Review of International American Studies
RIAS—Vol. 18, Fall-Winter, № 2/2025
ISSN 1991-2773
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31261/rias.18524

GIVING A FACE TO ONE'S ENEMY
A Conversation with Marcelino Truong

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2104-323X

Marcelino Truong is a French illustrator, painter, and author. Born in Manila to a South Vietnamese diplomat and an artistic French mother, he spent his youth between Saigon, Washington D.C., London, and Paris. Between 2012 and 2015, he channeled his experiences into a critically acclaimed graphic memoir diptych centered on the Vietnam War (*Such a Lovely Little War*; *Saigon Calling)*. This was followed by *40 Men and 12 Rifles* (2023), a graphic novel recounting the First Indochina War through the eyes of a forcibly enrolled war painter. Our conversation took place in late 2023 over the course of two chilly autumn afternoons in Truong's newly built in-house atelier in Saint-Malo. Sipping beer while calmly stroking his brush against a canvas depicting two bathers in period swimsuits strolling along the *malouin* seafront, Truong answers all my questions about his ongoing artistic exploration of the war-torn corner of the 20th century that bore him. For hours, we weave together the threads of his life and the tangled, blood-soaked histories of France and Vietnam, from the battlefields of Điện Biên Phủ to the halls of the Sorbonne.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

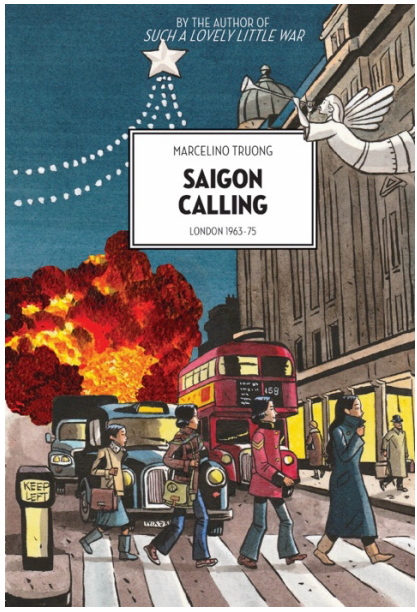

Fig. 1
Cover art of the English edition of *Such a Lovely Little War* (All figures reproduced with permission from the author)

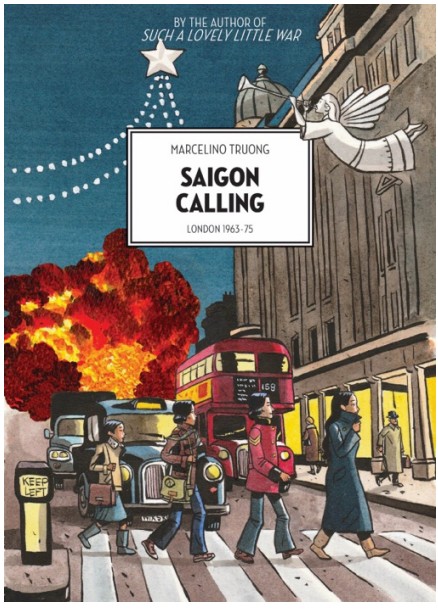

Fig. 2
Cover art of the English edition of *Saigon Calling*

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

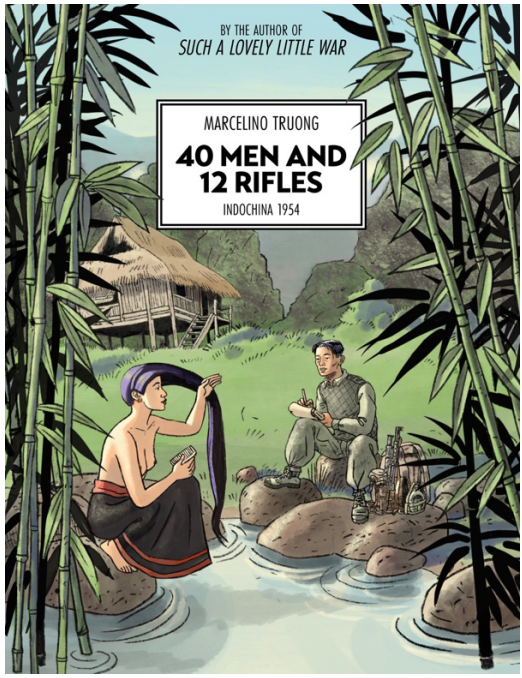

Fig. 3
Cover art of the English edition of *40 Men and 12 Rifles*

THE OTHER SIDE

Giacomo Traina: Given the circumstances of your life, I find it interesting that you devoted a whole work to the perspective of "the other side."
Marcelino Truong: My first two graphic novels were autobiographies—it was the story of my family. And through my family, I told the experience of a great number of Vietnamese families from the Republic of Vietnam. But for the last graphic novel, *40 Men and 12 Rifles*, I went back to a very old project which I began in the very early 1990s. One could almost go back even further in time, because before ever considering doing a graphic novel on the Việt Minh, on the communist-led resistance movement during the Indochina War, I had been accumulating documentation for years about one of the 19th century anti-French resistance fighters in Vietnam called Hoàng Hoa Thám. He was killed in 1913—there are streets in Vietnam called after him, there are films and books about him, there are probably monuments. And I was very interested in that character.

Why? Probably because when I was young, in the '60s and '70s, those were the counterculture years. One of the aspects of the counterculture was a rejection of the former colonial empires. This was

true not only in France but was very prevalent in England, or even in America. I was born from a mixed parentage of Vietnamese father and a French mother. So, there was this inner conflict in me, especially when I was an adolescent, between my Vietnamese side and my French side. At some point in my life, I didn't really like my Vietnamese side. I would have preferred to be completely French. Because then, as today, the mainstream culture always shows the white man as the standard. My mother could have been a pure Nordic beauty, she was blonde, very good-looking; and I didn't like my nose, I didn't like my mouth, I thought it was too large. I felt that I belonged to "the underdogs"; the peoples that have been colonized. That I had to come to terms with that. And when I reached the age of 16, I was in Brittany, doing the last two years of secondary school, I started reading books about the history of Vietnam. I was trying to figure out how those French colonialists who had been in the French Resistance, when they returned to Vietnam in 1945 as soldiers to disarm the Japanese, found themselves fighting not the Japanese, who had capitulated, but a new movement called the Việt Minh, which at that time was a very large front attracting people from all political persuasions dreaming of independence. I couldn't understand how the French had dared to subjugate another civilization.

The idea of romantic rebellion [was popular] among the youth in those years. Think of James Dean, or of *Star Wars*. The Empire looks like the Metropolitan Police, mixed with the Nazis, and the Japanese fascists with those samurai-looking armors. So, it's always the same story. Robin Hood is more popular than the Sheriff of Nottingham. I wanted to be like the hip people, the trendy people, who were more or less leftwing, even if they were from very wealthy backgrounds, especially at the French *lycée*. If you were leftwing, you were sympathetic to the Vietnamese people under the bombs. Look at Bob Dylan, Joan Baez. The cool guys could not side with Lyndon Johnson or with the South Vietnamese President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu. Solženicyn once said that in the West even politics are a question of fashion, and he was right. When you're young and cool and beautiful, you're leftwing. The idea of revolution as something very romantic was prevalent. If you claim to be on the side of "the underdog," you can advocate violent revolution and get away with murder, and people will think, "Oh, you are cool." But if you advocate *coups d'etat* or military takeovers? Then you're a baddie. But what is a revolution, apart from a violent takeover? My aim was to try to gently get the French reader to understand what was behind all the romantic myths concerning the Việt Minh and their war sacrifices. That one should be careful

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

because, it is not that if people are ready to die in thousands for a cause, that the cause is necessarily good. And with this novel my objective was also to give a human face to the other side, which had been always depicted as a bunch of fanatics—like in the American movies.

GT: Indeed, you show the Việt Minh—at least the rank-and-file—as young guys gathering around pictures of naked women, etc. They come off in a very different light compared to the one-dimensional idea of the "Vietnamese communist soldier" we often see depicted.

MT: Yeah, because on one side they were idealized; the Left romanticized Mao Zedong, and these far-Eastern, exotic revolutions. There is a lot of orientalism going on here. And, on the other hand, the rightwing French soldiers from the CEFEO [*Corps expéditionnaire français en Extrême-Orient*], often presented a caricatured view of the Việt Minh; in their memoirs, the Vietnamese people, and more so the Việt Minh, are uniformly described as brainwashed fanatics. I'm sure there must have been brainwashed fanatics, but I'm also sure that for the French prisoners of war, their image of the Việt Minh was perhaps biased because of their experience. So, I wanted to show the people, the charisma that some leaders had, like the old captain in the book, who hops on Minh's truck, when Minh is traveling with a Chinese driver, and they pick up this officer.

GT: And he keeps speaking ill of the Chinese, because he was one of the Việt Minh old-timers who were fighting since 1947. And that after 1950, when the Maoists barged in, he becomes disillusioned.

MT: He's based on many people I've met, that I've been able to speak to, who are from the educated class and who often went to French schools, and saw the mounting of the class struggle, which became more and more prevalent, and fierce, from 1949 onwards, when Mao defeated the Kuomintang in China and started sending aid to the Việt Minh.

FAMILY TIES

GT: So what prompted you to give a "human face to the other side"?

MT: When I started going back to Vietnam in the early '90s, I was lucky to be received by my father's cousins. They all had come to France on the same ship in 1948. All of them with scholarships to go to study either in Paris or in Belgium. They had the same ideals, same upbringing, same education. But some chose the nationalist side. And others chose the Việt Minh at an early stage, and others chose first the Republic of Vietnam, and then opted for the National Liberation Front, but clandestinely.

Fig. 4
Marcelino Truong in his Saint-Malo atelier. Photo by Charles Montécot, courtesy of Marcelino Truong

GT: How many people in your family were on the communist side?
MT: The ones I know of, because my grandmother from Vietnam had eleven brothers and sisters, so you can imagine how numerous the offspring were. There was at least a cousin who joined the Việt Minh during the French Indochina War, or as they called it, "the first patriotic resistance." He spent ten years in the North, from '54 to '64, because he had been a "*tập kết*," a regrouped soldier.
GT: One of those 300,000 people who resettled in the North following the 1954 partition.
MT: That's it. Amongst whom were many Việt Minh soldiers who had been asked to regroup up north expecting to come back two years later after the reunification.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

GT: Because of the 1956 elections that never took place.
MT: Instead, he stayed ten years and started another family up north. He had a second wife and two children there. And his first, legitimate wife was in Trà Vinh with three children. He also had a daughter from a first, very short marriage, who is now living in Montreal and who left Vietnam as a boat person.
In Vietnam, the uncle I spent the most time with was a member of the National Liberation Front in the early '70s, and then a member of the Parliament in '75. He was called Lý Chánh Trung, he was a famous journalist in the South. He taught philosophy at the university. He was a leftwing intellectual, as leftwing as one could be in South Vietnam in those days. He wasn't harassed, but at one point he had a police car parked in front of his home in Thủ Đức. But he never actually went to jail or anything. And then there's my uncle Trương Bửu Lâm, who's now retired in Hawaii. He wrote a book at Yale called *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention* (1967). He presents these texts from Vietnamese history, that all tend to show the resistance against foreign invaders as a long tradition, that the Vietnamese struggle for independence owes nothing to foreign influences.
GT: One of the moments I love the most from the graphic memoirs is the panel in which we see the room of your alter ego with a South Vietnamese flag *and* a Hồ Chí Minh poster hanging from the wall. I love the paradox, the contradiction. Did you really hang those in your room?
MT: Yeah. When I arrived in France. Because I read Jean Lacouture's biography of Hồ Chí Minh. My father gave it to me; he was quite open-minded, he would say, "You have to read books from both sides, don't content yourself with reading books that support whatever opinions you may have." And Lacouture was one of the professors in the school I went to later. In 1977, I ran into him in the halls of the school. I'd read his book, and I recognized him immediately, and I said to him "Monsieur Lacouture, I know that you have returned to Vietnam; may I ask you, if you have a moment, to speak about it." He was in a hurry, he said, "Oh, I've written a book about it which will soon come out, please read that." This book was called *Vietnam: voyage à travers une victoire* (1976). He co-wrote it with his wife Simonne. I bought the book, and I read it. His enthusiasm was beginning to cool off a bit, but very slowly. In that book, there's a footnote at one point where he's talking about North Korea, and he says, "Here we have a socialist country which is full of promise, North Korea, we must keep an eye on the country which may prove to be something very positive" [Both laugh].

So, back to the question, I was always interested in "the other side" because in my youth, leftwing, peace-loving people, they were all sympathetic to the rebels. Think of Che Guevara. He was handsome, a sex symbol—this was Jesus wearing combat fatigues and a black beret. Handsome like Jesus, except he had a gun. In the case of Hồ Chí Minh, the "casting" was perfect. This old guy looking like the father of the nation with the goatee beard. The military plain-looking clothes with no decorations, no medals, no ranks. All that was very appealing.

GT: *40 Men* is about the First Indochina War. Have you ever considered writing this same story from the point of view of the Vietnamese nationalists who served under the French?

MT: Yes. Maybe I will do it one day, but graphic novels are a lot of work! I've been attracted by the idea of doing something on the Vietnamese paratroopers, the Vietnamese soldiers who joined the nationalist side either because they were politicized from the start or because they had been disappointed by the Việt Minh. Nguyễn Văn Thiệu was a Việt Minh, and also President Nguyễn Khánh, before becoming a paratrooper alongside the French, had been a Việt Minh for some time. Many of them became disaffected; others were just attracted by the prestige of the uniform, the red beret, etc. Nothing very romantic or idealistic. They just wanted to be part of the "big boys." A lot of them joined because of that. The prestige of the white beret of the Foreign Legion, or the red beret of the paratroopers. What the Vietnamese rightwing or center rightwing patriots were lacking in was that they didn't have the equivalent of the Marxist doctrine.

GT: Ngô Đình Nhu tried to introduce Personalism but that didn't work.

MT: It was too intellectual, and nobody could define it, whereas a sort of vulgarized bible of Marxism, made of catchphrases, was easily quoted all the time. I read this in the memoir of [the South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States] Bùi Diễm. He says that we were lacking a doctrine, a gospel which could be recited. It wasn't that we didn't have a political program, including social welfare, but it wasn't as clear-cut as the other guys' program.

GT: I was thinking that Minh, the protagonist of *40 Men*, was originally supposed to be a nationalist soldier. That's the whole premise of the story.

MT: He gets his military papers, he's called up.

GT: But then his father sends him away to dodge the draft.

MT: His father is very disappointed to hear that his only son will not serve under the nationalist flag because he's too concerned with his artistic pursuits. You can imagine that Minh's mother must have

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

intervened like, "Listen, if you don't do something for your only son, I will leave you immediately." She probably owns half of the property anyway. So, he obtains a deferment—which I checked, existed, when one was an only son. And maybe he paid off a few people.

REDRAWING HISTORY

GT: You stated that one of the main inspirations for the story was George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.
MT: *Homage to Catalonia* is indeed one of my favorite books. Orwell describes the Spanish, the Catalans, as being really nice people, very generous, very friendly. And that's what I do too. The ordinary people are nice, they're friendly, they're generous, they're idealistic, quite often. They are ready to endure great suffering. And then what Orwell describes in *Homage to Catalonia* is how the Spanish Communist Party received the order from Moscow, who had just signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler, to get rid of the anarchists, because they were getting in the way of a peace with Franco, and Stalin wanted to make peace with Franco. To leave the country to the rightwing.

I also love Orwell's political essays. I used to read them when I was 20, at Sorbonne, studying English. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, I enjoyed them all. Orwell went to Eton School because his parents wanted him to have an upper-class education. But there was always in him this desire to understand and to mix with the underdog. When you read *Down and Out in Paris and London*, he has just spent a few years in the police in Burma. He's an Etonian and he returns to France and England and lives practically on the street. There's this affection for the everyman. Which I try to apply in my own life, and which is important when you depict a movement like the Việt Minh. The masses, the majority of the forces fighting on Hồ Chí Minh's side were from the people. Only the cadres were from the educated classes.
GT: I guess it's not a coincidence that in your book you never show the Việt Minh's leadership *directly*, but only through flashbacks, or pieces of propaganda art. You don't see Võ Nguyên Giáp, you don't see Hồ Chí Minh. You see people *thinking* about them, but you don't see *them*.
MT: Whenever you show historical characters, it's tricky, there is always someone that would tell you, "He wasn't like that," or "This is false, this is approximate." So, to avoid that, I avoid showing famous people. But in the original draft Minh is actually called up to draw a portrait of Giáp. Because in the First World War, in England, some artists, according to their style, were appreciated for their skill of drawing portraits of leaders like General Haig. A picture, or a sketch, and then

they will reproduce it on matchboxes, things that soldiers will exchange so that they can see what their leaders look like. This wasn't the age of photos everywhere; nobody had a smartphone.

GT: I guess it's the same principle as the Roman coins that bore the emperor's face.

MT: Exactly. So, I had planned to have him draw Giáp's portrait, having Giáp sitting in front of him, telling him to hurry, because he's expected somewhere as the battle is raging. And I wanted Minh to overhear a conversation between Giáp and a Chinese counselor who speaks Vietnamese. This would have been an opportunity for me to show the influence of Chinese counselors on the Việt Minh's war effort. But I didn't get to do it, probably because there wasn't enough space. And again, I always find it tricky to depict well-known people because it's easy to fall in caricature.

GT: Compared to the Vietnamese American authors I worked on, you seem to deal with a different political legacy.

MT: When I arrived in France, in the 1970s, the rhetoric around the Vietnam War was still very strong, and the Left, from the extreme to the center, all agreed on one thing, that decolonization was a good thing. France's colonial guilt played a huge part in that. "Grandad was in Indochina, so we have to make up for that." Even today I get people coming up to me in book fairs excusing themselves because their grandfather had fought in Indochina. They feel embarrassed about telling me that their one of their own has fought in that war, thinking that they should feel guilty about it. They excuse the wrongdoing of their parents. And my answer is that it may have been a colonial war at the outset, but it became something else in 1949.

GT: Indeed—a Cold War struggle fought by a seven-division army equipped with artillery pieces. In the novel we see the Việt Minh deploying a 105 mm American-made howitzer, taken in Korea, I reckon.

MT: Or from Chiang Kai-shek, from the Chinese nationalists. Mao gave them to the DRV along with the ammo, the ordnance they had, because their artillery was Soviet equipped.

GT: I was also thinking about another forgotten legacy of the Vietnam wars, the role played by Chiang Kai-shek, by Nationalist China. That in 1945, four years before Mao's victory, the Vietnamese communists were cooperating with Chiang's nationalists. Historian Christopher Goscha writes extensively about this.

MT: Very few people read David Marr's *1945* book enough. I must have read one third of it. Very fascinating, so much input. Very few people know that when the French arrived in North Vietnam between 1945 and 46, at one point, in certain parts, they may have fought alongside

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

the Việt Minh to eliminate the nationalists, because some people in General Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division were pretty leftwing.

GT: 1945–46 is a very complex time. Regarding your sources, what about *China and the Vietnam Wars* (2000) by Qiang Zhai? It argues that until 1969, Hanoi was leaning more towards Beijing than Moscow, and that without Chinese aid the Việt Minh would have never beat the French. Was emphasizing the role played by Maoist China in the Indochina War another of your objectives?

MT: When I was young and I read these books on the Indochina War and the Vietnam War, there wasn't that much emphasis on the role of China, except in books written by former French soldiers. They would sometimes mention the Chinese influence, but that could easily be brushed aside by the leftwing French, who would stick to the romantic Vietnamese communist narrative that claimed, "This is all our doing, we did this on our own, grabbing the weapons of the adversary." And when you read Giáp's memoirs, he downplays the Chinese aid, he brushes that aside, it's all the Vietnamese people's victory. This info about the extent of the Chinese aid only became apparent quite late. But in the '70s we never heard about this. We learned later that in 1975 there were 300,000 Chinese in North Vietnam.

GT: Have you visited all the places you depict in the story?

MT: Yes. I went to Hanoi in 2013, and I also traveled to Điện Biên Phủ, by road, always in 2013. That was the last time I was in Vietnam. I met three former cadres of the Việt Minh. One was Đặng Văn Việt, also known as the "Grey Tiger of Colonial Route No. 4." Route No. 4 is the one along the frontier with China on the eastern border. Lạng Sơn, Cao Bằng…

GT: Where one of the early offensives of the war took place.

MT: Yes, November 1950. The first Việt Minh counteroffensive. Đặng Văn Việt came out of this a hero because he was considered as one of the artisans of some huge ambushes involving 6,000 soldiers attacking a French convoy.

GT: Did you draw sketches during that trip?

MT: I did a few sketches, but not that many, and not at Điện Biên Phủ. I did a lot of portraits along the way, faces, people I met, either on the street, or at the hotel, the receptionist, the driver…

GT: Did you turn them into characters?

MT: No, because I would have needed frontal sketches, all the perspectives. I could've made photos, but I didn't dare do that. When I got to do the book, this was a big problem—characterization. And so, I resorted to finding films on YouTube, Vietnamese films, not necessarily about the Indochina War. Black and white films, modern films,

anything. And I would use characters from those films, who will appear in different angles and make screenshots of those, to be able to draw their faces.

GT: This is a very "cinematic" book, in a way.

MT: My publisher told me, "Think of it as a movie," but even if he hadn't told me so, I suppose I always tried to imagine it as a movie. Because I'm not satisfied with the movies I see, the Vietnamese movies I see on YouTube. These movies can be very good, quality-wise, but it's the content which I find too ideological, too filtered. There's always this taboo of showing things as they really happened. In these movies you will never see a soldier insulting an officer or a cadre. You will rarely see exhausted soldiers. And so, I tried to imagine a story which could be made in film, I suppose, at great cost. I try to do stories which I would like to see but that don't exist.

AU COEUR DES TÉNÈBRES

GT: I wonder what you think of movies like *Apocalypse Now*.

MT: *Apocalypse Now*, I rushed to see it when it came out in October 1979, in Paris. And then I must have seen it about six or seven times. It's probably the only film I've seen that many times, and I also read a lot about it—anything I could find, including of course *Heart of Darkness*, but also J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and books on Coppola. I love that film—I could even recite bits of the narrative. At lunch today we were discussing the idea of confession, I thought about Captain Willard's quote.

GT: "And if his story is a confession, so is mine."

MT: That's it. Our discussion reminded me of Coppola, being an Italian Catholic—the confession, repentance, and redemption, all these things. I had a Catholic education, and I can relate to all these themes. One of the most enlightening things I read about *Apocalypse Now* was a comparison between that movie and *The Godfather*, and that made many things clearer for me. The essay argued that—I hope I remember correctly—the American army in Vietnam was functioning almost like a mafia, with its leaders and its hitmen. Willard is a hitman who is sent by the Special Forces to eliminate a former hitman who has stepped out of line. He's gone nuts. He's doing things we would dream of doing but which aren't allowed in a democracy. He is using counter-insurgency methods that are used on the other side, but we can't really use, at least openly. It doesn't fit in with our democracy, so we have to eliminate him. So, this guy was part of the "mafia," but he has left it, and we have to eliminate him.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

I see this film as a sort of magnificent fresco of the different Vietnam Wars that existed. There was the conventional war, perhaps depicted in this film with the helicopter attack scene—the new conventional war that was fought in Vietnam by the Air Cavalry, which was born in Algeria, by the way, the French developed that but with far fewer means, in 1961, and maybe before, American Green Berets or soldiers would go to Algeria to see how Colonel Bigeard and the French were handling things, how they were using the helicopters to drop soldiers on top of a hill and then go downwards, since parachute drops are not that precise. That started in Algeria, and the Americans would go and take lessons from the French, who had fought against a communist Maoist rebellion, against rebels using Maoist techniques. So, there's the conventional war.

GT: Colonel Kilgore, et cetera.

MT: Exactly. And then the unconventional warfare, the secret war waged by Kurtz and the Special Forces, using the same unconventional militias and ruthless methods, where you have to spot, identify, and kill the right persons. There is no use in bombing 50,000 people. You want to find out who is the leader, what is the network, and eliminate them one by one. It's nasty, but in the end, one might say that it's more efficient and less blood-costly than carpet bombing. So, you have these two wars in Vietnam, and people who don't know about revolutionary warfare or have a very romantic idea of it, might think that Coppola was only criticizing the Americans. But the communists also used both techniques, from the start. And maybe they construed it as an anti-American film.

GT: There's even a club called *Apocalypse Now* in downtown Saigon.

MT: I've been there. Terrible music! So loud that you have to write a text on your phone and show it to the waiters. I hate that place.

So, it's a beautiful film with a beautiful soundtrack. I bought the album; I got it somewhere. I love "Suzie Q," and also the original themes written by Coppola's father. When they hit Kurtz's compound, and you hear *that* bassline! I really love that. And also, the guys on the ship, they were good. The Chef, and that black boy who gets killed, "the light and space of Vietnam really blew his mind," and the captain of the ship who's a nice fatherly figure. In literature, there are a lot of helmsman or guides who die when the hero reaches his destination. Charon showing you the way to the hell, through the River Styx.

GT: Did you like the 2001 *Redux* version? The one with the French plantation scene.

MT: I'm glad they cut that out. I think that the 1979 version was much better.

GT: I agree. It slows the pace down. But what do you think of the fact that the movie completely erases Vietnamese perspectives?
MT: That's quite true, because it's not the subject. They're just *figurants*, extras. Props. That used to shock me in the past. It annoyed me. But I always say, it's up to the Vietnamese to do their own films about the war. The communists do it and they do it well. There are lots of films about the Vietnam War on YouTube. *The Scent of the Burning Grass*, etc., which are quite good. And there are documentaries, that nine-hour documentary that was recently released.
GT: Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's *The Vietnam War.*
MT: But even that one is a film made for Americans, and they can only produce that because their public is American. It's up to the Vietnamese to do their own documentaries. I'd love to do that, but I never learned things like that, and Vietnamese people probably would say that I'm not "really Vietnamese."

Fig. 5
From the original French edition of *40 Men and 12 Rifles* (*40 hommes et 12 fusils*, Denoël Graphic, 2022)

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

GT: Getting back to *40 Men*, the propaganda billboards that Minh draws, are all real?
MT: Yes, I can show you the photocopies. I found this one at the War Museum in Hanoi. I did it precisely, exactly as it was. It was impossible to read it properly. But the original at the museum was itself a photocopy. This was a press illustration, a cartoon in the bottom right-hand corner of the daily newspaper of the People's Army, *Quân đội nhân dân*, they were made so that the even the guys who couldn't read could appreciate that.
GT: Why did you pick this one in particular?
MT: There are several in the same style. I got them on my computer. It struck me of being very "Chinese." The large soldier with a huge arm, and a huge fist, strangling the French besieged combatant. The size of his chest and his arm are typical of Chinese and North Korean propaganda. And the way of killing by strangulation goes back to the martyrdom of some French priests, they were strangled with a rope.
GT: Throughout the story, sometimes you can "hear" other people thinking, through the balloons. In your mind, that's Minh seeing himself, say, through the eyes of the girls looking at him and thinking "he's cute"?
MT: Oh, that's just a running gag. I wanted to show that in spite of the fact that these young men and women are wearing uniforms and fighting, they're human beings, they're flirting.
GT: I was also wondering why you put *Bonjour tristesse* in the novel.
MT: That's a real story. One of the three men I met in Hanoi in 2013, Đỗ Ca Sơn, was at Điện Biên Phủ, with Regiment 174, which was an elite regiment. Đỗ Ca Sơn was as a cadre, the equivalent of a subaltern officer. The perimeter of the French and nationalist encampment was growing smaller day by day, as the Việt Minh were digging offensive trenches to get closer. A lot of the parachutes that were dropped to send food, ammunition, whatever the French and Vietnamese nationalist soldiers needed, would fall in the no man's land, and be picked up by the Việt Minh.

One day, one of such containers fell behind the communist lines; it held seven or eight perfectly new maps of the entire French defenses. The rule was that when Việt Minh soldiers got hold of one of these containers, it should always be opened in the presence of an officer who read French, because they often contained valuable military information. These guys, most of them couldn't read French. One day Đỗ

Ca Sơn's men told him, "We've got this container, and we need you to come over because there's some French documents." And he rushed to the place, and he was given a parcel containing books in French. But he soon discovered that these were just novels being sent to a soldier in the French lines. And he opened the parcel and found *Bonjour tristesse*.

The book was probably sent by a wife or a sister to a French lieutenant, there was his name on the parcel. So Đỗ Ca Sơn slipped the book into his pockets, and he read it during the many sleepless nights of the terrible battle for a position called *Les Élianes*, they were numbered. The hardest fighting was on *Éliane 2*, which the Vietnamese called *Đồi A1*, Hill A1. So, it's a real story and it struck me as being exactly the sort of thing I needed to, as I say, give a face to the enemy, to bring them closer to us, as *Bonjour tristesse* was a huge hit in France.

GT: Were you aiming for realism?

MT: I tried to produce something very exact, historically, with lots of detail, at the expense of doing something artsy. I wasn't trying to be artsy. I was striving for realism. So that people, for example in Vietnam, who know about these things could say, "These are the right uniforms, these are the right weapons, the right vehicles, the right faces, they're not too fat." In one of the series I watched for inspiration, *Đường lên Điện Biên Phủ*, they're too fat, they're too cute, they should have lost *at least* 5 kilos per person. They're too *clean*. They're not thin enough. Their uniforms are not large enough. Việt Minh uniforms were very baggy. During the Vietnam War the ARVN troops had very tight clothes because they didn't want to look like their enemies, who wore large, baggy uniforms.

TRUONG'S PROCESS

GT: I have a question about your use of colors. Is there a rationale for it?

MT: Yes. This story is very long, almost 300 pages. I was supposed to produce a story in 110 pages. So, I started off writing and illustrating the story, and when I reached page 55, Minh had only just left Hanoi! This is a one-man show, I do everything. And people tell me, "Oh yes, but you did this digitally." I worked on my iPad Pro with an app called Procreate, which is not an app about how to make children [Both laugh]. But this doesn't mean that the process is faster. Because of the possibility of enlarging very easily, I tended to work the detail closely. So, to color the whole story in full color would have been exhausting. But when I had to use black and white, it's not black and white, there is one color in it.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

GT: Blue and red, right?
MT: Blue when you are in Hanoi with the nationalists and the French, and then it's brick red when you're with the Reds. And this made the coloring process quicker, although it's still a lot of work. On an iPad, for each page, you can look up the info, the statistics. And they will tell you how many hours you've spent on this page. You can also use a video function and see the video in timelapse motion. And the statistics will tell you "This took 20 hours." So, I chose just to do the full pages and the double page spreads in color.
GT: Let's zero in on your creative process for a minute. Did you have an outline?
MT: For my first two graphic novels I had actually written a scenario. I had sat down for three months and wrote the story in detail, page by page, including the dialogues. And then I sat down to draw the rough pencil of each page. This I did for the first two novels, because I was really afraid of not being able to do this properly, so I needed to assure myself, to convince myself that I could do this. Whereas for this story I was influenced by a French comic artist with whom I did a tour in Canada, Sandrine Revel. She doesn't write things ahead. After having written a synopsis, she makes things up along. Drawing and writing. I thought, let's try this technique. I just didn't feel like sitting down for three months just writing the story, as I had done for the previous three graphic novels. And it worked, but I can tell you that when I started this job, I was really nervous about being able to do this.
GT: How much time did it take?
MT: Three solid years of hard work. 2019–2022.
GT: Every single day, 8 hours per day, something like that?
MT: Probably, yeah.
GT: And how many pages per day?
MT: Just one. One page per day is quite enough.
GT: Did you have to cut some stuff, eventually?
MT: If you compare it with the original synopsis, probably yes. Because writing a synopsis is very easy. It's very easy to write, for instance, "And he arrives on the battlefield of Điện Biên Phủ, and there is a lot of commotion." Now, when you have to *draw* that, that's another story!
GT: Minh's injury, for instance. Did you plan that from the outset, or did it come up along the way?
MT: I really can't remember; I wanted him to have an injury because I wanted the war to be lethal. This is no joke; we're talking about real war. This is not *Tintin*, where he fires his Browning at someone, the guy falls and there's no blood. That's why I take pains to draw weapons carefully.

GT: Have you considered writing a follow-up to the story?
MT: No. It's too much work. In a way, the follow-up to this particular story is *Such a Lovely Little War.*
GT: I wonder what would've become of Minh in post-1954 South Vietnam.
MT: I think he could very well have succeeded in South Vietnam even without a leg. As an artist, even without a leg, you can paint.

BECOMING A POLITICAL ARTIST

GT: Do you see yourself as a political artist?
MT: Not at first. I'm a self-taught artist. I learned the trade by myself, studying what others were doing, etc., and I was much too busy to think about politics. But at 17, I went to a famous school in Paris, the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, a.k.a. Sciences Po. A sort of temple of political studies in France, not because of its students, but because of the teachers. Many of them are academics, but many of them aren't—many are lawyers, people working for the state. They know what they're talking about.
GT: In *Saigon Calling*, you show the discussions that you entertained with them back then. I have the impression that you do so with the third graphic novel as well, as if you're projecting such discussions on the character of Phù Long.[1] As if a Việt Minh encampment during the Indochina War became a Sciences Po classroom in the 1970s.
MT: Thankfully, there were very few "Phù Longs" teaching at Sciences Po—I would have hated it! But there were experts on Vietnam, namely a guy called Philippe Devillers—I took a course with him. Devillers was an expert because he had been to Vietnam in 1945 with Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division. He was in their press service along with Jean Lacouture. They were friends. Later in life, Devillers became an academic, he wrote a book about the Geneva Accords and the 1954 partition.
GT: Did you clash with him?
MT: Oh, no. I just studied his course about Asian history, which, I must say, was pretty boring. He would go into the history of each country, Indonesia, Malaysia, and there was so much stuff that you couldn't remember all that. Luckily, on the day of the oral examination, he questioned me about the First Indochina War. And I got a 13, which is a good mark, the most you can get is a 14. He gave me an easy

1 Phù Long is a character in *40 Men and 12 Rifles*, a white French communist sympathizer who joined the Việt Minh and serves as the leading officer of the propaganda unit under which the protagonist works.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

question. He probably suspected I was Vietnamese. But I would never have crossed swords with him.

GT: What about Jean Chesneaux?

MT: I met him. My father gave me his books. I went to dinner at his place, not very long before he died. Chesneaux too was a French communist and I didn't cross swords with him either.

GT: So, who was your "Phù Long"?

MT: My "Phù Longs" are all those French or Western people—not necessarily intellectuals—fascinated with Vietnam. It can sometimes just be a guy with a Vietnamese wife, and this makes him think he knows all about Vietnam, and he will lecture you on your own history. That happens all the time. And they always know who the goodies and the baddies are. It seems that in France, the history of Indochina mainly captivates either the extreme left or the extreme right. The name Phù Long, in my graphic novel, is a joke. I know this guy who is a French Trotskyist, and his name sounds like Phù Long, but in French. I crossed swords with him many times on Facebook. He would really annoy me.

GT: You say he was a Trotskyist. Was he a follower of people like Tạ Thu Thâu or Ngô Văn Xuyết?

MT: No, he knew that the Vietnamese Trotskyists were slaughtered and silenced. This he didn't share with us. He would be on the side of "the underdog" against the Americans, etc. He was sure of being on the right side and he would say things like, "I can't understand how a guy like you, who had studied at Sciences Po, can be so silly or so bigoted." And I would say, Sciences Po isn't the Party school. Different professors have different opinions. And so, to make fun of him, I named the character acting the part of the French crossover in my story after the French Trotskyist's name. I named him Phù Long. He represents so many idealistic Westerners who supported Communism out of idealism, not only in Vietnam.

THE BOUDAREL AFFAIR

GT: While we're on the subject, tell me about your relationship with Georges Boudarel.[2]

MT: I met Boudarel through a Vietnamese friend at an exhibition at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris, around 1995. After that, I began to exchange with him because the famous scandal, what we call

2 Georges Boudarel (1926–2003) was a French intellectual who became a Việt Minh political commissar during the First Indochina War.

l'affaire Boudarel, had begun in 1993. Boudarel was then a professor at the University of Paris VI. He was a specialist of Vietnamese culture and history along with Pierre Brocheaux, Daniel Hémery, and others. As a former member of the French Communist Party, he was invited to hold a conference at the Senate in France. As he began his talk in front of the Senate, suddenly a voice rang out, saying, "Are you Mr. Georges Boudarel? Are you the former political commissar of camp 113, in which many French officers were held captive during the Indochina War?" The man who had stood up and cried out asking that question had been a prisoner of the Việt Minh for five years. He had been captured in 1950 after the Cao Bằng defeat. There was an uproar, and Boudarel was interrupted, and he was led out.

And then the *affaire* started, because the former prisoners came forward to say, "Yes, we were prisoners of this guy, and this guy shouldn't be teaching our children." And at that time, I was in the mood of trying to "give a face" to the Việt Minh, trying to see if there was any good in them, because I had met my uncle in Vietnam. I was influenced by my uncle to believe that there were good guys on the other side too. I wanted to investigate about that, because I had realized that if my uncle was on their side, they couldn't be all that bad. I wanted to see for myself. I was also annoyed by the attacks on Boudarel. Not that they didn't have the right to hate him. On all accounts, being a prisoner of the Việt Minh was a terrible experience. But what I did know was that having met lots of former soldiers, some of them were racist, and some of them were very rightwing. And again, why did they have such a good conscience? How did *they* treat Vietnamese prisoners? No one comes out of a war clean. I've always been like this, when there's a group, like a pack of dogs attacking one person, I always try to, if possible, to defend that person, or try to see if they're right.

So, when that scandal broke out, I wrote to Boudarel and discussed things because I didn't like the way he was being pushed into a corner. And I didn't side with Boudarel, but I exchanged with him because he happened to be extremely knowledgeable about North Vietnam. We knew very little about the North; he had been behind the "bamboo curtain," and for once we had a French professor who had been there, who hadn't only studied books about the Việt Minh, but had sided with them.

GT: What happened to him after the war?

MT: First, he stayed a few years in Prague, working for some Eastern Bloc organization, and then in 1966 the French justice declared an amnesty of all crimes committed in Algeria or Indochina. And Boudarel had come to realize that Stalinism was a mistake. I picked a lot of ideas

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

from his biography—I'm always interested in clothes, and he says that the further up north he would go, the stricter the uniforms would be, the button-up collars, this was clearly Chinese-influenced, before that they had open collars. He knew Vietnamese history, and he could read Vietnamese quite well. And his attitude had changed. He repented. He said, "J'ai été un con," I was a fool.

SUCH TWO LOVELY LITTLE WARS

GT: Getting back to my original question, I guess that you became a political artist by writing the two memoirs.
MT: Immediately, because the subject was heavily politicized. As you know, the Vietnam War divided societies in the West. You were for Hanoi, or you were for America. People were divided; this was a terribly political subject. You would read history books about Vietnam, written by Nguyễn Khắc Viện, who was a Vietnamese communist. It was a bit heavy-handed, but it worked, because it relied on raising empathy for the underdog. Any kind-hearted person would say, "How evil they were, the French, and how right the Việt Minh were to fight for their freedom." One of his books would be enough to convert you. Although we should have seen through the rhetoric, and we should also have raised the fact that there was very little information coming from the Eastern Bloc, from China, from Russia, from North Vietnam. We knew very little, but this was sort of accepted, as something almost normal, that there should be, for instance, 300 journalists in South Vietnam in a normal period, and in times of crisis like Tết 1968, the number would rise to 800 for reporters in the South, whereas in the North you could count them on one hand, and they were always accepted by Hanoi because they were sympathetic to their cause.
GT: When exactly did you start working on your first memoir? Can you give me a timeframe?
MT: I must have started it in the middle of 2010.
GT: And how much time did you let pass before starting the sequel?
MT: Very little. As soon as my book came out, in 2012, I started to work on a story, which was supposed to tell the story of a young patriot starting in 1945, who could have been Minh, but more like someone like my father or his cousins. So, I started reading David Marr, and I started writing this fiction. And then my publisher asked me, "Would you like to do a sequel?" So, then I gave up the fiction project, which is in my notes somewhere, and started working on the sequel to *Such a Lovely Little War.*
GT: *Saigon Calling*, which is about the Vietnam War as seen from Europe.

MT: I needed to tell people, especially in France or in the West, that in spite of what leftwing people in France would say, the Vietnamese were divided, and not everyone sided with Hồ Chí Minh. To say that the entire population sided with him is a lie. For me it's like saying, "All Asians look alike, can't tell one from the other."

My father's generation was stigmatized as being "pro-American," and that word really annoys me, because if you say stuff like "the pro-American Saigon regime," you should also say "the pro-Soviet Hanoi regime." Nobody calls De Gaulle's Free France "pro-American," although the only French equipment the Free French had were their rank insignias. All their equipment was American! It's rubbish to say that because you have received the help of a country you immediately and unconditionally become "pro-that" country. Unfortunately, you need their help. And when you rely on someone else to come and save you, you always pay for that. But it's kind of racist, dismissing us as "pro-American."

GT: How much of yourself is in Minh, as a character? You share a vague physical resemblance.

MT: There's a lot of Minh in me. Not out of narcissism, I often say. A lot of comic artists, or artists in general, tend to draw themselves naturally. To create these characters, if yours is a realistic style, you have to have models. And the mirror is the closest model available.

GT: Putting yourself in Minh's position, would have you made the same choices? Choosing art, and Paris, over the military.

MT: I'm not so sure about that. When I wrote this story, I was thinking about what I would have done in his situation. But the guy-who-wants-to-go-to-Paris situation, this was not so much my personality. I wanted him to be very much like the youth of *today*, who hope to study, to go on Erasmus to Barcelona. They don't want to join any fight or struggle. They're not particularly political, most of them. So, I wanted him to be a hedonist, more interested in pleasure, in the arts, than in the war. My case was different: although I was influenced by the anti-militaristic atmosphere in France, I was also curious of seeing what the French army was like. I was drafted at 23. I was curious to discover the famous French army which we had seen in Vietnam. I found it an interesting complement to a young man's education.

GT: That's also what happens to Minh in the story, do you reckon? He matures?

MT: War enables him to mix with people from other social classes. He befriends the two guys who escort him, and lots of other soldiers. Guys he would otherwise never have met.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

GT: One of my favorite moments in the novel is when he receives news of the Việt Minh victory, and he says, "*We* have won." Despite his forced enrollment and all. Another paradox.
MT: One day, my father called me and said, "You must come and have lunch with me and an old colleague of mine, he was a diplomat in Washington, he's called Nguyễn Phú Đức. When we knew him in Washington, he was a junior officer at the embassy. But in 1972–73 he became the RVN's Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was at the Paris peace talks with Kissinger representing South Vietnam." We went to lunch in a restaurant. This must have been in 1995. And we came to discuss the battle of Điện Biên Phủ. And so Nguyễn Phú Đức said, "When I learned about the victory at Điện Biên Phủ, I was already on the nationalist side, but I felt a sort of shiver of pride, because the Vietnamese had managed to defeat the French." Before the WWII defeat, the French army was considered the best in the world. In Indochina, the French expeditionary force tried to wash away the shame of the 1940 defeat, exactly as officers like Francis Garnier, who attacked Hanoi in 1873, had wanted to wash away the shame of the 1870 defeat against the Prussians. In French we say, *Redorer le blason des armes françaises*, "to regild the coat of arms of the French military."
GT: And do *you* feel the same too? I'm fascinated by this paradox.
MT: Yes, because Điện Biên Phủ Qestablished the Vietnamese soldiers' valor on the battlefield.

Fig. 6
Truong's father, diplomat Trương Bửu Khánh (1927–2012). The picture was taken in 1952 when Khánh served as a press officer in the High Commission of Vietnam in Paris. Photo courtesy of Marcelino Truong

GT: In the novel you put the spotlight of the State of Vietnam, which was a French-controlled entity with limited agency—an "associate state"—but formally, it was independent from Paris. Do you think it stood a chance?

MT: My viewpoint is much influenced by my father's. He had studied International Relations at Sciences Po. In 1951, someone offered him a job in Emperor Bảo Đại's cabinet in Paris, which would later become the *Haut Commissariat du Vietnam en France*. So, he seemed to have believed in the State of Vietnam, at least as a possibility. And he wasn't the only one. Many non-communist Vietnamese wanted to believe that the Associated State of Vietnam was a feasible option.

Now, it's difficult to build a state in the midst of a war. Especially with a neighbor as huge as China lurking next door. The State of Vietnam was far from being perfect. It was easy to criticize—its opponents didn't waste one second to say that this was a puppet state, or worse, a fascist regime. A constitutional monarchy, which could have evolved into a pluralistic democracy, that was what my father was dreaming of. That was his hope. He wasn't dreaming of a *fascist* state. He admired England's parliamentary system. I think that the nationalist option given by France may have been imperfect and very difficult to bring to life in a country at war, especially from 1949 onwards, with the birth of communist China. One can imagine that Mao wasn't eager to have a nationalist Vietnam at China's southern border.

The State of Vietnam (1949–55) and later the Republic of Vietnam (1955–1975) were both described by the progressive West as dictatorships. Perhaps, but the same could have been said of communist North Vietnam. Moreover, looking back on the post-war years, I can't help observing that many countries who started off with conservative right-wing regimes slowly drifted towards more democratic and pluralistic institutions. Take Spain, Greece, Japan, Chile, Taiwan, South Korea, etc. Meanwhile, no such change has taken place either in China, in North Korea, in Cuba, or in Vietnam.

GT: Did your father read your work?

MT: He died in June 2012; my first book came out that October. He had only read the first 150 pages in the form of a rough. I was trembling when he read it because he was a very learned man, and I was afraid of his judgment. But he made absolutely no comment about the content and only corrected my Vietnamese spelling mistakes and wanted to make sure that his career as a diplomat was accurately depicted. I remember him saying, "You show me attending cocktails in Washing-

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland

ton, it all sounds very frivolous, I didn't just do cocktails, I endeavored to get grants for Vietnamese students, I organized exhibitions, I had artifacts brought over, I wasn't only having drinks." But he didn't read the rest of the book because he died. I'm hoping that I have been saying things that he would have liked to say himself.

GT: While reading *40 Men*, I kept wondering *when* and *to whom* Minh is writing the story, as he speaks in a past tense.

MT: He's telling the story to French readers of today. To warn them against too much enthusiasm for high-flown ideas. Originally, however, I wanted the first few pages to show Minh in a reeducation camp after the French Indochina War, with cadres asking him to write his biography, because that's what they asked you to do in reeducation camps. So, the whole book was supposed to be his confession, steeped in self-criticism (*autocritique*). That was the original idea. First, it would have been a confession in a North Vietnamese prison camp. Then another option was that his voiceover was what he was explaining to a military officer of the South Vietnamese army in Saigon, who was working for the Southern security apparatus, filtering these guys coming from the North and settling down in Vietnam. Lots of spies must have come over to the South in those days.

GT: Last question. Will you ever write another memoir about your life experiences after the Vietnam War? About your life in the 1980s–1990s.

MT: I don't know. Perhaps if I have the time. I'd like to write more and draw less. I'm not saying it's not hard work. It's difficult, but it's clearly less work.

Abstract: This conversation with French illustrator, painter, and author Marcelino Truong retraces his decades-in-the-making artistic journey with a special focus on the historical research informing it. The son of a South Vietnamese diplomat and a French mother, Truong has devoted a trilogy of graphic novels to Vietnam's tumultuous recent past. The interview, conducted toward the end of 2023, specifically centers on his latest work, *40 Men and 12 Rifles*, which recounts the First Indochina War through the eyes of a forcibly enrolled war painter. Among other things, Truong discusses his creative process, the complexities of his mixed heritage, and his motivations for giving a human face to the "other side."

Keywords: Marcelino Truong, Vietnam War, Vietnam War narratives, First Indochina War, Assimilation, Memory, Identity, Trauma, Diasporic Experience, Cold War History, Global Cold War, Diasporic Vietnamese Literature, Vietnamese Diaspora

Bios: Marcelino Truong, painter, illustrator, and author, was born in 1957 in Manila, on the Calle San Marcelino—a street that lent him his name. The son of a Vietnamese father and a mother from Saint-Malo, he spent a peripatetic childhood in the Philippines, the United States, Saigon, and London. A self-

taught artist, Truong holds a degree from Sciences Po Paris and is an agrégé in English; he launched his artistic career in 1983. Known for his warm and luminous style, he has illustrated a wide range of adult and children's literature, both fictional and documentary. In 2002, he authored and illustrated *Fleur d'eau* (Éditions Gautier-Languereau), the first of four picture books portraying a bygone Vietnam. He continued exploring Vietnamese heritage through *La Carambole d'or*, a traditional tale adapted by Yveline Feray (Éditions Philippe Picquier Jeunesse). His later work, *Trois Samouraïs sans foi ni loi* (2008), evokes the world of masterless swordsmen in Edo-period Japan. Truong also designed the animation *Petit Wang* (dir. Henri Heidsieck), which won the Television Film Award at the 2006 Annecy Festival. A prolific book cover artist, he has collaborated with publishers such as Éditions de l'Aube, Le Dilettante, Actes Sud, Plon, Kaïlash, and Gallimard, and has illustrated works by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt (Albin Michel). His drawings appear regularly in the French press (*Libération*, *Marianne*, *ELLE*, *XXI*). Returning to comics, he adapted James Lee Burke's *Prisonniers du ciel* for Casterman/Rivages/Noir (2010). His most significant recent work is the graphic memoir *Une si jolie petite guerre – Saigon 1961–63* (Denoël Graphic, 2012), a vivid recollection of his childhood during the early years of the American war in Vietnam.

Giacomo Traina is a Research Fellow at Sapienza University of Rome, and an Adjunct Professor of Anglo-American Literature at the University of Trieste. He holds a PhD in English literatures, cultures, language and translation from Sapienza University of Rome (Italy) and the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland). His research interests include the memory of the Vietnam War through the works of contemporary Vietnamese American authors and the narrative works of Herman Melville. In 2022, Giacomo Traina's article "Perverse Theaters and Refracted Histories: Violence and (Anti)realism in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*" has won the Emory Elliott Award for the Best Paper Delivered at the International American Studies Association World Congress. His first monograph on the fiction of Viet Thanh Nguyen has been published in Italian by Ombre Corte in 2024.

WORKS CITED

Lacouture, Jean, and Simonne Lacouture. *Vietnam: voyage à travers une Victoire*. Seuil, 1976.

Marr, David G. *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*. University of California Press.

Orwell, George. *Homage to Catalonia*. Mariner Books, 1969 [1938].

———. *Down and out in Paris and London*. Mariner Books, 1972 [1933].

Trương Bửu Lâm. *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858–1900*. Yale University Press, 1967.

Truong, Marcelino. *Such A Lovely Little War: Saigon 1961–63*. Translated by David Homel, Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver, 2015.

———. *Saigon Calling: London 1963–75,* Translated by David Homel, Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver, 2017.

———. *40 Men and 12 Rifles: Indochina 1954*, Translated by David Homel, Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver, 2023.

Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Marcelino Truong
Graphic Novelist,
France
Giacomo Traina
The "Sapienza" University of Rome,
Italy,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland