International Radicalism and Antiwar Protest

JUDY TZU-CHUN WU

In 1966, Argentinian revolutionary Che Guevara wrote an address to the newly formed Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAL). He was then based in Cuba, where he had served as a commander of the rebel army in the revolution of 1959 before becoming a government official under Fidel Castro. Che would eventually support and lead anti-imperialist, guerrilla movements in the Congo in Africa as well as other parts of Latin America, including Bolivia, where he was ultimately assassinated in November 1967. In April 1967, however, his message to OSPAAL was published in the organization's magazine, *Tricontinental*. In what has become a movement classic, Che wondered, "How close we could look into a bright future should two, three or many Vietnams flourish throughout the world with their share of deaths and their immense tragedies, their everyday heroism and their repeated blows against imperialism."[1] This call for "two, three, many Vietnams" became a popular slogan during the US wars in Southeast Asia. It conveyed how radical activists around the world understood Vietnam not as an isolated country or exceptional war. Instead, they interpreted the Vietnam War as a, and arguably the, primary example of US imperialism. The slogan also captured how the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) served as heroic role models whose resistance could be replicated around the world.

Drawing upon the burgeoning scholarship on the global 1960s, this chapter argues that the Vietnam War was a key historic event that internationalized radical social movements. The war did so in three main ways. First, through the conflict, activists in different parts of the world formed a global public sphere. Through transnational circuits of travel and information exchange,

---

1 Che Guevara, "Message to the *Tricontinental*," *Tricontinental* (Havana, Cuba), April 16, 1967, Che Guevara Internet Archive, www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm.

critics of the war developed a common "international language of dissent."[2] They nurtured a belief in the need for resistance against those with military, financial, and authoritarian political power and shared a repertoire of activist strategies. Individuals, organizations, and movement communities based in different locales and nation-states disagreed with one another in terms of political analysis, ideology, and resistance tactics. Nevertheless, there was a tendency toward creating a "global consciousness." In the words of the editors of *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of a Global Consciousness*, "one of the defining features of the political and cultural movements of the era was the feeling of acting simultaneously with others in a global sphere, the belief that people elsewhere were motivated by a common purpose."[3] This global public sphere helped to transcend Cold War and colonial divisions between the First, Second, and Third Worlds, terms and identifications embraced by historical actors of that era. However, these geopolitical formations as well as the uneven power relations within and across each world also shaped how activists understood and participated in internationalized antiwar movements against US imperialism.

Second, the resistance against the Vietnam War fostered internationalism by foregrounding the agency of the marginalized. The war featured a David-versus-Goliath competition between a presumably backward, peasant society against the mightiest military in the world. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) and the NLF did receive support from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Nevertheless, it was the Vietnamese revolutionaries – male and female, young and old – and their dedication to fighting, organizing, sacrificing, and even "winning" that made them into global role models. Their status as the ultimate underdogs helped to bring attention to others who experienced systematic oppression due to race, class, gender, religion, political ideology, and so on. It became more conceivable to celebrate subaltern groups and individuals as makers of history, capable of what Che called "everyday heroism."[4] There were blind spots to this recognition of the subaltern, as the oppressed could easily be tokened as victims and iconized as one-dimensional heroes. Still, the

---

2 Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).
3 Scott Rutherford, Sean Mills, Susan Lord, Catherine Krull, and Karen Dubinsky, "Introduction: The Global Sixties," in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, and Scott Rutherford (eds.), *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of a Global Consciousness* (Toronto, 2009), 3.
4 Guevara, "Message to the *Tricontinental*."

idealization of Vietnamese revolutionaries facilitated a crossborder identification of shared oppression.

Third, the wars in Southeast Asia helped to internationalize antiwar resistance by illuminating the interconnectedness of various systems of inequality. Imperialism and colonization became part of the activist lexicon, utilized to interpret cultural, racial, class, gender, and other forms of exploitation everywhere. Vietnamese representatives and sources of publication played an important role in disseminating the political message about the interlocking nature of power as well as the idea that the "powerless" could perform meaningful forms of resistance. However, Vietnam also became a symbol that non-Vietnamese around the world could imbue with meaning. Vietnam served as a multivalent signifier of oppression and resistance. As such, the idea of "Vietnam" could be used to identify multiple manifestations of imperialism as well as the need to challenge these forms of inequality both abroad and at home.

This chapter will draw upon the increasingly rich scholarship on transnational protest movements, particularly those based outside the United States, during the "long 1960s." These studies explore the uniqueness of periodization, historical events, and political actors in different locales, but they also point toward how these local, regional, and national movements reached beyond political borders and Cold War divisions. Regardless of the issues debated during the "long 1960s," Vietnam was frequently invoked as part of these transnational cultures of dissent. There were significant points of political difference as well as misunderstanding within this global network of activists. This relatively brief overview of international antiwar activism will illuminate how the circulation of people and ideas facilitated the creation of a global public sphere, and the recognition of subaltern heroism, as well as the replication of Vietnam as a symbol of imperialism and resistance.

A Global Public Sphere

How did Vietnam, a relatively small country in Southeast Asia that most Americans could not locate on a map, become a familiar site of war and a source of global political inspiration? Martin Klimke, in his study of the transnational connections between student protests in the United States and Germany, argues that it was the antiwar movement in the United States that transformed the leading New Left organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), into an international phenomenon:

> Starting in 1965, the growing antiwar movement in the United States influ-
> enced the style of protests on an international level … [The] movement was
> also able to gather a worldwide following of protestors by the late 1960s, all
> of whom had one thing in common – their opposition to the Vietnam War.[5]

This collective antiwar movement articulated similar critiques of the war as
a US-led imperialist venture that utilized inhumane forms of warfare. The
activists in different locales also utilized a common set of protest strategies,
ranging from teach-ins and nonviolent direct action, to protest theater and
even guerrilla-like forms of violent resistance. Both the recognized move-
ment leaders and the rank-and-file activists shared ideas through travel and
the circulation of activist literature. Through repetition, the underground
activist media fostered a common political language and a sense of simul-
taneity for their readers. Together, they created a global public sphere, in
which people and ideas traveled across borders to create a common protest
language as well as a shared sense of community and responsibility.[6] This
global public sphere had the ability to bridge Cold War and colonial divisions.
However, people of varying backgrounds, from different nations and regions
of the world, and as members of the First, Second, and Third Worlds, also
tended to perceive Vietnam and the conflicts there in diverse ways.

Activists in First World nations based in Western Europe, North America,
Australia, and arguably Japan recognized the global reach of US political and
military interests. By definition, as constituents of the "First World," coun-
tries such as West Germany, France, Canada, and so on were political allies
of the United States during the Cold War. Their collective participation in
alliances such as NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), ANZUS
(Australia, New Zealand and US Security Treaty), and other security agree-
ments tethered the political interests of First World nations to that of the
United States. The relationships with the United States and policies of each
nation varied, and some were quite critical of US policy in Southeast Asia.[7]

---

5 Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in
the Global Sixties* (Princeton, 2010), 4.

6 Jon Piccini, *Transnational Protest, Australia and the 1960s: Global Radicals* (London, 2016);
Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism
during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, 2013).

7 Lorenz M. Lüthi makes an important point that there were multiple Cold Wars,
and that various countries in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East had complex
and changing relationships to one another. See Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the
Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge, 2020); Lorenz M. Lüthi (ed.), *The Regional Cold Wars
in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East: Crucial Periods and Turning Points* (Washington,
DC, 2015).

Overall, these countries tended to receive reconstruction aid from the United States in the aftermath of World War II, serve as host countries for the expansion of US military bases during the Cold War, and be subjected to diplomatic pressures to support US policies globally, including in Southeast Asia. Many of these First World countries also experienced being on the frontlines of the Cold War. The political tensions between "East" and "West," the militarization of their societies, and the possibility of nuclear annihilation were tangible threats.

In this context, the activists who opposed the US wars in Southeast Asia tended to frame their critiques in terms of both US aggression/imperialism and their own governments' perceived collusion in these conflicts. Protests throughout the First World targeted symbols of American influence (e.g., America House in West Berlin) and US political leaders (Vice President Hubert Humphrey's European tour in 1967) for protest. In his characterization of the British New Left, Holger Nehring argues that "some activists … framed … the United States … as a war-prone capitalist–imperialist power. They rejected American consumerism as potentially totalitarian and regarded the American intervention in Vietnam as a novel form of colonialism."[8] Bertrand Russell's Tribunal on Vietnam, held in Sweden and Denmark in 1967, charged the United States with war crimes.[9] In addition, antiwar activists in the First World also critiqued their own nation's support of US policies. For example, members of the German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund) targeted NATO "as the central offspring of global imperialism in Western Europe."[10] Rudi Dutschke, one of the key leaders in Germany's New Left, called for both an "attack [against] American imperialism politically" and "the will to break with our own ruling apparatus."[11] Antiwar activists in the First World condemned both existing policies that supported US militarism and their nations' past colonial and ongoing militaristic endeavors, such as the UK's policy of nuclear proliferation, France's wars in Algeria and Vietnam, Germany's Nazism, Australia's settler colonialism, and Japan's empire in Asia. The struggles in each locale were interpreted as part of a broader global pattern. At the February 1968 Vietnam Congress held in West Berlin, approximately 5,000 activists from across Europe, the United States, and other parts

8 Holger Nehring, "Great Britain," in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York, 2008), 129–30.
9 Arthur Jay Klinghoffer and Judith Apter Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunals: Mobilizing Public Opinion to Advance Human Rights* (New York, 2002).
10 Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 93.
11 Ibid.

of the world were in attendance.[12] Participants, encouraged by US activists, understood their collective antiwar activism as forming "an international 'second front'" in the Vietnam War.[13] The war was being waged not just in Southeast Asia but in the First World as well.

The motivation and antiwar activism of those in the socialist Second World differed from those in the First World. Again, variations existed across nations and over time, but the Soviet Union and East European socialist nations tended to condemn the Vietnam War as part of their government- and party-endorsed policies. Having official diplomatic ties to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam facilitated the sponsorship of international anti-imperialist meetings and conferences in Eastern Europe and the circula- tion of political travel through the Soviet Union. The convenings in Eastern Europe attracted representatives from the East and the West, facilitating political dialogue and fostering a global public sphere. For example, members of US antiwar movement met with representatives of the NLF and DRVN in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in 1967 and in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, in 1968. Tom Hayden of the US SDS attended the Bratislava meeting, along with thirty-seven other Americans as well as representatives from antiwar move- ments from other parts of the world. These meetings had a profound impact on antiwar activism globally. Vietnamese representatives discussed the possi- bility of releasing American POWs to US antiwar activists as acts of solidarity, which in fact occurred through followup discussions and travels to Southeast Asia.[14] Bernadine Dohrn, who became a leader in the Weather Underground, recalled that the 1968 meeting in Ljubljana "was life-altering"; it "took place the same week as the Democratic National Convention demonstrations in Chicago, the same week that the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. This convening of New Left forces, who consciously came together after the spring 1968 uprisings in both the US and Europe, including Eastern Europe, was hugely transformative because it helped us locate where we were in history."[15] These meetings in the Second World were facilitated through

12 Martin Klimke, "Germany," in Klimke and Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe*, 103.
13 Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 93.
14 Robert D. McFadden, "Tom Hayden, Civil Rights and Antiwar Activist Turned Lawmaker, Dies at 76," *New York Times*, October 24, 2016, www.nytimes .com/2016/10/25/us/tom-hayden-dead.html; Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam: American Peace Activists and the War* (Syracuse, NY, 2002); Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.
15 "'We Didn't Know How It Was Going to Turn Out': Contemporary Activists Discuss Their Experiences of the 1960s and 1970s," in Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York, 2010), 280.

state resources and Communist Party organizations such as the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). The gatherings established contact and facilitated invitations for antiwar activists in the First World to visit Vietnam itself. These subsequent travels often went through the Soviet Union, particularly Moscow, before arriving in the DRVN.

Although the Second World helped facilitate political dialogue and travel across the First, Second, and Third Worlds, the motivation of activists also differed from those from the other geopolitical regions. Nick Rutter points out that activists from the West and those from the East might have shared a common vocabulary and critique of the Vietnam War; however, they had different understandings of politics.[16] Dutschke, who defected to the West from East Germany, encountered cynicism when he traveled to a conference in Prague in 1968. Even prior to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that year, Dutschke had discovered a lack of understanding for his enthusiasm for Marxism; for Czechs who dialogued with Dutschke, "Marxism meant oppression."[17] Similarly, Polish activist Adam Michnik argued that he and his Warsaw comrades "fought for freedom," while students from the First World "fought against capitalism."[18] Internationalist gatherings, like the 9th World Youth Festival, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1968, were not necessarily free, open arenas for political exchange. Instead, the speakers, performers, agenda, and attendees were carefully monitored by the socialist state to foster particular types of internationalist discussions.

Nevertheless, the cause of Vietnam held political appeal for those resisting Soviet and socialist political control. The DRVN, a relatively small country, and the NLF, based in South Vietnam, had to skillfully navigate political differences between the USSR and the PRC in order to chart their political and military paths.[19] East European countries shared this position of having to negotiate Soviet control. As a result, Vietnam received both affective and political support as well as economic and material aid from East European countries and their citizens. In her study of the German Democratic Republic, Christina Schwenkel notes that "solidarity campaigns in East Germany,

---

16 Nick Rutter, "Look Left, Drive Right: Internationalisms at the 1968 World Youth Festival," in Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (eds.), *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, 2013), 193–213.

17 Quoted ibid., 195.

18 Quoted ibid., 196.

19 Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, 1999); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012).

through voluntary and coerced mechanisms, garnered extensive humanitarian and other aid to Vietnam."[20] While some scholars document that this officially mandated internationalism generated resentment among East Germans who felt obligated to donate, others point to the "depth of empathy felt by Eastern German citizens for those struggling against invasion, occupation, and racialized oppression, and the salience of a moralized sense of differentiation from the US-led bloc."[21]

The political solidarity between the Second and Third Worlds revealed ambivalence regarding the role of race in socialist political ideology. While racial dialogue was officially banned in East Germany in the aftermath of World War II and tended to be minimized within the Second World, there nevertheless existed a tendency to represent Vietnam and other Third World countries and peoples through a practice that Quinn Slobodian describes as "socialist chromatism."[22] Socialist propaganda posters tend to feature "racial rainbow" motifs that "profile[d] nonwhite objects of solidarity," oftentimes in stereotypical and caricatured ways, to proclaim internationalism and to attack imperialism.[23] These displays of socialist internationalism built upon Soviet representations of "a multiethnic territory under a single administration" and anti-imperialist political rhetoric.[24] These representations, which foregrounded race, helped to generate empathy and political solidarity. Although Schwenkel points out that East Germany contributed the most aid in comparison with other European socialist countries, the sense of socialist international solidarity as well as the desire to assist victims of and condemn US imperialism reverberated throughout the Second World.

Those in the decolonizing Third World tended to regard Vietnamese liberation fighters as "comrades of color" engaged in a shared global struggle against Western imperialism.[25] Although the term "Third World" originated with a French social scientist in 1952, it became a widely recognized political category and identity in the aftermath of the 1955 Afro-Asia Bandung Conference. Bandung sought to chart a third alternative for decolonizing

---

20 Christina Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam," in Quinn Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, 2015), 272.
21 Quinn Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, 32.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 28.
24 Ibid., 30.
25 Slobodian uses this phrase to explore the relationship between the Second and Third World. I am borrowing it to describe political affinity and solidarity within the Third World.

nations, pressured to choose alliances between the First (noncommunist) and Second (communist) Worlds.[26] By the 1960s, particularly late in the decade, "Third World" described countries, movements, and peoples seeking decolonization in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (i.e., the Tricontinental) whether they were communist or capitalist. The term "Third World" was also used to characterize racialized people in the First World, particularly the United States, seeking to overthrow internal colonialism. Che Guevara presented this vision of tricontinental anticolonial solidarity in his statement calling for "two, three, many Vietnams." He described this sense of anticolonial internationalism by asserting the interchangeability of Third World warfare:

> the flag under which we fight would be the sacred cause of redeeming humanity. To die under the flag of Vietnam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Colombia, of Bolivia, of Brazil – to name only a few scenes of today's armed struggle – would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, an Asian, an African, even a European.[27]

Adding the phrase "even a European" suggested that the primary audience of Guevara's appeal was for those in Latin America, Asia, or Africa or those who were descendants of these countries. Although there were racial and ethnic variations as well as political differences within and across these continents, Guevara's statement nevertheless called for pancontinental solidarity across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Locales within the Third World did help foster a global antiwar movement. Political icons such as Che and important organizations such as the Black Panthers promoted resistance against US policies in Vietnam. Also, Third World countries such as Cuba, Algeria, the People's Republic of China, North Korea, and so on offered meeting sites and facilitated political contacts for antiwar activists around the world.

Nevertheless, there were important distinctions to note about these Third World expressions of solidarity. Zachary Scarlett argues that China's interest in Vietnam stemmed from national political priorities of countering Soviet leadership in the Third World and promoting support for Mao Zedong in the midst of the Cultural Revolution.[28] Strategic representations of Vietnamese fighters helped to project "Maoism across borders and promoted the idea

---

26 Christoph Kalter, "A Shared Space of Imagination, Communication, and Action: Perspectives on the History of the 'Third World,'" in Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett (eds.), *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York, 2013), 23–38.
27 Guevara, "Message to the *Tricontinental.*"
28 Zachary A. Scarlett, "China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the Imagination of the Third World," in Christiansen and Scarlett (eds.), *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, 39–56.

Figure 24.1 A crowd gathers in Havana, Cuba, to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution in 1953. A banner showing Che Guevara urges the people of the Third World to create "two, three, many Vietnams" (July 26, 1967).
Source: Keystone-France / Contributor / Gamma-Keystone / Getty Images.

that Mao was the leader of the global revolution."[29] Samantha Christiansen and Scarlett also suggest that there were crucial distinctions within the Third World during the post–World War II era. They identify a "first wave" of Third World nations that up to the mid-1960s "focused on the anti-colonial struggle for national independence."[30] The second wave, in contrast, "fought against neo-colonialism and the project of the nation-state, which tended to subvert progressive activism in favor of stability."[31] The Republic of Korea (ROK, i.e., South Korea) could be interpreted as a prime example of the neocolonial formation of the Third World nation-state. Characterized as a "subempire" of the United States, South Korea contributed more than 300,000 troops to fight with the United States and South Vietnam.[32] The South Korean soldiers were

29 Ibid., 49.
30 Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett, "Introduction," in Christiansen and Scarlett (eds.), *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, 4.
31 Ibid.
32 Jin-Kyung Lee, "Surrogate Military, Subimperialism, and Masculinity: South Korea in the Vietnam War, 1965–1973," *Positions: East Asian Cultures Critique* 17, 3 (2009), 655–82; Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: The Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

reputed to be among the most vicious fighters during the war. In addition, the Republic of Korea received approximately $1 billion from the United States in exchange for its military contributions. The money in turn helped to fuel the economic modernization of South Korea. The differing positions of the PRC and the ROK reveal that there was no natural alliance between Third World countries; the former supported the DRVN and the NLF but the latter supported the Republic of Vietnam and the United States. Each made its choice based on calculated political self-interest as well as ideological solidarity.

This periodization of the first wave (decolonialization up to the mid-1960s) versus the second wave (neocolonialism after the mid-1960s) of Third World development does not quite match Vietnam's lengthy chronology fighting against Japanese, French, and US imperialisms. Nevertheless, Vietnam's anachronism may help explain why it became such an important political symbol. As a country that experienced almost continual warfare for national liberation between 1941 and 1975, through World War II as well as the French Indochina War and the Vietnam War, Vietnam had the romantic revolutionary appeal of a not yet fully realized nation-state. The heroes and heroines of Vietnam's liberation struggle became iconic "Third World Guerrilla[s]" and political role models.[33] Only after the reunification in 1975 did Vietnam become a "country," not a "cause," a consolidated nation-state with messy policies.[34] In the midst of the struggle for decolonization, however, Vietnam could generate internationalist solidarity and political sympathy across the First, Second, and Third Worlds for those who sought to condemn US imperialism, capitalism, and militarism.

The Heroism of the Subaltern and the Ubiquity of Anti-Imperialism

Along with Che's "Two, Three, Many Vietnams," Tom Hayden's pronouncement at the 1967 Bratislava conference that "We are the Viet Cong now" became another important mantra of the antiwar movement. Viet Cong or VC was the shorthand term used by the US military, political leaders, and media to identify the Vietnamese who engaged in warfare against the United States and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Due to the nature of guerrilla warfare, the NLF were particularly denigrated for engaging in "sneak" attacks. "VC" more commonly described the fighters of the National

---

33 Christiansen and Scarlett, "Introduction," 8.
34 Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.

Liberation Front rather than the regular troops of the DRVN, although the lines could be blurred. By claiming identification with the despised enemy of the United States, activists around the world declared their opposition to the US political and military establishment and those who supported their views. Instead, critics of US policies celebrated the heroism of the underdog, those with such unequal military power that they had to resort to guerrilla warfare. This identification facilitated the alliance with the VC of people experiencing oppression due to race, class, gender, religion, and/or political beliefs within their own societies. Like the Vietnamese, ostracized peoples around the world could be potentially capable of similar forms of heroism. The phrase "We are all the Viet Cong now" indicated that critics of US policies conceived of themselves as guerrilla fighters, too, engaging in a war against the war, opening an additional front behind enemy lines.

The dual meaning of the term "Third World" illuminates the connections that activists made between national liberation and racial liberation. The Third World referred to decolonizing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as to people of color in the First World. While the former experienced colonialism on a global scale, the latter framed their oppression as a form of "internal colonialism."[35] The connections between internal and global colonialism relied upon the intersections between race, economic exploitation, and political disfranchisement.

The Vietnam War, as argued by many activists, particularly those of Third World identification, was a racial war. The extensive bombing (triple the amount of tonnage used during all of World War II), the use of chemical weapons, the popular use of the term "gook," and the dehumanization of the enemy all served to racialize the Vietnamese enemy as subhuman.[36] In addition, as a "working-class war," US armed forces were composed disproportionately of the poor, the less well educated, and men of color.[37] As Martin Luther King, Jr., argued, the Vietnam War siphoned US economic resources away from the War on Poverty in the United States, thereby "devastating the hope of the poor at home"; furthermore, the conflict "was sending their sons, and their brothers, and their husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high

35 Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, 2006).
36 Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, *The Oriental Obscene: Violence and Racial Fantasies in the Vietnam Era* (Durham, NC, 2011); Daryl Joy Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York, 2011).
37 Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

proportion relative to the rest of the population."[38] In fact, the war ironically provided the US public with an opportunity to watch "Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same school room."[39] In explaining why he resisted the draft, champion heavyweight boxer, Muhammad Ali, famously stated, "I ain't got no quarrel with those Viet Cong."[40] In a quote attributed to Ali and others, including the musical *Hair*, the draft represented "white people sending black people to fight yellow people to protect the country they stole from the red people."

African American troops, along with other racialized soldiers, stationed throughout the world and fighting in Southeast Asia, experienced racism through the US military, through the conditions of war, and in their host societies. In response, activists in Europe, Canada, Japan, and elsewhere connected Black liberation struggles with antiwar activism. In Germany, for example, organizers reached out to US GIs, "particularly black soldiers," to encourage political discussions about the war and to support desertion; one German activist argued, "this war in Vietnam is dirty and so is the American Army and what it stands for. American soldiers should be told how things are and what they can do to get out of that army."[41] In fact, focusing on race in the US military merged the two most powerful movements of the 1960s, the antiwar and Black liberation movements. African American political leaders, including members of the Black Panthers, were popular if controversial speakers who traveled globally to speak to antiwar activists and US Black soldiers stationed around the world.

Antiwar activists also encouraged Chicano/Latino soldiers to think about the commonality between their status as colonized peoples in the United States and the status of the Vietnamese.[42] Similar to African Americans, Mexican Americans tended to face systemic discrimination and hence had lower socioeconomic status as well as fewer opportunities for college admissions. Consequently, Chicanos tended to be overrepresented in the military.[43]

---

38 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam" Speech, April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York, transcribed by Pacifica Radio, UC Berkeley Social Activism Sound Recording Project, https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/c.php?g=819842&p=5924547.

39 Ibid.

40 "Muhammad Ali Refuses Army Induction," *This Day in History*, April 28, 1967, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/muhammad-ali-refuses-army-induction.

41 Quoted in Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 183.

42 Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí! Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley, 2005); Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.

43 Oropeza, *Raza Sí! Guerra No!*

Chicano/a activists encouraged members of their community to question why they were fighting in the war. In 1970, they formed the only "minority-based antiwar organization, called the National Chicano Moratorium Committee."[44] The Moratorium, held in Los Angeles, attracted an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 protestors, including elderly and children, the "largest anti-war march by any specific ethnic or racial group in US history."[45]

The depiction of Vietnamese as a racial other was profoundly connected to the racialization of Asians in the United States as well. Asian American soldiers were presented to other members of the US military as examples of what the Vietnamese enemy looked like.[46] No distinction was made between an Asian person serving in the US military (who was unlikely to be Vietnamese, given the ethnic composition of the Asian American population), a soldier in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam that was allied with the United States, a Vietnamese civilian, and a "Viet Cong" guerrilla fighter.[47] This racial lumping of all Asians as the enemy was reinforced by the US military practice of counting all dead Asians as VC.[48] Doing so inflated the body count and helped to broadcast the success of the war.

Scholars of colonialism have pointed out that both race and gender are intertwined with imperial and military processes. Similarly, the Vietnam War raised global awareness about the gendered impact of war. As Asian American antiwar activist Evelyn Yoshimura pointed out in her 1971 essay "GIs and Racism," the representation of Asian women played a central role in the racial education of US military personnel.[49] Through the systematic creation of red-light districts in Asian countries where US troops were stationed, in what sociologist Joane Nagel calls the "military sexual complex," the US military institutionalized a culture of American GIs frequenting Asian

---

44 Ibid., 6.

45 Ibid.

46 Steve G. Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu, *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* (Los Angeles, 2001).

47 In 1965, on the eve of immigration reform in the United States, just over 600 Vietnamese lived in the United States out of a total Asian American population of 1 million. See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (Boston, 1998).

48 Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, 1977); Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia, 1993); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Oakland, CA, 2014); Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York, 2013).

49 Evelyn Yoshimura, "GIs and Racism," *Asian Women's Journal* (occasional publication, University of California, Berkeley, 1971 / Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 3rd printing, October 1975), 74.

prostitutes.[50] Not limited to individual excursions, these practices became integral to military culture and discourse through ritualized retellings of these experiences. An Asian American marine recalled of his boot camp experience,

> We had these classes we had to go to taught by the drill instructors, and every instructor would tell a joke before he began class. It would always be a dirty joke usually having to do with prostitutes they had seen in Japan or in other parts of Asia while they were stationed overseas. The attitude of the Asian women being a doll, a useful toy, or something to play with usually came out in these jokes and how they were not quite as human as white women … how Asian women's vaginas weren't like a white woman's, but rather they were slanted, like their eyes.[51]

Such racialized and sexualized depictions of Asian women, used to foster male bonding among US soldiers, shaped US military policies and practices in Southeast Asia – in the brothels and in the general prosecution of war.

Vietnamese women who suffered these practices helped to educate women around the world about the gendered impact of militarism as well as potential for women to combat the war. Vivian Rothstein, a member of the US SDS who had traveled to Bratislava in 1967, recalled that the Vietnamese women whom she met insisted on having women-only discussions with American representatives. This was unusual for Rothstein. She tended to work in mixed-gender settings as a student activist. Also, men and women both attended the Bratislava conference. However, the women from South Vietnam wanted to convey that the war had a unique impact on women. Rothstein recalled that they discussed how militarization fostered the growth of prostitution in South Vietnam. In addition, they provided examples of how American soldiers threatened and utilized rape as well as sexual mutilation as military tactics. Shaken and moved by these meetings, Rothstein requested an audiotape version of their presentation so that she might share their "appeal to the American women."[52]

---

50 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, 1990); Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in US–Korea Relations* (New York, 1997); Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (Cambridge, 2011); Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York, 2002); Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York, 2003), 191.
51 Yoshimura, "GIs and Racism," 74.
52 Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam: American Peace Activists and the War* (Syracuse, NY, 2002); telephone interview of Vivian Rothstein by author, March 9, 2007; Wu, *Radicals on the Road.*

These international dialogues between women of varying nationalities and racial backgrounds occurred throughout the war.[53] The Vietnam Women's Unions (VWU) in the North and South reached out to women globally through women's organizations, such as the Women's International Democratic Federation, the Korean Democratic Women's Union in the North, Women Strike for Peace in the United States, and the Voice of Women in Canada. The VWU also hosted visits to North Vietnam and sponsored meetings and conferences around the world.

Studies on global feminism and global sisterhood have noted the disproportionate power and the misperceptions of white middle-to-upper-class women from the "West" seeking to "rescue" oppressed Third World women.[54] This politics of rescue was not completely absent in the gendered political discourse of the war. For example, Gregory Witkowski points out that solidarity campaigns in East Germany, particularly in church-based campaigns, tended to portray "the deserving poor, primary women and children, who did not have the means to help themselves without external help."[55] Quinn Slobodian coined the phrase "corpse polemics" to capture how West German activists increasingly showed "dead and mutilated" Third World bodies, thereby transforming "usually nameless and mute bodies into icons of mobilization."[56]

However, the agency of Vietnamese women in fighting the war and building a women's global antiwar movement also reveals that these "Third World" women served as political mentors to women around the world. In fact, after Rothstein accepted an invitation to visit the DRVN after Bratislava, she observed how the VWU inspired and mobilized women to protect and

---

53 Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* (September 2010), 547–73; Jessica M. Frazier, *Women's Antiwar Diplomacy during the Vietnam War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017); Katherine McGregor, "Opposing Colonialism: The Women's International Democratic Federation and Decolonisation Struggles in Vietnam and Algeria, 1945–1965," *Women's History Review* 25, 6 (2016), 925–44; Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, 1993); and Wu, *Radicals on the Road.*

54 Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC, 2005); Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988), 61–88; and Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, 1997).

55 Gregory Witkowski, "Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, 88.

56 Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC, 2012), 135.

transform their society. The VWU had chapters at various levels, ranging from local villages to the national level and operating in schools, workplaces, health clinics, and government units. In all of these settings, the unions trained women for political leadership and advocated for their collective interests. VWU representatives conveyed to Rothstein "how important it was to organize the women … and how powerful American women could be" as well.[57] When Rothstein returned to the United States, she went back to the "little women's group" that she had participated in before she left. Inspired by her experiences in Czechoslovakia and North Vietnam, Rothstein proposed the formation of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, a group modeled on the VWU.

Vietnamese women not only inspired female activism around the world, but the political constructs of imperialism and colonialism were also utilized to characterize patriarchy and female oppression. Some feminist and lesbian organizations during the late 1960s and early 1970s argued that women constituted the original colonized subjects under male domination.[58] In fact, some called for a gendered liberation movement that was akin to the emergence of a "Fourth World."[59] Just as the Third World asserted its autonomy from the United States and the Soviet Union, women, described as constituents of a Fourth World, sought self-determination and liberation.

The heroism of the subaltern had an appeal not only among racialized groups and women. The identification with the Viet Cong extended to individuals and groups who experienced marginalization due to a variety of factors. The French separatist movement in Canada, the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, and the alienated youth of the New Left and counterculture around the world all proclaimed identification with the revolutionary Vietnamese and their cause.[60] Treated as outsiders and self-identified as colonized subjects, they allied with the enemy of their enemies, the revolutionaries seeking self- and national liberation.

---

57 Rothstein interview, March 9, 2007.
58 "Hello Sisters! We Are Radicalesbians …," 1, folder "Indo-Chinese Women's Conference" no. 3, Anne Roberts Women's Movement Collection Fond, Archives and Records Management Department, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada [hereafter cited as Simon Fraser University].
59 Barbara Burris, Kathy Barry, Terry Moon, Joann DeLor, Joann Parent, and Cate Stadelman, "Fourth World Manifesto," folder "Indo-Chinese Women's Conference" no. 1, Anne Roberts Women's Movement Collection Fond, Archives and Records Management Department, Simon Fraser University.
60 Niall ó Dochartaigh, "Northern Ireland," in Klimke and Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe*, 137–52; Dubinsky et al., *New World Coming*; Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.

Two, Three, Many Vietnams

The Vietnam War appealed broadly to radical activists around the world. It resonated differently depending on the geopolitical context, but the Vietnam conflict and the Vietnamese people drew worldwide attention, support, and sympathy. The North Vietnamese and those based in the South who resisted the United States and the Republic of Vietnam consciously cultivated these internationalist affinities. They assigned personnel and allocated resources to engage in formal as well as citizen diplomacy.[61] In addition to waging war on the battlefields and engaging in state-to-state negotiations, the NLF and the DRVN also prioritized a third front of mobilizing worldwide public opinion.

In addition to hosting diplomats and political visitors in North Vietnam, the DRVN and the NLF posted communication officers and sent diplomatic missions to Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, Australia, and Canada.[62] These representatives communicated not only with heads of state but also with individuals and organizations seeking information about the war in Vietnam. Pham Van Chuong, for example, worked for the Liberation News Agency of the NLF. He was posted in East Berlin during the early to mid-1960s and was then sent to Prague in 1965. Because Czechoslovakia was relatively easy for those from the West to reach, Chuong met with religious and pacifist delegations both in Prague and in other European cities. He recalled meeting well-known antiwar activists Dave Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Staughton Lynd, and Stewart Meacham of the American Friends Service Committee, as well as entertainers Jane Fonda and Dick Gregory.[63] In both North and South Vietnam, organizations were established to foster these international relationships. The Vietnam–America Friendship Association was created in 1945, soon after the founding of the DRVN. During the Vietnam War, the organization became the Vietnam Committee for Solidarity with American

---

61 Both Mary Hershberger and Cora Weiss refer to this concept of citizen diplomacy, which suggests that American travelers also identified with this role. See "Cora Weiss," in James W. Clinton, *The Loyal Opposition: Americans in North Vietnam, 1965–1972* (Niwot, CO, 1995), 169; and Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam*, xx–xxi.

62 Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*.

63 Chuong also served as a representative and interpreter for important international peace conferences, including the 1967 Bratislava meeting and also one in Paris where he had, in his words, "the privilege and also the heavy task of translating for" African American comedian Dick Gregory. Because of Gregory's use of Black vernacular, the best that Chuong could do was to tell the Vietnamese-speaking audience members, "He must have spoken something very funny, but I did not understand!" However, that comment drew such a positive response from his audience that Gregory complimented Chuong on his translation abilities: interview of Pham Van Chuong by author, August 12, 2009, Hanoi.

526

People or the Viet-My Committee. The NLF created a similar organization. Other groups fostering Vietnamese friendship with various nations were also established.

These citizen diplomacy efforts were perceived as a crucial part of the war effort. Trịnh Ngọc Thái, a former delegate at the Paris Peace Talks and the former vice chair of the External Relations Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, explained that the Vietnamese conceived of fighting the war on multiple fronts. He quoted Hồ Chí Minh, who identified two primary fronts: "the first front [is] against the US war in Vietnam, and the second one is inside the United States. The American people fight from inside, the Vietnamese fight from outside."[64] Thái also quoted another Vietnamese leader who conceived of the war in three fronts: "one united front against the United States in Vietnam; one united front of Indochinese nations against the United States; and one front formed by the people in the world against US imperialism, for national independence, and peace."[65] In either the two- or three-front formulation, the mobilization of US and worldwide public opinion was regarded as an important priority. As Thái notes, "the power of public opinions" could pressure US policy and military leaders. In addition, worldwide support served as "an enormous source of encouragement to the Vietnamese people and their armed forces in the battlefields. The world people's support was very valuable both spiritually and materially to the Vietnamese people."[66]

Recognizing the impact of these global antiwar efforts, the US government and their allies also closely monitored the potential proliferation of two, three, many Vietnams.[67] Moshik Temkin points out how the French government surveilled American expats for their political activities and also attempted to control their travels.[68] Even Canada, formally neutral and a locale to which US draft resisters fled and where significant antiwar conferences were held, nevertheless engaged in covert military initiatives to support the US war effort and at times denied visas to Vietnamese spokespeople

---

64 Trịnh Ngọc Thái, "The World People's Front in Support of Vietnam: The Paris Agreement Negotiations Period," in *The Historical Negotiations* [in Vietnamese, trans. Quynh Phan] (Hanoi, 2009).
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Suri, *Power and Protest*.
68 Moshik Temkin, "American Internationalists in France and the Politics of Travel Control in the Era of Vietnam," in Andrew Preston and Doug Rossinow (eds.), *Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History* (Oxford, 2017), 247–67.

against the war.[69] During the period between the 1969 and 1971 conferences, a group of Vietnamese representatives were prevented the right of entry into Canada. They had planned to participate via closed-circuit television in the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation, a three-day conference sponsored by Vietnam Veterans against the War in Detroit.[70] As a result of the denial of visas, the organizers of the 1971 Indochinese Women's Conference had to balance their need to advertise these meetings to attract antiwar activists in North America and also prevent the Canadian government from excluding participants from Southeast Asia.

This concern about the proliferation of Vietnams stemmed from the ability of the war and the people engaged in fighting for national liberation to evoke political solidarity and sympathy across the First, Second, and Third Worlds. The Vietnam War graphically illustrated the militarized imperialism of the United States. The war also illuminated the ability of the subaltern to resist and even win against the most powerful country in the world. Vietnam gave those who experienced oppression and identified with the marginalized a sense of political hope and purpose. This belief in "everyday heroism" motivated activists around the world to read, think, protest, and organize. Through their collective efforts, they created a global public sphere that could broadcast critiques of the Cold War order, foster awareness of the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, and possibly work toward creating a new and just world.

---

69 Although the country was officially neutral, Canadian citizens volunteered to fight in the US-led war in Southeast Asia. In addition, the Canadian government engaged in "secret missions, weapons testing and arms production." See www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/canadas-secret-war-vietnam. See also Charles Taylor, *Snow Job: Canada, the United States and Vietnam, 1954–1973* (Toronto, 1974).

70 Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.