

# The ghost

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I don't want to feed the ghost  
that haunts the furrowed brows  
of the uncles gathered 'round shouting,  
arguing who lost more in the war,  
who was more wronged by whom,  
sipping bitter cups of coffee gone cold,  
stale, angry stories to pass the time.

I don't want to feed the ghost  
that licks the tears of sad mothers  
then winds tight around their necks,  
pressing out bitter words,  
suffocating  
their hopeful love  
suffocating families,  
possessed by anxiety and envy,  
a perpetual tightness in the chest.

The ghost grins and leans close  
pushing on old scars,  
where families and lives were ripped apart,  
still throbbing deep within their souls.

Ghost pains —  
for what was once was  
and now is no longer,  
yet lingers still.

I don't want to feed the ghost  
that squeezes the hearts of veterans  
turning righteousness into rage,  
bravery into bloodlust,  
squeezing hearts to squeeze pockets  
funds for an apparition army, reincarnating violence  
to retake the shadow memory of a city,  
ignoring the seeds of life  
sprung from its ruins:  
Saigon lives on through the living.

I don't want to feed the ghost  
in the narrow gazes of my neighbors.  
The ghost whispers,  
“Who are they? Were they friend or foe?  
They seem like us, but who really knows...”  
familiar faces, dark mirrors  
a community held in close embrace  
by mutual suspicion, a shared habit of distrust  
carved from the same cloth, torn.  
strangers together, in a strange land  
too close to ignore,  
too close to let in.

