







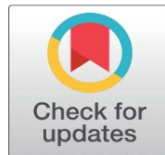
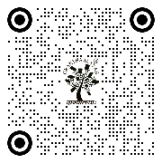
VISUAL ARCHITECTURES OF POST-MEMORY: SKETCHING INTERGENERATIONAL CHILDHOOD IN SELECT GRAPHIC MEMOIRS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how visual representation enhances the depiction of intergenerational memory and childhood experiences through the textual analysis of G. B. Tran's *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey* (2010) and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (2017). The paper studies how graphic memoirs become a medium for understanding how families remember their past. Both the graphic memoirs trace the life stories of Vietnamese refugees using a visual archive of family photographs, testimonies, domestic interiors, and other recurring motifs in a fragmented timeline. They also present intergenerational memory and bonds within families. In Tran's *Vietnamerica*, a visually dense narration is used to represent a disoriented family and its past, while Bui's *The Best We Could Do* uses a watercolour palette to show the process of slow dislocation and efforts of assimilation. This article conceptualizes the notions of visual architecture, memory, and intergenerational childhood theorized through the frameworks of postmemory studies, queer temporality, and affect theory. The study examines how childhood is a reimagined and a revisited place and how visual architecture constructs postmemories of cultural displacement across Vietnamese and Vietnamese American generations. Childhood is analyzed in nonlinear time, negotiating adult subjectivity and familial history. Queer temporality is further used to analyze the resistance of chrononormative development, while affect theory is used to trace how emotions are felt in an intergenerational space.

Keywords: Graphic Memoir, Visual Artefacts, Vietnamese American, Migration, Refugee, Visual Architecture, Memory, Intergenerational Childhood, Nonlinear Narration

1. INTRODUCTION

Graphic memoir has distinctly emerged as a subgenre in autographic narratives, where sequentially visualized memories are used to narrate life stories. Graphic memoirs recount the life experiences of the author and count on the correlation of words and visual representation to stage acts of remembering. According to Goodwin (2015),

In reading a graphic narrative or a map, the eye behaves differently than it does with a traditional text; settling randomly on the page, it seeks a focal point. Images and text here have a value relative only to one's own position, not an absolute importance, unlike in a text composed entirely of words where reading follows a linear order, from first word to last, first chapter to last, and so on.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) note that graphic memoirs describe the self not only verbally but also through self-portraits using a visual field. Thus, in a graphic memoir, layout, photographs, and pictures act as narrative agents that organize temporal experience and mediate the reader's access to the past. Marianne Hirsch (2012) describes how graphic memoir uses postmemory to narrate intergenerational narratives of family and childhood. She engages postmemory as a medium to connect to the past. The past experiences are remembered only as the narratives and images that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right (Behrendt, 2013). In graphic memoirs, postmemory enhances visual representation by including family photographs and media images. They are redrawn and inserted into the pages of the memoir.

Effective manipulation of graphic novels involves the knowledge and ability to capture one's message efficiently in panels, sequences, pages, and the narration. It also calls upon the reader to make interpretations that complete the process of getting across sensations and ideas. The remainder of this volume explores how this process has been and continues to be carried forth, in this exciting form of human communication. (Duncan & Smith, 2017)

Graphic memoir as a genre owns the ability to juxtapose multiple moments of temporality, to showcase variant aspects of key scenes, and to visually display emotions like pain, shame, and resilience. Hence, graphic memoirs are a form of narrative that is non normative. Instead of using developmental, linear arcs of traditional autobiography, graphic memoirs use interrupted, looping, and recursive structures. Authors have been utilizing this genre to narrate and visualize significant but overlooked stories, negotiating the scope of what is being told and withheld, and thereby expanding the possibilities of representation. "Visual narrative is uniquely positioned to produce identification through its imagery and does so in such a way as to lend greater legibility to the movements and memories of refugee subjects" (Landis 2020). Graphic memoirs have become a medium to rework the postmemory of families and reimagine childhood through visual form rather than a linear narrative. A visual architecture of memory is constructed to navigate familial histories. The reader can literally move through memory, traversing across visual space, thereby crossing thresholds of time. These visual architectural nodes intersect past and present. In graphic memoirs, family, childhood, and intergenerational memory are not limited to linear space. It gives the reader the privilege to visually enter houses, classrooms, camps, streets, parks, beaches, and mountains. They are able to reenter these spaces with new angles and with new interpretive perspectives and frameworks. This paper analyzes the visual architectural metaphor in select graphic memoirs to understand the construct of intergenerational familial bonds, their memories, and their childhood. It looks at how the design of visual spaces has the ability to represent childhood experiences and parental histories that echo across generations.

G. B. Tran's *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey* (2011) and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (2017) form the core of this inquiry. Both are graphic memoirs in which Vietnamese refugees introspectively map their childhoods. For Vietnamese American writers, "harnessing visual forms becomes a critical tool through which producers resist or 'talk back' to dominant, colonizing narratives" (Landis 2020). Their life is saturated by parental histories that spatialise memory and intergenerational connections. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey* brings in Vietnamese American childhood, fragmented and dispersed around family homes caught in wartime, and streetscapes in the middle of resettlement. The legitimacy of the political choices of parents and grandparents is brought in between the architectural spaces filled with paraphernalia of war and migration. The memoir's pages often slide into the visual spaces of family houses in the U.S. and Vietnamese suburbs, throwing insight into the intergenerational mnemonic journey. In *The Best We Could Do*, a Vietnamese refugee family's trajectory is reconstructed from colonial schooling, war, and boat escape to resettlement in the United States. The memoir repeatedly returns to the visualization of camps, border zones, and cramped apartments, which act as major sites in an intergenerational history. Here, the refugee camps and rentals are provisional units that stand against the permanent domestic spaces of home. The two graphic memoirs present different visual architectures of intergenerational childhood, complexly layered with histories of Vietnamese war, migration, family division, and domestic rebuilding. These memoirs are structurally centered around the convergence of visual form, memory, and childhood across generations.

This article conceptualizes the notions of visual architecture, memory, and intergenerational childhood, which form the three main axes for textually analyzing the select graphic memoirs. The visual architecture refers both to the built

environment, which includes refugee camps, government offices, and apartments, and also to the designs of the pages composed, which include splash pages, panel grids, inset images, and visual motifs. These carefully curated structures represent families with different layers of personal and cultural histories. In both texts, the pages juxtapose the spaces of rooms, streets, and environment on a repeated basis, which brings in a sense of how memory is paused, accessed, and stored. The second axis, memory, is a mediated and intergenerational practice. Adult narrators move across photographs, letters, and family stories in order to reconstruct childhood scenes and intergenerational bonds. The narrative voice puts forth the uncertainties that emerge when visual evidence is juxtaposed with remembered affect. In both the texts, memory is less an act of personal recollection and more a negotiation of a shared visual archive. The third axis is the cross-generational, non-linear nature of childhood. In the select works, the representation of childhood is not a bounded life stage belonging to a single, isolated subject. The daughter's childhood is influenced by the unspoken childhood of the parents, the war, and the migration. Intergenerational childhood, hence, represents both an object and a method. Childhood as an object explains how childhood is always lived in relation to other generations. By method, childhood can be described as a way of understanding experiences of the child as a key point in larger familial networks rather than an isolated and self-contained episode in an individual's life story.

The three axes of visual architecture, memory, and intergenerational childhood are further theorized through the frameworks of postmemory studies, queer temporality, and affect theory.

Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Identifying tropes that most potently mobilize the work of postmemory, it examines the role of the family as a space of transmission and the function of gender as an idiom of remembrance. (Hirsch, 2012)

Postmemory is the memory transmitted through stories, images, and behaviours that the second generation assimilates as their own memories. Postmemory thus provides a language to understand how images, spaces, and stories act as a medium to connect children with their ancestral histories. Queer temporality explains nonlinear ways of life lived in time. It resists chrononormativity, in which life is scheduled in the order of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) theorizes the term chrononormativity to study how subjects are scheduled into normative rhythms within the linear frameworks of time. She states that subjects often refuse this synchronization of time (Freeman, 2010). Jack Halberstam (2005) argues 'queer time' as temporalities that rise against 'the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction,' which permit people to picture life outside the normative life framework. Queer temporality helps in understanding how the select texts counter chronological development, with loops and juxtapositions of memory across intergenerational familial bonds. Affect theory explains 'affect as force or impetus manifested in bodies' (Ahern, 2024). Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi's philosophical model explores 'biologically rooted operations of affect/s', which are deeply entangled and embodied in human relations (Ahern, 2024). This theory claims that emotions are not purely shaped by private spaces but are influenced by history and politics. Affect theory aids in conceptualizing visual architectures of felt emotions in Tran's *Vietnamerica* and Bui's *The Best We Could Do*. The visual architecture of these works portrays emotional lives of children and parents entangled in feelings of shame, depression, and anxiety.

Contemporary studies on postmemory, queer temporality, and affect theory state that chrononormativity is incapable of capturing the essence of intergenerational childhood and memories of family. They favour the nonlinear nature of graphic narratives in effectively portraying the transfer of emotions and its effect across generations. Building on Marianne Hirsch's postmemory, Caroline Kyungah Hong (2014) analyzes GB Tran's *Vietnamerica* as a fragmentary process of recollecting Vietnam War memory. Mary A. Goodwin (2015) emphasizes the spatial dimensions in *Vietnamerica*, placing topography as a postmemorial agent. Elena M. Ortells Montón (2025) analyzes Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* by describing how the narrative tracks migrant experiences. Abhilasha Gusain and Smita Jha (2021) establish how graphic narrative, dismissed as entertainment, becomes a medium for portraying loss and intergenerational memory through images and visual motifs. Chippy Abraham (2025) studies Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* through the frame of queer narrative time, where memory occurs in a loop. Nonlinearity here becomes a tool of survival against getting erased (Abraham, 2025). Stephen Ahern's (2024) use of affect theory understands literary texts' representation of emotions as feelings that persistently overwhelm characters and readers.

Widely recognized as a landmark narrative of Vietnamese American graphic novels, *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey* (2010), by Gia-Bao Tran, traces the four generations of Tran's family history through war, colonialism, refugee

flight, and resettlement in the United States of America. Born and raised in South Carolina to parents Dzung Chung and Tri Huu, Tran grew up largely indifferent to his family's past. Tran visited Vietnam in 2001, after his grandparents passed away and that is when he felt the urgency to recover and preserve his family history. The memoir can be observed as a visual palimpsest in which scenes from different locations and decades are layered across the page non-chronologically in collaged spreads. The narrative opens with Tran's first visit to Vietnam and meeting his relatives that he barely knows. It then revisits the past, showing his grandparents' lives in French Indochina and his parents' childhood in the South, followed by the escalating violence of the American War, leading to the family's evacuation. The memoir primarily focuses on the lives of Tran's parents, all the while providing a multi-vocal, heterogeneous, and internally fragmented account of the family. It also shows the lingering resentments and unresolved political differences that carry them into exile. Both Tri's decision to flee Vietnam and his lie to Dzung about leaving the place on a temporary basis are key points in the narrative. His decision further haunts their marriage and their children's understanding of why their parents never returned. Later sequences represent the family's attempt at rebuilding a life in the United States. A rebuilding that entails both the relief of escape and the profound losses of language, kinship networks, status, and homeland. Tran's own belated coming to consciousness as a second generation subject is clearly presented in the narrative. He is represented as a disinterested son. Tran's initial reluctance to visit Vietnam is evident in his repeated refusal of his mother's invitation to visit and learn more about their family's history. In a climactic scene, after reading his mother's note, Tran calls back to ask, "Can I still go to Vietnam with you?" (2010) This, according to critics, is read as emblematic of his postmemorial labor. Over the course of the narrative, his stance shifts. This oscillation between indifference and involvement, distance and intimacy, structures the text's affective arc.

For the second generation the existence of an abstract history is often reified due to the presence of the present. For Tran, the name Vietnam was just a name on a map until he actually stepped onto the soil. Added to this is the concept of the architecture of loss, where the physical structures like the house in Saigon are imbued with memory, which becomes a container for everything they left behind. This critically frames the narrative around the burden often felt by the children of immigrants. Tran took charge of documenting his family's past as a necessary fulfillment of his generational duty. He writes, "Our parents care for us as our teeth sharpen ... So we care for them as theirs is dull" (2010). This graphic memoir is a powerful engagement with the historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts of war and its aftermath from a Vietnamese American perspective. Tran's thoughtful interplay of words and images allows the juxtaposition of the official records of the wars with the intimate, often contradictory family stories and the visualization of postmemory across generations. The formal elements in this narrative are used to articulate the inherent gaps and silences frequently present in a postmemorial narrative, which moves beyond simple recollection to a mode of "representation, projection, and creation often based on silence rather than speech" (Hirsch, 2001). There are gaps in the panels where the stories simply stop in places where the memory is too heavy to be drawn. This is representative of structural silence, a deliberate, yet effective, technique seen in postmemorial narratives, where the negative space and gaps created limit the knowledge of the second generation. It also emphasises an obligation to draw, map, and re-narrate family lineages. Thus, the visual architecture created through haunting and absence embodies the postmemorial condition.

The strategic use of distinguishing features and color coding to manage the density of intergenerational time and multiple narrative threads extends this visual architecture. Tran uses a nonlinear structure that alternates between the present and the past, mirroring "the way in which memory functions, especially when trauma is involved" (Sanderson, 2014). This tackles the complexity of the narrative structure. Tran provides his readers with specific elements that guide them throughout the narrative. His characters are given "distinctive features," and their speech is rendered in different fonts, such as the capital letters used for Tri's commands and the "delicate cursive" peculiar to Dzung, representing parental presence and authority (Sanderson, 2014). Tran also uses his color palettes in a deliberate manner; they are instrumental in identifying the narrative streams: Dzung's story is frequently told in hues of blue, while Tri's is associated with brown (Sanderson, 2014). The Vietnamese immigrant experience is visually organized into a "multitude of puzzle pieces," which, according to Sanderson, is "not one smooth picture" (2014). Tran's careful attention to the visual details and elements, such as the two-page Scrabble illustration that "sums up Tran's life as immigrant" (Sanderson 2014), are representative of the structural choices that transform the graphic medium into a complex historical archive.

Vietnamerica is a narrative space where memory functions as a powerful affective force, one felt deeply within the physical body and the emotional core. Affect theory acts as a critical lens to look at the transmission of memory across generations, focusing not only on the cognitive recall but also on the visceral and bodily manifestations of felt emotions. Affect theory focuses on the capacity to affect and be affected, leading to the formation of recurrent physical images. The

experience of the war is fundamentally somatic, where the body acts as an archive. According to Lee, as Tran's parents' experiences remained unspoken, it resulted in a sense of silence, which was later forcefully inherited by the postmemory generation. To explore the affect it holds, Tran uses non-linear reading to transform his parents' unspoken emotions into graphic signs that operate as visual signs. The visual unpacking of his parents' unarticulated history actively engages with his postmemory and the felt emotions (2018). This indicates the involuntary and enduring physiological response to the past danger. The body's involuntary reaction decades after war is generated from the affective archive of memory. The embodied grief is also evident in implicit memory, particularly in the instance when Mother's hands are found shaking while looking at the old photographs. It demonstrates how an object can catalyze a physical reaction to a cold memory. The profundity of this felt emotion is further captured by the idea of untold grief, the agony of losing a home that you have heard about through stories but have not lived in. This is suggestive of the limitations in visualizing and verbalizing an affect that occurred before one's body could fully comprehend the postmemory retained.

Vietnamerica, thus, is saturated with historically conditioned moods like claustrophobia and depressive tolerance. These moods circulate between panels, characters, and bodies, turning the graphic memoir into an affective environment that forms its visual and narrative architecture. Postmemory and intergenerational childhood are the two major lenses that analyze the second generation's engagements with the traumatic past that they did not directly experience. Vietnamerica functions as "the story of a second-generation Vietnamese American's quest for his origins and progressive discovery of his family's complex history and long-kept secrets" (Sanderson, 2014). The novel serves as a critical vessel for the preservation and discovery of the family history. The protagonist, GB Tran, "evolves throughout the book towards that of a young man determined to understand and preserve his family's history" (Sanderson, 2014), a necessity resulting from the challenges faced by the first generation. Sanderson notes that Tran's parents "struggle to find traces of their childhoods in the new landscape or are reluctant to remember traumatic memories" (2014). Their loss comes to the surface in Tran's explanation of their return trip; he says, "It was then that they realized their Vietnam only existed in stories and fading memories" (2010, as cited in Sanderson, 2014). The novel becomes an "urgent attempt to give voice to a narrative from the past, before it is too late and all the voices are silent, their secrets forgotten with them" (Sanderson, 2010), highlighting the role of the memoir in archiving an otherwise fading history.

The unlived experiences of the parents inherently shape a child's life, and this relationship is characterized by a repeated temporality. According to Marianne Hirsch, for the second generation, narratives of the past, especially the ones that preceded their birth, bind them to the past rather than lived experience (Hirsch, 2012). These memories form a postmemorial connection to their parents' memories, which in turn becomes a shadow of personal memories for the child while growing up. The cultural disconnect that the children have to navigate, 'Vietnamese rules and responsibilities on one side and allure of American freedoms on the other' (Sanderson, 2014), further complicates and highlights the struggles to adapt to a new culture. It also shows the burden of bearing an inherited and often disruptive past. This postmemorial condition makes the second generation the recipients of the burden of war memories that they never fought. The paratext of *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey* figures the memoir's entry into the family timeline as belated. Trans, only in his late twenties, began to learn his family history when he visited Vietnam for the first time after the death of his grandparents. Hence, in his adulthood he returns to an origin he never inhabited in his childhood. This late beginning is knotted with the temporal orientation of his parents, as they 'struggled to adapt to life in America' and, at the same time, 'preferred to forget the past and to focus on their children's future.' (Tran, 2010). The text shows how displacement violates generational time. The mother often goes back to her childhood space 'after 50 years,' where the 'sights, sounds, and smells' of the street take her back into a 'forgotten childhood' (Tran, 2010). Tran and his family live 'double lives,' within the 'walls of home,' where Vietnamese 'rules' collide with the 'American freedoms.' This temporality is worsened when the family moves to Saigon, leaving one sibling behind, thus making the timelines of siblings divergent (Tran, 2010).

The sense of transnational limbo is often considered a manifestation of the inherited memory. The result is a perpetually displaced and out-of-sync identity, away from the normative narratives of progression and assimilation. This perspective of the second generation is marked by an oscillation in identity, dramatized by the feeling of being the American son and the Vietnamese son simultaneously. This continuous oscillation positions the child's identity in relation to competing geographies (Hong, 2014). Through the lens of nonlinear time, the family's experience can be theorized as the narrative breaks the linear progression; the timeline is broken in 1975 to start over from a different world of a different language. This disruption in the linear progression can be read using Halberstam's (2005) notions on non-linear, non-reproductive time. The child's upbringing and the parents' war-torn youth are emphasized to present

the depth of the generational disconnect, as seen when the father cautions the son, 'You can't look at your family in a vacuum and apply your myopic contemporary Western filter to them' (Tran, 2010, as cited in Sanderson, 2014). The intergenerational weight of responsibility resulting from the complex negotiation of inherited memory ultimately compels the second generation to actively engage with their past to make sense of their present and to shape their future. The recursive loop in which caregiving and understanding move backward and forward is an attempt of the second generation to understand their lineage. By tracing his roots, the son finds a "multiplicity of interconnected threads, reaching deep into the earth and growing high into the sky, in a flurry of entangled branches" (Sanderson, 2014), illustrating that understanding one's history is crucial for identity, as Confucius is quoted: "A man without history is [sic] a tree without roots" (Sanderson, 2014). The commitment to understanding and narrating parental experience points at a non-chrononormative future that is grounded more in the active transformation of inherited memory for the next generation than in the normative reproduction.

Both *Vietnamerica* and *The Best We Could Do* use graphic memoirs to construct Vietnamese refugee stories across generations using family testimony in a fragmented timeline, thus presenting intergenerational memory and bonds. In Tran's *Vietnamerica*, visually dense narrations are used to visualize a disoriented family and its past, while Bui's *The Best We Could Do* uses a watercolour palette to show the process of slow dislocation and efforts of assimilation. The profound influence of Thi Bui's identity as a Vietnamese American immigrant is reflected in the graphic novel, *The Best We Could Do*. This work is an intergenerational exploration into the history of her family. Her quest for family history is largely catalyzed by her son's birth and her journey as a mother. She begins a personal quest to unravel the unspoken past of her parents, Bó and Má. She meticulously reconstructs her family's narrative through intensive research and visual documentation. This shed light on the stark difference in her parents' upbringings: Má had a comparatively privileged childhood, while Bo struggled very hard in his early years. Ma received a French colonial education, while Bó had to face famine and violence in northern Vietnam. The couple met at a Saigon teachers college in 1962, and their bond grew in the middle of the Vietnam War, which escalated every other day. During the early years, their life met with intense grief as they lost their two infants to death. As the war intensified, they had to flee to San Diego, California, as refugees. The past from Vietnam permeated deeply into their lives. They did not sever the ties to their history, as the lingering 'ghosts' of their traumatic past permeated their new lives. As Thi maps their lives in a graphic novel, across family, generations, and childhood, from Vietnam to America, she shifts her perspective to empathize with complex individuals and their resilience.

The graphic novel distinctly uses visual imagery to disentangle the enduring memories of an intergenerational childhood. The graphic demonstration used becomes a tool for the reconstruction of memory. Bui has limited the colours used in the graphics to a palette of stark black ink and orange-red watercolour washes to intensify the contrast and complexity of the immigrant experience. The 'rectilinear shapes of lawns and parking lots' in San Diego and the 'claustrophobic darkness inside our home' visually map the emotional chasm within the immigrant experience (Bui, 2017). She portrays how the past of her parents weighs on her present, analyzing the inevitable presence of parental history in her own youth. She believes her youth was one where 'certain shadows stretched far, casting a gray stillness over our childhood' (Bui, 2017). This visual imagery of a dark stillness mirrors the domestic spaces as intensely emotional. Their American home is transformed into a space where Tam, her brother, developed the habit of hiding in the closet for HOURS-holding his bowel movements in, trying not to mess his pants' to escape their father's sudden outburst of rage (Bui, 2017). She is driven by her own journey into motherhood and a desperate desire to bridge what she perceived as 'two sides of a chasm, full of meaning and resentment' (Bui, 2017). Bui makes use of visual elements to spatially map out her family's unhealed wounds. She metaphorically places her parents onto the 'chessboard' of a historical narrative of conflict. This narrative introduces Vietnamese people as ones who never had 'a name or a voice' and 'weren't any of the pieces on the chessboard' (Bui, 2017). Bui uses the act of drawing to endure grief and intergenerational voids.

Bui builds the memoir traversing back and forth through space and time, thus providing a visual architecture to narrate human history. Her belief was that 'turning it into a graphic novel might help' in providing originality and complexity to her narrative (Bui, 2017). She makes use of visual architecture to construct a spatial frame for the memoir. The architectural preoccupation in the memoir is a reflection of the lived experience of migration. Bui distinguishes the spaces of physical and emotional 'proximity and closeness' (Bui, 2017). Her memories from San Diego, 'America's Finest City,' provide the family a space of safety, suburban comfort, and opportunity. At the same time the city is featured with 'blinding concrete and the rectilinear shapes of lawns and parking lots' (Bui, 2017). She juxtaposes this building of a rectilinear suburbia with a 'claustrophobic darkness inside [of] home' (Bui, 2017). This becomes a visual demonstration

of the difference. The interior of the home is crowded and heavily shaded. The stark difference between the sunlit, geometrically aligned exterior spaces and the dark, dense interior visualizes the family's refugee condition. The spaces that are supposed to assimilate became 'holding pen[s] for the frustrations and the unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America's Finest City' (Bui, 2017). The usage of architectural vocabulary like "rectilinear" and "claustrophobic" is not coincidental, but it shows the "shadows" of displacement that "stretched far, casting a gray stillness over our childhood... hinting at a darkness we did not understand but could always FEEL" (Bui, 2017).

Postmemory analyzes the children's relation to their parents' traumatic experiences. As they are connected only through stories and images, postmemory interacts with queer temporality, a non-linear experience of time. In *The Best We Could Do*, the author visually maps postmemory. The memoir is drawn using stark black ink over an 'auburn watercolor' wash that reminds one of the color tones of old family portraits. Bui creates a visual effect of the space, enhanced with nostalgia and the weight of history (Porrás Sánchez, 2024). When she became a mother, Bui found that 'FAMILY is now something I have created and not just something I was born into' (Bui, 2017). This marks a shift in perspective towards intergenerational responsibility. Bui displays the frustration of belonging to the second generation, as she states, 'We're such ASSHOLES! We're the lame second generation' (Bui, 2017). This presents the emotional abyss between their parents' survival stories and their own modern lives, which often feel full of "meaning and resentment" (Bui, 2017). The embodiment of postmemory is physically depicted when Bui shows her childhood self etched on her back along with a map of Vietnam (Bui 36). Through this instinctual image etched on her body, Bui displays her yearning to 'bridge the gap between the past and the present.' She desires to see 'Việt Nam as a real place and not a symbol of something lost' to 'fill the void between me and my parents' (Bui, 2017). Belonging to the 'second generation' and having no memories of the homeland directly, she experiences it entirely through postmemory. She renders this inheritance of loss as a physical scar. Bui effectively visualizes the vulnerability of the precarious condition of the refugee child, thus making the displaced lives legible (Porrás Sánchez, 2024).

Affect theory explores how humans' understanding of the world is affected by their emotions and visceral sensations. In Bui's work, memory is 'felt' before it is understood and processed consciously. Her reactions to her father's story exemplify this. "...I feel my stomach go black the way it did once when I was a child.. and Bo had carelessly told Ma in front of me about a rape..." (Bui, 2017). The way her mother responds to Thi in labour also reflects the felt affect. 'I had forgotten until I saw you on that bed, and it all came back to me' (Bui, 2017). The shared physical experiences of mother and daughter are explored here along with the generation of the affective trigger of childbirth for the mother. The repressed memories are reactivated in the labour room. Affect theory puts forth a framework for understanding how the visual architecture of memoir is inhabited. It also provides a vital perspective to understand how unspoken grief becomes a loop within the domestic space of a refugee family. Bui memorizes how 'certain shadows stretched far, casting a gray stillness over our childhood,' a dark shadow in the air that physically portrayed her parents' circulating grief (Bui, 2017). Surviving the harrowing pain of famine and terror of war, her father, Bo, is swallowed by 'unexorcised demons that had nowhere to go in America's Finest City' (Bui, 2017). The affective burden of this intergenerational grief is realized when Bui later understands her childhood fears were an extension of her father's terrible past: 'I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own' (Bui, 2017). This loop of fear across generations explicitly explains how the struggle of refugees is not left behind but is persistently felt within the space of family (Porrás Sánchez, 2024).

Bui's memoir represents her parents' childhoods reconstructed through oral histories and her repeated recollection of those memories. Hence, they are narrated with the affective weight of lived memory. One cannot distinguish the remembered and imagined, as the line between them is blurred deliberately. Bui did this conscious act to 'bridge the gap between the past and the present' and to 'fill the void between my parents and me' (Bui, 2017). Postmemory here is not a tool to display inherited stories but is seen as a tool to let the second generation inhabit their parents' childhood. Bui reflects on her current life in comparison to her parents', pointing out that she is "older than [her] parents were when they made that incredible journey" in a boat as refugees. Yet she harbours the thought that "around them, I will always be a child..." (Bui, 2017). This gives an experience of childhood from a non-chrononormative space different from a normative generational timeline of adulthood, which is achieved by transcending one's parents' procurements. In the narrative pattern of the memoir, Bui is chronologically older than her parents when they fled Vietnam. But it did not transform into mature or authoritative feelings. The position of Bui as a child is consistent and relational regardless of lived years (Bui, 2017). The visual construct in the graphic memoir juxtaposes Bui as a child and as a mother within the frame of a single sequence. Thus, the generational time is stacked to coexist in the same visual field.

The thought of herself as the replaced child, as she says, 'Lan, like me, was a replacement' (Bui, 2017), complicates the conceptualization of intergenerational childhood. Her existence is placed around the lost firstborn. She is defined by the absence of the first child who 'came out STILL and blue' (Bui, 2017). Postmemory here is about a substitution for someone mourned for. She becomes the replacement that embodies the impossibility of regaining something lost forever. Bui extrapolates her parents' past into her own present as the unresolved grief persistently comes in the way of linear development. This can be often observed when the diseased infant siblings Bui, Quyen, and Thao re-enter the normative timeline of the family now and then. Her parents get caught in the past, as they are ever haunted by the question of how someone is able to overcome the loss of a child. Bui portrays these children as 'shadowy figures, not human, not dead, already adults' (Bui, 2017; Porrás Sánchez, 2024). Bui uses the visual architecture of the graphic memoir to consciously break the intergenerational transgression of loss and pain, thus making a genuine attempt to secure a future for her newborn son.

In graphic memoirs, the quality of the line, the sequence of panels, and the page layout introduce elements of interpretation and reception that are markedly different from prose. It encompasses the visual architecture of truth and the fictional aspects of the stories (Kuhlman, 2017). Vietnamamerica's visual architecture primarily utilizes the rhizomatic, non-linear layouts and the circular or winding panels to map trauma and displacement. The migration of the family history is represented using colors as the temporal anchor. Tran also uses a muted sepia palette for the representation of 1950s to 1970s Vietnam and high saturation colors for present-day America. The bleed of the background elements seen across panel borders further accentuates the visual synchronicity present between the desperate eras. Furthermore, the affective burden of postmemory is portrayed by the depiction of a shadow self. Tran involves varying levels of iconic abstraction and heavy graphic weight, especially in the ink-heavy re-education camp sequences. Added to this is the use of the negative spaces and gutters for representing the structural holes in the narrative. This necessitates a reader-driven closure to bridge the gap between the generations. He also employs multigenerational layering, where the child version of the father and the adult version of the son are placed within the same visual plane; this collapses the chrononormativity. He also uses sticky notes, objects, and shared landscapes to present the functionality of the refugee timeline outside of the linear timeline. Landis (2020) observes that in contrast to G.B. Tran's more symbolic style, "the maps in *The Best We Could Do* are more geographically accurate, with carefully labeled borders and cities, rather than visually symbolic." In *The Best We Could Do*, memory is being translated into graphic images through terracotta-toned combinations. Here watercolor shades act as cues for memory and emotions. The use of a monochrome palette aids in transforming memory into a fluid, yet fragile, substance that continuously leaks into new frames. The minimalist backdrop and the vanishing panel borders enhance the fragile nature of human resilience in the face of displacement. Visual architecture in the graphic memoir is reflected through emotionally embodied images of silhouettes, hollow spaces, and recursive sequencing. Postmemory elements in the memoir show Vietnam as a somatic inheritance transferred among generations through gestures of care, grief, reproduction, and hunger. The hand-painted family photographs are recreations acknowledging the emotions outside the squares of frames. The spatial compression, empty gutters, and viewpoints pointing downward visualize the effect of feeling. The visuals of childbirth that are recurrently used in the memoir become a converging site for postmemory and affect convergence. An idea is translated through the medium of the hand and graphically rendered as an expression of a lived experience in a way that cannot be conveyed by prose alone.

2. CONCLUSION

G.B. Tran's *Vietnamamerica* and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* reframe the Vietnamese American experience, utilizing the medium of graphic narrative, which uses visual architecture to articulate the complexities of an intergenerational life.

Words can do things that visual images cannot - for instance, portray complex inner mental states or complex philosophical meditations and visual images can do things that words cannot, such as capture subtle facial expressions. An excellent graphic novel combines the best of both the verbal and the visual worlds..... When powerful written words are combined with powerful drawn images, and the reader can stay focused on any page or panel that he or she chooses for any amount of time...[One] can turn backward or forward in the work at will and quickly look at the past or future of the story, and the advantage of a graphic novel (Tabachnick, 2017)

Both the select memoirs describe the intergenerational existence of Vietnamese Americans through the eyes of the second generation in a fragmented timeline narration. The temporal loop in these works helps the physical manifestation

of gaps in the family histories portrayed. Instead of constructing childhood as linear and innocent, it is reconfigured as a node of a loop where the pain and complexities of the past experiences affectively collide with the present and future generations. Here the sense of self of every individual in each generation is negotiated across time and space. The visual architecture effectively bypasses the linguistic narration in portraying the raw affects moving across generations. Aesthetic structure, color palettes, lines, and panels are not used entirely as stylistic elements but are used as tools to enhance the effect of the felt emotions of the characters. In both *Vietnamerica* and *The Best We Could Do*, the Vietnamese American identity is negotiated through the lens of postmemory. The memories of the past that cannot be fully owned or resolved by the second generation are reconstructed through visual and verbal dialects. Ultimately, these works prove that the inherited burden is an outcome of the ceaseless loop of affective spatial practices that are imprinted in the graphic page. This analysis thus emphasizes the critical relevance of prioritizing the visual grammar of graphic memoirs to reconstruct the entangled nature of intergenerational memory and kinship in specific geographical contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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