

Thao Thanh Tran

Dr. Bussell

Funds to Modern America History

29 March 2020 (Revised a bit)

A struggle among Vietnamese

I'm Vietnamese. Born and raised in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. My Vietnam is one unified country. But for my family, across generations, we share a struggle—a struggle with our identity—for what it means to be Vietnamese.

History told, for hundreds of years Vietnam was divided and swayed by complex chaotic political weather from both inside and outside the country. There was a time Vietnam seemed almost like a piece in the chessboard played by global superpowers: 61 years colonized by France then seized by Japan during World War II. Ordinary people longed for independence, longed to be unified. Then came Cold War.

Cold War swept through Vietnam, the country was divided into communist North and US-backed South. North Vietnam was declared independence in 1945 by Vietnamese communist hero Ho Chi Minh; and was set ready to unify the country with communist allies—mainly the Soviet. In response to the threat of communism spreading worldwide, the US opposed the independence of North Vietnam. In the name of “world freedom” (Truman, 1947) and the ideal of “free society” (NSC-68, 1950), the US financially supported the French military, then in 1955 established South Vietnam with corrupt prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem. Involvement of both the Soviet Union and the US brought in fundamental changes to the quest of unifying Vietnam and to the Vietnamese identity.

In the South, Diem failed the people. A revolution was needed. This, then, became the sufficient condition for communism to appeal to people, for the Viet Cong organization (the

National Liberation Front) to become stronger. Viet Cong strived to knock down the South Vietnam government and US troops. Viet Cong found a direct link to communist North Vietnam government. Viet Cong ended on the winning side at the end of the Vietnam War. And the result was, North and South got unified in 1975. And since, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has ruled the country—my country.

Of course Vietnamese people needed the right of independence, needed to be unified; but by what principle and whom should we live for? Like all people, Vietnamese should be able to speak for ourselves and raise own questions. We should dare to speak of how we are and want to be governed, right?

I believe that, in the Cold War, the US was justified in sending US troops to Vietnam to fight against the spread of communism. Because communist parties would never be in for the guarantees of individual liberty, communist parties would never let ordinary people speak about the insecurity and injustice we face every day.

Evidently, the CPV has never been for the will of majority—of the Vietnamese people. Every day, we live with censorship implemented by the government. Me and my family live with controlled press, controlled media, and controlled new media. I live with the fear of being canceled or punished for saying more than what the CPV deems as right. And ultimately we don't have free elections. This way of life sucks—and we sure have known of this since Cold War.

This way of life was rejected by President Truman. In the Truman Doctrine, the US foreign policy was defined as to “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures” and as “investment in world freedom” (Truman,

1947). To that end, it sounds just for the US military power to be exercised against communism in Vietnam.

But in fact, while fighting the spread of communism, the US was never in for freedom, for the guarantees of individual liberty. The US supported French imperialists and propped up corrupt South Vietnam government. The US chose not to invest in Vietnamese people. The US chose to prolong the struggle for independence and self-determination among Vietnamese. In other word, before and after the US involvement in South Vietnam, Vietnamese people were still oppressed, exploited, and silenced. In other word, the US government did fool my family then.

“[The Vietnamese people] must see Americans as strange liberators,” Martin Luther King spoke of the US role in the Vietnam War in his speech A Time to Break Silence (1967). Oh, yep. This war, also, crashed much more than the lives and hopes of American soldiers and their family. Overall—under war, societies just went mad. I now get why Martin Luther King said that “social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action” (1967).

If only nonviolent action could sufficiently unify the hearts of Vietnamese North and South to stop the spread of communism and the exploitation by foreigners. But sadly, amid the chaotic global combat between superpowers, Vietnamese fought Vietnamese. And now—we got one Vietnam. Yet ruled by the CPV, Vietnam now is not the final Vietnam!

Again I quote Martin Luther King, “We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develops” (1967).

Today my struggle is to understand what it means to be Vietnamese. Am I capable of making my Vietnam better? Am I capable of making the world listen to the Vietnamese identity struggle?

As Vietnamese, I know we want to change the way we are governed. I know we want to update our status and share worldwide the insecurity and injustice we face every day—and of course the beauty too. We want a better world, right?

As global citizens, I suppose we all move forward. Because in the long way ahead, there is so much needed us to cooperate. Because together, there is so much good we can create. And because only then, we shall see: God is good.

Works Cited

NSC-68. The American Yawp Reader, 1950, americanyawp.com/reader/25-the-cold-war/nsc-68-1950/. Accessed 28 March 2020.

Truman, Harry S. The Truman Doctrine. The American Yawp Reader, 1947, americanyawp.com/reader/25-the-cold-war/the-truman-doctrine-1947/. Accessed 28 March 2020.

King, Martin Luther. A Time to Break Silence. History Muse, 4 April 1967, historymuse.net/readings/MLKTimetoBreakSilence.htm. Accessed 28 March 2020.