

# Phở

I apologize  
For the times I couldn't bite back  
When they called you squinty-eyed  
And they used you to copy your homework  
And your white horde of friends settled uneasily in your stomach  
And our fierce love was not enough  
To shield you from the hurt.  
I wonder, do you ever regret Vietnam?  
Self-hatred would come easily  
If all we wanted  
Was to eat our phở. But it's not like that.  
It's also appreciating the worn-out chopsticks we use  
And hearing our mother fret in her tongue  
Do your homework, do good in school  
And reassuring her in English.  
Do you ever regret Vietnam?  
Listen: it was never your fault  
That no one could tolerate  
Some Asian boy taking up space  
And it's not pity you receive  
But well-intentioned love that doesn't appreciate  
The darkened skin that made us  
And think you can give this all up--  
Phở and chopsticks and all--  
Because they don't know  
That we are calloused  
That we live off the diaspora  
And we always imagine our mother's boat  
Stranded in the sea, lost, alone,  
Singing

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