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The Echoes of Trauma: Unravelling Intergenerational Pain in *What My Bones Know*

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Abstract:

The turmoil and misfortune experienced by migratory communities can deeply embed trauma into cultural narratives and family histories. The challenges of loss, displacement, and the struggle for survival often leave a lasting legacy for the next generation. In *What My Bones Know*, Stephanie Foo recounts her journey as a Malaysian immigrant in America, navigating the aftermath of an abusive childhood while grappling with complex posttraumatic stress disorder. This research paper investigates the intricacies of intergenerational trauma and its enduring effects on family dynamics within immigrant communities. It highlights the necessity of recognizing and addressing these inherited wounds to foster resilience and healing. Through a critical analysis of Foo's experiences, the paper aims to unravel the mechanisms of trauma transmission and its manifestations in daily life, impacting relationships, mental health, and overall well-being.

Keywords: C-PTSD, Intergenerational Trauma, Migration, Healing, Resilience, Abusive childhood.

The study of trauma was once primarily focused on psychology and medicine, but in recent decades, it has gained relevance in literary and cultural studies. Trauma studies have

become a new subject within the humanities as trauma has become a significant theme in fiction and life writing. Trauma exposure and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been receiving growing attention in research over the last decades. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), trauma is defined as having experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event that involves actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Typical checklists assessing trauma inquire whether individuals have directly encountered or witnessed a life-threatening incident such as an accident, fire, flood, or natural disaster. They also ask about experiences related to combat or war, incidents of rape or sexual molestation, instances of childhood abuse or neglect, or witnessing severe injury or death of another person (Kessler et al. 1995; Copeland et al. 2007).

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs traces the development of Complex PTSD diagnosis back to 1988 when Dr Judith Herman of Harvard University introduced the concept. She aimed to describe the range of symptoms resulting from prolonged trauma more accurately. These symptoms span various domains: behavioral challenges such as impulsivity, aggression, sexual acting out, and self-destructive tendencies through alcohol or drug misuse; emotional struggles like mood swings, intense anger, persistent depression, and panic attacks; cognitive impairments such as dissociation—a sense of detachment from oneself or reality—and profound changes in personal identity; interpersonal difficulties manifesting as tumultuous or unstable relationships; and somatic symptoms leading to frequent medical consultations despite no apparent physical cause. According to Bessel Van Der Kolk, “Trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself...means feeling free to know what you feel and to feel what you feel without becoming overwhelmed, enraged, ashamed, or collapsed” (Kolk 243).

This expanded diagnosis of complex PTSD was deemed necessary because traditional PTSD, which typically relates to single, acute incidents of trauma, does not fully capture the complexities experienced by individuals enduring prolonged abuse or trauma over extended periods. As Samantha, a therapist in Stephanie Foo's memoir, aptly explains, traditional PTSD is often associated with a distinct moment of trauma. In contrast, complex PTSD arises from ongoing and severe abuse or trauma endured over years, such as in cases of chronic childhood abuse:

The difference between PTSD and complex PTSD is that traditional PTSD is often associated with a moment of trauma. People living with complex PTSD have undergone continual abuse- trauma that has occurred over a long period over the course of years. Child abuse is a common cause of complex PTSD. (Foo xi)

The Asian American population has endured profound trauma due to historical and geopolitical conflicts that have left deep scars on their communities. Key events such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and the Cambodian genocide have had lasting impacts on families and individuals, shaping their collective experiences and identities. The intergenerational transmission of pain and resilience within families illustrates how past traumas continue to shape their present and future. Foo poignantly describes the origins of this trauma, noting that the Asian American community was largely forged from the devastation of America's wars against communism. As Foo reflects in her memoir, these painful histories have significantly influenced the Asian American experience:

The Asian American population went through so many things. There were so painful family histories: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the Cambodian genocide. The community was built in large part from the wreckage of America's brutal proxy wars against communism. American massacred civilians in No

Gun Ri and My Lai, it poisoned fields of crops and buried mines, it left behind machine guns in the wrong hands and let houses turn to rubble. (Foo 176)

This historical backdrop contributes to the global surge in displaced populations, who not only carry enduring emotional wounds from their past but also face new sources of trauma in their present circumstances. The phenomenon of intergenerational trauma highlights how these historical wounds reverberate through generations, potentially perpetuating cycles of violence and conflict. This ongoing impact underscores the complexity of trauma's influence on individuals and communities, presenting significant challenges for long-term healing and stability. This paper will explore Stephanie Foo's memoir, *What My Bones Know*, focusing on her journey to understand and navigate trauma across generations. Through her narrative, Foo examines the complexities of complex PTSD and reveals how unresolved trauma from previous generations can impact and undermine subsequent ones. The memoir provides a poignant look into how intergenerational trauma is passed down, shaping the experiences and challenges of those who follow.

Stephanie Foo's memoir, *What My Bones Know*, published in 2022, skilfully intertwines themes of trauma and migration, offering a profound exploration of their impact on personal identity and emotional resilience. Born in Malaysia in 1987, Stephanie Foo is a distinguished writer, producer, and radio journalist known for her contributions to programs like *This American Life*, *Snap Judgment*, *Reply All*, and *Radiolab*, as well as publications such as *Vox* and *The New York Times*, brings her expertise to bear in this poignant memoir. Her insights, informed by her own experiences and extensive research, offer a testament to the complexities of healing and the enduring power of personal narrative. The memoir goes beyond personal narrative to delve into the intricate dynamics of intergenerational trauma. Foo examines how past traumas resonate through familial ties and cultural legacies, shaping behaviors, emotional responses, and resilience across generations. Foo recounts her journey as

an American immigrant grappling with complex PTSD stemming from the challenges of cultural adaptation and relocation. Through her work, Foo underscores the enduring effects of unresolved trauma, shedding light on its enduring influence on individuals and communities alike.

Traumatic experiences leave enduring traces that impact multiple facets of our lives, influencing both broad historical and cultural contexts and deeply personal aspects of our existence. On a personal level, trauma affects families through the subtle transmission of unspoken pain and dark secrets across generations. This can lead to strained family dynamics and perpetuate emotional patterns that influence future generations' coping with stress. Bessel van der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, highlights the far-reaching effects of trauma, stating:

As human beings, we belong to an extremely resilient species. Since time immemorial, we have rebounded from relentless wars, countless disasters, and the violence and betrayal in our lives. But traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale (on our histories and cultures) or close to home, within our families, where dark secrets are imperceptibly passed down through generations. They also leave traces on our minds and emotions, affecting our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even on our biology and immune system. (Kolk 1)

What My Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma is a poignant and introspective memoir written by Stephanie Foo. Published in 2023, the memoir delves deeply into Foo's journey through complex trauma, exploring her experiences with dissociation, therapy, and, ultimately, healing. The memoir centers around Foo's own experiences with complex PTSD, a condition that occurs when trauma happens continuously over the years. She describes in great detail her abusive childhood and talks about the long-lasting impact of

childhood trauma on her life, relationships, and sense of self. She discusses dissociation extensively and describes how it affected her memories, emotions, and perceptions of reality. It combines personal narrative with insightful reflections on trauma, healing, and resilience. Her writing invites readers into her inner world, offering a nuanced understanding of complex trauma and aftermath. She reflects on the challenges and breakthroughs encountered during her therapeutic journey, highlighting moments of growth and self-discovery.

Her memoir delves deeply into intergenerational trauma, examining how historical and personal traumas resonate across generations within her family. It explores the reverberations of her grandmother's experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, where atrocities and profound loss left enduring scars on her family's psyche. Through vivid storytelling, Foo depicts how her grandmother's unspoken trauma affected subsequent generations, influencing family dynamics, cultural identity, and individual lives. The memoir poignantly illustrates how trauma can be transmitted through familial bonds, impacting behaviors, emotional responses, and the understanding of one's heritage.

Cultural Heritage: Perpetuating Intergenerational Trauma

"There is real scientific evidence that the traumas we experience can be passed to our children and even our grandchildren. DNA, of course, is the genetic code that determines the shape of our nose, our eye color... So, when our body is making and remaking itself, every cell in our body actually "reads" our DNA and uses it as a blueprint for what to build" (Foo 200). When discussing her family's history, Foo recounts her Auntie's characterization of the men in their lineage as "hopeless fellows." She introduces her great-great-uncle, who initially emigrated from China to Malaysia and amassed considerable wealth through ownership of multiple mines. However, the upheavals of the World Wars swiftly eroded their fortune, plunging them from prosperity to destitution. Amid these challenges, Foo highlights the

remarkable resilience of her great-grandmother, who became the backbone of the family's survival. Stephanie recounts her great-grandmother's relentless efforts and says, "To do this, she tailored clothing. She sold lunch to the men who worked the mines and came up with discounted meal plans for them to ensure she'd have a steady supply of income every month. She took any odd job that was offered to her. And, of course, she did the domestic labor of raising her four kids" (Foo 183). Despite everything, her great-grandmother remained steadfastly optimistic.

Foo's reflections on her family's history reveal a pattern of silent endurance among the women—her Auntie, grandmother, and great-grandmother—who faced immense challenges with dignified silence rather than outward anger. They exemplified a cultural norm where suffering was endured stoically, often without expressing the depths of their pain. This cultural practice of silent endurance passed down through generations, became a way to cope with and survive adversity. Foo writes:

Our parents did not talk about loss. Sometimes, once in a long while, they might offhandedly mention soldiers or a violent father, but nobody ever said anything about what must have happened: abuse, sexual assault, the traumas of poverty and war. But even at a young age, without understanding what these things were, we sensed them as we kicked our way through the currents of our day. We could feel it looming somewhere, large and dark beneath everything: our parents' pain. So, when the hands came, we offered our cheeks. We offered ourselves as conduits for their anguish because they had suffered so we wouldn't...We excused all of it, absorbed the slaps and the canings and converted them into perfect report cards to wipe away our parents' brutal pasts. (Foo 147)

This cultural practice of silent endurance passed down through generations, became a way to cope with and survive adversity. She reflects on how every woman in her family silently endured immense pain, contrasting her rebellious nature that did not meet the family's standard of quiet endurance. She observes, "All the women in my family—my Auntie, grandmother, and great-grandmother—navigated their challenging lives with dignified silence rather than outward rage. They demonstrated that true strength resides in enduring suffering"(Foo 181). Foo's Auntie recalled how Foo had been favored as a child because she silently endured physical punishment from her mother. Reflecting on this, her Auntie remarked, "Everyone is kind to you because they know you suffer a lot... That's why they're so kind to you. Because when you're young, they understand. You suffer a lot" (Foo 183). This poignant recollection underscores the intergenerational transmission of resilience through silence and acknowledgment of suffering, illustrating how these dynamics shape familial relationships and individual identities.

Intergenerational trauma, in this context, is perpetuated not only through direct experiences of hardship but also through the cultural norms and practices that shape how individuals cope with and transmit their trauma. The silence observed in Foo's family reflects a coping mechanism deeply ingrained in their cultural heritage, where emotions are suppressed, and strength is measured by the ability to endure silently. This perpetuation of silent suffering can impact subsequent generations by shaping their behaviors, relationships, and emotional responses, illustrating how trauma can be inherited and passed through cultural practices and the unspoken transmission of resilience.

Inter-generational Trauma: Impact on Immigrant Family Dynamics

"When I close my eyes and think about my childhood in America, all I can picture are welts and white knuckles" (Foo 21). Stephanie Foo's portrayal of her relationship with her

parents in her memoir is a nuanced and poignant narrative, revealing emotional turbulence where trust and safety are fragile. Recounting her childhood, she offers a candid and introspective account, delving deeply into the complexities of her upbringing. She describes feeling conflicted emotions towards her mother—simultaneously experiencing love and fear alongside a sense of frustration stemming from her mother’s impossible standards. While she grew accustomed to physical abuse, it was her mother’s harsh words that left a lasting impact on her psyche. As she narrates in her memoir:

Here is what I *have* kept from my childhood: my whippings. My mother whipped me a lot. She whipped me for not looking her in the eye, but if I looked her in the eye with too much indulgence, she whipped me again. She beat me for sitting with one leg up on the chair “like a trishaw puller” or for using American slang like ‘don’t have a cow, man” ...Sometimes the beatings would be mild-she’d use her hands, chopsticks, my toys...and then she’d blame me for it. “You made me do it because you’re so stupid!” she howled ... Then she turned her eyes up to the ceiling and screamed at God: “What did I do to deserve an ungrateful, useless child? She ruined my life. Take her back! I don’t want to look at her ugly face anymore. (Foo 13)

Torture represents a profoundly severe form of psychopathology, distinguished by its systematic and intentional infliction of harm by humans upon other humans (Sironi, 1999; Viñar, 2005a). Survivors of torture endure widespread damage that affects multiple aspects of their lives, including their physical health, psychological well-being, emotional stability, and relational dynamics. Stephanie Foo vividly conveys these impacts in her memoir, detailing the extensive repercussions she faces: “The difficulty regulating my emotions. The tendency to overshare and trust the wrong people. The dismal self-loathing. The trouble I have maintaining healthy relationships. The unhealthy relationship with my abuser. The tendency to be aggressive but unable to tolerate aggression from others. It’s all true. It’s all me” (Foo xii).

Foo's reflections highlight the complex and pervasive nature of the trauma inflicted by torture, illustrating its deep and enduring effects on survivors. Similarly, Bessel van der Kolk describes how traumatic events can continue to affect individuals long after the event itself, stating, "Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger, mobilizing disturbed brain circuits and secreting massive amounts of stress hormones. This results in unpleasant emotions, intense physical sensations, and impulsive and aggressive actions" (Kolk 2). This description underscores the persistent and disruptive impact of trauma on the brain and body, perpetuating a cycle of distress and dysfunction.

During an interview with Sarah McCammon, Stephanie Foo discussed her parents' histories and their immigration from Malaysia, elaborating on how these experiences profoundly shaped her childhood:

I think my parents being recent immigrants gave them fewer resources in some ways. We didn't have access to a lot of family. And my parents, I think, were pretty alone and isolated in their ability to take care of me and in terms of having other people be able to take care of them and the mental illnesses that they suffered from. My parents came from lines of - where their parents had suffered immense traumas... You know, there were real consequences to that culturally, in terms of the way that they were raised, but even more so in their literal DNA. (Foo)

Abused children often develop defense mechanisms that compel them to rationalize and protect their parents, despite enduring mistreatment. They may assume responsibility for the abuse, convinced they deserve punishment due to perceived flaws or shortcomings. In her memoir, Foo reflects on this dynamic: "I am the trauma you bury away. I am the lie you hold under your tongue, the thing you bury, vanish, erase, the thing you can almost always pretend is forgotten as long as you don't touch it... I am blood and sin. I am the sum total of my parents'

regrets. I am their greatest shame” (Foo, 217). This coping mechanism helps children maintain attachment to their caregivers amidst emotional turmoil and conflicting feelings. It also serves to shield them from confronting the harsh reality of abuse, preserving fragile stability in their relationship with their parents. Foo vividly portrays in her memoir, reflecting, “It’s not her fault. It’s just that I’m bad, I’m awful, I’m evil” (Foo 17). Judith Herman, who coined the term complex PTSD, describes a coping mechanism where a child assumes responsibility for their parents’ behavior in order to preserve their belief in the parents. She explains this phenomenon as a way for the child to maintain a sense of trust and security, even amidst the chaos and dysfunction imposed by the parents:

The abused child...must find a way to preserve hope and meaning. The alternative is utter despair, something no child can bear. To preserve her faith in her parents, she must reject the first and most obvious conclusion that something is terribly wrong with them. She will go to any lengths to construct an explanation for her fate that absolves her parents of all blame and responsibility...The abuse is either walled off from conscious awareness and memory...or minimized, rationalized, and excused, so that whatever did happen was not really abuse. (Foo 167)

Impact of Trauma

From a sociocultural perspective, ruptures created by trauma are embedded within an intersubjective context wherein severe emotional pain cannot find a relational home in which to be held and integrated (Atwood et al., 2002; Stolorow, 2011). Trauma creates ruptures at the intersection of the individual and their social context and is related to safety, trust, independence, power, esteem, intimacy, as well as spiritual and existential beliefs.

In *What My Bones Know*, the concept of Complex PTSD resonates deeply with the protagonist as she navigates a relentless cycle of trauma inflicted repeatedly over the years.

Complex PTSD emerges from prolonged exposure to trauma, often in environments where safety and security are consistently compromised. Repeated exposure to trauma saturates the individual's psyche with triggers, both conscious and subconscious. Each instance of mistreatment, betrayal, or threat reinforces a pervasive sense of danger and unpredictability in their world. The accumulation of these experiences distorts their perception: mistakes no longer appear isolated but rather as potential triggers for further harm; people are not seen as individuals but as embodiments of untrustworthiness.

People with trauma often exhibit heightened vigilance and an acute awareness of their surroundings. They tend to categorize individuals as either safe or unsafe, and even minor grievances can lead them to feel uncomfortable or threatened around someone. Their discomfort can make it challenging for them to engage with others effectively. Additionally, those with trauma may struggle to comfort others, as they often focus on fixing problems or providing help rather than offering emotional support. They might also tend to blame themselves for issues and make situations about their own experiences. This self-critical mindset can lead to a negative outlook and frequent complaints about life as they struggle with inadequacy and worthlessness.

“But when I made a mistake, the dread crept into my field of vision and I couldn't see anything except my mistake for an hour, maybe even a day” (Foo 51). Stephanie captures the profound distortion of perception that accompanies Complex PTSD, especially in her workplace experiences. Each error or misstep carries an exaggerated weight, fuelled by a pervasive sense of threat and impending consequences. This hyper-vigilance is not merely a reaction to isolated instances of criticism or blame but is deeply ingrained from repeated exposure to harsh judgment and mistreatment. In this environment, where criticism and the fear of inadequacy are constant, her distorted beliefs about herself and others are reinforced. This perpetuates a cycle where every mistake or perceived shortcoming further solidifies her sense

of danger and unworthiness. She reflects, “What made me such a terrible representative? Maybe I wasn’t funny enough. Maybe I wasn’t professional enough. Maybe I wasn’t informed enough” (Foo 57). This self-questioning reveals the internalization of workplace criticism and underscores how Complex PTSD shapes her self-perception and interactions.

People with Complex PTSD often develop an intense fear of abandonment and a constant need for reassurance. Their insecurity runs deep, making it challenging for them to trust others. She articulates this struggle succinctly, stating, “First of all, I have an abandonment complex. Obviously. My mom left. My dad. Then everyone else...And I need constant reassurance. I am really insecure. And I have a really hard time trusting anyone” (Foo 59-60). They can become hyper-vigilant, perceiving threats in everyday interactions and environments. This heightened state of alertness stems from a history of repeated trauma and betrayal, which has shaped their worldview and relational patterns. Consequently, individuals with Complex PTSD may struggle to feel safe and secure, perpetually on edge due to their heightened sensitivity to potential danger. As Foo reflects in her memoir:

My fear of being abandoned forced me to need proof of love in abundance, over and over and over again, a hundred times a day. So even though my friends were constantly attempting to fill the great void of my self-hatred with generous words, assurances and compliments...they were all simply getting sucked into that black hole, mere crumbs for my intense desire. (Foo 136)

Pathways to Healing

Resilience after trauma is a profound and multifaceted journey that involves navigating a complex interplay of psychological, emotional, and social factors. It is about recovering from adversity, adapting to challenges, and ultimately emerge stronger. No one can undo the impact of rape, molestation, child abuse, or other traumatic events. However, what can be addressed

are the lasting imprints of trauma on the body, mind, and soul. This includes managing anxiety, depression, fear of losing control, constant alertness for danger or rejection, self-loathing, and difficulties in opening up to others. The challenge of recovery lies in reclaiming ownership of your body, mind, and sense of self. It involves learning to acknowledge and experience your emotions and thoughts without becoming overwhelmed, enraged, ashamed, or debilitated (Kolk 243). In this memoir, Foo reflects on her path to resilience, driven by a deep desire to overcome her depression. She is committed to addressing her past trauma and negative behaviors while uncovering and nurturing her inherent positive qualities. Foo aims to transform herself into a stronger, happier, and more stable person, capable of making meaningful and lasting connections. Foo describes her need to become self-sufficient; she emphasizes her desire to build resilience and independence writes:

I wanted to learn to be happy and strong and independent so I could support others instead of letting my own depression always take centre stage. I wanted to learn how to be a better friend, partner, family member, to invest in permanent relationship. I wanted to be the kind of woman people didn't leave. I had to find out what was salvageable, if I had good qualities underneath all of those layers of trauma and hurt and workaholism (Foo 71).

Trauma is more than just a story of past events; it encompasses lingering emotions and physical sensations that manifest as disruptive reactions in the present rather than fading memories. Thus, revisiting and addressing one's past is vital for reclaiming control over oneself. Confronting these experiences is key to building confidence and understanding. Stephanie Foo acknowledges that her childhood experiences were not unique, reflecting on the broader context of her upbringing: "I am a product of a place. I am one of many. All of us are victims of a dysfunctional community that was very good at throttling itself while murmuring. Smile through your tears. Swallow your pain" (Foo 174). In her memoir, Foo delves into her

past to determine whether her experiences of abuse as an Asian-American were isolated incidents or part of a larger pattern:

I want to know whether my trauma is personal or communal. I want to know the truth so I can fully understand my community of origin. To understand how place shaped me. And I want to know the truth because I can't fact-check what happened within the walls of my childhood home...if my memories about our communal trauma are accurate, then that would validate the memories surrounding my personal trauma. It would validate my withered brain matter. My very sanity. (Foo 150,151)

Learning to breathe calmly and maintain physical relaxation while confronting painful and distressing memories is a crucial recovery tool (Kolk, 248). To alleviate the immediate pain of the present moment, many advocate starting with meditation and mindfulness. In her memoir, Foo emphasizes the significance of physical exercise and meditation in her recovery journey. She details how these practices have been instrumental in her healing process, describing her sessions:

The feeling of perfect cool air flowing over my open palms transported me to a meadow on a spring day. The feeling of my chest stretching wide made me feel courageous and whole. My back felt devoid of pain, my waist felt heavy and warm underneath the heavy blanket. Even my breath felt fresh and clean coming in and out of my body. And most importantly, there were no annoying voices. I wasn't thinking about the past, or various insecurities, or the future...It was available to me anytime. I was overwhelmed by my discovery of a rapturous new drug that also happened to be free and legal and noncaloric! (Foo 124)

Studies show that having a strong support system is one of the most effective protections against trauma. A reassuring voice or a loving, firm hug can provide profound

comfort when someone is anxious or terrified. Just as frightened children find solace in gentle holding and the reassurance that a protective presence is caring for them, frightened adults benefit from similar comforts. To recover, the mind, body, and brain must be convinced that it is safe to let go. This occurs when you feel secure and can connect that sense of safety with past memories of helplessness. It's crucial to stay in touch with loved ones, both near and far, and to reunite with family and friends in a safe environment as soon as possible (Kolk 251). In her memoir, Foo reflects on her relationship with Joey, her boyfriend, who made her feel safe. She describes her feelings:

I unfolded my love for him enthusiastically. I conjured his kindness, his reassuring grin, and the reckless certainty he instilled in me. The love I had for him felt immense, almost too big to contain, as if it might leap out of my chest... He had made it clear that he would always be waiting for me at home. I tried to feel what he must feel toward me, to see the good he must certainly see, and to understand how he loves my flaws. Waves of gratitude washed over me. How fortunate I was to be loved in this way. How lucky, how lucky, how lucky. (Foo 228)

Having a skilled therapist is crucial for effective healing. A proficient therapist demonstrates profound empathy, fostering a supportive and understanding environment. Stephanie Foo highlights the importance of a good therapist, contrasting her experiences with past therapists who often appeared as distant, all-knowing figures:

So often, past therapists I'd encountered had presented themselves as a kind of all-knowing, all-seeing Wizard of Oz. 'Why do you think you feel that way?' they asked. But whenever I wanted to peek behind their curtain and examine their process, they demurred. In contrast, Dr. Ham was only too happy to give me a tour of the engine room. (Foo 268)

Effective trauma therapist training involves a thorough understanding of trauma, abuse, and neglect, coupled with mastering techniques to stabilize and calm patients. Therapists must be adept at helping patients process and resolve traumatic memories and reenactments, as well as supporting them in rebuilding connections with others. Ideally, therapists have also undergone the types of therapy they offer, enhancing their ability to empathize and connect with their patients (Kolk 253). For further emphasizes the value of a therapist's vulnerability, noting how Dr. Ham's openness increased her trust:

Dr. Ham was acknowledging his own vulnerability within the session. But his vulnerability didn't make him seem less competent or trustworthy. It did the opposite. I trusted him more. I felt comfortable letting him correct my behavior, but I also felt okay pushing back on him and telling him when he was being too much. (Foo 268)

So, after extensive therapy, Foo developed effective strategies to combat complex PTSD. The intensity of these confrontations with trauma may diminish over time, and the coping tools may become more effective. Complex PTSD can resurface unexpectedly, triggered by various events and manifesting in different forms. Given that loss is a constant in life and trauma often resurfaces with grief, managing complex PTSD becomes an ongoing challenge. She now holds onto hope and a sense of agency, recognizing that while triggers may be intensely painful, they are only temporary. Each struggle with PTSD reinforces her resilience, leaving her feeling more alive, joyful, and empowered. Healing, she understands, is not a destination of perfection but a journey marked by both losses and triumphs. With each battle, she gains valuable insights into the nature of her struggles and their limitations, continually refining her approach to her ongoing healing process.

Conclusion

Reaching out across generations to foster open communication can significantly enhance understanding and provide relief within families. *What My Bones Know* is a poignant example of how unresolved trauma from previous generations can profoundly affect subsequent ones. Foo delves into her past to understand why she endured such a harsh childhood and to discern whether her experiences were unique to her or reflective of broader patterns within the Asian American community. By tracing her roots and examining the experiences of her ancestors, she seeks to uncover the reasons behind her parents' harshness and aims to find resolution and healing.

In her memoir, Foo deftly combines her own experiences with the larger historical and cultural settings of migration to show how trauma and displacement both have a twofold impact on the lives of individuals and families. Foo emphasizes the unsaid legacies of pain, the silent perseverance passed down through generations, and how these events shape identity and relationships through her moving insights and evocative narrative. Her story emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend trauma as a complex, intergenerational phenomenon that interacts with migration, cultural displacement, and individual resilience rather than as a single, isolated experience. Her work sheds light on the more extensive human experience of negotiating and overcoming extreme hardship. It provides insightful understanding of the long-lasting effects of trauma and the resilience needed to confront and heal from it. By acknowledging and addressing the complexities of intergenerational trauma, we can better support the emotional and psychological well-being of those navigating the challenging legacy of migration.

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