam syndrome that prevailed in America in the post-war years. Hollywood knew that such a portrayal would reach people and their consciousness. However, through different film genres, the directors tried to package the story of Vietnam in their own way. Each of the films approaches the subject from its own point of view, especially the films during the time of President Reagan whose control of film production conditioned the narratives. Although these films are different in many ways, none of them directly criticizes American interventions and domination over the weaker in general, especially in the case of the Vietnam War.

## 5. DEER HUNTER

*Deer Hunter* is a 1978 movie directed by Michael Cimino that immediately captivated the audience at the time. The main plot revolves around three steel mill workers who, in the first part of the film, live an idyllic life in a small town in Pennsylvania. At the very beginning of the story, we are introduced to Nick's wedding, and seemingly everything seems like a fairy tale. After that, the director suddenly brings us to the territory of Vietnam, where three best friends have to survive the terror of the local Vietnamese. Succeeding in this plan, the action returns us to the soil of America, where the main protagonist Mike needs to get used to post-war life and adapt to the new-old environment. His return to Vietnam was marked by a search for his friends. While one of them, Steven, was left crippled, Nick adapted to the new environment and completely distanced himself from society. Eventually, Nick commits suicide playing Russian roulette, and the last scene of the film shows his funeral.

Although Cimino distanced himself from claims that this movie has no close correlation with the theme of the Vietnam War and that his film wants to show ordinary people and their lives, there are still certain elements of a political message expressed through numerous scenes and character performances. The movie is divided into two parts. The first part can be characterized as the life of average Americans within a small environment before the start of the Vietnam War. In that part, Cimino tries to present American culture as diverse and multi-ethnic. Although he was Italian, the main protagonists of this film are Ukrainians on American soil (Burke 250). This example shows his intention to show American freedom and equal rights for all, given that this society is not dominated by Americans alone. However, in this case another explanation is possible for the emergence of Ukrainians as the ruling class of a small town in Pennsylvania. Their history is organized in such a way that they were constantly oppressed and mistreated by Russia, and it is on this relationship that one can look and compare South Vietnam and the coming communism. Patriotism is present in this case, and it was also the guiding thread for Americans throughout the war. While on the one hand Ukrainians succeeded in secession from Russian terror and managed to find a new homeland, Vietnamese yet have to evade communist invasion.



As the plot moves on, the movie enters the phase of the period itself before the departure of the main protagonists to the war. This is where the celebration of Americanism comes in, and that is the white wedding. In that part, we see a combination of several cultures in one place. Cimino tries to unite different nationalities and ethnicities in one place and present an image of America living in unity even though there is a brutal war going on somewhere far away. However, although the whole scene is filled with happiness, celebration and love, one detail depicts the state of affairs among Vietnam veterans. The moment when Nick, Steven and Michael meet a member of the Green Berets brings closer the relationship between those returning from the war and those who were just about to experience it. Cimino's intention was to compare what life the average American had before the war. He elaborates this through the act of marriage, the most sacred event in a man's life. On the other hand, the Green Berets soldier is alienated from society and refuses any contact with the community. In that scene, Michael asked a member of the Green Berets, smiling, "What is it like over there? Can you tell us anything?" The answer from the member of Green Berets was "Phuket" (*Deer Hunter* 43:00-43:05). This short scene creates a sense and insight into how young Americans felt before going to war and how enthusiastic they were. On the other side, there stood a person who represented the American reality after the bloodthirsty war.

Another scene symbolizes and implicitly hints at what will happen to the young recruits on the battlefield in Vietnam. The moment when Angela and Steven, a newly married couple, drink wine from a small jug and a drop of wine spills on her dress. According to tradition, if the wine is not spilled, the couple will be happy for the rest of their lives. Although this part does not necessarily have to be associated with the Vietnam War and the terrible experience of the Americans, Cimino nevertheless inserts this scene into the film. This gives rise to the opinion that his goal here was to criticize the American intervention in Vietnam and to show how a beautiful young life can be destroyed by aimless warfare. As already mentioned, the film is divided into two parts. The first part glorifies the American way of life and tries to portray Americans as people who are incapable of committing carnage and terror in the Vietnam War. Three friends live an easy life and this is celebrated by the act of marrying one of them, but still in the scene after the wedding, the real fear of young people about going to war and possibly ending their life is revealed. This was seen in the moment when Nick and Michael are sitting

on the basketball court and Nick addresses Michael with the words " If anything happens, don't leave me over there"(*Deer Hunter* 51:59-52:01).

The entire movie revolves around the role of a male person during the Vietnam War. It is common knowledge that the male population experienced great shame after the war and it took time for those wounds to heal. Therefore, Cimino chooses the character of Michael, played by Robert de Niro, in order to establish through his persona the old relationship of power where a man rules the situation in life. Thus, he represents a cold person, distant from everyone at the wedding. Masculinity is still reflected through the custom of deer hunting, which should be the central theme of this film. Cimino introduces the film with wedding scenes and slowly moves away from that idyllic, perfect life towards the act of deer hunting. This transition also marks a transition in the lives of people who were forcibly drafted for the war in Vietnam. "When the deer hunt replaces the wedding, the domination of female by male, love by war, is complete" (Burke 252). The idea of masculinity and a male figure in a dominant role extends throughout the movie. On the battlefield in Vietnam, Michael takes the main role in their rescue and manages to escape from the jaws of the Vietnamese. Furthermore, he decides to return to Vietnam to save his friends and restore his old relationships before the war. This is where the intention of remasculinization present in *Deer Hunter* can be seen. Nevertheless, the suicide of Nick marks the total collapse of masculinity and the continuation of the post-Vietnam syndrome in men.

As the action moves to Vietnam, a major criticism of Cimino's portrayal of the Vietnamese emerges. Although he tried to defend his reputation and show that his intention was not to characterize them as sadists and torturers, most of the film illustrates the Vietnamese people in that way. This is especially evident in the first scenes after arriving in Vietnam where a Viet Cong soldier throws a bomb into a bunker where civilians are hiding. Also, the greatest brutality and negative portrayal of the Vietnamese is present in the scene of playing Russian roulette. That scene gives the impression that the Vietnamese aimed to make fun of the young soldiers. Such an idea is correlated with the ideology of fascism and Nazism whose methods were similar, killing as an enlist (Adair 136).

The game of Russian roulette best depicts how Cimino saw Vietnam, their culture and identity. Throughout the movie, Vietnamese people are depicted either as savage killers who

unfairly treat American soldiers or ordinary Vietnamese who gamble on people's lives later on in the movie. By showing their cruelty and violence with randomness, the director illustrates what the war in Vietnam looked like for the American military. For him, it represents a guerilla struggle in which the US Army was terrorized and massacred by barbarians from Vietnam. This scene indicates that Vietnam as a whole or a nation did not exist, therefore in a way Cimino wants to justify the American intervention in Vietnam. The very thought that guerrillas playing Russian roulette can rule a sovereign state gives the USA the right to change that situation. There are only paranoid, vicious guerillas or families-in-exodus: remnants of a community whose coherence has not been allowed to evolve in the face of repeated foreign attack (Burke 253). This example can also be used to compare an ordinary life by an average American and life in Vietnam. Deer hunting and Russian roulette both aim to end the act with one shot. While on the one hand, deer hunting represents enjoyment and a hobby for ordinary people, Russian roulette reflects the personality and ruthlessness of Vietnamese guerrillas. Although in parts of the movie Cimino justifies America and portrays Vietnam as a country of barbarians and sadists, one of the messages of the movie is that the war harmed America more than it benefited. Michael outsmarts the Vietnamese and manages to save himself and his comrades, but their painful departure from Saigon depicts what the soldiers had to go through and overcome at the end of the war (Chong 95).

As the action returns to America, the focus shifts to the American veterans who are at the center of the Vietnam War. As already pointed out, soldiers and recruits returned crippled both physically and mentally, therefore the adjustment to the post-war period was extremely difficult. This part of the movie is based on three friends and their decision to overcome the terror they experienced. After leaving the battlefield and the end of the war, Nick stays for some time in an American military hospital where he recovers from mental problems acquired during the war. At one point he was asked if his name was Russian, to which he replied "No, it is American" (*Deer Hunter* 1:38:23-1:38:30). Through Nick's answer, one gets the impression that American patriotism existed even after the war and the hope that America will manage to recover through the identity of its people. However, his crying and the grief that followed indicate that the wounds are still fresh and that the recovery process is painful and long-lasting.

Cimino then introduces the character of an African-American person who has lost limbs. In this way, he wants to emphasize what the war has done to people and their families, and it is a message that this kind of horror must not be repeated. Nick decides to put the past behind him and turn a new page in life by staying in Saigon among the local community. This illustrates the sense of loss of identity that emanates from this moment to the end of the film. Up to this point, there are indications of the unity of American soldiers and fighters, and the idea was to show how their patriotism can give birth to a positive future for the coming generations. Even the scene in the hospital where Nick identifies himself as an American can be a sign of nationalistic spirit. His refusal to return to his homeland and stay in "defeated" Vietnam indicates doubt about the correctness and justice of his country.

The portrayal of cities and towns in the movie plays a major role in understanding the political discourse on the war. At the beginning of the movie, the town of Clairton in Pennsylvania is described as a colorful place where weddings are celebrated. It shows the celebration and all the beauty of the free life of the USA. On the other hand, Nick's departure to Saigon introduces viewers to a life filled with vices and everything harmful to the local community. ...“a world of prostitutes suspended in cages, waterfronts veiled by fishing nets, the swish of softly beaded doorways, coolie-infested shelves of opium dens and mandarinesque conversations that seemed to be conducted entirely in fortune of cookie proverbs...” (Gilbert 140). Through this example, it is visible what kind of discourse dominated a certain group of people who did not necessarily support the war in Vietnam, but persistently refused to show their guilt for the shame that happened. Here an ordinary American person who infiltrates a chaotic community is shown and thus becomes the Other. The desire is to show that American soldiers and fighters were innocent and honest and that all the atrocities committed were under the influence of the Vietnamese. So in this case, Nick has to change for the worse precisely because it is conditioned by the presence of the evil Vietnamese.

Michael's return to Clairton marks a confrontation with post-war reality. Through this sphere, we get a detailed account of how the soldiers had to continue with their lives and adapt to the world. The Vietnam War marked a new chapter for the US, especially regarding the role of veterans. While after numerous wars their heroes were welcomed with parades and celebrations, Vietnam veterans had to quickly assimilate from the state of war into an ordinary

life. When Michael came home, the small community decided to throw him a welcome party, which he declined and decided not to show up. This example shows the alienation of Vietnamese fighters from the community that flooded American society after the war. At this moment, Cimino begins to criticize the American ruling group for allowing the majority of returnees from the war to experience this fate. His most obvious problem is his alienation as a soldier in a civilian world that has shared none of his brutal experience (Burke 254).

This separation from society and the feeling of loss of identity is felt through the prism of all three main protagonists. While Michael is trying to survive in the old environment, Steven and Nick have decided not to return to the old neighborhood and thereby secure their new identity. This course of action identifies the post-Vietnam syndrome, which is one of the main characteristics of movies about Vietnam. The first meeting between Michael and Linda marks the first step in healing wounds that are still fresh. When Linda asks him what his wounds are, he replies "It's nothing, it's just the usual complications" (*Deer Hunter* 1:58:23-1:58:27). This only shows how physical injuries are less stressful than the mental difficulties faced by Vietnam veterans. Furthermore, their meeting symbolizes the condition of women who lost their loved ones in Vietnam. Linda had a hard time coping with the loss of Nick and hoped that she would be able to see him again. Through these instances the desire is to reconsider how much the war in Vietnam was necessary considering that these consequences the ordinary people had to face. This relationship was supposed to serve as a kind of consolation and help for Michael to overcome his experiences from the war. However, his inability to achieve this goal conveys how the horrors of the experiences were too strong to continue a normal life.

Michael's attempt to adapt to the new norms of life is manifested through his favorite hobby, which is deer hunting. His helplessness in the hunt and the feeling of disgust during the act of killing symbolize how the war affected the psyche of the Vietnam fighters. Cimino implies that the Vietnamese committed horrors against the American military forces and that image is etched in Michael's mind. This caused his denial of his hobby involving the sound of guns and rifles, something he had experienced in Vietnam. This mental problem for Michael is visible in the scene when his friend Stanley threatens Axel with a gun. Through this scene, another problem is revealed that explains the loss of identity of the Vietnamese fighters.

Michael's main occupation was hunting and with the refusal to fire a shot at a deer, his identity and belonging to the community vanished.

Michael's departure to Saigon and search for friends illustrates the last attempt to establish an identity and save American society. His arrival there is also marked by a new criticism of the Vietnamese, whose city now looks even worse and more inhumane than in the first scene there. Through such a depiction of Saigon, the idea is reflected that the American defeat and abandonment of Vietnam actually ended and destroyed the capital of South Vietnam. This image also speaks to the American perception of Vietnam. For most of them, it is a place where atrocities must happen.

As Michael and Nick meet for the last time, the final act comes. Nick's suicide means America's exit from the war and the interpretation of responsibility for the war. Considering that the Vietnamese did not commit this terrible act but it was done arbitrarily by American recruits, the message is that the Americans defeated themselves and did more harm than good. Nick's suicide, which occurs after real news footage of the Saigon evacuations, signifies America's withdrawal from the war through an implosion. Nick does not get killed in battle but dies by his own hands (Chong 99). Michael's holding of Nick's lifeless body symbolizes the impossibility of American society for reconciliation, and this scene warns that the consequences of war will remain woven into the lost identity of post-Vietnam society for a long time.

As the movie enters its final scene, the action shifts to Nick's funeral. The depiction of a funeral with a minor number of people signifies the absolute defeat of the USA in the war and in society. In the last scene, Michael and company sing God Bless America, which symbolizes hope for a better future for the American community, which was crippled by the futile war in Vietnam.

*Deer Hunter* is not necessarily a movie about the Vietnam War, which could be guessed through this analysis. Cimino explores various topics, among which the discourse on the significance and consequences of war dominates. Through the analysis of individual scenes, it can be seen that the movie exudes a political connotation addressed to American society and the ruling structure. It can be said that the dominant message of this movie is that the war was not necessary and that it harmed individuals, which can be seen through the characters of

Michael, Stevie and Nick. Nevertheless, Cimino's portrayal of the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese landscape does not hold the USA responsible for the horror and terror in Vietnam. "Vietnam is a hell on earth, but was not made so- the movie seems to suggest- by American presence" (Adair 140). Therefore, *Deer Hunter* is a movie that mostly sends criticism to society that this should not happen again.

Michael represents a dominant male figure and that helps Cimino to analyze the men returning from the war and the reality they had to face. Through his character, the theme of masculinity and the superior role of men, which disappeared after the war, is dealt with. His ultimate failure in his goal to bring the old society together marks the final defeat by Americans in 1975. The last scene in the movie reveals that America has a chance to be exceptional again, as it was before Vietnam. Nevertheless, the scenes from Vietnam reflect the perception of a certain group of people who offer as the main culprits the Vietnamese whose ruthless treatment has forever damaged the American identity.

## 6. APOCALYPSE NOW

*Apocalypse Now* is a movie directed by Francis Coppola in 1979. The movie takes place against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, beginning with the main character, Captain Willard, being assigned a secret mission to find and kill Colonel Kurtz an officer who lost his mind, and created his own cult empire deep in the Cambodian jungle. Willard travels along the Mekong River on the ship "PBR Streetgang" with a squad of soldiers led by Lieutenant Kilgore, characterized by being haunted by ocean waves and the smell of napalm. The journey unfolds amid the chaos of war, where Willard and his team confront the horrors and absurdities of the conflict. During their search for Kurtz, they encounter various harsh situations, including attacks from enemy soldiers and soldiers going insane. Finally, Willard reaches the limestone fortress of Kurtz, where he faces insane and moral challenges. The movie culminates in a dramatic confrontation between Willard and Kurtz which ends up with Kurtz's defeat as he is killed by Willard. Willard leaves the outpost and sails down the river while Kurtz's reign and insanity is over.

Although it is difficult to find the real message of the film, Coppola tries to show what Vietnam meant to the Americans. The dominant current in the movie is that the war was futile and that it harmed American soldiers and recruits. Right at the beginning of the movie, the action moves from Vietnam to the room of Captain Willard, who is experiencing difficult moments from the war and timidly awaits a new call. "Saigon...s\*\*t, I'm still in Saigon" (*Apocalypse Now* 4:22-4:30). These are the opening words of the movie that reveal the perspective and thoughts of the American military forces at the moment of war on the battlefield. A scene in which arms resembling a helicopter rotate on the ceiling explains the effects of war on individuals. Furthermore, it implies how difficult it is to forget war experiences and how the traces are rooted in the most banal things like the ceiling in this example.

The action later moves to the Nha Trang base where Captain Willard is tasked with finding Kurtz and stopping his command. In this scene, Coppola's intention is to portray the war in a different way. His desire is to show how lower-ranking members of the American forces had to be obedient and how those in the highest positions had absolute power (Adair 147). There is a



criticism of the US war methods in Vietnam because uncontrolled powers and unrealistic goals are one of the reasons for the US defeat in Vietnam.

Throughout the film, the plot revolves around a group of young men on a ship who are in search of their mission. The depiction of young people in a bloodthirsty war provides a critique of the American government that allowed many young lives to be lost in this way. Their first destination is the zone where they meet Colonel Kilgore. The character of Colonel Kilgore presents a person in a high position and with authority on the ground in Vietnam. His behavior and callousness reflects the current situation in Vietnam. Furthermore, his craziness and unconventionality show that it was the only way to survive during the war. His craziness and lack of common sense can be seen the moment he says “I love the smell of napalm in the morning“(Apocalypse Now 43:23-43:25).

With the transition to Vietnamese territory, a description of that landscape and Vietnamese people appears. Although the main message of the film is anti-war, only in the scene where Willard looks at Saigon and the well-dressed Vietnamese area, their culture can be seen. Their customs, relationships and unique identity are not shown in any other part of the film. The scene in which Kilgore tries to give water to a thirsty Vietnamese man, but the next moment he gives up because the surfer Lance has appeared, best illustrates the portrayal of the Vietnamese in the film. While on the one hand Coppola does not hold them as absolute worthless beings, he does not give them importance for a single second. “In such scenes, however, the Vietnamese are still merely faceless tools used both to glorify war and to criticize the American military“ (Woodman 50). The scene in which American soldiers devastate a Vietnamese village illustrates the brutality and carelessness of American soldiers. Throughout the film, Coppola has no intention of understanding Vietnamese culture and life. For him, they represent something secondary, and that's why Wagner's opera plays during that scene. This absurdity at the moment when atrocities are happening on Vietnamese territory symbolizes what Vietnam actually represented to American society.

As the crew continues their journey through the territory of Vietnam, they come across a jungle where an encounter with a tiger takes place. In that scene, one of the crew members, Chef, experiences a mental breakdown when he expresses his views on the war and going to Vietnam. Coppola's attitude and criticism towards the necessity of war are reflected through his

speech and anger. Most of the fighters opposed the war and did not understand its significance, therefore, through the character of Chef, the director symbolizes the opinion of all those who had to die over the years.

As already mentioned, the Vietnamese are minor characters throughout the film and their life and culture were not of great importance to Coppola. In the scene when the crew attends the U.S.O show, a small group of guerrillas is shown hanging on the fence watching the Americans celebrate. This example also illustrates what the Vietnamese represented to the West. A group of thin and dirty Asians whose culture bordered on barbarism (Nguyen 22). Furthermore, that scene where the Playboy bunnies proudly entertain the soldiers draws a comparison between American and Vietnamese soldiers. While the American soldiers are having fun, the Vietnamese are focused on war and victory. “Charlie didn't get much USO. He was dug in too deep or moving too fast. His idea of great R&R was cold rice and a little rat meat. He had only two ways home: death, or victory“ (*Apocalypse Now* 1:11:02-1:11:27). Through this prism, criticism of the very conduct of the war is manifested and an attempt is made to find the reason for the final American defeat. Likewise, the celebration and revelry are meant to distract and divert the mind from the real horrors of the Vietnam War.

Like most Vietnam films, *Apocalypse Now* contains scenes in which Vietnamese guerrillas kill American forces. The scene when Chef dies is ambiguous. While on the one hand it criticizes the American government through the death of a young recruit, because of his skin color it also symbolizes racism, which was a hot topic and subject of conflict in America in the previous decade. This is later confirmed by the example of the second death of the character of Chief. The entire film revolves around a diverse group on board that aims to show how African Americans were drafted into combat. It was often decided unfairly, and this criticism permeates through the deaths of Chef and Chief. The scene on the Do Lung Bridge reveals the true nature and brutality of war. Americans in the trenches and on rough ground against a ruthless enemy is an opinion provided by supporters of the war. Although this is certainly an anti-war film and criticizes the intervention in Vietnam, certain elements indicate that Coppola does not want to put all the blame on the Americans since throughout the movie people can get a sense of their inner fears and experiences.

This movie has two versions. In the shorter version, the scene where the crew is having lunch with the French was removed. The reason for removing that scene is that it criticizes the French colonization of Indochina, which was a forbidden topic at the time. However, that scene best depicts what the war was all about. Through it, one gets a deeper political picture of why the war was fought and what is the difference between the French and American intervention. While the French previously lived in that territory and owned their own colonies, the Americans' reason for intervening in this area was the fear of the spread of communism. This scene symbolizes what everyone in America knew, even the soldiers themselves, which was that the war was futile. Captain Willard's expression and tiredness on his face clarifies the actual situation on the battlefield and the attitude of most Americans about the war. "When you ask me why we want to stay here... We want to stay here because it's ours - it belongs to us. It keeps our family together. I mean, we fought for that. While you Americans... you are fighting for the biggest nothing in history" (*Apocalypse Now* 2:12:35-2:12:57).

The journey through Vietnam is dedicated to reaching the final goal, Colonel Kurtz. Their final meeting was marked by a long conversation in which the heart of America's problem in the war was revealed. In his speech, Colonel Kurtz, as an experienced soldier and someone who spent a lot of time in Vietnam, gives his point of view. His opinion is that the Vietnamese are simply more eager to win because they know what they are fighting for. This is one of the rare instances in which Coppola criticizes American authorities and their intervention. Through Kurtz's monologue, a main war problem for the USA was presented.

*Apocalypse Now* in all its segments and connotations is an anti-war film whose goal is to show the absurdity of war in the first place. A group of soldiers must go through terror and horror to find a crazed colonel. The reason is that they want to satisfy the military leadership. This shows the mistake and political greed of the ruling structure. Sending young soldiers and recruits on meaningless tasks is the symbolism of the film and criticism of such a way of conducting war. This group is diverse and non-homogeneous, and the correctness of the draft can be analyzed through this. The draft was abolished in the USA after the Vietnam War because it did not create homogeneous groups and units. The movie presents the picture from the American perspective and gives a sense of the American experience in the war like most films about Vietnam. The significance of the Vietnamese in the film is only that they are fleeing

and insignificant, which reflects the American image of Vietnam as a culture and a people. Individuals throughout the film are depicted in different ways depending on their status in the army. The group on the ship is reluctant to go to war and has a desire to return home. On the other hand, Kilgore and Kurtz represent people who, in their own way, understand the futility and value of this war. Kilgore does absurd things and thus refuses to accept the role of a conventional leader. Colonel Kurtz is a person who criticizes the state leadership with his methods and is just waiting for the end of worthless warfare (Nguyen 38).

Finally, the last scene in which Kurtz illustrates the strength and persistence of the Vietnamese against the playful Americans provides justification for the American society. Coppola's message is political and aims to criticize those who started the war. Nevertheless, through this presentation of Colonel Kurtz, it is explained how the American defeat in Vietnam occurred which removes the main blame for the defeat from the government.

## 7. RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

*Rambo: First Blood Part II* is a movie from 1985 directed by George P. Cosmatos. It follows the iconic character John Rambo, played by Sylvester Stallone, as he embarks on a daring mission to Vietnam. Recruited for a covert operation secret, Rambo is tasked with returning to that war-torn country to gather evidence about the American prisoners of war still being held. As he traverses dangerous jungles and faces off against formidable enemies, Rambo discovers a betrayal that shakes him to his core. Driven by a deep sense of duty and justice, he transforms from a lonely warrior into an icon of resilience and determination, displaying both exceptional fighting skills and a vulnerability that adds depth to the character. Eventually, John manages to overcome all the challenges he faced in Vietnam and return to America.

At first, what makes this movie special is the fact that it has two sequels dealing with the theme of Vietnam. *Rambo First Blood* from 1982 describes a veteran John Rambo who returns from war emotionally distraught. Throughout the movie, he fights the local sheriffs and the community before finally succumbing and surrendering. In the next sequel, Rambo changes his character and thus goes from a troubled and lost veteran to a superhero and a symbol of masculinity. "First Blood and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* set the poles for the alteration in the image of a veteran that has transpired in recent years, an alteration in which the image of the victimized soldier/veteran/American male has been regenerated into an image of strength and revived masculinity" (Jeffords 130).

One of the reasons for the change in attitudes and characteristics of men is President Ronald Reagan. His turn in politics brought new ideas and an attempt to revive the American spirit, especially after the heavy defeat in Vietnam. Reagan had some specific details which marked his reign such as government should be limited and taxes reduced, and red tape should be eliminated. He promoted individual entrepreneurialism and that is why government will do everything to support that kind of business enterprise (Kellner 59). All of these segments were incorporated in Hollywood. Reagan's presidency was marked by military interventions in Grenada, Libya and Nicaragua and that is why he needed Hollywood to promote a military mindset. This also involved male warriors who had to be revived and that was primarily achieved through the character of John Rambo.

The movie is full of political messages and images that aim to raise awareness among the American citizenry. Apart from a couple of occasions when the director points out the poor treatment of the previous governments towards the Vietnam veterans, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* deals with other topics. The film's dominant narrative concerns the male soldiers who suffered disgrace in Vietnam. Likewise, Vietnam and the Vietnamese are characterized as sadistic and uncivilized barbarians.

In the first scene of the film, Rambo is in prison and doing manual labor in a quarry. During the conversation with Colonel Trautman, John is assigned to go to Vietnam to collect prisoners of war. During the conversation, one gets an impression and a perspective on the image of Vietnam. The only way for him to get out of prison is to go to Vietnam. This comparison of the two places reflects what Vietnam represented to Americans. "John, I'm sorry they sent you to such a hell hole... I've seen worse" (*Rambo: First Blood Part II* 1:40-1:45). Likewise, their interaction illustrates the condition of Vietnam veterans who are disconnected from society and pessimistic about the behavior of their authorities after the war. He arrives at the US Army camp where Marshall Murdock presides over the operation. Through that scene, it is understood that the veterans were once again betrayed by their country. Rambo goes on an impossible mission, so his disappearance will finally calm the American public. However, going to the place of shame gives John and the other veterans a chance for redemption and revenge. On getting into the helicopter before going to Vietnam, John emphasizes that Trautman is the only person he trusts. In this way, criticism of the previous American government, which ignored the importance of Vietnam veterans, is propagated again.

The moment it arrives on Vietnamese soil, the film enters a phase where the real picture of Vietnamese people and their lives is elaborated. When he travels by boat with the agent Co, Rambo speaks for all veterans. That conversation reveals the true nature of the problems in American society. His claim that he was greeted by a new war in America that had no winner symbolizes the attitude of American politics towards those who wanted to give their lives for their homeland. In that scene, he states how men are expendable and explains it in this way "It's like someone invites you to a party and you don't show up. It doesn't really matter" (*Rambo: First Blood Part II* 25:35-25:41). This explanation speaks for all veterans who gave their lives for their country, but were cheated by politics.

Not long after fighting in the jungles of Vietnam and after managing to find a POW, Rambo is betrayed and captured by the Soviets and the Vietnamese. In the scene where they hold him and torture him, the second enemy of Vietnam veterans is presented in the film. Cosmatos wanted to show in this way that although the American government betrayed the veterans, it was the Soviets and the Vietnamese who harmed and embarrassed the USA in the war. Therefore, the main goal of Rambo is to come out of here as a winner and defeat evil forever.

His arrival in Vietnam reveals new film propaganda. Although the first sequel showed Rambo as a guerrilla, a member of the wilderness who survives, his departure to Vietnam reflects his main characteristics. It is precisely his characteristics as an individual, an opponent of technology and bureaucracy that reflect Ronald Reagan's policy. His fight for American values despite being betrayed symbolizes how a true American should behave. The fight against barbarism and communism is the main task of men. Through Rambo's scenes of survival and escape from the jaws of his opponents, Reagan embodies a character that symbolizes a true American male citizen and soldier.

As Rambo manages to get out of the jaws of the Vietnamese and the Soviets, the first scene of a male-female relationship occurs. The entire movie revolves around the character of a man who aims to revive the white American male. On that path, women are secondary characters. Therefore, they are portrayed in the film as whores, and not as people who make war. This scene is where the romance between John and agent Co Phuong Bao is soon killed by Vietcong soldiers. This shows the director's intention to feminize the male characters as little as possible because after Vietnam they lost self-confidence and this film was supposed to serve to restore their male character traits. A woman gets in the way of a real man to achieve his final goal, to defeat evil (Kellner 67).

Furthermore, masculinity is portrayed during every scene in Vietnam and is especially pronounced in the scene where John crashes the helicopter. The supernatural strength he displayed symbolizes redemption for the shame of Vietnam. It provides strength and faith that American society can heal fresh wounds. In the end, he manages to defeat the Vietnamese and the Soviets and achieve what America dreams of, which is revenge. That act of victory in Vietnam depicts what the citizens longed for. Although politics treated the veterans shamefully,

their love for their country still prevailed, and that is why Rambo decided to deal with his opponents.

The movie ends with John's return to America and his reminder of all the bad things he experienced because of national politics. Through his interaction with Trautman, Rambo illustrates what is essentially the desire of all Vietnam veterans. "I want, what they want, and every other guy who came over here and spilled his guts and gave everything he had, wants! For our country to love us as much as we love it! That's what I want" (*Rambo: First Blood Part II* 1:31:58-1:32:19). This monologue sends a final critique to American society and American politics that the lack of respect for veterans should never have occurred. However, it reveals that love for the country is more important than anything else and thus creates a sense of patriotism in American society. In this way, an attempt is made to destroy the pessimism that ruled society in the post-Vietnam years.

*Rambo: First Blood Part II* is generally a movie that sends a message to Vietnam veterans. In the first sequel, there was a version where John dies at the end which was eventually scrapped. Therefore, his survival in the first part and the victory in the second sequel provide hope for a better tomorrow for the veterans. Stallone reveals that his character was meant to embody all war veterans. Through his extensive description and depiction of his feelings, fears, and disappointments, the audience gets a sense of the effects of the war on the veterans. More importantly, it is understood that the state has made a mistake in its treatment of veterans. Therefore, this movie does not aim to criticize the idea of US intervention in Vietnam, but sends a message that the veterans deserved better. This criticism can be read in the character of John, who in the first sequel followed the instructions of the authorities and finally surrendered. In this sequel, John ignores the orders of the top and thereby defies the norms of society (Jeffords 531). In this way, the mistake of the American government and their treatment of veterans is acknowledged. This is shown through the character of the callous Murdock who only cares about his own interests. Despite this, the movie is imbued with an even more negative image towards the Vietnamese and the Soviets. Through their presentation, it is emphasized that the war against evil must always be waged.

The symbolism of the movie is in the portrayal of a male warrior. His role was to make the male population in the USA aware that this is the task of every citizen. Highlighting



Rambo's body and appearance motivates the citizens to new war campaigns and illustrates how American citizens are superior to others. The happy ending in the film creates a sense of pride and faith in a happier future for America. Such an end aims to leave Vietnam and its wounds behind. The intention was to portray the Americans as the winners. Rambo's confrontation with his opponents and the final destruction of the enemy symbolizes compensation for shame and defeat in reality. In this way, the citizens were assured of a war victory through a film culture.

## 8. PLATOON

*Platoon* is a 1986 film directed by Oliver Stone. The plot of the film revolves around the main character Taylor, who as a recruit finds himself at the height of the war in Vietnam. The story follows his conversation with his grandmother, with whom he has a close relationship. As the group survives the war, so do atrocities. The backbone of the plot is the conflict between the two sergeants, Elias and Barnes, which escalates so that Barnes kills Elias. Finally, there is a final confrontation with the Vietcong in which many American soldiers die. Taylor kills Barnes and eventually leaves Vietnam in a helicopter on his way back to his homeland.

This film approaches the issue of the Vietnam War from a different perspective, unlike other Vietnam topic films. The plot is located only in Vietnam and focuses on the depiction of combat most of the time. Placing the events in the period of 1967 symbolizes the bloodiest battles ever fought. Stone was present in the war, so he wants to recount the war from his point of view. Through the character of Taylor, his inner state is reflected, the opinions he had about the war and its necessity. In the first few minutes, a description of the landscape of Vietnam is shown as well as the difficulties that the young recruits had to face. The expressions and shock visible on Taylor's face depict what it meant for young recruits to arrive in Vietnam. Although he was there for a very short time, Taylor quickly understood the essence and intricacies of the war. "I think I made a big mistake coming here" (*Platoon* 11:25-11:30). As the action and the war continues, the first young victim of the fight with the Vietnamese appears in the film. This scene shows the sad side of war for recruits and the lack of unity among soldiers. Taylor is accused of negligence and responsible for the death of a colleague even though he is not guilty of it.

The absurdity of drafting people is seen in the scene when Taylor talks to two comrades about the number of days the others have spent in Vietnam. Their celebration of going to Vietnam points to potential reasons for America's loss of the war. After Vietnam, there was never a draft to go to the battlefield. The constant change of soldiers every 12 months led to a lack of morale and sacrifice for their comrades. This is clearly illustrated in *Platoon* where everyone wants to look out for their own interests and cannot wait to leave the war. Taylor, like Stone, dropped out of college and decided to join the army. His parents expected him to finish

college and were disappointed by his actions. Because of this, his close relationship with his grandmother, who was the only one who believed in him, stretches throughout the film. He did not belong to the lower class in America, so his going to Vietnam sends a message to everyone. His example serves that the selection of poorer and less educated people to go to war is irregular. If the majority of the wealthier and better off saw the soil of Vietnam, the politicians would end the war very quickly (Bates 106). The embodiment of Stone through the character of Taylor pays tribute to all the irregularly drafted recruits who had to go through the horrors and horrors of war. His participation in Vietnam is elaborated when he says “ It didn't make much sense. I wasn't learning anything. I figured why should just the poor kids go off to war and the rich kids always get away with it“ (*Platoon* 29:13-29:20).

War is a stressful period for everyone and everyone experiences it in their own way. Throughout the film, Stone inserts scenes from American bunkers where free time was spent. Most soldiers use marijuana and alcohol and find peace in it. The symbolism of this is to show the psychological effects of war on individuals and to justify some of their actions. However, the action moves from the bunker to the jungle where the soldiers find their dead comrade. This provokes a revolt of their platoon and leads to one of the biggest massacres in the Vietnam War. The My Lai massacre is one of the biggest shame of the US military and its units during the Vietnam War. The scene where Barnes and his group enter the village was inspired by that massacre. Through that scene and the depiction of massacres and bombings, Stone brings people closer to what really happened in March 1968. Therefore, this depiction and the depiction of the rape of the girl in the forest most realistically describes what really happened in Vietnam. The brutality of the depiction and the explicit depiction of each such scene marks Stone's criticism of the US military and its actions in the war.

As the army enters a new combat with the Viet Cong, the final showdown between Barnes and Elias takes place. Their relationship symbolizes the disunity of the American military and the betrayals that distanced American troops from any chance of victory. The character of Barnes symbolizes the sergeants who lost their minds because of the war and began to commit inhuman acts. Through his account, Stone's disillusionment with America's conduct of the war can be seen. Politics elected the commanders and sergeants who governed the lives of ordinary soldiers and grunts in Vietnam. Although Barnes tries to cover it up, Taylor exposes

him and tries to kill him. Barnes gets out of that situation without any consequences, and this is where the real background of America's problems is reflected. The message is being sent that the state and military leaders do what they want and are not held accountable for it. People like Elias represent good-natured people who only want to give their lives for their country, but in the end they lose the fight. The whole essence and meaning of the war in Vietnam is outlined through the Barnes-Elias relationship. While the top government ignores and oversees the carnage in Vietnam, innocent soldiers who just love the country are suffering.

As the movie enters its final phase, there is a final battle between the opposing sides. Taylor manages to kill Barnes and thereby avenge Elias and all those who died unjustly for the country. Barnes' death marks the fulfillment of justice. This actually kills the character who symbolizes the madman whose excessive powers led to America's embarrassments during the war (O'Connor & Rollins 401).

*Platoon* is the first of the movie on this topic, the action of which is located only in one part of Vietnam. A certain unit stayed there, including Stone himself. The movie allows those who were in the war to relive the memories and horrors they experienced. Likewise, those who watched the war on television got a different perspective on what the Americans were doing. The scene of the slaughter in the village is one of the first scenes in the movies where the main blame falls on the USA. Unlike the rest of the films, *Platoon* does not aim to portray the Vietcong and the natives as barbarians or uncivilized people. That very scene from the village shows that Stone was the local people who independently built their culture and survived. The arrival of a foreign body on their territory caused their cultural and life destruction. Taylor as the embodiment of Stone does not aim to change a certain situation on the battlefield and turn the tide of the war like some kind of superhero. Through his stay there, the story is told in Stone's way. The rest is for the presentation of certain personalities who were present in reality during the war.

From another perspective of the view, the movie does not openly criticize the American government, and the film does not abound in discourse directed negatively toward the government. Nevertheless, the depiction of American crimes and inhumane acts illustrates how disappointed Stone is that he had to be a part of this aimless war. "I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy; we fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us. The war is over for

me now, but it will always be there, for the rest of my days as I'm sure Elias will be, fighting with Barnes for what Rhah called possession of my soul. There are times since I've felt like the child born of those two fathers. But, be that as it may, those of us who did make it have an obligation to build again, to teach others what we know, and to try with what's left of our lives to find goodness and a meaning to this life“ (*Platoon* 1:54:31-1:55:23). Through this final monologue, all the essence of the war in Vietnam is summarized. While Stone is disappointed that they fought an aimless war and that it will always haunt him, there is still a glimmer of hope for a better tomorrow with a warning about future generations should repeat this mistake.

## 9. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the period of the Vietnam War represents a controversial period in the American past. Such a narrative was also reflected in Hollywood, where filmmakers aimed to portray Vietnam as realistically as possible, but still not to enter into an overt conflict with the authorities. Each of the selected films approaches the theme of Vietnam in its own way, but they still contain some components that are similar. Mainly, not a single film sends an open criticism of the American intervention in Vietnam. The films show doubts about going to war, but nowhere does it openly state that the USA is responsible for the conflict. Although there are scenes where Americans commit crimes in *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*, neither film has the characteristic of condemning American dominance over inferiors.

Such a connotation can be read in the depiction of the Vietnamese and their culture. What the films have in common is that everything is shown from the perspective of an American soldier. His experiences and his passing through the war are emphasized. At no point is it revealed what the local people experienced and how they survived. This is followed by the depiction of the Vietnamese through films. *Deer Hunter* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* openly portray the Vietnamese as uncivilized barbarians. In *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*, the local population appears very rarely in the scenes, which gives the conclusion of the importance the American audience attached to that culture and people. Given that the USA was going through a difficult period of affirmation to a new reality, it was necessary to mark and restore faith in people. Therefore, these films include certain elements that served as an instrument for this. Each of the main characters is driven by love for their country and would do anything for it. Because of this, movies promoted patriotism as a symbol that should reunite Americans. Furthermore, masculinity is an important element of these films. *Deer Hunter* centers around the character of Michael who embodies a real, cold man recovering in the post-war years. The same is the case with John Rambo, who represents the ideal of the American post-war soldier ready for new victories. In the movies *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*, this is less emphasized, but still Willard and Taylor manage to survive in the horror of Vietnam and send the message that a brighter future awaits the male population. This amount of masculinity is reinforced by male-female relationships in films that literally do not exist. Some appearances are present in

*Deer Hunter* where Michael still fails to achieve a love relationship like John Rambo in the movie. Although the films do not send an open criticism of their government and its decisions, there is still a certain sadness and disappointment in the government's attitude towards veterans. Therefore, all films focus on individual soldiers, and later on veterans. Through their monologues and behaviors, a sense of unfair treatment towards them is created. This is especially highlighted in *Deer Hunter* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* where the war veteran struggles to get used to the new situation. In *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now* we see how soldiers had to listen and follow their authorities in order to justify someone's interests.

All in all, each of these elements served to shape the discourse and send the message about the Vietnam War. I can say that there is a great similarity between *Deer Hunter* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, considering that the themes of masculinity, nationalism and the life of veterans after the war appear and stand out in both movies. *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon* approach Vietnam from a slightly different angle, focusing exclusively on the period during the war and elaborating on what the war meant to ordinary soldiers. Nevertheless, it can be said that all four films aim to show that Vietnam was unnecessary and that it is a period of history that the USA should forget as soon as possible. Through the final scenes of the movie, we get the impression that the years after the war are difficult to overcome, but still, there is hope for a better tomorrow.

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## **11. POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE VIETNAM WAR AS SEEN THROUGH AMERICAN MOVIES: SUMMARY**

This paper deals with the depiction of the Vietnam War through certain films in Hollywood. The author emphasizes the importance of the situation in the USA and society in order to elaborate in more detail the main segments that were shown in the films. Furthermore, the author presents how the theme of war was depicted and explored throughout the history of American films. The dominant themes are nationalism, masculinity and the post-Vietnam syndrome. Through the description of nationalism, the author explains what the war meant for the average American soldier. This is followed by masculinity, where an attempt is made to portray the American soldier through the prism of war and life after it. Finally, life after the war is analyzed and it shows what the war actually meant for society and the individual.

Key words: Vietnam War, masculinity, nationalism, post-Vietnam syndrome, Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Platoon

## **12. POLITIČKI DISKURS O VIJETNAMSKOM RATU PROMATRAN KROZ AMERIČKE FILMOVE: SAŽETAK**

Ovaj rad se bavi prikazom Vijetnamskog rata kroz određene filmove u Hollywoodu. Autor naglašava važnost situacije u SAD i društvu kako bi pobliže elaborirao glavne segmente koji su prikazivani u filmovima. Nadalje, autor prezentira kako je tema rata bila opisana i istražena kroz povijest američkih filmova. Teme koje dominiraju su nacionalizam, maskulinitet i post-vijetnamski sindrom. Kroz opis nacionalizma autor objašnjava što je rat značio za prosječne američke vojnike. Na to se nadovezuje maskulinitet gdje se pokušava prikazati američki vojnik kroz prizmu rata i života nakon njega. Završno analizira se život nakon rata i prikazuje što je rat zapravo značio za društvo i pojedinca.

Ključne riječi: Vijetnamski rat, maskulinitet, nacionalizam, post-vijetnamski sindrom, Lovac na jelene, Apokalipsa sada, Rambo: Prva krv, Dio II, Vod smrti