ABSTRACT

Between 1964 and 1968, RAND (an abbreviation for Research and Development), conducted some 2400 interviews in Vietnam with Vietnamese political prisoners (Davison, 1970). The interviews developed by RAND provide researchers with the opportunity to investigate how discursive ideologies are produced and what their impact is on the actors involved. In particular, the interviews reveal a rare glimpse of the interactions between the colonial powers (U.S.) and colonial people (Vietnamese population). By conducting our research in accordance with the hermeneutic circle, our research has shown that the various theories, theoretical frameworks, and methodological designs developed by the RAND Corporation were concerned with objectivity, validity and reliability (Davison, 1970; Elliott, 2010). Yet they failed to fully recognize the socio-political nature of their own assumptions that informed their research. Furthermore, although RAND employees regarded themselves as researchers and academic scholars wanting to consider the Vietnamese interviewees as participants in the RAND projects (Elliott, 2010), their predisposed opinions about the Cold War conflict prevented them from viewing the Vietnamese “interviewees” as anything else that the “other”. Analysis of the RAND interviews indicates a sense of strong resistance from the Vietnamese; a sense of resistance that is not normally found in analysis of texts written by those from the perspective of the colonizer. Choosing not to answer the interview questions serves as a form of resilience and resistance as the only powerful tool the prisoners have to resist. From the interviews analyzed we further see that the Vietnamese did not consider the Americans as rescuers but rather understood them as a destructive force in Vietnam.

BACKGROUND

Since the 1950s, the RAND Corporation, described as a U.S. non-for-profit think-tank, has played an important role both in the development of organizational research methods and in U.S. military operations including the Vietnam War (Abella, 2008). As we shall contend below, both are linked.
Between 1964 and 1968, RAND (an abbreviation for Research and Development), conducted some 2400 interviews in Vietnam with Vietnamese “who were familiar with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army” such as political prisoners, refugees and those who left the army (Davison, 1970). The overall purpose of this undertaking was to help the United States military to be able to better understand the reasons why people joined and supported the Viet Cong (US military slang for members of the communist National Liberation Army of South Vietnam) and the North Vietnamese Army (Davison, 1970).

The interviews are numerous associated documents developed by RAND provide researchers the opportunity to investigate how discursive ideologies are produced and what their impact is on the actors involved. In particular, the interviews reveal a rare glimpse of the interactions between the colonial powers (U.S.) and colonial people (Vietnamese population).

A key position of this paper is to focus on postcoloniality in action, to show how colonial attitudes were not only developed and perpetuated on one hand and but also resisted on the other hand. As stressed by Prasad (2005), the postcolonial approach challenges the “Western” thoughts of modernity, but does this by always emphasizing the relationship of the West with the other. RAND documents offer a unique way of having two voices side by side. This proximity allows for an even deeper analysis to highlight issues of imperialism, marginalization and ideological subordination.

As management and organizational scholars, study of RAND’s role in the Vietnam War provides a focus on the role of organizations in the development of postcolonial relationships. While Said’s (1979, 1993) classic work on postcolonialism focused on literature as a powerful cultural artifact through which postcoloniality is generated we set out to explore the role of the corporate organization. Thus, we are not only interested in the fact that the RAND corporation
undertook work for the US military but also that it operated as a corporate entity in its own right, with specific implications for our understanding of postcolonialism in action.

As we are interested in a series of documents associated with activities and meanings at a particular point of time and, in particular their outcomes in terms of power and knowledge our methodology is derived from critical hermeneutics (Anshuman Prasad & Mir, 2002).

By applying critical hermeneutics, “text” can be seen in a broad sense. It means that any given text, artifacts, activities, organizational practices, economic or social structures are considered as “text” (Anshuman Prasad, 2002). Critical hermeneutics further focuses on revealing the deeper meaning of power relations within the “text” analyzed (Prasad, 2005). In the context of this paper, this will allow us to analyze the dynamics and interactions between RAND, as the colonial force, and the Vietnamese interviewees, as the colonized voices. A key aspect of critical hermeneutics is its concept of the hermeneutic circle that stresses the interdependence between the “text” analyzed and the socio-historical context the text is embedded in. Thus, our paper is organized in accordance with the hermeneutic circle. We will first introduce the RAND documents we plan to analyze. This section will be followed by the introduction of the socio-political context in which the RAND interviews took place. Then, we will conduct an analysis of the RAND interviews. Finally, we will give our interpretation of the findings by embedding those findings in the theoretical framework of postcoloniality.

METHODOLOGY

Postcolonial Theory and Its Focus on Rand

Postcolonial theory was born out of continuous critiques of imperialism and of the decolonization process happening throughout formerly colonized continents such as Asia, Africa,
and the Middle East (P. Prasad, 2005). Edward Said’s work is seen as one of the inspirations of postcolonial theory with the related concepts of “orientalism”, “tropicalization”, “primitivism”, and “imperialism” (P. Prasad, 2005). These concepts point to colonial discourses to raise awareness of Western feelings of superiority towards the rest of the world. From a postcolonial perspective, the concept of Western superiority is well explained through the model of binary oppositions:

A simple distinction between centre/margin; colonizer/colonized; […]; civilized/primitive represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates. Binary oppositions are structurally related to one another, and in colonial discourse there may be a variation of the one underlying binary – colonizer/colonized – that becomes rearticulated in any particular text in a number of ways.

(Ashcroft, 2007, p. 20)

These binary opposites are the core characteristics of imperialism that categorizes the Westerners and the colonialized societies into distinctions of the white/intelligent/civilized colonizer versus the ugly/unintelligent/primitive colonized. These assumptions then form a strong formation in dealing with the “other”. While the concept of the binary opposites is not necessarily motivated by the desire to dominate, it nevertheless creates a structural order of how reality is understood and depicted (Ashcroft, 2007). Prasad (1997, p. 291) offers an extensive list of binary opposites that shape the discourse of colonialism and how the West viewed the “other”.
# The Hierarchical System of Colonialist Binaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>Non – West</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Margin/ periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilized</td>
<td>Primitive/ savage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonizer</td>
<td>Colonized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>Backward/ undeveloped/ underdeveloped/ developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fullness/plenitude/completeness</td>
<td>Lack/ inadequacy/ incompleteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical (people with history)</td>
<td>A historical (people without history)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The liberated</td>
<td>The savable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine/ effeminate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Archaic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>Tribe</td>
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<td>Occidental</td>
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<td>Scientific</td>
<td>Superstitious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Object</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Inferior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The vanguard</td>
<td>The led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black/brown/ yellow</td>
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As stressed by Prasad (2005), postcolonial lenses “go behind the seeming normality of routine organizational processes to reveal the enduring colonial legacies that undergird them” (p. 277). Postcolonialist theory focuses strongly on the relationship between “colonizers” and “the colonized” on various levels. It challenges the Western’s ideologies of superiority and with it the associated imperialist paradigm. It does so by looking at the economic, socio-political, ideological and geographic dominance of the “West” and how these discourses manifested themselves in material and non-material realities (Ahluwalia, 2007).

Postcolonialist theory focuses on the consequences of colonial discourse on both the minds of colonizer and colonized (see, for example, Memmi, 1991; Said, 1979). Although postcolonialist theory is a pluralistic tradition with many approaches and voices (McClintock, 1992; P. Prasad, 2005), the core foundation of its tradition is its “growing impatience with the persistence of economic and cultural imperialism” (Prasad, 2005, p. 263). Young (2001) stresses the significance of postcolonialism by arguing that “postcolonial critique marks the moment
where the political and cultural experience of the marginalized periphery developed into a more general theoretical position that could be set against Western political, intellectual and academic hegemony and its protocols of objective knowledge” (p. 65).

Our study is not strictly speaking a classic postcolonial case. It deals with the military intervention of a Western power (the United States) into the affairs of a former (French) colonial state - Vietnam. Nonetheless, the RAND case focuses on the discursive relations between Vietnamese prisoners, their military captors and American researchers that arguably lend themselves to postcolonialist analysis. The RAND study is also unique in so far as it deals with sets of relationships that are mediated through imprisonment (of Vietnam people), in a context of anti-colonial struggle, and at an historic time (1964-1968) when the Vietnamese and Americans were still engaged in an on-going colonial relationships. This latter aspect adds an important dimension to an under-researched area of the study of direct relationships between colonized and colonizer. The interviews allow us insights not only into the thinking of the actors of the aspiring colonial power (the United States) but also the direct reactions of those who are being colonized. In the process we can also gain insights into the reflections and resistance of the colonized.

Postcolonial theory not only uses “texts” – such as press reports, archival material or tourism brochures but also examines institutional processes and cultural events within organizations to disclose hidden colonial and imperialist discourses (P. Prasad, 2005). Although there have been some studies undertaken applying postcolonial theory to create a conceptual bridge, or to reflect the ideological meaning of factual issues such as the study of the rise of OPEC (Anshuman Prasad, 1997), state museums (Harrison, 1997), etc., not many studies have focused on organizational-level activities to uncover the hidden faces of colonialist thinking. Therefore, the study of the role of organizations such as RAND - a think-tank of the U.S. (Abella, 2008) – will
contribute greatly in the uncovering of colonial and imperialist structures in organizational entities.

Memmi (1991) stresses that in order to understand the reality of the characters he studied in North Africa, he “first had to understand the colonizer and the colonized, perhaps the entire colonial relationship and situation” (p. vii). This focus on relationships in context is an important but difficult one to capture. This might explain why a number of postcolonialist works tend to focus on one aspect or one side of the relationship. Indeed, Said’s (1978) now classic work focuses largely on Western literary depictions of the oriental ‘other.’ A study of the RAND Corporation’s work in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, we argue, provides an interesting situation for ‘viewing’ postcolonial relationships in context (albeit a uniquely constructed one). It also affords us the opportunity of capturing elements of the social construction of the non-Western ‘other’ as well as resistance to those social constructions and the posing of alternative social constructions.

Through a focus on the RAND Corporation, we gain insights into the role of multi-national corporations in the creation of the non-Western ‘other’ that has reverberations through to the current day and the role of the Vietnam War in the American psyche. Finally, the study sheds some light on the influence of colonial relationships on the development of social science research methods in a company noted for its impact on business research (Abella, 2008).

Thus, our analysis of the RAND documents will be performed through a postcolonial lens, which draws on the burgeoning literature on postcolonial theory in management and organization studies (see, for example, Banerjee & Prasad, 2008; Ibarra-Colado, 2008; Anshuman Prasad & Prasad, 2003).
Critical Hermeneutics and Its Focus on RAND

Critical hermeneutics views language as a symbolic act. Thus, any form of text has an obvious meaning such as factual aspects and also a symbolic meaning that displays relationships beyond the surface. Symbol is understood as objects, actions and units of communication that “conveys not only a manifest of surface meaning but also another meaning that is different from the obvious (Prasad & Mir, 2002 p. 94). Consequently, the task of critical hermeneutics is to uncover “the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning” (Prasad & Mir, 2002 p. 96). Critical hermeneutics focuses on uncovering “the ongoing maintenance of asymmetrical relations that characterize a particular organization” (Phillips & Brown, 1993, p. 1554). Thus, the root task of critical hermeneutics is to provide a critique of the ideological aspects of the text interpreted (Habermas, 1990). As mentioned previously, one of the key concepts of critical hermeneutics is the notion of the hermeneutic circle. This concept argues that a text can only be interpreted and understood within the context in which it has been produced. Similarly, the context can only be understood from the texts that have been produced during its time, thus one influencing the other and consequently creating a circle. A text is a representation of and can only be understood in its cultural and historical context (Prasad & Mir, 2002).

Prasad and Mir (2002) outline four main stages when applying critical hermeneutics as a research method of “text”, which will also be applied in this paper. The first stage is referred to as choosing and reading the “text” which will be considered as data for analysis. As mentioned above, “text” should be understood in a broad sense. Specifically, “text” can be anything that can be interpreted by human minds; it ranges from conventional texts, organizational activities/practices, and cultural artifacts to economic and social structures. In this case, we will focus on the RAND interviews specifically as our “text” to be analyzed. In the second stage, it is
necessary to *layout the context* so that “text” can be inferred more correctly from that. Palmer (1969) stresses that any text is influenced by its context, where either “the part” or “the whole” can only be understood if they are placed in a harmonious relationship. In our paper we will therefore layout the historical and cultural context by introducing a brief history of Vietnam, the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and shed light on RAND as an organization and its research. The third stage is referred to as *closing the hermeneutic circle* in which texts are analyzed in accordance with their historical and cultural context. In this paper, the interviews will be laid out, interpreted and analyzed so that it can illustrate the dialogues between text and context. The last stage is labeled as *a conceptual bridge to critical understanding*. This stage closes various analyses of the above stages into some concrete critical and ideological meanings (Prasad & Mir, 2002). In this case, we will draw conclusions from our interpretations from the interviews and the historical and ideological contexts and interpret these findings applying postcolonial lenses.

**STAGE ONE: OUR SELECTION OF RAND INTERVIEWS AS “TEXT” FOR CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS**

Between 1964 and 1968, under contract with the U.S. Department of Defense, RAND has conducted about 2,400 interviews with Vietnamese prisoners, amounting to 62,000 pages of material (Davison, 1970). The interviews were mostly with Vietnamese prisoners, but also with some defectors and refugees, and individuals who were sympathetic to U.S. presence in Vietnam.

The interviews are classified into several series (Miller, 1968). For example, the AGR series in 1965 explores attitudes of refugees about the Viet Cong, the government of South Vietnam, the Americans, and the war in general; the K series was conducted between 1966 to 1968
investigating cause and objectives of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese armies; the “V” series was developed in 1967 to 1968 to understand Viet Cong activities in villages and hamlets; “H” investigates views of South Vietnamese villagers on herbicide and its effects on village food supplies.

For our study, we took a random sample of 100 interview transcripts from the roughly 2000 interviews housed in the Otto Richter Library of the University of Miami, along with a series of RAND documents that detailed and discussed the overall project. In the total collection male interviewees outnumbered the female ones in 10 to 1, so, in choosing 100 interviews we made sure that every tenth interview involved a female interviewee. We have also included a “text” in the form of a diary created by a Vietnamese doctor Dan Thuy Tram (Tram, 2007), who worked for the Viet Cong and kept a diary between 1968 and 1970 about her political and personal reflections on the Vietnam War. Killed by American forces, a U.S. intelligence specialist kept her diary, although ordered to destroy all documents without military value. After 35 years in his possession, this diary was published in 2007.

**STAGE TWO: LAYING OUT THE CONTEXT**

In this section of our paper, we will layout the historical and cultural context in which the RAND documents have been produced. As will be shown, the RAND interviewers and the Vietnamese interviewees met and engaged in a context of historical and cultural opposites.

*Influences on the Vietnamese Perspective*

In providing an account of the `Vietnamese’ “perspective” we are acutely aware that this is problematic, least of all because it is difficult to claim that any given perspective represents all
manner of opinion (Czarniawska & Gagliardi, 2003). What we present is a series of narratives that arguably served as a powerful influence on dominant Vietnamese thinking at the time under study.

In the 1860s, Vietnam was conquered and colonized by the French. According to Moss (1994), the French considered Vietnam’s society as backward and savage and colonization as bringing advancement to this civilization. Within a hundred years of French colonial rule, Vietnam also experienced a short domination by the Japanese during the 1940s. The Viet Minh, a communist organization that fought for the independence of Vietnam, led a fight against the Japanese and against French rule in Vietnam (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). After the Viet Minh had successfully defeated the French in 1954, internationally brokered talks between the Vietminh and the French led to an agreement to temporarily divide Vietnam into two nations. The North established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the DRV), while the South established the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (the GVN). The plan for reunification within two years broke down when the leader of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, rejected the Geneva accords. Diem’s decision was supported by the U.S. government that was highly concerned about the communist influence spreading throughout South East Asia. In 1961, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (the NLF) was established with the purpose to overthrow the government of Diem and to form a coalition government which would negotiate with North Vietnam to reunite the country (Elliott, 2010).

From 1954 to 1956, there were about 90,000 loyal communist Viet Minh troops regrouped to the North. However, after the suspension of the Geneva agreement, about 30,000 of these regrouped soldiers are believed to have been sent to South Vietnam (Zasloff, 1968). The purpose of this movement was to help the Southern insurgents (the Viet Cong) fight against the Army of
the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Those “re-groupees” (Elliot, 2010, p.81) played a significant role for the presence and growth of the Vietnamese Communist (Viet Cong) organizations.

Most of the militants went to South Vietnam by foot in groups of 40 to 50 (Zasloff, 1968). Normally, these regroupees were transported through North Vietnam by truck and, upon reaching Laos, began to trek to the South on foot. The movement was apparently so strenuous that it took about two and a half months for them to arrive in the South where they would be integrated into the NLF (Zasloff, 1968).

Concerning the cultural mentality of the Vietnamese population, a powerful narrative that is often evoked in their love for their motherland. In histories of Vietnam this ‘love of motherland’ is linked to various struggles for independence and a single nation united without the involvement of strangers is a crucial point for the Vietnamese psyche. Under Chinese control for over a thousand of years (111BC – 938AD) and struggling against European and U.S. intrusion, one of the most prominent themes for Vietnam has been “to preserve national identity against foreigners” (Tucker, 1999, p. 1). The government in North Vietnam therefore did not accept Vietnam’s ultimate division into North and South. The presence of the Americans was seen as an outsider and thus caused a strong motivation for continuous resistance against them like against the previous invaders including the Chinese, French, and Japanese. From the Vietnamese perspective, they were in their own land which consisted of one nation (Davison, 1970).

*The American Perspective*

U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and support for South Vietnam was arguably motivated by U.S. fears of communism and the increase of Soviet power (Abella, 2008). According to Bolton (2008), “it was a socio-cultural consensus that the Soviet Union represented a dangerous tyrannical threat to America’s way of life” (p. 29). U.S. urgency to prevent South
Vietnam from becoming communist and thus facilitating a further global spread of Soviet power is well reflected in the drastic numbers of so-called “advisors” and military staff sent to Vietnam. Between 1962 and 1963 the number of U.S. “advisors” in Vietnam increased from 700 to 15,000 (Karnow, 1983). The presence of U.S. troops between 1965 and 1967 rose rapidly from 200,000 to 500,000 peaking at 580,000 by 1968.

RAND’s presence in Vietnam was of crucial importance for the U.S. government and was aimed at helping the United States to manage the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. RAND has employed high caliber researchers and advisors for its researches, 27 of whom were Nobel Prize holders (Abella, 2008; Elliot, 2010). Stressing its mission as “to further and promote scientific, educational, and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare and security of the United States of America” (Abella, 2008), RAND has always considered itself as a non-student university with all necessary human and equipment to conduct research as an actual academic institution (Abella, 2008).

In terms of management theory, one of RAND’s more important contributions has been the development of rational choice theory that assumes that “self-interest defines all aspects of human activity” (Abella, 2008, p. 52). This theory was also seen as useful in helping to defeat communism by stressing economic self-interests of the individual over ideological sacrifices for the collective good. In other words, it was arguably a culture-bound theory of management and economics. Very early on after its foundation, RAND become an essential part in the U.S. government decision-making body. RAND, for instance, contributed greatly to the development of scenario for dealing with the possibility of the U.S. using the atomic bomb against its enemy, the USSR in the 1950s. Following the Cuba Missile Crisis in 1962 the U.S. military, with the help of RAND concentrated on other Third World nations, including Vietnam, that were at the
risk of communist domination (Abella, 2008). RAND soon became the strategic brain of the U.S. government by using its studies to give advice on military activities to both the U.S. and the government of South Vietnam (Karnow, 1983).

RAND’s most prominent role during the Vietnam War was between 1964 and 1968 (Abella, 2008; Davison, 1970; Elliot, 2010). During that time, RAND researchers developed and utilized RAND-generated theories, such as the domino theory (psychological theories), game theory (the theory of rational choice), theory of aid (social and economic theories), urbanization theory, bloodbath theory, and the madman theory (Abella, 2008; Elliot, 2010; Robin, 2001).

According to one source, between sixty-five and seventy per cent of RAND staff believed in the domino theory (Elliott, 2010) which proposes that the fall of one state to communism would quickly cause other states to follow. Thus “the loss of one state to Soviet communism would lead to eventual domination by the USSR of a whole serious of countries” (Sheehan, 2003, p. 34). The theory was used as a warning against the threat of communism in Asian countries including China, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, and India. The game theory is another body of “knowledge” that shaped U.S. operations and RAND’s conduct in Vietnam. In the principle of the zero-sum game, this theory proposes that one participant’s gains are exactly proportional to the losses of the opponent. In the context of the Vietnam War, this theory aimed at predicting the warfare strategies of the North Vietnamese army in their attempt to avoid loses and thus gains for the U.S. military. As stressed by Abella (2008), this theory aimed at predicting, “whether a nation chooses a path to armament, conflict and war, or disarmament, cooperation, and peace” (p. 55). The theory and practice of foreign aid assumes that the greater the economic progress in a society and the reduction of poverty, the greater is the population’s support for a democratic government and society. Thus, various economic policies
were developed by RAND to enhance (a particular notion of) economic progress in Vietnam (Elliott, 2010). The urbanization theory, proposed by Huntington (1968), contends that:

The crucial characteristic of the heavily contested rural areas is the absence of effective social and political organization above the village level [...] The strength of the Viet Cong is its ability to fill this vacuum of authority; the weakness of the Government has been the failure of its pacification programs to generate self-sustaining local organizations. (p. 644)

To counterbalance this tendency, Huntington argued that the Viet Cong had no possibilities to gain support in municipalities and as a solution proposed the dislocating of the rural population to cities. He believed that rapid urbanization and modernization would greatly help in the defeat of the Viet Cong (Robin, 2001). The madman theory is a term used by Nixon as a strategy for containing North Vietnam by giving the impression that the U.S. government would do whatever it took, up to and including nuclear weapons, to prevent the North from communist infiltration of South Vietnam (Elliott, 2010). Nixon explained to his advisors that leading US government officials “would ‘just slip the word’ to the enemy that, ‘Nixon is obsessed about communists. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button’” (Elliott, 2010, p. 360). The madman theory served as a warning to communist North Vietnam in the hope that they would give up their military actions and be willing to negotiate. The “bloodbath theory” (Elliot, 2010, p.499) was proposed by President Nixon, who repeatedly argued that if American troops should retreat from Vietnam, the Communist army would conduct a bloodbath with the South Vietnamese population out of revenge. It was predicted that the Viet Cong backlash would cost the lives of around three million people after the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In a report published by RAND it is stressed that the Viet Cong’s revenge would be part
of their doctrine to punish those who have supported the American troops in Vietnam, referring to this fact as “implacable” (Elliott, 2010, p. 500).

These theories were all developed during RAND’s research in Vietnam and was, in large part either developed by RAND researchers (e.g, domino theory) or supported by them (e.g., bloodbath theory). It is clear that most RAND analysts viewed the war in Vietnam as a commitment to prevent the spread of communism and as RAND members, they were “laying the groundwork for countering that threat” (Elliott, 2010, p. 19). In the process they failed to challenge the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, which Elliot, 2010, p.19) argues, should have been done “as early as 1961–1962 when the growing U.S. involvement in Vietnam indicated the significance of this conflict for the U.S.”.

The various theories, theoretical frameworks, and methodological designs developed by the RAND Corporation were variously discussed and debated for their level of objectivity. Working within a scientifistic (or positivist) culture (Abella, 2008; Latour, 1987) RAND researchers were concerned with such things as objectivity, validity and reliability (Davison, 1970; Elliott, 2010). Yet they failed to fully recognize the socio-political nature of their own assumptions that informed their research. Thus, for example, in compiling a `users guide to the RAND interviews in Vietnam,’ W.P. Davison raises the concern that: “dimensions of cooperativeness (or willingness to answer questions), objectivity, and political bias cut across the categories of defectors and prisoners” (1970, p.50). He did not seem to question the objectivity or political bias of the RAND researchers themselves. In raising issues of reliability and validity, Davison (1970, p.46) wonders whether “the respondents tell the truth?” And he goes on to say that “obviously some of them did not but the interviewers made strenuous efforts to secure valid information.” From the seemingly smallest to the largest observations RAND researchers appear
to have viewed their own, ‘Western,’ scientific knowledge as the font of objectivity; a striving for objectivity in the face of people who may well lie to the interviewer. It is the Vietnamese “respondent” who is the danger to objectivity not the underlying philosophical values of the researchers. Notably the RAND researchers seem oblivious to the problem of characterizing prisoners as “respondents”! Even the term “interviewee” tends to mask the uneven process, with all its implications, of the fact that the people being questioned were prisoners. Furthermore, in their overall concept of what is important to the Vietnamese they appear to have greatly underplayed or take into account factors such as religion, nationalism, patriotism and culture (Robin, 2001). Furthermore, although they regarded themselves as researchers and academic scholars and wanted to consider the Vietnamese interviewees as participants in the RAND projects (Elliott, 2010), their predisposed opinions about the Cold War conflict prevented them from viewing the Vietnamese “interviewees” as anything else that the “other”.

STAGE THREE: CLOSING THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

Laying out the context in the previous section has given us an understanding about the role of the U.S. and RAND in the war in Vietnam. The previous section has also shed light on the deep commitment of the Vietnamese population towards a national identity and its historically deep-rooted aversion towards foreign intruders.

The analysis of the following texts of RAND documents will demonstrate the interactions of the “colonizer” with “the colonized”.


Q59: Did you fight against the American or GVN troops?

A: Our purpose in coming south was to fight against the American troops. The reasons we fought against the GVN soldiers as well were if we attacked the American troops and were attacked by the GVN soldiers, then we were
forced to fire at the GVN soldiers. If the puppet soldiers surrendered, we wouldn’t fire at them. We would capture them and make them prisoners. But if they deliberately fired at us, we would have to fire back.

Q.92: In your opinion which country had more influence on the Government in the North, Russia or China?

A: As far as I know, the Government in the North wasn’t influenced by either Russia or China. It had its own policies and adhered to them accordingly. In the matter of national policies, the Government in the North and the Party put the interests of the nation and the people above all else and would follow the same policies. It wouldn’t let itself be drawn this or that direction following Russia and China.

Text 2: “Military prisoner, infiltrator from North Vietnam, interviewed in Nov. 1967 (AG-650)”

Q239. How much longer do you think the war will last?

A: That I don’t know…. There’s one thing I believe; that is when the war is over, victory will be ours…Our purpose is to liberate the people. We aren’t invading any other nation. This is the people’s war. The people are the source of troop supply. Each citizen is a soldier. This war has no front, which is to our advantage.

Q240: Do you think the war might end with a peace negotiation?

A: Peace would be achieved if all American, ROK (Republic of Korea) troops, and others pulled out of this country….This country should belong to Vietnamese alone.

Q243: It is essential that this country has to be unified and Communist?

A: It’s the tradition of this country to be independent. Our people didn’t have much choice, however. Now we are going to fight until the other half gains its independence from the Americans.

Q249: How could peace be achieved now?

A: It’s simple. If the American, the Koreans, and other allied troops pull out then peace would return.

Q251: Let’s suppose Americans weren’t here, would you fight the ARVN alone?

A: Without American interference, we’d negotiate peace with the GVN.

Q254: Does independence and communism mean the same thing to you?

A: Communism or no communism, that’s not very important. What we should concern ourselves with is how to bring food and clothing to all the people.

In text 1, the questions posed by the RAND interviewer imply a division between the U.S. and the GVN government (South Vietnam) although they are supposed to work together during the war period from 1964 to 1968. The interviewers wanted to show a good image of Americans coming to Vietnam, not as the invaders but liberators and rescuers to the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese respondent considers the U.S. as the invaders of Vietnam who encouraged the soldiers of South Vietnam to fight against their own nation. Referring to the South Vietnamese
army as “puppet soldiers”, the prisoner further stresses his awareness of the Americans being the true opponents and not the South Vietnamese.

Text 2 reinforces the themes in text 1. The prisoner shows strong opposition to any foreign forces in Vietnam. It is very clear to the Vietnamese prisoner that foreigners have no reason to be in Vietnam. The term “the outsider” is so strong that anyone who ever worked for the outsiders is also considered as an outsider. For example, the term “My-Diem” is used by North Vietnam to refer to Diem [South Vietnam’s president] as dependent on the Americans (Moss, 1994; Zasloff, 1968). Also among South Vietnamese, Americans were considered as an outsider in Vietnam. In a narrative by Abella (2008), a South Vietnamese major was so angry at a RAND’ staffer working in South Vietnam, that he questioned him “Why are you American here?”, “What do you think you have to teach the Vietnamese in Vietnam? Do you think we are not brave enough to fight the Communists?” (p. 193).

Moving to a broader layer of context, we argue that from the perspective of the Vietnamese prisoners in text 1 and 2, the termination of the Vietnam War should be considered as the removal of the outsider. The withdrawal of the American soldiers would represent the end of the Vietnam War and the reunification of Vietnam. The question of ideological formation of the government is secondary. The primary concern is to bring welfare to Vietnam as a whole, in the north and the south of Vietnam.

Text 3: “A refugee interviewed in May 1965 (AGR-1)”

Q 65: What did the people in your village think of the fall of the Diem regime?
A: People were worried at the fall of Mr. Ngo [surname of Diem]. They were worried about the future. They feared that the next head of government would intensify the war and the ARVN operations. Under Mr. Ngo, people knew peace and they were able to work for a living because the ARVN did not attack the village very often.

Q 66: What did the VC tell villagers about the fall of Mr. Ngo?
A: They said the Americans had realized that they were in a bad position because Mr. Ngo had not been effective in leading the war. Consequently, the Americans had to change Mr. Ngo for a more effective man. The VC said Mr. Ngo was downed because the Americans were losing the war to the Front. Afterward, on the occasion of each change of government, the VC said the Americans were losing faster and faster every day; therefore they had to change their men who had been incapable.

Q 164: Have you seen any Americans?

A: I see them driving by very often but yesterday I saw the first Americans who came here to visit us (Note: They were one US military adviser, one US embassy official and one RAND Corporation staff member.)

Q 165: What do you think they are doing here?

A: I do not know accurately but I think they are here to govern us and to help us.

**Text 4: “A refugee interviewed in May 1965 (AGR-3)”**

Q122: Have you seen any Americans? What have you heard about them?

For a long time, I have heard that Americans are rich, and they lack nothing in their material life; they have oil wells, gold mines and are short of nothing at all. When I lived in Saigon and My Tho, I seldom met Americans. But now they are very numerous.

Q123: Why do you know they are numerous?

A: I have seen them pass by on the high way in jeeps and cars.

Q126: Have you seen people from other countries other than Americans (Koreans, Filipinos, etc.) who are helping the Vietnamese?

A: No.

In text 3 and 4, the questions posed by the interviewer indicate U.S.’ and RAND’s self-perception as that of the rescuer and supporter to the Vietnamese people. By posing the question “Have you seen people from other countries other than Americans who are helping the Vietnamese?”, the interviewer indicates firstly, that Americans are the only ones who are willing to come to help to the Vietnamese, thus making themselves morally outstanding, and secondly, that Vietnam is in need of help and being saved.

From the prisoners’ perspective, texts 3 and 4 show that they don’t see any direct interaction or help from the Americans. They only see them driving by in their modern vehicles and know from hearsay that they are supposed to be rich. Text 3 again poses questions about Diem, the top leader of GVN so as to explore the sentiment among peasants for the Diem government. As a
nationalist, it was Diem who had denied any foreign involvement in Vietnamese affairs. At the beginning of the war, Diem was the president of South Vietnam. Diem also challenged the presence of RAND in Vietnam. Not until his assassination in 1963, supported by the CIA (Jacobs, 2006), was RAND was able to conduct research and studies in Vietnam.

Text 5: “A military captive, NVA infiltrator (SX46) interviewed in Nov. 1967”

Q 200: Was your unit ever attacked by B-52s?
A: No.

Q 201: What do you think about the present war situation?
A: I have no opinion on this.


Q65: Have you heard about or seen the effect of GVN defoliation operation?
A: Is this the scientific poisonous fruit (trai doc khoa hoc) that you mean?

Q66: Yes, the Front calls it “scientific poisonous fruit”, but in our side the term “defoliation” means killing of vegetation such as trees and bushes along roads, canals or railroad, or in areas of Front camps by air spray or by ground forces. The Vietnamese term is “khai quang”. Have you heard about it? Or have you seen its effects?
A: Oh yes! I have seen trees and bushes destroyed by this poison, which is very dangerous. It has caused much damage to the fruit trees belonging to the villagers and the latter have complained about it very much. I heard these complaints at Bien Hoa by the people of Tan Phu and Chung Thanh districts.

The questions in text 5 and 6 exemplify the instruments of U.S. power such as the B-52 air bombers. As indicated by the interviewer, the term “defoliation” has been equated to the Vietnamese term “khai hoang” which means that the people remove the leaves of trees manually. However, defoliation refers to the chemical spraying that Tram (2007) mentioned in her diary in which she talks about the disastrous consequences from this chemical on her skin and that of other communist militants. The answers offered by the Vietnamese prisoners at the same time show their disrespect for the presence of the Americans and their destructive power in Vietnam. In text 5, this is displayed through the minimal conversational engagement of the prisoner with

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\(^{1}\) Those who had not originally wanted to be captured were labeled “hard core prisoner,” while those who wanted to be captured were classified as “potential rallying prisoner” or “rallier” (Cochran & Jacobsen, 1968, p. 1)
the interviewer. In text 6, this is stressed through the prisoner’s acknowledgement of the disastrous consequences of the defoliation operation for Vietnam’s nature and Vietnamese villagers; meaning the detrimental effects of U.S. actions on the innocent population rather than the Viet Cong.

*Text 7: “A military rallier, NVA infiltrator, interviewed in Nov. 1967 (SX45)”*

Q 197: What do you want to do now?
A: I hope that South and North Vietnam will be soon unified, so that I will be able to return to my family soon.

Q 198: In what way do you wish the country be unified?
A: I wish no discrimination about the government regime, be its nationalist or communist. If the whole country becomes a nation like South Vietnam now, I would be happy, too. I only wish for reunification in the near future.

*Text 8: “Politician, interviewed in Sept. 1966 (L7)”*

Q6: As politician, how do you view the Americans?
A: I think the Americans judge persons and things in this Orient full of mysteries with the mechanical eyes of an engineer who is only precise with figures. In Vietnam, there couldn’t be only white or only black things, but there are both white and black, light and dark.

In text 7 and text 8, the interviewers tried to make sense of how the Vietnamese think about the Americans and about their own futures. The military rallier (text 7) stressed the importance of the unification of Vietnam independent of the political character of the government. This again stresses the priority of national unity over political ideologies. This text illustrates that a mental separation into North and South Vietnam never took place in the thinking of the Vietnamese and that the political “dispute” only plays a secondary role for the Vietnamese people. Text 8 shows the mechanistic view Vietnamese have of the Americans. It also reflects the Vietnamese’s impression of the Americans whose evaluations are strictly shaped into black or white thinking. This stands in contrast to the Vietnamese culture that assumes that situations must be looked at from various perspectives and cannot be judged either all good or all bad. In the context of the war in Vietnam, the politician’s statement (text 8) evokes the impression that
U.S. involvement in Vietnam cannot be categorized into black and white thinking, as the American’s do, but is a more complex issue.

Most of the RAND interviews began with classifications of the interviewee into such categories as “infiltrator,” “military ralllier,” “refugee,” “politician,” etc. These classifications were arguably very much part of the process of othering the Vietnamese and reflect pre-established cultural and political biases. The term infiltrator, for example, suggests that the Vietnamese captive had illegitimately entered the geographical space of another country, and had done so in a deceptive way.

The RAND interviews also often included comments attached at the end of the transcripts. The comments by RAND interviewers reflect the colonial thinking of the landlord and his/her servants. These comments also highlight the representation of the East as the inferior being. The interview AG-659, for example, has comments attached which clearly display the interviewer’s ideological dismissal with regard to the prisoner and his political outlook:

The subject was sulky, stubborn, and childishly hostile. He glared at the ‘poor’ interviewer at first, and tightened his lips as if to say: ‘Oh, I despise you.’ He rejected an offer of cigarettes with a movement of his hand: ‘Put them away, I don’t want any.’ After a lot of nonsensical chats, he became relaxed and friendlier. He lied a lot but not very well. Sometimes he talked like a propaganda cadre using strong words, but making little sense. He was eager to repeat what he had learnt at the Front, and either did not pay any attention to the questions or evaded them. The interview ended in a friendly atmosphere, and he walked back to his cell with the whole pack of cigarettes in his pocket. (p. 33).

By using expressions such as “sulky”, “stubborn”, and “childishly hostile”, the prisoner is clearly degraded. Rather than saying, “the interviewee was uncooperative”, the interviewer chooses words that clearly display the lower opinion he has of the prisoner. By telling the story how the prisoner did not initially want a cigarette and afterwards took all of them, the interviewer’s superiority is expressed by showing that even the most uncooperative prisoner will
be won over by the righteousness of the Westerner. By choosing expressions such as “nonsensical chats”, “propaganda cadre” and “making little sense” it is clear that the interviewer is not capable to go beyond his own “blindness” (Prasad, 2005). The interview DT-263 I is another example of Americans’ conviction of their own superiority versus the Vietnamese and also reveals gendered thinking:

The subject is still a naïve girl. She was sincere and cooperative. The interviewer had the feeling that her past work for the Front had immunized her against any further temptation of looking for fun or glory with the VC [Viet Cong]. (p. 9)

While in other cases the interviewees are described as “simple” or of “little intelligence”, this woman is described as a “girl” who is “still naïve”. She strikes the interviewer as critical towards the activities of the Viet Cong, so the interviewer describes her in positive terms and affirms that she is now immune for any “fun” and “glory” (p. 9) with the Viet Cong. The change in description of prisoners further displays that the perceived quality of the prisoners was influenced based on their ideological attitudes. If the interviewers felt that the prisoner is anti-communist, they are described in positive terms and their credibility is not doubted.

Mr. Chung was a healthy and cheerful young man. He was earnestly cooperative during the interview. I had the impression that the subject had been very happy to be able to rally. He had those gestures and attitudes of a person who had just escaped a terrible accident. (TETVC – 77, p. 2)

In another interview this tendency is reflected as well. “The subject was cooperative and seemed intelligent. The interviewer doesn’t think that the subject wasn’t sincere about the reason she stopped working for the Front” (V-37 (III), p. 15).

The image of savage and backward people in contrast to the modern and civilized West is displayed vividly:

The subject was not very intelligent and looked passively stubborn. She was uncooperative and spoke with a low, barely audible voice, keeping her face down all the time. She was
more interested in presenting her image as an innocent girl than in telling what she knew about the Front. (File No. DT-36 (I), p. 20)

In the interview TETVC-26, the interviewer acknowledges that the prisoner was well educated due to attending high school but “he was, however, a quiet and rather dull-witted person” (p. 2). In the interview H-43 the interviewer describes that the subject’s “intelligence was below average and his memory poor […] He had difficulty in understanding many of the interviewer’s questions and also in conveying his meaning” (p. 16).

The concept of binary opposites between the “colonizer” and “the colonized” is well reflected in these descriptions. The interviewers describe the prisoners as “dull-witted” and with intelligence “below-average” which consequently must stand in contrast to the “witty” and “above-average” intelligent Westerner.

At the same time, when looking at the texts as dialogues between the “colonizer” and “the colonized”, we find examples of resistance and resilience of the Vietnamese prisoners in subtle but nevertheless meaningful ways.

**Text 9: “A civilian prisoner, a party member, a propaganda specialist interviewed in April 1965 (G24)”**

Q8: What do you think of rumors detrimental to the GVN which are stated by the Front?

A: If the GVN does something bad, we will not hesitate to tell people about it. For example, coups d’état happen continuously in the GVN. The VC exploit this by telling the people that the temporary period of stability (under Diem) has ended, and that from now on it will be the period of continuous crises. One man after another will come to power. For this reason, the people in the countryside will no longer [be] surprised by the coups d’état. They understand that it is the natural state of things.

Q16: In case of Front losses for example, do you withhold news on your losses to avoid affecting people’s confidence in the Front?

A: No, we announce all our defeats. When we lose, we have to inform the people why we have lost. We have to mobilize the people’s spirit in such a way that they will contribute more to the Front to achieve its victory… For this reason, we tell the people about all losses and victories, as the case may be. Victories will encourage people to achieve more victories, defeats will make them determined to win the next time.

Q18: Could you tell me about the specific defeat and the Front exploitation of it to make the people contribute more to the Front?

A: I don’t remember any specific case.
Q68: In your opinion, what is the weakness of the VC propaganda and how can the GVN exploit them?
(Subject kept silent)

Q69: How should the GVN appeal to the people or to the Front members?
(Subject remained silent)

In text 9, we have an example of resistance by the prisoner who uses silence as a form of refusal and withdrawing from participating in the interview. In accordance with the broad meaning of text, we consider these reactions as “silent texts” which carry great meaning beyond the surface of a non-reply. Choosing not to answer the questions serves as a form of resilience and resistance to participate with the RAND staff in their research. Since the prisoner has no other form of showing his resistance in this context, his choice of not replying to the interviewer’s questions is the most powerful tool the prisoner has at this moment to offer resistance.

The examples of the texts presented above reveal some representations of the Vietnamese made by the Americans through the role of RAND. We argue that these representations replicate the hierarchical system of colonist binaries in terms of a comparison between the West and the East. The analysis of interviews also reveals resistance from the Vietnamese prisoners. For instance, text 5 and text 9 show silent texts, which we interpret as a metaphorical resistance among Vietnamese regardless of their position as infiltrator, refugee, rallier, or politician.

The transcripts of the interviews represent dialogues between interviewers and interviewees who are both ideologically indoctrinated. On the surface, the former developed questions to try to make sense of the Vietnamese, and the latter responded with their understanding of the war, of their home country and of the Americans. Under the surface however, strong themes of colonial thinking among RAND staff has been detected while forms of resilience and resistance among Vietnamese prisoners has been shown.
STAGE FOUR: A CONCEPTUAL BRIDGE TO CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING

In our analysis of the RAND interviews a number of factors come to the fore in a series of questions with potential insights for future direction. First and foremost is the form through which (post)colonialist thought processes are pursued in this case: that form is the interview. At one level ‘the interview’ can be seen as a standard method for gathering data. Although contested as a cultural artifact rather than an objective tool for knowledge production (Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005) its cultural biases are rarely viewed out of context. Arguably, in the RAND case the cultural limitations of the (scientific) interview are exposed and allow us to view them as one important means through which cultural values are transmitted. This is performed in two or more ways. The first is through interactions with those being asked the questions. In this scenario the structure of the interview (the expert interviewer and the naïve interviewee) and of the questions themselves (implying specific values) serve to create a set of interactions whereby the person answering the questions is placed in a context where they response to pre-established and dominant values. The second form of cultural influence is where the outcomes of a series of interviews are developed into a narrative of ‘scientific’ evidence that are used to develop specific truth claims about the character of the Vietnamese people.

Many of the questions appeared to be of a ‘factual’ nature but they were framed by the context in which the questions were asked (the imprisonment of the ‘interviewee’) and a number of subtle and more open political questions and statements. For example, in an interview with one military prisoner (File AG-649), who is described as an “infiltrator from North Vietnam.” Over the course of the interview the man is asked 192 questions, including the following:

Q1. “Would you describe your trip from the North to the South?”

Q4. “How many recruits were in your company?”
Q5. “Did you come South by trucks of did you walk?”

But he was also asked questions of the following type:

Q. 25 “Do you think that the war will last for 10 or 20 years?

A. “No one can guess that”

Q. 26 “Did you think you would be able to fight 10 or 20 more years if the war would last that long?

A. “I would continue to fight to the end.”

Q. 82 “Do you think what you are fighting for is worth 10 or 20 more years of the people suffering?”

A. “The people haven’t suffered that much. They can endure more if need be.”

Q.109: “Did anyone in the North demand that the government stop the war and restore peace?

A. “The people in the North all wanted peace and long for it. Though no one publically asked that the Government restore peace, we discussed it when we sat together . . . during co-op meetings”

Q.110 “What did you say? What do you think that the government in the North should do to restore peace?”

A. “The only way to restore peace was for the aggressors to withdraw”. The taken-for-granted nature of the interview can be likened to other forms of corporate communications, such as recruitment, training and promotion protocols used by multi-nationals in hiring locals. It is a symbolic device whose appearance of objectivity conceals deep-rooted cultural biases from both those applying them and those at the receiving end.

The cultural device, in this case the interview, is usually also used to mediate between local representatives and those consuming the data. In the RAND case the process begins with end of interview commentary, which serves as a translation device for reading the raw material. Thus, at the end of the interview above the researcher notes:
The subject was a well indoctrinated cadre who absolutely believed in the superiority of the liberation forces and the victory of the Liberation Front. He was relaxed during the interview and answered all the questions, but they were so deeply colored by his ideological stand it was hard to judge their veracity.

Presumably indoctrination and ideological stands are seen as something that the subject (rather than the interviewer or the reader) has.

In another case the interviewer notes that “the subject was just a simple country boy who had enjoyed living under the Communist government of the North. He believed in the magical power of Communism, although he didn’t know much about the ideology itself. He was not articulate, but he was cooperative and seemed sincere.” (File AG-655).

And a third case the interviewer says of a civilian prisoner that for “an average Vietnamese, the subject’s life story contains nothing of significance. It’s simply one of thousands of similar cases which have taken place so far. It might, however, amaze a foreigner.” (File DT-270).

The raw material of the interviews was usually crunched into manageable pieces that address specific organizational issues; in this case the need for the US military to understand how to defeat the enemy (Abella, 2008). Much of the cultural richness of the prisoners’ narratives are left out of account as the RAND reports focus on issues of strategic importance only. For instance, a number of reports were produced like one that described “some characteristics of the Viet Cong” in terms of the number who lived in a village, communist party membership, and attitudes to the National Liberation Front (Cochran & Jacobsen, 1968).
The reports themselves and high-level reaction to them also found their way into negative American attitudes to the Vietnamese from sections of the public and the military as found in popular culture as well as on the ground behaviours.

This leads us to a second issue of the imposition of discursive characterizations (of the nature of the war and its people) and their role in colonial-colonized relations. RAND researchers did not invent the idea of two divisive Vietnamese states (the North and the South) at being at the heart of the war, or the labeling of the conflict as the Vietnam War but they utilized the concepts in structuring, applying and analysing a series of interviews. More directly RAND developed characterizations of the people of Vietnam as “fish” that contributed to a military campaign that treated the Vietnamese as less than human.

One country/two countries: At the outset of the war in Vietnam colonizer and colonized (Memmi, 1991) had sharply different conceptions of the character of the country that was the focus of attention. For RAND (and the US military) there were two Vietnams – one communist state in the North and one free, independent state in the South. While this recognized the temporary political divisions stemming from an earlier Geneva accords it seems to have influenced RAND researchers’ belief that Vietnam was culturally two disparate states. Thus, at one level RAND researchers categorized some combatants as “infiltrators” if they came to “the South” of the country from “the North.” At another level (see below), the war itself was classified as the Vietnam War, between combatants from two Vietnamese states. With the United States becoming involved to support one state (South Vietnam) over another, aggressor, state (North Vietnam). From the Vietnamese perspective, Vietnam is one nation of an “S” shape with one main language - Vietnamese. Its long history of struggle against foreign intruders shaped the Vietnamese’s strong resistance to any division or to any domination by foreigners. As we get to
glimpse in text 7, there is a Vietnamese notion that the (one) country has been divided and the hope is for “reunification” as opposed to what the RAND reviewers see as the take-over by one state by another. There is considerable evidence that the Vietnamese people never thought that it should be two nations because – as the interviewee in text 7 indicates -- the people both from the North and the South have their relatives living on either side (Elliott, 2010).

From the American perspective, Vietnam appears to be considered as two separate nations, just like the post-war division of Germany (into East and West) and the post-Korean war division (into North and South). What started as divisions due to political outcomes later seem to become understood as socio-cultural as well as socio-political divisions. The U.S. military is association with RAND saw themselves as the liberators and civilizers brought in to “save South Vietnam from North Vietnam”. Such ideological thinking was deeply entrenched among the U.S. soldiers and RAND’s researchers before the intensive war began in Vietnam (Elliot, 2010).

*The Vietnam War vs. The American War*: The opposite naming of the war in Vietnam (Vietnam War versus American War) is more than just a descriptive term. It is rather a discursive process. In a broad sense, the meaning of the war totally changes when we consider the former or the latter expression. The ’Vietnam War’ gives a sense of domestic struggles between conflicting Vietnamese states and/or Vietnamese peoples where help from the outside is needed. Thus, the Americans play the role of hero. On the other hand, ‘the American War,’ as referred to by North Vietnam, paints the Americans as invaders and it is war with the invading Americans, not with the Vietnamese themselves. Both are discursive ways of thinking that is at the heart of a struggle to impose or resist colonial attitudes. There is increasing irony in the later stage of the war when the United States Government, increasingly anxious – under pressure from its own people – to disengage from Vietnam attempts to replace US troops with local Vietnamese troops. The
process becomes referred to as the Vietnamization of the war – a not too subtle recognition of the US role in Vietnam. The RAND research project directly assisted in this process of attempting to get the Vietnamese to adopt US concerns and issues and take over the defence of those issues.

The Fish in the Pond Metaphor: This metaphor, originally expressed by China’s political leader Mao Tse Dung, was used by RAND strategist Leon Goure to describe the guerilla fighters and their military strategies (see, for example, Goure, 1965; Goure & Thomson, 1965). The fish stands for the Viet Cong. The pond stands for the rural areas in which the Viet Cong were able to operate because of the support of the village populations. Goure metaphorically suggested draining the water from the ponds by bombing the villages and forcing the villagers to flee into the cities. Thus, the Viet Cong would be left without support of the locals and end up “floundering like fish out of water” (Elliott, 2010, p. 97). We argue that the image of fish and the pond are related to colonial images where the people of the Third World nations are viewed as both non-human but also an underdeveloped fishing and agricultural nation.

While the terms “two nation” and “Vietnam War” label Americans as the liberators in the war in Vietnam, the theme “taking fish out of water” identifies the Americans as a modern, superior physical power. The metaphor of the fish in the water and the strategy of bombing to achieve this goal reveal highly anti-human and unethical methods. Vietnamese people were considered as creatures that can be controlled by bombing and spraying poisonous chemicals.²

Simultaneously, RAND members tried to teach the benefits of American civilization to local youths through activities such as how to play baseball. American medics were organized to provide medical care for local residents. However, as Karnow (1983) points out “the effort made

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² The Mylai massacre by American troops in 1969 also reaffirms the anti-human approach riddled with U.S. racism towards the Vietnamese (Karnow, 1983).
only a superficial dent in Vietnamese culture” (p. 245), and although local people welcomed American medical help they sympathized with the Viet Cong. In accordance with postcolonial theory, this again exemplifies the colonial images of the colonizer as “teacher” and the colonized as “student”.

When the U.S. understood the difficulty of winning the war in Vietnam, it wanted to withdraw its troops as soon as possible without acknowledging its failed mission.

The departure of Americans with the strategy of Vietnamization left the South Vietnamese troops the full burden of the war, revealing a kind of a master/servant relationship. When the latter is of no use, the former disposes of them without any more interest in the latter (Memmi, 1991).

In terms of organizational analysis somewhere between the implementation of selected cultural artifacts (e.g., the interview) and the translation of the outcomes of those artifacts (e.g., policy reports) there are opportunities for cooperation or dominant behaviours. In the context of a war that the US government perceived as a struggle for world supremacy (communism versus freedom) contextual factors overwhelmed the ability of the researchers involved to see beyond their own socio-political and cultural values.

This leads us to a final set of observations, namely, the power of resistance. In postcolonialist accounts we are often able to view the process of othering from within the Western project (O’Hara, 2010). We less often get to glimpse the experiences of those at the other end of the othered process. The availability of the RAND interviews and accompanying documents allow us to see how certain ideas are received by those being classified and processed. At its most dramatic Vietnamese resistance came in the form of warfare and armed
struggle. That much we know. But the interviews go beyond that to reveal some of the thinking behind the military struggles. We see such things as commitment to military struggle against the United States military. As one prisoner puts it, he is “prepared to fight to the end.” We also see contradiction. When the interviewer alludes to the fact that the North Vietnamese government does not appear to want peace the Vietnamese prisoner argues that he or she wrongly describes the level of suffering – “the people haven’t suffered that much,” and goes on to argue that the continued existence of US troops in Vietnam is what is holding up the prospects of peace. In other cases resistance comes in forms of silence or a direct refusal to answer questions and or through misinformation or “lies” (Davison, 1970). Through this lens we gain a rare opportunity to analyze the actual relationships that come to constitute aspects of postcoloniality, albeit through the unique relationship of prisoner and researcher.

CONCLUSION

By applying critical hermeneutics in our study of the RAND interviews as “texts” and laying out the historical context these interviews were embedded in, we can see the influencing role RAND has had during the war in Vietnam. RAND, labeled as an independent research organization and as neutral and objective, has acted as the extended instrument of the U.S. government to implement its imperialist doctrines beyond its national border.

In accordance with postcolonial theory, we argue that RAND perpetuated representations in Vietnam of Americans as liberators, modern, physically superior, the vanguard, and intelligent against the Vietnamese who were considered the liberated, archaic, intellectually inferior, the led, and dull. In addition, social management theories generated by RAND during the war in Vietnam came to be considered as “knowledge” and “truth”. However, as proved during the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, these theories have proved not to be universally applicable. Factors
such as nationalism, religion, patriotism, among many others, play an important role in predicting the mentality and behaviours of the opposing forces.

Analysis of the RAND interviews also indicates a sense of strong resistance from the Vietnamese; a sense of resistance that is not normally found in analysis of texts written by those from the perspective of the colonizer.

But the RAND corporation is not a unique organization in its impact on postcolonial relations (Hartt, Mills, Helms Mills, & Durepos, 2012). It provides clues as to the way that (Western) organizations can serve as carriers (translators) of cultural values that may be insightful in the study of other organizational involvements in so-called Third World countries.

This paper has further described, beyond RAND specifically, the role of organizations in the accumulation of ideas and production of “knowledge”. Based on the example of RAND and its operations in Vietnam we have been able to show how an organization has produced and perpetuated a colonial discourse of “knowledge” and how this knowledge has been encountered by the colonized side and resisted. Finally, we propose that postcolonial theory can further explore the prevailing character of colonialism and imperialism in current global organizations and the mechanisms that are utilized to prevail this discourse.
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