

This is my personal Vietnam – a tableau vivant in contrasting tones, an incessant bustle set off by an unexpected slowness.

Fire and ice, agitation and stillness, dynamism and slowness. On the one hand Hanoi's markets, bursting with life, and on the other hand Lenin Park – huge, motionless as a stuffed dinosaur, with its cement benches, a place where retired people go through the slow motions of their keep-fit exercises; on the one hand the labyrinthine, impression-laden streets of Saigon, no more than two metres wide, where I was going to get lost three times in the space of an hour, and on the other the leaden grey, frightening waters of the Mekong river which seems to be waiting unmovingly for something to happen.

On the one hand the courageous Vietnamese who harried the Americans and drove them out of the country, and on the other the Vietnamese who inject themselves with molten opium and no longer have the strength to fight even with themselves. Fire and ice.