

Original Paper

Uprooted from Home: Analyzing Vietnamese Amerasian

Diaspora in the Unwanted

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Abstract

After the Vietnam War, approximately 100,000 mixed race children between Vietnamese women and American soldiers, who are called Amerasian, were born. The Vietnamese Communists fought against the US, and Amerasians who were part Americans became the enemy of the Vietnamese. Amerasians were raised fatherless in patriarchal society where the presence of the father was essential to one's social status. They were taunted by their lack of the father. Vietnamese women who had children with Americans were regarded as prostitutes, and Amerasians were looked down by the Vietnamese as the children of prostitute. Many reasons combined, Amerasians were mistreated in post-Vietnam War society, and humiliated as "bui doi," the dust of life.

This paper will explore Vietnamese Amerasians' experiences of war, loss of home and father, diaspora, and trauma by reading Kien Nguyen's autobiography. The home functions in the novel as the symbol of the family's destiny. Nguyen's trauma of postwar experiences was augmented every time he was uprooted from his home. By tracing the changes of Nguyen's home, we will understand the transition of his life. The US was his last home after the diaspora from Vietnam, and I will examine if the US really healed his trauma of the war.

Keywords

Amerasian, the Vietnam War, trauma, Diaspora, physical and spiritual homelessness

1. Introduction

The involvement of the United States of America (hereafter the US) in the Vietnam War generated various sociopolitical problems in Vietnam such as antipathy between the Communist Vietnamese and the anti-Communist ones, the destruction of the nation, political turmoil, economic devastation, etc. Among them, this paper focuses on the problem of mixed race people called Amerasians. They were

born between Vietnamese women and American soldiers, and suffered discrimination in Vietnamese society. Many left Vietnam because they could not bear discrimination, or forced to leave their hometown. This paper analyzes their domestic as well as transnational diaspora by reading Kien Nguyen's *The Unwanted: A Memoir of Childhood*.

Trin Yarborough reports that approximately 100,000 Amerasians were born during the Vietnam War (x). They are called "bui doi," meaning the dust of life. This label eloquently illustrates their wretched social status in Vietnamese society. They were marginalized in Vietnamese society in many reasons. They were the children of enemy Americans. Vietnam was a patriarchal society and many Amerasians did not have fathers, and that made them a target of prejudice. Further, Vietnam was a racially homogeneous society. Mixed race Amerasians were discriminated against because of their skin color. Especially, Amerasians with Black skin faced harsher discrimination.

Some fled to the US to escape the harsh living environment of Vietnam. Vietnamese Amerasians' diaspora to the US, however, did not end their plight. According to Robert McKelvey, Vietnamese Amerasians had suffered mentally, economically, and culturally in the US. Many had no English language ability and job skill. They did not know American culture. Some found escape in drugs or alcohol, and damaged their mental and physical health. Due to these factors, they were marginalized in American society, too. Some could not overcome the trauma they had in Vietnam as well as in the US. Their new life in the US was also filled with pain.

This paper will explore Vietnamese Amerasians' experiences of war, loss of home and father, diaspora, and trauma. The home functions in the novel as the symbol of the family's destiny. Nguyen's trauma of postwar experience was augmented every time he was uprooted from his home. Tracing the changes of Nguyen's home, we will understand the transition of his life. The US was his last home after the diaspora from Vietnam, and I will discuss if the US really healed his trauma of the war. The paper examines how diaspora triggered by wars impacts on one's life mentally, physically, and culturally.

2. The Birth of Amerasians in Vietnam

Vietnam has had a long history of colonization. The country was colonized by France from 1883 to 1954. During World War II, Japan colonized the country, too. The Communist Vietnamese stood up for independence from France, and Indochina War started in 1946. The US supported France during the war. The Communist Vietnamese defeated France in 1954. The Geneva Agreement was made between the Communist Vietnamese and France, and that promised the unification of the Communist North and the anti-Communist South by election, but the US did not approve of the agreement. The 1950s was the time of cold war between the Capitalist US and the Communist Soviet Union, and the US was afraid of Vietnam becoming a Communist country through the election. The US supported the anti-Communist South, waged war against the Communist North, and this war is known as the Vietnam War.

By the time the Vietnam War was over, the US sent nearly half a million soldiers to Vietnam, and

among them, approximately 60,000 were killed, and 300,000 were injured. Vietnamese casualties were much bigger. The 1.5 million soldiers were killed and 2 million injured. 4 million Vietnamese civilians were killed (Skife, p. 924). The mass death of soldiers and civilians of both parties reported in the media gave Americans the anti-Vietnam War sentiment, and the antiwar movement took place all through the US. Pressured by people, President Nixon finally agreed to cease the war. In 1973, the agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace was signed between the Communist North and the US. The Communist North took over Saigon in 1975, and Vietnam became a Communist nation.

While American troops were stationed in Vietnam, prostitution around the US military bases was a common sight. American soldiers needed women for their sexual desire, and Vietnamese women needed money for their survival. During the Vietnam War, many rural areas were bombed. Many village people were killed, maimed, and injured. Survived people were displaced out of their villages. They moved to cities such as Saigon, but could not find any jobs. Only job displaced village women could find was prostitution. Yarborough describes how cities were crowded with prostitutes and American soldiers.

In the southern cities of Vietnam, particularly in Saigon, bars, dance clubs, and brothels quickly sprang up to serve the growing number of Americans entering the country, as well as the large number of Vietnamese military, officials, and others enriched by American spending aid. Prostitutes crowded streets and alleys, especially in the Ton Dan area of Saigon, soon famous for its pleasures (p. 17).

In these cities, some Vietnamese women met Americans. They had sexual relationships with American soldiers for many reasons such as for love, money, curiosity, etc., and some of them had mixed race children with American soldiers, and these children were called Amerasian. Amerasian is a word that combines Asian and American, which usually refers to the children of Asian women and American soldiers. The word is coined by a Nobel Prize winner Pearl Buck (Mizumura, p. 188). These children were called “bui doi” (the dust of life) in Vietnamese with despise.

In Vietnamese history, the birth of mixed race children born between local women and foreign men were not the first phenomenon due to the country’s long history of colonization. Under French colonization, some Vietnamese women had mixed race children with French men. When France was defeated in Indochina War and needed to withdraw from Vietnam, these mixed children of Vietnamese mother and French father became an issue. According to Yarborough, the French government decided to look after all these children as their citizens.

France arranged to evacuate some 25,000 French-Vietnamese children and some of their relatives to France, and, according to some reports, paid subsidies to some children who stayed in Vietnam until they reached the age of eight. All the children were given French citizenship (p. 11).

France took responsibility for the mixed race children born between Vietnamese women and French men as their children and gave them a humanitarian treatment.

On the other hand, Amerasians from the Vietnam War had the totally different path from the mixed race

children of French fathers. The existence of Amerasians reminded Vietnamese people of the painful memory of the war and Americans. The incredible number of Vietnamese were killed and maimed by Americans. Many Vietnamese lost their families, friends, and properties by Americans. The war gave Vietnamese people the unforgettable memory of the war and unforgivable anger against Americans. In postwar Vietnam, Amerasians symbolized the trauma of war for the Vietnamese. They were hated and pushed to the fringe of Vietnamese society. Their mothers were also discriminated against in Vietnam as women who bore the offspring of enemy Americans. Amerasians and their mothers both became the target of hatred and discrimination in postwar Vietnam. Amerasians were punished for the sin they did not commit just because they were part-American.

With the fall of Saigon, any Vietnamese who had relationships with Americans became the target of persecution by the new Communist regime. They attempted to flee the country. Amerasians and their mothers were also the target of persecution, and many tried to flee persecution. Their escape triggered Vietnamese diaspora. According to Skaife, approximately four million Vietnamese fled the country and live in more than 100 countries all over the world now (p. 926).

In the case of Nguyen in the *Unwanted*, his family took two levels of diaspora, which was domestic diaspora and transnational diaspora. After the fall of Saigon, Nguyen's family were forced to move around the country because of harsh discrimination against them everywhere they lived. Their only hope to escape the discrimination was to move to the US. In both diaspora, they were uprooted from their home, kin, and cultural roots. Next, I will analyze the two levels of diaspora Nguyen underwent, and examine how the loss of home deepened his trauma of war.

3. Domestic Diaspora: Surviving the Unbearable

Nguyen was born between a Vietnamese mother and an American father in 1972. His father was an engineer. His mother was a hand model for a jewelry company when she met Nguyen's father. Nguyen writes of the mother's beauty as follows:

My mother was not a typically thin Asian woman. She had heavy breasts and round hips, joined by a thin waist. Her eyes, big and rimmed with dark mascara, concentrated on the image before her. Years spent watching my mother gaze herself in the mirror convinced me that she was the rarest, most beautiful creature that ever walked the face of this earth (p. 7).

The beautiful mother fascinated the American engineer, and they fell in love, but they did not marry. Nguyen's father left the family but gave a big sum of money to Nguyen's mother so the family could live comfortably. After Nguyen's father left Vietnam, his mother bore another Amerasian son with an American military officer. He also left the family but gave a big amount of money to the family. The mother ran a bank utilizing the money her American partners left for her. Although Nguyen had no father in the house, his father's money supported him and his family. The family lived in a three stories mansion with eight bedrooms near the beach in Nhatrang. The house had maids, nannies, and gardeners.

They invited friends and had parties often. Nguyen was a rich boy and did not play with poor kids outside of his house (p. 6). He had a financially comfortable life but he sensed something was wrong about his life. His house was surrounded by high walls and barbed wires. He writes,

My mother also had the tall wall erected around the mansion, which not only shielded the house from outsiders' curiosity but also sealed us up, as if covering something shameful. We were meant never to be discovered (p. 23).

Nguyen's mother was conscious of the stigma associated with her children. Vietnam had suffered from colonization for a long time, and had antipathy toward foreigners. Mixed race children were seen with hatred as a result. Nguyen's mother was afraid of his sons being the target of discrimination, and built walls around her home in order to protect the sons.

When the Vietnam War got intensified, Nguyen's mother attempted to leave Vietnam because there were rumors that the Communists would win the war. She prepared passports and airplane tickets for her entire family. She tried to convince her parents to go to the US together before it was too late to leave. Her father was an ex-captain of the Vietnamese Republican army. He refused to leave Vietnam. Nguyen's mother gave up going to the US because she could not leave her old parents behind. Nguyen's grandfather's reluctance to leave his birthplace was understandable. He was born and raised in Vietnam, and served the country as a military officer. He was deeply rooted in Vietnam, and going to the US meant that he had to lose his roots. While the family could not make a decision to leave their country, Saigon was in the hands of the Communists.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 changed Nguyen's family's destiny completely. The Communist new regime regarded any Vietnamese associated with Americans as enemy. The family's home and property were robbed by thieves. They had no one to protect them. His family was forced to leave their mansion. Their domestic diaspora thus began.

According to Robert Cohen, the definition of diaspora is "dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions" (p. 8). People are violently forced to leave their home, and that diasporic process gives them trauma. In short, diaspora and trauma are inseparable. Nguyen has augmented his trauma every time he was uprooted from his home. In *the Unwanted*, trauma and diaspora are also intertwined and cannot be discussed separately.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Nguyen's family first moved to Saigon from the beach city of Nhatrang with the hope of leaving Vietnam. Nguyen's mother had an American acquaintance working at the embassy, and went there for help. They slept in the American embassy waiting for helicopters to escape the country. Yet, when Saigon was taken over by the Communist new regime, Nguyen's mother's acquaintance kicked out the family from the embassy. He yelled at the family,

The war is over. We can't keep you here anymore. Take your sons and your friend out of this building before it is too late. We are better off here by ourselves, without any Vietnamese. Do you understand me? Get out of here now (p. 42).

The anti-Communist Vietnamese had been working with Americans to defeat the Communists. When the war was over, Americans mercilessly turned their back to their former allies. Yarbrough introduces A. J. Langguth's delineation of Americans' cold attitude towards the Vietnamese at the time of the Fall of Saigon, and calls it the blatant racism. Yarbrough quotes that "even Vietnamese with U.S. passports were turned away at the gates while any white face was pulled inside" (p. 37). Nguyen's mother had befriended with Americans and had proper documents to leave the country, but she was kicked out of the embassy as other Vietnamese. Nguyen's family was at a loss in the middle of postwar chaos.

For the Nguyen's family, their home functioned as a shelter to hide Amerasian children from society. The beach mansion had tall walls and barbed wire so the children were not hurt from the neighbors' curious and cruel gaze. After the fall of Saigon, what their mother could do for the children was to rent a basement of a house in Saigon and hid them from society. Its living condition was far from comfortable unlike their beach mansion. The basement floor was dirt and inside was dark. Nguyen calls the basement prison and writes,

Inside our new prison, my brother and I became the center of my mother's misery. She had always tried to protect us from the rumors, stares, and judgements that our American features drew. But now the pressures on her were more than she could handle. Hiding in the furthest corner of the cell, my brother and I watched our mother pace like a caged animal (p. 44).

The mother dyed Nguyen's hair black so his American feature did not draw attention in public. Realizing how much his American root was a target of hatred in Vietnamese society, and the source of his mother's agony, Nguyen cursed himself, and writes that "I wanted to pull the fair hair out of my head, and scratch off my pale skin" (p. 45). He grew self-hatred.

Nguyen's family decided to go back to their beach mansion in Nhatrang, which they once gave up, and found out again the house was rampaged, and difficult to live. Nguyen writes:

At home, we faced an incomprehensible ruin. The iron gates to our house had been smashed inward, and a trail of garbage and dirt led to the front door. Feces had been smeared everywhere, turning the pale beige face of the house into obscene brownish mask (p. 71).

This scene symbolizes clearly the loss of their previous luxurious life and the beginning of their misery. They lost the home that used to protect them. Their dignity was smashed like the home. Nguyen's family moved to a shack built next to the mother's sister's house. He describes the shack as follows:

On the left side of my aunt's house stood my new home. At first glance, it seemed impossibly small and primitive. It struck me that the entire place could fit in my mother's old garage (p. 95).

Every time they moved, their living condition got worse. People's attitude toward the family got worse, too. The aunt treated the Nguyen's family badly. The aunt apparently disliked Nguyen and his brother because they were Amerasian. She said that living with them was a bad luck. She humiliated her sister for bringing the Amerasian children home, and taunted the children "half-breed". The mother scolded her sister not to insult her children but the sister talked back saying, "I don't appreciate the tone of your

voice. You can't talk to us like you still have money, sister. Times have changed (97)". The power relation between Nguyen's mother and her sister changed after the war. During the war, the mother was powerful because of her money given by her American partners, but the defeat of the war made the sister more powerful because of her anti-American political background. The mother had to accept the sister's taunt and to live in a small and frail shack built next to her sister's house. Here again the home symbolizes the fragility of Nguyen's family.

In the new Communist society, Nguyen's family was exposed to public humiliation. Nguyen and his brother were the target of bully by neighbor children. His mother also struggled very hard. In the village Nguyen's family lived, the Communists had a regular town meeting. People were regularly tested their allegiance to the Communist regime. At the meeting, Nguyen's mother was interrogated her past by her neighbors. They asked her why she had two Amerasian children. Before the fall of Saigon, she was running a bank, and was a capitalist. She could not admit that she used to be a capitalist because in the new regime, being a capitalist was a graver crime than being a prostitute. She therefore had to lie that she was a prostitute. She was forced to say that "Yes, I was. A prostitute is exactly what I was. And I am utterly ashamed of it" (p. 111). Public humiliation of the Vietnamese women who had relationships with Americans were not rare in postwar Vietnam. McKelvey reports a mother of two Amerasian children's experience as follows:

The mother was insulted for having an affair with an American and when she walked by people would chant a demeaning phrase, *tam bay tam ba* (wherever you go, you do the wrong thing) (p. 97).

Amerasians' mothers were the target of social hatred, anger, and ridicule. They were stereotyped as someone who did or would do wrong things. Nguyen's mother was beaten by humiliation and ongoing suffering, and her "once highly maintained beauty had long abandoned my mother's face, leaving behind a mask of naked desperation" (Nguyen, p. 180). The beautiful mother lost her beauty in despair and exhaustion. She did not have anyone to protect her and the children. Even her own sister joined the misery of Nguyen's family.

Vietnam was devastated greatly by the war. Although the country defeated the US, the US continued their retaliation against Vietnam through economic sanction. International society could not help impoverished Vietnamese, and many Vietnamese struggled to survive a day. Even among the kin, supporting each other was difficult. Especially, the new Communist government sent many Vietnamese who associated with Americans to the New Economic Zone for hard labor and reeducation. Yarborough reports that approximately 76% of Amerasians were sent there, too (p. 49).

The New Economic Zone was located in jungle areas near the Cambodian border, and many sent there contracted disease such as malaria, and some died as a result. Labor there was physically strenuous and mentally unbearable. Nguyen's aunt's cold attitude to Nguyen and his family was understandable because she might have been sent to the New Economic Zone just because she had the sister who had Amerasian children. To protect her own family, Nguyen's aunt needed to turn her cold shoulders to her

own sister and nephews. The postwar era was the time that many people had to sacrifice their humanity to survive.

Nguyen was not only insulted by his aunt but also by his school teachers and classmates. They called him “half-breed”, and discriminated against. Nguyen studied hard to get out of poverty and apply for university. He thought education could improve his life. Yet, his teacher said he had no qualification to enroll university because he was part American and non-Communist. He writes of his agony when he was refused to apply for university:

With my college dream shattered, I was forced to reevaluate my options. No matter how hard I had tried, I could not escape my unfavorable past. The urge to leave Vietnam once again took root in me (p. 279).

He became desperate in poverty and in life that offered him no dream. Education for Amerasians was not only blocked because of their racial difference but also of socio-political structure. Yarborough explains that educated people usually worked for the Vietnamese government, which would never hire Amerasians (p. 93). No matter how hard Nguyen studied, there was no place he could utilize his education in Vietnam.

While many Amerasians faced hardship in postwar Vietnam, Amerasians with African American heritage had more difficult time than Amerasians with Caucasian physical features. Nguyen writes that Black Amerasians were called “burnt rice” and delineates the misery of a Black Amerasian girl. A noodle shop’s lady talked about the girl to Nguyen’s mother, and Nguyen overheard the story. This girl’s mother sold her mixed race children one after another for money. The girl was sold to three men for sexual purpose. After the men raped her, they killed her. The noodle soup shop’s lady concluded her story by saying, “Your children are lucky that they are white. At least you have a chance to live. The burnt rice have no luck (p. 179)”. Valverde explains why Black Amerasians underwent more difficulty in Vietnam.

Black Amerasians encountered the most discrimination because their dark skin made them conspicuous. The Vietnamese, much like other Asian groups, look down on dark skin, which they equate with lower peasant class or ethnic minorities (p. 147).

The Communist regime valorized peasant working class over the capitalist class, who supposed to have lighter skin because they did not need to toil in outside fields. The Communist tried to reassess blackness as beautiful (Yarborough, p. 88). Despite the Communist government’s efforts to change the concept of beauty, that did not favor the fate of many Black Amerasians. Combined with colorism and class bias, Black Amerasians were pushed to the bottom of Vietnamese society. As the episode of the Black Amerasian girl in *The Unwanted* shows, they were treated terribly. On the other hand, McKelvey writes that white skin “bestowed certain advantages to White Amerasians in Vietnam, where it is considered attractive” (p. 47).

Unlike the Black Amerasian girl, Nguyen did survive, yet, his sense of inferiority deriving from his

racial difference and the lack of the father was grown stronger. While he loathed his skin and blond hair, he came to dream of being saved by his father, and of going to the US. In his misery, the US and his American father became a hope for Nguyen. He asked his mother what his father was like. The mother said that Nguyen's father was a good-looking, caring man. He loved Nguyen so much (p. 271). The mother gave a positive image of the father to Nguyen, and he decided to write a letter to his father. Nguyen wrote of his hardship in his letter as follows:

Please take me to America. I have nothing to live for in Vietnam. I am always hungry, and unhappy. I don't have new clothes, or blanket. I am sleeping on two rice sacks because I have no bed. After many rains, lots of mosquitoes around, and the weather get very cold at night. You may remember about that since you lived here before. Please write. I want to hear from you (p. 272).

Nguyen believed that his father could rescue him from his misery. Nguyen was not the only one who idealized American father as a savior of Amerasians. In the mind of Amerasians, American fathers seemed to function as a buffer, which protects Amerasians from social mistreatment. The harder the life in Vietnam got, the more the US and American father got idealized by Amerasians. Yarborough explains that the idealization of American father is commonly seen among Amerasians.

Amerasians needed to be acknowledged as having a place, if not even an important place, in the lives of their birth parents. The fathers they sought were idealized figures who by accepting and loving them could heal all the misery and shame of the past (p. 138).

American fathers were an imaginary home for Amerasians. Homes protect residents from harsh weather, provide them a safe place to sleep, eat, and grow physically and mentally through family's warm interaction. For Amerasians, their imaginary American fathers could offer them a home, which they had lost for a long time since the fall of Saigon. Without fathers, Amerasians were spiritually homeless.

Amerasians were physically homeless, too. Yarborough reports that many Amerasians were homeless in postwar Vietnam. He writes:

Many Amerasians were abandoned in the streets, without any family or friends, no opportunity for education or future, teased with no one to care for them, so they came to feel lonely and unconnected. All these things affected their feelings about themselves as they grew up (p. 87).

Many Amerasians were abandoned or escaped from parents. They ended up becoming homeless. Some abandoned Amerasians were put into orphanage. Nguyen was neither homeless nor orphan. After being uprooted from the mansion near the beach, Nguyen had moved into fragile shack, which was hard to call a home. The shack failed to give him and his family a safe life, and they were constantly exposed to social prejudice and danger. Nguyen had a place to live. However, whether they had a place to live or sleep on a street, all Amerasians were homeless children because they lost their father who could protect them. Without father, children are symbolically homeless in Vietnam. Nguyen's yearning to meet his American father was therefore not only his dream but also all Amerasians'. They were desperate to find their home, i.e., father, who could end their misery and plight. Nguyen waited

anxiously for the reply to his letter from his father.

Nguyen's father did not reply to his letter. In reality, it was rare that American fathers of Vietnamese Amerasians responded to their children's desperate need for reunion. Valverde reports that only 2% of Vietnamese Amerasians met their fathers (p. 149). The American government prevented Amerasians from finding their fathers. In its 1970 statement, the US Department of Defense said,

The care and welfare of these unfortunate children has [...] never been and is not now considered an area of government responsibility, nor an appropriate mission for the DOD to assume (Lamb).

After waiting for the reply from his father for a long time, Nguyen gave up the hope of hearing from his father. Nguyen attempted to leave Vietnam on his own because he realized that he could not rely on his father. Nguyen grew his hope to go to the US stronger and stronger, and wrote a petition letter to the American embassy in Thailand to help him escape from Vietnam in 1984.

Mid-1980s was the time the American government and the Vietnamese government negotiated on Amerasian issue. Amerasians born in Laos and Cambodia were already rescued by the US through the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act. This Act did not include Vietnamese Amerasians because the US did not have a diplomatic relationship with Vietnam, and also the US still had bitter sentiment against Vietnam.

While the American government intentionally evaded the issues of Vietnamese Amerasians, the American media reported on the plight of Amerasians, and American people started pushing the government to rescue Vietnamese Amerasians. The biggest move that changed the fate of Vietnamese Amerasians happened when Irene Virag from Long Island Newsday publicized a story and a photo of Le Van Minh on June 22, 1987. Minh was abandoned by parents, and had been homeless since he was four-years-old. Minh managed to live by begging on a street of Saigon. His body was twisted due to polio. He could not take any proper medical treatment, and he had to walk on all four limbs. Readers of Long Island News were shocked to see the crippled Minh begging and crawling on the street of Saigon. The Huntington High School students campaigned to rescue Minh, and responding to their plea, Congressman Robert Mrazek took an initiative to enact an act to take Vietnamese Amerasians and their families to the US. In 1987, the US congress passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act, which allowed Vietnamese Amerasians and their families to come to America as citizens with refugee benefits. Mrazek himself flew to Vietnam to take Minh to the US. Virag reports the conversation between Minh and Mrazek at the airport of Vietnam.

"We're going home," Mrazek said. "We're not there yet but we're going home." Minh repeated the last word. "Home," he said in English (p. 1).

The Amerasian Homecoming Act enabled many Vietnamese Amerasians to go to their long-yearning home. Approximately 30,000 Amerasians went to the US through the Act (Yarborough, p. ix). Nguyen and his family was one of Vietnamese Amerasians who moved to America and found their new home. The Act triggered the diaspora of Vietnamese Amerasians to America.

The procedure to leave Vietnam for Amerasians was however not easy. They had to fill in many paper works, to prepare documents that proved their American ties such as a photo of father, to save money to fly to the US, and to make an appointment at the American embassy for interview. Nguyen luckily went through all the procedures and got permission to leave Vietnam. He was filled with happiness and relief but the moment he was leaving Vietnam, he again had an unpleasant experience. When Nguyen gave paper works to a police officer at the airport for boarding, the police officer dumped papers on the floor, and yelled at Nguyen, "Get out of here and stop wasting my time. Nobody wants to keep trash like you in this country (p. 334)". Nguyen was hurt but that incident reignited his anger toward Vietnam. He left the country with bitterness and resentment. Vietnam even in the last moment was mean and cruel to Nguyen. Nguyen as well as Amerasians who went to the US were desperate for a new home that might give them safety. Next, this paper argues if Vietnamese Amerasians' diaspora to the US really gave them a new home.

4. Trauma: The Aftermath of Transnational Diaspora

Many Vietnamese Amerasians moved to the US through the Amerasian Homecoming Act with the hope of meeting their American father and of having a new safe home. Nguyen's life in the US was successful. He resumed his study, which he was rejected in Vietnam, and graduated from New York College of Dentistry. He became a dentist. He achieved success but he confessed that his life in the US was greatly affected by trauma. He writes,

Often, I dreamed that I was still on the streets of Saigon, trying to get the last of my documents signed. And across the city, the plane was leaving without me. Other times, I saw myself drowning in the middle of a vast ocean. Above my head, pale corpses wrapped their limbs together to form a shield of flesh, preventing me from reaching the surface. I would awake, unable to shake my terror. Even during the daytime, the frightening images haunted me. I came to dread going to bed at night (p. 342).

Nguyen's nightmare was caused by the experiences he went through in Vietnam, and the experiences became trauma. Trauma is "am-anh" in Vietnamese, which means:

haunting, unrelenting memories of things one has done wrong, harmful, painful things done to oneself, evil acts one has committed, cruel actions one deeply regrets but cannot block from one's mind (Yarborough, p. 84).

America is a new home where Nguyen was supposed to feel protected but trauma sneaked into his mind, and tormented him. Melissa Bayne explains how trauma affects people's psyche:

Trauma refers to the negative physical and/or emotional results of a distressing event, situation, or condition that exceeds an individual's ability to cope. Those who experience trauma are often referred to as "victims". The impact of trauma can be short- or long-term and includes unintended and often unhealthy physical, psychological, and behavioral conditions (p.1300).

Nguyen's new life in the US did not remove his trauma out of his mind. He was a typical trauma victim,

and being affected long-term. Day and night, he was tormented by haunting memories. The hardship he underwent in Vietnam was inscribed too deep in his mind to get rid of it. Being tormented by trauma was not just Nguyen's experience. Mckelvey writes that Vietnamese "Amerasians report more present use of alcohol and continue to suffer more symptoms of trauma and depression than other Vietnamese (69)". Some Vietnamese Amerasians were haunted by trauma and that caused mental as well as physical disorders. They used alcohol and drugs to escape from pain. Trauma prevented them from settling down in the US.

Along with mental and physical problems caused by trauma, many Vietnamese Amerasians found themselves unfit in American society due to their lack of English language, job skill ability, and cultural knowledge. While many Vietnamese Amerasians were pushed to the margin of Vietnamese society because of their physical difference and a lack of father, they were again marginalized in American society because of their cultural difference. Vietnamese Amerasians who could not do well in the US were in a way doubly uprooted: first from Vietnamese society, and secondly from American society. They could not find a home where they feel settled and secured in both countries.

5. Conclusion

Compared with other Vietnamese Amerasians, Nguyen was relatively lucky because he was not abandoned by his mother, and not sent to the New Economic Zones. Although he was taunted in the village, he could live with his family. Yarborough writes that "Amerasians who grew up in small towns outside the NEZ areas often ended up the least damaged" (p. 90). Nguyen was exempted from the life in the New Economic Zones. His mother's effort to protect her children was remarkable, too. After the fall of Saigon, she failed to offer a safe home for her children. She lost her beauty and property, but she never gave up her children's future. She encouraged Nguyen to continue his school, and worked very hard for her children. Nguyen later found out that the mother even sold her blood to support the family (318). With the love and support of the mother, Nguyen could leave Vietnam, had good education, and took up a prestigious job in the US. He admitted his luck and wrote as following:

Stories of Vietnamese Amerasians were all too common ones of terror and repression, abuse and neglect, strength, and ultimately—for lucky ones—survival (p. 343).

He found his new home in the US, and faced his own trauma and tried to overcome it. Like Nguyen, some lucky Vietnamese Amerasians have settled down in their new home in the US. Being uprooted from their home and having no protection of father, Vietnamese Amerasians underwent tremendous hardship in Vietnam and the US. Some are still struggling in both countries, but other lucky ones have survived and grown their new root in American soil. Nguyen's *The Wanted* shows us how the once unwanted had transformed into the wanted with their valor and resilience.

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