The Language of Empire and the Case of Indochina: Masculine Discourse in the Shaping and Subverting of Colonial Gender Hierarchies

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by

Ashley E. Patadia

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Thesis written by
Ashley E. Patadia
B.A., Baldwin-Wallace College, 2007
M.A., Kent State University, 2009

Approved by
Rebecca Pulju, Advisor
Kenneth Bindas, Chair, Department of History
John R.D. Stalvey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
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Chapter One
Imperial Masculinity

Historical Introduction

The French colony of Indochina was not officially established until the late nineteenth century, but the French presence in that region of Southeast Asia was felt as early as the sixteenth century. Missionaries and merchants were the first to arrive, and their appearance sparked a gradual process whereby France gained increasing control over the land and its people. By 1887 the Union of Indochina was formed, comprising Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin, all regions that would ultimately be united under the nation of Vietnam, in addition to Cambodia. In 1893 Laos was added to this union.

During World War II Japan occupied French Indochina, though it allowed the French to maintain administrative control over the region until 1945. After the Japanese surrender at the end of the war, the Vietminh, led by Ho Chi Minh, proclaimed independence under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Laos and Cambodia also declared independence around this time. Yet the struggle for an independent Vietnam had begun two decades earlier. In 1925 Ho Chi Minh founded the Revolutionary Youth League, and at this same time the newspaper Thanh Nien spread the Communist message throughout Vietnam, Laos, and Siam, infusing this ideology into the nationalist movement. In 1930 the Vietnamese Communist Party was founded at a conference in Hong Kong. This signified the merger of the Annam Communist Party and the
Indochinese Communist Party. It also coincided with unrest throughout the country, as well as an increasingly desperate economic situation around the globe.

The French had been forcibly expelled from Indochina by the Japanese, but they were able to reoccupy Laos and Cambodia shortly after the end of World War II. Their attempts to re-conquer Vietnam, however, resulted in the First Indochina War. In the early years of this war, France ratified treaties recognizing Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos as independent states within the domain of the French Union. The French attempted, but failed, to gain support from the non-Communist factions of Vietnam by holding up the weak Emperor Bao Dai as a potential unifying figure. When their superior technology and numbers did not grant an easy victory, the French appealed to the United States for aid. The United States granted their request by helping to finance the war. In 1954, after enduring heavy losses at Dien Bien Phu, the French abandoned Vietnam, which was divided along the 17th parallel. Though the struggle for Vietnam would continue with the intervention of the United States in the region, the French colony of Indochina was officially at an end, the Geneva Conference of 1954 having granted the region full independence.¹

From the founding of Indochina to its ultimate demise, power was contested and challenged. The people of Vietnam engaged in an eighty year struggle to overturn French rule. Alongside this struggle for power and independence, there raged a battle to define colonial identity. French domination was legitimated through gendered constructions of power. These colonial power structures were not natural or stable, but

constantly challenged and renegotiated. In the twentieth century, as the conflict over political control of Indochina intensified, so did the war to define the gendered identities of the colonizer and colonized. As gendered difference had represented a crucial component in the construction and justification of French Empire, the fight over gendered identities was intense, as well as multi-dimensional.

**Purpose**

Within the last two decades, historians have become increasingly interested in examining the language of empire. Prominent among this group of scholars are Anne McClintock and Ann Laura Stoler. These two historians, among others, have demonstrated how gender, sexual, and racial identities were constructed and interwoven within the context of European Empire. In her path-breaking article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” Joan W. Scott contends that “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. It might be better to say, gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.” McClintock and Stoler have expounded upon Scott’s ideas in order to illuminate how these interconnected identities of race, gender, and sex provided a foundation upon which colonial relationships were built and legitimated, as within the colonial discourse they became categories of difference, the basis upon which Europeans were distinguished from colonized people.

The purpose of this thesis is to extend this historiography by revealing complexities, ambiguities, and debates within the gendered language of empire,

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particularly within the case of French Indochina. It will seek to demonstrate how the
gendered and racial identities of the colonial discourse were both confirmed and
contested by various groups and in different contexts from the World War II era through
the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. This thesis will illuminate differences in how
distinct groups both perceived and manipulated colonial gender identities, but it will also
highlight continuities. Repeated masculine imagery reveals that though French
colonizers, French women who occupied an ambivalent position in the colonial
hierarchy, and indigenous nationalists all had different and often opposing views on who
should be included within the category of men, they often reaffirm the definition of
masculinity offered by the colonial discourse.

**Chapter Breakdown**

This first chapter will introduce the historiography of the gendered language of
empire. By exploring historians’ discussions of the use of gender, sex, race, and maturity
in constructing and legitimating the colonial power relationship, as well as nationalist
groups’ attempts to assert their own hyper-masculinity in reaction to colonial repression,
this chapter will illuminate the prominent place of these identifications within the
European discourse. It will provide the basis of subsequent chapters by establishing the
gender identities that would be confirmed and contested by various people throughout the
tumultuous history of Indochina. It will also reveal the operating definition of
masculinity within the colonial discourse, a categorization that would be frequently
reiterated even as the basis of the French Empire in Indochina itself was contested.

As much of this chapter will focus on European colonialism in general, it is
important to point out that the gendered discourse across the spectrum of European imperialism had many striking continuities. The images of the active, healthy, virile colonizer and the feminine, passive, child-like colonized man dominated from India to Africa. Yet in Indochina there was one important difference. This colony encompassed three distinct nations and cultures that the French arbitrarily joined together into a single geographical entity defined by its position between India and China. The French colonizers then sought to argue that the people inhabiting this region were characterized not by three separate histories or traditions, but by a civilizational void that the French needed to fill. Thus, though the people of Indochina were feminized in a manner very similar to other colonized peoples across the world, they were also defined by a certain lack of distinguishing characteristics, a faceless femininity. The peoples of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, within the French colonial discourse, were as indistinct from one another as the colonizers were different from them.

The second chapter will explore the ambivalent position of European women in the colonies. They simultaneously occupied a dominant position in one gender hierarchy, above both indigenous men and women, and a subordinate position in another, below colonizing men. This second chapter will reveal how the ambiguous position of French women in Indochina was reflected in the travel diary of Claudie Beaucarnot and Marguerite Duras's work *The Sea Wall*. It will illuminate the complex nature of gendered representations within the context of empire by demonstrating the manner in which these women at times confirmed and at others challenged the images of the colonial discourse.
The third chapter will explore the language of Vietnamese nationalists in order to reveal how they sought to subvert the representations of the colonial discourse. By reversing the gendered images that were at the core of the colonial relationship, these nationalists undermined the basis of French domination. This chapter will focus in particular on the autobiography of Tran Tu Binh and the works of the most prominent Vietnamese nationalist of the twentieth century, Ho Chi Minh. It will also compare Ho Chi Minh’s works to the writings of several well-known masculine theorists of other colonies in the French Empire, in order to demonstrate that colonial assertions of masculinity were not unique to French Indochina.

The first chapter will be an examination of gendered language within the European perspective. The second will explore the works of women who, though French, were born in Indochina and represent at once both the oppressor and the oppressed. The third will illuminate the viewpoint of those struggling for independence from the French Empire. The fourth will then turn once again to the French perspective. This chapter, however, will demonstrate that during the era of decolonization the French stance on Indochina was anything but straight-forward and unambiguous. People within the colonies and in the metropole responded to Vietnamese independence in different and often conflicting ways. Though some struggled to maintain the separation between the white, masculine colonizer and the racially distinct, feminine colonized, others reaffirmed the arguments of indigenous nationalists, whether intentionally or not.

Ultimately this thesis will argue that the gendered language of empire was complex and multifarious and that colonial identity, as a result, was the site of much
confrontation and contradiction. As the French colonizers and the native Indochinese struggled for power, a similar battle was waged to define colonial gender and racial identities. Yet, even as those on either side of the conflict fought to determine who was to be included in the category of men, there were some individuals who straddled the fence of the gendered language of empire.

**The Language of Empire**

Historian Ann Laura Stoler argues that colonial discourse is “more than a reflection or legitimation of European power”; it is “a site of its production.” Therefore, examining the language of imperialism is crucial to an understanding of how power was constructed within a colonial context. The current historiography reveals the manner in which European colonizers defined their own imperial identity, as well as that of the colonized populations, within the colonial discourse. By asserting their own masculinity and feminizing the colonized, they defined a gendered relationship of power that was dependant upon the juxtaposition between the Occident and the Oriental Other. Within this discourse and throughout its practical and legal applications within the colonies, notions of race, gender, sex, and maturity became intertwined within a complex web of relations, rendering each identity inseparable from the other. Through the manipulation of these identities within the colonial discourse, Europeans exercised control over the colonies and colonized peoples. They utilized language in an attempt to create and maintain an intellectual monopoly with serious implications for the colonial reality. This

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historical precedent grants profound relevance to later nationalist movements that took
upon themselves the language of gender and sought to define their own masculinity both in opposition to and independent of their colonizers. They endeavored to contribute to the colonial discourse that had previously cast them in an entirely feminine role and thus throw off the yoke of domination which had relied on this gendered model.

**Sex and Empire**

Joan W. Scott, whose work has largely defined the ways in which historians understand the use of gender in determining power relationships, rearticulated the assertion of Michel Foucault that “sexuality is produced in historical contexts.” She also cited the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier, who argued that “Sex-related differences between bodies are continually summoned as testimony to social relations and phenomena that have nothing to do with sexuality. Not only as testimony to, but also testimony for – in other words, as legitimation.” Thus, the European colonial discourse that utilized gender as a basis of defining power relationships between colonizer and colonized was first and foremost predicated on notions of sexuality. Sexuality granted the colonizer a dominant position in the colonial hierarchy both metaphorically and practically, as well as a foundation upon which to identify and expand on racial difference.

It is here that a crucial link within this analysis between Scott’s identification of gendered relationships of power and Said’s theory of Orientalism is made apparent.

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5 Quoted by Scott, “Analysis,” 1069.
Sexuality “serves as a loaded metaphor for domination” through gender differentiation, and through Orientalism as a “male power fantasy . . . in which the Orient was penetrated, silenced, and possessed.” The colonies themselves were “an erotic playground, a virgin bride to be ravished and penetrated by the white European male.” Anne McClintock argues that even before Europeans embarked upon imperialist adventures, the unknown continents of the world occupied their imaginations as erotic fantasy worlds. She labels them the “porno-tropics” and identifies them as the object “onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.” By categorizing the colonies as a sexual object of gender difference, an Other that existed for the Europeans to desire, dominate, and consume, colonizers initiated a discourse of power. This sexual imagery at once created, reflected, and legitimated colonial hierarchies.

This had particular consequences for female colonial subjects. Native women of the colonies were particularly constructed as “objects of desire.” They represented the “Other,” marked for European male “consumption.” French colonialists employed a Vietnamese phrase for the labeling of Asian concubines: congaï. As objects of sexual conquest, however, they represented far more. A concubine came to be known as a “skin dictionary.” Through metaphor, colonizers “equated carnal knowledge of the colonized with knowledge about the colony.” Thus, through “sexual prowess,” the European male

6 Stoler, Knowledge, 44.

7 Nicola Cooper, France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 134.


simultaneously dominated both the native woman and the colony she inhabited.\(^{10}\) Such representations granted Europeans privileged manhood and cast native peoples of both genders within a feminized perspective, thus legitimating political dominance through metaphors of sexual domination.\(^{11}\)

Many different and often contradictory representations were used to preserve this sexual hierarchy necessary for European domination. Another means of maintaining the sexual difference of the colonized, for example, was through the depiction of an oversexed native population. Again women were the primary focus of this erotic imagery. McClintock asserts of these colonized women that, “Folklore saw them, even more than the men, as given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial.”\(^{12}\) Climate was perceived as the driving influence that rendered native women so overtly sexual. In the eighteenth century the Encyclopédie counseled male travelers headed for the tropics to wear chastity belts so that they did not fall victim to sexual attack by this oversexed female population. In this way climate served as a perverted


\(^{11}\) For the preservation of such gender notions, the masculinity of native men was necessarily restricted. Thus, native men were not permitted to occupy the same sexual zones as their colonial counterparts. In the British Cape Colony, brothels were racially segregated. Those women who serviced whites were prohibited from servicing men of color. Legislation passed in 1902 also banned white prostitutes from making themselves available to black clientele. “White colonial customers disliked the idea that the women they purchased might service men of other races.” See Philippa Levine’s “Sexuality, Gender, and Empire” in *Gender and Empire*, edited by Philippa Levine, 134-55 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

rationalization of colonial superiority and dominance, as Europeans were not believed to be as vulnerable to the influences of their environment.\textsuperscript{13}

In the European imagination, sexual difference became a marker of morality and racial superiority. Dating back to the growth of trade contacts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, science linked physical sexual traits with racial differentiation. Thus, “Larger genitals were equated with smaller brain size. Sexual excess became the mark of inferiority.”\textsuperscript{14} An eighteenth century dissertation by Pierre Barrère, which sought to discover the cause behind color and race difference, attributed Negro pigmentation to black bile caused by intense sexual lust. Though no consensus existed among Barrère’s contemporaries, his theory was part of a larger discourse that served to feminize the African population through the objectification of the African body.\textsuperscript{15} Imperial racial theories were further confirmed by observation among native populations at Moore River and other settlements. Stanley Hall asserted that white children underwent an adolescent phase from which indigenous populations were physiologically barred. This granted whites “higher order moral and psychosexual development,” while natives were mentally confined by their sexual nature in a permanent state of immaturity. Again, notions of sexuality justified white dominance and moral rule over colonized subjects, further contributing to the colonial discourse of gender and race.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{14} Levine, “Sexuality,” 136.

Through the regulation of sexual norms and identities, European colonizers created the racial categories that they sought to maintain. In the words of Ann Stoler, this fact “bears historical witness to Ian Hacking’s contention that the power of categories rests in their capacity to impose the realities that they ostensibly only describe.” Thus, “classification . . . is not a benign cultural act but a potent political one.”

Affirmations of sexual difference created, reflected, and reconfirmed colonial power relationships and were inextricably linked with divisions of race and gender. The regulation of sexuality was mandated by the nature of the imperial venture. Imperialism was a fundamentally masculine endeavor, and man was by nature overtly sexual. Thus, maintaining the colonizer’s superiority demanded sexual restrictions, for “Over-sexedness, associated with colonial peoples, was feared as an unmanning threat which might lead to effeminacy, enervation, and weakness.”

The moral and racial superiority of Europeans was dependant upon their innate sexual control.

Sexual control was also necessary for the preservation of another element fundamental to European masculinity: health. European men, unlike colonial men, were perceived as inherently healthy, vigorous, and energetic. These qualities were necessary for the demanding activities of empire building, and they guaranteed colonizers their dominant position in the colonial hierarchy. Yet European men were also naturally virile and sexually vigorous, and unrestricted sexuality was a contributing factor in disease. As

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colonialism progressed and colonial administrators became increasingly concerned with the preservation of racial purity from the natives’ contaminating influence as well as the threat posed by the growing mixed population and their ambiguous position in society, sexual relations between colonizer and colonized were more of a cause for anxiety. Particularly beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, colonizing men were discouraged from sexual contact with indigenous women, particularly “Negresses.” This seems to be a direct contradiction of the erotic imagery of empire that lured adventurous men to discover and conquer. Yet it was necessary, for “of all the excretions, the seminal fluid was the most precious, and its undue expense could entirely wreck the impressionable passions of the mind.” Even missionary men could fall to temptation in the oversexed colonial climate. Thus, married men were preferable as missionaries, for their masculinity was “tamed and domesticated to prepare them for the pitfalls of the field.” In the nineteenth century concubinage was a preferred method of sexual release, due to the fact that prostitution threatened male virility through the possible spread of syphilis. Known as “congai” in Indochina and “petite épouse” throughout the rest of the French Empire, concubines protected the prestige and virility of French men by preventing a disease with the potential to cause infertility. In the twentieth century, however, marriage to European women became the ideal as it also allowed for the preservation of racial purity and the upholding of European morals. Both practices represented solutions to unrestricted sexual practice which was a menace to


superior European morality that also threatened to produce “non-productive European men.”

**European Masculinity at Work in Empire**

The relationship between gender and race within the colonies, and the power structures it created, was complex. The colonial hierarchy was dependant on both notions of identity, and they were in constant flux, continually redefined by the colonizing agents who sought to maintain their own power on the basis of their superiority over the colonial Other. As mentioned previously, sexual prowess translated within the colonial discourse into a broader ideal of masculine domination. The perceived virility of the colonialist expanded to include the vigor, energy, and activity necessary to build an empire. Thus, the sexualized representations of the colonial world contributed to the structuring of broader gender power hierarchies that justified the imperial relationship. The juxtaposition of the masculine colonizer and the feminine colonized Other came to characterize all areas of life. Stoler asserts that the colonizers were not a unified group; they were divided by fears and social and political interest. Yet, they “constructed imagined communities” in opposition to the indigenous population, creating racial borders based largely on gendered difference.

The colonies were represented as the domain of the European male. Colonialism itself “was often figured as a gendered enterprise and was undertaken in gender-specific ways, by gendered agents.” Colonizing men in Indochina served as soldiers, engineers,

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22 Ibid., 24.
and administrators. They were held up as the “idealised image of the active, energetic male.” Women and colonized natives were denied such characteristics, a fact that further confirmed the binding of gender and racial identities and the feminization of indigenous men. Philippa Levine describes this process of idealizing the masculine in a colonial context: “The focus on a group of pioneer men taming wild terrain into productivity and profitability put the spotlight on physically courageous and industrious men, posing an ideal white male figure.”

The ultra masculine imagery perpetuated in the colonies denied the existence of less energetic white males. Further, the maintenance of colonial authority was dependent upon the preservation of the gender colonial hierarchy. Less rigorous European men were a threat to the image of the masculine colonizer against which the feminine colonized were juxtaposed, and which also served to legitimate European power. Stoler describes measures that were taken in the colonies to uphold the European masculine ideal: “When possible, authorities restricted the presence of nonproductive men and those who might sully the image of a healthy and ‘vigorous’ race. In Deli, the infirm, the

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23 Cooper, Encounters, 133-4.

24 Philippa Levine, “Introduction: Why Gender and Empire,” in Gender and Empire, ed. Philippa Levine, 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Ann Stoler argues that “the assertion of European supremacy in terms of patriotic manhood and racial virility was not only an expression of imperial domination, but a defining feature of it.” She offers the example of colonizer planters in Deli who were equated with soldiers fighting for the British Empire. According to Stoler, “official discourse was laden with military metaphor, bolstered by brass-buttoned uniforms, roll calls, and forms of deference and address.” This discourse was intended to unify colonizers who may otherwise have been divided along class lines through the creation of a common foe. In 1925 the construction of ‘a tomb to the unknown planter’ was proposed in order to honor those who had died as a result of assault by coolies. Such masculine and heroic representations were widespread in the colonies. These images promoted the idea that Europeans held privileged status on the basis of their valiant character, and thus that their honored position within the colonial hierarchy was merited. Moreover, their character was a legacy passed on to them through their European ancestry. Thus Asians and Africans were officially and permanently barred from such status. See Stoler, Knowledge, 16, 27, 32.
aged, and the insane were quickly sent home.” In a similar manner, unbecoming white males were “institutionalized” in nineteenth-century India and were forced into “orphanages, workhouses, mental asylums, and old-age homes” where they could not be seen and thus were not a menace to white prestige. Additionally, British administrators in the colonies retired by the time they reached fifty-five years of age, “ensuring that ‘no Oriental was ever allowed to see a Westerner as he ages and degenerated, just as no Westerner needed ever to see himself, mirrored in the eyes of the subject race, as anything but a vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj.”

Colonial hyper-masculinity at times even restricted women from entering the colonies. In 1897 the Société française d’émigration des femmes (SFEF) organization was established in France to locate jobs for upstanding young French women to travel to the colonies. In reality the organization functioned largely as a match-making service to find suitable wives for male French colonialists and thus promote the purity of the French race. Government officials in Indochina, however, initially denied requests by the SFEF to locate jobs for French women: “The negative response to this, and to later initiatives, revealed keen tension between metropolitan desires to domesticate the colony and the dreams of colonial officials to preserve their patch as the stamping ground of European males.”

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25 Stoler, Knowledge, 35, 65.

26 Edwards, “Womanizing,” 112-3. Similarly, in Deli military personnel and employees were restricted the privilege of marrying until they had served a number of years. Even after this time requirement had been met, many companies still mandated that employees request permission before taking a wife. These policies were rooted in the belief that marriage could lead to European destitution as men sought to uphold a certain standard of living for their wives in the colonies, and thus undermine imperial authority. See Stoler, Knowledge, 51-2, 132-3. In some cases, the inability of European men to initiate a family or
Conversely, the presence of European women was necessary in the colonies. Aside from the desire to maintain the purity of the white, European race, women could fulfill tasks deemed inappropriate for masculine, rigorous colonial men. For example, female missionaries were needed to perform un-masculine tasks below the dignity of missionary men. The teaching of school children was perceived to be insufficiently “heroic,” and was thus left to missionary wives. Yet when these women took upon themselves traditionally masculine roles as their husbands left to engage in itinerant preaching, credit was denied them in mission reports. In the realm of written documentation and official reporting, colonization had to remain a male enterprise.

Historians have argued that masculinity was a defining feature not only of imperialism but also of European citizenship. Thus the feminization of indigenous peoples allowed Europeans to justify colonial domination as well as to rationalize the exclusion of colonial subjects from the national citizenry. The birth of the citizen soldier was an essential factor in the formation of this identity based on gender and racial difference.

Historians have further identified a profound shift in the formation of French national identity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a result of the French Revolution and the prominence of “armies of citizens,” “the virile and heroic values
associated with the military became increasingly merged with the ideal of the citizen.”

As French colonial identity was defined by the existence of its opposite, so was citizenship defined by what it excluded: women, aristocrats, and “male ‘Otherness.’” This fact is confirmed by French paintings dating from this time period in which “the citizen-soldier comes to the fore and is increasingly constituted by the exclusion and subjugation of the ‘Other.’”

The Colonial Other

In addition to constructing a colonial mythology based on the masculine European ideal, France wrote itself into the mythology of Indochina, and in so doing constructed a mythological feminine counterpart for itself. The aspara was the Cambodian “celestial dancer who [embodied] ‘purity of spirit and eternal beauty.’” These dancers served in the royal court as intermediaries between “king and heaven.” French colonial imagery

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29 Melanie Ulz, “Napoleon and His Colonized ‘Others’: The Demise of Citizenship in Post-revolutionary and Napoleonic History Paintings,” in *Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western Culture*, eds. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and Anna Clark, 46, 61-2 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). This trend was not exclusive to France. The political climate of eighteenth century Britain and the prominent place of war within it reaffirmed the national essence “as comprised of the ‘manly qualities necessary for military triumph and successful colonization: independence, fortitude, courage, daring, resourcefulness, and paternalistic duty.’” This national identity based on military prowess and masculinity served to legitimize the British Empire through Othering, in a manner very similar to what has been discussed in earlier sections. The colonies were imagined as places of chaos and barbarity; they required the civilizing hand of “a disciplined, authoritative, but compassionate masculine English subject.” The gender identifications that came to characterize the colonizer and the colonized were thus not inherent or certain. They were adopted to fit preconceived notions of the British nation, its citizenry, and their role in the world, as well as to separate them from colonial peoples. These gender characterizations “served most importantly to mark who was protected by British ‘rights and liberties’ and who was not.” See Wilson, “Modernity,” 16, 18, 22.
separated the aspara from this traditional framework. The dancer instead came to fulfill a role as the mediator “between the French pantheon and the Cambodian people.” At colonial exhibitions throughout the early twentieth century, in 1906, 1922, and 1931, figures representing France symbolically and protectively stood over the aspara bearing weapons. France and the colonies were joined through symbolism and cultural imagery. Yet like the colonial hierarchy, this relationship had its foundation in constructed gender identities. The Cambodian woman, *la Cambodgienne*, served as a striking example of this fact:

Unlike France, whose matriarchal demeanor implicitly challenged the colonizer’s manhood, *la Cambodgienne* represented a Rousseau-like ideal whose atavistic calling to serve man was still intact. Matronly metropole, virile colonizer, and nymphlike colony were joined in a conceptual triangle which privileged French manhood as the vital link between the raw earth of the colony and the bright hearth of the homeland.

Vietnam and Laos were represented in a similar feminized fashion. A description of Louis Botinelly’s monument, “Our Possessions in Asia,” constructed in 1927, illustrates the feminization of Indochina: “Sporting an Angkorean headpiece and a decidedly Parisian hemline, Cambodia reclines as she is waited on by younger, scantily clad Laos and Vietnam.”

The hyper-masculine French colonial identity depended upon the existence of a feminine colonized counterpart. Said asserts, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.” The resulting relationship between the Occident and the Orient was one of power and domination, “of

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varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”

The process of feminizing colonized populations and asserting the hyper-masculinity of European men is understood by historians as key to the “assertion of white supremacy.” European colonialists utilized a form of circular logic for the legitimization of their power: “it was not uncommon for colonized peoples to be seen by imperialists as weak and unmasculine because they were colonized, an opinion that already assumed that male weakness and lack of masculinity were central to the process of becoming a colony.” Europeans stressed gender and race differences in order to distinguish themselves from colonized people historically and culturally.

Colonialists were represented as masculine and active. They reinforced this representation through the “contrasting image” of the feminine, inactive colonized man. French accounts of travelers in Brazil emphasized the extensive tasks undertaken by native women and their integral role in maintaining their society. This was not intended to highlight the women’s importance, but to “enhance the image of native men as idle.” By the European standard of masculinity, these men were unmanly.

The feminization of the colonial Other is prominent in the case of Indochina.

The French represented the colonial relationship as a marriage. Some have argued that

32 Stoler, Knowledge, 46.
this was intended to counteract the image of conquest tainted by violence, but it also served to confirm the feminized and submissive position of the colonies beneath a protective, masculine France, as Indochina was relegated to the position of the “subservient” wife.\textsuperscript{36}

As Indochina itself was feminized, so were its people. Both men and women were subject to gendered representations: “In the context of French Indochina, the natives are constructed as feminine and submissive, regardless of their gender.”\textsuperscript{37} In travel accounts Westerners often confirmed these gendered images. In her book \textit{The Menacing Sun}, Mona Gardner represented men and women in Indochina as indistinct from one another. She described native men as “delicately featured,” with features that were “long and thin.” Women were without “curves and contours” that would mark their womanhood. Both sexes wore clothing that was identical in material, color, and shape.\textsuperscript{38} Helen Churchill Candee similarly reinforced feminized images of native men in her travel account titled, \textit{New Journeys in Old Asia: Indo-china, Siam, Java, Bali}. She described the hands of indigenous laborers as “always long and fine, with delicate wrists.” In reference to her chauffeur, an Indochinese man, she stated, “His hands were long and slender, his fingers fit for the finest violin, his wrists as delicate as befitted such a hand.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Cooper, \textit{Encounters}, 135.

\textsuperscript{37} Chiu, “Camille,” 140.


\textsuperscript{39} Helen Churchill Candee, \textit{New Journeys in Old Asia: Indo-china, Siam, Java, Bali} (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1927), 69, 85.
Travel writers further feminized the indigenous people of Indochina through characterizations of their passivity and submission. Gardner characterized them by a hate that was “too fundamental” to be a product of French presence. She argued that it was a hatred of “mankind and of life,” resulting from the nature that surrounds them and dictates their existence. The sun “drain[s] the vitality out of these men and give[s] it to the soil.” She declared, “Nature has been no mother here, but a shrew and a vixen, slashing out with typhoons, floods, and droughts to humble her men.” Thus, the people of Indochina are feminized physically by travel writers and defined by a passivity reserved for popular representations of women and contrasted with the image of active European men. As seen before with the representations of sexualized natives, climate offers an explanation of racial and gender difference. The fact that these women reaffirmed gendered representations of colonized people unwittingly and unquestioningly confirms their place embedded within the Western psyche. Through the substantiation of feminized colonial imagery, these Western women confirmed the masculinity of European colonial men whose identity was dependent upon an opposing Other.

Native people were also popularly represented as children and contrasted with mature Europeans: “To French colons in Vietnam, the children of the colonies referred to all Vietnamese, regardless of age or educational level.” All areas of Vietnamese society and culture were similarly denigrated: “With respect to philosophy in particular,

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French *colon* perceived the Vietnamese as children, even toddlers, whose ideas were still unformed.‘’

The people of Indochina represented everything that France was not: idle, feminine, delicate, passive, and childlike. By representing indigenous people in this manner, the French confirmed their own identity as active, masculine, strong, active, and mature. These opposing identities confirmed French superiority and thus legitimated their imperial domination and the structuring of the colonial hierarchy.

**Discourse Monopoly**

Europeans were able to maintain a dominant position within the colonial gender hierarchy because they controlled the discourse that defined it. The gender identifications and norms explored in the above sections were neither fixed nor natural. They resulted from processes of cultural identification and were constantly adapted in reaction to threats to the colonial order. In times of imperial crisis colonizers renegotiated identities and behavioral norms and increasingly emphasized gender and racial difference. The extent to which they adapted gender power structures on the basis of perceived threats supports several important points: 1. Gender identities were constructions that determined realities. 2. Gender constructions were fundamental to the maintenance of empire. 3. Within the context of colonization Europeans to a large extent enjoyed a monopoly of the gender discourse, which helped them to maintain their position of power and differentiate themselves from those they colonized.

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Though the presence of concubines had served to protect colonizing men from the de-masculinizing threat of sexually transmitted diseases and thus reaffirmed colonial hierarchies by maintaining the health and vigor of colonialists, concubines came to be seen as hazardous to the colonial order. Their danger lay in their potential to complicate the difference on which racial and gender hierarchies rested through the production of “mixed blood” children who “straddled the division of ruler and ruled as they threatened to blur that divide.” Stoler articulates the connection that Foucault illuminated between racism and colonial anxiety over mixed populations:

The revival of a symbolic blood derived from the imperial logic that cultural hybridities were subversive, that subversion was contagious, and that native sensibilities and affiliations were the invisible bonds that could position those of ‘mixed blood’ against ‘full-blooded’ Europeans who claimed the right to rule. For Foucault, modern racism appears as a consequence of that class body in the making.42

Dating from the turn of the twentieth century, as colonialists became increasingly concerned over the peril these populations represented for their dominant position in the colonies, marriage to European women gradually came to replace concubinage as the acceptable social institution. The presence of European women in the colonies more sharply defined “racial lines.” The “need for their protection,” which was keenly felt by European men, demanded the clarification of racial identities: “It coincided with perceived threats to European prestige, increased racial conflict, covert challenges to colonial politics, outright expressions of national resistance, and internal dissension

among whites themselves.” Colonialists reinforced sexual, gender, and racial difference in response to imperial threats, thereby asserting their monopoly over the colonial discourse. In Vietnam and Indonesia, for example, perceived threats over “metissage” or mixed blood coincided with threats from native nationalist movements. Colonists preserved their manhood through the exercising of “racial vigilance.” As Georges Hardy, “one of the principal architects of French colonial educational policy” remarked in 1929, “a man remains a man as long as he stays under the gaze of a woman of his race.”

End of Empire

The gender identities central to imperialism could not be sustained indefinitely. In the end they were as mortal as Empire itself. France in the twentieth century witnessed the weakening of the link between military masculinity and citizenship. The “increasing frequency of colonial wars where national security was not directly threatened, with the development of more mechanized, more impersonal forms of engagement” combined with the inclusion of French women into the electorate after 1945

43 Stoler, Knowledge, 57.

44 Ibid., 1. With the increased immigration of European women to the colonies, anxieties over the purity of female colonialists became linked to hazards to Empire: “As in the post-Reconstruction U.S. South, where black men were lynched in the name of chivalry, any attempted or imagined infringement of that honor [of white women] came to be seen as a challenge to European, white, and colonial rule.” In 1929, the Dutch colonial administration interpreted the death of an estate assistant’s wife at the hands of a Javanese worker as “a subversive act of ‘communist agitation’ and a direct threat to Dutch authority.” They responded by sending army reinforcements to Deli and increasing intelligence forces. Rape legislation in the colonies was not prompted by actual incidents of rape, but perceived threats to Empire: “The term ‘Black Peril’ referred to sexual threats, but it also connoted the fear of insurgence, and of perceived nonacquiescence to colonial control more generally.” After the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion in India, though no incidents of rape were reported, colonialists invoked images of the “sexual mutilation of British women by Indian men.” See Stoler, Knowledge, 34, 58-9.
to stimulate the “gradual feminization of politics and society.” In Britain activism represented a principal threat to imperialism from within: “Interracial sex, anti-imperialism, socialism, and feminism . . . de-centered the imperial and patriarchal certainties of the Victorian era, subverting the gendered identities of colonizer and colonized upon which the continuing success of the imperial project rested.” Thus the gender discourse began to crumble from within, and this process would continue through the end of Empire.

In the twentieth century European empire suffered from a “perceived post-war crisis of masculinity.” A number of factors contributed to this perception. There were increasing numbers of married men for whom imperialist adventures must have seemed both less desirable and practical. The experience of war had weakened the confidence of men and thus undermined the imperial masculinity which many associated so closely with Empire. The generation after the war seemed to be without “a sense of adventure and patriotism” that was crucial for the imperialist venture, and many veterans fell victim to “restlessness, boredom, and ‘purposelessness’” that “undermin[ed] their ‘fitness for the imperial mission.’” Despite this, or perhaps as a result of this perceived masculinity crisis sweeping much of the population, imperial masculinity continued as the ideal for pro-imperialist men and women. Athletic ability became a primary value on which access to high positions within colonial administrations and private companies was granted. Pro-imperialist women sought masculine, heroic colonizers for marriage. These

45 Forrest, “Citizen-Soldier,” 124, 126.
women “continued to admire rugged, romanticized, upper-class imperial masculinity” and consciously rejected the anti-imperial force of feminism.\textsuperscript{48} The impending loss of Empire and the ideals of masculinity that it had upheld led many to cling even more tightly to that quickly vanishing identification that had distinguished them from the colonized.

Even after the virtual end of Empire, colonial gender representations continued. Fears surrounding the emancipation of Western women led to the increasing feminization of Eastern men in “a constellation of monuments, exhibitions, and museums.”\textsuperscript{49} The end of imperialism was a blow to European pride and its masculine identification. As former colonies increasingly asserted their own masculine identity, the Other upon which European masculinity had depended fell away. The result was an increasingly feminized Europe, a trend felt keenly in Britain: “Loss of Empire created a crisis in British masculinities and, as nationalism transformed colonial masculinities, the ‘emasculating’ of Empire accelerated.” Black migration into Europe, the sexual revolution, and “second-wave feminism” contributed to the redefinition of British national identity and the “‘feminization’ of the nation.” Lingering nostalgia for masculine imperialism was evoked in popular films, such as \textit{Lawrence of Arabia}, which was released in 1962.\textsuperscript{50} As these examples demonstrate, just as gender constructions were necessary for the proper maintenance of Empire, so was the perpetuation of Empire vital to European national gender identifications.

\textsuperscript{48} Bush, “Century,” 84-5.

\textsuperscript{49} Edwards, “Womanizing,” 129.

Masculine Nationalism

Before the end of empire, as the colonial system was on the brink of collapse, many nationalist groups responded to colonial repression through the assertion of their own masculinity. Indian psychiatrist Ashis Nandy identified the essence of post-World War II India as defined by “hyper-masculinity.” He argued that nationalists in India and other “societies warped by European imperialism” reacted to the unequal relationship of power inherent within the colonial system with “deliberate celebration[s] of their toughness.” Masculine displays allowed formerly repressed populations, males emasculated by the colonial gender discourse and their subordinate position within the colonial hierarchy, to discover their own manhood and thus a new self. As the age of empire dimmed on the horizon and the era of decolonization began, collective hyper-masculine identity came to be the characterizing mark of post-colonial modernity and nationalist struggles throughout Asia and Africa.

Anne McClintock quotes Cynthia Enloe who asserted that “nationalisms have ‘typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.’” In response to their long years of emasculation and exclusion from European masculine constructs, nationalists struggling for independence during decolonization often imitated those very forms of imperialist masculine behavior that had been denied them during the colonial era. Nationalists in Indonesia, for example, adopted military

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53 McClintock, “Heaven,” 89.
uniforms, bandanas, and long hair. They assumed powerful militia names such as “Red Bears,” “Gorilla Guards,” “Wild Tigers,” and “Black Bulls.” One author described how the scent of blood and gunpowder granted the revolutionary soldier in Indonesia “‘an exhilarating sensation’ because it allow[ed] him to revel in his masculinity.” On either side of the conflict people drew comparisons between “Republican freedom fighters and macho cowboys in the American Wild West.” Indonesian nationalists also labeled those who represented obstacles to their struggle in much the same way that they had been labeled by Dutch imperialists. Native Indonesians “who collaborated with the blue-eyed enemy” were weak and effeminate. Women similarly threatened the cause as they were “capable of diluting men’s anticolonial resolve.”

Masculinity and brotherhood were for colonized men powerful symbols of self-identification, independence, and nationalistic spirit. These concepts embodied an entire world view, yet they were also a means of rejecting the labels placed upon the colonized by European imperialists. By rejecting these labels and seeking to define their own identity, colonized men disrupted the colonial discourse through which colonizers both produced and legitimated power. Yet it is important to recognize that indigenous men did not seek to overthrow completely existing gender relationships of power. They did not challenge the core association of the constructed gender hierarchy which placed man over woman. Rather, they sought to gain admission to the dominant status that had formerly been reserved for European men:

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55 Ibid., 161.
For legal decolonization was less about dismantling the power-laden constructions of power, identity and knowledge of the colonialist narrative and more about inclusion – about having ‘access’ to the prevailing system of power. In other words, this decolonization was less about doing away with the racialized, sexualized construction of transnational hierarchy and more about reconfiguring this hierarchy so that ‘postcolonial men’ could be included.  

Thus the hyper-masculinity of decolonization and indigenous nationalism actually reinforced and naturalized gendered constructions of power. Nationalist men, though they challenged the colonial discourse, repeated the masculine imagery inherent within it and continued to define manhood in the same way.

**Conclusion**

As this first chapter has demonstrated, the language of imperialism was a primary means of production of European colonial authority. Through the colonial discourse, European colonizers constructed relationships of power based in imagined sexual, gender, and racial difference. These constructed identities then served as a legitimization of the very power that they had enabled into existence. Europeans manipulated the colonial discourse and the identities involved with it, emphasizing racial separation at times of perceived imperial crisis as a means of maintaining dominance over colonized peoples. Yet in the twentieth century, colonized men responded to this gendered discourse by asserting their own masculine identity.

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57 This would have major consequences for indigenous women, both within their own societies and in terms of how they are constructed historically. For works discussing the position of Vietnamese women in the midst of the nationalist movement, see Bill Turley’s article “Women in the Communist Revolution in Vietnam” in *Asian Survey*, and David Marr’s “Question of Women.”
The next few chapters will seek to demonstrate how the gendered images explored within this first chapter were complicated, reversed, and manipulated by various groups in the context of Indochina. It will reveal how the colonial discourse was simultaneously challenged and reinforced in a range of contexts, as well as illuminate the extent to which even those who confronted the gendered colonial representations continued to define masculinity in a manner consistent with the colonial discourse. And finally, as this chapter has revealed the ways in which gender constructed and maintained relationships of power, subsequent chapters will explore gendered language as a means of challenging those same power relationships.
Chapter Two
The Colonizing Woman

Introduction

In the journal recording her travels throughout “Old Asia” published in 1927, Helen Churchill Candee described the young girl known as “La Tonkinoise.” She was at once repulsive and beautiful. Both of these qualities could be traced to her exoticism. Candee wrote, “. . . if a slightly flattened round face is repugnant, then you will miss seeing it in a wistful shyness and a saucy smile.” Yet Candee also expressed love for this figure who embodied the contradictory repulsiveness and draw of her land and its people. Candee wished for this girl a pleasant future. She expressed a hope that “she will marry something better than the thatch-plumaged men of the rice fields.”

Within these reminiscences, descriptions, and expressions of desire, Candee reflected the gender paradox of the colonies. She, like others, reinforced colonial gender constructs based on the image of the exotic through her portrayal of “la Tonkinoise.” Yet she sympathized with the girl’s powerless state as her hope for a brighter future demonstrates. This sympathy was perhaps derived from Candee’s own position below men on the gender hierarchy. Western women in the colonies simultaneously represented the powerful, through their relationship with the imperial nation, and the powerless, a status given them by their gender. In other words, they were at once the oppressor and the oppressed.

1 Candee, Journeys, 9, 14.
The ambiguous and conflicting position of these women in the colonies is reflected in their writings, and in the world view that they present. At times they demonstrated sympathy and compassion toward the indigenous population, yet at others they confirmed the very images that robbed the native people of their humanity and masculinity. This chapter will explore the paradoxical role of the colonizing woman as reflected primarily by the diary of Claudie Beaucarnot and by Marguerite Duras in her novel The Sea Wall. It will seek to illuminate how the gendered relationships of power that Joan Scott described could operate simultaneously on multiple levels and in contradictory ways, placing certain groups into ambiguous roles that were never truly reconciled. This, in turn, will also confirm the complex nature of the relationship between gender and race in the colonies. This chapter will further complicate the understanding of the gendered language of empire by demonstrating that it was not always straight-forward or unambiguous. Ultimately, it will seek to reinforce the importance of gendered language and imagery in the colonies through a demonstration of how deeply entrenched the representations of the colonial discourse were within the European mind.

Both Duras and Beaucarnot were women of French descent born in Indochina. Both lived in the colony into their teen years and came to view the place as home, a fact that grants further complexity to their position. That Duras, who lived in Indochina until the age of seventeen and spoke Vietnamese fluently, and Beaucarnot, who actually had indigenous blood coursing through her veins, unwittingly reaffirmed the conventions of the colonial discourse indicates how deeply these representations were embedded within
the colonial psyche. This demonstrates the power of the colonial structure and the vast scope of the colonial discourse even more forcefully than incidents of outright repression, because it is unacknowledged and perhaps even unintentional. Though they demonstrated sympathy for the colonized people, and though Duras sought to reverse the gendered imagery of the colonial discourse which cast the colonizer as the legendary, masculine hero, neither woman granted the colonized people a voice. Thus they perpetuated the stereotype of the passive colonized man below them on the colonial hierarchy.

Further, both women were writing at a time when the French Empire was most vulnerable. Beaucarnot’s diary chronicles the summer of 1943, which she and her family spent traveling throughout Indochina. Though at this time France retained administrative control of the colony, Indochina had been occupied by the Japanese, who were using it as a base from which to launch their World War II efforts. Frenchmen at home faced a similar situation. Though the Vichy government led by Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain retained governmental control of France, by this time the whole of the country was occupied by German Nazi forces. With both the French homeland and the colony occupied by foreign powers, the French Empire was seriously destabilized. In 1950, when The Sea Wall was published under its original French title, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique, France was struggling to re-conquer Indochina. Five years had passed since the Vietnamese declared independence, and French support for the war in the colonies was slowly waning. Many had come to the conclusion that the costs of the war far outweighed its benefits, and the French were becoming increasingly dependant on
American aid. This further emphasizes the power of colonial imagery. Despite the fact that both women were writing in the midst of a weakened French Empire, both confirmed gendered representations of the colonial discourse. Yet before this theme can be fully explored, the paradox of the colonizing woman must be examined.

**The Paradox of the Colonizing Woman**

Western imperialism’s long tradition of constructing colonies from a gendered perspective and the associated sexualized, effeminate representations of colonized people made colonial desire a loaded act. Karen Ruddy argues, “Following the Foucault of *The History of Sexuality*, Said’s observations on Oriental sex demonstrate that desire is not innocent of power or history, but is instead discursively constituted and historically occasioned, and imbued with operations of knowledge and power.” The colonial relationship of power commonly articulated itself through erotic symbolism and sexual imagery. Notions of sexual difference that cast the oversexed native population in opposition to the civilized, sexually virile yet controlled colonizer were connected to theories of climate, and these representations shaped the position of the European woman in the colonies. In contrast to the highly sexualized representations of the women of the tropics, European imperialists believed that their climate bestowed upon Northern European women sound morals. They further perverted this notion as a rationalization of European superiority and dominance. Montesquieu articulated the belief that “savages” could be distinguished from Europeans on the basis that they “were almost entirely

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dominated by climate and nature."³ European colonial women, within this construct, embodied the moral superiority of Europe, and their nations would call upon them to maintain this essence throughout the colonizing effort.

In 1897 the Société française d’émigration des femmes (SFEF) was founded in France in order to facilitate the emigration of women to the colonies. The founders of this organization believed that the movement of French women to the colonies would extend the ideal of the family to the outer reaches of the empire. The endeavor would also simultaneously reflect and reinforce France’s “long-term commitment” to its colonies. The organization operated under the guise of finding employment in the colonies for young French women, but it was a virtual match-making service that found suitable husbands among the colonists for these women who could uphold French morality in the empire.⁴

This organization also sought the promotion of “racial purity” within the colonies. “Women could do their patriotic share by reconstituting French life and reproducing the French race in the outposts of the empire.”⁵ Through this patriotic act, women could become preservers of French nationhood.⁶ The conservation of white superiority and difference in the colonies demanded the strict regulation of white women’s sexuality.

This regulation “was understood by colonial administrators as crucial to bolstering white

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³ Jennings, Curing, 9.


⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁶ Prasenjit Duara examines the role of women as preservers of authenticity in the case of China. See Prasenjit Duara, ‘The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China,” History and Theory 37, no. 3 (Oct. 1998), 287-308.
prestige, maintaining the racial purity of whiteness, and thereby fixing racial difference between whites and non-whites.”

Not only were the French women brought to the colonies by SFEF expected to promote the unity of the French race, but they also had to maintain status over colonized people. One middle class woman in the colonies stated that “it would have been detrimental to French prestige if French women were seen going to the market.”

By maintaining the standards of French leisure in the colonies, colonial wives “served the highly strategic purpose of establishing ‘civilized’ bourgeois norms in the outposts of the empire.” Colonial women thus served multiple roles. They extended to the colonies ideals of French morals, race, and society.

The imagining of Indochina as the “subservient” wife in relation to the loving French husband and the feminization of the Indochinese people complicated further the position of French women within the colonies. Their nation demanded that they simultaneously maintain the moral and racial status of the country in the fulfillment of their feminine role and unify in the colonial effort that placed them in the position of male domination. Within the context of the 1931 Paris International Colonial Exhibition, the French people were encouraged to assert ownership over the colonies as a nation united. Thus, women joined in the colonial identity which was the symbolic extension of male power over the female colonial counterpart. In some ways, by accepting this

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7 Ruddy, “Ambivalence,” 84.
8 As quoted from an interview by Sylvie Locret-Le Bayon, Ha, Women, 114.
9 Ha, Women, 115.
10 Cooper, Encounters, 135.
11 Ibid., 67.
position of borrowed power, women confirmed their position below French men. It was only with male consent as well as aid that they could exert any power at all. Thus, their gender and racial identities, rather than mutually reinforcing each other, existed at odds.

Complex and contradictory gender constructs granted a different experience of the colonies by men and women, whether indigenous or colonizing. Indigenous women were confronted by the restrictions imposed upon them by their own culture, as well as the additional restraint placed upon them by “both men and women associated with imperial power.” French women in the colonies existed within a paradox. They were not directly involved in the rule of the colonies, and just as the indigenous women, they were restrained by laws created by and for the advantage of men. This is confirmed by the fact that they would not be granted the right to vote in France until 1944. Yet McClintock asserts,

Nonetheless, the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men. As such, white women were not the hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.¹²

Thus, in George Groslier’s *Le Retour à l'argile* published in 1928, the character of Mme. Bertrand was presented as the ideal colonial wife because she refuted feminine norms and took on male traits. This allowed her to fit within the colonial community which was characterized by the ideal of the “active, energetic male” and associated with “virility.” The character of Raymonde Rollin was the antithesis of this. She was overtly female and

thus unsuited for colonial life. Helen Churchill Candee presented a similar image of the ideal colonial woman. “Madame” spent her mornings supervising the force for her “new venture in rubber.” Afterward she returned home, and for the rest of the day was “occupied with her feminine duties.” Candee asserted that she was “the best advertisement for colonial life that one could find in French Indo-china.” These examples reflect the dual role that colonial women were expected to fulfill. The moral and racial preservation of France abroad required feminine authenticity, yet the colonizing mission behind which the nation unified was essentially male. Ultimately, European women in the colonies simultaneously inhabited two gender power relationships: one which placed them in a superior position over colonized people, and another that subordinated them to European men.

*Adieu Saigon, Au Revoir Hanoi: The 1943 Vacation Diary of Claudie Beaucarnot*

The ambiguous position of women in the colonies is reflected in Claudie Beaucarnot’s travel diary *Adieu Saigon, Au Revoir Hanoi*, a work that also demonstrates the paradoxical role granted her by her mixed heritage. Beaucarnot’s father was a Frenchman. He moved to Indochina in 1920 and became Director-General of the Tileworks in the region. Beaucarnot related of him, “Knowing Indochina well, he loved it and valued its people.” Her mother, however, was born in Indochina. She was the product of a “Breton father” and “a Vietnamese mother from a good Ha Dong family.” Beaucarnot’s position within Indochina was complicated by this mixed heritage. She felt

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14 Candee, *Journeys*, 121.
a certain ownership over this region where she was born and where she experienced the joys and trials of childhood.\textsuperscript{15} Her father appreciated the beauty of Dran, a land that reminded him of his own homeland. Beaucarnot, however, remained loyal in her heart to her own land. Within the pages of her diary she declared, “Me, I am Tonkinese: I love my delta, the beach, the countryside, and the ocean.” She related of her ancestry and the emigration of her family from France, “All of these components were thus gathered so that we would be genuine Indochinese and that we would remain all of our lives in this country that was ours.” Yet war would cast her family from this land that they had made their home. She articulated this tragedy of her youth: “The events chased us from it. It was a total heartbreak.” And in writing the introduction to her diary forty-seven years after her adolescent self originally put the words to the page, Beaucarnot continued to lament the loss of her homeland. “There is not a single day that my mind doesn’t drift back to my faraway country that I will most likely not see again.”\textsuperscript{16}

Beaucarnot felt intense love and loyalty for her homeland. She thus admired the diversity of its people and their cultures. She was astonished upon touring the market in Djring to see such variety within one small area. On her travels throughout her homeland she distinguished between the Cham women with their “fearsome air” and “savage appearance,” living under a Hindu influence, and the Highlanders who were “completely black and half-naked,” as well as “proud and independent,” “loyal and candid.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Claudie Beaucarnot, \textit{Adieu Saigon, Au Revoir Hanoi: The 1943 Vacation Diary of Claudie Beaucarnot}, trans. David Del Testa, \url{http://www.bucknell.edu/Beaucarnot/diary.shtml} (March 2, 2008), 4

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{17} Beaucarnot, \textit{Adieu}, 34, 43-44, 46-48, 81.
These unique portraits that Beaucarnot painted of the people of Indochina contradicted the representations of the colony within the French discourse. Indo-chine, as it was originally termed, was named for the geographic place it occupied between India and China. This capricious unification became the basis for a discourse of power and the justification of French dominance: “It is an empty space where traces of a glorious past can only be excavated with the knowledge and expertise of the French.” This “staging of the idea of Indochina” became also a “strategy of containment.”

Void of its own culture and history, Indochina reflected the essences of the countries along its borders. France would enfold this indistinct region within the empire, granting it identity as an extension of the French nation abroad. Mona Garner declared of the people of Indochina, “They are the human material which France must make into citizens if she wishes to retain that rich colony.”

Aside from legitimating the French presence in Indochina, the arbitrary unification and naming of the region, which re-imagined the political map, had serious implications for determining cultural, political, and even gender identities.

Said famously argued that the opposing ideas of the “Occident” and the “Orient” are creations of man. They are historical, cultural, and geographical constructions that men use to define relationships of power and continuums of civilization and savagery: “Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in

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and for the West.” These opposing concepts provide the foundation for a global hierarchy through the naturalization of invented images and identities. The map of the world that we recognize as geographical reality universalizes the division between East and West by positioning them at divergent ends of the earth. Were China to replace Europe as the center of the world on the map, for example, this binary would no longer appear natural and universal. The constructed map does not represent objective reality but a constructed world view. Through mapping and naming and their associated images, ruling powers invent geographical realities and thus construct relationships of power:

One of the means by which ruling classes, races, or nations secure their power is by making a particular way of mapping the world appear natural. Geographical terms are political because they essentialize a singular way of mapping the world, repress the fact that there are multiple ways of mapping the world that have unique histories, and ignore the fact that those histories are structured by life-and-death struggles between memory and forgetting, blindness and insight.

Through the invention of Indo-china, the French imperial power constructed a historical and cultural reality and asserted its own dominant position over it. French colonizers fused the three nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos into a single colonial entity named solely for its place between India and China, thus robbing the colonized people of their independent histories, cultures, and traditions.

This act of arbitrary unification also had gendered implications, for historian Anne McClintock forges a connection between naming and masculine identity. She cites Luce Irigaray who argued that naming allows males to participate in the ownership of

20 Said, Orientalism, 5.

“origins.” Biologically speaking, the male’s participation in reproduction is open to question. Through naming, a man can assert ownership. McClintock asserts that this translates to the role of naming and discovery in the ritual of imperialism.22 Through the construction and naming of Indo-china, French colonizers asserted ownership over the colony. They denied colonized men in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos their masculinity by depriving them of the right of ownership over their own nations. When in Hanoi, Candee lamented this condition of colonized people: “. . . the bitter taunt is the naming of the streets after the men who conquered the race who walk on them.”23

In her travel journals Mona Gardner demonstrated the extent to which the geographical construction of Indo-china was universalized. Upon her arrival in the colony Gardner was startled to hear an indigenous person speak French, because this forced upon her the realization that the Indochinese were in fact distinct from Chinese people. Gardner also quoted some Frenchmen whom she overheard discussing the Aryan (Indian) and Chinese traits that were joined together in the people of Indo-china:

There is less of India in these people than there is of China, and each generation seems to breed more of the Mongol into them, but curiously they retain certain of the Aryan traits . . . This blend of the Chinese and the Indian is not like where you take a peach and a plum and get a nectarine. Here you see a peach and a plum producing . . . a vegetable! A vegetable with acid in it, much acid!24

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22 McClintock, Leather, 29.
23 Candee, Journeys, 20.
24 Gardner, Sun, 5, 59-60.
Gardner identified the Mekong River in Indo-china as the “dividing line between the inherited Indian and Chinese forces of this country,” at which point the Chinese characters transitioned to sanskrit, and the people of “yellow skin” gave way to “an earthy brown.”  Thus Gardner reinforced the image of Indo-china as void of its own culture and in need of the civilizing influence of France. Her account confirmed that geographical representations and naming have the power to construct and legitimate power relationships.

In contrast, Beaucarnot did not view the people of Indochina as a blanket “Other.” For her, these peoples, though arbitrarily united within Indochina, had their own cultural essence. Beaucarnot defied colonial power constructs and their gendered implications through her failure to recognize the unity of Indochina and her refusal to classify its people on the sole basis of Indian or Chinese influence. Her mixed ancestry and her identification with Indochina as her homeland perhaps contributed to this rejection of accepted relations of power. Her frustration with her own lack of power, however, may also have allowed her to sympathize with people who were utterly denied power by the colonial system. She declared, “When I come across books that are entertaining to read, I dream of being the Kipling of Indochina. Alas! I will never have the power. It’s the one regret of my young life.” Without power or a voice of her own, Beaucarnot was perhaps able to sympathize with those who were granted no cultural identity outside the influence of India, China or France.

25 Gardner, Sun, 70.

26 Ibid., 89.
During the war in which France attempted to re-establish power in Indochina, Vietnamese nationalists similarly rejected the gendered identifications embedded within this imagined unification. They challenged the geographical construction of Indo-china, and in so doing denied the French masculine rights of ownership over their nation. In his work *Eyewitness in Indo-china*, western Communist Joseph R. Starobin recounted his travels accompanied by members of the Vietnamese Communist Party. He told the story of Comrade Luong who assisted him on his journey. Luong was a “veteran of the revolutionary movement.” He had been imprisoned for five years while seeking refuge in Thailand, a fate that was shared by most revolutionaries and not dwelled upon by members of the Communist Party. Luong proclaimed to Starobin that the Vietnamese did not accept the term Indo-china: “That is the French imperialist expression to them, with all the implications of the fact.” He asserted that Indo-china was comprised of three separate nations with their own cultures and histories. “The French conquest gave these peoples a common destiny, and a common struggle now unites them, but they are separate peoples.” Luong referred to “Pathet Lao,” or “the Lao nation,” in order to “[reassert] the nationhood of this long-submerged people.” He similarly identified Cambodia as Khmer. “This too was a deliberate recollection of the great past of the Cambodian people. The name itself was a weapon in the fight for a national future.”

For Comrade Luong, to reject the name Indo-china was to reject French power and thus to symbolically deny French masculine rights of ownership.

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Beaucarnot may have shared nationalists’ rejection of the idea of a unified, void Indochina, but she unwittingly contributed to the gender power construct of the colonies in other ways. She obviously enjoyed an elevated position within Indochinese society on the basis of her French heritage. Even as a young girl she comfortably rested above indigenous people, both men and women. And though she sympathized with the Indochinese people, she seemed to assume that their unfortunate position was the inevitable result of climate. Her contradictory perception of the colonies, characterized by a certain level of understanding and toleration yet also unacknowledged reinforcement of power constructs shows the complicated role French women served within France’s colonies. As women they were denied power, yet as colonizers they dominated the colonized. Though she did not directly contribute to the colonial system through participation in its administration, Beaucarnot reaffirmed the power construct upon which it was based through her worldview and also enjoyed its associated privileges. Colonists naturally enjoyed a position of prestige and luxury above and outside that of the people whose country they inhabited. The fact that Beaucarnot was willing on some level to accept this societal structure is even more telling given her mixed heritage.

Throughout her travels in Indochina, Beaucarnot rested comfortably in a car. She repeatedly referred to the indigenous people who had to walk the streets, denied the luxury of the colonizer. Yet she did not challenge this implicit social hierarchy, despite the fact that this was her land and these were her people, an inheritance passed on to her by her maternal grandmother. She seemed to accept her elevated position and as a consequence the inferior role of the Indochinese as natural. While passing through a
village she casually referred to the crowds of colonized people: “Papa is obliged to give more than just a tap on the brakes to avoid the women of the villages, half-asleep, half-deaf.” And even when she did express sympathy for those less fortunate, she did not question her own advantaged role: “The car raises a considerable amount of dust. The poor people who we pass quickly doff their large frond hats and plunge their faces into them.” Beaucarnot was also willing to take advantage of the indigenous laborer. When not within the confines of the car, she and her family took “a quick tour” by “pousse-pousse,” also known as a rickshaw. They also made sure to lock the car when it was left in the presence of a group of indigenous people. This implies a certain distrust on the part of Beaucarnot and her family of the people that share her land.

Beaucarnot demonstrated in several instances that she was aware of the inequalities that determined her status. Though she was willing to recognize the distinct identities of the colonized people in spite of the arbitrary unification imposed upon them by French imperialism, she nonetheless related the condition of the “filthy highlanders.” She differentiated herself from them on the basis of their hygiene. She also used this as a basis to describe a village which her family passed through on the way to Nha Trang. “As much as the beaches are beautiful, the town is ugly and dirty.” She was also aware of economic inequalities, a fact that was apparent as she related an encounter with an indigenous beggar: “An old woman asks for money to have a new cai ao made. We give her six sous. She isn’t happy. It isn’t enough. Too bad!” Beaucarnot’s mother too was conscious of her elevated position as well as the role that she was required to fulfill.

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28 Beaucarnot, Adieu, 11, 20-1, 23.
within the colonies. While following a path in Dran, she encountered a steep slope. As she slipped she was disturbed by “the presence of . . . highlanders” who “contemplate[d] [her] with pity.” Eventually she was forced to accept the help of her husband “in order not to lose her prestige vis-à-vis the highlanders.” Similarly, Beaucarnot’s father consciously exercised authority over colonized people. Upon a confrontation with a “coolie” who demanded higher pay, “[Papa] wanted to throw the coolie in the water, because of this offensive behavior!” Her family further differentiated itself from colonized people through the maintenance of a colonial social network. As they traveled throughout Indochina, they repeatedly stopped to visit other Europeans abroad.29

The colonized people were also aware of the inequalities inherent within the colonial relationship. The Indochinese begged money from Beaucarnot’s family, assuming that they had money to give, and as they passed through a village in their car, troops of small children and even adults came “to admire” them. While traveling to Hué Beaucarnot’s family encountered a village of “bleary-eyed” people with a vulnerability to conjunctivitis. “They circled the car and contemplated with a curious air these ong tây, ba tây who eat do an An Nam,” which translates as “Mr. and Mrs. French who eat Vietnamese food.”30 Yet though Beaucarnot commented upon these contacts with indigenous people, she accepted her position above them, her mother’s need to maintain prestige among the colonized, her father’s frustration with the “coolies,” and the awe that met her family in the villages. Her failure to question this inherent colonial hierarchy and

29 Beaucarnot, Adieu, 24, 41, 56, 90.

30 Ibid., 19, 36.
her implied acceptance through this lack of vocalization reinforced colonial power relations.

On some level Beaucarnot seemed to attribute the differences between the colonists and the colonized, between Europeans and the Indochinese to differences in climate. She sympathized with the people who formerly belonged to a rich and fertile land since decimated by the dry air and those who were starving because their climate would not support them. Yet she did not question the role that placed them at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy. Of the Cham who had fallen from grandeur she stated, “We see irrigation canals, which were dug by the Cham people during their time of splendor. It appears as though this region used to be rich, many centuries ago. Today it’s dry, very dry.” She also attributed differences within Indochina and its people to climate conditions. She contrasted the lively atmosphere of Saigon to the somber ambience of Tonkin:

I’ve always had a strong attraction to Saigon. Life is very different, merrier, more nonchalant than in Hanoi. This comes, without a doubt, from the climate and the personalities of its inhabitants. They lead the good life. Besides, life is much easier for them than in Tonkin. The country is rich: rice grows in large quantities in the Mekong delta and there are numerous other interesting crops. While in Tonkin, the severe climate conditions commit the inhabitants to perpetual work with a poorer yield. The Red River delta is sad. All is ochre; the sky, the ground/soil, the rice fields, and even the clothing of the people are colored brown. But I love my Tonkin more than anything. That’s where I was born.31

The people were a product of their environment, as were their hardships. They even came to resemble the land that they inhabited. In Annam Beaucarnot observed, “Again,

31 Beaucarnot, Adieu, 71-2.
the plain with all its rice paddies all dried out. This makes me think of a similar place; this morning, during a stop, we saw a poor man so thin you could see his heart beat under his skin.”

The climate had placed a burden upon its people, and their hardships had placed them in a subordinate position within the colonial power structure. Beaucarnot presented this as sympathetic and perhaps even tragic, but nonetheless a natural result.

Though her father had “a great physical resistance that allowed him to spend day after day in the bush,” Beaucarnot affirmed theories of acclimatization. While in Dalat she succumbed to sensations of weakness and lightness. She asserted, “It appears that it takes five days to acclimatize.”

By reaffirming theories of climatic determination and acclimatization Beaucarnot unwittingly reinforced ideas that were used to rationalize European superiority. This is further evidence of her world view as both strengthening and reflecting colonial power structures.

Beaucarnot’s gender and heritage granted her a unique and complex position within Indochina. She sympathized with the colonized people and recognized their distinct ethnic identities, possibly as a result of her frustration with her own lack of power. Yet she did not question the hierarchy that granted her an advantaged position in colonial society, and through her characterization of Indochina and its people she actually confirmed colonial power structures. The colonial system which she reaffirmed was gendered in nature, and it placed a young girl in the position of masculine dominance over colonized men. Beaucarnot’s representation of the colonies is contradictory and


33 Ibid., 4, 50.
ambiguous, a fact that reflects her own position in Indochina. She failed to grant the colonized people a voice, though she recognized their unique identities independent of French Empire. She herself was both powerless and powerful, a position granted her and other women by the gender constructions of the colonies and the legislation that they supported.

**Marguerite Duras’ *The Sea Wall***

Marguerite Duras was a profoundly ambiguous, complex figure. As a French woman in Indochina, she was granted a paradoxical identity by her birth, a theme she explored herself in her work *The Lover.* Yet her identity, and her colonial perspective, was further complicated by various circumstances in her life. The story of *The Sea Wall* is semi-autobiographical, and the exploitation at the hands of the colonial government that the characters in her novel experienced was in reality endured by Duras and her

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34 *The Lover* tells the story a young French girl living in Indochina who was exiled to Paris as a result of her affair with a wealthy Chinese man in the colony. Like *The Sea Wall* this work is autobiographical, and it allowed Duras to explore her own paradoxical relationship to the colonies and the people within it. Karen Ruddy examines colonial desire from the perspective of the white woman within *The Lover,* and she argues that Duras’s subversion of traditional sexual morality in *The Lover* “both challenges and affirms the racializing and racist dynamics of colonial society.” She reveals the interconnected threads of “colonial sexuality, gender, race, and Orientalism” which defined the appropriate scope of white women’s sexuality and desire in the colonies. Ruddy contends that the young girl in *The Lover* was only able to assert her sexuality independent of this structure as a result of her ambivalent desire, defined simultaneously by “libidinal attraction to and racist disavowal of her desire for her lover.” The young girl’s attraction was at once “perversion,” because sex between a white woman and an Asian man defied European racial purity and blurred the colonial racial boundary, and a confirmation of the power granted the girl over her lover through the conventions of “racial privilege.” Her ambivalence thus derived from the contradictions of gender and race and the paradox of her identity. As a woman, her sexuality was strictly defined for her by the patriarchal system, yet as a European, she was in a dominant position over both men and women of other races. According to Ruddy, this work “cannot be understood apart from the regimes of sexual and gender regulation that characterized life in the colonies, and therefore from the crossing of gender, sexual, and racial boundaries that such desire permitted white women.” *The Lover* evoked colonial fears of racial mixing and contamination. Thus Ruddy argues that “the subversiveness of Durassian writing remains implicated in the discourses of white colonial patriarchy that it seeks to challenge.” As in *The Sea Wall,* Duras, though she confronted certain colonial images, was unable to write or exist apart from them. See Ruddy, “Ambivalence.” Quotes are from pages 77-8.
family. Yet later in her life she was employed by the very colonial bureaucracy that had caused her family such pain and hardship. During World War II she was involved with the anti-Nazi Resistance in France, and she even joined the Communist Party for a time before rejecting it as too restraining. Duras’s background suggests that she was oppressed both within the context of the colonies and her own family, and her activities as an adult imply that in various circumstances she took up the cause of the oppressed. In *The Sea Wall*, however, she confirmed some of the representations of the colonized people that had justified their subordination in the colonial system.

In *The Sea Wall*, Marguerite Duras’s ambiguous position in the colonies was echoed by the contradictory role of her primary characters. She reversed the masculine imagery of the colonial discourse and debunked the myth of the heroic, sexually virile colonizer, yet she simultaneously upheld the image of the passive, silent, colonized man that served as his counterpart. The characters that dominated *The Sea Wall* and with whom Duras sympathized were equally ambiguous, a fact made evident by the name she gave them: “colonial natives.”

Like colonial women, the characters of Ma, Suzanne, and Joseph were at once the oppressor and the oppressed. They occupied a middle ground between the colonizers engaged in the administration of the colonies and the indigenous people below. They contributed to the repression of the people of Indochina as French occupiers, and it never even occurred to them to consider the colonized people as equals. Yet at the same time they were subject to repression by the colonial state: Duras stated of the character of Ma that she had been “desperately ignorant of the blood-

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sucking proclivities of colonialism, in the tentacles of which she was helplessly trapped.”

In *The Sea Wall* Duras described the oppression her family endured in Indochina. Corrupt colonial officials would sell arable land for twice its value and pocket half of the money. The irreclaimable land they would only grant conditionally. After a few years’ time, when it was, predictably, uncultivated, they would seize it only to sell it again. Ma, Suzanne, and Joseph were likewise victimized by this colonial system. Yet in a reversal of the European colonial discourse, Duras juxtaposed Joseph, who sought to assert his masculinity in the face of his own impotence in an unforgiving land, with his sister Suzanne’s suitor Monsieur Jo, a planter representative of the imperial power. Through her comparison of these characters, Duras challenged the images of the masculine colonizer that both produced and legitimated the colonial relationship while simultaneously granting Joseph a masculine identity that she continued to deny to colonized men.

Duras challenged the persistent “idealised image of the active, energetic male in Indochina” through her oppositional characterization of Joseph, Monsieur Jo, and Pa Bart, a canteen proprietor in Ram. Joseph, a “colonial native,” asserted his masculinity by hunting. Duras described the family’s tool shed, which was filled with deer carcasses, and the resulting odor that lingered in the air. Though the family of three could not eat all of the deer that Joseph shot as he went out hunting every other night, and Ma

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37 Cooper, *Encounters*, 133.
continually “bawled him out” for wasting his shot killing deer that then had to be thrown away, “Joseph could not bear to return empty-handed from the forest.” On nights when Joseph sat on the verandah staring out into the forest, reminded of the desolation of the family’s situation and the injustice they were subjected to at the hands of the colonial administrators, the desire to go hunting was irresistible, and nothing could stop him from going. And after Joseph’s trip home from the Ram canteen in the family’s run-down B-12, during which he had been passed by the rest of the family riding in Monsieur Jo’s impressive Léon Bollée, he spent the night cleaning his guns. When Suzanne contemplated Joseph, she realized that he “was a hunter, and only that.” Ma said of him that “he was not made for study, that he was intelligent only in such things as automobiles and hunting.”

Duras’s Joseph hunted when he felt emasculated and at times when he was confronted with his impotence in the face of the colonial administration.

From the time that Joseph was “old enough to assert himself,” he took upon himself the defense of the family against the colonial administration. When an official came to inspect Ma’s concession in order to verify that once again she had failed to cultivate the irreclaimable land, Joseph asserted his masculine prowess through the brandishing of his gun. It was at that moment that Joseph became “another man,” and Ma could not fail to notice “his new importance.” He took “indecent pleasure” in “tearing to shreds that man who had been so self-assured till then, so terrifying to everyone,” who had possessed an “almost divine power.” When the agent threatened the

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38 Duras, *Sea*, 14, 25, 49.
family, proclaiming that their fate was in his hands, Joseph declared that in fact the 
agent’s fate was in theirs. After this incident the officials left the family in relative peace, 
sending only notices rather than coming in person to inspect the property. Ma’s cries of 
injustice, the family’s struggle, neither had any meaning for the colonial bureaucrats. 
Only Joseph’s claims to masculinity gave the family any reprieve from the burden of the 
colonial state. Through her characterization of Joseph, Duras indirectly confirmed the 
representations of the colonial discourse by echoing its images of manhood. Though at 
times she reversed the discourse, she operated under similar definitions of masculinity 
and femininity and appropriate gender roles.

Though Duras granted Joseph, representative of both the oppressor and the 
oppressed, masculine agency, she confronted the image of the masculine colonizer 
through her description of other characters. This paradox illuminates an apparent 
contradiction in her position on the colonies as a colonizing woman. Duras’s 
characterization of Pa Bart, a Frenchman, the proprietor of the canteen in Ram, 
challenged the gendered representations of the colonizer that dominated the colonial 
discourse. Unlike Joseph, Pa Bart was a representative of the colonial order. The 
Governor General had even seen fit to procure for him the Legion of Honor “for his 
having kept open for twenty years, to the glory and honor of France, the canteen of Ram, 
‘a distant post.’” People “praised him as a good man,” because he had adopted a native 
child. Yet he was far from the ideal, virile colonizer. He was “apoplectic and obese,” 
and the canteen that he operated was not a reflection of the glory of the French Empire,

39 Duras, Sea, 242, 244, 247.
but a place where he had grown old and fat. He moved little, yet was constantly covered in his own sweat. Made inert by the Pernod that he sold illegally, he made his adoptive son fan him and attend to all the business of the canteen. Pa Bart only rose to greet customers: “He did nothing else, and when he displaced himself it was with the slowness of a marine monster removed from its native element, almost without lifting his feet from the floor, so weighty was his unforgettable paunch, that barrel of absinth.”

Through vivid descriptions of Pa Bart’s laziness and obesity, Duras mocked the image of the healthy, vigorous, active colonizer that dominated the colonial discourse and which colonialists struggled to maintain in order to legitimate their domination within the colonial hierarchy. Yet again, though Duras mocked the image of the active colonizer, she reconfirmed his masculinity, for she demonstrated through her satire of Pa Bart that she was operating under a similar definition of masculinity.

Another representation that Duras complicated through her characterization is that of the sexually potent colonizer, a figure whose image allowed Europeans to assert their own masculine prowess, feminize their colonized counterparts, and maintain strict racial borders. Duras defied the image of the sexually potent colonizer through her depiction of Monsieur Jo, yet she asserted the sexual prowess of Joseph, the “colonial native.” Suzanne was able to sleep with whomever she liked, yet to Monsieur Jo Joseph proclaimed, “But in your case, if you want to sleep with her, you’ve got to marry her. That’s our way of saying to Hell with you!” Monsieur Jo was unnatural in Joseph’s eyes, because he was able to restrain himself from sleeping with Suzanne. Joseph himself had

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40 Duras, Sea, 31-2.
slept with all of the white women and the prettiest of the native women in the region, and he believed that he could sleep with all the women of the world. While in the city Joseph met a wealthy woman, and he lusted after her while riding with her in a car that her husband Pierre was driving. After arriving at a tavern she and Joseph fed Pierre drinks until he passed out, at which point they left him and spent a few days intimately engaged in a hotel. Joseph thus demonstrated his own virility while simultaneously emasculating Pierre. He spoke derisively of the man, conjecturing that he was the type to hire thirty trackers by phone from Pa Bart and spend only as much time in the forest as it took to kill a tiger. Within Duras's narrative it was Joseph, the “colonial native,” who was sexually potent. She denied Monsieur Jo and Pierre, who were closely linked to Empire rather than being subject to it, the masculine sexual prowess that was so fundamental to the maintenance of the colonial racial hierarchy.

Duras further complicated the colonial gender discourse through her feminization of Monsieur Jo, a rubber planter from the North. His father was a land speculator whose fortune was typical of those made in the colonies. He built cheap “native apartment buildings,” which were breeding pools of plague and cholera. He would also buy rubber plantations for cheap, sell them to inexperienced men, and then buy them again at a depreciated price. Monsieur Jo, his incompetent son, was the one failure in the life of this wealthy imperialist. Duras described Monsieur Jo with language traditionally reserved for colonized people, language consistent with the emasculation of colonized men. She stated of Monsieur Jo that he had narrow shoulders and small, thin, well-cared

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41 Duras, _Sea_, 55, 73, 75, 207-8.
for hands emphasized by a large diamond ring. Even his voice was effeminate: “His voice was not like those of the planters or the big-game hunters. It came from somewhere else, it was soft and distinguished.” Monsieur Jo’s feminine, sensitive nature required that he always wore tussore silk: “he would never have been able to stand anything else because he had tender skin.” He was unable to go sea bathing because he had a “weak constitution” and was easily fatigued. Suzanne could not help but to compare Monsieur Jo, who was “not the type of man” she liked, with her vigorous, masculine brother who could crush Monsieur Jo “with a blow of the fist,” and whom Monsieur Jo was forced to resent in silence. To Suzanne, Monsieur Jo was insubstantial without the items that he possessed. He ceased to exist in her mind after giving her a phonograph as a gift.42 He was thus not truly a man.

Duras similarly feminized Suzanne’s second suitor, Mr. Joseph Burner, a representative of the British Empire in India. Interestingly, Duras described his and Monsieur Jo’s hands in much the same way that Candee described the hands of Indochinese men in her travel journals as discussed in the first chapter: “His thin, well-cared for hands recalled Monsieur Jo’s hands. He also wore a ring, but without a diamond. The only ornament on it was his initials, a J lovingly interlaced with a B.” Each time Burner passed through the colony he sought to find a young, French virgin whom he could wed and mold into the proper wife. Weak himself, Burner required a weak bride. Joseph, a true man, would not go for such a girl. When asked on two separate occasions if she would consider marrying either Monsieur Jo or Burner, whom

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she imagined as a delicate bird, Suzanne offered the same response: “I’d rather have a hunter.”

Though Duras challenged the colonial discourse through contradictory representations of the colonizer, she also reinforced the image of the passive colonized man. The tragic tale of “the Corporal,” an indigenous man who served the family during their time on the concession, in addition to demonstrating Duras's confirmation of the passive indigenous stereotype, also complicated the sexual hierarchy inherent within the colonial relationship. Before coming to work for Ma, the Corporal worked to construct roads in the colony. This work was done primarily by convicts but supplemented with recruits and supervised by native troops from the “Native Militia for Natives,” a group chartered by the French colonizers. Both the convicts and recruits were horribly abused and exploited by their overseers, but the recruits’ wives who traveled with them were subjected to the most abhorrent treatment. In her descriptions of their plight, Duras presented a disturbing affirmation of the stereotype of the oversexed native. These women were used sexually by the indigenous militiamen, and the “virility” of these men guaranteed that they were constantly pregnant. The native troops saw to it that there remained a stable pool of recruits so that women would constantly be at hand, even in the most isolated of regions. Starvation, disease, and death were frequent company to these exploited laborers and their wives, and their supervisors confirmed their own authority, “which daily became more assured and fantastic,” by immediately dismissing any recruit

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whose wife had died and thus could no longer serve them sexually.\textsuperscript{44} Though their behavior was deplorable and repugnant, these indigenous supervisors demonstrated a sexual prowess to rival any colonizer. The Corporal, on the other hand, was so powerless that he could not even prevent the repeated rape of his own wife. And though Duras was sympathetic to his tragic circumstances, she rendered him mute. Within \textit{The Sea Wall} he had no voice with which to even tell his own story.

Other mute and even nameless indigenous people also inhabited \textit{The Sea Wall}. Though the plain on which they lived would not support a large population, every year the children of the colonized were “relentlessly born.” Some had to die, and indeed they did:

They died in such numbers that they were no longer mourned, and for many long years it had been the custom to bury them without ceremony. On coming back home from work, the father merely dug a little hole in front of the cabin and there laid his dead child. The children returned simply to the earth like wild mangoes falling from high branches or like the little dead monkeys found at the mouth of the rac.

Thus, colonized men demonstrated a passive acceptance in the face of death, a fact necessitated by the precarious land on which they lived, land granted them after the colonizers had taken their fill. When Ma suggested that they build walls to hold back the sea from flooding their land and destroying their crops, they were astounded: “To begin with, the sea had invaded the plain for thousands of years. They were used to it and had never imagined it could be held back. Then, their misery had accustomed them to passivity, their one and only defense against the spectacle of their children dying of

\textsuperscript{44} Duras, \textit{Sea}, 194-5.
starvation, their crops being destroyed by salt.”

Duras’s position was again ambiguous. Though she characterized the colonized people as passive, conforming to the colonial discourse, she presented this passivity as a reaction to their circumstances, a defense against the atrocities of colonialism.

Joseph was ultimately unable to overcome the tragic circumstances surrounding his family’s life in the colonies. When confronted with the death of Ma, his face took on an “expression of frightful impotence.” Yet the powerful masculine language with which Duras characterized Joseph throughout the rest of the work cannot be denied, nor can her effeminate characterization of Monsieur Jo. Monsieur Jo represented Ma’s “whole life,” an existence defined by repression at the hands of a colonial state and a succession of misfortunes endured while waiting for something good to come along.

Joseph’s refusal to wait for Monsieur Jo to decide whether or not he would propose to Suzanne, and his aggressive confrontation with the colonial inspectors, suggest that he was struggling to cope with frustrated manhood. These conflicts granted him an outlet, a chance to affirm the masculinity that was denied him by his situation as a “colonial native.”

The ambiguities of The Sea Wall reveal Duras's complex perspective on the colonies and colonial gender identities. Julia Walters further complicates the figure of Duras by arguing that throughout Duras’s career, her work, and her position on the French Empire shifted to reflect the political and theoretical atmosphere of the day. According to Walters, Duras's co-authored work L’Empire français promoted the

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45 Duras, Sea, 42. 93.
46 Ibid., 73, 285.
colonial institution while simultaneously seeking to reinforce French confidence in the
glory of its empire in the face of German aggression. Duras's challenges to the colonial
establishment within the context of *The Sea Wall*, then, reflected her newly found affinity
for Marxist doctrine and subsequent distaste for colonial repression. Walter contends that
within this work Duras portrayed the indigenous people as a monolithic proletariat
oppressed by the white colonizing minority, and thus verged on reaffirming the very
degrading colonial discourse that she is attempting to challenge. Again, this underlines
the strength of the colonial imagery that Duras confirmed even when she was seeking to
refute it. *The Lover* was then written at a time when Duras had taken up the banner of
feminism, and this work subsequently reflected her derision for the patriarchy embedded
within the colonial system through its portrayal of an oppressed European woman.
Walters highlights the ambiguities and contradictions which echo Duras’s shifting
sympathies, yet she also emphasizes the homogenization of the indigenous people that
runs throughout all of her works, including *The Sea Wall*. Duras's ambivalence is
derived not only from her position as a woman in the colonies but also from her
transformations in attitude and sympathy, which echo the changing times. Walters work
suggests that her conflicting perspectives can never truly be resolved.

**Conclusion**

The paradoxical position that Beaucarnot and Duras occupied as colonizing
women was reflected in their ambiguous stance on the colonial system. These women

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47 Julia Walters, *Duras and Indochina: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Liverpool: Society for Francophone
Postcolonial Studies, 2006).
simultaneously inhabited two gendered relationships of power: In one, they were above the colonized; in the other, they were below colonizing men. Their position demonstrates that race and gender had a complex relationship, as these two identifications set colonizing women in conflicting roles. Their writings complicate the gendered language of empire, for at times they reaffirmed the conventions of the colonial discourse, yet at others they refuted accepted colonial images. Their writings also demonstrate how entrenched colonial representations were, as even women who were themselves subject to repression within the confines of a gendered relationship of power did not think to question the inequalities of the colonial relationship.

Yet, in *The Sea Wall*, Duras began to challenge the colonial discourse through her depictions of Monsieur Jo, Pa Bart, and others. She presented Joseph, a “colonial native,” whose masculinity transcended the feeble representations of the colonial hierarchy, and who himself was an ambiguous figure, a reflection of Duras’ position in the colonies. Though her ambiguous representations of the colonial system that she simultaneously confronted and confirmed were not reconciled within the pages of *The Sea Wall*, Duras’ work represented a step in the direction that nationalist groups throughout the colonial world would later take. In an attempt to challenge the gendered language that both created and legitimated the colonial system and was firmly entrenched within the European psyche as evidenced by these female writers, nationalists in Indochina and elsewhere would seek to reverse the representations of the colonial discourse. They would feminize the colonizer, much in the same way that Duras had done in *The Sea Wall*, yet instead of accepting the passivity of the colonized man as a
reaction to his environment, they would challenge this image as well by asserting their own masculine identity. The next chapter will examine the gendered language of nationalists in an attempt to demonstrate how they sought to subvert the colonial system through the reversal of entrenched gender identities, and in doing so will add yet another layer of complexity to the gendered language of empire in Indochina.
Chapter Three
Nationalist Masculinity

Introduction

As discussed in the first chapter, one of the ways in which the colonial system was both constructed and maintained was through a colonial discourse. Within this discourse, several identifying factors dominated as the primary means by which colonial relationships of power were imagined and articulated. Among these were gender, race, and considerations of maturity. Colonizers defined themselves by the purity of their whiteness, their constructed masculinity, and their civilized maturity. In turn they defined the colonized people as racially inferior, innately feminine, and child-like. Thus within the colonial discourse, these three categories of difference were intimately linked. This connection was further reinforced, as shown in the last chapter, by women writers in the colonies.

As indigenous people sought to define their own national and individual identities independent of empire, they were forced to confront the effeminate representations of themselves that dominated the colonial discourse. Because their subordinate position in

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1 Anne McClintock explores the complex yet intimate relationship between gender and race in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. In *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), Kristin Hoganson explores the American perception of Filipinos which dominated in the 1890s and which revolved around the image of the Filipino man as uncivilized, child-like, and effeminate. This representation suggests that within the justifications of American colonialism, gender and maturity were closely linked. In “Empire and Violence, 1900–1939” which appears in *Gender and Empire*, Jock McCulloch explores how British assaults on indigenous black men in Kenya were justified as assertions of white superior masculinity over a physiologically inferior, child-like population, thus further confirming this link between race, gender, and maturity.
the colonial hierarchy was constructed and maintained through gendered language and representations, it was necessary for them to revise the prevailing gendered imagery and engage in a gendered discourse in order to break free from the colonial relationship of power. Nationalists challenged the colonial discourse through the three categories of difference mentioned above. By asserting the masculinity of their own people and challenging the image of themselves as children incapable of independent rule, indigenous nationalists subverted the colonial discourse and thus ultimately undermined the basis of the colonial relationship. This chapter will reveal how the language of indigenous nationalists, particularly during the era of decolonization, reversed the representations of the colonial discourse, yet in so doing actually repeated much of the masculine imagery of that discourse.

This chapter will begin with an exploration of the work of one Vietnamese Communist, Tran Tu Binh. It will then examine the writings of perhaps the most prominent Vietnamese nationalist, as well as the most important member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Ho Chi Minh. The language of Ho’s articles and speeches will be compared to the works of several masculine theorists in the French Empire, in order to illuminate the common struggle of colonial people both within and outside of Indochina to confront the representations of the colonial discourse that had contributed to their subordination.

**Tran Tu Binh’s The Red Earth**

The autobiography of Tran Tu Binh is presented in his work *The Red Earth*, which begins with his expulsion from a seminary school in Vietnam in 1926 for “publicly
mourning the death of Phan Chu Trinh, a prominent Vietnamese scholar-patriot.”
Through this act, Tran Tu Binh unwittingly “joined the ranks of the young intelligentsia, a group destined to play a critical role in modern Vietnamese history.” Later in the same decade he went to work on a French colonial rubber plantation at Phu Rieng in order to “proletarianize” himself through immersion “in a working-class environment in order to engineer eventually the overthrow of both foreign imperialists and native landlords.”
Due to his knowledge of the French language, Tran Tu Binh became an unofficial spokesman for his fellow workers. He was part of a four person cell formed at Phu Rieng by a member of Ho Chi Minh’s Revolutionary Youth League, and he later organized the security unit of a new Communist Party branch whose objective was to link local efforts to the national struggle. Because of his involvement in a strike at the Phu Rieng plantation, Tran Tu Binh was arrested and imprisoned for five years at Con-Son prison island where he began his Marxist-Leninist indoctrination. Thereafter and up until his death in 1967, Tran Tu Binh was intimately involved with the affairs of the Communist Party. He was post-humously awarded a medal for his “long service to party, state and army.”

In *The Red Earth* Tran Tu Binh relies on both fact and symbolism. Most of the details of this work, which covers his life from his expulsion at the seminary through his time spent on the rubber plantation, are confirmed in confidential colonial records that are now located in the *Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer* in Aix-en Provence. A central theme of *The Red Earth* is the psychological attack of the exploiter over the exploited.

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The colonizers with whom Tran Tu Binh comes in contact utilize language as a means of control through demoralization. He perhaps feels this psychological abuse more keenly because he is fluent in the language of the oppressor. The members of the plantation staff assume the title of “master” and address their Vietnamese workers as children and animals. On the plantation Tran Tu Binh struggles to affirm the identity of the workers as intelligent adults, and he continues this battle symbolically through his use of language in *The Red Earth*. He challenges the image of the immature, animalistic, passive worker and replaces him with the likeness of a strong, determined man unafraid to take action when confronted with colonial oppression. As a nationalist dedicated to the struggle against imperialism in Vietnam, he confronts the French colonial hierarchy through a subversion of the gendered discourse based on racial difference and tied to notions of maturity.

During his time at the seminary, Tran Tu Binh was not stirred by the prayers he learned and memorized. Instead, he was inspired by historical and Biblical tales of heroism:

Little David, the poor shepherd who dared to stand up for his people and his fatherland, to face the enemy general, the fierce giant Goliath . . . Or there was the story of the heroine Joan of Arc, the French shepherd girl who led her people in a struggle to preserve her motherland . . . Besides these, there were courageous

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3 For an examination of plantation conditions see Stephen L. Harp’s “Marketing the Metropole: Colonial Rubber Plantations and French Consumerism in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Views From the Margins: Creating Identities in Modern France*, edited by Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). Harp explores the discrepancies between the realities of exploitation on rubber plantations in Indochina and the French vision of tourist culture promoted by Michelin tour guides which circulated in the metropole. He specifically discusses incidents at Phu Rieng among other rubber plantations in the colony.

examples I could read surreptitiously in the modern literature. The person I admired most was De Tham, the tiger of Yen-the region, who opposed the French continually for dozens of years until his death, and never submitted.

In his confrontations with the colonial oppressor, Tran Tu Binh seeks to emulate these heroes born of both European and Vietnamese tradition. Beginning during his time at the Hoang Nguyen seminary, he practiced martial arts and encouraged others to do so. He sought to prepare himself both physically and mentally to serve his country “in the manner of De Tham and Phan Dinh Phung.” Thus, Tran Tu Binh rejected, both actively and symbolically, the notion that heroism was the sole domain of the imperial power or Europeans in general, while simultaneously cultivating the physical prowess of the Vietnamese people.

Tran Tu Binh began his active struggle against the injustices and inequalities of colonialism through his open conflicts with the head of the Hoang Nguyen seminary, Canadian priest Father Quy. He describes the constant insults that he and his fellow students were forced to endure at the hands of this priest: “His reproaches were like water dashed in our faces the whole day long. ‘Ignorant Annamese! Stupid Annamese!’ or ‘Annamese are lazy. They steal all the time.’ It was truly shameful, and deep inside we were livid with rage.” On the day of Phan Chu Trinh’s funeral, Tran Tu Binh could no longer bear these slurs to the honor of his nation. He proclaimed to Father Quy that to insult the Annamese people who cultivate the rice that sustained his existence was to “eat the fruit” without remembering “who planted the tree.” Eighteen years later, while in

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6 Ibid., 3-4.
prison, Tran Tu Binh once again confronted Father Quy. The priest was at Con-Son prison island under the pretense of baptizing and pardoning prisoners, but Tran Tu Binh asserts that he was truly seeking information for the French Secret Police. Father Quy was still an oppressive, insulting priest, but Tran Tu Binh had matured: “I was imprisoned there, but was no longer a naïve youth just come of age. I had been forged by the party and by the revolution to become a person experienced in struggle.” He used wit and the lessons of the seminary to belittle Father Quy in front of his fellow inmates, many of whom were also members of the Communist Party. Tran Tu Binh thus proved his own intelligence and his status as a mature man, and he simultaneously demonstrated the ability of the nationalist struggle to assist its members in realizing their own manhood.

Throughout the work Tran Tu Binh rejects the image of the feminine, passive, colonized man that is so prominent in the colonial discourse and emphasizes on the united action of the indigenous laborers who are joined together through fraternal bonds of brotherhood. They strike to obtain the pay and provisions guaranteed to them in their labor contracts, and they strike again in order to receive proper, humane treatment on the ship carrying them south to the rubber plantations. Tran Tu Binh in particular is revered by others for his “spirit of daring to act and to take on hardship.” He leads others in

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7 Tran, *Earth*, 4-5.

8 It also seems that Tran Tu Binh is promoting a more aggressive manhood than that represented by Father Quy, which within the context of worker exploitation at the rubber plantation in Phu Rieng would even turn violent. The concept of competing restrained and aggressive masculinities has been examined in various contexts by historians. Christopher Forth, in *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), explores contrasting definitions of French masculinity which circulated at the fin de siècle and around which men on either side of the Dreyfus issue posited themselves. In *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Amy S. Greenberg similarly identifies the oppositional notions of restrained and martial manhood which helped to shape American expansionist policies in Latin America.
protests against the overseers and supervisors at Phu Rieng, and upon reaching Saigon en route he defies the Frenchmen who treat his brothers as children and even animals: “We ‘gentlemen’ signed a contract to come down here to work. The contract promised there would be no beatings. Yet they have beaten us ‘men.’ That is not lawful. If they continue to beat us, we ‘men’ will take them to court!” Tran Tu Binh constantly repeats a message often heralded by Ho Chi Minh: the more men are oppressed, the more they will unite together in struggle. He declares, “It takes only one man to sing out a line and a hundred, a thousand, will follow.” Tran Tu Binh and his fellow workers struggle determinedly, demonstrating that the French colonizer is not the only man of action in the colonies.

The men of the rubber plantations assert their manhood through both physical prowess and mature, civilized behavior. In retaliation for brutal intimidation beatings inflicted by the French overseer Monte, Nguyen Dinh Tu, one of the new recruits known as “an adventurer,” convinces the other men to rise against him. He proclaims, “They are men; we are men, too. How can we let them keep on beating us forever! Set a careful ambush, knock off one of them right away, and it will scare the wits out of the rest of them. ‘Kill one man, ten thousand men fear you.’” Tran Tu Binh also refuses to be threatened by a French nurse named Vaillant. When Vaillant insults Tran Tu Binh by calling him “savage,” Tran Tu Binh fights back. Vaillant cannot punish him too severely due the increasing strength of the Communist movement at Phu Rieng. He simply docks Tran Tu Binh’s pay and attempts to reconcile with him, and in response Tran Tu Binh

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9 Tran, *Earth*, 18-20, 30-1.
thinks to himself, “Your mother! Just try something and see what happens.” Yet at other times the workers respond to injustices by turning to the law. When one youth dies after being kicked in the spleen by a French overseer, Tran Tu Binh threatens to take the plantation supervisors to court for breaking a contract that forbids beatings. The overseers respond with more severe and brutal beatings, demonstrating their own lack of civilization, humanity, and respect for the law.\footnote{Tran, \textit{Earth}, 35, 38, 51-2.} As Tran Tu Binh and his “brothers” struggle to affirm their own manhood through physical strength and civilized behavior, the French overseers confirm their own weakness and savagery.

An additional aspect of the colonial discourse that Tran Tu Binh challenges is based upon the definition of men as the protectors of women. Within the colonial discourse, the better women were treated within a given society, the more advanced that society was believed to be. The European nations were perceived as the most evolved and thus the most just.\footnote{For examples of this, particularly within the context of the British Empire, see Alan Forrest’s “Citizenship and Masculinity: The Revolutionary Citizen-Soldier and His Legacy” in \textit{Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western Culture}, edited by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and Anna Clark (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Catherine Hall’s “Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century,” Mrinalini Sinha’s “Nations in an Imperial Crucible,” and Kathleen Wilson’s “Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century” in \textit{Gender and Empire}, edited by Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).} Yet on the Phu Rieng rubber plantation, the sexual exploitation of the female workers by the French supervisors resulted in the emasculation of the male workers. Tran Tu Binh asserts that the men whose wives were raped by foremen and overseers died of humiliation and heartbreak. The women were not even safe when seeking medical treatment: “The women workers were forced to sleep with the medical personnel. Whether cured or still sick, the women workers were kept and imposed upon
until the French nurses grew bored and sent them back to work.” When Tran Tu Binh was transferred to work at the clinic on the plantation doing laundry, he asserted his own masculinity by protecting these women from being raped by the head nurse: “Many times I stopped him, he beat me, and I hit back. I had long been famous at the plantation for my obstinacy, and I was not about to submit to him.”12 Conversely, Tran Tu Binh characterizes the French overseer most often guilty of rape, Durandet, as a beast: “To this day I still remember the stooped form of that deadly ape. In a fit of passion he would go through the rubber forest as the late afternoon sun’s rays slanted down, searching for a mate, looking truly loathsome.”13 Tran Tu Binh describes Durandet with animalistic language that would have been reserved for colonized people within the colonial discourse while simultaneously challenging the image of the oversexed colonized man.

It is not only the women of Phu Rieng who were exploited sexually. Tran Tu Binh paints a horrible image of the last in a succession of managers at the rubber plantation, Soumagnac:

He was dissolute in some bestial fashion. He always had six or seven servants at his bungalow, as drivers, house servants, cooks, secretaries, and the like. Soumagnac selected each person with great care. They had to be handsome, strong, and young before he would take them. Any man who went to work in Soumagnac’s bungalow had to spread his buttocks to satisfy the manager’s carnal passions. Soumagnac kept this up until a person was haggard and pale, then turned him out and replaced him with someone else.14

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12 Tran, *Earth*, 24-5, 27, 47.
13 Ibid., 60.
14 Ibid., 61.
Not only is Soumagnac a homosexual, which immediately puts his manhood in question, but Tran Tu Binh also describes him with animalistic language similar to that which he uses in his representation of Durandet. He is not a man; he is a beast driven by his carnal appetites. Soumagnac’s wife also exploits the workers sexually, presumably because her husband is unwilling or unable to satisfy her. She has a lover whom Tran Tu Binh describes as “a second Paris,” but she also forces the servants and cooks to have intercourse with her. She shares her husband’s bestial passion: “It could be said that as soon as the master belched, the mistress got hungry, and vice versa.” Like her husband, she ravages the male workers until they are “exhausted, their faces pale and yellow, their bodies always warm and feverish, sweat drenching the backs of their shirts.”

Through these depictions of Soumagnac and his wife Tran Tu Binh reinforces the image of the beast-like colonizer who is unable to control his sexual appetites, an image that is in direct opposition to the colonial discourse.

During the Tet celebration of 1930, the rubber workers began their strike through a symbolic demonstration of strength and determination by the dragon dancers:

The dragon dance team continued its dance, the dragon prancing around bravely and imposingly, quite different from the style of dancing in years past. It did not grovel on the ground, lick the earth, or bow and scrape in submission. On the contrary, like a courageous prince of the mountains and woods it jousted with the staff-wielding fighters.

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16 Ibid., 68-9.
Through this symbolic dance the indigenous workers affirmed their masculine prowess and further cemented their bonds of brotherhood forged by united struggle. Yet after the strike they argue over opposing definitions of heroism. Some of the workers argue that heroism is defined by one’s willingness to fight energetically and aggressively when attacked. Others among them, including Tran Tu Binh, refer to lessons of Chinese classicism and avow that true honor and heroism stem from knowing when to fight and when to act in the interests of self preservation.\(^{17}\) Despite the fact that these workers do not agree over the definition of true valor, they are joined together by a desire to act heroically and honorably to prove their status as men.

When confronted with the strength and determination of the workers, the French exhibited qualities that had traditionally characterized the weak colonized man of the colonial discourse. French soldiers fled the charging laborers in fear and desperation: “Their uniforms in tatters, they ran like ducks to their trucks and sped straight to Saigon.” Tran Tu Binh accuses the French imperialists of responding very “passively” to the workers’ struggle in Vietnam.\(^{18}\) Again, he attributes characteristics to the colonial oppressor that the colonizer used to define colonized man.

Tran Tu Binh, like other colonial nationalists, sought to affirm the masculinity and civilized maturity of his people. He reversed the colonial discourse by rejecting the image of the immature, feminized indigenous man and debunking the myth of the noble, heroic colonizer. Yet, in so doing he repeated many of the masculine images of the

\(^{17}\) Tran, *Earth*, 75-6.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 71, 80.
colonial discourse. In his struggles on the colonial rubber plantation at Phu Rieng he fought for the recognition of the Vietnamese as men. Though he articulates a debate in which the striking workers disagree over the definition of true heroism, he operates for the most part under a classification of masculinity strikingly similar to that designated by the colonial discourse. He does not seek to overturn the colonizer’s image of manhood or masculinity; he only wishes for his people to be included within it.

The Legendary Figure of Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh, a figure who has become a powerful symbol of his nation’s struggle for liberation from French imperialism, similarly challenged the gendered representations of the colonial discourse. Ho Chi Minh was the last pseudonym of Nguyễn-tất-Thành. He was born in 1890 in Vietnam, the son of a family of poor peasant scholars. Early in life he learned the lessons of poverty and struggle, and he came to detest the colonial system. He traveled widely in pursuit of his education and as a galleyhand on a French ship. In his journeys he witnessed the hardships of men and women around the world, workers both within the colonies and without who were exploited and kept down by a few wealthy men. Scholars have debated endlessly whether Ho Chi Minh was primarily a Communist or a Vietnamese nationalist, yet it must be acknowledged that throughout his life he struggled endlessly for both causes. He led the Vietnamese people in their battle to throw off the chains of colonialism, and after declaring his nation’s independence on September 2, 1945, he served as its

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president. He fought against the French imperialists both before 1945 and after, as they struggled to re-conquer Vietnam. Later he would also battle the American interventionists. He was prepared to renounce Communism if it would have facilitated Vietnamese independence, but throughout the course of his life he was a member of at least four or five national Communist parties including the French, the Soviet, and the Chinese.  Few people served the Communist Party, or the Vietnamese nation, in as many capacities or for as many tireless years as Ho Chi Minh.

Yet Ho was not merely a leader in the struggles against French imperialism and worker exploitation. He was more than a man; he was a legend. To the Vietnamese people he was “Uncle Ho”; to the soldiers battling French occupation he was “notre père,” or “our father.” He was the ultimate Vietnamese patriarch, yet he also embodied the struggle itself. Through all the stages of the colonial struggle Ho “remained as the leader and soul of the people’s effort and resistance.” He was the people’s voice. He saw his role as speaking for those who sought independence from the French but were ignorant of Communism and knew not how to attain freedom. Western Communist Joseph R. Starobin described Ho Chi Minh upon his rise to the presidency after the

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20 Salisbury, Diary, xi.

21 Claude Goëldhieux, Quinze Mois Prisonnier Chez les Viets (Paris: René Julliard, 1953), 34. For an in-depth examination of the traditional gender and family dynamics of Vietnam within which Ho was operating, as well as the ways in which they were threatened by French colonization, see Neil L. Jaimeison’s Understanding Vietnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). In particular Jaimeison argues that Ho intentionally cast himself in the role of the uncle, or more specifically “bac, father’s older brother,” so that he could intervene in times of crisis but not be directly responsible for the discipline of the Vietnamese people (p. 235).


23 Ho, Speeches, 16-7.
August 1945 Revolution: “This man had become a legend and a symbol to millions of Vietnamese; he now came forward as the farsighted, triumphant leader who had realized the eighty-year struggle for independence . . . He had been hunted and persecuted but had never given up, and had now forged the sword of liberation.” And after meeting Ho in person, Starobin further articulated the sentiment that he was not a mere man, but instead a representative of a nation’s fight for freedom and the defining struggle of an era: “Ho Chi Minh is a man in whom one sees a kaleidoscope of experiences, an entire saga of a people, the whole panorama of our century.” According to Starobin, Ho Chi Minh’s struggle was almost religious in nature: “To the humble peasant, Ho evokes the legend of Gautama Buddha, who also wandered and suffered in search of the truth, and, having found it, returned to his people.”

From August 28, 1942 to September 16, 1943, Ho was imprisoned by Chiang Kai-shek’s police force. While being led in chains from one prison to another in Southern China, Ho composed poems in the traditional Chinese style. In this collection of poems, popularly known as the Prison Diary of Ho Chi Minh, Ho symbolically proclaimed his own masculine prowess. In the introduction to this prison diary, Harrison E. Salisbury referred to Ho’s verse entitled “Word-Play II,” which ends “When the prison-doors are opened, the real dragon/ will fly out.” Salisbury declared,

Perhaps, in this Tang quatrain, Ho wrote his own epitaph – a poet with the soul of a dragon. Perhaps this was his legacy to a revolutionary generation, both within his country and outside it – the knowledge that within the humblest and most fragile of men there is concealed a weapon more potent, more powerful, more mighty than is encapsulated in the most complex technological device the mind

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24 Starobin, Eye-witness, 30, 112-3.
can conceive, more tremendous than the atom bomb, stronger than the strongest steel. Man’s spirit. While that spark remains, Ho makes clear, no force can prevail against it.\(^{25}\)

Ho wrote poems with “iron and steel,” and he believed that the poet “also should know how to lead an attack.”\(^{26}\) In his poem entitled “Advice to Oneself,” Ho proclaimed that he had been hardened by calamity and that hardship had transformed his mind into steel. In “On the Way to Nanning” Ho compared his prison chains with jade rings, and he declared, “I move with all the dignity of an ancient government/official!”\(^{27}\) Despite being imprisoned and left to bear cold, hunger, and endless hardships, Ho became stronger, not weaker. He also maintained his state of dignity and honor despite the chains dragging him down, proving that a man remains a man regardless of his surroundings.

Yet as the world was “ablaze with flames of war,” Ho Chi Minh remained in jail where “inaction weighs heavily on the prisoner.” He lamented, “My noble ambitions are valued at less than a cent!”\(^{28}\) As a man and a nationalist, Ho yearned to be active in the name of his country. Unable to assert his strength through active struggle, Ho asserted it symbolically through his poetry.\(^{29}\)

\(^{25}\) Salisbury, Diary, xvi.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., xv.

\(^{27}\) Ho, Diary, 28, 42.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 47.

\(^{29}\) In Understanding Vietnam Jaimeson explores the poetry of other Vietnamese insurgents which allowed them to articulate “unity, conformity, the power and satisfaction of collective action” (p. 255). Jaimeson associates these qualities with yang, the set of operating principles defined by male dominance.
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

In his many published articles and speeches, Ho continued to herald the heroism and enduring strength of the Vietnamese people. Despite the fact that he called all to battle for an independent Vietnam, including women, children, and the elderly, the language that he used is undeniably masculine, particularly beginning in 1940 after the French allowed Japan to invade Indochina. He also reversed accepted colonial gender norms and identifications in a manner mirrored by theorists of masculinity throughout the French Empire. Ho struggled to gain for his people recognition as members of humanity, but also more particularly as men deserving of equality. He defied the colonial discourse that sought to portray colonial men as sub-human, brutish, and uncivilized. In the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from September 2, 1945, Ho referred to both the American Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed that “All men are created equal,” and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which declared that “All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights.” He asserted that the acts of imperialism perpetuated by France in Vietnam were abuses against the ideals of humanity and justice and violations of the Vietnamese fatherland. Ho Chi Minh, *Down With Colonialism!* (London: Verso, 2007), 51.
right to seek the ideals of independence and freedom for their own fatherland.\textsuperscript{31} As men, Ho Chi Minh believed that the Vietnamese were entitled to the natural rights of man as established by the powers of the Western world.

Ho was not alone in this belief. In his account, Starobin referred to Comrade Hinh, a Vietnamese cadre, who quoted the Liberation Manifesto of Cambodia which was taken almost verbatim from the American Declaration of Independence: “All men are born equal in right and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights that none can violate, among which are the right to live, the right to be free, the right to realize happiness.”\textsuperscript{32} The example of Hinh demonstrates that others throughout Indochina shared Ho’s call for the equality of man, thereby simultaneously demanding recognition as men and the rights associated with manhood.

Ho’s wish for his people to be recognized as men was also echoed by masculine theorists in other parts of the French Empire. Among these was Albert Memmi. Memmi was born in Tunisia in 1921. He was educated at both the University of Tunis and the Sorbonne, and was among the most influential colonial theorists on Africa. In his work \textit{The Colonizer and the Colonized}, Memmi examined the condition of the colonized man in order to better understand himself and to identify his proper “place in the society of other men.” He declared that the burden of colonialism which he described belonged not only to himself, or even to the people of his nation, but to all colonized people. They were all united in their struggle through bonds of brotherhood, and they shared the need


\textsuperscript{32} Starobin, \textit{Eye-witness}, 62.
to assert their manhood and throw off the yoke of European oppression. Memmi proclaimed, “To live, the colonized needs to do away with colonization. To become a man, he must do away with the colonized being that he has become.”33

Frantz Fanon was another theorist who, like Memmi, examined the plight of the colonized man and his position in society. Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925, and he volunteered for the French Army during World War II. He studied psychiatry in France and worked as the head of the psychiatric department in a government hospital in Algeria. Fanon applied the principles of psychiatry to colonial racism. In his work *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon expressed his determination to be recognized as a man, as a contributing member of humanity, by the European colonizer.34 Fanon heralded the coming of a “new man” that historians have described as “at once a historical, a physical, and a psychosexual phenomenon” meant to transcend the “maimed” manhood of the colonizer. The new man represented “the release of muscular tensions accumulated under decades of racist colonial structures, and the realization of dreams of ‘muscular prowess.’” Yet at the same time Fanon’s analysis depended “heavily on a Freudian model of castration whereby the (male) castrated colonized subject attains full manhood or ‘wholeness’ through revolutionary solidarity and the violent overcoming and expulsion of the colonizer.”35


In addition to asserting the equality of Vietnamese men, Ho Chi Minh also implied that submission to foreign occupation, passivity in the face of denied liberty, was shameful and un-masculine. For four years during the Second World War the French had protested German occupation and labeled themselves patriots in their struggle, yet they hypocritically branded nationalists in Indochina as rebels. Banners in Indochina proclaimed in French “Liberty or Death,” an echo of the ideal that the French had heralded over a century before.\(^{36}\) In his “Address to the Frenchmen in Indochina” Ho argued that if the French people were imposed upon by foreign invaders they would struggle ceaselessly for their freedom, and he demanded, “Then why do you want us shamefully to accept French domination?” He was unable to understand why the French people would want the Vietnamese to be less than men, to submit without honor to the power of other men. He proclaimed proudly, “We do not fear death, because we want to live. Like you, we want to live free, not to be trampled underfoot and strangled.”\(^ {37}\)

As he claimed his people’s right to the pursuit of liberty and equality, Ho also desired for them identification as men through masculine fraternity. He sought to forge a brotherhood between French workers and the exploited Vietnamese people. He imagined them as equal brothers struggling “against their common masters,”\(^ {38}\) and in a “Letter to the French Government, National Assembly, and People” from January 7, 1947, Ho stated, “The Vietnamese people sincerely wish to cooperate with the French people like

\(^{36}\) Pierre De Fondettes, Solution Pour L’Indochine? (Paris: René Julliard, 1952), 47.

\(^{37}\) Ho, Revolution, 154.

\(^{38}\) Ho, Articles, 19.
brothers on a basis of sincerity and equality.” Others in Indochina similarly sought to be united with anti-colonial Frenchmen through the bonds of brotherhood. In the journal chronicling his time spent as a prisoner of war among the Vietnamese, Claude Goëldhieux referred to the Communist Tuc who proclaimed to the French POW’s “Vous êtes mes frères,” (“You are my brothers”), and declared that one day they would be united in their struggle. Tuc asserted that the Communists were fighting for all the men of the world, so that in the future the women of the world would not have to mourn the deaths of their brothers and husbands.

Also, like Memmi, Ho imagined that all colonized people were bonded together through brotherhood. He contended that though Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos would no longer represent the single geographical entity of Indochina, they remained as brother nations. Brotherhood also joined together those soldiers engaged in the struggle for Vietnamese independence. On September 9, 1952, in the “Meeting of Officers for the Preparation of the Military Campaign in the Northwest,” Ho announced that all military officers from the highest on down “must share joy and hardships with the soldiers, take care of, help, and treat each other like blood brothers.” This small act of joining together in fraternal bonds was a victory over the imperialist enemy. According to Ho, all men deserved to share in the rights of man, but an intimate masculine bond joined together those who struggled against injustice and exploitation. Thus while seeking to attain the

39 Ho, Revolution, 176.

40 Goëldhieux, Quinze Mois, 27.

41 Ho, Revolution, 251.
ultimate goal of national liberty, Ho declared for himself and his compatriots the
masculine rights of equality and fraternity.\textsuperscript{42}

**History of Heroism**

Ho Chi Minh sought to carve for his people a place in the history of man and to
proclaim their masculine heroism which the colonial discourse had denied. In his “Letter
from Abroad,” dated June 6, 1941, Ho Chi Minh declared,

> For nearly eighty years under the French invaders’ iron heel we have unceasingly
sacrificed ourselves and struggled for national independence and freedom. The
loyal and heroic spirit of our predecessors such as Phan Dinh Phung, Hoang Hoa
Tham and Luong Ngoc Quyen is still alive, the heroic feats of our revolutionaries
in Thai Nguyen, Yen Bai, Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces remain forever in our
memory. The recent uprising in the South and at Do Luong and Bac Son have
testified to the determination of our compatriots to shed their blood as their
glorious predecessors did, heroically to annihilate the enemy.\textsuperscript{43}

Through this heroic language Ho rejected the colonial discourse that restricted heroism
and masculine strength to European colonizers. He also called upon his people to follow
the example “set by our forefathers in the glorious task of national salvation.” By

\textsuperscript{42} Lynn Hunt, in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), explores the family “as an imaginative construct of power relations” within the context of the French Revolution of 1789 (p. 196). She argues that the French citizenry undermined the authority of the monarch by seeking to replace the model of the bad father with a fraternal brotherhood founded on the basis of equality. This provides an interesting parallel to the case of Indochina in which Ho Chi Minh and other nationalists sought to undermine the authority of the patriarchal colonizer and replace it with a fraternal brotherhood. Hunt’s work also provides a framework for understanding the position of women in the Vietnamese nationalist movement, for she argues that the republican brotherhood promoted in Revolutionary France resulted in the exclusion of French women from the political sphere. And indeed, French women would not attain full inclusion in the political system through voting rights until 1944. The fraternity which Ho asserted in his writings and speeches is also interesting in light of the Confucian relationship between elder and younger brother. In this relationship the elder brother taught, nurtured, and protected the younger brother in exchange for respect and obedience. Jaimeson explores how this relationship provided a model for Vietnamese societal relationships. See pages 17-8.

\textsuperscript{43} Ho, *Articles*, 29-30.
emulating their ancestors who united in an attempt to expel the Mongolian invasion and those who struggled against the French since their occupation of Indochina in the nineteenth century, the Vietnamese people were at once claiming a stake in history and asserting their own heroic strength. Ho compelled his countrymen to overthrow the forces of the French and the Japanese who had come to occupy their country at the start of the war. He declared boldly, “The sacred call of the Fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of our heroic predecessors who sacrificed their lives is stirring in your hearts! The fighting spirit of the people is displayed everywhere before you! Let us rise up quickly!”

Thus Ho demanded the people’s allegiance to both their ancestors’ memory and the Fatherland that they loved. As the people were united in brotherhood, so were they joined together by their commitment to the patriarchal figure that was the Vietnamese nation. Ho continually evoked the image of the Fatherland and those who “fertilized the Revolution tree with their blood and bones” throughout the attempted re-conquest of Indochina by the French in the years after World War II. He even forged a connection between the Fatherland and the ultimate patriarch. In a “Letter to Southern Compatriots,” dated December 9, 1949, Ho defined the “sacred duty” of the Vietnamese people: “To serve God. To serve the Fatherland.”

Ho also declared that the Vietnamese nationalist struggle was destined for inevitable victory. He expressed faith in the growing strength of the determined Vietnamese guerillas. In the beginning of the people’s struggle the Vietnamese and the

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44 Ho, *Articles*, 30-1.

45 Ho, *Revolution*, 212.

46 Ho, *Articles*, 49.
French resembled a “locust fighting an elephant.” The Vietnamese guerillas had unequal experience and inferior weapons. Yet in a “Political Report at the Second National Congress of the Vietnam Workers’ Party” given in February 1951, Ho asserted: “Today the locust fights the elephant but tomorrow the elephant will be disemboweled.” As the struggle wore on, the French grew increasingly weaker while the Vietnamese locust grew “up into a powerful tiger.”\(^{47}\) Thus, Ho implied that the longer the Vietnamese people were engaged in their struggle, the more they realized their own power and masculinity. Starobin quoted Commander Vuong Thu Vu who, in speaking of the soldiers of the People’s Army, expressed similar faith in their might while simultaneously proclaiming their civilized behavior: “As you have seen, outwardly they are very gentle, but in battle, they are ferocious. The moment the enemy drops his weapons, however, our soldiers are taught to be cordial immediately.”\(^{48}\)

The Vietnamese forces were defined by what Ho described as “a severe and conscious” “iron discipline.” At the Sixth Congress of Party Cadres on January 18, 1949, Ho articulated the urgent task of the party: “To keep discipline” so that in combat they would be united “as one man.”\(^{49}\) Yet the Vietnamese soldiers also exhibited uninhibited passion for their cause. In a speech made in the fall of 1950 at the Conference Reviewing the Second Le Hong Phong Military Campaign Ho declared:

Our soldiers are very zealous and heroic. This has been amply proved by the examples of the man who had his broken arm chopped off to facilitate his

\(^{47}\) Ho, *Articles*, 52.

\(^{48}\) Starobin, *Eye-witness*, 82.

\(^{49}\) Ho, *Colonialism*, 68.
movement in the assault, of another man who rushed into an enemy stronghold with a charge of dynamite in his hands, or of many others who did not eat anything for three or four days but continued to fight with all their ardour and heroism, and other examples.\textsuperscript{50}

The soldiers were not the only ones who demonstrated masculine discipline and enthusiasm for the struggle against French imperialism. In June 1947 Ho sought to explain why the Vietnamese were succeeding against the better equipped French troops. He asserted that “in the long war of resistance, each citizen is a combatant, each village, a fortress. The twenty million Vietnamese are bound to cut to pieces the few scores of thousands of reactionary colonialists.”\textsuperscript{51} Even the children in Vietnam attended school “with the same vigilance as their fathers and brothers display in guerilla fighting.”\textsuperscript{52} Those actively engaged in the fight for Vietnam’s independence were thus a shining, glorious example of masculine strength and determination for the rest of the people. Women, children, and the elderly all emulated the heroic guerillas and fulfilled their duties to the nation as soldiers. Ho appealed to them to carry out destruction across the country. He suggested that by destroying roads, bridges, and buildings that if left intact would facilitate the French attempts to re-conquer Vietnam, they would be sacrificing for their Fatherland just as the soldiers actively engaged in battle sacrificed their lives.\textsuperscript{53} For Ho Chi Minh, it seems that masculine heroism and strength were intimately linked to

\textsuperscript{50} Ho, \textit{Colonialism}, 74.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{52} Ho, \textit{Articles}, 63.

\textsuperscript{53} Ho, \textit{Colonialism}, 57-8.
both discipline and zealous determination, characteristics that he attributed to all the people of Vietnam, not just the soldiers.

Through these assertive speeches and declarations, Ho simultaneously rejected the European monopoly on strength and determined masculinity, heralded the heroic power of his people, demanded loyalty to the Fatherland, and granted to Vietnam the heroic past that colonization had denied its people for so long. He also repeated many of the masculine images of the colonial discourse. As he sought Vietnamese inclusion into European definitions of manhood he confirmed those designations. Manhood was defined by heroism, maturity, honor, action, and united brotherhood. But, Ho also offered a uniquely Vietnamese spin on European masculinity based upon the zealousness, passion, discipline, and careful balance between gentleness and ferocity that characterized his people.

Theorists of masculinity contended that the failure of the colonizer to grant indigenous man a place in history was merely one aspect of their constructed colonial mythology that justified the colonial system. For Memmi, the most troublesome aspect of the colonizer’s invented mythology was the effect it had upon the conscious of the colonized man. The colonizer justified his elevated position by degrading the people whose home he had invaded: “Nothing could better justify the colonizer’s privileged position than his industry, and nothing could better justify the colonized’s destitution than his indolence. The mythical portrait of the colonized therefore includes an unbelievable laziness, and that of the colonizer, a virtuous taste for action.” The colonizer effectively robbed the colonized of his manhood through language, yet gradually his words took on
increasing truth as the colonized came to accept the representations of him that pervaded the colonial discourse. Of the colonized man Memmi declared, “He has forgotten how to participate actively in history and no longer even asks to do so.” He can no longer recall liberty, and his reluctance to pay the steep price for freedom only confirms his cowardice for the colonizer. Fanon proclaimed that the colonized man was a “slave of the past.” He was denied any connection to the history of mankind by the European colonizer, so he resigned himself to an artificial manhood lived through the white man.

**Challenges to the Heroic Colonizer**

In addition to asserting the heroism of his people, Ho Chi Minh rejected the heroic mythology of the masculine, French colonizer by proclaiming French weakness and fear in the face of the Vietnamese Revolution. He declared that the French “tremble with fear,” and he argued that they terrorized the people of Indochina in an attempt to suppress their struggle. Goëldhieux cited his conversation with a Vietnamese “Commissaire du bataillon” who similarly proclaimed that “The French are scared.” In a speech from the fifth anniversary of the August Revolution, September 2, 1950, Ho asserted that the French were exhausted and could no longer fight without aid from the United States, but at the same time they were terrified that U.S. forces would take their

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54 Memmi, *Colonizer*, 79, 87-8, 92-3.

55 Fanon, *Skin*, 225-6.

56 Ho, *Articles*, 27.

57 Goëldhieux, *Quinze Mois*, 33.
place in Indochina, just as Japan had done in 1940 and again in 1945.\textsuperscript{58} Repeatedly, Ho argued that not only was Vietnam’s independence threatened, but French independence was also made vulnerable by American intervention.\textsuperscript{59} In an article from 1952 entitled “The Imperialist Aggressors Can Never Enslave the Heroic Vietnamese People,” Ho identified the American interventionists as the “masters” of the French colonizers.\textsuperscript{60} He and others rejected the notion that colonization in Indochina confirmed the weakness and effeminacy of its people and the masculine superiority of the French colonizers by arguing that the French were vulnerable to colonization by the American interventionists.

Ho further described an attack on Hoa Binh province by the French who were attempting to prove to their American masters that their foreign aid was being well utilized. He argued that de Lattre de Tassigny claimed French victory in this conflict, which took place in November of 1951, despite the annihilation of French troops at the hands of the Vietnamese. Thus, Ho implied that the pride of the French colonizers was misplaced and that French prowess was a farce, a lie. He suggested that the French, by the time of the attempted re-conquest of Indochina, were no longer the men of action that the colonial discourse described. He stated, “Whenever France tried to take some action, well, she immediately realized that she was paralyzed by the war in Indo-China.”\textsuperscript{61}

The images that Ho attempted to substitute for the representations of the colonial discourse portrayed an increasingly weak and exhausted France alongside a Vietnam

\textsuperscript{58} Ho, \textit{Colonialism}, 78.


\textsuperscript{60} Ho, \textit{Articles}, 59.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 60, 65.
gaining in strength and determination. Ho even went so far as to directly challenge the manhood of French colonizers. In an “Address to the Frenchmen in Indochina” from October 1945, he defied them: “Frenchmen in Indochina! It is now up to you to show that you are worthy children of the glorious heroes who formerly struggled for freedom, equality, and fraternity.” The men of Vietnam had confirmed their manhood through their eighty year struggle against imperialism, yet Ho implied that the French colonizers had yet to prove their own masculinity. He commended his countrymen for the continuation of their fathers’ struggle, for their emulation of their ancestors’ heroism and enduring spirit, and he called upon the French colonizers to prove their own worth in relation to the glorious tradition of France. Ho suggested that a man’s quality was not affirmed merely by the fact of his ancestry, but by his actions.

Again, theorists of masculinity in other parts of the French Empire echoed Ho’s arguments and the doubt he cast upon the character of the colonizer. Memmi in particular denied the myth of the masculine, heroic colonizer. He articulated the popular portrait of the adventurer in the colonies only to reject it:

We sometimes enjoy picturing the colonizer as a tall man, bronzed by the sun, wearing Wellington boots, proudly leaning on a shovel – as he rivets his gaze far away on the horizon of his land. When not engaged in battles against nature, we think of him laboring selflessly for mankind, attending the sick, and spreading culture to the nonliterate. In other words, his pose is one of a noble adventurer, a righteous pioneer.63

62 Ho, Revolution, 155, 189.

63 Memmi, Colonizer, 3.
Even if this man had ever truly existed, by Memmi’s time he was extinct. In his place was a colonizer who sought in the colonies an easier, more profitable life surrounded by his own countrymen and the support of his nation’s military. His defining characteristic was “mediocrity.” Memmi argued that were a man of true character and heroic nature to come to the colonies seeking an outlet for his benevolent spirit or the fulfillment of his manhood, he would soon leave. He would either recognize the oppression of the colonial system and choose not to engage in it, or he would realize the limitations imposed upon his ambitions by the colonial setting and seek fulfillment elsewhere.64 In her travel journals Helen Churchill Candee reaffirmed Memmi’s claims of the mediocrity of the colonizer: “What then is the charm of Indo-china’s capital to the French? The fact that here they are all masters. The man who was an employé in France, is an employer here. The woman who slaved at her household tasks at home directs her servants here. He who was a clerk, is here proprieter.”65 According to Candee, the colonies attracted those who could never hope to attain social status or business success within the borders of their own nation. The bright and potentially powerful stayed home. Only the weak and powerless looked outward for the fulfillment of their hopes and aspirations.

Memmi not only denied the existence of the heroic, masculine colonizer, but he also argued that his very legend arose as the inadequate man struggled to compensate for his shortcomings. As he confronted the reality of his position in the colonies, the colonizer had to recognize his own status as a “usurper,” yet he was willing to defend this

64 Memmi, Colonizer, 48.
65 Candee, Journeys, 110.
position to the very end: “He endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories – anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy.” He attempted to release himself from the burden of blame for colonial injustice by making “a public show of his own virtues” and arguing “with vehemence to appear heroic and great.” He distanced himself from the colonized through the construction of two figures in opposition. Thus, the image of the effeminate, backward colonized man was not a product of the colonial reality, but a construction of the insecure, inadequate European, the man “of small stature” hiding behind “the pomp or simple pride of the petty colonizer.”

According to Memmi, the colonizer’s inadequacy also gave rise to his representation of the weak, unmasculine man of the metropole. He was forced to respond to suspicions of injustice and oppression from his countrymen at home by emphasizing the difficult life he led in a barbarous land. He invented a colonial mythology of heroism and masculinity to shield himself from the doubtful gaze of others. “Other times, furious, aggressive, he reacts clumsily, giving scorn for scorn, accusing his homeland of cowardice and degeneracy.” Yet, in a complete contradiction, the colonizer also heralded the greatness of his homeland. He simultaneously highlighted his own relationship to his grand nation of origin and stressed the colonized man’s exclusion from it. He engaged in the most ostentatious yet empty displays of military strength and grandeur: “He loves the most flashy symbols, the most striking demonstrations of the power of his country. He attends all military parades and he desires and obtains frequent and elaborate ones; he

66 Memmi, Colonizer, 49, 52, 54-5.
contributes his part by dressing up carefully and ostentatiously. He admires the army and its strength, reveres uniforms and covets decorations.” Thus, he also forged a link between masculinity and European identity or whiteness, gender and race.

The reversal of the colonial discourse by Ho, Memmi, and Fanon included not only assertions of their own masculinity but also denials of superior European masculinity. For his part, Ho Chi Minh used language to challenge the gendered imagery and assumptions upon which the colonies were founded. He rejected the “old society” of the colonial system, which was characterized by corruption and the “exploitation of man by man.” As Fanon sought the creation of a “new man,” so Ho Chi Minh desired to construct a “new society of equality, virtue, and honor,” in which all men would enjoy the right to liberty.68

Civilization or Savagery

As discussed in the first chapter, one of the ways in which the colonial discourse had differentiated between the colonizer and the colonized was through the construction of a loose continuum of civilization. The European colonizer was the embodiment of civilized progress, and he had an obligation to civilize the colonized man whose unrestricted sexuality, innate savagery, and child-like demeanor placed him at the opposite end of the spectrum. This is yet another image against which Ho Chi Minh struggled. By asserting his people’s civilization and intelligence, he implied that they were mature and ready to govern themselves.

67 Memmi, Colonizer, 57-60, 65.

68 Ho, Articles, 67.
Ho compelled his people to strive for unity and cooperation with the French in order to “show to the world that we are a civilized people.” He expressed his faith in the inevitable victory of Vietnam whose people were united together in a just cause. Again, he articulated his desire for them to demonstrate to the world that “we are an intelligent people, more civilized than the homicidal invaders.”

He asserted the civilization of the Vietnamese while simultaneously casting doubt upon French civilization and honor, thus destabilizing the constructed continuum of civilization. The people of Vietnam sought only the liberation of their country, yet the French colonizers behaved “lawlessly” in their desperation to re-establish power. They disregarded the Modus Vivendi of September 14, 1946, by terrorizing and massacring the colonial people.

Ho thus implied that rather than being characterized by honor and dignity and acting in the interests of justice, the French colonizer reacted to Vietnam’s struggle for independence with savage brutality.

Ho’s accusations of lawlessness, homicidal behavior, and lack of civilization on the part of the French paralleled claims by Memmi, Fanon, and Aimé Césaire that colonization made savages of the colonizers. Césaire was born in Martinique in 1913 and educated in France. He was involved with the French Communist Party for a number of years, and during that time he served as mayor of Fort-de-France and deputy to the French National Assembly for Martinique. Césaire, Fanon, and Memmi all denied the myth of the heroic colonizer, as well as representations of his legendary benevolence and civility. The European colonizer for them was not truly a man, but an uncivilized,

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70 Ho, *Articles*, 35-6.
animalistic brute. In fact, he bore a striking resemblance to the image of the colonized that he had laboriously constructed. Césaire proclaimed, “... colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred and moral relativism.” He asserted that through the passive acceptance of violence and injustice, the European man had allowed a “poison” to invade his body and his home. Thus, “slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward savagery.” Césaire also argued that as the European colonizer sought to justify the inequalities of imperialism by portraying the colonized man as an animal and treating him as such, he merely succeeded in transforming himself into an animal. Memmi similarly asserted that the act of oppression transformed both the colonizer and the colonized: “It diverts and pollutes the best energies of man – of oppressed and oppressor alike. For if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer.” These arguments bear striking resemblance to Tran Tu Binh’s representations of Durandet and Soumagnac, whom he presented as brutish and uncivilized on the basis of their sexual exploitation of the Phu Rieng workers.

**Slaves or Soldiers**

For Ho Chi Minh, the choice between fighting the French colonizers and submitting to foreign domination was the choice between living as soldiers or slaves. In a “Message to the Vietnamese People, the French People and the Peoples of the Allied Nations” dated December 21, 1946, Ho declared that the people of Vietnam were to

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72 Memmi, *Colonizer*, xvii.
either struggle for independence from the French or “stay with hands bound and heads bowed as slaves again.” He proclaimed: “No! The Vietnamese people cannot accept foreign domination being imposed on them again. No! The Vietnamese people never want to be enslaved again. They would rather die than lose their independence and freedom.” This is a theme that he explored on several occasions. In a “Message to the Southern Compatriots” from September 26, 1945, Ho asserted, “We should remember the heroic words of a great French revolutionary, ‘I’d rather die as a free man than live as a slave.’” Ho was thus willing to emulate French revolutionaries who had struggled in their time, but he nevertheless sought to distinguish his people from the cowardly, dishonorable French colonizers. In an article printed in Bucharest in April 1952, Ho argued that unlike the French colonizers who accepted the aid of the Americans and thus submitted unwittingly to their domination, the Vietnamese people would have no masters: “The U.S. interventionists have nurtured the French aggressors and the Vietnamese puppets, but the Vietnamese people do not let anybody delude and enslave them.” As this declaration demonstrates, Ho differentiated between those Vietnamese who fought courageously for their nation’s independence and those who served the French army. To serve with the French, to “bring the elephant home to trample on the tombs of our ancestors,” was to be a traitor to the “Fatherland.”

According to Ho, the people’s courageous resistance against the French, their masculine struggle, and their choice to be soldiers rather than slaves, made them

73 Ho, *Articles*, 37.
75 Ho, *Articles*, 61, 55.
deserving of freedom and independence. Their “unity of action” and their united manhood guaranteed their eventual independence. In 1952 Ho implored all those engaged in the struggle to unite “as one man.” And in an “Appeal Made After the Successful Conclusion of the Geneva Agreements,” on July 22, 1954, Ho announced, “If our people are as one, if thousands of men are like one, victory will certainly be ours.”

**Conclusion**

The works of Tran Tu Binh and Ho Chi Minh demonstrate the extent to which nationalists in Indochina reversed the gendered imagery of the colonial discourse. The parallels between Ho and the works of Fanon, Memmi, and Césaire confirm that this occurred not only in Indochina but also in other areas of the French Empire. These works reveal the complexities of gendered language in the context of empire, as many of the same images and representations that had constructed and maintained the colonial system were used to assert the masculinity of those who sought to challenge that very system. Tran Tu Binh confronts the images of the active, heroic, sexually virile colonizer as well as that of the passive, animalistic, savage colonized man. He therefore challenges the link that joined together race, gender, and maturity level as defining categories of difference separating the colonizer from the colonized. Yet at one point he offers an alternative definition of heroism, and therefore of masculinity, from that espoused within the colonial discourse. He implied that for the Vietnamese, true heroism means preserving one’s strength rather than aggressively demonstrating one’s power in any

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76 Ho, *Colonialism*, 53.

77 Ho, *Articles*, 68, 93.
context. And Ho, though he also sought the promotion of a united manhood in Vietnam equal to that of the French and thus also blurred the line separating the mature, civilized colonizer from the savage, feminine colonized, did not seek to emulate every aspect of French manhood. He sought the establishment of a new society and a new masculinity, consistent with the discipline, zealously, and sacrificing spirit of the Vietnamese people.

This chapter has demonstrated that nationalists in the colonies engaged in gendered language and thus halted the European monopoly on defining the gender identities of both colonized and colonizing people. The next chapter will explore the French reaction to this reversal of the colonial discourse, and thus illuminate the debate over masculinity in the era of decolonization, during which nationalists and colonizers struggled to determine masculine identity. It will also reveal the ambivalent position that some French people took, as they realized that the cost of the war to retake the colony of Indochina outweighed its benefits, yet were unwilling to relinquish their perception of the feminine colonized man and the heroic colonizer.
Chapter Four
Reactions to Decolonization

Introduction

British writer Bernard Newman, author of Report on Indo-china, a work published in 1954, contended that France did not establish colonies out of a need for profits, as was the case with Britain. For the French, imperialist ventures were a “matter of pride.” Colonies were estimations of a nation’s worth, required possessions of a “great power.” With the defeat and subsequent Nazi occupation of France in 1940, an awful blow was dealt to French prestige, as well as to French manhood. French men had failed in their traditional masculine role, because they had allowed Germany to invade their country. Yet Newman lamented, “An absurd misconception has swept the world. Because the French were defeated in 1940, it seems to be assumed that they have suddenly lost all the qualities which made them great. This is madness.” After the end of the Second World War, despite the desperate need of the French to rebuild their own nation, the reclaiming of the colony of Indochina offered them an opportunity to reclaim their glory and honor. In his 1954 work Newman proclaimed “Indochina must be held – if only for considerations of prestige.” According to Newman, the cost of the war to reconquer Indochina was to “nullify the accusation of colonialism”: “It would have been much cheaper – in all but honour – to have cleared out of the country years ago.”

The UN Charter in 1945 encouraged the autonomous government of former colonies in the postwar world. European imperial powers quickly lost control over their possessions in India, Palestine, and Indonesia. Yet supporters of Empire within France did not believe that this lesson had relevant applications for their colonial system. They saw the UN Charter as a call for self-administration rather than independent government, and thus believed it to be immaterial to the French Union. They also inherently rejected this intended interference in French “internal affairs.” French journals attributed the British loss of India to “the failure of the British model” and continued to believe that the “French model,” founded on the principles of the Revolution, was a superior form of rule. Thus, after World War II, the French state struggled violently to retain power over its colonies.

The French desire to prove their honor and prestige to a postwar world, and their faith in the innate supremacy of their colonial system caused many to reject the indigenous nationalist masculinity that challenged the foundations of that system. Yet the reactions of others within France to colonial assertions of maturity and masculinity were more complex. Some had lost faith in French imperialism, believing that the costs of maintaining colonies far outweighed their benefits. Yet even among this group many continued to deny the masculinity of the colonized man, despite their derision of the system that had initially placed his manhood in question. Despite their lost love for colonialism, they could still not accept the equality of the repressed indigenous population. In a manner that revealed their ambivalence, an ambivalence which

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paralleled Duras and Beaucarnot, they confirmed at times the arguments of nationalists and at others sought to portray them as either savage terrorists or passive incompetents. Others, including some Communists in France and abroad, were more willing to accept the struggle of colonial nationalists against imperial exploitation as just.

This chapter will examine the varied and sometimes ambivalent responses of various people and groups within France, as well as a few other Westerners, to Vietnam’s struggle for independence and associated assertions of masculinity. It will illuminate further the complexities of the gendered language of empire by demonstrating the diversity of reactions to decolonization, and the bilateral debate that ensued as both Frenchmen and indigenous nationalists sought to define masculine identity.

**Continued Othering and Challenges to the Discourse – The Fight for Masculine Identity**

Despite the bold proclamations of masculinity by Ho Chi Minh and other nationalists, many French colonialists and supporters of imperialism within the metropole, in an attempt to preserve French glory and prestige, continued to assert the masculine prowess of the colonizer while feminizing the colonized man. Such affirmations would continue even after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In his work published in 1949 titled *L’Indochine dans le Cadre de l’Asie et ses problèmes actuels*, Colonel Marchand declared that despite incessant combat with forces of superior numbers and the pitfalls of weakness and exhaustion that confronted the French troops after long sojourns in Indochina, French soldiers met the Vietnamese with energy and
And in the work *Le Drame Indochinois*, published in 1953 under the name Général Jean Marchand, he recalled the “heroic resistance,” “energy,” and “courage” employed by French troops in Indochina who were forced to retreat to China under the threat of Japanese forces and hostile guerillas, and he further described their treacherous journey through high mountains and dangerous jungle. Marchand proclaimed that for years the French struggle to restore power in Indochina was characterized by courage and energy.4

In another account of the colonial struggle in Vietnam published in 1954 under the title *La Fin des Illusions: Notes d’Indochine (Février-Juillet 1954)*, Robert Guillain, a French newspaper correspondent in Asia, described the impatience of French soldiers who grew hungry for battle after two months without combat. He asserted that the troops continually repeated the phrase “*On va leur montrer,*” demonstrating their enthusiasm to engage the Vietnamese in battle and thus prove their valor and doubtless also realize their frustrated manhood.5 In December 1954, months after the final Vietnamese victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, the magazine *France Indochine: Revue Mensuelle* held up this battle as a shining example of French heroism. The glory of France was confirmed by those willing to sacrifice their blood for their nation, and the civilizing and cultural

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influence of France would continue to have a profound impact upon its former colony and offer a consoling hope to those who struggled to preserve French power.\textsuperscript{6}

In addition to employing this heroic and masculine language, many French people continued to justify their presence in Indochina by presenting it as a necessity mandated by the inability of the people of Indochina to govern their own nation. On August 16, 1945, the French newspaper \textit{Le Monde} published an address to \textit{l’Union Indochinoise} by General Charles de Gaulle, in which he stated that the mother country was speaking to its children.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, less than one month before Vietnam declared independence, French leaders continued to view the people of Indochina as immature children in need of French guidance and protection. Published in 1950 in Paris, the work \textit{Indochina (A French Point of View)} argued that “France stays in Indo-china, justifying her continuing presence there by her past efforts, her present sacrifices and the vital contribution she has to make in shaping the future.”\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, \textit{France Indochine: Revue Mensuelle} asserted that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was in need of France, though France did not need it.\textsuperscript{9}

André-François Mercier, a member of the Popular Republican Movement (MRP) in France during the Fourth Republic, was particularly interested in military affairs and the conflict in Indochina. He believed in the independence of Vietnam within the confines of the French Union and was the only member of the MRP to vote against the Geneva Accords in 1954 granting the nation full independence. In his work titled \textit{Faut-il}

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{France Indochine: Revue Mensuelle} (December, 1954), 224.


\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Indo-china}, 90.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Revue}, 236.
abandonner l’Indochine? published in 1954, he declared to the Vietnamese youth that though some believed that Vietnam could not be independent within the context of the French Union, true independence did not exist in the modern world. There was only beneficial interdependence and devastating independence. Thus, without its relationship with France, Vietnam would inevitably become a satellite of China. These examples demonstrate that despite the struggle of the Vietnamese people to assert their independence and Ho Chi Minh’s battle to affirm the strength and masculine heroism of his nation, some in France continued to portray them as incapable of taking on the challenges of freedom and independence.

Many also continued to emasculate the men of Indochina through language and representation. They suggested that only through the emulation of colonizing French men could colonized people abandon their passive natures and become courageous, active men themselves. Marchand argued that the Annamese people had a great facility for assimilation and imitation. He also asserted that the might and honor of the French nation, and the courage that French troops displayed during the conquest of Indochina, made the colonized people love and admire their conquerors. Thus, they had accepted the forging of their destiny with that of the French people. Marchand referred to a young intellectual of Indochina, who, upon discovering France, proclaimed that the China


11 Marchand, Cadres, 61-2.

12 Marchand almost seems to elucidate a love story evolving between France and its colonies. See Matt K. Matsuda’s Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). In this work Matsuda explores the place of love and desire in the French imperialist endeavor and the paradox between discourses of desire and assimilation.
of Confucius was no longer anything for him but a silver-haired “venerable old woman” who strongly resembled his grandmother.\textsuperscript{13} And Newman quoted a Vietnamese corporal who spoke of the good that France had done his country. Though this corporal believed that “one people cannot rule another for ever,” he also asserted that none of his countrymen were mature enough to realize this truth: “We are still children. I never had such thoughts myself until I came to France, and talked to the French.”\textsuperscript{14} By the accounts of certain Frenchmen, and also confirmed by some Vietnamese intellectuals, the Vietnamese people were not only effeminate and weak but also so child-like and immature as to be unable to attain independence or even conceive of it on their own.

Upon contemplating an “unmongolian” revolutionary in his account \textit{A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Indo-china}, British travel writer Norman Lewis stated,

> There had been many Caucasian characteristics about the other Vietnamese intellectuals and revolutionaries I had met, and I was wondering whether whatever physical mutation it was that produced this decrease in Mongolian peculiarities encouraged at the same time the emergence of certain well-known western traits, such as restlessness, aggressiveness, an impatience with mere contemplation, and a taste for action.\textsuperscript{15}

Though Lewis was willing to grant Vietnamese revolutionaries and intellectuals certain masculine traits, he implied that these traits were essentially “Caucasian,” and thus naturally “unmongolian.” Active, aggressive Vietnamese men were the exception rather than the rule, and their masculinity was gained through a “mutation,” perhaps resulting

\textsuperscript{13} Marchand, \textit{Drame}, 16, 19.


\textsuperscript{15} Norman Lewis, \textit{A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Indo-China} (London: Jonathon Cape, 1951), 298-9.
from contact with European men. Similarly, Marchand affirmed that the elites of Indochina were formed in the image of France after being given French civilization and language by the colonizers. Thus, many Frenchmen and other Westerners during decolonization continued to emasculate the colonized man who was in the process of asserting his own masculinity, and even among those who did accept the masculinity of the colonized, some attributed it to his prolonged contact with French manhood.

**Debunking the Myth of Ho Chi Minh**

Some Westerners also indirectly rejected colonial assertions of equality and masculinity by denying the heroism of the legendary figure who many believed to embody the people’s struggle. They sought to overthrow the image of Ho Chi Minh as the heroic personification of his nation’s fight for freedom. In the work *Indo-china (A French Point of View)*, the editors sought to debunk the myth that Ho was a “Vietnamese patriot,” the leader of his nation’s struggle and thus deserving of French respect. They contended, “That is absolutely false. Ho-Chi-Minh is not a Vietnamese patriot at all. He is the prototype of the man-without-a-country, whose allegiance is given entirely to the cause of international Communism.” They argued that Ho only led the struggle in Vietnam because his superiors determined that the Communist struggle was most likely to succeed there. He could just as well have been in any other Asian country.\(^{16}\) In Bernard Newman’s *Report on Indo-china*, he declared that when Chinese forces finally left Northern Vietnam after World War II and the French arrived, “Ho Chi Minh now had to fight or negotiate: he chose negotiation.” Thus Bernard implied that Ho was a weak

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and frightened leader, only willing to negotiate because he feared the great and powerful French forces. He also suggested that Ho was a blind follower of other Communist leaders. He unquestioningly followed Stalin’s policy of collaboration with the Chinese: “it was only when Moscow reversed this, and openly supported the Chinese Communists, that Ho Chi Minh obediently declared open defiance of the French.”

**Confirmations of the Colonial Argument**

Yet, as certain French people continued to emasculate the colonized people and deny the legend of their leader, others confirmed the very arguments used by Ho to assert his people’s right to equality and liberty. In *Solution Pour L’Indochine?*, Pierre de Fondettes highlighted a contradiction inherent within the American support of French imperialism. He argued that the American interventionists, living in the shadow of the legacy of the American Revolution, chose to believe that they were protecting the people of Indochina from Soviet imperialism rather than perpetuating the French imperialist system. The Americans had apparently uncovered a loophole in the rights of man that enabled them to deny these rights to the Vietnamese. By highlighting this paradox, De Fondettes confirmed Ho’s claim that the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen were incompatible with the brand of Western imperialism that denied colonized men basic rights.

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17 Newman, *Report*, 37, 39. The authors of these works also seem to be driven by anti-Communist sentiment, though it is difficult to differentiate their anti-Communist motives from their general disdain for Vietnamese nationalism and Vietnamese opposition to France within their writings.

De Fondettes also echoed Memmi’s accusation against mediocre European colonizers. He suggested that racism, rather than being a natural inclination of the French people, was a defensive reaction in response to white mediocrity in the colonies. He argued that the colonizer made claims to a superior intellect only when confronted with an intellectually superior indigenous population. He referred to André Gide, who after traveling to the Congo asserted that the less intelligent a white man was, the more likely he was to label the black man as stupid. De Fondettes further asserted that among the colonialists in Indochina there was a disproportionately high number of mediocre Frenchmen. He claimed that educated Vietnamese came to regard the colonial system as the enemy when upon returning to their homeland they saw mediocre whites occupying positions above refined Indochinese men.

De Fondettes suggested that the French, though willing to invest their money in the war for the colony, were less willing to sacrifice their own blood. He remarked that their fighting force was comprised of “colored” troops recruited from Africa and foreign regiments, the majority of whom were German. Only one third of the men fighting to restore the French Empire in Indochina were in fact Frenchmen. These men continued “to massacre in silence, conforming to their tradition of serving in honor” without questioning orders.19 In *La fin des Illusions: Notes D’Indochine (Février-Juillet, 1954)*, Guillain raised similar doubts about the whiteness of the French army. He stated that in Paris when one spoke of the conflict in Indochina and the army fighting to preserve French power one thought of Frenchmen, and the image of “an army of white men

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fighting a yellow adversary” came to mind. Though this was true in 1947, it was no
longer the case in 1951. By then the French army was comprised of “Marocains,
Annamites, Algérians, Sénégalais, legionnaires, Méos, Tonkinois, Thais, Muongs.”

Though, unlike de Fondettes who perceived this as a blow to French honor, Guillain
appeared to see this as a positive for the army. According to De Fondettes, the French
colonizers in Indochina were mediocre at best, and men willing to massacre the innocent
in order to preserve their own misplaced sense of honor at worst. Thus, he denied the
image of the masculine, civilized, heroic colonizer upon whose back the colonial system
was constructed, thereby echoing Memmi who called into question the basis of the
French Empire itself.

In the midst of nationalist assertions of masculinity, many French political
thinkers in Indochina refused to adapt to the new political situation. Though Vietnam
had declared independence and the French were struggling to regain control of the empire

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20 Guillain, Illusions, 12.

21 De Fondette’s position is particularly interesting given the crisis of masculinity which followed the
Second World War in France. The first chapter of this thesis very briefly addressed how the experience of
war had weakened the confidence of men and thus undermined the imperial masculinity which many
associated so closely with Empire. However, the French defeat and occupation by the Nazis resulted in
much more than a loss of confidence. In Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France,
translated by John Flower (Oxford: Berg, 2002), Fabrice Virgili examines the “context of the Occupation,
Liberation, post-war years and the twentieth century in general” in which “women of all ages and all
professions who were accused of having collaborated with the occupying Germans had their heads shaved.”
In response to the question “How could a woman, who is the mother of nine children, take up arms?”
Marguerite Gonnet, head of the Libération-Sud movement in the department of the Isère, responded to the
president of the military tribunal in Lyon: “Quite simply Colonel, because men had dropped them.”
French men were seen as responsible for the humiliation of France, because they had failed to defend their
nation from invasion. This represented the continuation of a crisis of masculinity which had begun before
the war. Virgili asserts, “Well before the defeat, the myth of the warrior no longer had any status; during
the period of the drôle de guerre there were many ways in which soldiers were represented which were a
long way from those of traditional warriors.” In response to this loss of masculinity, the punishment of
women guilty of collaboration allowed French people “to move from a position of being the victims of
violence to one where they inflicted it, and thereby reasserted their patriotic identity.” These acts
reconfirmed French virility, yet the blow to French masculinity which defeat and occupation had dealt
continued to shape post war identities and perspectives. Quotes are from pages 1-2, 237-8.
that they had all but lost, some continued to “live in the nostalgia of the imperial euphoria of another time.” They conceived of the conflict between France and the Vietnamese nationalists as “a simple colonial rebellion” that interested only the French in Indochina. French colonizers attempted to enforce peace with force and to re-establish the antebellum status quo. Others continued to justify the French presence in Vietnam by arguing that they were fighting to prevent the spread of Communism, but as De Fondettes argued, Asia did not want to be protected against the forces of Communism by the whites who were responsible for colonial repression.²² Newman quoted Nguyen van Tam, the prime minister to Emperor Bao Dai, who articulated an old Buddhist saying: “Do it for yourself!” – “This is our country – why should we leave its liberation to the French? . . . We must win the battle.”²³ The French colonizers and Vietnamese nationalists were engaged in a powerful and multi-dimensional struggle. Both groups claimed to be the protectors of the Vietnamese nation and its people, yet each also sought the right to define the gender identity of colonized man. In the midst of this battle there were those like De Fondettes who, though he did not support the nationalist cause, confirmed some of its primary arguments.

In his work Eyewitness in Indo-china, American Communist Joseph R. Starobin also reaffirmed many of Ho Chi Minh’s claims and contentions. He suggested his own support of the colonized man’s struggle as he quoted Dr. Mordecai Johnson, former president of Howard University, who declared that the colonies were filled with a billion

²² De Fondettes, Solution, 46-7, 114.
people who were seething to overturn the rule of the colonizers and taste freedom. This desire sprang from the fact that, though for two centuries Europe had the power to guarantee the political and economic freedom of the colonies,

we have not only not done so, but we have used that very power to conquer them in war, to dominate them politically, to exploit their natural resources and their labor, to segregate them and humiliate them upon the land where their fathers died and in the presence of the graves which hold the bodies of their mothers.²⁴

Starobin challenged French claims to masculinity as protectors of the colonial people. He implied that Europe had failed to protect the people of the colonies and argued instead that the Vietnamese people were capable of protecting themselves: “Imperialism, say its apologists, is a system for the protection of the so-called backward peoples; yet here was a people whom France’s rulers did not protect from Japan and who freed themselves in battle against both the French and Japanese.”²⁵ Starobin thus threatened the basis of French colonialism in Indochina, just as nationalists had done. The French had legitimated their rule by arguing that their civilizing, protective influence was needed. By asserting Vietnamese power and denying French masculine prowess, Starobin rejected the foundation of legitimate French rule in Indochina.

Starobin further echoed Ho’s argument that the French, in addition to being unable to protect the Vietnamese, were in danger of being colonized by their American masters.²⁶ Starobin claimed that American intervention was a means of preventing a

²⁵ Ibid., 28, 32.
direct settlement between the French and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: “No
doubt, the chief American effort would be directed toward paying for France’s man-
power and absorbing the costs of the war on the condition that France do the fighting; the
colonizers, in short, would themselves be colonized.” Like Ho, Starobin refuted the
argument that colonialism confirmed the immaturity and femininity of the colonized man
by suggesting that France was equally vulnerable to colonization.

According to Starobin, the Vietminh’s struggle against colonial repression began
in 1940 and intensified tremendously in 1945. As the “weakening Japanese” “assumed
unilateral rule” over Indochina without any visible resistance from the Vichy
government, the people seized their opportunity for freedom: “This was another turning
point. The eighty-year rule of French colonialism crumpled and the Vietnamese saw
what a façade it had become; the people realized that their oppressors could be thrown

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26 This assertion coincided with fears of Americanization in France. In Fast Cars, Clean Bodies:
Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture Kristin Ross argues that postwar France was itself a
colonial power and simultaneously colonized by the United States. In Seducing the French: The Dilemma
of Americanization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Richard F. Kuisel contends that the
violent anti-Americanism of 1950’s France derived from fears of political domination by the United States
and distaste for American consumerism which slowly permeated French cultural and economic life. A
veritable French identity crisis followed the rapid defeat and subsequent occupation of the country in World
War II, and the perceived threat of Americanization intensified French cultural anxieties. It is interesting
that Starobin, an American Communist, noted the vulnerability of the French nation to colonization when
Communists in France represented the most ardent opposition to American cultural and economic
influence. According to Kuisel, French anti-Americanism reflected French ambivalence toward modernity
in general. Thus on the one hand France needed the United States to maintain its imperial status, a notion
of prestige that had its origins in an earlier century and was quickly becoming out-moded in the postwar
world. On the other, American intervention meant the veritable colonization of France itself, and the
inevitable modernization of the country through Americanization. See also Reinhold Wagnleitner’s Coca-
Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second
Wagnleitner explores the use of cultural propaganda by the United States toward a state of cultural
imperialism or cultural colonization in Europe. He argues that culture served as both a driving economic
force and a political tool, a weapon within the context of the Cold War.

27 Starobin, Eye-witness, 167.
off, and popular confidence in the Viet Minh movement began to grow rapidly.” With this simple statement, Starobin seemed to confirm Ho’s belief in the just cause of his people. French domination of Indochina, far from being natural or necessary, was a farce. The Vietnamese people, through their support of the Vietminh, were demonstrating their support of their nation and their determination to rid themselves of their oppressor.

In addition to denying the legitimacy of French colonialism, Starobin confirmed the heroism of the Vietnamese people that Ho so eloquently heralded. Starobin spoke of the French conquest of Vietnam in the 19th century in heroic terms, yet his heroes were not the conquerors but those engaged in the “bitter struggle” of resistance. He also proclaimed the heroism of contemporary Vietnamese men. He repeated the story of the heroic assault on a blockhouse in 1950 by the national hero La Van Cau, as related to him by Le Vinh Quoc, a tale also recounted by Ho Chi Minh:

Shortly after creeping up on the blockhouse, La Van Cau’s arm was shot to slivers. But he had a mission to accomplish. And [he] gave orders to have his arm cut off, and the torn shirt was used to dress it. He crept forward with the stick of dynamite in one hand. He held it between his feet, pulled the detonator, and tossed the stick with his left hand. The blockhouse was destroyed.  

He related another legend. On the Red River peasants had dug underground shelters in which to hide village leaders. The French, aware of these shelters, sent out patrols “to scourge the fields.” As they walked they poked stakes into the earth, and if the ground yielded, the entire area was bombed.

28 Starobin, _Eye-witness_, 29.

29 Ibid., 82.
One night, a local leader of the Lao Dong Party and a village guerilla chief were huddled in such a shelter. A pointed stake went through the ceiling. The guerilla leader promptly put up his arm to the pointed stake, and it was withdrawn. A second time, and his right arm went up. A third time, and the stake descended toward the head of the Party leader. The guerilla leaned forward, his head grazing the ceiling and he sustained the point once again . . .

And Starobin related yet another legend, this time of Dien, a young guerilla in the village of Gialong, Bac Ninh province. Dien was in an underground hideout with a Lao Dong Party leader, and their shelter was discovered. Soldiers, afraid to go in themselves, sent in a young boy who reported the hideout to be empty. After beating him, they determined to go in themselves. “The Lao Dong leader whispered to Dien, the village guerilla: ‘Let us rush out together. With our hand grenades, we shall be able to kill them before giving our own lives.’ Dien replied: ‘No, you must live, for without you all our work in the village will be spoiled.’” Then Dien hid the Party leader in a corner under dirt and straw and rushed out alone. He took down one of the enemy soldiers before being killed himself. Through all of these related stories of Vietnamese heroism, Starobin asserted the strength and passion of their struggle. He reaffirmed again and again Ho’s claims of the valor and discipline of the Vietnamese soldiers.

But like Ho, Starobin contended that the soldiers were not the only heroes of Vietnam. The people struggled continually to harvest crops in the midst of attacks on their country. The French asserted, “It is better to kill one buffalo than ten Viet Minh,” and so they attempted to prevent the plowing and destroy growing crops. Starobin stated,

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31 Ibid., 98-9.
“There are stories of elderly men who risked their lives for the harvest since the fields are often mined. ‘We are old,’ they say, ‘and if we have to die, we will die without regret . . . ’” The lives of the people were precarious. For years they endured an endless cycle of “guerilla battles, mopping-up operations, devastation of the fields, replanting, hiding the crop, guerilla battles and then mopping-up operations, and replanting again.” Starobin declared, “It is a fight to live, and people live to fight.” He quoted a Vietnamese engineer: “When the enemy comes, grab a gun; when the enemy leaves, grab a hoe – that is our motto in the delta.”

According to Starobin, the people of Vietnam were characterized by the same courage and fearlessness that defined the soldiers actively battling for independence.

As a Communist, though not a Frenchman himself, Starobin was more willing than some to accept the just cause of the people of Vietnam, and to confirm their masculine heroism in the face of colonial repression. His arguments echoed the language of Ho, a fellow Party member. They were two men engaged in the struggle against repression and exploitation, though in different forms.

Yet by Starobin’s account it was not just the Communist cause that was capable of forging links between the people of the West and those struggling in the colonies. He recounted the events of an International Congress in Beijing on the eve of National Day, 1952. Present was Raymonde Dien, a young French woman who had led a demonstration in Marseille to oppose the war. She and other women had protested by lying on railroad tracks near a munitions plant. Also present was Henri Martin, a naval officer who was

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sentenced to five years in solitary confinement for opposing the war. Starobin proclaimed that together they represented the “tortured conscience of France and the rising disgust with the Indo-China adventure.” These French representatives at the Peking conference wept and embraced the delegates from Indo-China, all of whom were speaking French: “... it was as though long-separated brothers and sisters had come upon each other. It was like the children of a single family.” This scene was observed by people of all different nations, and it was followed by applause and raised glasses. By Starobin’s account, these Frenchmen felt a connection with the people of Indochina. As Ho had desired, they were bound together through the bonds of brotherhood, united in the common struggle to end the war and the colonial repression that it represented.

Articles published in the French Communist newspaper *L’Humanité* indicate that, like Starobin, Communists in France were more willing than some to acknowledge the virtue of Vietnam’s struggle for independence as well as to reject the basis of French imperialism. In an article dated from April 1, 1939, concerning an anti-Soviet, anti-Communist pact made by Japan, Germany, and Italy, after which Japan decided to occupy *les îles Spratly* located near Indochina, *l’Humanité* suggested that France and Indochina faced similar difficulties in the face of fascist aggression. The newspaper stated that Japan could argue that it had to protect civilization in Indochina, and that Germany could similarly argue that it was to save French civilization from bolshevism. Thus, the Communist writers of *l’Humanité* implied that both France and Indochina were


equally vulnerable to the aggression of the Axis powers, an implication that would deny the might of France and the contrasting weakness of its colonies. They also rejected the argument that one nation had to protect the civilization of another, which was the basis of French imperialism in Indochina.

In an article published on May 8, 1954, after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, *l’Humanité* declared the war in Indochina to be “unjust” and “vain.” It also asserted that the Vietnamese struggle was based upon a “sincere desire to conclude peace,” a peace rooted in the respected acknowledgement of Vietnamese independence. *L’Humanité* contended that to fail to convene immediately in order to discuss a cease-fire in Indochina would be “criminal.” Thus, *l’Humanité* rejected the French right to rule in Indochina while simultaneously proclaiming the virtue of the Vietnamese cause.

In addition to pronouncing the validity of Vietnam’s struggle, *l’Humanité* repeatedly heralded the fraternal bonds that united the Communists and workers of France with their counterparts in Algeria. The writers of the newspaper declared that the workers of France needed to assert their “solidarity” with the workers of North Africa, and also to demand their rights “in France as in their country.” *L’Humanité* proclaimed that the workers who represented “la vraie France” had a duty to aid the people of Algeria in their struggle to retake their “liberty,” their “country,” and their “bread.”

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The Communists who wrote and edited *l’Humanité*, at least in theory, supported the struggle of the colonial people with whom they were united through bonds of brotherhood. They echoed Ho Chi Minh’s call for fraternal harmony between workers in the colony and in the metropole and decried the injustice of France’s imperialist war in Indochina.

**Fanatics or Heroes?**

Although many Frenchmen and other Westerners were unable to deny the courage of the Vietnamese nationalists that Starobin proclaimed outright, they refused nevertheless to acknowledge the honor and dignity of the colonized man which potentially equaled or rivaled their own. The editors of *Indochina (A French Point of View)* contended that guerilla tactics were suitable to the “native qualities of the Vietnamien, whose courage is undoubted, but who relies more on patience and cunning than displays of valour.” And Newman offered an analogy for the conflict between the French forces and the Vietminh:

> It is a battle between a heavy-weight and a feather-weight – lumbering force against light agility. The heavy-weight packs a terrific punch – if it lands, his opponent would be instantly knocked out. But the lighter man dodges, and allows himself to be chased all over the ring. Then, when the heavy-weight tires or begins to puff, the feather-weight essays some blows – light, but irritating, and from unforeseen angles.  

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37 *View*, 58.

Though this analogy initially seems to parallel closely Ho’s metaphor of the locust and the elephant, it is subtly derisive. As Newman suggested that the might of France was ineffectual against the guerilla forces of the Vietminh, he also implied that these guerillas, if they encountered the French in open battle, would be instantaneously defeated. Thus, while conceding the cunning and skill of the Vietnamese, Newman continued to deny their masculine power and might in relation to France.

Newman and others, in addition to subtly rejecting the strength of the Vietminh, demeaned the Vietnamese forces by characterizing them as fanatical. The same behavior that Ho Chi Minh and Starobin attributed to passionate and determined heroism, various others attributed to fanaticism. Marchand, for example, articulated the essence of the Viet Minh army as defined by undeniable valor, mobility, and fluidity, yet he also ascribed a certain level of fanaticism to the youth engaged in the people’s struggle.  

Similarly, Newman stated of the Vietminh army that they were “composed largely of fanatics. Further, even their terrorist methods of recruitment bring in a number of men who have never heard of Communism but who take naturally to banditry.” Newman thus contradicted the argument made by Ho and supported by other nationalists that the Vietnamese cause was just and glorious. Instead, he implied that it appealed to thieves and other criminals. Of a Vietminh rising in Hanoi on December 19, 1946, Newman stated, “French men, women and children were slaughtered under conditions of sheer savagery.”

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39 Marchand, Cadre, 203-4.

40 Newman, Report, 38, 53.
discourse that denied the civilization of the colonized people. Newman thus
simultaneously reinforced the images of the colonial discourse and contradicted Ho’s
argument that the French colonizers were homicidal invaders who terrorized the
Vietnamese people by suggesting instead that the Vietminh were the savage murderers of
innocent Frenchmen in the colonies.

De Fondettes, who in some ways confirmed the anti-colonial arguments of Ho
Chi Minh, further contended that these Vietnamese fanatics took advantage of an
ignorant, miserable, and apathetic population. The contradictions inherent within his
arguments demonstrate the ambivalence of some Frenchmen toward the colonial system.
Though he illuminated the paradox of the imperialist born in a free nation who denied
freedom to colonized people, De Fondettes suggested that the propaganda of the
Vietminh forces fighting for the liberation of their nation only succeeded because they
were uncontested in a country whose people were rendered indifferent to politics. 41

Others echoed De Fondettes’ contention that coincidence and manipulation were
more responsible for the success of the Vietminh in winning the support of the people
than the glory of their cause or their skill in battle. The editors of Indo-China (A French
Point of View), asserted that the Communist propaganda in Indochina generated a
“collective enthusiasm” comparable to the atmosphere of the French Revolution in which
“people ceased to think altogether,” and abandoned “themselves to the general ecstasy.”
Thus, the Vietminh cause was even embraced by those who were the intended victims of
the new state. They further argued that the Vietminh were only able to seize power

41 De Fondettes, Solution, 31.
because on August 17, 1945, after having endured defeat in World War II, the Japanese allowed the Vietminh “to gain possession of all the strategic posts of government.” In the face of great military loss, “Japanese generals decided to throw all caution to the winds and to sow the seeds of revolt in all the territories they were about to abandon.” Then, after having attained power, the Vietminh resorted to “scorched earth tactics,” which the editors referred to as “stupid acts of barbarism,” not out of necessity, but as a “blind copy of Russian tactics.” Rather than successfully asserting their own might, the Vietminh only revealed their desperate longing to mirror the Soviets: “There was, at the bottom of it all, a form of pride, which longed to equal in heroic grandeur the Russian resistance to invasion.” The Vietminh attempted to convince the Vietnamese people of their might and strength. The people “had to be convinced of France’s downfall, so that their enthusiasm should not be damped by fear of a return of French authority.” As Memmi implied that French demonstrations of masculinity and might were an attempt to mask their own mediocrity, the editors of *Indo-china (A French Point of View)*, suggested that Vietminh assertions of strength were similarly intended to camouflage their own weakness in the face of French might.

Newman further rejected the image of the Vietminh as heroes by arguing that they only claimed to struggle against colonial repression. He referred to the Japanese occupation of Vietnam whereby they left the French in administrative control: “The country was quiet. Much later Viet Minh claimed to have fought against the Japanese forces, but neither Japanese nor French records or memories have any trace of such

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42 View, 43, 50-1, 96-7.
actions.” Their only action was propaganda and the “eliminating such of their own people as might prove serious opponents.” According to Newman, they were not heroes; they were frauds.

**Conclusion**

These sources demonstrate that while some Westerners confirmed the anti-colonial arguments of Ho Chi Minh, others contradicted the masculine assertions of Vietnamese nationalists. They represented guerilla troops as fanatics rather than heroes, the Vietminh as terrorists who manipulated the passive population rather than civilized liberators. Some, like De Fondettes, straddled both camps. Thus, the reaction to Vietnamese nationalism and nationalist masculinity was complex and contradictory.

Ultimately, the gendered language of empire was utilized by various groups in many distinct, conflicting ways. The gendered discourse constructed and sustained colonial relationships of power, but was also reversed to challenge the legitimate basis of the colonial system. Masculine identity came to be highly contested, particularly during decolonization, as both the colonizers and the former colonized people struggled to determine who was to be characterized as man. Interestingly, throughout this debate, the definition of masculinity itself remained surprisingly consistent. The discussion, for the most part, centered not around what man was, but who was one.

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Conclusion

This thesis has examined the debate over masculine inclusion that ran alongside the political fight for liberation and independence in French Indochina in the middle decades of the twentieth century, more specifically in the nation of Vietnam. It has demonstrated the complexities and the multifarious dimensions of the gendered language of the French Empire, as well as the extent to which repeated masculine images persisted throughout various perspectives.

Within the colonial discourse that served to both construct and legitimate European power in the colonies, images of a heroic, civilized, sexually virile colonizer were contrasted with representations of a passive, feminine, child-like indigenous population. Within these constructions, notions of race, gender, sex, and maturity were inextricably linked. Colonizers renegotiated these identities and reinforced gender and racial barriers at times of imperial crisis. The blurring of gender and racial identities was equated with threats to European power and prestige, thus the colonial discourse served to bolster European supremacy.

The images of the heroic colonizer and the passive colonized man were both confirmed and challenged by French women in Indochina, as was demonstrated by the travel diary of Claudie Beaucarnot and Marguerite Duras's novel *The Sea Wall*. Their ambiguous perspective reflected their own ambivalent position in the colonial hierarchy,
as they simultaneously occupied positions at the height of one gendered power relationship and the bottom of another.

Because the gendered representations of the colonial discourse helped to maintain the colonial power relationship, nationalists who sought to challenge French power in Indochina were also forced to confront the image of the passive, feminine, child-like indigenous man. The works of Tran Tu Binh and Ho Chi Minh, two prominent Vietnamese Communists, demonstrate the extent to which nationalists subverted the representations inherent within the colonial relationship as a means of challenging the foundation of that relationship. They asserted the heroism and the united manhood of the Vietnamese engaged in the struggle for their nation while simultaneously rejecting the notion of the heroic, civilizing French colonizer.

Subsequent reactions of certain French groups and other Westerners to Vietnamese nationalism were varied and at times contradictory. Some Frenchmen continued to juxtapose the masculine colonizer and the feminine colonized while simultaneously debunking the legend of Ho Chi Minh. Others, particularly French Communists, were more willing to assert the virtue of Vietnam’s struggle and even to confirm the arguments made by Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese nationalists.

This thesis has thus revealed several layers of complexity surrounding the gendered language of empire in the case of French Indochina. Gendered representations were used in various contexts to legitimate as well as to challenge the colonial relationship, and this paradox illuminates the contested nature of identity within the context of empire. More research, however, remains to be done. This thesis has included
a variety of perspectives, but there are certain elements which were not considered. For example, the voices of the indigenous women of Indochina and those either less prominent in or not engaged in the nationalist struggle against French imperialism, as well as those indigenous groups who were opposed to it, are absent. Considerations of time, as well as the barrier posed by language, made this exclusion necessary. It is also possible that issues of literacy would make it difficult for historians to illuminate some of these perspectives in depth. Yet it is important to note that the Vietnamese viewpoint is not homogenous and that there are further positions open for exploration.

The focus in the third chapter of this thesis was largely on the rhetoric of Ho Chi Minh, language intended to persuade and convince people in various camps of the masculinity of Vietnamese nationalists and the united manhood of the Vietnamese people. Further studies could explore the internal conflicts and competing masculinities within the nationalist struggle. Did Ho really believe in the united manhood that he proclaimed, or were there racial, regional, religious or ethnic barriers to his fraternal masculinity? Did he, like the Frenchmen he so passionately opposed, intend to limit manhood and the equality and liberty associated with it? Did he replace one gendered power relationship with another, equally restrictive in nature? By exploring the answers to these questions, subsequent research can further illuminate the complexities of the gendered language of empire in Indochina.

Another potential topic of exploration is the relationship between French views on Indochina and their perspective on French Africa. Did differences in religion, color, ethnicity, and cultural background affect the way Frenchmen imagined the colonial Other
and thus subsequently impact their reactions to decolonization in various parts of the Empire? Studies on British India have suggested that British colonizers painted Muslims in the colony as the masculine counterpart to effeminate Hindu subjects. Further research could examine the extent to which the portrait of the masculine Muslim carried over into the French Empire. Ultimately, this line of research can reveal the impact of imperialism in shaping the identities of those on either side of the colonial endeavor.
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