Throughout the text *The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui, Bui explores the multiple impacts of the Vietnam war through the unique storytelling method of the graphic novel. She explores her parents as well as her own story as a way for her to connect back to her parents and repay them all they went through to raise her. One such impact she explores is the representation and recollection of truth — both in the sense of a objective history, but also on a much more personal level. Initially, Bui tells the story of struggling to understand the conflicting evidence, but we progress into a state where can can relate and even empathize through themes including trauma and childbirth. The scene on pages 206-210 especially illustrate this idea. In *The Best We Could Do*, Thi Bui refines her beliefs on the events of the Vietnam war and their personal impact on her. She compares the evidence commonly seen in American history against first hand stories handed down from her parents and uses such information along with her own experiences to put the impact of history into the perspective of her own life.

The story told in American history books on the Vietnam war is one that majority of people educated on the Vietnam war would know. Bui finds herself confused and finding inconsistencies in this official story with the one her parents told her as a kid. On page 207, Bui recalls common misconceptions and misrepresentations of her people in American propaganda: "Bad Guys: the Viet Cong (communist front in the South). The South Vietnamese: bar girls and hookers; corrupt leaders; kids looking for handouts; small, effete men; and papa-san" (207). The propaganda she mentions is displayed in the style of a poster, converse to the style of the rest of her novel: containing larger titles and subtext without speech bubbles along with images arranged in a collage style all within a singular comic frame. This difference brings interest to the topic she discusses — and flies directly in the face of the entire story she has been telling prior to this point. Her parents had been South Vietnamese at this point of the propaganda. The depiction of South Vietnamese women being "bar girls and hookers" was the complete opposite to her own mother carrying her before she was born. Bui even states that these contradictions "troubled [her] for a long time", accompanied with multiple images of her character acting visually confused and frustrated (207). These misrepresentations are tied back into the story towards the end when she discusses the modern day misconceptions and struggles of refugees. Bui alludes to these on page 208, "The former general, like my parents and so many immigrants was in a state fallen from grace, working behind the counter in a pizzeria in Virginia." Bui makes it clear in this section that she is dislikes the current misbeliefs on the objective facts of the Vietnam war.

Bui still has not come to her own understanding of what the war meant to her parents. Her father tells her his experience during this time, yet it still manages to confuse her further. On page 206, her father comments on the general in control of his town and the now famous *Saigon Execution* photo: "Treating their

own people like criminals, no wonder people hated them!... You know, the American media broadcast that all over the world and made South Vietnam look bad, but no one talks about how that same Viet Cong, just hours before, had murdered an entire family in their home!" Bui responds once again with confusion: "Wait. Does he hate the general or is he defending him? Did he like communism or not?" (206). This scene highly contrasts her own confusion with *Saidon Execution*, drawing the powerful parallel of incomplete information. On page 208, she elaborates that Eddie Adams, the photographer of *Saigon Execution* was "[l]ike my father, he knew the context of the shooting. And that it was absent from the photograph itself." These quotes are are accompanied with her own depiction of the behind the scenes of the taking of the photograph — a reference to the broader understanding of the context of the image which was missing, to her own misunderstanding through incomplete information, and the misunderstanding of refugees in general as an effect of this. Directly following, she enforces the misunderstanding of her people in general: "'Saigon Execution' is credited with turning popular opinion in America against the war. I think a lot of Americans forget that for the Vietnamese...the war continued, whether America was involved or not" (209). As she cites the now conscious understanding of the non-polarity of the events of the Vietnam war, she also exudes her growing understanding of her own truth.

At the end of the passage, she finally ties her contemplations back into her own personal understanding and life. On pages 209-210, "For my parents, there was a rocket that barely missed their house and killed a neighbor, best friends and students killed in combat, frequent periods of separation, the constant stress of money, the baby that died in the womb, and then my arrival, three months before South Vietnam lost the war." The end of the section is definably distinct from the rest as it ties the conflict all the way from the politic between America and Vietnam, down to the Vietnamese, down to her neighborhood, then parents, and finally herself. She has already described all the connections prior to this explicit demonstration except the one of childbirth. All the way down from propaganda, to her father's conflicting stories, to the war itself, she still lacked a direct personal connection to the issue until this point. This childbirth is significant in multiple ways: the most basic being it physically links her to the conflict, being technically there with her mother, and her mother struggling alongside her as well as her own empathetic link to the situation. The book opens with a scene of her having childbirth and ends very much similarly. Both the introduction and the ending talk a lot about her mother and how self-referential childbirth is, from her mother birthing her to now her birthing her own son, greatly emphasizing her connection — although rocky — with her mother. However, now we gain a deeper understanding for her thought in the first chapter: "A wave of empathy for my mother washes over me" (22). An understanding both for her mother's pain and work in childbirth, but also her effort to just stay alive and keep her child safe. She directly compares the war with her mother and her own childbirths, which additionally flies in the face of the entire common masculine narrative of the war which she was

uncomfortable with. Her entire comparison is so completely contrary to what we are used to hearing on top of being an alternate perspective on the history. At this point, Bui is at rest and has formulated her own truth on the issue — one which is not nearly as polar as she initially imagined — through her own personal connection of childbirth.

Throughout *The Best We Could Do*, Bui grappled with the complex topic of her own relation to the Vietnam War and the task of understanding and repaying her parents. Inconsistencies stemming from many misrepresentations and erasures initially confuse her understanding, but she ultimately moves from thinking the truth and her connection was one that was black and white, to now understanding the complexity and nuance the situation entailed. Ultimately, her own childbirth was the final connection she needed to tie herself back into and understand the complexities of the Vietnam War.