
**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS IN APOCALYPSE NOW
(1979) BY FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA**

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ABSTRACT

This article shows war as an expression of humanity's own perversity. That sounds just about right for a film that explores the madness of war. In *Apocalypse Now*, Characters like Colonel Kurtz and Willard have seriously experienced it, embracing atrocities and unrestrained brutality as a necessary winning strategy. Kurtz is also fine with his followers worshipping him as a god. Coppola's movie depicts a bloody, dark might of the soul for the American myths. It is an ambiguous antiwar film that unveils the social and political absurdities of the Vietnam conflict. The film reveals the brutality and purposelessness of war, amplifying its dire effects on human nature. This paper mirrors the psychological and traumatizing journey of Willard into darkness to assassinate Kurtz, which results in a groundbreaking epic that continues to be revered as a masterpiece. Through a series of episodes up to the river, Coppola brings through an intentional sensory journey where the audience is left with the ultimate unsettling aftertaste, witnessing the struggle of the protagonist, Willard. In the film, Coppola raises issues from the social-historical context of the Vietnam War, debunking myths of heroism and victory. He underscores the horrors of war and its impact in the world.

Keywords: Humanity, Madness, Vietnam War, Myths, Heroism, God.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Vietnam War, filmmakers begin to have a critical view of the war due to its aftermath on veterans and America. In Vietnam, concepts such as heroism, patriotism and bravery are no longer valid. Post- Vietnam War marks a turning point for Hollywood films. As one of the first filmmakers working in Hollywood, it seems as though the sky was the limit, and with his next project, Coppola tests his creative, financial and psychological in adapting Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Penned by fellow scribe and director John Milius in the late 60s under the title *Apocalypse Now* (1979), the film shifts the setting of Conrad's story from the jungles of Africa at the turn of the century to the deadly landscape of the Vietnam War.

Through the movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Francis Ford Coppola examines post- Vietnam War experience. Coppola's movie is a depiction of an anti-war stance. In early 1970s, the antiwar movement fundamentally influenced this narrative. Antiwar veterans are an anomalous, alienated group challenging received ideas about the moral virtues of the American military. By the end of the decade, though, veterans' image undergoes a sea change. They remain plaintive figures. Films such as Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by Francis Ford Coppola, dwell on the trauma of Vietnam from the jungle warfare to homecoming. They emerge from the foreshadows of Vietnam experience and concentrate on the war's aftermath, especially stories about veterans coming home and the psychological and physical scars they bring with them. *Apocalypse Now* is adapted from Joseph Conrad's

novel *Heart of Darkness*. The screenplay changes the setting from the late nineteenth century Congo to the mid-twentieth century Vietnam in the midst of war. The film is a depiction of Captain Benjamin

L. Willard, played by Martin Sheen, on a secret mission to assassinate Colonel Kurtz, who has gone insane and declares himself as a demi-god. It also revolves around Willard's journey to find Kurtz so that he can complete a mission. Willard's narration through the film illustrates the psychological conditions that American soldiers experience during the war. This movie shows conflicts among American soldiers and lack of discipline in the US army. Then, it features war atrocities committed by American soldiers who randomly kill innocent Vietnamese villagers.

In post-Vietnam era, many writers, scholars and filmmakers express their view about Vietnam experience. With the release of Michael Cimino's movie *The Deer Hunter* (1978), the American public, for the first time, comes to grips with the reality of the Vietnam War. The traumatized events are revealed through the twelfth story, which is entitled "The Man I Killed", in *The Things They Carried* (1990). Through this section, Tim O'Brien presents readers with a stark reminder that beneath the veneer of glorious battle lies only suffering and death. O'Brien imbues his work with a grim severity and presents the reality of war as it truly exists. In this book, men inflict grievous injuries on one another, breaking bodies and shattering lives, without truly knowing for what or whom they are fighting for. *A Rumor of War* (1977) by Philip Caputo explores the varying perspectives and experiences seen and learnt with war. Caputo's book tackles the consequences of being sent into such harsh warfare because he saw the realities firsthand as he was a soldier in the war.

The Vietnam war is largely considered a failure, a waste of resources, time and precious lives. It is a conflict that does not need to be fought. Soldiers are sent in to fight in this war, and they come back with very different experiences. We manage to convey, in this work, the true sacrifice of the conscripted soldier, the broken innocence copying with the atrocities of war. The emotional scars of warfare are revealed through the journey into unknown areas. It seems the darkest and most surreal place where characters display psychic symptoms. In Coppola's filmic narratives, the psychological journey into the darkness unveils the madness of war, breaking down the quest for essence of individual morality. The absurdity of war is still a topical issue many world countries contend with without measuring its dire effects on humankind. By delving into war and its lingering impacts, which break bodies and shatter lives of people will make them aware of the nature of war.

In this work, we use the psychoanalytic theory for interpreting the meaning of a text in literature. This literary criticism aims to provide deeper insights into psychology of characters and the author. In Coppola's movie, characters like Captain Willard are depicted, displaying emotional disorders during the psychological journey into the darkness they undertake. According to Francis Ford Coppola, the mental and physical pressure that mounts as he labors against increasingly difficult circumstances drives him to edge of his psychological limits. As Willard and men travel upriver into an increasingly bizarre, dangerous, and morally depraved reality, so do the filmmaker and co-workers. It is safe to assume that Coppola has never, before or since, endured a production as troubled and chaotic as that of *Apocalypse Now*. However, it is one of cinema's quintessential examples of life imitating art, he and his team fearlessly step out into the unknown and are plunged deep into the darkest and most surreal corners of their psyches. This article examines the psychological journey into the darkness. It is divided into three parts : The first part explores the imperialist venture, highlighting the relationship between civilization and war. The second one examines the traumatizing journey up to the river

and the last and final part deals with the individual fragmented experience, resulting from the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

2. THE IMPERIALIST VENTURE

By moving the war to the level of nightmare, these films such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now* and *First Blood* carry it to a mythical and even religious dimension. The hellish war represented in the films may be a place to run away from, but it also offers redemption. Mythicizing the Vietnam War in the American setting constructs an attractive image of the military and war through the western hero. The Vietnam landscape is not a suitable place for the western hero to wage a war. The realities of the environment foreshadow the crisis of the warrior character's cultural and religious myths. The term myth is narrowly defined here as the stories that contain a people's image of themselves in history. These myths are extremely simplifications of reality, but they are also necessary part of the culture of a nation. They can act as a blueprint, which examines either the past of a nation or prepares for its future. National myths do not merely offer versions of the past, but they also offer vision of the future. In the nineteenth century, the frontier was the most cherished of all-American myths used to give a religious foundation for the Indian wars. However, it proves equally serviceable as a rationalization for the superiority implied by the manifest destiny.

The frontier myth can be made to justify the American isolation, its imperialism and the Pax Americana. Indeed, the frontier continues to play a central role in contemporary American political mythology. Using myths and metaphors gives meaning to the Americans' way of thinking. In a society with conflicting views, the dominant myths need to be recreated to give a meaningful interpretation of Vietnam experience.

Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*, based on Lévi-Strauss's discussion of myth, is a depiction of modern myth. Frank P. Tomasulo analyzes this movie in the light of Lévi-Strauss's discussion of myth. According to Lévi-Strauss, the myths, which include binary oppositions of certain social realities and familiar tendencies are important for society. They guarantee the permanence of societies and serve to construct and maintain particular world views and ideologies. They function as social mediators and produce an impression of resolution even though they are illusory.

By the same token, Lévi-Strauss investigates the phenomenon of mythification when he notes that myths function like a control device. They may be satisfying for a troubled society. In an attempt to define this notion, he asserts: "Myth...provides an interpretive grid, a matrix of relations which filters and organizes life experience and produces the blessed illusion that contradictions can be overcome and difficulties are resolved" (Tomasulo, 1990, p.146). Focusing on Lévi-Strauss' words, we remark that the use of myths in Vietnam literature serves to interpret war experience and come to terms with the aftermath of this conflict. They are an effective way to solve problems. Lévi-Strauss's ideology, as a cultural product, is depicted in Coppola's film. *Apocalypse Now*, as a modern myth, is filled with ambivalent messages and binary oppositions such as civilized vs. savage, city vs. Jungle and strong vs. weak.

In this movie, Willard is cast in the role of a western hero because of the way he executes his mission to assassinate Kurtz. This categorizes him as being in a state of perfection in the war that takes place around him. The film implicitly codes this very functionality as a precursory state of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the portrayed dissociation of the individual during trauma, exemplified by blurred images. In *Apocalypse Now*, Kurt draws on and engages in moral discourses on the US military involvement on a national and individual level. His monologue furthermore envisions a status of human perfection. That is to attain absolute moral "freedom from the opinion of others" (Coppola, 1979) and simultaneously reduces one's

action to a mere functionality in emotionally charged situations, thereby excluding potentially traumatic events from consciousness.

As John Hellmann delves into the importance of myth, he states: "Myths may often distort or conceal, but these stories are nevertheless always true in a sense that they express deeply held beliefs" (Hellmann, 1991, IX). Through this statement, Hellmann defines myths as cultural beliefs. They can either be changed or hide a cultural way of life of a nation.

In *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola, the opening scene establishes the presentation of the symbolic journey of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This mythic journey into an unknown territory is itself an adventure mystery tale, through the specific conventions of the hard-boiled detective formula. This use of popular genres is related to the Central American myths of the nineteenth and twentieth century connects two films.

There is a similarity between Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the hard-boiled detective formula that reflect their common source in quest myths. Both have isolated protagonists on a mystery adventure and these characters are in the service of others while actually preserving their personal judgment. In both works, the protagonist encounters revelatory scenes of the depravity of his society in the course of his journey.

In *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola uses the hard-boiled detective formula as a means for transforming the river journey of *Heart of Darkness* into an investigation of American society. It is represented by the army and American idealism through colonel Kurtz in Vietnam. The river journey, in *Apocalypse Now*, is full of allusions to Southern California, the usual setting of the hard-boiled genre, with the major episodes of this trip through Vietnam centers around the surfing, rock music and go-go dancing. It is also a depiction of drug taking associated with the west coast culture of the time.

Besides, Captain Willard's journey on the river is both external investigation of that culture and internal pursuit of his idealism. Willard is a hard-boiled detective hero who, in the Vietnam setting, becomes traumatized by the apparent decadence of his society and searches for the grail of its lost purposeful idealism. Kurtz represents that idealism and the horrific self-awareness of its hollowness too. The hard-boiled detective is denied by his pervasive society even the refuges of nature and friendship with a natural man available to the western hero. He is thus forced by his investigation of corrupt society to retreat into his own ruthlessly strict moral idealism. In Coppola's film, the detective hero is in search of a quest for that idealism itself.

The most important binary opposition in the film is civilized and savage. This difference is presented through civilized Americans vs. Vietnamese who are considered as savage. This opposition is illustrated by the fact that while Americans attack with helicopters meaning modern machinery of war, Willard and his crew use arrows and spears along with their journey considered as antique machinery of war. This depiction of the Vietnamese using arrows and spears is taken from the novella. It is a way to attach the attribute of savage to the Vietnamese because they do not use such weapons in the Vietnam War.

The western and the hard-boiled detective formulas provide *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* with a cultural means in order to interpret a national experience. Both formulas are genres of romance characterized by its use of mythic, allegorical and symbolical forms. They are taken as the main strategy of America for encountering the traditions and extreme ranges of American culture and experience of which Vietnam is a recent and particularly a traumatic example. The western is the major formula story of American popular culture since it establishes its central significance as American myth.

Furthermore, the western is defined instead by the influence of its symbolic landscape, a frontier between civilization and wilderness, upon a lonely hero. The confrontation of these

basic forces creates delineated conflicts resulting in a variety of stock characters and plot configurations. As the western lays emphasis on the relation between the hero and the frontier landscape, it deals with the conflict created by the dominant direction of American experience. The western represents the flight from the community symbolizing Europe, the East, Restraint and the Conscious into the wilderness related to America, the West, Freedom and the Unconscious.

Through the book *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997), Marita Sturken examines the inner contradictions of many Vietnam films and their use of metaphors to represent the war as realistic. From this outlook, Sturken states:

As narratives films depicting a highly charged event in U.S. history, Vietnam war docudramas often have two conflicting intentions- to present the war realistically and to examine its large meanings through metaphoric interpretation (Sturken, 1997, p.88).

According to Sturken, many movies use metaphors and symbols to interpret the Vietnam War experience. This metaphorical and symbolic representation gives a realistic and meaningful interpretation of the myths. The double-codedness of Vietnam movies functions on two levels of signification, a realistic and a symbolic one.

In the context of *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola depicts the link between historical event and reality. By Coppola's account, the spectator is encouraged to think that the Vietnam conflict is not caused by certain policies, but it derives from the devastating effects of unification of the modernized world with the dark side of humans. If a metaphor deciphers an unknown thing with a well-known thing, *Apocalypse Now* does this efficiently.

John Hellmann's book *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (1991) is an investigation of the myth of the American frontier hero. It is described as one "which examines Vietnam War literature as it fits into the myths of the American frontier hero" (Hellmann, 1991, p.147). Hellmann's work lays emphasis on the American symbolic landscape and how, in Vietnam, this dissolves into a nightmare version of assumptions and values of previous American myths. Coppola's movie *Apocalypse Now* uses the Vietnam War as a metaphor to explore more general matters associated with ambiguity and hypocrisy. In this respect, it is quite harmonious with the novella, though it is a loose adaptation. Vietnam movies interpret the social and historical realities of war using metaphorical symbols in order to give meaning to these events. The case of Coppola's film supports this idea. *Apocalypse Now* offers a solution by connecting the war to ethical problems by using the boat journey as a metaphor for the discovery of psychological questions. It explores the mythification of the Vietnam landscape while focusing on the relationship between civilization and war.

3. THE TRAUMATIZING JOURNEY.

In post-Vietnam era, the filmic narratives cast light on the absurdity of war and its ironic glorification. They examine the degradation of soldiers' moral sanctity as they move further into war and away from civilization. Coppola's movie *Apocalypse Now* is a depiction of Willard's captivity in the camp of Kurtz. This occurs in the third part of the film when the crew, now left with Chef, Lance and Willard, reaches the camp of Kurtz. At their first visit, they do not succeed in finding Kurtz. However, they are shocked by the horrific circumstances. During their second visit to the camp, Willard is imprisoned and Chef is decapitated. The latter's head is delivered to the captive Willard. The protagonist is held captive in a wooden cage and ends up in a cave. He is locked up by Kurtz for an attempt at assassination. When he is finally set free by Kurtz, Willard is taken care of by the natives. This film features characters who are

affected by the horrific conditions of their captivity in camp. Coppola, through these events, deals with the maddening psychological influence of war on characters.

Many of the films investigate the psychological effects of the war on American soldiers. The veterans struggle to forget the painful memories and traumatic experiences. By way of illustration, we can say that characters like Willard in *Apocalypse Now* and Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July* contend with vivid flashbacks. These flashbacks then push them to call back the war's stress, confusion and frustration. They affect their lives and families well after the end of war. As it is pointed out in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*:

Every time I wake up I always think I'm in the jungle, but then I realize there is nothing. I've divorced my life. All I can think of is getting back to the jungle. Every minute I sit in this room I get weaker, and Charlie is getting stronger (Coppola, 1979).

The traumatic experiences of the Vietnam War seem to be too painful and intense to ever forget. The films highlight the stresses and ills of the war that have an impact on the participants in such a way that they can never have the power to let it go. Likewise, the main character of *Platoon* perhaps sums it up best when he says: "the war is over for me now, but it will be in me for the rest of my days" (Stone, 1986). He epitomizes the scars of the War. The wounds it inflicts on veterans are still felt even getting back from Vietnam.

Through the film *Apocalypse Now*, Francis Ford Coppola reveals that he captures the essence of the Vietnam War. In fact, he realizes that what he creates is not at all a movie, but the reality itself. He further illustrates that the film is Vietnam itself rather than about Vietnam. Coppola highlights the Vietnam experience, which is the psychological reality of the war. He remarks that the production itself, in many ways, mirrors that reality. It seems that the film is very much like the Americans who are in Vietnam. In the jungle, there are too many of them who have access to a lot of money and equipment and little by little, they go insane. *Apocalypse Now* is a portrayal of the horror that Kurtz talks about. By way of illustration, we claim that there are severed heads and dangling bodies at Kurtz's compound where this horror lies. In Coppola's film, the traumatic situations of killed Vietnamese show the horrors of war in Kurtz's compound.

Apocalypse Now by Coppola features the story of Captain Willard's classified mission. In this outlook, the screen writer John Milius, in his video interview with the film's director, admits that this character is the embodiment of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Milius focuses on the monologue of Willard that reveals:

Saigon [...] I'm still only in Saigon. Every time, I think I'm going to wake back up in the jungle. When I was home after my first tour, it was worse. I'd wake up, and there'd be nothing. I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce. When I was here, I wanted to be there. When I was there, all I could think of was getting back into the jungle. I'm here a week now. Waiting for a mission. Getting softer. Every minute I stay in this room, I get weaker. And every minute Charlie Squat in the bush he gets stronger. Each time I looked around, the walls moved in a little tighter (Coppola, 1979).

In this passage, Coppola depicts Willard's mental disorder and his sense of loss due to the traumatic experience of Vietnam War. He also underscores the protagonist's agony. And the fact that he considers himself as useless for the American Army comes to an end when he first hears about his mission.

The soldiers who fight in the Vietnam War suffer from uncontrollable emotional reaction to an extreme psychological trauma called post-traumatic stress disorder. Coppola's film depicts the horrors of the Vietnam War. This movie describes the critical standpoint of the way that society works during the Vietnam War. It tells about the US Army assassin Captain Willard's mission,

both a mental and physical journey, to terminate dangerously lawless warlord and former Colonel Kurtz who has gone AWOL (Absent Without Leave). However, Willard becomes a self-appointed god and rules a band of native warriors in the jungle. His episode journey upriver gets increasingly dark, violent and chaotic. Any sense of order and mission progressively breaks down with each stop along the way.

Coppola's movie depicts two main heroes, Colonel Kurtz and Captain Willard who are totally dissimilar personalities whose destiny and attitudes to life become similar. Brando's colonel Kurtz, depicted as a mad man, is a victim of the influence of war atrocities. He has virtually no chance how not to succumb to such a long-lasting impact. In the film, Coppola gives a portrayal of Captain Willard as follows:

at the beginning of the film, he was already a time-scarred war hero who knew that mankind was deprived. His journey to find Kurtz only confirmed this knowledge and turned him darker still (Coppola, 1979).

This remark highlights the idea that Willard is aware of all various kinds of horrors that happen in the world around him. After meeting Kurtz, his world becomes so deprived and lost that even the homecoming cannot save him from its obscurity. The movie points out that any man can truckle to all kinds of madness and unpredictability because every human being perceives the world around him in the same way. He just needs the right environment to allow his temptations and hidden imaginings to be free, which is confirmed through Captain Willard.

Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* is a portrayal of the horrific combat exposure on veterans in Vietnam. When Willard and Chef first penetrate the jungle, eye-level pans followed by extreme long shots are employed to present them as enveloped by and almost invisible in the threatening shadow. In the jungle, there is an overwhelmingly spacious obscurity that makes it impenetrable.

For Peter G. Bourne, 'the mise- en – scene' and cinematography are used to generate a sense of what he calls "anticipatory psychic stressors for the audience to experience" (Bourne, 1970, p.7). In the film, a sudden confrontation with a tiger prompts acute stress reactions. Characters begin to experience overwhelming fear, impulsive firing, momentary disorientation and emotional breakdown. Because of this traumatic experience that he witnesses, Chef frantically repeats to himself the rule to "never get out of the boat" (Coppola, 1979). What is traumatizing mostly in the journey up river is a close-up of Willard's vacant stare that accentuates his momentarily dazed state. The images remain bleak and shadowy, thereby underlining his withdrawal from the situation. Throughout the film, for instance, the shots show the dense jungle metaphorically closing in on the boat.

The Vietnam War cannot be compared to other conflicts in which America is involved. This is the first war soldiers have fought unprepared. They enter Vietnam untrained in jungle warfare. Then, the Viet Cong (VC) as soldiers call them, Charlie, are far superior in the battlefield. The VC mainly move at night, during the protection of the dark. This makes it almost impossible to secure an area at nighttime. Because of the jungle horrors in Vietnam, a soldier, in a letter home, said that "the days are fairly peaceful but the nights are pure hell!" (Allen, 1985, p.126). Actually, Paul Allen highlights the horrific conditions of warfare that soldiers face in Vietnam.

Similarly, the metaphorical title of the film *Apocalypse Now* refers to the biblical apocalypse, which seems to suggest that Vietnam is hell for America. The story is more like the Pilgrim's Progress into the depths of an infernal place. In a nutshell, we can say that the mythical journey is looked upon as a case of awakening and transformation.

Veterans have no idea clue about what they get involved in Vietnam. Reflecting on his plane ride to Vietnam, another soldier, in *Nam* (1982) by Mark Baker, relates to his horrific war experience while asserting that:

there was this bag black MP that sat across from...He kept my spirits up all the way over. He said "you just a baby. You don't know what you in for." Midge knew what I was in for and he tried to keep me laughing... The first dressing I changed was a guy who laid in a water filled with ditch for days... I took the dressing off his arm, he didn't have an arm... It had gotten full of maggots in the ditch... I had to go in the little utility room... to regroup... (Baker, 1982, p.69).

In this passage, Baker investigates the first experience of veterans who come with great shock in Vietnam. The effects of war are not apparent to soldiers who get involved in it. They are forced to adjust quickly to warfare conditions in order to survive. The adversities the Vietnam soldier faces do not end in the battlefield, but continue once he returns home.

Francis Ford Coppola's movie is a depiction of the horrors in the jungle warfare. Characters such as Philips and Chief are tragically killed in attacks out of the jungle. This anticipates the intensification of the psychic stress. The impacts primarily register on the inexperienced Lance, for example, he begins to paint his face as though he hides behind a protective mask. He withdraws from interaction, dances while in a trance and lets out screams and moans of suffering and desperation during and after the attacks.

Apocalypse Now portrays the dwelling of Kurtz as a dark and impenetrable environment. This is revealed while the company approaches Kurtz's dwelling place. Temporal and spatial demarcations are increasingly blurred by impenetrable fog and persistent cross-fading. The soldiers pass dark territories where torches and large crosses are visible against a light emanating from unknown sources. In daylight, corpses, skulls and spears complement the scene. As Coppola's film proceeds, the audience is left to witness how the soldiers' amplifying psychological stress and the cinematic encoding thereof coincide with Willard's review of Kurtz's development. When the dossier gradually comes to its limit in providing the material for a logical narration and meaningful representation of an individual's traumatic experience, Willard asserts: "I felt I knew [...] things about Kurtz that weren't in the dossier" (Coppola, 1979). This reflects the shift in the film's logic. The journey up to river as to kill Kurtz is traumatizing. Characters like Willard display PTSD symptoms that reveal his anti-experience. These stress reactions attest that he has no absolute correlation with later occurrences of severe PTSD.

In *Apocalypse Now*, the company reaches Kurtz's dwelling and faces the psychedelic and utterly dystopic atmosphere, which accompanies Kurtz's intense but often elusive monologue. Willard becomes increasingly passive and withdrawn from his surroundings. This fact is emphasized by the repeated static frames of a motionless, staring figure in the dark. Willard displays PTSD symptoms when he replies to Kurtz questions, which are delayed and short. The state of Willard's captivity is significantly aggravated when he is taken captive.

Coppola's film explores the case of Kurtz who has established a kind of primitive kingdom in the depths of the jungle. In a state of insanity, he recites Western classics and it seems as if he found his own version of the meaning of life. He believes that horror lies at the center of human existence. Kurtz is mystified by the violence he witnesses in the war. And he tries to reproduce this horror in the alternative community he establishes. The film's closing statements "horror, the horror," (Coppola, 1979) with the visual accompaniment of classics scattered on the floor, reveal that Kurtz is actually commenting on the history of the western civilization.

The film's message about the war is revealed in a rambling speech by Kurtz at the end of *Apocalypse Now*. In this monologue, Kurtz describes an atrocity that bears no relation to any

known incident. He tells Willard that Northern Vietnamese soldiers hack off the arms of children vaccinated against polio by humanitarian Americans. The main reason why they react in this way is that, instead of resisting the Americans, these people let their children be vaccinated. Kurtz is hit by the sudden realization of the horror and the beauty of this violence when he sees the pile of cut arms in the center of the village.

Coppola movie is a depiction of Kurtz's stigmatization, resulting from the power and beauty of horror of the war. From this outlook, he points out that "I thought: My God, the genius of that. The Will to do that. Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we" (Coppola, 1979). Focusing on Kurtz's speech, we can take it for granted that this revelation has two functions for the film's ideological and racist message. This film offers the traditional right-wing discourse about why the US cannot win in Vietnam. It does not depict the Vietcong as psychopaths who can easily mutilate children for their political goals.

Coppola's movie depicts human existence as a fragile and almost absurdly crawls through a history of violence that leads to nothing but nightmares, leaving behind the slime of men's death and lost dreams. The same happens on the way to Kurtz's dwelling. As the boat approaches, we witness soldiers running up to a crew on the boat, jumping in the river and calling for help.

In this scene, the sky is lightened up by momentary sparks and flares, mortars being shot from the surrounding jungle. There is also the sound of the rocket attacks and of shooting. We can see the parts of jeeps sticking out of the water and a smashed helicopter on the river banks. The desperate soldiers are crying and swearing trying to reach the boat. One of them is even carrying some language and M16 with him. All the pain and insanity are well depicted in Virgil's scream when he keeps shouting "take me home! Goddamn you!" but Chief orders him to "get away from this boat" (Coppola, 1979). Actually, soldiers display feeling of fear and anxiety by screaming owing to the horrific conditions in the jungle.

Apocalypse Now by Francis Ford Coppola is a portrayal of Willard who carries the burden, the sense of guilt and death of others. The soldiers on the boat are no longer just characters, but they truly become symbols and bear witness to all the memories and different stories of the casualties at war. The dead soldiers like Clean characterize the tragedy of young Americans at war and all their pain far from their families. It also underlines a world, that of the US, which discloses mournfully the disintegration of its values, pride and moral because of this war and of the Elite's political expansionistic strategies.

In the Vietnam War films, this common cause is a cynical joke and it is portrayed as empty and powerless. In Apocalypse Now, this disorder is present in Cpt. Willard's initial orders. The military wants to kill Kurtz for political rather than military reasons. The soldiers he meets along the river almost universally lack commanding officers and display a total breakdown in unit cohesion.

Besides, Coppola's film shows Captain Willard who is consistent with his own position as a soldier while passing judgment on Kurtz, or on American imperialism for that matter. In fact, this phenomenon further challenges any position of Apocalypse Now as antiwar. Willard is not, indeed, disillusioned because of any insight about the nature of man or the horrors of war. However, his disillusionment depends on the way the war is conducted and the lack of professionalism or seriousness shown by US troops as well. In the same way, Apocalypse Now further shows Willard's disillusionment when he admires Kurtz and Kilgore for fighting the war on their own terms. He sees Kilgore as somewhat frivolous and fails to see a method in Kurtz's madness. This admiration results from the fact that Kurtz orders execution of four civilians, including two high-ranking South Vietnamese officials. That is ultimately the reason

for his own mission to terminate the colonel's command, but their executions only draw Willard's admiration. The actions of Kurtz are admired and vindicated by Willard. He hardly seems consistent with any idea of horror nor do they seem consistent with any claim to the film's antiwar status.

Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now*, describes Kilgore as a fascinating character. He strides confidently through the aftermath of a battle dropping death cards on the bodies of the Vietnamese villagers so that the Vietcong know who kill them. He dons a traditional cavalry hat when he steps out of his helicopter, evoking the memory of American cavalry commanders. Kilgore boasts philosophically on the pleasures of warfare: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning... It smells like, victory" (Coppola, 1979). In fact, Coppola shows the boastful behavior of the characters that are willing to conduct the war and celebrate their victory. Focusing on the climactic scene of the film, we realize that Kilgore sends a helicopter assault on the village at the mouth of the river with characteristics flair. In this world, Kilgore represents the victory culture that Engelhart proposes as the unifying feature of the American war story. Kilgore's cavalry hat and Wagner's classic song allude to the values of militarism and masculinity from earlier eras. They are characterized by courage chivalry, patriotism and honor that contrast sharply with the chaotic violence on display in Vietnam.

When Willard finally reaches Kurtz, he finds a hoard of painted Cambodian tribesmen guarding a ruined Angkor like temple littered with dead bodies and severed heads on spikes. Kurtz's troops appear to have gone native and follow their god-like commander with religious devotion. Kurtz himself, played by Marlon Brando, is a fallen character. In Cimino's film, Willard meets Kurtz in his jungle hideout. This is the first close-up of Kurtz other than archive photographs seen earlier in the movie. While talking to Willard, Kurtz emerges out of the darkness like a monster or a dead person-lit with ghoulish yellow. He seems imposing and dismissive of Willard, a powerful man but one who is both spiritually and physically diseased.

As a model soldier marked for swift promotion to high command, Kurtz becomes disillusioned with the American mission in Vietnam. He mainly criticizes the military's lack of understanding of the Vietnamese motives of the war. In *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola evokes an alternative framework of colonialism through which, his audience can understand the war. This movie underlines key features of the American memory of the war including a lack of a clear organizing mission, a faceless inscrutably enemy and the breakdown of patriotic martial mythology. Coppola's film depicts the war as an imperialist venture, which offers some meaning to why the troops on the ground feel so aimless and cynical. The representation of military policies and hierarchy in the Vietnam War genre accounts for the reasons why the patriotic mythology of the American soldiers breaks down. The terror and tragedy of war are a universal experience because it is fought in a purposeless manner.

4. THE INDIVIDUAL FRAGMENTED EXPERIENCE

Focusing on the theme of trauma in *Apocalypse Now*, 'mise – en- scene' and its cinematographic aspects help emphasize how visuals evoke invariably the connotation specific to an individual fragmented anti-experience. Facing a traumatizing event includes a state of numbing and impeded perception that is effectively engendered by the lightning. It alternates between a dim spot of light on Willard's passive gaze in a medium shot and absolute darkness. Coppola's movie features the remarkable cinematic implementation of Willard's anti-experience by a potent experiential mode. This transgresses drastically the rationality and superiority in Hollywood representations of US warfare. The audience witnesses multiple manifestations of soldiers who contend with the emotional scars of war at the bridge. Panicking

soldiers desperately beg to be taken home. They act mindlessly in a state of impenetrable daze and wonder aimlessly or are paralyzed.

In *Apocalypse Now*, Francis Ford Coppola underscores the victory of the US and the possibility of returning home. In the film, Willard highlights homecoming issues and strongly supports his own view about this phenomenon. From this reflection, he declares: "That'd be just fine with the boys on the boat. They weren't looking for anything more than a way home.... Trouble is, I'd been back there...and I knew that it just didn't exist anymore" (Coppola, 1979). Actually, home is not what it used to be anymore. The Vietnam War veterans' dreams are shattered and the return evolves into the realization of these dramatic changes in America's society.

According to most American soldiers, there is a lack of political will for winning the war. In *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz has accepted his fate, but simply he wants to be understood and die like a soldier, not at the hands of a political assassin. Kurtz's character represents and criticizes the arguments of US military commanders who insist throughout the war that all they need is more men and weapons in order to finish the job.

Coppola's movie casts the war as an imperialist venture that further explains the reasons why the troops on the ground felt so aimless and cynical. The representation of military policies and hierarchy in the War genre sheds light on the patriotic mythology of the American soldiers that is broken down by the Vietnam syndrome. The terror and tragedy of war are considered as a universal experience fueled by a sense of purposelessness.

Apocalypse Now by Coppola portrays Willard's crew, which encounters a group of French settlers. Throughout Vietnam's colonization and declaration of independence, this group decides not to go back home. In fact, they still prefer the name Indochina. After losing the character Clean, the PBR-crew is invited for dinner by these Frenchmen. During this scene, Willard asks Hubert Maracs, "How long [they] can possibly stay [there]" (Coppola, 1979). Hubert, while answering Willard in an irritated way, states:

We stay forever [...] I mean, this is our home, captain. [...] You don't understand our mentality, the French Officer mentality. At first, we lose in WWII. I don't say that you Americans win, but we lose. In Dien Bien Phu, we lose. In Nigeria, we lose. [...] But here, we don't lose. This piece of earth, we keep it! We will never lose it, never! (Coppola, 1979)

Through this conversation, the Frenchmen account for the mental disorders that go through their minds. They embody this state of crisis caused by world wars. Because of the lack of political will and groundless decisions of French and American governments, soldiers cannot win any war. For them, the battlefield is less traumatizing than home and staying there gives them an opportunity not to lose the war again.

Apocalypse Now is a depiction of both pro-war and anti-war film that reveals and reflects the US political disunity and indecisiveness about the Vietnam War in cinema. By asserting that this movie has an anti-war statement, there are scenes that depict the absurdity of the American presence in Vietnam, the unfairness of American policy and the brutality of Americans in the war.

Likewise, *Apocalypse Now* by Coppola features the character Willard who visits a plantation in which the talk with some French soldiers brings up the following statement: "you [Americans] don't even know why you fight" (Coppola, 1979). Actually, Willard realizes that these soldiers argue about the question for many years. This feeling of weariness makes him aware of the aimless presence in Vietnam. Coppola unveils the lack of moral purpose and integrity of Americans' invasion there. For Hurtado Alvarez and Jose Antonio, Cimino thinks that Americans discuss the same problem for too long. He believes that it is "... a mean attitude...however we lock ourselves in a room to interchange arguments, everything goes on the same" (Alvarez and Antonio, 1989, p.69). In this statement, Alvarez emphasizes that these

poor views of America's intervention do not better the dramatic and doubtful situation of the war, which occurs in Vietnam. A clear moral purpose has to be taken with the purpose of coming to terms with this phenomenon.

Although Willard, as an American, does not seem to agree with this ideology, he is guilty of identical practices. His realization only comes when he meets colonel Kurtz. In Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz emphasizes the genocides mythology of war that are related to his belief. Kurtz accuses the elite, the society and the way the military systems think and conceive conquest. The epic image of conquer motivated by ideals of liberty and democracy is diminished to a primitive, violent and barbarian warfare. Then, the "we" Kurtz uses, clearly refers to this elite that does not dirty their hands in blood. American political leaders much more prefer to sacrifice the life of many young men by forcing them to the battle.

Similarly, Kurtz highlights the hypocrisy of this elite. In that sense, he provides deeper insights into this phenomenon when he declares: "and they call me an assassin. What do you call it, when the assassins accuse the assassin?" (Coppola, 1979) According to Kurtz, the US government casts the blame on veterans for creating the chaotic conditions in which the war is fought in Vietnam. Focusing on his statement, we remark that he bears the burden of veterans' complaints. He has a critical view of war waging and rejects any indictment of American society against them.

The first line of The Doors' song 'The End', in Coppola's movie, has the mournfully sung lyric, 'This is the End.' The lyrics echoes the onscreen destruction of a beautiful and untouched Eden by the devilish nightmare of Napalm, which is an explosive petroleum jelly. The music accompanying this hypnotic dream-like sequence is the epic song by 'The Doors', 'The End'. This lyric is a set of images, as Coppola puts it, "in our desperate land, referring perhaps to both American and Vietnam" (Coppola, 1979). Then, the film highlights Kurtz's dying words: "The horror... the door..." (Coppola, 1979). It is a quote from Marlow, the character whom Kurtz is based on, from Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*. The phrase refers to the dark centre of human nature that is unleashed in barbarous conditions like those found in an isolated jungle or a chaotic war zone. The Horrors of war are revealed through the conversation between Willard and Kurtz at the end of the film.

Willard: I'm taking you back.

Kurtz looks up to him, then an expression of overwhelming intense and hopeless terror, hopeless despair. A whisper at some image, at some vision, he cries out twice, a cry that is no more than a breath.

Kurtz: Horror, Horror. (Coppola, 1979)

Through this dialogue, Cimino discloses the psychological state of characters. The emotional scars of warfare affect Kurtz who collapses in the jungle. He shows a feeling of fear and desperation and ends up dying. Cimino also casts light on the absurdity of war and the extent to which it breaks down human nature. This individual fragmented experience results from the chaotic war zone.

As a representation of a dehumanized soldier, Willard's last voice over monologue suggests that despite having killed Kurtz, he remains as conflicted and alienated as ever. In that light, Willard points out that "they were going to make me a Major for his and I wasn't even in the fucking army anymore" (Coppola, 1979). Actually, Willard unveils the hypocritical and ineffective military's intervention in Vietnam. He shows the purposeless policy of US in terms of domestic and foreign affairs. He seems skeptical and reluctant about fighting in Vietnam.

The film gives a portrayal of the antihero protagonist, Captain Willard. He is significantly shot in an intense BCU and upside down. His wound is literally and metaphorically inverted. Coppola also shows the central image of a hellish fire consuming beautiful nature, which

reflects how Willard's mind is trapped in the horrific jungle war. It takes places across Vietnam and the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. To the left, the impassive all-seeing eyes of a Buddhist statue contrasts his personal chaos with the inner peace of Eastern philosophy. In *Apocalypse Now*, Cimino examines the madness of war, harrowing human experience. In that light, he points out: "the most important thing I wanted to do in the making of *Apocalypse Now* was to create a film experience that would give its audience a sense of horror, the madness, the senselessness and moral dilemma of war... I tried to illustrate as many of its different facets as possible. And yet, I wanted to go further, to the moral issues behind all wars" (Coppola, 1979). In this vein, Coppola emphasizes the moral purposelessness of conducting war and the damages it can inflict on human nature. The movie reveals the insanity of warfare on characters who change within their worlds. For American forces, Vietnam seems to be divided pretty much between military virtuosi, grateful for any chance to exercise their skills. Most of the troops never believe in anything except the possibility of being killed. They are tormented by fear and pointlessness into rank of barbarities and new pits of racism. Characters like Willard and Kurtz are pinned between a growing anti-war movement at home and an unwinnable war. Consequently, their suffering is often transmuted into slaughter, heavy drugging and hysterical hilarity set to music. Coppola lays foundation for this wild psychedelic war, much more a jungle discotheque with butchery than in the mud naturalism. He attempts to dramatize private moral agony and general moral abyss during the Vietnam War.

5. CONCLUSION

Filmmakers reconstruct the Vietnam War experience. They displace the complexities of social experience with a deeper meaning drawn from the popular mythology. The mythification of the Vietnam landscape and the consecration of the combat atmosphere create an exotic and even eroticizing perception of war and present it to the spectator as a spiritual experience. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* is depiction of American soldiers who experience the horrors resulting from the jungle in Vietnam. The war exposure has emotionally and psychologically affected those who fight in Vietnam. Because of the horrific situations they undergo there, characters like Willard and Kurtz display symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome. Along with the attack on the national psychology in general, there is another similarly damaging attack on human psychology in particular. A majority of Vietnam veterans, whose souls are once distorted by the horrors in the war, continue to be traumatized by its unpleasant memories and suffer much emotional disturbance in their lives. Coppola's film unveils the cynical behaviors of soldiers over conducting a war in Vietnam. It also discloses the psychological and emotional damages of warfare on individuals. The movie delves into a counterculture view of American interventionist foreign policy and a hypocritical and ineffective military.

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