

On Genocide

Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre presided over the International War Crimes Tribunal, founded by Bertrand Russell, in Stockholm in May 1967. Later that year, at the second session of the Tribunal in Roskilde in Denmark, he presented his report on genocide in Vietnam.

The word 'genocide' has not been in existence for very long: it was the jurist Lemkin who coined it between the two world wars. The *thing* itself is as old as humanity and there has never been a society whose structure has preserved it from committing this crime. All genocide is a product of history and it always carries the signs of the society from which it springs. The case which we have to judge concerns the largest contemporary capitalist power. It is as such that we must attempt to consider it; in other words, inasmuch as it expresses the economic structure, the political aims and the contradictions of that power.

In particular, we must try to understand whether there is an *intention of genocide* in the war that the American government is fighting against Vietnam. Article 2 of the Convention of 1948 defines genocide on the basis of intention. The Convention was tacitly referring to very recent history. Hitler had declared a deliberate plan to exterminate the Jews; he did not conceal the fact that he was using genocide as a *political tactic*. The Jew had to be put to death, wherever he came from, not because he had taken up arms or had joined a resistance movement, but just *because he was a Jew*. The American government, on the other hand, has made no such clear declarations. It even averred that it was going to the rescue of its allies, the South Vietnamese, who had been attacked by the Communists from the North. Is it possible for us, in objectively studying the facts, to unveil their hidden intention? And can we, after this examination, say that the armed forces of the USA are killing Vietnamese in Vietnam for the simple reason that they are Vietnamese?

This can only be established after a look at history: the structures of war change at the same time as those of society. From 1860 to this day, military motives and objectives have undergone a profound change and the end result of this metamorphosis is precisely the war of 'example' that the USA is waging in Vietnam.

- 1856: Treaties for the preservation of the property of neutrals;
 1864: At Geneva, an attempt to protect the wounded;
 1899, 1907: At The Hague, two Conferences attempting to control conflicts.

It is no coincidence if jurists and governments have multiplied agreements to ‘humanise war’ on the eve of two of the most horrifying massacres that man has ever known. Vladimir Dedijer has shown very well in his book *On Military Conventions* that capitalist societies were all simultaneously creating this monster, total war, which expresses their real nature. This is because:

1. Competition between the industrialised nations fighting over new markets engenders a permanent hostility which is expressed, both in theory and in practice, by what is called ‘bourgeois nationalism’.

2. The development of industry, which is the source of these antagonisms, enables them to be resolved at the expense of one competitor, in the production of more and more *massively* lethal arms. The result of this evolution is that it becomes less and less possible to distinguish the rear from the front line, between the civilian population and the soldiers.

3. More military objectives appear, near to the cities. The *factories*, even if they are not working for the armies, do comprise the economic potential of a country. Therefore, the destruction of this potential becomes the aim of the war and the means by which it may be won.

4. For this reason, everybody is mobilised: the peasant fights at the front, the labourer is a soldier in the second line, the wives of the peasants replace the men in the fields. In the *total* effort of one country against another, the worker tends to become a fighter because, in the end, it is the strongest economic power that has the greatest chance of winning.

5. Finally, the democratic evolution of the bourgeois countries interests the masses in politics. The masses do not control the decisions of the state, but gradually gain a self-awareness. When a war comes, they no longer feel detached. Thus, reappraised and often deformed by propaganda, war becomes an ethical decision of the whole community. In every nation engaged in war manipulation makes all, or nearly all, the citizens the enemies of the other nation. In this way war becomes total.

6. These same technologically advanced societies do not cease to enlarge upon the field of competition in multiplying the means of communication. The well-known ‘One World’ of the Americans already existed at the end of the nineteenth century when the wheat from Argentina managed to ruin the farmers in Britain. War is total not only because all the members of one community are at war against the members of another, but because its risk embraces the whole world.

Therefore the war of bourgeois nations – of which the conflict of 1914 is the first example, but which had been menacing Europe since 1900 – is not the invention of one man or one government, but the simple necessity since the beginning of the century for a totalitarian effort against those who wish to carry on their politics by other means or methods. In other words, the option is clear; no war or total war. It was total war that our fathers fought. And the governments –

who could see it coming but did not have the intelligence or the courage to avoid it – tried vainly to humanise it.

However, in the First World War, intentions of genocide only appeared sporadically. The primary aim – as in the two centuries previously – was to destroy the military strength of a country, even if the more profound aim was to ruin its economy. But, although it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the civilians from the soldiers, it was rare, except during a few terroristic raids, for the population itself to be a target. Further, the two sides were developed nations, which implied from the outset a certain balance inasmuch as each side had a sufficient deterrent against the threat of extermination: the possibility for retaliation. This explains how, even in the midst of the massacre, a certain caution was observed.

However, since 1830 and throughout the last century, there have been many genocides outside Europe, some of which were the expression of authoritarian political structures, while the others – those which we need to know about to understand the growth of US imperialism and the nature of the war in Vietnam – found their origin in capitalistic democracies. To export goods and capital, the big powers, and in particular Great Britain and France, built themselves colonial empires. The name by which the French called their conquests – ‘overseas possessions’ – clearly indicates that they could only have acquired them by wars of aggression, seeking out the foe in his own country, in Africa, in Asia and in the underdeveloped lands. Far from being ‘total wars’, which would indicate a certain initial reciprocity, such complete superiority of arms only required an Expeditionary Force. This easily conquered any regular armies that existed, but because such barefaced aggression provoked the hatred of the civilian populations, which is the reserve of manpower or soldiers, the colonial troops imposed themselves by the terror of constant massacres. These massacres had all the characteristics of genocide: they involved destruction of ‘one part of the group’ (ethnic, national, religious) to terrorise the rest and break down the indigenous social structure. When the French had made a bloodbath of Algeria during the nineteenth century, they imposed on this tribal society – where every community possessed its own indivisible lands – the *Code Civile*, which consists of bourgeois jurisdiction with regard to the division of inherited property. Thus, they systematically destroyed the economic structure of the country. The land soon passed from the peasant tribes into the hands of merchants who had come from France. In fact, colonialisation is not just a simple conquest – as was the case in 1870 when Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine – it is necessarily a cultural genocide. One cannot colonise without systematically destroying the particular character of the natives, at the same time denying them the right of integration with the mother country and of benefiting from its advantages. Colonialism is, in effect, a system: the colony sells raw materials and foodstuffs at a favourable price to the colonial power which then sells industrial goods back to them at world market prices. This peculiar method of exchange can only be established when the native labour is made to work for starvation wages. It naturally follows that the colonised lose their national personality, their culture, their customs, sometimes even their language, and live in

misery like shadows constantly reminded of their own sub-humanity.

Yet their value as virtually free labour protects them to a certain extent from genocide. The Nuremberg Tribunal was fresh in the memory when the French, to make an example, massacred 45,000 Algerians at Sétif. This was such a common occurrence that no one then thought of judging the French government as the Nazis had been judged. But this deliberate destruction of 'one part of the national group' could not be continued without proving to the disadvantage of the settlers. To have done so would have ruined them. It is because they were unable to liquidate the Algerian population, and because they did not integrate the country, that the French lost the war in Algeria.

These comments enable us to understand how the nature of colonial wars was transformed after the Second World War. It is at about this period, in fact, that the people in the colonies, enlightened by such conflict and its impact on the 'empires', and encouraged by Mao Tse-tung's victory, determined to regain their national independence.

The characteristics of the struggle were clear from the beginning: the settlers were superior in arms, the colonised in numbers. Even in Algeria – a colony of settlers rather than of outside exploitation – the ratio of settlers to natives was 1:9. During the two world wars, many native peoples had learned the military arts and become well-seasoned soldiers. However, the scarcity and quality of weapons – at least at the beginning – limited the number of fighting units. These conditions dictated the nature of the fighting: terrorism, ambush, harassing the enemy, and the extreme mobility of the combat groups which had to strike unexpectedly and disappear immediately. This was not possible without the participation of the entire population. Hence the well-known association of the forces of liberation with the masses: the former organising agrarian reform, political bodies and education; the latter supporting, feeding and hiding the liberation army's soldiers, and giving them their young to replace their losses.

It is not by mere chance that the 'popular' war, with its principles, its strategy, its tactics and its theoreticians, begins at the same time as the industrial powers brought total war to its ultimate stage with the harnessing of nuclear fission. Nor is it by chance that it resulted in the ruin of colonialism. The contradiction that gave victory to the FLN in Algeria was typical of the time; in fact, popular war eradicates classical war (as does the hydrogen bomb).

Against partisans backed by the entire population, colonial armies are helpless. They have only one way of escaping from the harassment which demoralises them and tends towards a Dien Bien Phu. This is to eliminate the civilian population. As it is the unity of a whole people that is containing the conventional army, the only anti-guerrilla strategy which will be effective is the destruction of that people, in other words, the civilians, women and children.

Torture and genocide were the colonialists' answers to the uprising of the natives. And that answer, as we know, is useless if it is not definitive and total. A determined population, unified by its fierce and politicised partisan army, will not let itself be intimidated, as it was in the heyday of colonialism, by a massacre 'as

a lesson'. On the contrary, this will only increase its hatred. It is no longer a matter of arousing fear but of physically *liquidating* a people. And as this is not possible without at the same time eliminating the colonial economy and the colonial system; the settlers panic, the colonial powers grow tired of sinking manpower and money into a conflict with no solution, the masses at home end up opposing the continuation of barbaric wars and the colonies become independent states.

There do exist, however, cases where the genocidal solution to popular wars is not held back by innate contradictions. Total genocide then reveals itself as the foundation of anti-guerrilla strategy. And, under certain circumstances, it would even present itself as the ultimate objective, either immediately or gradually. This is exactly what has happened in the war in Vietnam. This is a new aspect of the imperialist process, one usually called neo-colonialism because it is defined as aggression against an old colonial country, which has already attained its independence, to subject it once again to colonial rule. At first, the neo-colonialists make sure – either by the financing of a *putsch* or by another underhand stroke – that the new rulers will not represent the interest of the masses but that of a small minority of the privileged classes and, thus, that of foreign capital. In Vietnam this took the form of Diem, imposed, maintained and armed by the United States, and of the proclaimed decision to reject the Treaty of Geneva and to constitute the Vietnamese territory south of the 17th parallel as an independent state. The natural results of this were a police force and an army to hunt those who, frustrated in their victory, immediately and even *before* any effective resistance movement, declared themselves to be the enemies of the new government. It was the reign of terror that provoked a new uprising in the South and re-ignited the popular war. Did the US ever think that Diem would quash the revolt at its outset? In any event, they did not delay in sending experts, then troops, until they were up to their necks in the conflict. And gradually we can retrace almost exactly the same war that Ho Chi Minh waged against the French, even though the American government declared at the beginning that they were sending their troops out of generosity and out of duty to an ally.

This is how it appears. But, fundamentally, these two successive conflicts do have a different nature: the United States, unlike the French, do not have any economic interests in Vietnam. A few private American companies have invested there, but they are not so large that they could not, if necessary, be sacrificed without really affecting the American economy or harming the monopolies. Because the US is not pursuing the war for *direct* economic reasons, it need not rule out putting an end to it by the ultimate strategy of genocide. This does not prove that America has thought of this solution, only that nothing bars it from such a strategy.

In fact, according to the Americans themselves, the war has two objectives. Recently, Dean Rusk declared: 'We are defending ourselves.' It is no longer Diem, the ally in danger, or Ky that they have come to rescue. It is the *United States* that is in danger in Saigon. This means that their first aim is military: it is to encircle Communist China, the major obstacle to their expansionism. Thus, they will not let south-east Asia escape. America has put men in power in Thailand, it controls

part of Laos and threatens to invade Cambodia. But these conquests will be useless if the US has to face a free Vietnam with thirty-one million united people. That is why the military chiefs often talk of 'key positions'. That is why Dean Rusk says, with unconscious humour, that the armed forces of the United States are fighting in Vietnam 'to avoid a Third World War'. Either this phrase makes no sense at all, or it must be understood to mean 'to win a Third World War'. In short, the first objective is governed by the necessity of establishing a *Pacific Defence Line*, which can only be imposed in the general political framework of imperialism.

The second objective is economic. General Westmoreland defined it in these terms in October 1966: 'We are making war in Vietnam to show that guerrilla warfare does not pay.' To show *whom*? The Vietnamese? That would be very surprising. Is it necessary to spend so many human lives and so much money to convince a nation of poor peasants struggling thousands of miles from San Francisco? And, above all, what need was there to *attack*, to provoke to battle and then crush it so as to show the uselessness of the fight, when the interests of the large companies are so negligible? Westmoreland's phrase – like that of Rusk quoted above – needs to be completed. It is to *the others* that they want to prove that guerrilla warfare does not pay: all the exploited and oppressed nations who may be tempted to free themselves from the Yankee yoke with a war for freedom, first of all against their own pseudo-governments and the *compradores* supported by a national army, then against the 'Special Forces' of the United States and finally against the GIs. In other words, it is an example for Latin America and the entire underdeveloped world. To Guevara, who used to say: 'We need many Vietnams', the American government replies: 'They will all be crushed as we are crushing this one.'

In other words, this war is primarily a warning for three, and perhaps four, continents. After all, Greece is also a peasant nation and a dictatorship has just been established there. It is best to warn: submission or complete liquidation. So, this exemplary genocide is a warning to all humanity. It is with this warning that six per cent of mankind hope, without too much expense, to control the remaining ninety-four per cent.

At this point in our discussion, three facts emerge: (1) the US government wants a base and an example; (2) this can be achieved, without any greater obstacle than the resistance of the Vietnamese people themselves, by liquidating an entire people and establishing a Pax Americana on a Vietnamese desert; (3) to attain the second, the US *must* achieve, at least partially, this extermination.

The declarations of American statesmen are not as frank as those that Hitler made in his day. But honesty is not indispensable; the facts speak for themselves. The speeches that accompany them, *ad usum internum*, will only be believed by the American people; the rest of the world understands only too well. Friendly governments keep silent. The others denounce the genocide, but the Americans reply to them that they are showing which side they are really on by their unproven accusations. In fact, say the American government, we have done

nothing but offer the Vietnamese – North and South – this choice: either you stop your aggression or we break you. There is no longer any need to point out that this proposition is absurd since the aggression is American, so that only the Americans themselves can put an end to it. But this absurdity is not uncalculated: it is clever to formulate a demand which the Vietnamese cannot possibly satisfy. In this way, America remains the master of the decision to stop the fighting. But, one might read the alternatives as: declare yourselves conquered, or ‘we will take you back to the Stone Age’. It does not cancel out the second term of the alternative, which is genocide. They have said: genocide, yes, but only *conditional* genocide. Is this legally valid? Is it even conceivable?

If the argument had any legal meaning, the government of the United States would only just escape the accusation of genocide. But, as Maître Matarasso has remarked, the law, in distinguishing between intention and motive, does not leave room for this escape clause. Genocide, especially as it has been carried on for several years, may well have blackmail as a motive. One may declare that one will stop if the victim submits. Those are the motivations and the act does not cease to be genocide by intention. This is particularly so when, as in this case, part of the group has been annihilated to force the rest to submission.

But let us look more closely and see what the terms of the alternative are. In the South, this is the choice: the villages are burnt, the population has to endure massive and deliberately destructive bombardments, the cattle are shot at, the vegetation is ruined by defoliants, what does grow is ruined by toxic elements, machine guns are aimed haphazardly, and everywhere there is killing, rape and pillage. That is genocide in its most rigorous meaning of massive extermination. What is the other choice? What must the Vietnamese people do to escape this atrocious death? Join the American armed forces or those of Saigon, or let themselves be enclosed in strategic hamlets or in those ‘new life’ compounds, which are two names for concentration camps.

We know about these camps from numerous witnesses. They are surrounded by barbed wire. The most elementary needs are ignored. There is under-nourishment and complete lack of sanitation. The prisoners are packed into tents or primitive huts where they stifle. The social structure is destroyed. Husbands are separated from wives, mothers from their children, family life – so respected by the Vietnamese – no longer exists. As the homes are broken up, the birth rate diminishes; all possibility of cultural or religious life is abolished. Even work that will improve the standard of living is denied them. These unfortunates are not even slaves (the servile condition of the American Negroes has not stifled their own deep culture); this group is reduced to the state of an appendage, to the worst of vegetative lives. Anyone who wants to escape can only make contact with other men shattered and ravaged by hate, who can only regroup clandestinely for political resistance. The enemy guesses this, so that the camps are raked over two or three times. Even there, security is never certain and the shattering forces are always at work. If by any chance a broken family, e.g. some children with an older sister or a young mother, are freed, they go to swell the proletariat in the towns.

The elder sister or the young mother, without a breadwinner and with so many mouths to feed, sinks to the utmost degradation in prostitution to the enemy. This is the lot of one third of the population in the South, according to Mr Duncanan's evidence. It is the sort of genocide condemned by the Convention of 1948:

- Grave damage to physical or mental health of members of the group;
- Intentional submission of the group to such conditions of existence as result in total or partial physical damage;
- Steps taken to prevent births within the group;
- Forcible removal of children ...

In other words, it is not true that the choice lies between death or submission. Submission, under these circumstances, amounts to genocide. Let us say that there is only a choice between immediate violent death and a slow death after mental and physical degradation.

Is it any different in the North?

One choice is *extermination*: not only the daily risk of death but also the systematic destruction of the economic system, from the irrigation ditches to the factories of which 'there must not be a brick left upon another brick'; deliberate attacks on the civilian population, and in particular on the countryside; destruction of hospitals, schools, places of worship, consistent effort towards wiping out the achievements of twenty years of Socialism. Is this simply to terrorise the population? That can only be achieved by the daily extermination of an ever larger number of the group. This terrorism itself, in its psycho-social consequences, is genocide. Who knows if, with the children in particular, this will not result in mental disturbances which will affect them permanently?

The other choice is capitulation. This would mean acceptance from the North Vietnamese that their country should be divided in two and that the American dictatorship, either directly or through their puppets, should be imposed on their compatriots and on the members of their own families from whom the war has separated them. Would this intolerable humiliation put an end to the war? This is far from certain: the NLF [National Liberation Front] and the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam – North Vietnam], although united, have different strategies and tactics because of their different stances in the war. If the NLF continued the struggle, American bombers would carry on, even if the DRV capitulated.

But should the war come to an end, we know – from official declarations – that the United States would be generously inclined to rebuild the DRV with mountains of dollars. This would mean that they would destroy, with their private investments or conditional loans, all the economic basis of socialism. That, too, is genocide: the cutting in two of a sovereign state; occupying one half with a reign of terror, effectively ruining the enterprise so dearly paid for by the other half with economic pressures and with calculated investments, to be held in a tight stranglehold. The national unit of 'Vietnam' would not be physically eliminated, but it would no longer exist economically, politically or culturally.

In the North, as in the South, there is a choice between two types of destruction:

collective death or disintegration. Most significant is the fact that the American government has felt the measure of NLF and DRV resistance: it knows now that only total destruction will be effective. The Front is more powerful than ever; North Vietnam is resolute. For this very reason, the calculated extermination of the Vietnamese people can only be intended to make them capitulate. The Americans offer them peace knowing that it will not be accepted. This spurious alternative hides the real imperialist intention, which is a gradual progress towards the ultimate escalation of total genocide.

The United States government could have achieved this immediately by a Vietnamese *Blitzkrieg*. But, apart from the fact that this extermination would have involved complicated preparations – for example, the construction and unrestricted use of air bases in Thailand, shortening the bombers' journey by 5,000 kilometres – the essential aim of the 'escalation' was and still is, to this day, to prepare bourgeois opinion for genocide. From this point of view, the Americans have succeeded only too well. The repeated and systematic bombing of the densely populated areas of Haiphong and Hanoi, which two years ago would have given rise to violent protests, is carried on today in a sort of general indifference which is more like gangrene than apathy. The trick has worked: public opinion accepts a constant and imperceptible increase of pressure which is preparing their minds for the final genocide. Is this genocide possible? No. But only because of the Vietnamese, their courage and the admirable efficiency of their organisations. As for the US government, nobody can excuse their crime just because the intelligence and heroism of their victims limits its effects.

One can conclude that, in a 'popular' war (that product of our times, the answer to imperialist aggression and the claim to sovereignty of a people conscious of its own unity) only two attitudes are possible: either the aggressor gives way, makes peace and recognises that a whole nation is opposing him; or else, realizing the ineffectiveness of classical strategy, if he can do so without damaging his own interests, he resorts to extermination pure and simple. There is no other choice; but, this choice, at least, is always *possible*.

While the armed forces of the USA are digging deeper into Vietnam, intensifying the massacres and bombings, attempting to subject Laos and intending to invade Cambodia, there is no doubt that the government of the United States, despite all the hypocritical denials, has opted for genocide.

The intention is obvious from the facts. And, as M. Aybar said, it can only be *premeditated*. It is possible that in the past genocide was committed suddenly, in a flash of passion, in the midst of tribal or feudal conflicts. Anti-guerrilla genocide, however, is a product of our times that necessarily entails organisation, bases and, therefore, accomplices (from a distance) and the appropriate budget. It needs to be thought over and planned. Does this mean that those responsible are fully aware of their own intentions? It is difficult to decide: to do so one would have to probe the latent ill-will of puritanical motives.

Maybe some people in the State Department are so used to lying that they still manage to believe that they only want the best for Vietnam. But, after the most

recent declarations of their spokesmen, one can presume that there are fewer of these innocents. 'We are defending ourselves: even if the Saigon government asked us to, we would not leave Vietnam', etc. In any case, we do not have to worry about this psychological hide-and-seek. The truth is to be found *on the field*, in the racialism of the American troops. Naturally, this racialism - anti-black, anti-Asiatic, anti-Mexican - is a fundamental characteristic which has deep-rooted origins and which existed, latent or apparent, long before the Vietnam war. The proof lies in the United States government's refusal to ratify the Geneva Convention on genocide. This does not mean that ever since 1948 the Americans have intended to exterminate whole peoples but that, according to their own declaration, the Convention would have conflicted with the internal legislation of many of the American States. In other words, the present leaders consider themselves unshackled in Vietnam today thanks to their predecessors who had wanted to respect the anti-Negro racialism of the South. In any case, ever since 1965, the racialism of the Yankee soldiers from Saigon to the 17th parallel has increased. The young Americans torture without repugnance, shooting at unarmed women for the pleasure of completing a hat-trick: they kick the wounded Vietnamese in the testicles; they cut off the ears of the dead for trophies. The officers are worst: a general was boasting in front of a Frenchman who testified at the Tribunal of hunting the Viet Cong from his helicopter and shooting them down in the rice fields. They were, of course, not NLF fighters, who know how to protect themselves, but peasants working in their rice fields. In these confused American minds the Viet Cong and the Vietnamese tend to become more and more indistinguishable. A common saying is 'The only good Vietnamese is a dead one', or, what comes to the same thing, 'Every dead Vietnamese is a Viet Cong.'

The peasants get ready to harvest the rice south of the 17th parallel. American soldiers come and burn their houses and want to transfer them to a strategic hamlet. The peasants protest. What else can they do bare-handed against these Martians? They say 'The rice is so good; we would like to stay to eat our rice.' No more, but that is enough to exasperate the young Americans: 'It is the Viet Cong who have put this into your heads. It is they who have taught you to resist.' These soldiers are so muddled that they consider as 'subversive' violence the feeble protests that their own violence has provoked. Originally, they were probably disappointed: they came to save Vietnam from Communist aggressors. They soon saw that the Vietnamese actually disliked them. Instead of the attractive role of the liberator they found themselves the occupiers. It was the beginning of self-appraisal: 'They do not want us, we have no business here.' But their protest goes no further: they become angry and simply tell themselves that a Vietnamese is, by definition, a suspect.

There is not a single Vietnamese who is not really a Communist: the proof is their hatred of the Yankees. Here, in the shadowy and robot-like souls of the soldiers, we find the truth about the war in Vietnam: it matches all of Hitler's declarations. He killed the Jews because they were Jews. The armed forces of the United States torture and kill men, women and children in Vietnam *because they are Vietnamese*. Whatever the lies or nervous hedging of the government, the

spirit of genocide is in the soldiers' minds. This is their way of enduring the genocidal situation in which their government has put them. The witness Peter Martinsen, a young student of twenty-three who had 'interrogated' prisoners for six months and could not bear his memories, told us: 'I am an average American, I am like any other student, and here I am a war criminal.' And he was right to add: 'Anyone in my place would have acted as I did.'

His only error was to attribute these degrading crimes to the influence of war in general. No: it is not war in the abstract, but war waged by the largest power against a people of poor peasants, and war lived by those who wage it as the only possible relationship between an overdeveloped nation and an underdeveloped one, that is to say genocide expressed through racialism. The only possible relationship, apart from stopping short and leaving.

Total war implies a certain equilibrium of strength, a certain reciprocity. The colonial wars were waged without reciprocity, but colonial interests limited genocide. This present genocide, the latest development of the unequal progress of societies, is total war waged to the end by one side and with not one particle of reciprocity.

The American government is not guilty of having invented modern genocide, nor even of having chosen it from other possible answers to the guerrilla. It is not guilty – for example – of having preferred it on the grounds of strategy or economy. In effect, genocide presents itself as the only possible reaction to the insurrection of a whole people against its oppressors. The American government is guilty of having preferred a policy of war and aggression aimed at total genocide to a policy of peace, the only other alternative, because it would have implied a necessary reconsideration of the principal objectives imposed by the big imperialist companies by means of pressure groups. America is guilty of following through and intensifying the war, although each of its leaders daily understands even better, from the reports of the military chiefs, that the only way to win is to rid Vietnam of all the Vietnamese.

It is guilty of being deceitful, evasive, of lying, and lying to itself, embroiling itself every minute a little more, despite the lessons that this unique and unbearable experience has taught, on a path along which there can be no return. It is guilty, by its own admission, of knowingly conducting this war of 'example' to make genocide a challenge and a threat to all peoples. When a peasant dies in his rice field, cut down by a machine-gun, we are all hit. Therefore, the Vietnamese are fighting for all men and the American forces are fighting all of us. Not just in theory or in the abstract. And not only because genocide is a crime universally condemned by the rights of man. But because, little by little, this genocidal blackmail is spreading to all humanity, adding to the blackmail of atomic war. This crime is perpetrated under our eyes every day, making accomplices out of those who do not denounce it.

In this context, the imperialist genocide can become more serious. For the group that the Americans are trying to destroy by means of the Vietnamese nation is the whole of humanity.