

Politicide in Cold War Cinema

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This paper explores the applicability of concepts from genocide and denialism scholarship to the analysis of two different subgenres of Cold War cinema. Specifically, this thesis maintains that the concept of politicide, defined as attempts to destroy adherents of a particular political ideology because of those political beliefs, can be effectively applied to the analysis of filmic representations of Cold War conflicts. The purpose of such analysis is to provide evidence of intent to commit politicide, the implementation of that intent and the denial of that intent all presented in American films of the Cold War era.

Using a case study approach, this research explores a sample of six films taken from two subgenres of Cold War film that were developed by the author. These are extermination films and whistleblower films. After selection of a sample of each of these types of films all were submitted to a detailed analysis to identify evidence of politicidal intent, politicidal actions and denial of such intent and actions within their representations. The results of the analyses revealed, uniformly, that evidence of politicidal intent, action and denialism were readily discernable in these examples of American Cold War cinema.

The conclusion of the research, therefore, is that analysis of American Cold War cinema through the lens of genocide scholarship provides historians with a new perspective on the etiology, events, and results of the Cold War.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Throughout the Cold War the United States government orchestrated a world-wide campaign of mass murder, resulting in hundreds of thousands, if not millions of deaths. The victims of this collective violence orchestrated by Washington were communists as well as others who, rightly or wrongly, were thought to be associated with the political left.¹ Planned in the same war rooms and halls of power, the violence directed at these groups was part of a global campaign united by a singular purpose. That purpose was threefold: to prevent the expansion of socialism in the global south, isolate the Soviet Union and preserve markets for US corporations. This goal was largely achieved, contributing not just to prevention of communist expansion but also to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar system of international relations which defined the Cold War. It cleared the way for America's rise as an uncontested global hegemon and to the ascent of the neoliberal order that it represents. As expressed by Vincent Bevins in the *The Jakarta Method*, American covert action in the global south brought forth a "monstrous international network of extermination ... which played a fundamental role in building the world we all live in today."²

At one level of analysis, the collective violence of the Cold War represents disparate episodes, each contingent upon a unique set of circumstances and embedded in its own historical context. However, the farther we become removed from the Cold War, the more clearly these acts of collective violence can be seen as

¹ Bevins, *The Jakarta Method*, 5-6.

² Bevins, *The Jakarta Method*, 2.

parts of the same transnational movement. Recent scholarship and the declassification of government documents through the Freedom of Information Act has added to our understanding of United States' complicity in extra-legal coups, dirty wars and atrocities during the years of the Cold War. Through the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other organs of state power, and in partnership with foreign governments and paramilitaries, the United States government perpetrated and abetted acts of collective violence in arenas of Cold War conflict around the world as part of a global policy to defeat communism however necessary wherever it was found.

How such events are presented to the American public has implications for their understanding of their country's history and their attitudes toward the national government. One of the ways in which such information is received by Americans is through the images that represent historic events on film. Although films are generally not intended to present historic material with perfect fidelity and are understood to take artistic license with the facts it is also true that film is sometimes used to present a false narrative of events, a narrative that is consistent with the filmmaker's or the producer's preferred narrative, even if that account greatly distorts the historic record. And, of course, there are situations in which the historic record itself is considered incidental to the story the movie tells and, therefore, assuring its veracity is of little consequence to the film maker. The results of these lapses from the truth may be inconsequential or they may permanently distort the public memory in important ways through the cinematic production of the political

imaginary.³ The purpose of this paper is to identify the existence and extent of historical distortions found in American Cold War cinema as it relates to American participation in, and denial of Cold War politicides.

To accomplish this objective the paper will analyze a set of Cold War era American films to determine the existence of denial and distortion of Cold War politicides in each of them. The analysis will also identify how, that is by what means and methods, the films produced and reproduced denialist reconstructions of history that could affect popular conceptions of the causes, events and results of the Cold War.

For the purposes of this research a sample of American films made during the Cold War (dated here as 1948-1991) which feature aspects of Cold War politicidal violence was gathered. I have organized these into two discrete categories. First, I will examine what is here termed *extermination cinema*, defined as films that prominently feature the mass killing of groups of people who are presented as the film's antagonists. The enemies in extermination movies specifically belong to real-world groups who, at the time of production, were regarded as enemies of the United States or a client state of the US. Made throughout the span of the Cold War, extermination films function as conventional action movies but also do the political work of dehumanization.

A second category of film to be discussed are films of the late Cold War that I will term *whistle-blower films*. These films, primarily made in the 1980s, convey counter-narratives that attempt to show the brutal reality of conditions in Cold War

³ Rogin, "Ronald Reagan, the Movie", 4-6.

killing fields. As a group, these films attempt to raise awareness of the plight of victims by featuring graphic violence with a starkly realistic tone and set within tragic narratives. The research will assess the extent to which these whistle-blower films explicitly and accurately represent the relationship between the violence which happened in these countries and American foreign policy.

After this introduction, Chapter 2 of the thesis will give an overview of the historical and legal conceptions of genocide and genocide denial and relate those concepts to this research. Chapter 3 will provide a brief history of American actions during the Cold War and its complicity in organized violence, atrocities, and genocide found in the historical record. This chapter will also review the nature and extent of American denialism with regard to its complicity in Cold War genocides. Chapter 4 will cover the relevant theory and historiography of American cinema as it relates to the Cold War and acts of organized violence. Chapter 5 will describe and analyze the films which have been selected as cases studies. Each film will have its plot described in brief and will be fully contextualized within its historical moment. The narrative, cinematography, casting choices and mise en scène will all be analyzed to determine the existence and extent of content related to genocide and genocide denial, using a classification scheme based upon the work of several genocide scholars. In Chapter 6, the conclusion, the results of the analysis of the case studies will be summarized, and the implications of the analysis will be probed.

Chapter 2: Genocide and Genocide Denialism

Section A: Genocide

The term genocide was first used in modern scholarly literature by Raphael Lemkin in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.⁴ The definition that Lemkin provided for the term was:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.⁵

Since Lemkin's seminal effort many scholars have added to a body of work that explores the concept of genocide and have studied genocidal events around the world. As several researchers have observed definitional debates dominate much of the existing literature⁶ and there are now many definitions of genocide. These definitions vary in terms of descriptions of perpetrators and victims and in the enumeration of types of genocidal acts⁷ but all share a common conceptual thread that the term always connotes: genocide involves organized attempts to eliminate a targeted group, who are the focus of genocidal acts solely because of

⁴ Dawson and Boynton, "Reconciling Complicity in Genocide", 242.

⁵ Nellans, "A Queer(er) Genocide Studies", 53-54.

⁶ Nellans, "A Queer(er) Genocide Studies", 60.

⁷ Charny, "A classification of denials of the Holocaust and other genocides", 12-26.

a shared characteristic.⁸

Although original scholarly interest in this subject arose primarily from the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust, the far broader possible applications of the concept were soon realized and genocide scholars, including Lemkin, who became part of a movement to have genocide codified as a crime in international law.⁹ This movement was successful. In 1948 genocide was identified as an independent crime in the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* developed by the United Nations. The convention states that:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group.
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The following acts shall be punishable:

- a. genocide
- b. conspiracy to commit genocide
- c. direct and public incitement to commit genocide
- d. attempt to commit genocide
- e. complicity in genocide¹⁰

As of 2018 the Convention had been ratified by 149 nations and has been accepted by the International Court of Justice as a standard element of general

⁸ Weitz and Hayden, "Comment: On the Meaning of Genocide", 415.

⁹ Eshet, *Totally Unofficial: Rafael Lemkin and the Genocide Convention*, 34-37.

¹⁰ Dawson and Boynton, "Reconciling Complicity in Genocide", 242-243.

international law.¹¹ Although there remains substantial disagreement among genocide scholars regarding the limitations the Convention placed on the types of groups identified as possible victims of genocide and the types of acts considered genocidal,¹² its imposition is still considered a landmark event in worldwide efforts to address intentional annihilation of targeted groups.

Having successfully gained acceptance of the concept of genocide, both in academia and under international law, genocide researchers and activists have more recently turned their attention to the issues of genocide remembrance and genocide prevention. These issues are considered to be related by most genocide scholars, with remembrance thought to be a deterrent to future genocides. This idea has been expressed by the anthropologist Alex Hinton, who said: “The well-worn phrase ‘lessons from the past’ is key. To combat genocide, we need to understand it -- what happened, how it happened, what the consequences were, and, critically, why more wasn’t done to prevent it.”¹³

As interest has turned to the prevention of genocide it has prompted scholars to pay particular attention to conditions or actions that have often historically presaged direct physical violence against targeted groups. Primary among these predictive occurrences is the initiation of a program of dehumanization of the potential victim class. What does dehumanization mean? Helen Fein, writing in 1990, defined genocidal dehumanization as “all those stereotypes, metaphors, and forms of defamation and symbolic degradation spread by large-scale

¹¹ United Nations, “Genocide”.

¹² Buckwald and Keith, *By Any Other Name*, 10-11.

¹³ UNESCO, “Critical thinking and learning about the past”.

propaganda operations that designate the victims as foreign and inferior—whether as sub- or non-human (as insects, parasites, germs, or viruses).¹⁴ Dehumanization, as observed by Mariot in his recent article on the role of dehumanization in mass killings, very frequently precedes genocidal events. He states, “It is very rare to encounter massacres that do not involve at least some minimal form of symbolic degradation of the enemy.”¹⁵

According to Mariot dehumanization often takes the form of comparing the targeted class to animals, particularly to animals that are considered repugnant or dangerous to humans. Hence the Nazis, in words and propagandistic images, referred to Jews variously as rats or snakes while the Hutu referred to the Tutsi as cockroaches in Rwanda and the American soldiers in the Philippines referred to Filipino insurgents as monkey men.

This language becomes a pervasive mode of expression in the perpetrating class, a part of their daily vocabulary, when referring to the targeted group.¹⁶ As the genocide progresses to more serious actions including forced segregation and even imprisonment of the targeted class, their less than human status is often symbolized by the shaving of heads, forced wearing of symbolic clothing or forced nakedness, removal of wedding rings and other personal possessions, tattooing and other forms of body disfigurement.¹⁷

These comments regarding depersonalization by genocide scholars make it clear that it is one of the key aspects of early genocide and suggest that is a

¹⁴ Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, 27.

¹⁵ Mariot, “On the Role of Dehumanization”, 105.

¹⁶ Mariot, “On the Role of Dehumanization”, 106.

¹⁷ Mariot, “On the Role of Dehumanization”, 106.

required element of any analysis of genocidal content in the media, including film.

An entire body of academic work has developed that suggests, describes and assesses use of the arts as tools in the remembrance of genocide. Much of this work uses the case study model and discusses specific attempts to use the arts to provoke or reinforce collective memory of particular genocidal events; for example, analyses of the intended and sometimes unintended effects on genocide remembrance and reconciliation of specific art exhibits such as the 2019 Venice Biennale¹⁸ or of particular films such as *Hotel Rwanda*.¹⁹

As demonstrated, however, by the comments of Sue Harper in her discussion of film and mass memory presented in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, some theorists have made much broader theoretical assertions regarding the use of cinema as a tool of remembrance:

Another attractive model is that this particular mass medium had appropriated to itself the function of society's mythologist. Film culture had come to operate as a fulcrum of the recent past... It had become the gatekeeper of mass memory. One way of reading popular film is that it is part of the nation talking to itself, explaining to its fellows (here the word is used advisedly) that which is unspeakable in everyday discussion.²⁰

Remembrance and reconstructions of genocide in the arts – in literature, painting, poetry, film – may portray only a singular interpretation, an accepted national mythology, of a genocidal event. Artistic representation may also, however, provide a venue for presentation of alternate remembrances, perhaps insurgent remembrances, of such events. This possibility is supported by John Hellmann in

¹⁸ Artnews.com, "Armenia's 2015 Venice Biennale Project".

¹⁹ Dokotum, "Re-Membering the Tutsi Genocide in Hotel Rwanda", 129.

²⁰ Harper, "Popular film, Popular Memory", 172-173.

his piece “The Vietnam Film and American Memory” when he points out that films such as the *Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket* conspicuously challenged the prevailing American myths about the Vietnam war at the time that they were made.²¹

It therefore appears true that, as Gregory Frame maintains in his article regarding filmic depictions of John F. Kennedy,²² the way films represent historical events cannot be assumed to reflect the historical record completely and accurately; the point of view of the film maker, the screen writer and the production company will certainly all play roles in shaping the story line that finally hits the screen. The message that the film conveys may reflect the prevailing national mythology about the events and people in the story or may, as Hellmann points out, present a different, culturally dissonant perspective on the genocidal events depicted.²³

This fact is important because, according to recent studies conducted by several different researchers, including a study by political scientist Michelle Pautz, movies may have the capacity to influence audience opinions about government, its institutions and its actions. Pautz, in a study of viewer responses to *Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, found that there was a statistically significant change in audience attitudes toward government, its institutions and its policies after viewing the films.²⁴ Pautz’s work is reinforced by findings from several additional researchers including studies conducted by Michelle A Mazur and Tara Emmers-

²¹ Hellmann, “The Vietnam Film and American Memory,” 185-187.

²² Frame, “The Myth of John F. Kennedy in Film and Television”, 21-22.

²³ Hellman, 177-179.

²⁴ Pautz, “Argo and Zero Dark Thirty: Film, Government, and Audiences”, 120.

Sommer, as well as the work of Matthew Alford.²⁵ To the extent that the body of evidence supporting Pautz's findings grows and measurable impact on public opinion based on film viewing can be confirmed, the extent to which filmic representations of genocide do not present the actual facts on record may have significant implications for genocide prevention efforts.

The possibility of media influence affecting knowledge of the historical record and, perhaps unintentionally, inciting additional genocidal violence, was also recognized recently by the United Nations when it released its *Plan of Action to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocities*. This document advises activists that they should monitor and attempt to influence presentations of atrocities in all media in order to foster ethical representations of these events that will "counter prejudices and false rumors" which incite additional violence.²⁶ The term "ethical representations" includes the conceptual elements of truth-telling, lack of distortion and lack of significant omissions of established facts on the historical record.

Section B: Genocide Denial

For many victims of genocidal acts, the pain of their victimization is exacerbated by attempts of perpetrators and the local, national and transnational communities of which they are a part to minimize or completely deny their experience. The internal dissonance that this creates can clearly be injurious to a victim's ability to come to terms with their personal losses and attempt to rebuild

²⁵ Alford, *Reel Power*, 170.

²⁶ United Nations, "Plan of Action to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocities", 26.

their lives. How can there be reconciliation and healing when the reality of a victim's abuse is not even recognized? So, we must answer the questions: What is genocide denial, what forms does it take and why does it occur?

Just as there are many different definitions of genocide with different shades of meaning, so denialism also has been defined and redefined by scholars over the past three generations. As is true with genocide itself, however, there is a common conceptual thread that runs through all of these definitions. That is that genocide denialism rejects the truth that there was an attempt to destroy a targeted group with a shared characteristic. This rejection may take different forms, as indicated in the appended Table which outlines some of the most common forms of denialism that have been identified in scholarly work of genocide scholars. Such methods include, of course, overt denial that the event actually occurred, but more commonly would depend upon reinterpretation, minimalization, distortion, omission and similar intellectual devices that allow the original event to be reconfigured as something other than genocide.

One of the most prolific writers in the arena of genocide is Israel Charny who edited of two-volume Encyclopedia of Genocide and was the executive director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem.²⁷ Charny, whose work is highlighted in the Table attached to this chapter, laid out in different pieces of his writing, more than twenty ways in which denialism can be operationalized. These ranged from overt denial of the occurrence to the convoluted mental gymnastics involved in transforming the perpetrators into the victims of

²⁷ Prevent Genocide International, "Prof. Israel W. Charny, PhD."

genocidal acts.²⁸

Another scholar in the area of genocide and remembrance is Rene Lemarchand. Lemarchand has centered his attention to the impact of what he terms “revisionism”. By this Lemarchand means using differing conceptual frameworks to obscure the reality that the event being analyzed resulted in the planned destruction of members of a group with a shared characteristic. Lemarchand maintains that, regardless of the conceptual frame of analysis being applied, such an event must always be understood first and foremost as a genocide.²⁹

According to Deborah Lipstadt this revisionism can sometimes take the form of a “yes, but” argument in which the deficits or inappropriate acts of an oppressed group are identified as a sufficient cause for a genocidal response. This can eventually lead to what Lemarchand refers to as “inverted discourse”³⁰ in which the role reversal between victims and perpetrators is complete.

It is important to understand that practicing denialism does not require that the denialist contend that a genocidal event never occurred, although some, like the Holocaust denier David Irving who disputes the very existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz³¹, may actually do so. Denial also occurs when deniers admit that an event actually occurred but contend that it was not calculated to lead to the demise of a targeted group. This form of denial was practiced during and after the mid-twentieth century Indonesian genocide when the government first indicated that the murder of a million of its own citizens couldn't have been a

²⁸ Charny, “A classification of denials of the Holocaust and other genocides”, 11-34.

²⁹ Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, 8.

³⁰ Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, 52-54.

³¹ Southern Poverty Law Center, “David Irving”.

genocide because murder of political groups, (Communist sympathizers in this case) was not defined as genocide by the United Nations³². The Indonesian government later added to that argument the fact that the numbers killed were far less than a million and thus did not meet some imagined minimum of deaths required to be considered a genocide.³³ Additionally, perpetrators may indicate that they themselves were the victims who had no alternative but to defend themselves; this is a frequent response made by the Turks to allegations of genocide against the Armenians during the “deportations” of ethnic Armenians from the Ottoman Empire in 1915.³⁴ Denial may also be practiced by subtler means such as misrepresentation of the causes or actual facts of genocidal events; this is alluded to by Garth Myers, Thomas Klak and Timothy Koehl in their article about the Rwandan genocide in which they challenge the western press for attributing the conflict solely to tribalism, thus avoiding exploration of western complicity in the event.³⁵

In her book *Denial of Violence* Fatima Gocek describes three modes of genocide denial; these are silence, secrecy, and subversion.³⁶ Silence is used, Gocek maintains, both by perpetrators and by victims as a method of denial. To explain the use of silence as a mechanism of denial by perpetrators Gocek applies the work of sociologist Malin Akerstorm, who defined “public silence” as silence “actively produced by those in power with the intent to limit the spread of information

³² Ungar and Adler, “Indonesia in the Global Context of Genocide”, 613.

³³ Ungar and Adler, “Indonesia in the Global Context of Genocide”, 613.

³⁴ Charny, “The Psychological Satisfaction of Denials”, 3.

³⁵ Myers et al, “The Inscription of Difference”, 42.

³⁶ Gocek, *Denial of Violence*, 22.

that will harm them, using the mechanism of preventing public access to such information through restrictive laws.”³⁷

Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot added to the understanding of the use of silence as a tool of denial by reflecting on when the silence may be invoked to deny genocidal events. These possible times are: moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).” Trouillot thus emphasizes that there are multiple junctures in the life of an event in which the state can and does use its ministerial authority to protect itself and suppress the truth of the historical record.³⁸

Secrecy is another mechanism used by perpetrators to deny genocidal events. This occurs, as Zerubavel argues, when the powerful control the scope of information others can access, as well as what they can pass on, leading to “various forms of forced blindness, deafness, and muteness.”³⁹ Limiting access to historical materials held in national archives is a clear example of the use of state power to maintain secrecy as is classifying current documents as “secret” or “top secret” to limit public review.⁴⁰

Practicing denial through subversion, Fatima Gocek suggests, involves perpetrators actually producing a literal or figurative text but do so by subverting what

³⁷ Gocek, *Denial of Violence*, 23.

³⁸ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

³⁹ Zerubavel, *The Elephant In The Room*, 4.

⁴⁰ Zerubavel, *The Elephant In The Room*, 34.

actually occurred and producing half-truths.⁴¹ Roy Baumeister and Stephen Hastings also address this issue, suggesting that denial of truth through subversion may occur through selective omissions, fabrications, exaggerations or embellishments, manipulation of facts to distort their relative importance, blaming the enemy or victim for your own genocidal acts, blaming circumstances as though they made your unfortunate act unavoidable or reviewing facts through conceptual frame that eliminates or minimizes the relevance of your actions.⁴²

Having reviewed the meanings of genocide and genocide denial attention can now be turned to the extent to which the United States engaged in genocidal activities carried out in service to its Cold War strategic imperatives.

Appendix A: Mechanisms of Genocide Denial

Name of Term	Description	Name of Author
Denial of the event	Not acknowledging that the genocide took place	Charny
Definitionism	Transforming the genocide into another kind of event such as "war"	Charny
Victims as victimizers	Portraying the victims as the perpetrators	Charny
Minimization	Insisting more victims were from the perpetrator's group or reducing counts of victims affected by genocidal acts	Charny
Reconstruction	Reinterpretation of genocidal events to deny genocidal intent	Charny
Denial of individual responsibility	"I was only following orders"	Charny
Genocidal terrorism	A readiness to attribute honorable meanings to genocidal killing,	Charny
Denial by non-perpetrators	In situations of historical, not recent, genocide subsequent generations from the perpetrator group deny its	Charny

⁴¹ Gocek, *Denial of Violence*, 28.

⁴² Baumeister and Hastings, *Distortions of Collective Memory*, 280-291.

	occurrence. Also refers to denial by individuals or governments whose interests are best served through genocide denial.	
Denial by group exclusion	Occurs when victim group is not covered by the current legal definitions of genocide.	Charny
Psychological or “innocent” denial	Practiced when recognition of the reality of genocide is so inconsistent with an accepted world view as to make its occurrence impossible to accept psychologically	Charny
Revisionism	“The imposition of a different analytical framework on the facts, in a seemingly scholarly way, which distorts the meaning of the data...”	Lemarchand
“Yes, but” denialism	Genocide deniers employ moral equivalency arguments, which make the claim that the crime of genocide is negated or rationalized by something the victimized group had done to the perpetrators	Lipstadt
“Inverted discourse”	Taken to its conclusion, the mythologies of denial can twist truth to the point that victims become culprits, and culprits become victims	Lemarchand
Misrepresentation of causes or facts	Denial may also be practiced by subtler means such as misrepresentation of the causes or actual facts of genocidal events	Myers,Klak and Koehl
Interpretive denial	Facts or historical events are given a different meaning	Parent
Silence	Silence is used both by perpetrators and by victims as a method of denial.	Gocek
Secrecy	The restriction of information to a small set of relevant actors with state censorship denying information to others	Gocek
Subversion	Involves perpetrators actually producing a literal or figurative text but do so by subverting what actually occurred and producing half-truths.	Gocek
Public silence	Silence “actively produced by those in power with the intent to limit the spread of information that will harm them,	Akerstorm

	using the mechanism of preventing public access to such information through restrictive laws.”	
Silence at four times	The use of silence as a tool of denial of genocidal events. The possible times are: moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).”	Trouillot (p.26)
Secrecy	When the powerful control the scope of information others can access, as well as what they can pass on, leading to “various forms of forced blindness, deafness, and muteness.” Limiting access to historical materials held in national archives is a clear example of the use of state power to maintain secrecy as is classifying current documents as “secret” or “top secret” to limit public review.	Zerubavel
Selective Omission	Probably the easiest and most obvious way to distort collective memory involves the selective omission of disagreeable facts. Events that make one’s social group look bad can often be ignored or expunged from its memory. To the extent that a group can succeed in deleting the bad side of its past, what remains will be mostly positive, and this will provide a good foundation for a positive collective self-image.	Baumeister and Hastings
Fabrication.	The complement to a strategy of denying something that did happen is to affirm something that did not—in other words, to invent a false memory. It seems that by and large outright fabrication of collective memory is rare. The implication may be that collective	Baumeister and Hastings

	<p>memories are to some extent constrained by the facts. Facts may be deleted, altered, shaded, reinterpreted, exaggerated, and placed in favorable contexts, but wholesale fabrication seems to lie beyond what most groups can accomplish.</p>	
Exaggeration and Embellishment.	<p>It is rare and difficult to fabricate a wholly spurious group memory, but it is relatively easy and common to take some shreds of historical truth and blow them up into a major, important myth for the group. Social groups exaggerate the importance and positivity of the deeds of their ancestors</p>	Baumeister and Hastings
Linking Versus Detaching.	<p>Distorting collective memory by manipulating associations. Often events are the products of multiple causes. By focusing on one cause and ignoring the others, one can severely bias an interpretation without actually altering the facts. Thus, this technique has the advantage of being strongly rooted in the truth (and therefore being relatively impervious to disconfirmation, unlike fabrication would be).</p>	Baumeister and Hastings
Blaming the Enemy	<p>Focusing on actual or presumptive misdeeds by one's enemies or opponents, to the extent that even one's own misdeeds can be minimized as mere responses to the enemy. The ultimate form of this allows one to attribute one's own misdeeds to one's enemies. ... Another version of this strategy involves constructing a view about what the enemy was going to do. Thus, one's own aggression can be perceived as a necessary means of preventing disaster. The distortion of collective memory thus takes the form of transforming an educated</p>	Baumeister and Hastings

	guess about an eventual conflict into an imminent reality	
Blaming Circumstances.	Shifting the blame off oneself by pointing to external circumstances. One's own responsibility for the suffering of others can thereby be minimized.	Baumeister and Hastings
Contextual Framing:	Most major historical events involve a highly complex web of causes, consequences, and corollaries. By choosing which causal nexus to emphasize, people can cast an event in a particular context that can make the memory serve the group's self-image.	Baumeister and Hastings

Chapter 3: US Complicity in Cold War Politicide

As indicated in the preceding section there has been a prolonged academic debate regarding the inclusion and exclusion of specific groups as potential targets of genocide. Responding to both this debate as well as to historic events of the mid to late twentieth century scholars such as, Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr, Gary Uzonyi, Matthew Krain and Petra Hendrickson have all suggested that the concept of genocide can validly be applied to groups which share a particular political ideology and are subject to persecution, with the goal of elimination, based upon their adherence to that politics.⁴³ Although the term *politicide* has, like the term *genocide* before it, been given various overlapping shades of meaning, perhaps the definition provided by Barabara Harff is the most applicable to the current research. Harff and Gunn define *politicide* variously as “political mass

⁴³ Harff and Gurr, “Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides”, 359-360.; Krain, “State-Sponsored Mass Murder”, 331; Uzonyi, “Interstate Rivalry, Genocide, and Politicide,” 476.

murder” and as the killing of groups of people who are targeted not because of shared ethnic or communal traits (the types of groups covered by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide), but because of “their hierarchical position or political opposition to the governing regime and dominant groups.”⁴⁴

The Cold War’s ideologically polarized political environment was fertile ground for the practice of politicide. In December 1974 Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State, explained why this struggle was vital in a speech that starkly laid out the presumed stakes:

The basic problem in our relation with the Soviet Union is the emergence of the Soviet Union into true superpower status. That fact has become evident only in the 1970's. As late as the Cuban missile crisis, the disparity in strategic power between the United States and the Soviet Union was overwhelming in our favor.

In the 70's and 80's the Soviet Union will have achieved and is on the road to achieving effective strategic equality, which means that whoever may be ahead in the damage they can inflict on the other, the damage to the other in a general nuclear war will be of a catastrophic nature.⁴⁵

Clearly Kissinger, who directly shaped the foreign policy of the United States for more than a decade, and himself is complicit in crimes against humanity,⁴⁶ believed that the Cold War was a winner-take-all conflict that the United States could not afford to lose. And, of course, he was not alone in that opinion. The Cold War was often framed in apocalyptic and existential terms, creating and utilizing a “politics of fear.”⁴⁷ Adding to national anxiety over this issue was increasing concern during the Cold War era, consistently conveyed to national pollsters

⁴⁴ Harff and Gurr, “Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides”, 359-360.

⁴⁵ New York Times, “Kissinger Remarks on Angola”.

⁴⁶ Scharf, “Statesman or War Criminal?”, 299.

⁴⁷ McQueen, “Salutary Fear? Hans Morgenthau and the Politics of Existential Crisis,” 78.

during the 1970s and early 1980s, that the power of the Soviet Union was increasing while the power of the United States was on the decline.⁴⁸ It was in this type of political environment, with leaders articulating that we were in a zero sum game with the Soviet Union that proxy wars played out around the world.

According to research conducted by Petra Hendrickson, this type of group annihilation was more common during the Cold War than after it. She maintains that this is not unexpected, as the demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the conclusion of the proxy wars between the USSR and the USA and left the United States, albeit briefly, in a hegemonic position as the world's single superpower, thus eliminating the cause of the conflict. Hendrickson's assertion regarding U.S. dominance in international affairs after the Cold War is supported by Yeisley who asserts that "the international system has assumed a unipolar orientation since 1991, with the United States the sole remaining "superpower".⁴⁹ Hendrickson maintains there has been not only a decrease in interstate conflicts but a decrease in intrastate warfare as well, with an accompanying decrease in the severity of the intrastate conflicts that have occurred. These changes, the author suggests, have resulted from a decrease in ideological conflict and the influence of an increasingly globalized economy that has had a dampening effect on state violence. Hendrickson also asserts that "During the Cold War, right-wing governments acted with the full support and often cooperation of the United States in quashing leftist movements; by the 1990s, that dynamic had shifted and many long-running conflicts that had included genocidal/politicial violence ended

⁴⁸ Smith, "The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism." 278.

⁴⁹ Yeisley, "Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China", 77.

absent continued U.S. support.”⁵⁰

During the Cold War multiple well documented attempts at the annihilation of internal groups espousing different political affiliations not consistent with that of the state occurred. Among the most fully verified of these are politicides in Indonesia, South Korea, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cambodia, China and Laos. In two of these, Vietnam and South Korea, the United States was involved in a protracted ground war, while in others, such as Indonesia and El Salvador, the violence was primarily carried out by proxy partners with US complicity behind the scenes.

If Cold War politicide is a documented fact, then the question of if and to what extent the United States was involved in these Cold War events is certainly a reasonable one. As a major actor in the bipolar politics of that era the United States was involved in a set of “proxy wars”, defined by Yeisley as “great-power hostility expressed through client states and ...superpower use of these states to pursue strategic and ideological goals within the confines of nuclear deterrent postures extant during the Cold War.”⁵¹ These proxy wars typically involved client states in which government forces, supported by one of the two super-powers, and insurgent forces, supported by the other super power, carried out the ideological battle between communism and capitalism on battlefields around the world.⁵² These proxy wars offered several clear advantages to the disputing super powers: first, the danger of nuclear war could be mitigated since the proxy

⁵⁰ Hendrickson, ““Old” and “New” Mass Killing?”, 5.

⁵¹ Yeisley, “Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China”, 77.

⁵² Yeisley, “Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China”, 77.

nations typically did not have nuclear arsenals⁵³; second, the support that the combatants received was far less expensive than the Soviet Union and the United States conducting the war themselves⁵⁴; and, finally, and most importantly, the tools and techniques of proxy warfare offered the super powers the benefit of plausible deniability since much of that support could and did occur off the public record.⁵⁵

Yeisley notes that “dozens” of these proxy wars between the USSR and the USA occurred during the Cold War and that support from the patron super powers to their client states included cash transfers, provision of weapons/technology, and advisory or combat support.⁵⁶ Similarly, O’Rourke estimated that the United States government attempted to extralegally change the governments of other countries seventy-two times during the Cold War and that of these attempts only six involved overt military action with the remaining sixty-six interventions involving support provided for coups in other countries through covert actions. This support, according to O’Rourke, included propaganda distribution, financing, equipping, and training forces aligned with Washington.⁵⁷

Thus, historical scholarship now suggests that the dominant Cold War political belief that all communist movements were under the control of the Soviet Union and therefore dangerous to the United States, when combined with the United States’ government’s strategic preference for covert action as the means for

⁵³ Yeisley, “Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China”, 77.

⁵⁴ Byman, “Why engage in proxy war? A state’s perspective”.

⁵⁵ Kim, “U.S. Covert Action in Indonesia in the 1960s” 63.

⁵⁶ Yeisley, “Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China”, 79.

⁵⁷ O’Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 3-17.

containing communism, fostered the development of alliances with indigenous actors friendly to the United States who shared U.S. antipathy to communists in their countries. It was through these coalitions that the United States committed, as Haas terms it, “genocide by proxy”⁵⁸, supporting the “civil war, domestic instability and mass killing” reported by O’Rourke as the frequent result of such alliances.⁵⁹

If we accept the premise that proxy wars were a significant element of Cold War aggression between the United States and the Soviet Union, then inquiry into the strategies and techniques that the United States sanctioned for use by its proxy states, or engaged in on their behalf, is a valid arena for inquiry. What was the United States willing to do, through its client states during these proxy conflicts, to win its existential battle with the Soviet Union? Here the historical record is becoming clearer as documents once withheld from public scrutiny are being made available for review and as witnesses, no longer fearing retribution, come forward.

In whatever part of the world we scrutinize the answer, based on documentary evidence and personal testimony, is that in the name of “democracy” the United States was willing to, directly or through its proxies, engage in acts that meet the definition of complicity in genocide established in international law. Examples of such politicides, targeting groups that were either socialist, communist or perceived to be so by US-backed interests in Angola, Guatemala and

⁵⁸ Haas, *Genocide by Proxy: Cambodian Pawn on a Superpower Chessboard*, 3-17.

⁵⁹ O’Rourke, “The U.S. Tried to Change Other Countries’ Governments 72 Times During the Cold War.”

Indonesia will be detailed in the following sections. These examples were selected to provide a representative cross section of nations from diverse parts of the world in order to confirm the geographic and temporal scope of US complicity in Cold War politicide.

A. Angola

Angola is a country of 32,000,000 people located on the western coast of sub-Saharan Africa. A colony of Portugal for almost 300 years, Angola was prized by its colonialist masters as a prolific trove of natural resources with which to support the sometimes flagging economy of the imperial core. These valuables resources included petroleum, uranium, diamonds and a host of other strategically valuable products.⁶⁰ As the post-World War II nationalist movements swept across Africa, Angola developed a domestic movement seeking independence from Portugal. This movement was comprised of several different organizations with differing political philosophies including the Marxist -Leninist MPLA (The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and the capitalism-oriented UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).⁶¹ These organizations were in open rebellion from the Portuguese government as early as the mid-1960s but had not made progress in achieving their goal of independence until a largely unexpected event changed the course of Angolan history.

On April 25, 1974, there was a coup against the authoritarian *Estado Novo* government of Portugal. The incoming democratic government quickly

⁶⁰ Thornton and Clarence-Smith, "Angola".

⁶¹ Sahistory.org, "The Angolan Civil War (1975-2002): A Brief History".

announced that negotiations would begin immediately to transfer control of Angola to its own people. A year later in November 1975 elections were held in Angola and the Marxist-Leninist MPLA was victorious against the candidates backed by the capitalist UNITA.⁶² This was when the civil war in Angola began. Angola was too rich a plum to be allowed to fall into alliance with the international communism without a struggle. The United States and its proxy ally, the apartheid government of South Africa, began courting Jonas Savimbi, the ambitious and charismatic leader of UNITA with offers of financial and technological support. Savimbi had vowed to carry on UNITA's struggle for control of Angola despite the fact that there had been an internationally observed election of which the MPLA had been declared the valid winner.⁶³

Until 1988 South Africa intermittently sent government troops to invade Angola in support of UNITA's assaults; South Africa also sent mercenaries, arms, and technical advisors during the entire 1975-1988 period.⁶⁴ For the South Africans the struggle in Angola assumed life and death proportions, as the apartheid government knew that the Marxist MPLA, like other socialist governments in southern Africa, would not institute apartheid in their nations and would fight against its continuation in South Africa. It was an interesting melding of US and South African anti-communist Cold War interests, with the South African fear of communism based as much on their racist social policies as their capitalist economic system.⁶⁵

⁶² Sahistory.org, "The Angolan Civil War (1975-2002): A Brief History".

⁶³ Minter, "The US and the War in Angola", 136-137.

⁶⁴ Sahistory.org, "The Angolan Civil War (1975-2002): A Brief History".

⁶⁵ Onslow, *The Cold War in Southern Africa*, 40-43.

Into this already heated transnational situation then stepped Fidel Castro, the Cuban people and to a lesser extent the government of the Soviet Union. Aware of US and South African interference in Angola Fidel Castro, in what he expressed to be “part of the world revolutionary movement”⁶⁶ sent troops and arms to Angola to support its socialist government. In all, more than 500,000 Cubans served in Angola over an almost twenty-year period and 10,000 of them died there.⁶⁷ Castro’s action, taken without Soviet agreement, sparked an out and out proxy war in Angola. Fear of the possibility of a new, socialist African continent was growing in the U.S. and the prevailing political environment supported the USA doing whatever it could to support Savimbi. Not only did the US not want communism to pervade Africa it also wanted to prevent the loss of much-desired resources such as petroleum, uranium, and industrial-use diamonds. U.S. corporate interests already had sizeable investments in Angola and did not want to see its industries nationalized and their investments lost.⁶⁸ All the Cold War motivation needed was present; the United States sent arms, advisors and funds to Savimbi and manufactured the landmines which were buried throughout Angola, as many as 14,000,000 of which still remain undetonated.⁶⁹

The war was a merciless event. Entire villages were killed solely because they were MPLA supporters; children were abducted and forced to become child soldiers; thousands of Angolans suffered mine-related amputations; women were raped and left to die. More than 500,000 Angolans died during the civil war and

⁶⁶ Castro, “We shall defend Angola and Africa!”, December, 1975.

⁶⁷ George, The Cuban intervention in Angola, 1.

⁶⁸ Houser, “the Angolan Situation and American Involvement”, 2

⁶⁹ Khamis, “Facts about Landmines”.

another 80,000 are estimated to have been maimed by land mines. Four and a half million people were permanently displaced from their ancestral homelands. Children today, a generation after the war's conclusion, still dig up or step on mines every week, adding their numbers to the dead and maimed because of this Cold War conflict.⁷⁰

US government records confirm that Savimbi's troops were armed and trained by the United States. There is proof, some of it in the mines still being unearthed, that most of the mines UNITA used came from the United States. There is no longer any room for doubt; the United States instigated, aided and abetted the civil war in Angola. It did so to preempt, not respond to, possible military incursion by communist states, to destroy the Marxist-Leninist government of Angola and to protect the interests of U.S. corporations. The victim groups targeted by UNITA were all supporters of the Marxist-Leninist MPLA and shared no other characteristic. UNITA's actions, aided and abetted by the United States government, present a textbook case of politicide. But perhaps this was a singular event, an anomaly in US foreign policy. To test this hypothesis US involvement in Cold War Indonesia will now be reviewed.

B. Indonesia

Indonesia is an island nation in southeast Asia. Its population of 270,000,000 people makes it the fourth most populous nation on earth and its location at the juncture of the Indian and Pacific Oceans has given it a history of repeated naval

⁷⁰ World Peace Organization, "Angola: Civil War".

invasions.⁷¹ European colonization of the islands of Indonesia began with Portuguese control, but soon the Portuguese were supplanted by the Dutch who ruled Indonesia from the seventeenth century until the middle of the twentieth. During most of the colonial period Indonesia was largely an agricultural and mining colony, providing minerals and agricultural products for European corporate interests.⁷²

There was frequent political unrest in Indonesia during the early part of the twentieth century with rebellions against the Dutch were put down several times. Soon after the end of World War II the Dutch were finally forced to bow to international opinion and allow the Indonesians their independence. One of the nationalist leaders of the late colonial period, Sukarno, declared Indonesia's freedom on August 17, 1945 and became the new country's first president.⁷³

During the early years of Sukarno's rule there were frequent rebellions. One of these occurred after the 1955 national elections in which the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) made a surprisingly strong showing. In Sumatra, one of Indonesia's component islands, anti-communist military and political leaders rebelled, refusing to accept the communist electoral victory, and received support from the United States, embittering the Sukarno regime. Later Sukarno nationalized several key industries, injuring U.S. corporate interests.⁷⁴ In 1956 Sukarno publicly supported the participation of the Indonesian Communist Party in the government

⁷¹ Minter, "The US and the War in Angola", 136-137.

⁷² Leinbach, et al, "Indonesia".

⁷³ Leinbach, et al, "Indonesia".

⁷⁴ Murphy, "US Rapprochement with Indonesia: From Problem State to Partner", 365.

because, he said, of the numbers of Indonesians the Party represented.⁷⁵ As an academic observer reported, Sukarno's rapprochement with the communists was not lost on western powers who viewed this development with alarm and interpreted it as a potential communist stepping-stone incursion into southeast Asia.⁷⁶ American anxieties did not diminish, for by 1965 the PKI became the world's "largest non-ruling Communist Party" and Indonesia became "the largest recipient of Soviet aid outside of the communist bloc".⁷⁷ The general Cold War world environment, the growing proxy war in Vietnam and Sukarno's perceived unpredictability and insolence, exemplified by his statement "The U.S. can go to hell with its aid"⁷⁸ created conditions ripe for extralegal U.S. intervention.

That time came in 1965 when a group of military officers, known as the 30th of September Movement, kidnapped, and killed six generals of a conservative faction, indicating that their motivation was to protect Sukarno from a rightist plot with CIA support. The conservative wing of the military blamed the PKI for this event and, although the actual planners of the event are still today uncertain, used it as an opportunity to rid itself, once and for all, of the PKI. The Indonesian military used the excuse the abductions and murders provided to hunt down, arrest and summarily execute hundreds of thousands, perhaps as many as a million, Indonesians who were either members of the PKI or thought to be PKI supporters.⁷⁹ This mass killing continued for two months. U.S. government

⁷⁵ Palmier, "Sukarno, the Nationalist", 112.

⁷⁶ Palmier, "Sukarno, the Nationalist", 112-118.

⁷⁷ Murphy, "US Rapprochement with Indonesia: From Problem State to Partner", 365.

⁷⁸ Murphy, "US Rapprochement with Indonesia: From Problem State to Partner", 36,

⁷⁹ McDonald, "Indonesia, 30 September, 1965: the mystery continues"

documents of the period reveal that the United States State Department and the CIA were aware that a genocide was underway but did nothing to stop it. In fact, the military killers used radio and transport equipment provided by the U.S. and many of their officers had been trained by the United States. Most alarmingly recently released State Department documents and Embassy staff interviews suggest that the U.S. Embassy provided the Indonesian police and military with “kill” lists of suspected PKI members, many of whom were later executed.⁸⁰

A general friendly to the west named Suharto soon took control of the government. Sukarno was put on house arrest until his death in 1970 and Suharto became the country’s president. He quickly established foreign and domestic policy agendas that were consistent with U.S. policy interests. These included the 1975 invasion of East Timor, the unseating of its new, post-colonial socialist government and a subsequent fourteen-year occupation that resulted in the murder of at least 100,000 of East Timor’s people.⁸¹

So, in the case of Indonesia, we see that the United States again, as admitted in its own documents and by its own officials, aided, abetted and encouraged the mass murder of communists and communist sympathizers because of their political affiliation. As many as a million Indonesians died in yet another politicide with the active collaboration of the United States government to meet the U. S’s Cold War objective of eliminating communism as an international threat. Would countries in our own hemisphere be treated any differently by the United States? Or

⁸⁰ Bevins, “What the United States Did in Indonesia”.

⁸¹ Robinson, “East Timor Ten Years On: Legacies of Violence.”, 1008.

would they too be of interest only as pawns in the U.S.'s struggle with the Soviets? The history of the civil war in Guatemala answers that question.

C. Guatemala

Guatemala, located in Central America, is a country of 17,000,000 people with a population that is approximately 56% mestizo and 42% of Mayan ancestry.⁸² Originally colonized by the Spanish, Guatemala first became an independent country in 1821. Its political history since independence has been one of frequent unrest, revolution and ethnic violence. The lack of political stability has been complicit in the economic malaise and poverty from which the country endemically suffers.

Adding to Guatemala's heavy burden of domestic problems has been the chronic interference of a single United States corporation in the country's internal affairs. In the late nineteenth century, the United Fruit Company began its long relationship with the Guatemalan government. United Fruit, a company now known as Chiquita Brands International, was in the fruit business, largely growing and distributing bananas. The company already had extensive holdings in Honduras and Costa Rica when it set its sights on Guatemala in 1900. The president of Guatemala at the time, Manuel Estrada Cabrera, signed contracts with United Fruit giving it control of much of the country's rail system and eventually management of the nation's postal delivery system.⁸³ Soon United Fruit controlled huge swaths of land granted to it by the government, growing to a half million acres by

⁸² Horst, "Guatemala".

⁸³ Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, 54

the beginning of the great Depression and making United Fruit the largest landholder in Guatemala. Farmers were forced off their land as a result of these government land grants and this, in turn, contributed to the unrelenting poverty of the Guatemalan people. Poverty in Guatemala was also exacerbated by United Fruit's exploitative labor policies and irresponsible environmental management. Guatemala, like other countries in Central America became known as a "banana republic" because of the level of economic and political control wielded by United Fruit.⁸⁴

In the 1940s and 1950s reform governments elected in Guatemala attempted to address national poverty through a land redistribution program that would give uncultivated land to small farmers. This development was alarming to United Fruit which needed an economically dependent workforce without alternatives to accepting the conditions of employment it offered and which would have had to give up uncultivated land that it was holding. It is now well-established that United Fruit went to the Truman and then Eisenhower administrations describing the government of Guatemala as communist and offering the land redistribution program as evidence. In response the United States government, through the CIA, funded and supervised a coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán and installed a military government more congenial to United Fruit.⁸⁵ This naked display of U.S. power set off another era of revolution in Guatemala, a revolution that went on for thirty-six years.

⁸⁴ Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, 5, 43-58

⁸⁵ Gordon, "A Case History of U.S. Subversion: Guatemala 1954".

During the long civil war the United States continued to support a chain of military leaders whose policies were anti-communist and pro-U.S. interests. During the war hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan communists, labor leaders, intellectuals and those suspected of communist sympathies were “disappeared”, i.e. abducted, tortured and murdered.⁸⁶ Many of the Guatemalan police and military who conducted interrogations and torture were trained at the Guatemalan police academy funded by the U.S. and U.S. military advisors provided guidance to Guatemalan army units seeking rebels in the Mayan highlands. The Guatemalan authorities were also given many millions of dollars in financial support and there is evidence that U.S. Embassy staff set up the safehouse that was used as a headquarters for extralegal police and military operations.

The Mayan community, in particular, was devastated during this period because they were viewed as pro-communist and, hence, targeted for destruction. Hundreds of Mayan villages were razed and many thousands of Mayans were murdered. Others were forcibly relocated to reeducation areas established by the government. After the war ended in 1996 a United Nations-backed truth commission found that the Mayans had been systematically targeted for elimination in a campaign that included “bombing villages and attacking fleeing residents; impaling victims; burning people alive; severing limbs; throwing children into pits filled with bodies and killing them; disemboweling civilians and slashing open the wombs of pregnant women.”⁸⁷ The commission also found that U.S. military

⁸⁶ Farah, “Papers Show U.S. Role in Guatemalan Abuses”.

⁸⁷ McDonnell, *Los Angeles Times*, “Guatemala’s civil war devastated the country’s indigenous Maya communities”.

assistance to Guatemala had a “significant bearing on human rights violations during the armed confrontation.”⁸⁸

D. Summary of Findings from Case Studies

Now the pattern of United States involvement in Cold War politicides becomes incontrovertible. In all three cases reviewed - Angola, Indonesia, and Guatemala - the United States played a crucial, often instigating, role in internal clashes between pro-communist and anti-communist forces solely because they were defined as conflicts between the reigning superpower ideologies and hence properly part of the overarching bipolar political controversy of the era. In all three cases hundreds of thousands of people died solely because of their political affiliation. There is documentation from government records, as well as first-hand witnesses to these events, to prove this. Arms were provided, training was given, millions of dollars of financing were provided, mercenaries were obtained, and U.S. military advisors were on the ground in each of these intrastate Cold War conflicts.

Having established the facts of the historical record with regard to U.S. complicity in Cold War politicides we will now briefly address the question of why the United States attempts to deny these chapters of American history.

E. Rationale for U.S. Denialism

When considering the practice of genocide denial whether by an individual, group or nation there are two basic questions to be answered. These are: Why is

⁸⁸ McDonnell, *Los Angeles Times*, “Guatemala’s civil war devastated the country’s indigenous Maya communities”.

the genocide denied and how is the genocide denied? Knowing this information then informs subsequent efforts to identify evidence of genocide denial in the existing historical record, in the utterances of our leaders and in the media and arts that describe incidents of mass murder and destruction of specific groups.

With regard to why genocide is denied there are a range of responses from the perspectives of academic disciplines as diverse as psychology, political science, and law. Herbert Hirsch in his book *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* (1995) contends that the same psychological rationales for denialism can be seen at the micro (individual) and macro (national) levels and that both people and states also use the same denial mechanisms.⁸⁹ These mechanisms, Hirsch maintains, are: denial of the event itself, denial of complicity, the shifting of blame, rationalization and relativization.⁹⁰ From the psychological perspective denial of genocide can be as simple and seemingly rational as responding to your own perceived self-interests; as noted by Israel Charny these perceived self-interests can cause people who are not personally sadists or bigots and didn't participate in genocidal acts themselves to deny that a genocide happened because that is the most expedient way to maintain social position, avoid psychological conflict or prevent political turmoil. Other psychological rationales for denialism include, of course, avoidance of shame and guilt.⁹¹ As Parent describes it, "denial serves to numb, enables avoidance of the unthinkable or protects the psyche by blocking out awareness of cruelty and extreme horrors committed by some

⁸⁹ Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life*, 31.

⁹⁰ Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life*, 31.

⁹¹ Charny, "The Psychological Satisfaction of Denials of The Holocaust or Other Genocides by Non-Extremists or Bigots, and Even by Known Scholars" 4 .

towards others, especially when members of one's in-group are identified as mass murderers."⁹²

Political science also provides a rationale for denial of genocide by political entities or nation-states. This sometimes occurs, we are told by Genevieve Parent, to avoid potential responsibility to take action to address the genocidal event. States often utilize what Parent terms "interpretative denial", in which facts or historical events are given a different meaning.⁹³ This form of denial is often used by political actors because they are aware that recognizing a particular event or set of events as a genocide may give their country an obligation under international law to intervene in these situations, this is particularly true if the nation involved was a signatory to the international Genocide Convention, which requires signers to enforce the Convention's prohibition against genocidal acts.⁹⁴

The existence of alliances that are considered vital to national security or meeting important national objectives is another political reason that countries such as the United States may deny that genocide has occurred. For example, many scholars maintain that this motivation was a primary reason for the United States' long-standing refusal, only recently changed, to recognize the forced "expatriation" of the Armenians from the Ottoman Empire in 1915 as a genocide. As Turkey, the descendant state of the Ottoman Empire, became important to US security as a buffer state between Europe, the Middle East and the Soviet Union and the site of two strategically important US military bases, strategic national

⁹² Parent, "Identifying Factors Promoting or Obstructing Healing and Reconciliation" 42.

⁹³ Parent, "Identifying Factors Promoting or Obstructing Healing and Reconciliation" 42.

⁹⁴ Parent, "Identifying Factors Promoting or Obstructing Healing and Reconciliation" 42.

interests trumped international justice for many years, causing the United States to deny through silence the reality of the Armenian genocide.⁹⁵

The discipline of law also adds to our understanding of why the United States government would deny the existence of a genocide. Since the 1948 passage of the Genocide Convention by the United Nations and subsequent development of the International Criminal Court in 2002 the international community has developed a body of international law that supports both the prosecution of political leaders who ordered genocides and restitution to victims of genocide and their families for loss of real property and items of cultural value stolen by perpetrators.⁹⁶ The United States, is, however, one of the 150 national signatories to the Genocide Convention and as such has bound itself to abide by its requirements. Signatory countries and their leaders can be tried in the International Criminal Court at the Hague (ICC) if they violate the Convention's precepts. The ICC investigates and, tries individuals "charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression."⁹⁷ The looming threat of international prosecution or causing another country to undergo such prosecution, as explained by Buchwald and Keith, has made it more difficult for nations to "...determine when to use the word. This complexity stems from the combination of legal and moral considerations that simultaneously inform the decision to make a statement that genocide has been committed."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Attallah, "Choosing Silence: The United States, Turkey and The Armenian Genocide", 77.

⁹⁶ SáCouto and Cleary. "The Case-Based Reparations Scheme at the International Criminal Court", 13-15.

⁹⁷ International Criminal Court, "About the Court".

⁹⁸ Buchwald and Keith, "By Any Other Name", 5-6.

These legal considerations were, of course, more difficult for the United States during the Cold War when the US was itself complicit in genocidal events. According to Buchwald and Keith,

“Throughout the Cold War period, there are few indications—at least in publicly available records—of extensive legal and factual analysis of whether the atrocities fell within the legal definition of genocide and bureaucratic “oversight” of use of the term seems to have been limited [by the US]. As the case studies show, for most of this period, those advocating for a stronger US government response to unfolding atrocities rarely pressed for public acknowledgments that genocide had occurred as a means to pressure the US government to take stronger actions. This began to change toward the end of this period”⁹⁹

In fact, the United States did not even become a party to the Genocide Convention until 1988 because there was serious Congressional opposition to the Convention during the Cold War, during a period in which many legislators felt the nation needed a free hand to do whatever was necessary to protect the country from the communist threat. Eventually as Cold War tensions receded as Glasnost began, the Senate saw the wisdom of becoming a signatory to the Convention.¹⁰⁰

Adding to this complex decision as to whether or not to suggest that another nation, or to admit that one’s own nation, has been involved in genocide or crimes against humanity is the financial issue of being required to make restitution for quantifiable losses sustained by victims during a genocide. As Ana Filipa Vrdoljak points out in her article “Genocide and Restitution: Ensuring Each Group’s Contribution to Humanity”, international law calls for the return of or

⁹⁹ Buchwald and Keith, “By Any Other Name”, 6.

¹⁰⁰ United States Senate, “William Proxmire and the Genocide Treaty”; Atlas, “After 40 Years, U.S. Will Join UN Treaty Outlawing Genocide”.

restitution for the loss of property wrongfully confiscated during time of armed conflict.¹⁰¹ This is done to prevent or end the loss of cultural patrimony that often is an element of genocidal action against a targeted group and also to return to the members of that group assets that may provide support needed to assure their continued existence. A second purpose of restitution under international law, according to Vrdoljak, is to contribute to the prosecution of perpetrators, by confirming that illegal seizure of property is an international “wrongful act.”¹⁰² The international community’s response to the seizure of property is thus intended to serve preventive as well as restorative purposes. This preventive aspect of restitution is why the international laws in question do not place time limits on claims that can be made nor do they absolve “third party states” which were complicit in, if not responsible for, the illegal seizures of property. After World War II the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) defined confiscation of property as a fundamental component of what was termed “denationalization.” The definition of this concept is pertinent to the United States’ historic treatment of the many groups living both within it and outside its borders. That definition is, in part:

“...policies aimed at the destruction of the collective identity of the targeted group and the imposition of the perpetrators’ identity through assimilatory policies. Acts defined as denationalization included the deprivation of cultural and social rights like the closure of existing schools and universities and their replacement by those of the perpetrator, the removal of children and their education in the perpetrator’s language and religion, banning the use of the national language in all public places and in printed material

¹⁰¹ Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 17-18.

¹⁰² Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 18.

and books, removal of national symbols and names, both personal and geographic, systematic dissolution of regional differences.”¹⁰³

When the 1948 Genocide Convention was being debated at the United Nations Rafael Lemkin advocated for provisions including acts of cultural genocide similar to those identified in the UNWCC’s preexisting definition of denationalization but in the end, there was little support for broadening the Convention’s language beyond the single cultural issue of physical removal of children. Vrdoljak maintains that this lack of interest in cultural genocide was “because of Cold War bipolarity and the fear of some states of possible international scrutiny of their domestic policies concerning minorities.”¹⁰⁴

The end of the Cold War led to increased willingness to apply international genocide laws. With the superpowers no longer involved on a propaganda battle that had included mutual accusations of genocide there was again an international appetite to try to refine, expand and enforce international genocide laws.¹⁰⁵ Vrdoljak notes, however, that while these international laws cover the acts of governments as well as individual perpetrators there has been a continuing reluctance to enforce the statutes when governments are among the accused.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, international genocide statutes have undoubtedly increased the caution exhibited by the United States government in recognizing genocidal acts in its own past or the histories of other nations.

¹⁰³ Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 30, 40, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Vrdoljak, “Genocide and Restitution”, 18.

Having now established that the United States has a diverse set of political, psychological, financial and legal reasons for denying participation in genocide, we can consider the question of how that denial was operationalized. What are the methods of denial that have been used by the United States to avoid acknowledgement of complicity in such acts of collective violence?

Chapter 4: American Cold War Cinema and Genocide

When trying to analyze the proxy wars of the Cold War era genocide and politicide are concepts that are clearly relevant. Why and how did cinema become involved in both promoting knowledge of such events and, in many cases, obscuring the historic record of Cold War genocides? To answer these questions, we must review the relevant historiography and theory pertinent to the presentation of genocide on film, specifically of politicide in movies about the Cold War. First, however, we must understand how it came to pass that genocide became a topic for filmic representation. So, this chapter begins with brief comments regarding how partisan actors of the opposing political ideologies of Cold War era defined the cultural role of cinema and a summary review of how genocide and politicide first became a topic of cinematic representation. A review of subsequent historical analyses related to the filmic representation of Cold War genocide will then follow.

A. Recognition of Film as a Method of Political Messaging

Cinema became available as a form of entertainment available to the general public in the first decade of the twentieth century and quickly gained immense

popularity. The implications for the potential use of this popular new entertainment to convey serious messages regarding political and social issues were not lost on some of the most important political and cultural figures of the era. Marxist political theorists including both Lenin and Trotsky quickly realized the value of the new medium in advancing their cause. Lenin, for example, said “Of all the arts, cinema is the most important instrument.[for educating the masses].”¹⁰⁷ Trotsky, writing for *Pravda* in 1923 added to Lenin’s assessment of the revolutionary value of the cinema by noting specifically its value as a tool for re-educating the masses, particularly since it could reach those who were illiterate; in the same article Trotsky also described how cinema’s value as an effective teaching mechanism was enhanced by the fact that it had the additional benefit of being entertaining as well as educational.¹⁰⁸

It was not only communist thinkers who were early adopters of cinema as a venue for political propaganda, however; American political and business leaders were equally taken with the potential of the movies to persuasively convey political messages. American politicians of the early era of filmmaking were enamored with the new medium. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, was renowned for his early use of film to support his political goals and was the first American President to appear regularly on film as the star of 104 biographical documentaries made during his lifetime. His belief in the film medium and his own consistent use of it for messaging to the American public was understood by that public as evidenced by a 1910 edition of *Moving Picture World* magazine referred to him as

¹⁰⁷ Raack, “Historiography as Cinematography”, 411.

¹⁰⁸ “Cinema as a Weapon of Revolution”.

“more than a picture personality -- he is A PICTURE MAN.”¹⁰⁹

Theodore Roosevelt’s understanding of the communicative power of the movies was shared by subsequent presidents, including Woodrow Wilson, who famously said of cinema that it was like “writing history with lightening”¹¹⁰ and Franklin Roosevelt who wrote to movie mogul Harry Warner “The motion picture industry could be the most powerful instrument of propaganda in the world, whether it tries to be or not.”¹¹¹

The nation’s capitalist business leaders were equally impressed with the potential value of movies as a tool of political messaging. William Randolph Hearst, best remembered as the nation’s most powerful newspaper magnate of the early 20th century, began his lifelong romance with the film industry during World War I. Historian Louis Pizzitola maintains that “early on Hearst recognized the new medium’s uses, especially as they related to education, politics, advertising and propaganda.”¹¹² By 1916 Hearst’s interest in the movies had led to his involvement in specific productions which were so propagandistic in nature that a San Francisco journal of that period, *The Lantern*, referred to Hearst as “employing the cinema as a means of molding [sic] public opinion.”¹¹³

B. Early Portrayals of Genocide on Film

The power of film to convey both the facts and emotion of events depicted was realized very early in the history of cinema. One of the early film genres that

¹⁰⁹ Lund, “The First Presidential ‘Picture Man’”.

¹¹⁰ Benbow, “Birth of a Quotation”, 509.

¹¹¹ Snow, “Confessions of a Hollywood Propagandist”.

¹¹² Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood*, 43.

¹¹³ Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood*, 43.

resulted directly from this realization was the *humanitarian film*, in which audiences would be shown documentary or fictional accounts displaying inhumane conditions which were being suffered by diverse oppressed groups around the world. These films were often produced and distributed by religious denominations for the purpose of garnering donations to support their missionary and relief activities. According to historian Michelle Tusan in her article “Genocide, Famine and Refugees On Film: Humanitarianism and the First World War” it was out of this World War I film genre that the first known feature film depicting genocide originated. This was the American feature film *Auction of Souls*.¹¹⁴

Auction of Souls, which is also known as *Ravished Armenia*, was released in 1919 and is believed to be the earliest depiction of genocidal atrocities ever put on film.¹¹⁵ This uncompromisingly violent film which realistically reenacts mass murders, rapes, and sexual torture, was made for the purpose of arousing awareness of the murder of more than a million Christian Armenians that had occurred in the Ottoman Empire five years earlier.

¹¹⁴ Apfel, director, 1919, *Auction of Souls*.

¹¹⁵ Tusan, “Genocide, Famine And Refugees On Film”, 208.



Source: *Auction of Souls* (1919)

Stated to be based on the first-hand account of a Christian Armenian girl and produced by the Motion Picture Committee of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, the film was shown to the general public in movie theaters across the United States. As the word genocide had not yet been invented by Rafael Lemkin, the newspaper advertising for the film says that it depicts “the martyrdom of Christian Armenia”.¹¹⁶ Only one twenty-minute segment of the nine-reel film has survived but that surviving segment confirms the very realistic depiction of genocide that *Auction of Souls* presents.¹¹⁷ The movie was widely viewed in the United States, so much so in fact, that an American trade journal reported in 1922 that *Auction of Souls* “made more money last year than any other single feature ever drew.”¹¹⁸ Its images, however, were considered so disturbing that the film could not be shown in some parts of the country and, because of the controversy its images caused, the League of Nations, which had

¹¹⁶ Whitehorn, “The Armenian Genocide in Feature Films”.

¹¹⁷ Apfel, director, 1919, *Auction of Souls*.

¹¹⁸ Tusan, “Genocide, Famine and Refugees On Film”, 213.

financially supported the production, removed itself from funding film projects for almost a decade to come. Historian Michele Tusan reports that “the film’s controversial content would be defended by human rights advocates and politicians who maintained that the historical facts on which *Ravished Armenia* was based “made it above reproach.” The film, supporters maintained, served a higher purpose, bringing real atrocities to light; it could not be considered mere “cheap sensationalism.””¹¹⁹

Although the graphic nature of *Auction of Souls* shocked many viewers and temporarily depressed interest in presenting genocide in American feature films, depictions of mass genocidal events still came before the eyes of the American viewing public through the ever-present newsreels typically shown before the main feature. Later, during and after World War II, representations of collective violence were sometimes found in the war dramas of the era, although, in part because of the imposition of the movie industry’s Motion Picture Production Code in 1934, the depictions of political atrocities in later films were significantly less graphic than *Auction of Souls*¹²⁰

In fact, the world’s first feature film depicting a politicide was a graphic dramatization of modern political conflict. Created by the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein.¹²¹ This movie was *Battleship Potemkin*, released in 1925. This memorable portrayal of class struggle set in the 1905 revolutionary era in tsarist Russia culminates in a six-minute depiction of the massacre of the Russian sailors’

¹¹⁹ Tusan, “Promises, Promises: The Strange History of Film and the Armenian Genocide”.

¹²⁰ Hays, “The Motion Picture Production Code”.

¹²¹ Bailey, “Visualizing Revolution”.

revolutionary supporters by monarchist troops. The sailors have rebelled against their royalist officers in a protest against appalling working conditions on board the *Potemkin*; their struggle is presented as a realistic yet symbolic depiction of the larger working-class struggle going on in Russia at the time portrayed. The men, women and children who are exterminated on the Odessa Steps are killed solely because of their political principles and their support for the Potemkin's mutineering sailors. The politicide of the citizens of Odessa is shown on the screen in graphic detail and the political reason for the mass murder is made quite evident. The critic Roger Ebert summed it up this way “‘The Battleship Potemkin’ is conceived as class-conscious revolutionary propaganda, and Eisenstein deliberately avoids creating any three-dimensional individuals... Instead, masses of men move in unison, as in the many shots looking down at Potemkin's foredeck. The people of Odessa, too, are seen as a mass made up of many briefly glimpsed but starkly seen faces.”¹²² Thus, Ebert understood clearly that what was being presented to the audience was a politicide in which it was group membership, not individuality that determined peoples' fate.

¹²² Ebert, “The Battleship Potemkin”.



Source: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

Review of the histories of *Auction of Souls* and *Battleship Potemkin* make it completely clear that both sides in the political struggle between capitalism and communism, had historical reasons to understand the value of film in disseminating political messages that were both informative and emotional. More specifically, both sides had reason to know that filmed portrayals of genocidal acts of violence committed by their Cold War opponent would be useful tools for engaging the audience in patriotic fervor against their adversary.

C. Factors Affecting Filmic Depiction of Cold War Collective Violence

The scholar Dominik Schaller has argued that the Cold War itself had a depressing effect on media accusations of collective violence on the part of the two superpowers of the era. Schaller indicates that, because the United States and the then Soviet Union would frequently accuse each other of genocidal acts during the Cold War, there was a general understanding that the accusations of genocide that came from either side in the struggle were likely politically motivated

and therefore not worthy of, nor amenable to, media scrutiny. Schaller believes that this unspoken media policy of ignoring Cold War genocide has led to a depleted record of Cold War atrocities.¹²³

The film historian Simon Willmetts reminds us that the presentation of atrocities in American film during the early Cold War was also severely curtailed by film industry self-regulation which began in 1934; at that time the Production Code Administration (PCA), a film industry organization developed to enforce the industry's own self-censorship guidelines, created the Motion Picture Industry Production Code, which became the "arbiter of social decency" of the American film industry.¹²⁴ It carried out this function until 1968, with a main objective of eliminating possibly offensive content from American movies and a secondary goal which was, according to Willmetts, political in nature; this was that the PCA "served a political function in its defense and preservation of a respectful image of the American government."¹²⁵ This is a main reason, Willmetts maintains, that the filmic record of early Cold War activities of the CIA and other agencies of the United States government is so sparse – that is, industry fear of engendering the ire of the PCA led film studios to simply remove all mention of these agencies and their activities from film industry products.¹²⁶

Recounting of Cold War atrocities on film was therefore suppressed, although not eliminated, until two events in the 1960s emboldened the movie industry to exercise more autonomy regarding topics their movies would cover. These

¹²³ Schaller, "From Lemkin to Clooney: The Development and State of Genocide Studies", 246-247.

¹²⁴ Willmetts, "Quiet Americans", 138.

¹²⁵ Willmetts, "Quiet Americans", 141.

¹²⁶ Willmetts, "Quiet Americans", 146-147.

events were the Supreme Court decision in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* (1964) which provided stronger First Amendment protections for those who criticized public officials and the 1966 challenges to, and ultimate abandonment of, the Motion Picture Production Code in favor of a film rating system. These events, Willmetts suggests, were vital precursors to the increased filmic scrutiny of government activities that began in the late 1960s. Willmetts even maintains that without the Sullivan decision and the death of the MPPC “direct condemnations of American government” might not have “been possible at all.”¹²⁷

With these two impediments to a more nuanced depiction of the activities of national government removed, however, Cold War cinema began to engage in a far broader Cold War filmic agenda, including portrayals of genocidal and political events. How have film historians and scholars from other disciplines added to our understanding of the reasons for, content of and results of such depictions?

Scholars of Cold War era cinema Tony Shaw and Denise Youngblood have written extensively on the filmic representations of the Cold War. In their 2017 article “Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda: A Comparative Analysis of the Superpowers” Shaw and Youngblood remind us that “Films and sports played central roles in Cold War popular culture. Each helped set ideological agendas domestically and internationally while serving as powerful substitutes for direct superpower conflict.”¹²⁸ Expanding on the relationship between cinema and the

¹²⁷ Willmetts, “Quiet Americans”, 146-147.

¹²⁸ Shaw and Youngblood, “Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda”, 160.

government in the United States during the Cold War Shaw and Youngblood suggest that:

Unlike its Soviet counterpart, the U.S. film industry was never a straightforward instrument of the state during the Cold War. As scholars have recently demonstrated, however, important links developed between filmmakers and various U.S. government agencies during the conflict. The Defense Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, State Department, and United States Information Agency (USIA), among others, found they could rely on Hollywood for recruitment and other propaganda purposes. Audiences generally knew nothing about this, with the result that the U.S. reputation for having free and independent mass media—itsself an important propaganda theme during the Cold War—largely remained intact.¹²⁹

The chronological evolution of this ostensibly free and independent relationship between the film industry and the U.S. government during the Cold War is also described by Shaw and Youngblood. They postulate that there is a chronology to Hollywood's own political preferences, suggesting a more conservative attitude during early years of the Cold War followed by a move to a more liberal perspective in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in a return to a more conservative viewpoint during the 1980s tenure of Ronald Reagan.¹³⁰ These changes in general political posture of the movie industry translated into 1950s era films that were generally supportive of government positions, presenting positive propaganda regarding its Cold War philosophy, policies and actions. Later, during the 1960s and 1970s, as the industry's political posture moved, Shaw and Youngblood suggest that there was a filmic turn to criticism and satire of the

¹²⁹ Shaw and Youngblood, "Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda", 161

¹³⁰ Shaw and Youngblood, "Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda", 162.

government followed by a 1980s readjustment of filmic representations toward those that supported government positions.¹³¹

In another monograph, Shaw suggests that the reasons for this change in the film industry's political attitudes were likely related not only to external events but also to developments in the film industry itself such as the 1960s rise of the independent film production companies which were more open to innovation and experimentation in filmic subjects and themes.¹³²

The 1960's move to the left in the motion picture industry was also made less dangerous by the then diminishing influence of two previously extremely powerful and strongly anti-communist syndicated newspaper columnists, Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. Both of these columnists had cooperated with the House Unamerican Activities Committee investigation of the movie industry and both had actively supported the blacklisting of Hollywood professionals who might have been communist sympathizers.¹³³ By 1960, however, Louella Parsons was 80 and Hedda Hopper was 75 years old; with their careers on the decline and no reasonable successors in the wings, movie industry leaders were no longer faced with the daily possibility of seeing their name "in the columns" with a career-damaging suggestion of communist sympathies. This resulted in increased willingness to support film projects with subjects, plots or themes that did not support the policies and actions of the national government.

¹³¹ Shaw and Youngblood, "Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda", 163.

¹³² Shaw, *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*, 238.

¹³³ Stonor, *The Cultural Cold War*, 239.

Thus Schaller, Shaw and Youngblood, Willmetts and Stonor all have offered reasonable rationales for increasing movie industry willingness to present filmic representations of previously controversial Cold War issues on screen during the 1960s and 70s. This new wave of cinema did not supplant films supporting the US government's Cold War policies but rather provided alternatives to the unremittingly supportive films of the early Cold War and even these new, subversive-in-tone films of the later Cold War omitted or distorted some of the more appalling facts of the historical record.

During the early years of the Cold War as noted by Shaw in *Cinematic Cold War* (2010) there was a realization on both sides of this super-power conflict that the struggle was based upon a difference in political ideology and that therefore it was vital to both sides to convince their human audiences of the righteousness of their cause. Based upon this realization both the United States and the Soviet Union fostered ideological orthodoxy among their people and created penalties for violating that required political code, including the possibilities of imprisonment or social erasure.¹³⁴ Against this background of imposed political doctrine it became a socially proscribed act to convey a dissenting opinion concerning the super-powers' political dispute. This was especially true for members of the Hollywood movie industry community which had been especially singled out for hostile investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

This paranoia-provoking environment was enhanced when the state began using the 1940 Alien Registration Act to prosecute communists and again in

¹³⁴ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 3.

1951 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Dennis v. United States* that the free-speech rights of accused communists could be restricted because their actions presented a clear and present danger to the government.¹³⁵ As individual motion picture professionals began to be persecuted the film industry took notice and fewer films challenging national policies were made. Cautionary tales like that of film maker Edward Dmytryk, who was blacklisted largely because his 1947 movie *Crossfire* urged cultural and religious tolerance, and didn't work again until he recanted and named names, were well-known in the motion picture industry, and acted as a damper on any instinct to challenge the national sociopolitical mythology.

The political orthodoxy displayed in Hollywood productions of this early period in the Cold War was the result not only of the general atmosphere of anti-communist sentiment abroad in the land and industry fear of retribution but sometimes also resulted from the opinions and policies of the leaders of the film industry itself. Matthew Alford, in his book *Reel Power* (2010), maintains that movie industry executives themselves, often politically conservative, used their control of film distribution, especially during the early years of the Cold War when studio power was at its zenith, to control the breadth of a film's distribution as well as the locations where the film would be screened. In doing so, Alford asserts, the American film industry controlled the political messages to which a movie goer would be exposed which, in turn, helped shape public opinion on contemporary issues. In the long run this strategy also diminished the profitability of

¹³⁵ Britannica.com, "Smith Act".

“nonorthodox” films and convinced financial backers that such films would lose at the box office. Over time this led to fewer controversial films being produced during this period.¹³⁶

A final element of control exercised over the film industry representations during the Cold War was the direct input offered by the CIA and other government organizations to the motion picture studios. According to Tricia Jenkins in *The CIA in Hollywood* the CIA, through its Public Affairs Office maintained a direct line of contact with the studios’ front offices¹³⁷ throughout the Cold War. The goal of these relationships was very simple according to Jenkins: do everything possible to influence industry decision-making to assure project approval of pro-government scripts and project denial or revision of scripts that the CIA considered pro-Soviet.¹³⁸

During this early period of enforced political orthodoxy, therefore, the American movies that were produced strongly tended to provide a positive representation of America’s position and activities regarding the conflict. Early Cold War movies such as *The Iron Curtain* (1948), *I Married a Communist* aka *The Woman on Pier 13* (1949), *Walk East on Beacon* (1952), *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1952), *Big Jim McLain* (1952), *My Son John* (1953) and the documentary *The Hoaxters* (1952) openly depicted communists as dangers to the “American way of life”¹³⁹ and also as thugs, liars, blackmailers and murderers. Alternative viewpoints were virtually absent from American cinema during this early Cold War

¹³⁶ Alford, *Reel Power: Hollywood Cinema and American Supremacy*, Kindle Edition

¹³⁷ Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood*, 10.

¹³⁸ Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood*, 11.

¹³⁹ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 97.

period except for movies that presented cloaked or unintentional content that could be interpreted as opposing the anti-Communist hysteria consuming the nation such as the western *High Noon* (1952)¹⁴⁰ or the science fiction film *Them!* (1954)¹⁴¹ or small films made by ideologically committed Hollywood outsiders like *Salt of the Earth* (1954).¹⁴²

In the 1960s and 70s Cold War proxy wars raged on but the Red Scare at home waned in the face of several related developments. These were: the discrediting and censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy; a series of Supreme Court decisions weakening the power of the government to prosecute communists simply because they were communists; the Supreme Court's nullification of the 1950 McCarran Act which had required the registration of communist and communist-front organizations; and the substantial nationwide decline in Communist Party membership during the 1950s.¹⁴³ The film industry, like the rest of the country, was moving away from daily fear of imminent nuclear catastrophe. As it did so, Shaw contends, it felt less constrained to present a wholly uncritical view of the nation's Cold War strategies.¹⁴⁴

This new, less orthodox approach to presenting the Cold War on film continued into 1970s American cinema. During that decade, Shaw maintains, changes in the national environment supported an openly critical Cold War cinema that looked at the nation's Cold War policies and actions, not with the unchallenged

¹⁴⁰ Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly", 24.

¹⁴¹ Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly", 29.

¹⁴² University of Washington, "Red Scare Filmography".

¹⁴³ Storrs, "McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare".

¹⁴⁴ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 156.

nationalistic loyalty of the 1950s or even the neutral or mildly critical lens of the 1960s but rather a lens affected by the reality of the disastrous proxy war in Vietnam with its 55,000 American casualties, public assassinations of American leaders and images of American soldiers killing American adolescents on college campuses on the evening news. In addition to these changes in the sociopolitical environment in the United States the film industry itself was also changing, and that change from a studio system led by an older generation of executives to an industry more and more under the control of a generation of younger executives who were comfortable with breaking the established, if unwritten, rules of Cold War filmic representation, created a new attitude of risk-taking and experimentation in Hollywood film-making.¹⁴⁵ It was during this decade that filmed dramas such as *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) began to mirror U.S. discontent with the proxy wars born of the Cold War domino theory and restlessly started to suggest that Cold War ideology was damaging American character and identity.¹⁴⁶ As Shaw's book *Cinematic Cold War* points out, 1970s Hollywood was even ready to step into the realm of critical comedy when dealing with Cold War issues as evidenced by the release of Woody Allen's *Bananas* which satirized U.S. Cold War policy in South America.¹⁴⁷

In the last decade of the Cold War, American cinema was heavily influenced by the advent of the Reagan era. Mirroring the growing polarization in politics,

¹⁴⁵ Silverman, "American Anthropology in the Middle Decades", 523.

¹⁴⁶ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 185.

¹⁴⁷ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 185-186.

film began to take a more traditionally patriotic view of Cold War events on the one hand, and a more openly rejecting view of Cold War ideology on the other. As Shaw says, "It was a propaganda battle the like of which hadn't been seen for three decades."¹⁴⁸ Suggesting, but never explicitly stating, that the 1980's pro-Cold War films had genocidal content Shaw maintains that many of them "exuded hatred and took pleasure in killing the enemy to the point of extermination."¹⁴⁹ Films such as *Red Dawn* (1984), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), *Strike Commando* (1987), *The Beast* (1988) and *Rambo Part III* (1988) fall into this category of Cold War film. Meanwhile films such as *Rambo: First Blood* (1982), *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *War Games* (1984) were presenting cautionary and sometimes angry tales about the effects of the Cold War on those who fought in its proxy wars and even on America's children who grew up in its shadow.

As the Cold War ended the nation would enter an era of reevaluation of US government policies and methods during that forty-year conflict. That scholarly reassessment would include reevaluation of the content of Cold War cinema.

D. Recent Scholarship of Cold War Cinema

Writing in 2015, Jon Cowans asserts that film has the "ability to shape as well as reflect popular outlooks," and that although "proving media influence is notoriously difficult, it is hard to deny at least some potential for mass media to form, reinforce, and even alter attitudes."¹⁵⁰ Cowans goes on to maintain that scholars

¹⁴⁸ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 189.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw and Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 189.

¹⁵⁰ Cowans, *Empire Films and the Crisis of Colonialism*, 2.

who study propaganda have observed that it's easier to influence peoples' opinions about subjects with which they do not have personal experience, suggesting a probable ease of influence by films dealing with unfamiliar conflicts in faraway places in the Cold War world.¹⁵¹ This influencing potential of film makes it important for historians, sociologists, political scientists and practitioners of related social sciences to study the messaging of films about the Cold War conflicts to determine the extent to which the representations of genocidal and political conflict are present or absent, whether the plot is consistent with the known historical record, and whether there is evidence, through language or action, of genocide denialism in American Cold War films. To what extent has there been scholarly attention paid to the analysis of cinematic representations of Cold War political violence?

In his article "Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History" Michael F. Hopkins asserts that, as the Cold War ended, Cold War scholars moved from emphasis on the political and economic aspects of the conflict to analysis of "ideology, public opinion and propaganda and psychological warfare" and recognized that "the West's confrontation with communism and the Soviet Union was conducted not only at the level of diplomats and the military but also in... various forms of art and architecture, theatre, ballet and cinema, and music and literature, and in sport."¹⁵² Hopkins also quotes the work of David Caute who maintained that the intensity of cultural conflict during the Cold War was without parallel in human history and was only possible because of the "emergence of

¹⁵¹ Cowans, *Empire Films and the Crisis of Colonialism*, 2.

¹⁵² Hopkins, "Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History", 925.

mass communications and its audience, the general public.” Caute, Hopkins states, “believes that the defeat of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War was as much a cultural, moral and intellectual victory as it was economic or technological.”¹⁵³

Scholarly assessment of the causes, content and impacts of the cultural Cold War has grown substantially, particularly as Hopkins suggests, in the concluding years of the conflict and, most significantly, in the generation that followed the Cold War’s conclusion. Early discussions of the cultural Cold War, such as Frances Stonor’s book *The Cultural Cold War* (1999), often emphasized associations between the US-Soviet Union ideological struggle and the high culture of each nation, usually defined as music, literature and theater. Other analyses, however, expanded the meaning of the cultural Cold War to include cinema and other aspects of popular culture.

Soon after the Cold War ended film historians began analyzing filmic representations of specific events of the cultural Cold War in depth. Daniel Leab, in his Introduction to a 1998 edition of the journal *Film History*, an edition entirely devoted to the cultural Cold War, indicates that:

In both East and West the mass media played an important role in the Cold War: propagandizing, cajoling, haranguing, distorting. Most of the major players undertook substantial information and disinformation campaigns. Propaganda was a major tool linked to important diplomatic and strategic actions and plans... The movies were among the fiercest participants in this war of ideas...¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Hopkins (quoting Caute), “Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History”, 925.

¹⁵⁴ Leab, “Introduction: The Cold War and the Movies”, 251.

Gordon Johnston also alludes to the evolving historical understanding of the term “culture” that informed later filmic analyses of the cultural Cold War. According to Johnston, culture came to connote both the high culture included in earlier analyses of the cultural Cold War as well as the involvement of popular culture in Cold War issues and themes, with popular culture usually defined to include film, television, radio and sports. Historians had begun, according to Johnston, writing in 2010, to assess the ways in which Cold War representations were “were produced, deployed, interpreted and challenged” in Cold War cinema.¹⁵⁵

Based upon the comments of Stonor, Leab and Johnston it can be hypothesized that there now should be, more than ten years after their books and articles confirming film industry involvement in a cultural Cold War were published, a substantial record of historical scholarship assessing the extent and nature of representations of the Cold War on film. There should also be some record of scholarly attention to the more specific, related issues of Cold War genocide and politicide depicted on film.

E. Examples of Post-Cold War Scholarship Regarding Depictions of Collective Violence in Cold War Cinema

Typical of works of post-Cold War filmic scholarship is Brian Woodman’s article “A Hollywood War of Wills: Cinematic Representation of Vietnamese Super-Soldiers and America’s Defeat in the War.” Woodman, in this 2003 article in the *Film and Video Journal*, reflects upon the fact that in describing America’s

¹⁵⁵ Johnston, “Revisiting the Cultural Cold War”, 294.

Vietnamese adversaries in a group of American films about its proxy war in Vietnam, several related distortions in representation are used to explain the USA's failure to win the war. These are the subtle process of othering in which the filmic depiction assigns negative characteristics to the enemy, for example, brutality and lack of compassion, to distinctly create for them a separate, less positive identity. Accompanying this othering according to Woodman, at least in the films he reviewed, was a clear attempt to present these nefarious others as dangerously skilled opponents, who were professionals, as opposed to the clearly less prepared American adolescent conscripts. Apparently, this process of demonization even included the star of one of the movies Woodman analyzes, the actor John Wayne, who, in a publicity interview about the film *The Green Berets* (1968), referred to the Vietcong as "dirty sons of bitches (who) are raping, torturing gorillas." The film's producer, Michael Wayne, defended that representation as follows: "the Americans are the good guys, and the Vietcong are the bad guys. It's as simple as that.... When you are making a (western) picture, the Indians are the bad guys."¹⁵⁶ Later in this article Woodman describes another method of othering the enemy seen on film, this through using long shots of the antagonists which make them appear as an impersonal mass rather than individuals, thus dehumanizing them in the mind of the viewer.¹⁵⁷

Supporting the contention that there was not only patriotic messaging in these Cold War films, but also critical representations of American forces in other Cold War films, Woodman also discusses representations from *Apocalypse Now*. In

¹⁵⁶ Woodman, "A Hollywood War of Wills", 45-47.

¹⁵⁷ Woodman, "A Hollywood War of Wills", 54.

this film Americans are portrayed as engaging in mass murder of Vietnamese villagers while Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* plays in the background.¹⁵⁸ Another scene shows an American abandoning dying soldier to die alone in order to meet a famous American surfer. These unflattering images of America's actions in a Cold War conflict are explained by the director Francis Ford Coppola as part of his attempt to "make the film as accurate a reflection of the Vietnam War experience as possible."¹⁵⁹ Whether the aim was accuracy or not, many of the actual images of the film, including one of a mass murder, do not support a positive post-war interpretation of American Cold War behavior and are evidence of the film industry's increasing willingness to provide unflattering portrayals of US military personnel and intelligence agents.

Adding to Woodman's confirmation of negative filmic representations of the Vietnam War is Sylvia Chin Huey Chong's 2005 article in the *Cinema Journal* "Restaging the War: *The Deer Hunter*" and the Primal Scene of Violence" in which she maintains that the plot of *The Deerhunter* recasts the Americans as victims in the Vietnam conflict. Chong's interpretation of the filmic representation of the three American servicemen whose time in Vietnam is recounted in the movie is that they are depicted as helpless pawns in a struggle that has little to do with them and in which their fate is a matter of chance as symbolized by the repeated Russian roulette scenes in the movie. Chong, like Woodman, comments on the use of othering to distance the Americans from the Vietnamese people. Chong says, "The only Vietnamese portrayed at length are either VC,

¹⁵⁸ Jeansonne and Lührssen, "The Cold War", 128.

¹⁵⁹ Woodman, "A Hollywood War of Wills", 49-52.

ruthlessly vicious in their treatment of American and South Vietnamese soldiers, or upper-middle-class civilians in Saigon, equally vicious in their disregard for life while gambling on human lives.”¹⁶⁰ Chong also points out that film critics noted the “counterfactual” elements of the movie’s Vietnam-based middle segment. Here she quotes the film critic Pauline Kael as saying “The impression a viewer gets is that if we did some bad things over there we did them ruthlessly but impersonally; the Vietcong were cruel and sadistic. The film seems to be saying that the Americans had no choice, but the V.C. enjoyed it.” Chong asserts that film reviewers, as a body, believed that the film’s director, Michael Cimino, had “not only distorted the historical record of American atrocities but also justified U.S. acts of violence committed on screen...”¹⁶¹ Cimino and others supporting him maintained that factual verisimilitude was not the purpose of the film nor required of the film maker. In the end Chong suggests that, using the genocidal mechanisms of othering, presenting themselves as the true victims, and factual distortion of the historical record, *The Deerhunter* restages history into a story that is more acceptable to American society.¹⁶²

This “restaging” potential of movie representations that is described by Chong may be a vital issue that materially affects the average citizen’s understanding of history, including the histories of international conflicts such as the Cold War. This is suggested by Glen Jeansonne and David Luhrssen who posit that the average citizen’s knowledge of critical historic events such as the Cold War comes

¹⁶⁰ Chong, “Restaging the War”, 91.

¹⁶¹ Chong, “Restaging the War”, 92.

¹⁶² Chong, “Restaging the War”, 100

more from cinema and the combination of knowledge and emotional experience it offers more than any other source of historical information.¹⁶³

Jeansonne and Lührssen offer an analysis of *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) to describe the filmic depictions of Soviet methods of warfare that were used during the Cold War conflict with the United States. Prominent among the Soviet methods depicted in this movie is the use of subversion, in which Americans, through a variety of techniques including brainwashing, bribery and blackmail are turned into sources of information and weapons of war by the Soviets. *The Manchurian Candidate* portrays the brainwashed American Korean war soldier played by Laurence Harvey, as an innocent dupe of the Soviet espionage system and his mother, played by Angela Lansbury, as a bribed Lady Macbeth willing to sell her country down the river to secure her husband's political future. The film, Jeansonne and Lührssen believe, leaves the viewer with the distorted idea that the Soviet Union engages in nefarious methods of conflict that were eschewed by the U.S., even in the life and death conflict of the Cold War.¹⁶⁴

Jeansonne and Lührssen suggest that in another film, 1984's *The Killing Fields*, the viewer is shown an opposing view of US behavior during Cold War conflicts. The movie *The Killing Fields* is a fictionalized recounting a Cold War mass killing carried out by the communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. It is presented, based on Jeansonne and Lührssen's comments, as a politicide in which the United States' complicity is only once removed. In this transnational

¹⁶³ Jeansonne and Lührssen, "The Cold War", Introduction.

¹⁶⁴ Jeansonne and Lührssen, "The Cold War", 103-105.

U.S./British production about the Cambodian politicide of two million people that occurred during the Vietnam War, we are told that the communist Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia and subsequent slaughter of a quarter of the country's population for political reasons, was the direct result of U.S. policies which destabilized the legitimate Cambodian government. This was augmented by the U.S. decision to actually hand over Cambodians seeking asylum at the American Embassy in Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge.¹⁶⁵ Jeansonne and Lührssen suggest that these actions, depicted in the film, actually led to the Khmer Rouge take over and the subsequent atrocities.

There is a common observation that is made in these examples of post - Cold War assessment of collective violence in American Cold war cinema by Woodman, Chong, Jeansonne and Lührssen; that is that the depiction of the role the United States played in collective violence during the proxy wars of the Cold War is in many ways at odds with the historical record. These distorted portrayals were achieved through several of the common methods of genocide denial catalogued by genocide scholars. Among the techniques of denial observed in the recent analyses are omission of facts, description of perpetrators as victims, presentation of victims as perpetrators, dehumanization of the victim, demonizing of adversaries, subversion of victims by nefarious antagonists, otherizing the filmic adversary and distortion of the historical record. These recent scholarly assessments also revealed that denialism was not uniformly practiced; in the later Cold War certain movies depicted a less distorted version of the historical record.

¹⁶⁵ Jeansonne and Lührssen, "The Cold War", 133-134.

We now have an understanding of the forces that shaped representations in Cold War cinema and of recent scholarship that found evidence of the practice of denialism in American cinema of the Cold War era. With this knowledge informing the assessment, an analysis of Cold War films to discern the presence of dehumanization and genocide denialism will now be offered.

Chapter 5: Film Analysis

A. Introduction

The immediate purpose of this chapter is to explore the existence and extent of genocidal behavior and genocide denialism in American Cold War movies. In this exposition a sample of six Cold War films will be scrutinized to identify evidence of dehumanization, politicide and genocide denialism that they may present in topic, plot, dialogue, characterizations, or imagery. The ultimate objective of this analysis is to begin a thread of scholarly discourse that views American Cold War cinema specifically through the conceptual lens of genocide and denialism.

Two types of Cold War movies were selected for this analysis. These are what here are termed extermination and whistleblower films. Each of these categories requires definition. For the purposes of this paper extermination films were those that feature the killing of large numbers of individuals from groups whose members were considered enemies of US interests at the time of the film's release. Whistleblower films are defined as those that attempt to raise awareness about genocidal violence happening at the time of the film's release and that may contain content critical of the Cold War.

Three examples of each of these two types of Cold War films will be submitted for analysis. These are *Huk!* (1956) *The 7th Dawn* (1964), and *Rambo Part III* (1988) as examples of extermination films, *Missing* (1982) *El Norte* (1983) and *Salvador* (1986) representing whistleblower films. Each of these movies was selected for the sample because they met a set of criteria established for film selection. The first of these criteria relates to the identity of those who produced film. Specifically, the selected films had to have been made by an American production company and distributed in the American market. This criterion is broadly enough defined to include films that had international production with partial American involvement.

The second criterion relates to temporality, that is, the selected film must have been made during the Cold War. For the purposes of this research the Cold War period is defined as beginning after the first Cold War policide abetted by the United States which was during the Jeju Uprising of 1948 in South Korea and concluding when the Soviet Union itself dissolved into its component republics in late 1991.

The third criterion considers the content of the film. Specifically, the film must feature one or more actions that are indicators of genocidal intent with leftists as the targeted group. These genocidal acts may include, as identified by the Global Justice Center in its 2018 monograph “Beyond Killing: Gender, Genocide and Obligations under International Law” not only murder but any acts that seek the biological, psychological or cultural destruction of the targeted group because “a narrow construction [of genocide] obscures how lethal and non-lethal acts work

together in a coordinated strategy aimed at destroying a protected group.”¹⁶⁶ Previous genocide scholars have suggested that genocidal activities include acts such as systematic dehumanization, through language describing and behavior exhibited toward the targeted group; marginalization, through restrictions to residence, use of public services or employment; separation, through legal segregation of the affected group; economic aggression, through confiscation of money and property; sexual crimes, intended to weaken the ability of the group to reproduce; and physical abuse, including torture, maiming and murder. All of these types of possible genocidal actions against the victim groups will be considered in this analysis.

Evidence of genocide denial will also be assessed for each sample film. Such evidence will include, as identified by earlier genocide scholars: denial of facts, omission of facts, minimization of facts, definition of perpetrators as victims, definition of victims as perpetrators, dehumanization and othering of the victims, denial of legal responsibility, and denial that the event met the definition of genocide.¹⁶⁷

The analysis will be presented in two sections; each section will review several films of a specific type. Every film will be summarized and contextualized. For each film the presence or absence of genocidal acts will be identified, and any identified genocidal acts will be described and categorized. Evidence of genocide denial will similarly be sought; if identified such acts of denial will be described. Finally, and most importantly, an overview of what the analysis

¹⁶⁶ Global Justice Center, *Beyond Killing*, 11.

¹⁶⁷ Stanton, “Twelve Ways to Deny A Genocide”.

suggested regarding genocide and genocide denial in American Cold War films will be presented.

B. Extermination Films

In this section three movies that meet the definition of extermination films will be introduced and analyzed. These are *Huk!* (1956), *The 7th Dawn* (1964), and *Rambo III* (1988). These films were selected to represent the extermination genre because of the presentations of Cold War mass violence they each include, because they were produced during different phases of the Cold War and because they dealt with events in different countries. For each of these three films the forthcoming summaries will provide, production details, a plot summary, an analysis of the messaging of the film from the perspective of genocide and genocide denial and brief comments regarding the critical reception of the film. It should be remembered that these films are only suggestive of a far larger body of Cold War extermination films that would include such cinematic works as, *Invasion USA* (1952), *Lost Command* (1966), *The Green Berets* (1968), *Red Dawn* (1984), *Rambo First Blood Part II* (1985), *Red Scorpion* (1988), and many others.

Huk!

Huk!, released in 1956,¹⁶⁸ exemplifies the anticommunist extermination genre. The movie is set in the newly independent republic of the Philippines during the Hukbalahap rebellion of 1942-1954. Hukbalahap was the name of a revolutionary peasant organization in central Luzon that had first waged guerilla war against

¹⁶⁸ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

the Japanese occupation. The Huks, as they were known, had a socialist ideology and were considered political enemies by the American owners of local agribusinesses and the new Philippine government, which refused to seat Huk representatives to their duly elected seats in the national legislature; in fact, with the tacit approval of the nation's President, Manuel Roxas, more than a hundred of them, members of the Hukbalahap Battalion, were rounded up by government forces, executed and buried in a mass grave.¹⁶⁹ That began the second phase of Hukbalahap Rebellion which is the subject of this movie.

The film stars George Montgomery as Greg Dickson, the son of an American plantation owner, who after hearing of his father's death returns to claim his patrimony in the Philippines. There Greg meets Cindy and Bart Rogers, also Americans, who manage the property of his late father. The country, however, is in the throes of civil war, with Huk rebels attacking plantations owned primarily by foreign business interests. Assisted by the armed forces of the Philippine republic, the Americans defend their property from the Huk rebels with extreme violence.

At no point does the film attempt to humanize the Huks; indeed, they are repeatedly dehumanized by the phraseology of the script, and by the costuming, acting and cinematographic choices the film makes. Throughout the film the Huks are presented as the bad guys, whose inferior status is indicated by visual cues such as ragged and dirty clothes, unkempt hair and faces bathed in sweat. Their destruction is openly celebrated while the representations of political violence against them are relativized.

¹⁶⁹ Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection*, Chapter 6

Expository text at the beginning of the film frames how the Huks are to be understood by the film's audience. "In the year 1951, the newly born Republic of the Philippines was fighting for its life against a lawless guerilla army dedicated to death, fire and pillage. This is one chapter in the story of that bloody struggle... filmed entirely on the battleground."¹⁷⁰ This opening text of the title sequence, describing Huks as "lawless guerillas...dedicated to death, fire and pillage" is accompanied by footage of burning buildings. It is a powerful combination of text and moving images that hammers home the association between Huks and senseless destruction, branding them as the villains of the picture. This point is reiterated when the leader of the Huks, Kalak, says "we will not rest until we destroy the plantations. We will attack, avenge the blood of our brothers." The grievances of Huks are rarely articulated and their associations with socialism are only obliquely shown by the red headbands that Kalak and other Huks wear. In fact, as noted by a TCM film review¹⁷¹ years after the film was released, the word "communist" is never uttered in the movie and the goal of the Huk rebellion, redistribution of land held by former colonists and wealthy capitalists, is only mentioned once when, later in the film, a leaflet written by Kalak is presented. Its language, "People of Paoli, rise up and join us. Strike now. The blood of young Dickson must water the earth, which is rightfully yours"¹⁷² obscurely indicates anti-capitalist sentiment. There are no other justifications of the Huk position offered in the entire movie and no mention at all of the massacre that started the

¹⁷⁰ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

¹⁷¹ Turner Classic Movies, "Huk! Notes".

¹⁷² Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

conflict.

At several points in *Huk!* there are comparisons made between the Huks and animals. As Filipino army soldiers are mounting a machine gun on the boat, Greg gestures towards the gun and asks Bart, “For sharks?” Bart replies “For Huks.” To this Greg retorts that using such a weapon would be “like swatting flies with a pile driver”.¹⁷³ In another scene, the Huks, charge into battle with herds of water buffalo inexplicably charging alongside them. Setting aside dialogue, the film uses visual metaphor to draw associations between socialist revolutionaries and beasts. These verbal and visual associations of oppressed people with animal life is one of the forms of dehumanization known to have been practiced in other genocides.

In several showcase battle sequences the Huks are killed in large numbers. Their deaths are filmic spectacle but also serve didactic purposes, indicating to the audience that extreme violence directed at the Huks is not only permissible but also virtuous. It is noteworthy that none of the Huks besides Kalak has any dialogue. They lack names and identities, and their deaths are anonymous. This depersonalization of adversaries is another mechanism frequently used to minimize the importance of victims killed in genocides.

The film also relativizes the slaughter of the Huks in a number of ways. The first words of dialogue from Bart are “We’ll bring back enough ammunition from Manila to pay them back.”¹⁷⁴ It is within the framework of “pay-back” rhetoric that the mass murder of the Huks is justified. Pay back can be compared to the notion

¹⁷³ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

¹⁷⁴ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

of “yes, but” or implicatory denialism in which perpetrators deploy whataboutisms to rationalize their own acts.¹⁷⁵ During the Cold War rationales of payback were often expressed by the American state and its attendants. For example, it was a version of the “pay back” rationale that was used after the fictitious Gulf of Tonkin Incident, to warrant the troop escalations in Vietnam.

In another scene Bart shoots a Huk trying to flee in the back. Greg, rattled by the violence committed by Bart, asks, “Just what’s he trying to get out of his system?”¹⁷⁶ The way murder is casually framed as getting something out of his system euphemizes the act. Euphemisms, as noted by Rossi, are commonplace in genocidal regimes, used to blunt the atrocities of oppressors. Hence in the Argentinian politicide those who were tortured and murdered were called “the disappeared” and in *Huk!* the dead Huks aren’t “murdered”, instead they are “out of Bart’s system.”

In the battles with the Huks the bourgeois Greg marshals his workers, seemingly against their will, to defend his plantation and its productive forces from which he profits. When several of the workers question this inequity and ask, “What about our homes?”, Greg paternalistically explains the necessity of their obedience to him. “Huks don’t care about your homes. All they wanna do is destroy the one thing on this island that means anything - this! How do you think you’d live? Where would you earn money for your families, if it weren’t for these machines?”¹⁷⁷ Greg’s racial arrogance is jarring even for 1956. The way he

¹⁷⁵ Hintjens and van Oijen, “From outright denial to blame-shifting”.

¹⁷⁶ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

¹⁷⁷ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

treats the Philippine workers is a microcosmic allegory for imperialism. When Cindy chides Greg's callousness, the film seemingly shows self-awareness of these issues. "These aren't people to you." Cindy says, referring to Greg's Philippine workers. "They're just so many guns." Greg responds, "We're living in .50 caliber generation, Mrs. Rogers. People are only as good as their aim."¹⁷⁸ By chalking up what was happening to the spirit of the times, Greg's retort provides another relativization of violence, another defense frequently presented by perpetrators of genocide.

An important subtext in *Huk!* are the several allusions to the American West and the western genre. For instance, for much of the film, Bart proudly brandishes a pistol on his hip, like the protagonist of a western. The leading man of the film, Greg, has the habit of rolling his own cigarettes, a proclivity which seems antique to Cindy who comments, "Even cowboys buy them by the carton these days." Inside Greg's mansion, the walls of one room are adorned with western themed memorabilia including a native bow, a cow skull and photograph of a cowboy on horseback. During one of the action scenes, in another allusion to westerns, Greg and Bart find themselves killing Huks while driving an antique locomotive that looks more Victorian than midcentury.

What do these allusions to westerns featured in *Huk!* represent? When *Huk!* was released in 1956, the western genre was culturally ascendent. Clearly the structure of the plot bears unmistakable parallels to those of many westerns and the Huks themselves are rendered in ways suggestive of the representations of

¹⁷⁸ Barnwell, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

indigenous people in American westerns. As noted by Stanley Corkin, midcentury western films are “concurrently nostalgic and forward looking. They look back upon the glory days of western settlement as they look ahead to the expression of U.S. centrality in the postwar world.”¹⁷⁹ And so, Cold War extermination films such as *Huk!* are a mirror to the Westerns which were produced in the 1950s in the sense that they draw semiotic material from past genocides to rationalize the present.

Throughout the film, the white American protagonists are assisted by a detachment of the Philippine army, led by Major Balatbat. Almost all of the Cold War extermination films feature such allies, a reflection of the real-world partnership between Americans and sympathetic forces during the Cold War. It was these proxy forces of foreign militaries and paramilitaries, abetted and encouraged the United States, that carried out the majority of the anti-left political killings. This fact is mirrored in the fictionalized spaces of *Huk!* Most of the shots fired at the Huks do not come from Greg and Bart but from Balatbat’s men. During one of the battle sequences it is their gunfire which mows down the Huks as they attempt to flee. At the climax it is Philippine army’s arrival along with the death of the leader Kalak which convinces the Huks to retreat.

As portrayed in the film, the Filipino soldiers wear the same uniforms and carry the same weapons as their American counterparts. Even if this was the result of wardrobe expediency, it signals to the audience that the mission of this proxy army is the same as that of the United States. Major Balatbat, who is

¹⁷⁹ Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors*, Kindle Location 137.

portrayed as an Americanophile and a steadfast ally who is fluent in English defends the relationship between the Philippines and the United States. When Greg Dickson wants to sell his father's plantation, Major Balatbat objects:

“who will defend the people who live here? ... In the United States do you read much of our leader Magsaysay? ... he teaches what I first learned in your country when I took my training at Fort Benning: That all free men are brothers. Whether you like it or not, Mr. Dickson, on this side of the world we are all playing for larger stakes than your plantation. Your country and mine have been together a long time. We're going to stay that way.”¹⁸⁰

Greg's response to Balatbat's speech, written by the American screenwriter, Stirling Silliphant is “Yeah. Guess I'm getting soft, major.”¹⁸¹ Thus, the script openly associates the Huk rebellion to a worldwide struggle in which the U.S. and its allies must prevail. It is an example of classic Cold War messaging.

The 7th Dawn

Another film that meets the criteria of extermination cinema is *The 7th Dawn* (1964) produced by the American Charles Feldman and distributed by United Artists.¹⁸² Like *Huk!*, *The 7th Dawn* features an American protagonist leading the fight against communist insurgents in a newly decolonized country of south east Asia. Instead of the Philippines, however, the action of *7th Dawn* takes place in colonial Malaya. Major Ferris, the hero of *The 7th Dawn*, is like Greg Dickson of *Huk!*, a wealthy plantation owner who at first is interested in cashing out and little else. Although addressed in the film as “terrorists”, the antagonists of the movie are clearly a representation of the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLP).

¹⁸⁰ Barnwell, John, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

¹⁸¹ Barnwell, John, director. 1956. *Huk!* United Artists.

¹⁸² Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

The MNLP was the armed wing of the Communist Party of Malaya who fought the government of Malaya in a guerilla war from 1948 to 1960. To the insurgents this conflict was known as the Anti-British National Liberation War, but the British colonial authorities called it the “Malayan Emergency.” The unusual use of the world emergency to name the conflict was a decision made by the British colonial authorities out of fear that insurance companies would not honor damages caused by ‘war’.

The film begins with a fictitious newsreel sequence of newspaper headlines spliced with scenes of murder and mayhem. One headline reads “1953 starts with tragedy: Col. Thompson assassinated”, another, “Planter shot in payroll robbery”.¹⁸³ Moving images of flames are superimposed over the distended front pages as an intense violin score heightens the mood of alarm. An aura of anxious anticipation is established as the conflict is framed for the viewer as involving criminal activity threatening the lives of colonists. From the opening scene of the film, therefore, the identity of the bad guys, i.e., the MNLP, and the good guys, i.e., the colonial government and the foreign planters, is quite clearly delineated for the viewer.

The narrative begins at the end of World War II, as Malayan resistance fighters are executing Japanese prisoners of war. With the Malaysians is an American soldier, Ferris, who was embedded with one of the “stay behind parties”. Within moments aircraft appear and broadcast to the resistance that the war is over. When the news hits their ears, the Malayan fighters rejoice, but they have no

¹⁸³ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

intention of stopping the executions of Japanese soldiers until Ferris intervenes. He does so by slapping the surviving prisoner of war in the mouth, quipping that “with his luck, I’d like to back him in a crap game”¹⁸⁴ as the man’s body flails into the mass grave where his compatriots’ fresh corpses lie. The seemingly comic intent of this scene signals the diminished value of the lives of those deemed enemies of the US.

Serving alongside Major Ferris is Dhana, a woman of mixed Asian and white parentage, as well as Ng, a Malayan. The trio are friends as well as comrades and both Ng and Ferris have romantic feelings for Dhana. However, the trio parts ways, with Ferris intending to stay in Malaya and get rich from landholding, while Ng leaves for Moscow to further his political education.

The film then jumps in time to the early 1950s. The war between the Malayan National Liberation Army and the British colonial authorities is raging. Ferris has become a land baron seeking to expand his operations by purchasing properties from other white planters who are fleeing from the Emergency. Dhana, in an open relationship with Ferris, is now a schoolteacher and the head of the local teacher’s union while Ng, who has returned from the Soviet Union, leads an MNLP army in the area.

The tensions between the combatants have reached a crisis and the British contact Ferris in an attempt to recruit his help. A coterie of British officers, led by Cavendish, arrive at Ferris’ orientalist estate. The film establishes a clear tension

¹⁸⁴ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

between the American Ferris and the British Cavendish, which flares up in this dialogue between the two:

Cavendish: Done a lot of killing haven't you?

Ferris: Some people refer to it as shooting.

Cavendish: One in the same thing really, isn't it? All ends up with something dead.¹⁸⁵

This exchange not only reveals the underlying tension between Ferris and Cavendish but also friction between the waning British Empire and the upstart Americans. Ferris' reluctance to accept what he has done as killing is also worth probing. In this exchange, Ferris would rather call killing, 'shooting', a euphemism with which he is more comfortable. As described in the literature of genocide the language of genocidaires is rife with euphemisms, which serves to relativize and deny the significance of killing. Then the dialogue between Cavendish and Ferris turns to the question of race:

Cavendish: Everyone knows how cozy you are with our yellow friends.

Ferris: I don't choose my friends according to their color, I even have a few white friends.¹⁸⁶

In their surface messaging *The 7th Dawn* and the other Cold War extermination films are very careful to distance themselves from racial framings of the conflicts they attempt to represent. And so, Ferris rejects Cavendish's racial slurs. The film is sending the message that it is not Asian people who are the enemy, but socialism and socialists. Murder is sanctioned, not because of race but

¹⁸⁵ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

¹⁸⁶ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

because of the political ideology with which Ng and the rebels are affiliated.

Despite Ferris' rebuff of racist speech, it is worth noting that the character gleefully participates in the structures of racist colonialism. Not only does the film portray Ferris as the owner of plantations worked by local Malaysians, but in another scene, it is revealed that Ferris also manages a brothel in town, where white men pair off with local women. Ferris later quips to Ng that "I've got a big stake in this country and you and your bloody war are raising hell with property values."¹⁸⁷ It's clear that Ferris enjoys the benefits of the colonialist system.

When talking to Ng, Ferris has no qualms about using dehumanizing and racist speech. Meeting with Ng for the first time since the end of the Japanese occupation, Ferris states "I think it's time to put a muzzle on the dragon." When Ng objects, Ferris rejoins, "Don't give me any of this Mongolian double talk." and "you're always yapping about independence."¹⁸⁸ Despite Ferris' earlier proclamations eschewing racism, he is seemingly unable to shed deep-seated assumptions about people of color. Racism, both conscious and unconscious, intertwined with anti-communist politicide in the global south throughout the Cold War.

In this respect *The 7th Dawn* reflected the racial biases of the society that created it; even the *New York Times* reviewer, Bosley Crowther was not immune from the racial prejudices of the day. In his review of *The 7th Dawn* Crowther says

¹⁸⁷ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

¹⁸⁸ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

that the movie is about “an American involved in a politico-military conflict in which a lot of sweaty orientals are embroiled” and is silent on the political meaning or context of the conflict itself, referring to it as “many episodes of burning and shootings and jungle crawlings.”¹⁸⁹ His comments, somewhat shocking today, were published in *the New York Times*, indicating their acceptability to a broad audience at that time. These overtly presented beliefs that other racial groups are inferior to whites, both in the movie and in Crowther’s review, are suggestive of cultural attitudes that found deaths in proxy wars acceptable, as long as they weren’t American deaths.

The 7th Dawn is not only critical of both the communist insurgents in Malaya but also the British colonial forces. In an extended sequence the British forces led by an administrator named Trumpey decides to burn down a village as retaliation for a grenade attack. Trumpey explains to his daughter, “We’re going to burn down the village of the man who threw the grenade last night. ... we’ve had a lot of trouble from this particular village. They’ve been supplying the terrorists with arms and food. We’ve decided to make an example of it.”¹⁹⁰

In this lengthy scene, British trucks roll through the village, their loudspeakers alerting the residents of the imminent destruction of their homes. Evacuated, the villagers huddle together and watch the British colonial troops proceed to set their thatched houses on fire. Ferris is outraged at this event and questions the British officer Cavendish whom he blames for targeting “innocent people”.

¹⁸⁹ Crowther, “Return to Far East Just Isn’t the Same,” 24.

¹⁹⁰ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

Cavendish replies, “Why don’t you wake up Ferris? These people aren’t all innocent, and if they don’t stop harboring terrorists, we’ll hit them harder.”¹⁹¹ Thus, the British character use generalization and depersonalization, two historically documented genocidal techniques of oppressors, to establish conditions that will reduce public outrage at the destruction of the village. The world is divided into two camps in this genocidal mindset and, as is true in most of history’s genocides, the innocent also suffer, deemed guilty by association and generalization.

The screenwriting, cinematography and acting choices of *The 7th Dawn* do convey a message of disapproval regarding the excesses of the British colonial order. However, the film reserves its greatest animosity for the communists led by Ng. The film climaxes with an attack on the communist base deep in the Malayan Jungle. In this scene, British warplanes drop bombs as colonial troops, both white and Malayan, paradrop into the combat zone. The communists are no match for the colonial forces, and they die in large and anonymous numbers. Indeed, most of the on-screen deaths are of communists, presented without any verbal or visual indicators of sympathy for them. They have been reduced to a nameless horde of brigands, are now fully depersonalized and thus die unworthy of sympathy.

It is at this point that the nuance the film has attempted to maintain melts away. As Ng flees with his hostage, Candace, the daughter of the British administrator, the character of Ng flattens into a stock villain. It is a timeworn propaganda technique to frame an enemy as the abductor and murderer of women

¹⁹¹ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

and *The 7th Dawn* uses this plot device to demonize Ng and the force he represents. Although it is the communist MNLA who have been exterminated it is Ng, through the self-protective abduction of Candace, who the movie presents as the primary perpetrator. Again, this is a very usual techniques of genocide denial – position the victim as the perpetrator. The fact that Ng is a Malayan (played by Japanese actor Tetsurô Tanba) also resonates with well-established racist tropes. In the words of Candace, Ng has become “twisted and perverted, a murderer”.¹⁹²

Ferris eventually tracks down Ng and after a tenuous truce the two come to blows. Ng dies at Ferris’s hands, and in his last moment confesses that his party organization ordered him to frame, Dhana, their former compatriot. Ng and his movement are painted as treacherous and deceitful, while the American Ferris, although personally flawed, never betrayed Ng’s trust until circumstances forced him to do so.

Pointedly, no character in the film utters the words communism or communists. There is only a single oblique reference to the Malayan National Liberation Army when Ferris sees a sign with the name of the organization written on it as he enters Ng’s camp. More often the MNLA are referred to simply as terrorists. It is this designation of terrorism that pigeonholes their political commitment to communism as villainous; the appellation of MNLA adherents as “terrorists” then also functions to dehumanize and depersonalize MNLA communists thus promoting the relativization and minimization of their eventual destruction.

¹⁹² Gilbert, Lewis, director. 1964. *The Seventh Dawn*. United Artists.

When not called terrorists, the screenplay awkwardly circumscribes the political identity of the antagonists in other ways. As the British officer Trumpey explains, “There’s something poisonous out there in the jungle trying to stop me. Something trying to create chaos. I’m going to stop this thing.”¹⁹³ Again, both depersonalization and dehumanization are used to support viewer acceptance of MNLA annihilation. The MNLA are not humans; rather they are “poison”, they are nameless “things.” With this description, the people of the MNLA are stripped of their humanity. Indeed, they lose their status as individuals and are conflated into a single “poisonous” “thing”.

At the end of the film, after Ng has been killed and the communists destroyed, the British Trumpey and American Ferris, having seemingly reconciled their earlier distrust, try to make sense of what they just lived through. Trumpey declares, “... I can feel the hate and bitterness when I walk down the street. But you know the truth Ferris, and the time will come when they know it. Then they’ll know him for what he was and the thing he worshipped for what it is.”¹⁹⁴ The unnamed “him” is Ng and the “thing” he worshipped is presumably communism and “what he was” was a communist. So, with the last words of the movie the viewer is left with a final reiteration of the now familiar denialist message. The antagonist isn’t truly a person he’s a thing, a “what”; and communism is not a political ideology it’s a “thing” that is worshipped with mistaken religious fervor but will soon be demasked “for what it is” which, it can be assumed, is nothing good.

¹⁹³ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

¹⁹⁴ Gilbert, director, 1964, *The Seventh Dawn*, United Artists.

Rambo III

Rambo III, as its name suggests, is the third in a series of American movies describing the exploits of John Rambo. This installment in the series was released in 1988. It was directed by Peter MacDonald and produced by Buzz Feitshans of Carolco Pictures who had produced both earlier films in the Rambo franchise. The film was written by Sylvester Stallone, who wrote both *Rambo: First Blood* and *Part 2*, with the collaboration of Sheldon Lettich.¹⁹⁵

Rambo III was released in 1988, six years after the franchise began. The story's protagonist is John Rambo, a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran who had served in Vietnam and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder but, despite his best efforts to live a quiet life, keeps getting hauled back into the maelstrom of war because of the government's need for his skills in war zones around the world. When the film begins John Rambo is living in Thailand where he engages in stick fighting by night and helps monks restore a monastery by day. He is found there by his old boss and close friend, Colonel Trautman, who is accompanied by two sunglasses-wearing, suited men who are presumably CIA agents. They ask Rambo to accept a mission in Afghanistan, helping Colonel Trautman deliver weapons to the anti-communist Mujahideen Afghani rebels who are fighting the Soviet invasion. In order to convince Rambo to help the Colonel he is shown multiple photographs of Afghan people who, the CIA agents say, have been injured, tortured or killed by the Soviets. Trautman and his CIA escort tell Rambo that recently 6,000 villagers were killed in a single Soviet attack and that the Afghans

¹⁹⁵ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

are being “slaughtered” by the invading Soviet forces who are using, among other things, chemical weapons. Despite their pleas Rambo refuses to go Trautman calls Rambo “a great fighting machine” indicating that combat was the role he was meant to carry out. Rambo still declines to assist Trautman, claiming “I’ve put in my time.”¹⁹⁶

Later, in Afghanistan, Trautman is captured by the Soviets after the rest of his party is killed by Soviet helicopter fire and is taken to an army garrison where he is questioned and tortured. The facility is full of the shrieks of the tortured prisoners who are tormented with beatings, electrocution and burnings administered by a blowtorch. The Soviet colonel is depicted as merciless and sadistic, personally directing the interrogation sessions.

The CIA agent informs Rambo of Trautman’s capture and Rambo agrees to go to Afghanistan to rescue him. The scene changes to Afghanistan where Rambo connects with the Mujahideen to learn where Trautman is and how to get there. He meets his Mujahideen contact in a shop that sells guns, artificial legs and crutches. Seeing Rambo glance at these items the contact tells Rambo that the Soviets have laid “many landmines.” At a meeting with the Mujahideen Rambo is told bluntly that the Soviets are trying to “wipe out a race of people” and that the Soviets kill women and children and bayonet the bellies of pregnant women so they “won’t have to fight the next generation.”¹⁹⁷ Rambo has a chance to see mass murder firsthand when Soviet choppers attack a racing event watched by a large crowd of onlookers. The Soviet colonel is looking for Rambo

¹⁹⁶ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

¹⁹⁷ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

whom he has been told by a spy is coming to rescue Trautman. The choppers open fire on the crowd killing men, women and children until Rambo succeeds in forcing them to retreat. The dead lay all over the field.

Rambo proceeds to the fortress and attempts a rescue which fails. While there he sees the horrors of the prison; men being dragged through the hall, women confined in a small cage from which they are removed one by one and the ever-present screams of the tortured. After his escape he plots and carries out a second rescue attempt, this time successfully. He and Trautman allude the Soviet commandos who are following them but then are faced with a tank battalion lined up in front of them. It looks hopeless for Rambo but just then the Mujahideen rebels arrive on horseback. The tanks are destroyed, many Soviet soldiers killed and the colonel himself dies under fire from Rambo while piloting one of the deadly helicopters. As the final credits roll we see that the film is dedicated to “the gallant people of Afghanistan”¹⁹⁸ and that the music chosen to undergird the final credits is the inspirational melody “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.”

As the foregoing plot summary suggests, it is made very clear to the movie audience through both dialogue and images that a genocide is going on in Afghanistan. Not only are viewers bluntly told so, twice, but there are visual representations of such events in the racing massacre which we witness as well as in the multiple scenes depicting torture. The motivation of the Soviets is never, however, explained by a Soviet character. The script is silent on their perspective on the carnage. What we hear about the reasons for the war is solely from the

¹⁹⁸ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

Afghan point of view, and from that perspective, the movie tells us that the war's intention is "wiping out a race of people"¹⁹⁹, a textbook definition of genocide. While several of the Afghans portrayed in the movie are full-fledged people with speaking roles the Soviets in *Rambo III* are only visual images in uniforms; only the colonel has a speaking role and the content of his comments are narrowly focused on finding and killing John Rambo. As is often seen in extermination movies, therefore, the antagonists are depersonalized and generalized. No one cares when the oppressors are killed by Rambo because they have never been portrayed as individual people and we have never even heard them speak. In addition, Rambo's decimation of the Soviets are rendered acceptable because their actions are considered against the background, carefully laid by the script, of Soviet involvement in genocide. Hence his actions, killing large numbers of Russian soldiers are "relativized" by knowledge of the Soviet atrocities in a "yes, but" moment²⁰⁰ that says yes, John Rambo killed a lot of people in this movie, but he was just retaliating against the genocidal activities of the Soviet antagonists.

This relativizing of genocidal behavior, as we have learned, played out throughout the Cold War with the two superpowers accusing each other of political acts of violence on a regular basis. *Rambo III* presents an illuminating example of this Cold War reality. Here in the script for *Rambo III* it is driven home again and again that the Soviets are genocidal brutes who are guilty of heinous acts like bayoneting the bellies of pregnant women so they "won't have to fight

¹⁹⁹ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

²⁰⁰ Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. Chapter One. Kindle Edition.

the next generation”²⁰¹ of Afghans. Painting this gruesome, if possibly realistic, portrait of Soviet activity in Afghanistan, makes any violence against their group seem trivial in comparison. So, when John Rambo kills fifty or a hundred Soviets in single scenes the audience cheers and does not question the rectitude of his own possibly politicidal actions. Is a free offense, earned by the Soviets through their actions toward the Mujahideen. This relativization is a denial tactic that is repeated through words and deeds in almost every scene of the film.

Another tactic that the movie uses to deny any culpability on the part of the Americans, represented by the figure of John Rambo, is the denialist tactic of contextual framing. Here, as suggested by Baumeister and Hastings, *Rambo III* presents the action of the movie in isolation from any earlier or concurrent historical events that would be needed in order to accurately understand their meaning in its actual historical context. The writer of *Rambo II*, Sylvester Stallone, presents the conflict in isolation from other world events even though the Cold War was still the primary fact of world political history at that time and had been for thirty years. The reasons that the USA wants to help the Mujahideen are framed as purely humanitarian. From the earliest scenes when the CIA is trying to recruit Rambo until the ending dedication to “the gallant people of Afghanistan” and the musical plea that “He ain’t heavy he’s my brother” the appeal to humanitarianism is made clear. By choosing, as Baumeister and Hastings observe, a single

²⁰¹ MacDonald, director, 1986, *Rambo III*, Carolco Pictures.

“causal nexus” for the conflict the film depicts, the script creates a narrow definition of events that “can make the memory serve the group’s self-image.”²⁰²

It would appear, however, that the movie’s humanitarian pitch was lost on many of the film’s reviewers. Typical of their overtly unconcerned responses was that of Candice Russell who said, “Rambo III sticks him[Stallone] with a cause that only human-rights groups, or Afghan immigrants, could passionately support.”²⁰³ Joan Maislin of the *New York Times* seems equally unconcerned about events in Afghanistan when she refers to the Mujahideed as “this film’s noble Indians”²⁰⁴ and Brian Johnson of *Commonweal* seems indifferent to the war in Afghanistan when he humorously remarks that Stallone had “better hope peace doesn’t break out.”²⁰⁵ These comments from reviewers of *Rambo III* indicate, as did Bosley Crowther’s review of *The 7th Dawn*, a distinct lack of concern for transnational issues or for deaths in American proxy wars that was perhaps common in this era..

Perhaps the most dangerous distortion of fact presented in *Rambo III* is its characterization of the Mujahideen rebels of Afghanistan. Here we see distortion of fact by omission of relevant facts. In the movie the Mujahideen, who are referred to by name in the script, are very clearly portrayed as the victims of Soviet aggression who are fighting for the freedom of their country. But these were not apolitical peasant farmers and there are many salient facts about the Mujahideen

²⁰² Baumeister and Hastings, 277-287

²⁰³ Russell, “Rambo III: Pyrotechnics Overpower Emotion., 1E

²⁰⁴ Maislin, “Stallone’s Rambo III”, C15

²⁰⁵ O’ Brien,. “Naturel Men II/III.”

and their reasons for fighting the Soviets that are simply omitted from the film, facts that change our understanding of the film's action as part of a much larger pattern of events in the region.

B: Whistleblower Films

The next category of films that was assessed were those defined as whistleblower films which deal with the human consequences of Cold War proxy conflicts and present a contrarian view of superpower policies during those events. The films selected to represent this category of films are *Missing* (1982), *El Norte* (1983) and *Salvador* (1986). They were selected on the basis of their content which was related to the impact of Cold War politicides on individuals and whole societies. Also determinative of selection was the fact that each of the films represented Cold War events in different countries, although all in the western hemisphere. These films are also representative of a broader genre of American films that includes movies such as *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), *Under Fire* (1983), *Choices of the Heart* (1983), *Last Plane Out* (1983), *Latino* (1985), *Sweet Country* (1987) and *Romero* (1989). There is also a body Vietnam War films which shares much in common with whistleblower films such as, *The Deerhunter* (1978), *Coming Home* (1978), *Platoon* (1986) *Born of the 4th of July* (1989), *Causalities of War* (1989), *Heaven & Earth* (1993).

Missing

Missing is a 1982 movie directed by the Greek-French director Costa-Gavras from a script co-written by Costa-Gavras and Donald E. Stewart. The screenplay

was based on the non-fiction book, *The Execution of Charles Horman: An American Sacrifice* (1978) by Thomas Hauser.²⁰⁶ Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek starred in this well-received drama that won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for Best Picture by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

The movie's action occurs in the context of the 1973 coup against the Chilean government of democratic socialist, Salvador Allende. The search for American journalist Charles Horman who was disappeared during the coup is central to plot. As the movie begins, a voice-over informs the audience that what they are about to see is a true story. In the first scenes we see the initial stages of the coup - people are shot in the streets, women are manhandled and arrested for being attired in slacks, and people are loaded on to army trucks and driven off in the night. Charles and his wife Beth become separated and when she finally returns home after a harrowing night on the bullet-strafed streets of Santiago Charles is gone and the house ransacked. A neighbor tells her Charles was taken by the soldiers and she should leave also since they might return and arrest her as well. After two weeks of unsuccessfully looking for her husband alone Beth is joined in the search by her husband's strait-laced, Christian Scientist father. Edmund Horman meets with Embassy officials and then proceeds to search hospitals wards, overflowing morgues replete with beaten bodies and soccer stadiums full of political prisoners for his son. He and Charles' wife become

²⁰⁶ Costa-Gavras, director, 1982, *Missing*, PolyGram Pictures.

convinced that Embassy officials are lying to them about the fate of their loved one. Finally, they learn that Charles was executed at the national soccer stadium turned killing field three days after his arrest. They return to the United States and receive Charles' body for burial seven months later. Charles' dad vows to expose the staff of the American Embassy for their complicity in his son's death.

Those are the bare bones of the story line but what is this movie really about and how does the story relate to politicide? The underlying message that is conveyed by this movie is that the United States was complicit in the military coup in Chile and even approved the executions of Americans whom it considered left wing extremists. This fact, incidentally, was confirmed by a Chilean court in a 2015 decision in which the Chilean tribunal stated that "Military intelligence services of the United States played a fundamental role in the murder of two U.S. citizens in 1973, providing Chilean officers with the information that led to their execution".²⁰⁷

Although neither the name of the nation in which the coup occurred nor the names of Allende or his successor, the authoritarian dictator General Pinochet, are mentioned in the movie, the book on which the movie is based does name all of the American and Chilean figures associated with the event. Why was this information, including the name of the country, left out of the movie? The film was released in 1982; at that time Pinochet was still the country's dictator, the Cold War still raged, and Ronald Reagan had just begun his Presidency. So, the politics of the moment did not support accusing the United States of complicity in a

²⁰⁷ Bonnefoy, "Chilean Court Rules U.S. Had Role in Murders", section A, 6.

politicide nor the murder of its own citizens. Denial of complicity by omission of pertinent facts is therefore used as the name of the country and of the individuals associated with the politicide are not mentioned. Film viewers unfamiliar with South American politics, as a result of these omissions, are denied the context needed to fully understand the representations in the film.

Additionally, all through the movie the staff of the United States Embassy in Santiago, including a man who was later found guilty of personal complicity in Horman's execution, deny any knowledge of the event. They use several standard denial mechanisms during their interactions with Charles' father. The first of these is denial that the event ever occurred at all. The American officials, who knew of Horman's execution because they approved it, tell the father different stories at various points in his search, including that Charles is probably in hiding, or that their sources indicate that he is alive and heading for the country's northern border. When these denial mechanisms don't work, they inform the father, using another well-known denial mechanism, portraying victims as perpetrators, that Charles was abducted and may be dead but that the crime was carried out by leftists in stolen army uniforms. Thus, the Embassy staff again, employs the denial mechanism of portraying the victims as perpetrators. Although this movie deals with only one victim of the Chilean politicide, this one case exemplifies the strategy of outright denial and misdirection that was used by the U.S. government regarding all of the victims of the violence in Chile. First, 'no genocide occurred' and then, as the bodies piled up, 'the leftists did it.'

As the father becomes more and more of a nagging nuisance to the American

diplomats and especially when he indicates that he believes they are lying to him, their strategy changes yet again. Now they try the “blame the circumstances” denialist defense outlined by Baumeister and Hastings. They tell the father essentially that patriotism made them do it. The ambassador harangues Edmund Horman saying “There are 3000 American companies doing business here” and that preserving that business relationship is needed for the “preservation of a way of life,” finally telling the dad that if it wasn’t for the “unfortunate” incident with his son he’d be “sitting at home satisfied with the result.” While the father is digesting that, the Ambassador adds, regarding Edmund’s son Charles, “you play with fire and you get burned.”²⁰⁸ Here, in the ambassador’s last statement, we see denial by blaming the victim - he wouldn’t have been killed if he wasn’t writing stories about events in Chile. The vast majority of the Americans killed or imprisoned, with US agreement, in the Chilean coup were left wing idealists who had come to Chile to support the changes Allende was trying to make. As represented in *Missing* these lives and other leftist lives were, from the point of view of American diplomats, justifiably forfeit if they did or said anything that offended the new rightest sensibility in Chile and the United States.

The relationship of all of these events to the whole constellation of right-wing Cold War politics is also made clear throughout the movie. Beth is interviewed by an Embassy official who asks her archly, “Now what exactly were your husband’s politics Mrs. Horman?” when Beth replies “Liberal” the official rejoins “Liberal or radical?” He also repeatedly asks the wife for a list of all of Charles’ leftist friends

²⁰⁸ Costa-Gavras, director, 1982, *Missing*, PolyGram Pictures.

so they can be “interviewed.” In another scene this same official speaking about Charles says, “He was sort of a meddler wasn’t he?” When Beth says he wrote for a certain newspaper the official responds “Left wing paper, hmm?”²⁰⁹ The viewer is left with the clear impression that the official was asking those questions to justify Charles Horman’s death to himself, to his colleagues in the room and perhaps to Charles’ family. In all of these interactions the Embassy official’s statements exemplify Lipstadt’s “yes but” form of denialism in which the misdeeds of the perpetrator, in this case writing for a left-wing newspaper, is cited as evidence that his death was justified and therefore not actually genocidal.

The role of the United States government in the Chilean coup is at first hinted at in *Missing* and then outright stated. When Charles goes to another town for a story and is stranded there during the initial phases of the coup, he speaks to a man in his hotel who tells him forthrightly that he is a contractor for the American military. We then see this contractor meet with an American military officer at the hotel. He tells Charles that things here are turning out “exactly as planned” and introduces Charles to US military officers who talk in veiled, yet clearly scrutable terms, in front of him about their covert efforts in Chile. Later in the film, Charles’ father interviews a policeman who saw Charles being interrogated; he tells the father that the Americans have an office just down the hall from the general in charge of carrying out the coup and that the General who ordered Charles to be “disappeared” would not have done so without US approval. Finally, in a flashback, Charles is told by the military contractor that “he’s on his way to Bolivia”²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Costa-Gavras, director, 1982, *Missing*, PolyGram Pictures.

²¹⁰ Costa-Gavras, director, 1982, *Missing*, PolyGram Pictures.

with a clear implication that the continuing work of fomenting political unrest in South America awaits him there.

Public silence as a means of denying genocide is also demonstrated in this movie. As defined by the sociologist Malin Akerstorm, “public silence” is silence “actively produced by those in power with the intent to limit the spread of information that will harm them, using the mechanism of preventing public access to such information...”²¹¹ In *Missing* public silence is seen repeatedly when the new government refuses to release data, delays meetings with families, indicates that lists of prisoners’ names are not available for review, denies access to locations where prisoners are being kept, etc.

Throughout the movie Costa-Gavras makes an interesting aesthetic choice. Although the Chilean coup and its aftermath is known to have been very violent, using not just political murder, but, according to the Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation ²¹², also mass murder, torture, rape and the “disappearing” of more than 40,000 victims, Costa-Gavras chooses not to show any actual violence, only its results. So, for example, throughout the film the audience hears the constant gunfire in Santiago and sees apparent victims of that gunfire sprawled dead on the streets but never sees anyone being killed or tortured. All the violence is clearly implied but never overtly presented. This choice enhances the atmosphere of anxious expectation that the film creates, letting the story speak for itself. It may also, however, be viewed as an

²¹¹ Akerstrom, *Betrayal and Betrayers: The Sociology of Treachery*.

²¹² Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation.

example of unintentional minimization in which the audience doesn't learn the true magnitude of the event because they are protected from its visual representations. Film critics Roger Ebert²¹³ and Vincent Canby²¹⁴ both comment negatively on this element of the film, noting that the failure to dramatize Charles Holman's death gives the movie a lack of resolution as well as leaving viewers with a sense of uncertainty regarding the film's intended message.

Similarly, although the family views large numbers of dead bodies stacked in rows at local morgues, Charles himself is never seen being interrogated, tortured and murdered. His fate is made known to his father and to the audience in a very brief, antiseptic telephone call from the Embassy to Edmund Horman in which the dad is told his son was killed at the soccer stadium death-processing site and his body then encased in a cement wall. Although his death is never seen the impact of the telephone call, routinely rendered and quietly received, provides a powerful statement regarding the casual nature of violence in a genocidal world.

El Norte

The film *El Norte*, released in 1983 is another example of a whistle blower film.²¹⁵ It features two young Guatemalans, siblings Rosa and Enrique, who emigrate to the US after their parents are murdered by the army in a representation of one of the many massacres the government perpetrated on indigenous people, labor unionists, intellectuals and others who supported socialist political policies. As such, it is one of the few films which attempts to represent a

²¹³ Ebert, *Missing*.

²¹⁴ Canby, *Missing*.

²¹⁵ Nava, director, 1983, *El Norte*.

contemporary politicide that occurred in the Western hemisphere.

El Norte was written and directed by Gregory Nava, who insisted on producing the film with independent sources of funding including the Public Broadcasting Service and pre-sales of the film. Nava and others who collaborated on the film did not want the film to be adulterated by corporate studio oversight. Thus, *El Norte* is a highly charged political film, one that aims to show its audience the plight of Guatemalan people during its long period of genocide.

The film begins in Guatemala, with indigenous laborers harvesting coffee plants under the watch of an armed overseer. To signal the end of the shift the foreman pulls out his pistol and fires into the air – an apt metaphor for how the exploitation of labor is maintained by state violence. Among the workers is Arturo Xuncax, the father of Rosa and Enrique. Arturo, fed up with exploitation, has left-wing affiliations which he expresses in a speech to Enrique,

The rich came here. They're not from here. ... I've worked in many places and everywhere it's the same. For the rich, the peasant is just a pair of arms. That's all. We are just a pair of arms to do their work. They treat their animals better than us. For many years We've been trying to make the rich understand. That the poor have hearts and souls. That we feel. That we are people, and we're all equal.²¹⁶

Later Arturo and several compatriots meet in the middle of the night for a clandestine political meeting. But the audience has already been tipped off to their fate. Earlier the film shows us the overseer bribe another worker, a pathetic and emaciated figure, to rat out the subversives. When the Guatemalan army arrives, they shoot at the workers without compunction. The gunfire rings through the

²¹⁶ Nava, director, 1983, *El Norte*.

village, waking up Enrique who rushes to the meeting site. There he discovers the horror of his father's decapitated head dangling from a tree branch. It is an image of graphic violence clearly designed to shock as well as educate.

Subsequently, Rosa and Enrique's mother is disappeared by state authorities, and the siblings decide to flee, becoming refugees from genocide. They travel north through Mexico to the United States, where for a while they find employment and peace. But their status as undocumented people in a hostile land spells their destruction by the film's end.

Rosa gets sick with a typhus infection from a rat bite, but is terrified of seeking treatment, "I can't go back to the hospital. They'll send me back, and I'll be murdered! No!"²¹⁷ Even though she has crossed two international borders, the violence in Guatemala is still an ever-looming threat.

Enrique loses his promising job as a waiter and the film ends with Enrique digging ditches as a day laborer, seemingly trapped in a purgatory of statelessness and poverty. The scene shows Enrique and other undocumented workers digging a trench at a construction site. As the camera is placed behind the wooden posts of an unfinished building, the segments of the trench resemble graves, that the workers seem to be digging for themselves. Following this shot, as the final image before the credits, the film cuts to the severed head of Enrique's father silhouetted against the setting sun.

²¹⁷ Nava, director, 1983, *El Norte*.



Source: Gregory Nava, *El Norte*



Source: Gregory Nava, *El Norte*

Clearly Nava is sympathetic to the Xuncax family and the real-world people they represent. The film is intended to be didactic and inform his audience about the forces of capitalism and racism destroying families like theirs.

Throughout the film we see Rosa, Enrique and other indigenous people are subjected to racism, both at the level of personal interaction and at the level of systemic inequality. When in Mexico, the siblings are called “dumb as animals” and “donkeys”, clear evidence of the dehumanization which is often a constituent of genocide. In another scene, Enrique and Rosa get into a petty dispute with another passenger over whether to keep the window closed. The Mexican passenger unleashes a racist tirade saying to them “Goddamn Indians You should die for this!” Here the screenplay directly ties the practice of othering to genocidal ideation. A minor dispute over ventilation becomes presumed grounds for extermination.

El Norte showcases genocidal violence and the plight of refugees in the United States. But does it tie the fate of the Xuncax family to the Cold War and American foreign policy? As a work of drama, the people who made *El Norte*, prioritized aesthetic considerations over historic accuracy or didactic quality. Feature length films, conventionally lasting between 90 and 150 minutes have structural limitations on what they can show on screen. They are not perfect panoramic records of reality, nor can they be. Nonetheless they still shape perceptions of the world in which they are situated.

There is never a moment in *El Norte* which American complicity in the Guatemalan genocide is made explicit. But the relationship is implied through use of symbols and other narrative choices the film makes. When Enrique and Rosa plan their evacuation, they consult a local man Ramon, who tells Enrique that the borderlands between Mexico and the US are “like a war zone”. The implication is

that the siblings are escaping one war zone to end up in another, and the regime of state violence that they find in the militarized border has common origins with the genocidal violence in Guatemala.

After the siblings crawl through a sewer pipe under the US border and evade INS helicopter patrols their coyote leads them to the Lazy Acres Hotel, the terminal destination for undocumented migrants. The hotel and the business of farming out undocumented workers is managed by Roman Bravo, an unctuous Chicano hustler. Ramon haggles with the coyote over harboring Rosa and Enrique, explaining “Guatemala, big deal. I get em from Guatemala, Salvador, Nicaragua, they coming in from all South America”.²¹⁸ Notably, the countries Ramon enumerates were all warzones at that time of the film’s release, ravaged by American trained death squads, armed with American-made ordinance.

When Rosa lies dying of typhus, she gains tragic clarity of the world and her place in it:

Rosa: Life here is very hard, Enrique. We’re not free. Isn’t it true that we’re not free?

Enrique: Yes, life is difficult here. It’s true. You have to work very hard.

Rosa: In our own land, we have no home. They want to kill us. There’s no home for us there. In Mexico there is only poverty. We can’t make a home there either. And here in the North, we aren’t accepted. When will we find a home Enrique? Maybe when we die, we’ll find a home.²¹⁹

With Rosa’s last words, the film questions the ideological foundations of the United States, a country which in the Reagan era fashioned itself as the leader of

²¹⁸ Nava, director, 1983, *El Norte*.

²¹⁹ Nava, director, 1983, *El Norte*.

the free world. Her death also functions to subvert the American Dream plot structure, which the film was appearing to conform to before the ending. Clearly Nava and Anna Thomas, the screenwriters wanted to communicate a truth about inescapable poverty here and abroad that has been whitewashed in America cinema.

Would it have been too severe a deviation from established aesthetic form to make the connection between migrant refugees and the politicides which displaced them more explicit? Film critics Roger Ebert and Vincent Canby both would have rejected this idea for they both comment very favorably about the film's lack of didactic content about the political situation in Central America and the film maker's choice to concentrate on the two immigrant siblings and their personal story.²²⁰ Canby even goes so far as to recommend two documentaries that he believes make good companion pieces for this "wonderful and terrible fable," seeming to imply that documentary is the cinematic form one can go to for facts.²²¹

Even in the subversive register of films like *El Norte*, made by filmmakers with left wing sympathies, overtly accusing the US of genocide was seemingly too difficult even for filmmakers with independent sources of financing. Politically didactic cinema may have been considered in bad taste, preachy or ham-fisted, an accusation hurled by some critics at the next case study, Oliver's Stone's *Salvador*.

²²⁰ Ebert, "El Norte".

²²¹ Canby, "El Norte".

Salvador

Salvador is yet another whistleblower film that was released in the 1980s. The film is set in El Salvador during the politicidal civil war. Like *Missing* and *El Norte*, *Salvador* was independently financed and was directed by Oliver Stone, a director famous for his critical posture towards American imperialism.²²² As such, *Salvador* goes farther than any other whistleblower film to indict the United States for abetting war crimes and political violence.

The film stars James Woods as Richard Boyle, a washed-up photojournalist with a resume of doing work in war zones. Boyle, a reprobate and self-proclaimed “fucking weasel” is living in squalor with a wife and infant son. He’s broke and desperate for work and convinces his friend, ‘Doctor Rock’, a fallen radio DJ played by James Belushi to drive him down to Central America with the inducement of women and booze. But what Boyle doesn’t tell Dr. Rock is that their true destination is the killing fields of El Salvador where Boyle thinks he can snap pictures for money.

Once in El Salvador, the Thompsonian duo are confronted with the brutality of the ongoing civil war; their lives are constantly in danger, but Boyle’s been to the country before, and he uses his deep well of contacts to navigate the tight-rope between the government and the rebels and get work in the process. Boyle also rendezvous with Maria, the mother of another of his children, and revives their relationship during his stay in the country. For all his neediness and

²²² Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

beggary, however, Boyle has a heart, and an important thread in the film's plot revolves around him acquiring the right papers for Maria which might help to protect her from the country's political government.

The audience is given a front row seat to political atrocities committed in the Salvadoran Civil War as throughout the film Boyle photographs mass graves, evades gunfire during battles, and is beaten by police. Over the course of the film Boyle's conscience gets the better of him, and he offers increasingly caustic scrutiny of the Guatemalan and American governments, which lands him in hot water with his former patrons. With his life in danger, and his film rolls spent, Boyle flees the country with Maria. At the denouement, seemingly out of harm's way, Maria and her children are apprehended by American INS agents after the bus they are riding is stopped in an immigration sweep.

Salvador represents the political violence of the Salvadoran Civil War with graphic verisimilitude. Shortly after they cross the border into El Salvador, Boyle and Dr. Rock are greeted with burning corpses and murder. Taken into a city, Boyle witnesses a teenage boy apprehended by the army because he doesn't have the right papers (cedulas). The officer in charge shouts at the boy, "Who are your friends? ... communists?" and then casually shoots him dead in the street.

Later, the film finds Boyle and another photojournalist, John Cassady, at a dumping ground for the victims of the state, a place called "El Playon". They roam the desolate landscape and take pictures of the human remains that are in various states of decomposition. In several shots the camera is placed above the

scene in order to give the audience a sense of the scale – of both the place and the extent of the killing. The simulated corpses are horrifically rendered by makeup and the limpness of the actors playing them. The ‘Playon’ shown in *Salvador* was a real place which was reported on by the New York times in a 1981 article. The article offers this description of El Playon,

An expanse of jagged lava rock known as El Playon is the sepulcher for an unknown number of slaughtered Salvadoran civilians. Where the vehicle tracks emerge from the high weeds about 100 yards from the paved road, three skulls, one with a bullet hole in the forehead, rest upright near the decaying rot of food, plastic, tin cans and soda bottles, for El Playon is also a dump for garbage. A walk across the hardened lava reveals pockets of jumbled skulls, jaws, pelvic bones and thighbones, sometimes protruding from the porous rock as if someone had sought to give them a burial.²²³



Source: Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²²³ Bonner, “For Salvador Victims, Macabre Fate”.

The film also showcases the assassination of Oscar Romero, the Catholic Bishop who was critical of the human rights abuses committed by the government. Stone weaves the assassination into the plot by having Boyle and Dr. Rock attend the mass in which he was assassinated. Beforehand we see Major Max, a stand-in for Roberto D'Aubuisson Arrieta, the founder of the right wing ARENA party, plot Romero's assassination. Before selecting Romero's assassin, Major Max articulates the genocidal vision that Stone imagined him to have. To the captains of death squads seated around him, he says,

For every one of our people, we will kill 100 of them. We will avenge the death of the south African ambassador ... These shit-faced subversives that have sold out country out to the communists will die. And these pseudo journalists sent here by the Zionist communist conspiracy to divide and confuse our people, they will die.²²⁴

Seven years after the release of *Salvador*, the UN-created Truth Commission for El Salvador came to the official conclusion that Arrieta had ordered the assassination of then-Archbishop Óscar Romero.²²⁵

Another episode of barbarity showcased in *Salvador* is the rape and murder of American Catholic missionaries at the hands of Salvadoran National Guardsmen.²²⁶ Earlier, the film introduces the young lay missionary Cathy Moore, played by Cynthia Gibb, who ministers to children maimed by the war. In a sequence inspired by the slaying of 4 Catholic missionaries December of 1980, Cathy and 3 other women, are stopped by a cadre of national guardsman, raped and

²²⁴ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²²⁵ El Salvador Accountability and Human Rights, *The Report of The United Nations Commission On the Truth For El Salvador*.

²²⁶ El Salvador Accountability and Human Rights: *The Report of The United Nations Commission On the Truth For El Salvador*.

murdered. Stone decides not to simulate the moment of killing on screen but executes a smash cut to their bodies being exhumed some weeks later. There are several closeups of the prop corpses which are rendered with shocking verisimilitude. The scene is noteworthy for its unabashed portrayal of necrosis for political purposes rather than merely shock value.

Beyond the representations politicidal violence, the screenplay of *Salvador*, attempts to unveil how denialism, both from the perspectives of bystanders and the state, is interwoven with acts of mass murder. As Boyle and Dr. Rock first enter El Salvador they reach an army checkpoint. Soldiers mull about while a charred corpse burns in the middle of the road, seemingly not worthy of attention. In a display of Freudian denial, Boyle attempts to rationalize the horror, telling Dr. Rock “Don’t worry man, it’s just some guy”.²²⁷ This seemingly disposable line is a clever demonstration of the psychological mechanisms which rationalize violence. The anonymous victim is just ‘some guy’ rather than a person with a name and an identity, and therefore their death and the political structures responsible for it can be brushed off and forgotten.

The film probes the apathy and denial strategies of bystanders to genocide in a number of ways. Dr. Rock, shocked by these scenes of graphic violence asks Boyle “You got any of those tranquilizers left?” in a bid to muffle the horrors he’s witnessed. Throughout most of the film, Rock is intoxicated, but the film shows him to be a man of conscience who shares what he has with local boys. His

²²⁷ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

inebriation is a stand-in for the coping mechanisms used to bury trauma and perhaps forget one's own complicity in acts of violence.

Denialism committed by perpetrators is also represented in *Salvador*. Major Max, both a genocidaire and presidential candidate, is Stone's primary vehicle for showing how perpetrators deploy forms of denialism to obfuscate their crimes. Immediately following the scene in which Max orders the assassination of Oscar Romero, the film cuts to a TV commercial for Major Max's presidential campaign. In it he speechifies, "I stand for nationalism, law and order, and economic prosperity. But more important, I stand for the church, family and a peaceful Salvador."²²⁸ The dissonance between reality and televisual representation is made palpable by the arrangement of these scenes back-to-back with one another.

In the chaos after Romero's assassination, the film shows soldiers framing a labor organizer for his murder. Later at a press conference, Major Max claims "it was the subversives who killed him, to provoke this atmosphere." At the same press conference, embedded with other members of the press, Boyle get into a heated exchange with Max, and questions him about "deaths squads terrorizing the countryside and cities", to which Max replies "There are no death squads in El Salvador. The outrage of the people against the communist threat cannot be stopped or organized by anybody."²²⁹ Here we see the paradoxical nature of genocidal rhetoric, wherein a denial is accompanied by an admission and a threat.

The film is also critical of the role the American press plays in denialism. This is embodied in the character of Pauline Axelrod an American reporter who is

²²⁸ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²²⁹ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

shown to be more interested in careerism than the truth. From the start Boyle is hostile to Pauline and calls out her “bullshit questions” at Major Max’s press conference. Later at the exhumation site of the Catholic missionaries, Pauline negligently repeats the official explanation of events that had been fed to her, saying “Rumor has it that they may have run the roadblock and there was an exchange of gunfire.”²³⁰

Perhaps *Salvador* is at its most subversive in how it explicitly links the violence in El Salvador to American imperialism. Taking place in 1980, the election of Reagan, and his foreign policy team are featured prominently in the film. Boyle first encounters them in the enclave of American press, intelligence and military personnel cloistered inside the cushy Camino Royale hotel (Spanish for royal road). It is there that the audience is introduced to representatives from the Department of Defense, USAID, the State Department, and the AFL-CIO. Stone emphasizes their inclusion in the scene by placing text underneath each of them which includes their name and affiliation.

At several junctures Stone presents the interrelations between the United States and El Salvador. The film includes footage of Reagan haranguing about the expansion of socialism in Central America. In the speech, he propounds that the United States must, “halt the infiltration of the Americas by terrorists, by outside interference and those who aren’t just aiming at El Salvador, but I think are aiming at the whole Central and possible South America and I’m sure eventually North America.”²³¹ The Salvadoran characters understand that the US is the

²³⁰ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²³¹ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

deciding factor in the Civil War. Major Max pleased with Reagan's election, says, "Finally we have someone in the White House with balls."²³² In the sermon scene, Oscar Romero, includes a critique of the United States, "I have called upon the United States repeatedly to stop all military aid to this army until it satisfactorily resolves the problems of the disappeared and submits itself to civilian control. ... We are poor. You in Washington are so rich. Why are you so blind?"²³³ When Boyle and other reporters are interviewing the rebels, their commander is asked when his offensive against the state will be carried out. He replies, "Before Reagan", implying that the rebel offensive needs to succeed before the new aggressively anticommunist administration takes offices. Boyle presses him with a follow up question, "you think you're ready? With 4,000 troops to take all of El Salvador. The odds are the Pentagon won't let that happen..."²³⁴

After his visit to the rebel base, Boyle shares his photographs with the representatives of Reagan's transition team. Betraying his principles in a bid to get his girlfriend the legal protections which could save her life, Boyle's indignation proves too difficult to contain, and he ends up upbraiding them and the entire Cold war project. This scene offers the most explicit and lengthy critique of American foreign policy in the entire film.

According to Stone in a 2011 interview, because the production was in "dire financial shape" he didn't know if he would ever make another film and so he expanded the dialogue of this scene considerably just before shooting. As Stone

²³² Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²³³ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²³⁴ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

explained, "This is going to be the last movie I ever make, I really thought so. I'm going to throw in everything I feel about this situation. ... This is our only chance. The American people are never going to hear it. We fought for it all the way through. People wanted to cut it, for various reasons.... We are going to say this, it's never been said before. ... The argument remains a valid one."²³⁵

The scene in question begins with Morgan, and Hyde, representatives of military intelligence questioning Boyle about what he observed at the rebel camp:

Hyde: Listen, Boyle we got ... enough military intel to prove 10,000% that this ain't no civil war, but outright commie aggression.

Boyle: You guys have been lying about that from the beginning. You have not presented one shred of proof to the American public that this is anything other than a legitimate peasant revolution. So please don't start telling me about the sanctity of military intelligence, not after Chile, not after Vietnam. I was there. Remember?

Hyde: You know, I personally resent that kind of shit.

Boyle: Then resent it, ok? You've been lying about the number of advisors here. You've been lying about the trainers here. ... You've been lying about switching social humanitarian assistance money to Salvadoran military coffers. And you've been lying saying that this war can be won militarily, which it can't.

Hyde: Of course it can.

Hyde - I'm not going to listen to this wino journalist left-wing commie crap, Jack. We know where this guy's sympathies lie.

Boyle - Left-wing colonel. Maybe? But I'm not a communist. You guys never ever seem to be able to tell the difference. ... I love my country as much as you do. That may surprise you. You are the ones who trained Major Max in the police academy in Washington. You are the ones who trained Jose Madrano and Rene Chacon. You trained them how to torture and how to kill and then you sent them here. And what did Chacon give us? He gave us the Mano Blanco. ... What are the death squads but the

²³⁵ Stone, Film at Lincoln Center 25th Anniversary Screening of *Salvador*, Interview.

brainchild of the CIA? But you'll run with them because they're anti-Moscow.

Hyde - Bullshit.

Boyle - You let them close down the universities, you let them wipe out the best minds in the country. You let them kill whoever they want, you let them wipe out the Catholic church and you let them do it all because they aren't commies. And that colonel is bullshit. You've created a major Frankenstein.

Morgan - We can control him.

Boyle - Like you control Major Max, Chile, and Guatemala, Argentina?

Morgan - What about Pol Pot and Castro, are they any better?

Boyle - What about Pol Pot and Castro? I don't know if they're better all I know is that some Campesino, who can't read or write, or feed his own family, has to watch his kid die of malnutrition. Do you think he gives a shit about Marxism or capitalism?

Hyde - It's that kind of crap thinking that lost us Vietnam, this guilt shit, you liberal assholes. What do you think the hell the KGB is doing?

Boyle - Is that why you guys are here? Some kind of post-Vietnam experience, like you need a re-run or something? You pour 120,000,000 bucks into this place, you turn it into a military zone, so what, so you can have chopper parades in the sky? ... All you're doing is bringing misery to these people. ... I don't want to see another Vietnam. I don't want to see America get another bad rap. I lost my hearing in this ear over there. What do you think I did that for? 15 dollars a photo from Pacific News Service? I did it because I believe in America. I believe that we stand for something. For a constitution. For human rights, not just for a few people but for everybody on this planet. Jack you've got to think of the people first. In the name of human decency, something we Americans are supposed to believe in, you got to at least try to make something of a just society here.

Jack - Look, Richard, it's all part of our national plan. We do a lot of good down here. You know, I'm often asked by people like yourself to examine my conscience, and every now and then I do examine it.

Boyle - What do you find there Jack?

Jack - That whatever mistakes we make down here, the alternative would be ten times worse.²³⁶

Pointedly, this scene attracted the attention and derision of film critics more so than other parts of the film. Roger Ebert, who had an overall positive impression of *Salvador*, had this to say about it, "A scene where Woods debates policy with the U.S. officials sounds tacked on, as if the director and co-writer, Oliver Stone, was afraid of not making his point."²³⁷ It is an irony that this scene which contains rarely articulated truths about American empire sounded tacked on, ham-fisted or unnatural to so many reviewers. Was it the delivery or the implications of its content that rendered the scene jarring to them? The reaction certainly raises interesting questions as to how the clarity of political messages in the past related to their appraisal as bad taste.

It is important to note that *Salvador*'s politics was not only critiqued from the right but also from a feminist perspective. Judith Williamson writing for the *New Statesman*, lambasted the film's treatment of women, as well as its liberal analysis of events. Williamson makes this final analysis,

Between raped virgins, sexy foreigners and careerist bitches, this does seem to suggest that like its protagonists, the film is unable to treat women as equals. It may seem churlish to stick on this point when the film is a strong indictment of the repression in *Salvador*, but it matters, and not only to women, for, despite the film's narrative message, on a deeper level it recycles the ideologies that underlie what it purports to condemn. Any boy that likes war films will get off on this one. ... Nevertheless, the project itself is an important one; if anti-war films can be made to appeal to precisely the *Rambo* audience, then their ideological function would come into its own.²³⁸

²³⁶ Stone, Oliver, director. 1986. *Salvador*.

²³⁷ Ebert, "Salvador".

²³⁸ Williamson, "Cinema: Arms and the Men."

C. Summary of Film Analyses

This analysis has explored a selection of films of the Cold War era through the lens of genocide and genocide denial. The question that was addressed was whether, when analyzed utilizing concepts from genocide and denialist scholarship, evidence of both or either of these issues could be found in the films under review. As the information provided in the preceding section reveals evidence of the promulgation of genocidal dehumanization, other genocidal acts and genocide denial was readily discernible in each of the films in the sample set. There was frequent confirmation of genocidal activity including dehumanization, torture, and murder in each of these movies as well as copious evidence of denialism including blaming the victim, omission of facts, distortion of facts, relativization, silence, the use of secrecy and many others.

So, although the words genocide and denialism are never used in any of these films, even a cursory review reveals that these issues permeate the films' plots and imagery. It is clear, therefore, that the field of genocide scholarship can indeed enrich our understanding of the intended and unintended messaging in these movies. Such analysis will, in turn, will help us determine which elements of their content should be afforded additional scrutiny to determine the extent to which denialism may have obscured or completely distorted the historical record.

In the process of establishing the sample set for this analysis it became clear that there are other subgenres of Cold War films that would also benefit from analysis. Though beyond the scope of the current effort, future work that analyzed the presence of genocide and denialism within Cold War comedies and

Cold War espionage films would provide an even deeper understanding of the extent to which these issues are reflected in Cold War cinema.

Conclusion

The Cold War was characterized, not only by political tension between the world's then reigning superpowers, but also by proxy wars conducted around the world in support of the rival political ideologies that they espoused. These wars involved millions of combatants and led to the death of many millions more. During and after these proxy wars and other Cold War events, people drew conclusions about them, in part, from representations that they saw on film. If a valid understanding of the forces that fueled the Cold War is to be gained, therefore, it's important to understand the messages that were embedded in these filmic representations when they were created and later disseminated to at least two generations of the movie-going public.

Film is powerful; current and historic observers of the medium have all acknowledged the role of cinema as a cultural educator. The best currently available data confirms these observations, indicating that film can make and change opinions about important political and cultural issues. When we look at Cold War extermination and whistleblower films from a new perspective, through the lens of genocide studies, it is not difficult to discern messaging that played on the broader social prejudices of viewers and provided fuel for Cold War conflagrations. Although genocidal messages were only rarely overt in Cold War cinematic presentations, the processes of othering, dehumanization of that other, and

progressive forms of violence ending in extermination of other groups clearly were often present in these topical films of the era. The politically “different”, who, to those in capitalist societies, would be communists and socialists, were presented in ways that condoned thinking about these fellow human beings as less than human, thus making it possible to consider their extermination. All of these conscious or unconscious representational choices in cinema made it more possible for the Cold War to maintain public support and extend its lifespan. Conversely, it was the countervailing force of whistleblowers and whistleblowing films that helped to bring the genocidal aspects of the Cold War to conscious awareness and added the weight of filmic messaging to the growing calls for peace.

Promoting understanding of the genocidal underpinnings of the Cold War is an important role for historians of the twentieth century. In doing so they will be not only clarifying the historic record of that era but also encouraging understanding of genocide and denialism as factors implicit to many historic processes and events.

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