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HST195 Vietnam War

Assignment One

PART ONE:

The story that caught my attention was that of Tran Thi Gung, a member of the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. What initially made me respond to this story was the fact that Tran was the only woman in her unit and was a very petite seventeen-year old on top of that. I thought her reason for joining in the fight was also moving, having been confronted by her father's murderers as well as wanting to change the horrible conditions of her community. As I read on, I was impressed with her ability to use any type of gun, her description of the elaborate tunnels, her dangerous reconnaissance missions, her capture of the nice American man, her shrapnel to the head, and overall the way that she spoke so matter of factly about each of these experiences.

As for the reliability when it comes to these stories, I am not sure that I have any way of knowing for sure how truthful they are. Do I think that they have been elaborated on? I am sure they have been, but I have no idea to what extent. I believe these experiences must have some truth to them as I know that I personally cannot imagine what sort of events occurred in this woman's lifetime. I do know that some traumatic events can be very vivid in our minds while others almost disappear. I would imagine that over time, our imaginations would fill in the details. I believe that we should listen to what Tran has to say and take it with a grain of salt, accepting most of it to be true but perhaps some of the more heroic parts perhaps to be her personal way of coping with the extreme loss and trauma that she experienced as a young person.

I believe Tran to be more credible in regards to the emotional aspect of the war as she personally experienced it. What I mean by this is that she can paint a picture of what it could have been like as an individual running up against these events in a time of turmoil. As far as the actual statistics and facts, I would expect perhaps that maybe Tran would be a little less reliable of a source

because she was so deeply personally invested into this cause and would clearly have very strong biases. I do not think that you could experience something as tumultuous as a guerrilla war fought in your country and come out with an objective story. There are far too many emotions involved.

PART TWO:

I found Part 2 of Appy's novel to contain many tales which were disappointing. I think that maybe the interview that disappointed me the most may have been the one with John Singlaub, the commander of the American SOG until 1968. His interview made me feel this way on more than one level. To begin with, the events that he described which he had participated in were just awful. His story included kidnapping people and lying to them about their location while brainwashing them, the grey and black propaganda via radio, and dropping commandos in the north to basically be "captured, killed, or doubled" (92).

What disappointed me just as much was his attitude about these events and his opinions about the war. He was talking about awful things that he had participated in with a tone devoid of feeling. Towards the end of his interview, it began to be revealed that he had no remorse and had a very skewed vision of what had happened. He talked of "traitors" at home who were opposed to the war and how this was part of the Communist strategy. He also talked about Vietnam not being a defeat for the United States because "...we slaughtered them. Man, we just cleaned their clocks" (93). He even went as far as to say that he at times had the feeling of being a missionary in Vietnam. I do not know what is worse: committing horrible crimes of humanity or believing the whole time that what you are doing is justified and right.

As far as something that one could take away from Part Two which could be seen as a learning lesson or a potential for good, I felt that the account of the monk setting himself on fire, though incredibly sad and perhaps disturbing, could fit. This man gave his life to send a message. He can be viewed as a hero because nobody can deny that this monk, Thich Quang Duc, had courage and determination. I think what was disappointing about many of the stories in Part 2 was that the person knew about something bad but did not stand up and fight it because they were afraid. Quang Duc was not going to stand by and watch the persecution of his people. He and the other monks did not do this as a rash decision either. It was clearly meticulously planned out, with a ceremony beforehand, a procession, and an organized blockade of the street. I feel that as sad and desperate as this act was, it was effective and perhaps one of the only thought out plans of the war.

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