

OPEN VEINS OF LATIN AMERICA

I stood still on the balcony watching Alex resolutely relighting the candles. The words were obscured, in a process of forming, or a process of dying. A process of both. A struggle of loss and a vigil of remembrance.

My understanding of these English words was lost as the rain fell and the wind blew. It reminded me of how my reading of my culture had been similarly obscured by water and uncontrollable forces.

My father, a Vietnamese refugee, came here by boat. He came here because of a war. I have heard stories throughout my life, but I am far from *knowing*. I am connected to this history by my blood, but not experience.

I grew up largely in white spaces. I grew up a white Australian. I never learnt Vietnamese. I can't speak past small talk with my father's parents. My grandparents, deeper levels of their personalities, their nuances in expression are lost to me. As I've grown, I've started to understand how much my Vietnamese identity is important to the way I am perceived and interact with the world. It changes the stories I am tied to, now the stories I listen more closely to, it changes my story – the more I feel this importance, the more I also feel a loss of understanding, a sadness at the break in the link of language that would make my Vietnamese identity more easily accessible.

I stood there, watching Alex carefully relighting the candles blown out. The wind and rain was like forgetting, it was the whitewashed culture that has allowed me to be so far from my father's family's cultural line. It was what English language did to my Vietnamese language.

It was so easy to see them go out, there was no dramatic pulses or sounds. The light would just stop. A loss that was hard to track and hard to notice until it happened.

I knew that Alex would be here all night, lighting these candles. It made me think about how much care and attention it takes to connect with what has been posed in Australia as a foreign identity. How much time it takes to learn a language, how much work I must do to really understand what it means to be Vietnamese. My way of being Vietnamese will always be different from my father's, because I was born over seas, the words of my identity will always be skewed from its source. But as I saw these candles being cared for, I thought about the importance of the attempt of a deeper understanding, of the attempt in rebuilding the lines, of understanding my veins, in their difference and similarity.

I thought about the violence of forgetting and the courage of remembering. I thought about the inevitability of forgetting and the courage of taking this change. The words were obscured; they were not visible in the figure that they had been laid out in. They were unintelligible and they were new.

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