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Part 1:

Phan Xuan Sinh's story titled "All my ancestors are buried here" caught my attention especially because of the kind of observations and details he included in his account. Whether intentional or not, the way in which Sinh used particular vocabulary produced a certain kind of irony. For instance, right at the start of his story he says "One time intelligence told us a company of Viet Cong would be landing by boat... we were ordered to set up an ambush near the beach..." (25). As his story continues it is revealed that the people they fire upon are a group of fishermen, not Viet Cong. The irony I saw in this part of his story was how despite the orders coming from "intelligence" and the constant checking in they did with the higher-ups, his platoon still managed to kill and wound innocent civilians – and that kind of incident, that kind of accident, wasn't uncommon. Sinh concluded that part of his story by saying "It's clear that common people on all sides bore the brunt of the killing and suffering" (26). Though he never made any inferences or suggestions as to why that was the case, he went on to tell another story about his time in Vietnam that, together with the first part of his story, is why his story stood out to me.

In the second part of his story, Sinh told about an old couple he found living in a little "thatched house" in a very dangerous area. He told about "helping" them pack some things and get onto a helicopter so he could take them to a refugee camp and then burning their house down so they wouldn't come back. A few weeks later, he found them again back in the same place, having rebuilt their house. He talked to the man and told him it wasn't safe and the man tells him that the land is their home and all of his ancestors are buried there and that they won't leave (26). This part of his story made it even more clear to me than the first part how little the American "intelligence" understood about the Vietnamese people and how little interest they had in understanding. Of course, our other text and the video series speaks to the same lack of understanding that had such a large effect on the war in many respects.

In terms of Sinh's reliability and trustworthiness, I don't think there is too much to be questioned. He doesn't make any sweeping generalizations about the war or any of the parties involved except for his last few comments about the hatred the Viet Cong had for the "enemy." While I generally think it's an oversimplification of the Viet Cong's sentiments, he reached his conclusion in a valid, albeit emotional, way and thus I don't think it's really too fair to question it. He was in the throes of a very emotional, frightening time in which his actions were having a visible impact on the lives around him – lives he didn't seem to think were worth taking or messing with.

Part 2:

I was most disappointed by Richard Olsen's story titled "It was like 'Terry and the Pirates.'" I suppose it's only fair to start out by saying that all people process traumatic situations differently and it's their right to do so, but I found myself seriously frustrated with the way Olsen recounted his experience – like he had edited it before hand to make himself come across as cooler or less affected by the experience. For example, he presented his experience as "romantic." He said: "I was in a romantic mode in that part of my life. I was with the best men in the world flying over rice paddies, canals, serpentine rivers, and savannas of elephant grass... It was all exciting, a rite of passage into manhood" (63). I was particularly curious after reading the last italicized portion of his segment that talked about how Olsen was now a painter whose work thematically recounted his experiences in Vietnam. I looked his paintings up; They're not cool or upbeat like he presented himself in his story. They're dark and nightmarish in many ways, suggesting there is much more to his analysis and experience than a "rite of passage into manhood." That being said, maybe he doesn't need to say anything truthful or deep about his experience in Vietnam; he certainly paints something deeper than what he offers in his story.

Among the Vietnamese people that share their stories in part two, there was an overwhelming sense of devotion to family that is seen in many recounts of war-torn nations around the world and throughout history. Of course the story that stood out the most on that front was that of Luyen Nguyen, titled "She divorced her second husband and waited for me." In his story, he told about being held prisoner for 11 years in North Vietnam. His wife was told he was dead and then remarried many years after his capture. When she found out he was alive, she divorced her second husband and waited for him (97). What stayed with me even more so was the fact that, when given the opportunity to write to his family, he chose not to so that their lives would not be disturbed. Though the people of Vietnam were played and discarded like pawns throughout the war, their devotion to family and ancestors allowed them a tiny bit of control that no foreign power could take away from them. Though I don't feel terribly satisfied identifying family solidarity as the little bit of positivity I was able to glean from part two, I really didn't sense much more – anyone that might have been able to turn the war in a more positive direction, even in the tiniest of ways was dismissed, ignored, imprisoned, or killed.

In retrospect, it seems that there are a lot of positive lessons that one might be able to glean in terms of decisions made that should not be made again – but I don't think I even need to say it – even that potential bright side has been offensively disregarded as we charge forth in the Middle East.

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