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Cover Page Footnote

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Transtrauma: Conceptualizing the Lived Experiences of Vietnamese American Youth

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Abstract

Drawing on empirical data from qualitative research I conducted with eight Vietnamese American youth in the Fall of 2020, this paper forwards *transtrauma*, a new framework for conceptualizing and understanding the lived experiences of Vietnamese American youth. The concept of *transtrauma* goes beyond the pathologizing of individual trauma, to examine how structures of domination inflict and extend trauma in marginalized communities, such as that of Vietnamese American communities. Transtrauma transcends the overt and linear focus on trauma as a single experience and the examination of how institutionalized violence by nation states shapes the experiences of Vietnamese Americans. This conceptualization interrogates the United States role in shaping the trauma of Vietnamese Americans. The workshop was anchored in a translanguaging perspective. That is, I enabled students to feel free to deploy any aspect of their linguistic/semiotic/multimodal repertoire in telling their stories. The methodology showcases the importance of storytelling and the use of the Arts as a way to guide the youth to collectively share their own stories of their parents and grandparents' journey from Vietnam to the United States. These collective stories highlight the *transtrauma* that Vietnamese Americans continue to experience. The paper concludes with advocating educators to uphold a pedagogy that is informed by transtrauma lenses in order for the youth to recognize their transtrauma and heal from it.

Introduction

This paper deepens understandings of the lives and experiences of Vietnamese American youth, an important population that is often left out of the conversation about Asian Americans in the United States. Vietnamese American youth are often perceived as ghosts, an unwelcome reminder of the violence of the war that took the lives of so many. Understanding the experiences of Vietnamese American youth as they live and go to school is most important at this time, given the growing institutionalized anti-Asian violence, the attack on ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum in the United States, as well as the global pandemic (Coloma et al. 2021; Foster et al., 2021; Medina & Walker, 2018).



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During the Fall of 2020 I led a series of workshops with eight Vietnamese American youth. I was interested in learning more about their collective experiences and the role that their families' journeys to the United States had in their lives. At the same time, I had a deep desire to share my understandings of Vietnamese history, culture and language, as well as their history in the United States, with the youth.

The careful examination of the youth's narratives during the workshops helped me develop a theory of what I call "transtrauma." I argue that although many refugee and immigrant youth experience trauma, Vietnamese American youth have distinct experiences from other Asian youth and other refugees. Their trauma is experienced transgenerationally and is not located in individuals per se, but has been transferred to the political entity that directly caused it and in which they live—the United States. Thus, the relationship that these Vietnamese American youth have with the country in which they have been born and have grown up is different than that of other Asian American youth, for, as we will see, they see the United States as their saviors, but also blame it for all the trauma that they continue to experience.

My analysis of the youth's narratives benefits from my own perspective as a Vietnamese refugee and researcher, whose father was sent to re-education camp after the war in the American/Vietnam War¹. My experience works to centralize and amplify the voices of Vietnamese American youth. In this paper I often narrate my own story in relationship to the stories told by the youth. And I often rely on historical narratives of others about the Vietnam War and its aftermath to tell the story of the youth's transtrauma.

In this paper I draw from one of the eight workshops that I held with Vietnamese American high school-age youth. Vietnamese youth often perceive their Vietnamese and English as inadequate to express their conflicted feelings about being Vietnamese and American. Because I was interested in the youth narratives, I took up a translanguaging perspective in conducting the workshops. That is, I enabled students to feel free to deploy any aspect of their linguistic/semiotic/multimodal repertoire in telling their stories. As we will see, my methodology showcases the importance of storytelling and the use of the Arts as a way to guide the youth to collectively share their own stories of their parents and grandparents' journey from Vietnam to the United States. The analysis of the youth's stories then led me to posit a theory of transtrauma to describe what Vietnamese youth are experiencing in the United States today. I propose that the sharing of stories, with freedom to use all their linguistic/semiotic/multimodal resources, as the youth did in the workshops I organized, is the best antidote to the transtrauma that the youth are experiencing.

Vietnam as an Open Wound

On June 9th, 2022, CNN ran an article, "'Napalm Girl' at 50: The story of the Vietnam War's defining photo." In the article Holland (2022) wrote:

Taken outside the village of Trang Bang on June 8, 1972, the picture captured the trauma and indiscriminate violence of a conflict that claimed, by some [estimates](#), a million or more civilian lives. Though officially titled "The Terror of War," the photo is better known by the nickname given to the badly burned, naked 9-year-old at its center: "Napalm Girl."

The photo of Phan Thi Kim Phuc running from her village engulfed in flame from the bombing of napalm on Vietnamese soil is an embodiment of the visible institutionalized violence

inflicted on Vietnamese people. What Holland failed to mention was that between 1962 and 1972, the United States sprayed more than 19 million gallons of chemical herbicides on Vietnam (Le, 2017). The herbicides sprayed contained dioxin that causes cancers, birth defects, and other disabilities. According to the American Red Cross, today there are still three million Vietnamese people who have been affected by Agent Orange (Cerre, 2017).

There is the visible trauma caused by such actions as the dropping of 7.5 million tons of bombs and 19 million gallons chemical herbicides on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that sometime gets talked about. Then there is the invisible trauma that does not get talked about. My work focuses on the silent trauma of Vietnamese Americans and how it continues to live within them.

Cassie Premo Steele (2000) explores how Gloria Anzaldúa's work uses the border between the United States and Mexico as an open wound, a marker of departure and return of collective traumatic history. Anzaldúa's work explores the literal U.S.-Mexico border as a wound, a site of historical trauma that continues to affect the present experiences of individuals and communities. My work with Vietnamese American youth uses the American/Vietnam War as a marker, a point of departure and return of the collective traumatic history of Vietnamese Americans. Vietnamese Americans' lived experience is very much tied to the traumatic history of the American/Vietnam War. This is similar to the lived experience of Mexican Americans living in the border and how it is tied to dispossession, colonialism, and the United States.

Trauma, Race and Translanguaging

I bring together distinct, yet intersecting literature and theories, which attend to the multiple dimensions of individual and collective lived experience and ways of knowing, including my own. I draw on theories of trauma, race, and translanguaging to listen to the youth's stories and weave my understandings of myself, as well as what I call transtrauma.

Trauma

Most existing studies on trauma of Vietnamese communities have largely focused on studying what is "wrong" with the individual (Birman & Tran, 2008; Kim et al., 2019; Mollica et al., 2008; Silove et al., 2007; Vaage et al., 2011). Additionally, many of these studies have prioritized quantitative approaches, often minimizing or fully excluding the voices and lived experience of Vietnamese refugees beyond the ways in which these populations "match" or align with refugee experiences.

Judith Herman's (2015) work on trauma is hailed as groundbreaking. She is one of the few clinicians who has linked her work on trauma to the social and political context. Herman argues that there needs to be personal and political means to protect and affirm the victims who suffer from trauma. A personal space needs to be created, in which the victim builds relationships with friends, lovers, and family. But also important is the necessary political movements that are created by society to empower the disempowered.

Herman (2015) turns to history to solidify her argument that political movements drive the interest in the study of trauma. She reminds us that the study of trauma began with the study of hysteria growing out of the republican, anticlerical political movement in the late 19th century in France. At that time most of the doctors believed hysteria was a disease that was only associated with women, hence the name hysteria. It was considered a "dirty" disease and physicians refused to study it. However, it was not until notable neurologists Sigmund Freud and Jean-Martin Charcot

began to study hysteria that the public perception shifted. Charcot and Freud recognized that hysteria was a condition caused by psychological trauma. However, by the turn of the 20th century, women were daring to advocate for their rights. It was problematic for enlightened men to pose as the champions of women's rights. Thus, the study of hysteria slowly dwindled.

The study of trauma picked up again after World War I and intensified after the American/Vietnam War. This was the result of the anti-war movement. After World War I, psychological trauma caught the attention of the public again as men came back from the war and began to act like "hysterical women." The men "screamed and wept uncontrollably. They froze and could not move. They became mute and unresponsive. They lost their memory and their capacity to feel" (Herman, 2015 p. 20). At first, these symptoms exhibited by the men were attributed to physical abuse. Charles Myers, a British psychologist who examined some of the first cases in combat veterans believed that the veterans' symptoms were attributed to constant exploding shells. Gradually, military psychiatrists recognized that the symptoms these veterans had were a result of psychological trauma. However, these veterans were shamed and considered weak for developing these symptoms. Lewis Yealland, a British psychiatrist, suggested that the treatment plan for veterans with psychological trauma should be based on punishment, threats, and shaming.

However, after World War II, the perception surrounding veterans who developed psychological trauma changed. American psychiatrists J. W. Apple and G. W. Beebe stated that even the most mentally and physically strong men in combat developed psychological trauma after 200-240 days in combat. Along with other American psychiatrists, they developed a treatment plan for veterans. They argued that the bond between soldiers was very important. Thus, the treatment plan for veterans revolved around limiting the separation between comrades.

At the height of the American/Vietnam War, the interest in the study of psychological trauma in war veterans picked up again. This time the study was more systematic and on a larger scale. The push for the study of psychological trauma did not come from the public or the medical community, but from the soldiers themselves. The push for the study of psychological trauma coincided with the anti-war movement. Some American veterans who fought in Vietnam came back to the United States and became antiwar activists. They formed an organization called Vietnam Veterans Against the War. These American veterans wanted to expose the war system and the false justification for the war in Vietnam.

The American Vietnam War veterans formed support groups called "rap groups." The purpose of the rap groups was to help American Vietnam veterans build community and share their stories. (This group did not include Vietnamese veterans living in the United States). As a result of pressure from the American Vietnam veterans, the Veterans' Administration was forced to develop a psychological treatment program called Operation Outreach. After the American/Vietnam War ended, the Vietnam Veterans Administration commissioned studies researching the impact of the war on returning American Vietnam veterans. Thus, this led to the American Psychiatric Association including post-traumatic stress disorder in the official manual of mental disorders in 1980 (Herman, 2015).

Memories, Wars, and Trauma

In her study of intergenerational trauma of Holocaust survivors, Gita Arian Baack (2016) includes a community that has suffered from marginalization based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religious prejudices. Baack (2016) calls the survivors the *Inheritors*. The inheritors

of trauma “can be defined as the generations of people who, consciously or unconsciously, have thoughts and feelings about devastating events that happened when they were very young or before they were born, or that may even go back to earlier generations” (Baack, 2016, p. 3). The inheritors are descendants of individuals who “are directly and indirectly affected by war, armed conflict, and terrorist attacks.” According to Baack (2016) the inheritors “include descendants of the European Jewish Holocaust and Genocide and other genocides including those in Armenia, Rwanda and Burundi, Cambodia, Nanking, Croatia, Africa, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Korea” (p. 4).

Baack (2016) argues that memory serves as a tool for survivors to construct their story and in essence heal them. According to Baack (2016) “there are forms of memory that can help us to reconstruct our story or that give us closure about the unknowns in our story” (p. 41). These include inherited memory, memory as family stories, silent memory, and diasporic memory. *Inherited memory* refers to survivors carrying memory from one generation to the next.

Memory as family stories is a form of memory that survivors create from stories that are told to them by their family and friends about themselves. Baack sees this kind of memory as valid even though neuroscientists view it as false memory. Then there is *silent memory*, a term that was coined by Dr. Carol Kidron in regard to her study of Cambodian genocide survivors. The memory of trauma is always present in survivors. It remains silent and dormant. Finally, there is *diasporic memory*, which usually belongs to refugees who lost their homelands. All they have is a post-war memory. It is the memory of their homeland that unites them in a foreign land.

Quynh-Tram, a Vietnamese refugee links diasporic memory to the haunting from loss and historical trauma. She says;

Like other displaced groups in the world, the Vietnamese have been forced to face loss of a lifeworld and other related necessities to nourish their communal soul in exile. The post-war memory is all that remains, collective in spirit but fragmented in sight. Vietnamese post-war memory engages with the past/present relations. Being a lived history rather than “true” history, it is history but not time bound. In addition, it is central to debate on ‘the right to remember, the responsibility to recall,’ and the ‘sense of the dangers involved in forgetting’ their history. It is manifested, modified, and invented from the historical and subjugated knowledge, the difficult knowledge that haunts the Vietnamese Americans of three generations who have experienced, both consciously and unconsciously, colonial wounds and paradoxes of loss and creativity. (Baack, 2016, p. 54)

Just like Baack, Marianne Hirsch (2008) whose parents were Holocaust survivors, also examines how children of survivors of genocides/wars indirectly experience the genocides/wars through secondary memories. Marianne Hirsch calls them “postmemory.” Postmemory “describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). Hirsch argues that these experiences are so powerful that they serve as memories. Postmemory is not recall, but what Hirsch (2008) views as “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (p. 108). These memories dramatically shape how the second generation experience the world.

Viet Thanh Nguyen (2013) a refugee from Vietnam, writer, and scholar supports Hirsch’s postmemory theory by stating that his parents’ traumatic experiences of the American/Vietnam War were passed on to him in some sort of ways as they kept telling him horror stories of the war.

Nguyen (2013) said “rather than myself seeking out the past, the past has sought me out, something I have felt ever since I came to the US as a refugee from Vietnam (p. 144). The American/Vietnam War is like a ghost that always haunts him. Việt Thanh Nguyễn (2013) writes “all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory” (p. 12). Nguyen’s work examines the ways institutions such as the United States, the Vietnamese government, and the Vietnamese American community in the United States remember the war.

Like Nguyễn, growing up, I never experienced the American/Vietnam War directly, but I experienced it through my father as I bore witness to his trauma. I never sought out the war, but the war always seemed to creep up on me. It was a reminder of my family’s past, present, and future. It haunted me as I entered college and decided to major in the History of Vietnam. I learned how institutions remember the war, but what about the generation after? How do the children of Vietnamese refugees remember and experience the war? The American War in Vietnam ended 47 years ago, but its impacts are still felt by the U.S.-born generation.

Race

I also draw from theory on race (Saucier & Woods, 2016) as I listen to the Vietnamese American youth’s stories. Saucier and Woods (2016) critiqued Omi and Winant’s (2015) theory on racial formation. Omi and Winant assert that race is a master category, “a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 106). Saucier and Woods (2016) argue that scholars who argue that race is a social construct still rely on the argument that race is biological. Saucier and Woods claim that Omi and Winant rely “for coherence on the rhetorical force of refuting the meanings given to race by biological associations and at the same time silently reinscribe those same biological associations as its only account of race” (Saucier & Woods, 2016, p. 9). Saucier and Woods’ main critique of Omi and Winant’s racial formation is that they maintain that race is a category and fail to take into consideration colonialism, slavery, as well as not centering Blackness. According to Saucier and Woods:

Race is not in the eye of the beholder or on the body of the objectified. Race is an inherited western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, superordination, exploitation and segregation. Race is constitutively and unequally relational, regulatory and governmental, demarcating the colonial rule of Europe over non-Europe. Race has diverse, irrepressible, circuitous, fractured, antagonistic, material and discursive histories. Race underlines and colors the western political institution of nation-societies. Race is the political relation of antagonism between institutionally dominant white populations and dominated non-white populations. Race is the social policing of non-whiteness, particularly Blackness, under the authoritarian populism of whiteness. Race as these colonial constituted practices has been obscured, redefined and naturalised in liberal academic and political discourses that privilege its meaning in the shifting and changing population metaphors of biology and ethnicity, under the white gaze. (Saucier & Woods, 2016, p. 10)

Saucier and Woods (2016) transcend race, relocating it from the bodies to the institutions and a “western, modern-colonial practice of violence.”

The ways in which race has been conceptualized is important to understand the experience of Vietnamese American youth. During the American/Vietnam War, Americans often made fun

of the Vietnamese as a race that was dubious, criminal, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and thus, worthy of the treatment they were getting. Americans used derogatory term such as “gook” to refer to Vietnamese people. This racialization of Vietnamese people has extended to Vietnamese Americans, who remain racially categorized as Asians, albeit almost invisible because of wanting to forget the war and their presence.

This dehumanization and racialization of Vietnamese people made it easier for the United States to massacre Vietnamese bodies with deadly chemical such as napalm and Agent Orange. The Vietnamese bodies become dispensable through dehumanization and racialization. Napalm makes it easier for the United States to see Vietnamese bodies as dispensable. Napalm is then “a political object, coalesces the contradictory logics of a war fought on behalf of liberal humanity that enacted untold material violence on racialized peoples and ecologies in Southeast Asia (Bui, 2021, p. 300). Bui (2021) argues “that napalm object co-constituted with the racialized Asian body as it engenders the objectification of populations made expendable by U.S. militarized violence (p. 300). I argue that napalm represents the institutionalized violence that was unleashed on Vietnamese bodies and territory.

Translanguaging

Just like Saucier and Woods (2016) who disrupt the notion of race and transcend it, scholars such as García and Li (2014), Li (2018), and Otheguy, Garcia and Reid (2015, 2018) disrupt the notion of language and transcend it through adopting a translanguaging perspective. Translanguaging has been defined as going beyond the politically defined definition of named languages by nation states that seek to marginalize and exclude the dynamic linguistic practices of minoritized communities. Translanguaging refers “to the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 283). Translanguaging isn’t about moving across named languages but going beyond named languages (García & Li, 2014). I approached my workshops not with a notion of which language or what mode or media the youth were going to use to communicate their ideas and emotions, but with a translanguaging stance. A translanguaging stance perceives the youth’ meaning-making repertoire as going beyond English or Vietnamese, and going beyond what has been called the linguistic to include all types of multimodalities—gestures, body movements, drawing, music, all of which are part of the process with which human beings make meaning. Translanguaging provides a space for the youth to draw on all their features such as storytelling, arts, play, and poetry to understand, acknowledge and share their trauma.

Translanguaging theory enabled me to develop a lens for looking beyond norms and boundaries of language established by either the United States or Vietnam. Vietnamese Americans live in a trans-world, a world that is no longer Vietnamese as they understood it, and yet not American, for it was the United States that was to blame for the suffering they have endured.

Theorizing in the Flesh

The literature on trauma, race and translanguaging also allow me to draw from my lived experience as a refugee from Vietnam. I listen to the youth’s stories by bringing together understandings of trauma, race and language, as lived and narrated by the Vietnamese youth in relationship to my own experiences. My family was able to relocate to the United States through the Orderly

Departure Program (ODP). The Orderly Departure Program was created by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) to facilitate the legal departure of Vietnamese refugees from Vietnam to the United States (U.S. State Department, 2000). The program helped 500,000 Vietnamese refugees resettle in the United States. My family qualified for the ODP because my father was a high-ranking military officer in the army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

When Saigon fell to communist forces on April 30, 1975, my father was captured and sent to a “reeducation” camp in the mountains of Vietnam. My father did not know that he wouldn’t see his family for eight years. During the eight years in prison, my father was tortured and starved. He also witnessed his friends and prison mates being tortured and killed. My father told me horror stories of his friends being killed in prison. He told me, “In the middle of night, the guard pulled men out of their cells and then gunshots exploded. I knew they were gone, I kept thinking when I will be next, will I be able to see your mother?”

Growing up, I bore witness to my father’s trauma. I felt helpless because I did not know how to help him. He turned to alcohol to cope with his trauma. I remember my father nhậu² with his friends on the weekends. As they sipped on cold Heineken beers, chatting, and eating dried squids, Paris By Night³ played in the background. Songs that reminded them of Vietnam and their time in the army played on repeat, such as “Chuyện Hoa Sim” [“The Story of the Purple Flower”], the painful life of a Vietnamese woman who married a soldier during war time and died as she waited for her husband to return. As the beer bottles emptied and the smoke filled the room, I heard my father and his friends speak of the good old days in Vietnam before the war ended. They talked about the battles they won. The communist soldiers they killed. The blame they put on the United States for pulling out of Vietnam, which caused their imprisonment.

The United States neither helped my father nor the many Vietnamese refugee men in his situation. The United States believes that the gift of freedom (M. Nguyen, 2012) is sufficient. My father relied on his friends who were also sent to reeducation camps in Vietnam. My house was also part of the construction of memories of the war in the diaspora communities. It became a place where my parents’ generation came to remember the war (V.T. Nguyen, 2016). On the weekends, my house in South Philadelphia became a gathering place for my father and his friends to process and heal from their trauma. The weekends were a sanctuary for my father and his friends. However, the weekends were hell as I bore witness to my father’s trauma and rage. Growing up, kids my age looked forward to the weekends; I hated them. As a child, I did not understand my father’s trauma. I did not realize that he was fighting that war until he passed away in 2002. It was not until I started my doctoral program that I stopped blaming my father for his erratic and abusive behavior and turning to alcohol to numb his pain. I was eventually able to relocate trauma from the individual bodies—that of my father and my own family—to the institutions and political context of nation-states. My father’s suffering as a result of the Vietnam war was not acknowledged in the United States and its institutions, since he was seen as just collateral damage in the war against communism (Bui, 2021). It was this neglect by the U.S. government and my father’s inability to fit into a society for whose values he had fought in Vietnam that produced his transtrauma, as he found himself as alienated in the United States, as he had been in Vietnam after the war.

The Workshops and the Youth

To understand my own identity as a Vietnamese American scholar, as well as that of Vietnamese youth, I set up a series of workshops with eight Vietnamese American high school students. The

purpose of the workshops was to better understand how Vietnamese American youth were interpreting their lives, that of their families, and of the American/Vietnam War. But at the same time, I wanted to share the history that I knew, as well as my own stories. Thus, the sessions had a double purpose—they were not only to extract and develop understandings from the youth, but to share my own understandings as an older Vietnamese American with a background in Vietnamese history, language, culture, education and the sociology of language and immigration.

Because my research was conducted during the COVID era, the sessions, which lasted approximately two hours each were conducted over Zoom. The sessions were transcribed and the written/artistic material produced during the workshops was collected and included in the analysis.

The eight participants were Nam, Eva, Mia, Laura, Grace, Sophia, Emma, and Lucy. These youth who identify as Vietnamese Americans come from different walks of life. The youth wanted to participate in the workshops because they yearned for a space to be in community with each other, a space in which they could learn about their lived experience and history. During session one of the eight workshops, Laura said, “I am here not because of my friend Mia, but I want to learn more about my family’s history and meet others who share the same experience as me” (Laura, September, 2020).

Nam and *Eva* live in Pennsauken, Southern New Jersey. *Mia* and *Laura* are from Delaware County, Pennsylvania. *Grace* and *Sophia* live in Philadelphia. *Lucy* lives in Chicago, Illinois. At the time of this project, all eight youth were in high school. Emma, Eva, Mia, Laura, Lucy, Grace, and Sophia are second generation Vietnamese Americans. They were born in the United States decades after the American/Vietnam War ended. Nam is a first generation American as he was born in Vietnam and came to the United States at the age of 14.

I met two of the youths, Nam and Eva when I was volunteering at VietLead, a nonprofit organization in the Philadelphia metropolitan area whose goal is to empower the community through civic engagement and community building projects. Nam and Eva introduced me to their friends and encouraged them to participate in this collaborative project.⁴

Table 1. The youth who participated in this collaborative project.

Name	Residence	Age
Nam	Pennsauken, New Jersey	17
Laura	Morton, Pennsylvania	17
Lucy	Chicago, Illinois	16
Eva	Pennsauken, New Jersey	17
Mia	Morton, Pennsylvania	16
Sophia	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	16
Emma	Pennsauken, New Jersey	16
Grace	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	16

This paper is based on the youth narratives produced during the session that focused on sharing the youth’ families’ stories of the American/Vietnam War and their journey to the United States. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, this was not one of the first sessions with the students. Although the data here presented is drawn from the students’ oral narratives, the Arts (plays, art, newsreels, movies, etc.) were used to elicit the students’ narratives.

The Collective Narratives

We began the workshop that is the topic of this article by watching a recording of an off-Broadway play, *Vietgone*, a funny story about a Vietnamese refugee man who found love in a refugee camp. But the play is not only about love, but also about war and resilience. The youth never heard about this play even though it had been released recently, in 2016. They were shocked that their school never mentioned this play when they were taught about the American/Vietnam War which they only knew as the Vietnam War. The clip was to trigger the youth's stories of war and passage to the United States in a light and humorous way before we dove into our families' stories.

The youth related to the play and wanted to see the whole play. Through watching clips of the play, the youth were able to learn about the American/Vietnam War that was not taught to them in schools. Lucy said, "How come I never learnt about this in school?" (Lucy, September, 2020). In one of the songs "Start Again," the lead singer sang about being separated into camps in the middle of nowhere in the United States. When Saigon (the capital of the Republic of Vietnam) fell to communist forces in 1975, the United States resettled about 125,000 Vietnamese refugees in Camp Pendleton (California), Fort Chaffe (Arkansas), Eglin Air Force Base (Florida), and Fort Indiantown Gap (Pennsylvania) (Gonzalez, 2015). The youth did not know about this. I did not learn about this until college after attending a talk by an Asian American scholar. Laura asked the group: Why did the United States do this? Why not let us choose where we live in the United States? Nam responded by saying that the United States wanted Vietnamese people to lose their roots, to be more American. He said, "They wanted to put us in the boonies, where we ate hamburgers and French fries" (Nam, September, 2020). Laura used the word "assimilation" when discussing the plight of Vietnamese refugees being scattered across the United States.

Two lessons are gleaned from this initial exchange. One, Vietnamese American youth know very little about the immigration and resettlement experience of their families, and schools are not including this history. Two, for the first time they are reflecting on facts and thinking of how this has affected their own lives.

We watched another clip of *Vietgone*, "I'll Make It Home" before we proceeded to our main activities. We discussed what home means to us. Sophia said, "Home is family and community" (Sophia, September, 2020). Laura said that home was a place she gets to eat her favorite meals cooked by her grandmother (Laura, September, 2020). Lucy mentioned that home does not have to be a physical place; it is where she feels loved and safe. It is interesting that the youth did not mention location as home. Instead, home to them were the people around them, our loved ones. Family was important to them even though their relationship to their family was tumultuous at times and they seem to understand very little about their families' experiences leaving Vietnam. To counteract the little understandings that the youth had, the workshop centered learning about their families' history and their journey to the United States. I first shared my own family experience with the youth. For some of us this was the first time we learned about our grandparents and parents' experiences. For others, we had an opportunity to dig deeper and to have difficult conversations surrounding war, loss, and trauma.

"There is Power in the Telling"

As Robin Wall Kimmerer says in *Braiding Sweetgrass* "even when it is misunderstood, there is power in the telling" (2013, p. 9), and so, it was important for the youth to share and tell what they had learned.

Mia was the first youth to tell us about her family's experience; she said:

My dad left when he was younger. His family went at different times. At some point during his youth, he didn't have his family with him. He was really young! Eventually, he got put in a refugee camp and they left him there for a while. He finally got out and there was a boat waiting and he got over here. And I think a couple of his siblings came over before he did. His siblings came here before him and they had a foster family, and they took my father in. Eventually, the rest of his family got here and now we all live in Pennsylvania. My mom got here in 2001 and she was visiting and met my dad and decided to stay and they got married. (Mia, September, 2020)

Mia emphasizes her father's youth (younger, youth, young!) as well as his loneliness during the years in a refugee camp. Her narratives stretch the time of loneliness, "they left him there *for a while*," "he *finally* got out." That terrible sense of an elongated suffering time came to an end when his siblings "took [him] in," after there was a "boat waiting." One gets the sense that Mia is narrating a fairy tale with a happy ending, "now we all live in Pennsylvania" and my dad and mom "decided to stay and they got married." To make up for her dad's suffering and loneliness, Mia emphasizes the togetherness of family in Pennsylvania, the mom and dad getting married. The narrative reveals that Mia needs to resist the trauma experienced by her father by focusing on living happily ever after together in Pennsylvania.

Mia continued to share her story with the group and reflected her family's experience of the Vietnam War. Mia timidly shared:

My dad's parents are from the North. When the war came, they went to the South. My grandparents are more like both. They speak differently, sometimes they say words but in a different accent. My dad speaks more of a southern person because he grew up there. About the war..... [a silent pause]. My grandfather fought in the war but I did not want to ask him just in case of PTSD or anything. (Mia, September, 2020)

Mia acknowledges the trauma that her grandfather still feels. Even though she was told to ask the family about the war, she "did not want to ask him," trying to protect him and herself in the process. Lucy chimed in,

I didn't ask about specific details cause basically I was in a rush, she was in a rush. She didn't go to the U.S. right away. She was on the boat. I didn't ask how long or the details. She lost her cousins from drowning because the boat was crowded. She arrived in the Philippines and lived there for seven months. After that, she finally got on a plane to Chicago. She lost a lot of cousins that couldn't swim or they were pushed off the boat. Around the 1980s, I don't remember the specific dates. Uhhmmmm, my grandfather was in the war. He was imprisoned for seven years and that was how he immigrated to the U.S. (Lucy, September 2020)

Lucy narrated this quickly. She seemed to be in a rush not to reveal too much "or the details." This boat was unlike the one in which Mia's father left. This boat was overcrowded, and did not offer safe passage. The narration felt as if Lucy herself was drowning, until she got to the place when the grandmother "got on a plane to Chicago." That is where the narration leads—to a safe silence. Lucy claims not to "remember." Her grandfather's seven-year imprisonment is

summarized in one quick sentence, as if wanting to forget everything until “he immigrated to the U.S.”

After this narrative, there was a long pause. We didn’t know what to do and just stared at each other silently. Sophia jumped and shared her story,

A couple days ago, I asked my parents what it was like for them and their families to emigrate from Vietnam to the United States. I was not expecting to hear what I heard from them. When I asked my mom to tell me her story, she looked hesitant, but I wasn't sure why. That day, I found out my mom had a brother. She told me that her dad and her brother were put into a boat to try and leave Vietnam and move to the United States. Ever since that day, she never heard from either of them again. She looked heartbroken, which made me feel heartbroken because I never knew she had a brother. After that my mom and her mom were sent to a camp in the Philippines, and they were kept there for nine months. After that, they hopped on a plane to Philadelphia. I don't know much more. My dad didn't want to say anything. My grandpa on my dad's side was involved in the war. (Sophia, September, 2020)

This narration was as hesitant as the hesitancy that Sophia detected in her mother. Silences were revealed, as, for example, the existence of a brother whom she had never mentioned and how her mother's father had also been lost on another boat that didn't offer safe passage. The mother's look as “heartbroken” was then transmitted to Sophia herself. As with Lucy, it was “hopping on a plane” that saved them from the horrors and the drownings left behind. And although there was recognition that the other grandfather was in the war, she does not know anything else. There are no shared intergenerational stories about the war. However, there is much intergenerational heartbreak and loss.

Another participant, Laura, also has family members who were lost at sea:

My dad and his family, they came to the United States by boat and my dad actually went to jail a couple of times trying to escape. [The Vietnamese government jailed refugees who tried to escape Vietnam but were not successful via boat.] When my dad came over on the boat he and his siblings were on different boats and they got separated. When they got to the U.S., he lost touch with his siblings. When I visited my grandma in California, she always prayed that one day she would hear from them. My aunt told me that she spent years praying. Her sons got lost at sea. No one knows if they are dead or alive. Till this day, she still prays that one day she will hear from them. On my mom's side, her dad was imprisoned after the war and they escaped Vietnam after that. (Laura, September, 2020)

As in the other stories, it is not the war itself that dominates the narrative, it is the sea, the drowning, the loss, the uncertainty of life or death. And at the same time, there is resilience often provided by prayer that keeps memories and hope flowing.

Like my own father, Emma's grandfather was sent to a reeducation for five years where he was tortured. Emma explained:

They moved here after my grandfather was done with the jail sentence, since he fought for the South, he had to go to jail. After my grandfather was released from prison they came to the United States. They were working in factories. They were poor. My youngest aunt is the only one who graduated high school. (Emma, September, 2020)

It wasn't the war that was traumatic for Emma; it was coming to the United States, working in factories, being poor, not being able to study. And these hardships are seen as a result of fighting "for the South" and cooperating with the United States in the war.

Eva revealed how her grandfather had gone through great length not to participate in the war. He cut off a toe:

My mother's father, I looked at his foot and he was missing a toe. I was like what, I did not notice that when I was little, he was hesitant a bit. He told me he cut off his toe because he didn't want to go to war and die so he cut off his own toe. Literally, right now has one of his toes missing. It was really scary to look at because I never have seen anyone with body parts missing. My grandpa on my father's side, I think he was a police officer in Vietnam when the war started. Eventually, he was arrested and taken into prison. My grandpa was in prison for more than eight years. My father did not remember much. He got a visa working for the US government in Vietnam and then escaped to the U.S. (Eva, September, 2020)

Eva's story reveals her fear. She was scared to "look," and so her story, like that of the other participants was full of silences, of fear. She claims that her father "did not remember much," revealing how it is that silences are built around the drowning/cutting off pieces of themselves experiences. The narratives only looked at the "plane," the "escape" to the United States.

At the end of this activity, we took a moment to catch our breath. We turned off our cameras and remained silent for about five minutes. We just needed some privacy to sit with our emotions and process them before we moved to the next activity.

Then we created a timeline documenting our families' journey to the United States. It was our first time using this software and we encountered some difficulties. Only two youths were able to create a timeline to document their families' journey to the United States. (See Appendix I)

Intergenerational Trauma: How Trauma is Inherited

It is clear from the ways that these Vietnamese American youth narrated their stories that they were suffering intergenerational trauma. Recently, local newspapers that have large Vietnamese American populations have begun to shine light on the issue of *intergenerational trauma* of Vietnamese Americans. They have published pieces, such as: "Intergenerational trauma affects mental health of Southeast Asian-Americans" (Nguyen, 2019), "War, Trauma, and the Mental Health of Vietnam War-Era Older Adults" (Elders, 2019), and "Wartime trauma among Vietnamese refugees subject of new study" (Wang, 2022). And in literary studies, works and discussions by and with Vietnamese American writers, like Ocean Vuong, Ly Tran, Nam Le, and Lê thị diễm thúy have brought forward the cruciality of understanding the experiences of Vietnamese American communities beyond the individual sufferings and survivals.

The study on intergenerational trauma is situated in historical and political contexts. The origin of intergenerational trauma stemmed from the study of Holocaust survivors. In a crucial study, Rakoff (1966) found that the children of Holocaust survivors displayed signs of trauma. In the initial report, Rakoff noted the Holocaust survivors didn't develop any psychological trauma, but their children did. It was more believable that the children suffered directly from the horror of the Holocaust and not the parents (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

As I said before, Gita Arian Baack (2016) talks about the inheritors of trauma "defined as the generations of people who, consciously or unconsciously, have thoughts and feelings about

devastating events that happened when they were very young or before they were born, or that may even go back to earlier generations” (Baack, 2016, p. 3). The inheritors are descendants of individuals who “are directly and indirectly affected by war, armed conflict, and terrorist attacks.” According to Baack (2016) the inheritors “include descendants of the European Jewish Holocaust and Genocide and other genocides including those in Armenia, Rwanda and Burundi, Cambodia, Nanking, Croatia, Africa, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Korea” (p. 4).

Rachel Yehuda, a professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital found that American Vietnam veterans had similar traumatic symptoms as Holocaust survivors (Baack, 2016). Ancharoff, Munroe, Fisher (1998) also found that the children of American Vietnam veterans developed similar symptoms to those of the children of Holocaust survivors.

It is clear that the trauma suffered by the Vietnamese American youth is intergenerational. Their grandparents and parents suffer one of the most brutal conflicts between western power and Vietnamese people. Their grandparents and parents passed their suffering on to the youth through their memories or lack of them. But the question for me is: Why is this trauma intergenerational? What other factors are present that makes this trauma of Vietnamese Americans last and last? Why does it feel like drowning all the time? My conceptualization of transtrauma goes simply beyond the intergenerational, to show how it has been produced by the United States’ continued marginalization of the Vietnamese community, even after they were received after the war.

Transtrauma: Going Beyond the Individual and the Generation. The Role of the Nation-State

Institutions and nation-states play a major role in shaping and defining the trauma of marginalized communities. They are mutually constituted. I’m calling what Vietnamese Americans experience, *transtrauma*. I am using the prefix trans- as in the word “transcend”—to go beyond. I view transtrauma as going beyond simply the individual, but looking at how structures of domination such as institutions play a role in inflicting trauma on marginalized communities. This *transtrauma* goes not only beyond an individual to encompass generations, but also social/national/citizenship structures. In the case of the Vietnamese diaspora living in the United States, the trauma began when the United States troops first set foot on the sandy beach of Đà Nẵng in 1958 in a form of military advisory to the Republic of Vietnam (McLeod & Nguyen 2001).

In 1964, the United States claimed that North Vietnamese patrol boats hit the Maddox, a U.S. destroyer (later, it was proven that this incident never happened). The United States considered this an act of aggression by the Democratic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). The United States Congress then passed The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the president the power to use any means necessary to defend the United States. President Johnson ordered the United States military to bomb Vietnam in 1964. By 1966, an average of 300 bombers a day flew over Vietnam destroying roads, railroads, bridges, and villages of Vietnam. By 1972, the bombing raids had paralyzed Vietnam. During the course of the war, the United States dropped more than 5 million ton of bombs across Vietnam. The United States dropped more bombs on Vietnam than World War I and World War II combined (Chan, 2006).

In addition to dropping more than 5 million ton of bombs on Vietnam, the United States also committed a plethora of atrocities and sprayed more than 19 million gallons of chemical herbicides on Vietnamese soil. Among the many atrocities committed in Vietnam, one of them was the Mỹ Lai massacre, in which United States soldiers murdered more than 300 women,

children, and the elderly. In 1968, in a small village in central Vietnam, a group of American soldiers entered the village looking for Việt Cộng. The soldiers did not find any Việt Cộng and began shooting at the villagers. The mothers who tried to shield their children were shot. The children who tried to run were shot. The huts were set on fire. The young women who tried to escape the huts that had been set on fire were raped and then shot (Hersh, 1972).

During the course of the American/Vietnam War, the United States sprayed more than 19 million gallons of chemical herbicides on Vietnamese soil, these included Agent Orange, Agent White, Agent Blue. The purpose of the chemical herbicides was to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam so that communist forces could not use them as hideouts. The United States government knew that the chemical herbicides caused serious health problems. In March 1948, at the Dow Chemical Companies, which produced the chemical herbicides, workers complained of skin rashes. However, despite the health hazard, the United States did not stop spraying these chemical herbicides on Vietnam until 1972. The American Association for the Advancement of Science found that Vietnamese babies born with birth defects were caused by Agent Orange (Le, 2017).

Today, the Vietnamese people and their environment are still suffering from Agent Orange. In certain regions of Vietnam, the soil is contaminated so severely that people are unable to cultivate their land. Areas of Vietnam with high levels of dioxin have more babies born with many deformities.

Transtrauma is not an individual condition; it is a condition produced by war, atrocities, rape, murder, Agent Orange. Through the youth narratives we can see that the transtrauma, which Vietnamese experience, extends beyond the borders of Vietnam and to the land of the United States, their new home. The United States has refused to acknowledge the role it continues to play in the suffering of Vietnamese Americans.

Transtrauma does not focus on the teaching and learning of the institutionalized history of the war in Vietnam, but instead focuses on the complex lived experiences of Vietnamese American youth living in the United States and how they embody the silent institutionalized violence. *Transtrauma* is a framework that jointly conceptualizes experiences of intergenerational violence and ethnoracial invisibilization from a colonial/imperial perspective, in efforts to develop new insights into the relation between healing and decolonization.

This decolonization approach takes on what García et al. (2021) call for in the rejection of abyssal thinking, which erases marginalized communities' ways of thinking/doing that are seen as not normative. In the case of Vietnamese Americans who experience intergenerational violence and ethnoracial invisibilization, alternative ways to heal from our transtrauma and fight for our stories to be heard must be found. For example, earlier I mentioned my father and his friends did not receive any help from the United States government. Our house in South Philadelphia became a sanctuary for them to collectively *nhâu* and share their stories of the good old days. It was an alternative way of healing as they did not get to see a trained therapist and/or receive institutional support.

It is most important for Vietnamese American youth to deal with their transtrauma, but neither their own families nor the U.S. schools in which they are educated are interested in educating them to their past and the role that the U.S. government has had in producing their transtrauma. Through the youth stories, as well as my own as participant in the workshops, I was able to theorize transtrauma going beyond my individual personal experience to that of the collective community, and help the youth locate it and grapple with it.

Discussion: The Youth's Experience of Transtrauma

The youth stories are told in ways that reveal pain and violence, as well as loss and silence. The American/Vietnam War and the atrocities perpetrated on their families haunted the youth across generations. They felt they were drowning, as some in their families did, as they told of pain inflicted not by the Vietcong, but by the United States, their home and country. Two themes emerged from the analysis of the narratives as evidence of the youth's transtrauma—the ghost of violence and pain and the ethnoracial invisibilization which produces a ghost identity. Both are experienced intergenerationally, with the United States to blame.

The Ghost of Violence and Pain

In a study on intergenerational trauma, Baack (2017) finds that people use metaphors like ghosts and haunting to describe how they've inherited memories of war from their parents. In the workshop, Laura, frustratedly said:

The Vietnam War is *like the ghost* that continues to haunt our parents. Our grandparents and parents are scarred. We are scarred. Our grandparents and parents did not want to talk about their experience during the Vietnam War that much. We did not want to push them as we were afraid that the painful memories would cause our grandparents and parents to be in distress. (Laura, September, 2020)

The burden was being placed on the youth to know when not to take a knife out and stab the open wound again.

I engaged a few of the participants in collaborating with me on rereading the data and reflecting on its meaning. During one of those sessions, Laura expressed concern that she did not want to cause her parents and grandparents to be in agony. Laura did not want her parents and grandparents to fight that war all over again. Laura wanted to protect her family members from the ghost that continues to haunt them by not pushing the conversations further. Lucy had the same perspective as Laura as she wanted to protect her family from the ghost of violence and pain of the past. In agreement with Laura, Lucy stated:

Yeah me too, I waited for my mother to be busy and asked her. Did I do that subconsciously? Like, I did not want to spend too much time on it so I decided to wait until both of us are busy to have this conversation. I felt really bad that they had experienced these things. The discrimination and having to rebuild a whole new life. I felt surprised, especially when my mom talked about the poverty she lived in for so many years. (Lucy, November 2020)

Like Laura, Lucy was trying to protect her family members from the ghost of pain and violence. Lucy purposely rushed the conversation with her parents because she did not want to dig deep into their pain.

The burden has been put on the youth to protect their family members from their trauma while simultaneously experiencing a transtrauma that is not only intergenerational, but also places blame on the United States. The United States is to blame because of its policy in silencing the experiences of Vietnamese refugees (the separation of Vietnamese refugees when they first arrived in the United States and not teaching about their history in schools). The United States is

embarrassed that the wealthiest nation with its military power lost a war to Vietnam, a tiny country with no military power. This silencing of the Vietnamese refugees' experiences is done on purpose as the United States wants to protect its image of "American exceptionalism." This protection is at the expense of Vietnamese refugees who still do not have the institutional support to process and heal from their trauma.

In addition, the youth expressed feelings of guilt, sadness, and being scared and scarred as they shared their stories. Most Vietnamese American youth did not learn about their families' stories until they participated in this collaborative project. The youth felt a sense of guilt that they did not learn about their families' painful history. Eva kept using the word "scar" when discussing the war. Laura witnessed her grandmother's sense of hope and hopelessness when she visited her in California. Laura's grandmother lights incense and prays every day to their ancestors that she may see her missing children again. I followed up with Laura about this experience and she commented, "I don't know, I felt her pain when I witnessed her doing this. I also felt helpless that I didn't know how to help my grandma" (Laura, 2022). The pain, the guilt, and scar are passed on from their grandparents to their parents and then to the youth. Helplessness is what they feel, as they try to forget the violence and pain, in silence, as they act like ghosts that the United States refuses to see.

Ethnoracial Invisibilization as Ghost

As I pointed out before, when Vietnamese refugees first arrived in the United States, it enacted a policy of separation. The U.S government set up camps in the middle of America far away from metropolitan areas where proper support was non-existent. The United States wanted Vietnamese refugees to ensure that they remained invisible by spreading them out. As Nam said, "they wanted to put us in the boonies, where we ate hamburgers and French fries" (Nam, September, 2020).

As a result of this policy, Vietnamese refugees did not have the space to share their stories and heal from their trauma. This was not the only time the United States enacted this violence against marginalized groups. For example, in the mid-19th Century, the U.S. government removed Native American children from schools that were run by Native American tribes and put them in boarding schools to learn American cultural practices and values (Spring, 2016). At the boarding schools, Native Americans were not allowed to speak with their own languages (García, 2009).

The invisibilization was furthered by the acts of Vietnamese refugees not to share their painful stories of loss, drowning and surviving to come to the United States with their children. These stories were buried and never talked about.

Most of the Vietnamese American youth involved in this workshop live in suburban areas where most of the population is white. They are not surrounded by other Vietnamese American youth with similar experiences. Thus, the youth do not have an anchor to collectively share their lived experiences with each other. Collective storytelling provides a mechanism for communities who have faced historical forms of racialized violence and trauma to find new pathways of healing and resistance (Chioneso et al., 2020; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Saul, 2014).

Furthermore, the youth did not learn about their experience in school. During the workshop, the youth felt a sense of frustration that they did not learn about the history of Vietnamese Americans. Lucy frustratedly voiced, "How come I never learnt about this in school?" (Lucy, September, 2020). When Vietnamese American youth aren't provided the space to learn about their history, this erases their lived experiences, as they live with ghosts, among ghosts and enacting ghosts.

The ethnoracial invisibilization goes beyond the borders of schools and extends into the media. Movies such as *Platoon*, *Born on Fourth of July*, and *Heaven & Earth* used Vietnamese bodies as dead props to depict the white American soldiers as victims of the war (Tran, 2020; Espiritu, 2008). Again erasing the experience of Vietnamese people to center the experience of white Americans, turning Vietnamese experience into ghost stories.

Ghost Stories and Memories

Espiritu (2008) argues that the lived experience of Vietnamese Americans has been institutionalized hidden or erased is considered ghostly. In order to “confront the ghostly aspects of social life is to tell ghost stories: to pay attention to what modern history has rendered ghostly and to write into being the seething presence of the things that appear to be not there (Espiritu, 2008, p. 1701). Rendering the experience of Vietnamese refugees as ghostly made it easier for the United States to justify the intervention in Vietnam and the institutionalized violence that was enacted on Vietnamese people. Thus, the United States can re-write the narrative of the war to depict the United States involvement as a blessing for Vietnamese people.

This re-writing the narrative of the Vietnam War/American War is what Nguyễn (2016) calls the politic of memory. The United States’ main goal is about forgetting the stories and memories of Vietnamese people. For example, the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C is a perfect of example of the institutionalized erasure of Vietnamese people and painted Americans as the victims of the war (Espiritu (2008). I call this strategic forgetting by the United States *transtrauma* as it renders Vietnamese people narrative voiceless turning them into ghost stories. This paper addresses the ghostly aspects of the lived experience of Vietnamese Americans by centering their ghost stories.

Conclusion and Implications

The ghosts of violence and pain of the past, as well as the present ethnoracial invisibilization that turns Vietnamese American youth into ghosts produces their *transtrauma*. They experience the haunting intergenerationally, and they are in turn haunted by living in the country that has produced their violence and pain.

During this journey, they discovered that their trauma is collective and institutionalized. Laura says, “there is a common theme in these stories, our family members experienced something traumatic in their lives because of the war” (Laura, November, 2020). Lucy agrees with Laura, “we are here because of the war” (Lucy, November, 2020). They are able to relocate their trauma from the onus of the bodies to the institution of war and conquest. The Vietnamese American youth are experiencing what I called *transtrauma* and they cannot transcend it because no one in the United States, neither their own families, nor educators want to talk about it.

In this paper I have brought together distinct, yet intersecting literature and theories, which attend to the multiple dimensions of individual and collective lived experience and ways of knowing, including my own. The youth’ muted stories enabled us to reflect on why Vietnamese American youth continue to be treated as “ghosts” in the history of American education, rarely receiving mention. This silence in turn produces the youth’ continued *transtrauma*.

By engaging Vietnamese American youth in a workshop that centers Vietnamese American history and identity, I give the youth an opportunity to leave their ghost identity behind, embodying an agency that comes from not feeling violence/pain and invisibility. The off-Broadway show,

Vietgone was used to break the ice to facilitate the youth in narrating their stories about the war and coming to the United States. These narratives counter what is being taught in schools about the war in Vietnam and centers Vietnamese Americans as full-bodied agents with voices that claim justice for their histories. In doing so, I hope to break the silence on the Vietnamese American experience, especially that of Vietnamese American youth.

In addition to giving the Vietnamese youth an opportunity to leave their ghost identity behind, I call on educators to uphold a pedagogy that is informed by transtrauma lenses in order for the youth to recognize their transtrauma and heal from it. I also call on educators to deploy translanguaging strategies to ensure that youth who have experienced trauma can share their stories. That means allowing students to use their entire semiotic/multimodal repertoire to express themselves (Callaghan, Moore, & Simpson, 2018). A translanguaging lens provides the space for youth to leverage the arts collectively to realize their transtrauma.

Transtrauma doesn't necessarily belong to just Vietnamese American youth but also to other marginalized youth who experience institutionalized racism, atrocities, and wars. But the case of Vietnamese Americans is especially salient. U.S. schools rarely teach about the complexities of Vietnamese society and the role of the United States in the Vietnamese War. Many U.S. youth view Vietnamese youth with distrust and ignorantly suspect that they may be Communist agents who are enemies of democracy. Many blame them for the United States' defeat in the war. Vietnamese American youth live with this transtrauma every day, and nothing is being done to alleviate it. My workshop provided a space to tell and show the youth stories, to open up wounds and heal them, and especially to understand the youth strengths as a people who sacrificed much for the United States and have received little in return.

Notes

1. In Vietnam, the Vietnam War is referred to as *Chiến Tranh Mỹ*, (the American War). I use the term American/ Vietnam War to offer a Vietnamese perspective when discussing the Vietnam War. It is disrupting the narrative that is told about the Vietnam War, which is always from the perspective of the United States.
2. *Nhậu* in Vietnamese means to drink and snack on dried goods. It is a ritual for Vietnamese men. I use it as a verb here. As Eva said, "you can't replace *nhậu* with an English word, the meaning isn't the same."
3. *Paris By Night* is a musical show that features overseas Vietnamese artists.
4. All of the youth who participated in this collaborative project gave me their informed and ongoing consent to participate and were authorized by their legal guardian. In order to guarantee anonymity participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms.

About the Author



Khanh Le is a Substitute Assistant Professor of Multilingual Literacies in the Department of Linguistics and Communication Disorders at Queens College, CUNY. He earned his PhD in Urban Education from the Graduate Center, CUNY. He is a scholar of language, race, the refugee experience, and trauma studies. As the child of a refugee family and a product of the Vietnam War, his research intersects translanguaging, transtrauma, and transmethodology. His most recent publication, co-authored with Lara Alonso, is titled “The Language Warriors: Transcending Ideologies on Bilingualism in Education.” The publication examines ways to combat deficit lenses when working with language-minoritized students. Khanh Le was awarded the 2023 Bilingual Education Research-SIG AERA Outstanding Dissertation 2nd Place Award and has received both the Graduate Center Fellowship and Dissertation Year Fellowship.

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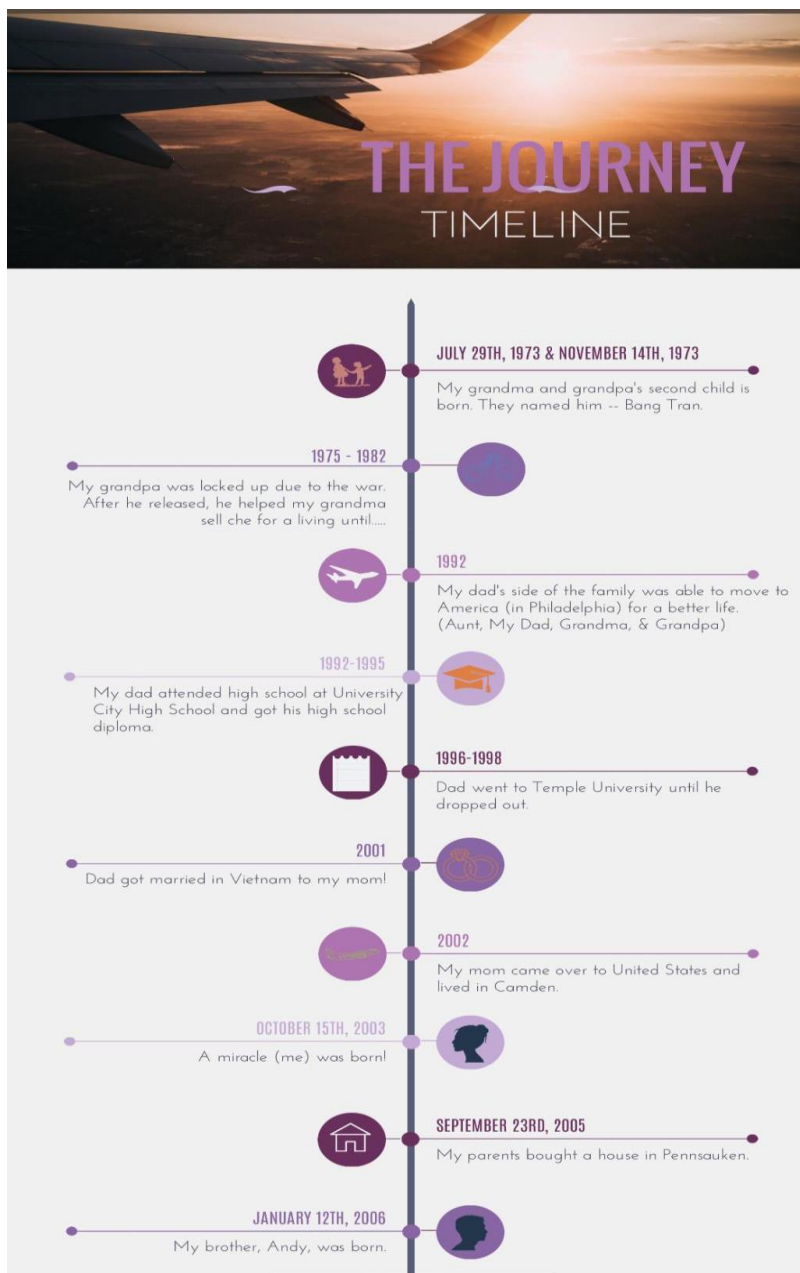
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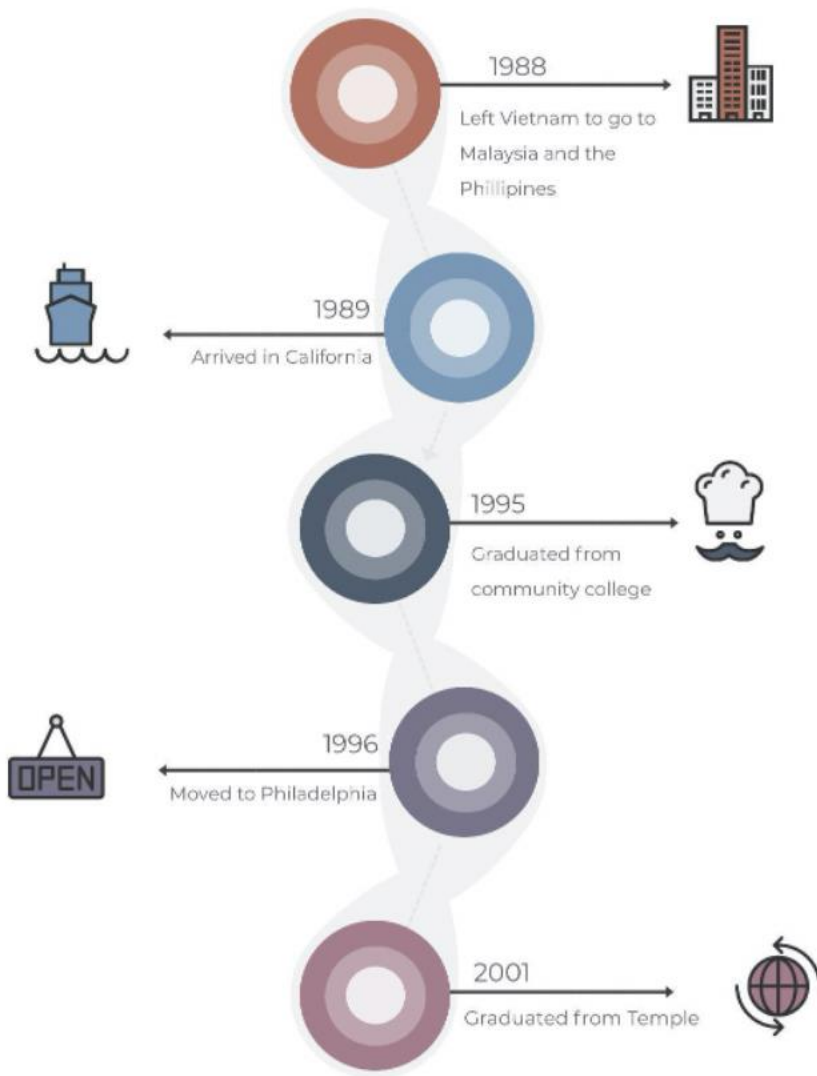
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Appendix

Appendix I shows *timelines created by Eva and Laura (Le, 2020).*





RESOURCES

<https://www.officetime.com/blog/timeline-templates-for-teachers>

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