

Not only does smoke suggest that something has been destroyed, it tells us that we are in the midst of further destruction. There is a chaotic urgency about it—the order that comes with “aftermath” has not yet arrived. **THIS PARTICULAR DISCOMFORT, URGENCY, OR CHAOS IS FOUND IN SMOKE-FILLED SCENES THROUGHOUT THE BOOK** including both intimate depictions of combat (48-49) and war-torn landscapes from afar (200)...Whether that means escaping a war-torn Vietnam, fleeing her burning home, or growing beyond her parents into her own independence, to leave is the only option—not only to escape danger, but to find a healthy, comfortable, and truer version of herself.

— UCONN HIS 3101W Student with Dr. Nu-Ann Tran

The author noted that “A LOT OF AMERICANS FORGET THAT FOR THE VIETNAMESE, THE WAR CONTINUED WHERE AMERICA WAS INVOLVED OR NOT” (Bui 209). In this example, Thi expresses how burdens from the war carried on even after American involvement ended. The burdens from the war were especially impactful on children who grew up in that time as we’ve seen through Thi’s parents, especially Bô. *The Best We Could Do* highlighted the importance of childhood and emphasized the influence that the Vietnam War had on herself and her parents.”

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“Thi knew when she was sitting in the hospital in the early pages of her book that familyhood would be hard so she really questioned herself but that’s when her parents past flashbacks gave her a sense of confidence. **THE DIGNITY SHE HAD GOT FROM HEARING HER PARENTS** helped guide the love she felt was not there, Thi very much questioned her own childhood because of everything that has happened. Knowing that the choices her parents made were obviously for the best and not just out of malignancy she knew the past had a purpose.”

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“Oftentimes when discussing and learning about historical events there is a chronology which focuses on war battles, political decisions, and important figures. While these broad chronologies are important, they leave out the many unique personal experiences of the people involved and do not capture the lingering effects major events can have on people... The memoir shows that the relationship between the private experiences of the family and the larger course of history is both incompatible and compatible at times... However, in telling the history of her family history, Bui does not do a chronology but rather tells the history through flashbacks. The novel starts with her in the hospital giving birth to her first son and then goes on to her as a young mother with a new family. While starting her new family she came to realize the disconnect she has with her own parents and the guilt she feels from this... The events of the war do not just happen and stay in the past, rather they leave a lasting and constant effect on those involved. ”

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“Even among monochromatic graphic novels, the settings are intentionally placed place during the day for a majority of the story. Thi Bui also conforms to this and uses the watercolor orange to portray darker times of the day. Such as when the setting sun is illuminating her father against the tall window pane (Bui 129). However, it is because of this natural avoidance of the black backgrounds that draws the audience’s attention to the panels that juxtapose the normally bright settings; and, within these filled panels, there are juxtaposed circular blank spots representative of lights.”

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“In these images, water could symbolize a fresh start in an already established story. The images reflect her now untroubled understanding of her son’s future, by showing him happily playing among the waves carefree, despite the potential danger that they could pose. The danger that the waves could pose represents this possibility of him being hampered by Bui’s struggles, but he’s still blissfully unaffected by both, and Bui realizes this. Previously in the book, water has almost always been associated with some sort of struggle as covered previously with her feeling a lack of connection to her family, confusion over their history, or even her confinement during childhood.”

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“She says she has been accustomed to run during chaotic experiences due to her VIETNAMESE CULTURE, WHICH CALLS HER “REFUGEE REFLEX”. She also says this instinctual urge to flee during a crisis is part of her Vietnamese inheritance. Effects of the war have followed her and her family to places even where they feel safe. They have become desensitized in situations where a reaction is warranted and have seemingly lost the ability to feel fear. Their experiences in leaving Vietnam by boat, living in a refugee camp, and traveling to the United States, have caused them to not feel comfortable in places where they should feel safe. The war and conflict in Vietnam have taken that feeling away from them. No matter where the war has caused an emotional toll on the family, to the point where they are still struggling to feel safe even when they are together.”

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“For Thi, an environment where there is smoke is one to be fled. Whether that means escaping a war-torn Vietnam, fleeing her burning home, or growing beyond her parents into her own independence, to leave is the only option—not only to escape danger, but to find a healthy, comfortable, and truer version of herself.”

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“Not only does smoke suggest that something has been destroyed, it tells us that we are **IN THE MIDST OF FURTHER DESTRUCTION. THERE IS A CHAOTIC URGENCY ABOUT IT—THE ORDER THAT COMES WITH “AFTERMATH” HAS NOT YET ARRIVED.** This particular discomfort, urgency, or chaos is found in smoke-filled scenes throughout the book including both intimate depictions of combat (48-49) and war-torn landscapes from afar (200)...Whether that means escaping a war-torn Vietnam, fleeing her burning home, or growing beyond her parents into her own independence, to leave is the only option—not only to escape danger, but to find a healthy, comfortable, and truer version of herself.”

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“When the men in his life decided to pursue their own desires and goals, Bo wasn’t considered a valuable part of the family, unless it benefited them. Taking up multiple panels, BUI EXPLAINS, “I GREW UP WITH THE TERRIFIED BOY WHO BECAME MY FATHER. AFRAID OF MY FATHER, CRAVING SAFETY AND COMFORT. I had no idea the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own,” (Bui 129). Because Bo lacked a supportive family, stable home life and bore witness to many atrocities of war, Bo’s development was stunted and he was never able to heal from his past”

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“The author noted that “a lot of Americans forget that for the Vietnamese, the war continued where America was involved or not” (Bui 209). In this example, Thi expresses how burdens from the war carried on even after American involvement ended. The burdens from the war were especially impactful on children who grew up in that time as we’ve seen through Thi’s parents, especially Bô. *The Best We Could Do* highlighted the importance of childhood and emphasized the influence that the Vietnam War had on herself and her parents.”

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“The significance of childhood in the memoir *The Best We Could Do* is that the lessons one learn intentionally or verbally, as well as the lessons learned through experience unintentionally, stick with the person who learned them throughout their life, and pass those lessons down to their children as well, whether it’s intentional or not.”

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