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French Lit.

### Colonization in *Blood Brothers* and *the Sea Wall*

The French had occupied Indochina, present day Vietnam, for about one hundred years in 1945. The imposing French had economic interests but disguised these interests as moral duties to humanity to civilize those who were not as civilized as they were. However, colonization had dramatic effects on both the colonized and the colonizers. Two literary works that thoroughly examine the effects of colonization are *Blood Brothers* by Pham Van Ky and *The Sea Wall* by Marguerite Duras. Through literary comparison we can discern the effects of the colonized in *Blood Brothers* and the effects of the colonizers in *The Sea Wall*.

The narrator's Western influence in *Blood Brothers* is significant because it reveals the long term effects of colonization. The narrator states, "One thing was clear: he and I no longer had anything in common. I refused to blame this on the conflict between East and West" (Ky 5). He refers to the narrator's friend, Le Tam. Le Tam represents the Eastern view of the world, with Taoist devotion to no action, simplicity, and understanding being one with nature. The narrator however, did not turn from the West. In fact, he embraced Western culture, "...the West obsessed me...Joyfully I immersed myself in it" (29). Here we have two colonizers who have been influenced differently by the West, one turns away from the culture and the other embraces it. The effects of these opposing reactions is evident when two lifelong friends no longer have

anything in common – a rift occurs separating the two, hence the struggle between the East and West.

Subtle changes in tradition also signify the effects of colonization on the colonized. The narrator's father in *Blood Brothers* is described as wearing "...a tunic of red and blue brocade, white trousers, a mandarin's ivory badge on his chest, a conical hat decorated with tortoise-shell and gold and surmounted by a huge silver point!" (9). After arriving ten years later, the narrator views his father's clothing, and the villagers' clothing, critically; he even states, "That world that had formed me in its womb suddenly struck me as anachronistic, illogical, ludicrous" (36). Over time, the West has wiped Eastern thinking away from the narrator and replaces it the Western view of the world. His Western view causes confusion and some resentment from some family and old friends in the village. However, the narrator's father may be quick to discern the differences in his Westernized son; he too has picked up Western influence. The narrator asks, "How could I deal with this man who would sometimes speak like me and would sometimes enjoin humility before Yao" (24); the narrator, and we can conclude that it is a "...hybrid combination of Confucian thought with a thin coating of French culture acquired through his contacts with the colonists..." (24). The narrator's insight reveals to us even the subconscious effects of colonization, that would plant themselves within the colonized and have an even more long term effect than the presence of the French.

The struggles that the colonizers are conflicted with in *The Sea Wall* are significant because they reveal the other view of colonization – the colonizers. The French government used propaganda techniques to recruit and persuade the French

people to invest their savings in a new and better life in Indochina. The propaganda slogans said “Enlist in the Colonial Army!” and “Young People, a Fortune awaits you in the Colonies!” (Duras 17); the propaganda posters had pictures on them “usually showed a Colonial couple, dressed in white, sitting in rocking-chairs under banana trees...” (17). People from France that decided to embark on this journey soon discovered that the promises the French government made were not what they claimed it would be. Ma, Joseph, and Suzanne illustrate the French family whose promised future was shattered and broken by the corruption in the French government and the terrible land they were allotted. Ma had lost her husband and decided to invest her savings into land and begin cultivation in order to spur profit. However, the cadastral agents failed to tell her the land she was receiving would be prone to the July floods, which would destroy any hope of growing anything. As Duras states, “...she had thrown her savings of ten years into the Pacific Ocean” (19).