This dissertation treats contemporary Vietnamese American literature as responses to common inquiries about history and identity stemming from U.S.-centric, myopic, and racialized narratives about the U.S.-Viet Nam War that serve to assuage lingering
American guilt and eclipse Vietnamese American perspectives. These inquiries include "Where are you from?" and "What was the war like?" The works studied here represent various literary genres-- comic books, cookbooks, memoirs, and novels--that offer diverse, distinct forms for negotiating ambivalent Vietnamese American identities, namely through the expression of trauma. This dissertation focuses on how each genre allows articulations of trauma by bending time and space to rewrite dominant histories of the U.S.-Viet Nam War as "over" or "ended." As argued in the following chapters, contemporary multi-genre Vietnamese American literature stresses that the war is not over, as its traumas resurface and are inherited by the second generation; the texts discussed highlight the ebbs and flows of forming and broadening conceptions of fluid identities that are labeled and fixed (or at least attempted to) as "Vietnamese American." This dissertation, then, focuses on works that use their respective genres to negotiate identities in terms of long-standing racialized stereotypes of the model minority and, in contrast, the threatening perpetual foreigner; each chapter further examines issues of diversifying the representation of Vietnamese Americans in dialogue with the figures of the refugee, commodified culinary tour guides, multiracial children, as well as transgender and gender fluid individuals. In order, the chapters in this dissertation will focus on the following texts: GB Tran's graphic memoir VIETNAMERICA; four cookbooks by Luke Nguyen, Charles Phan, Nhut Huynh, and Ann Le; life narratives by Kien Nguyen and myself; and the genre-bending, queer narratives of Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam by Andrew X. Pham and lê thi diem thúy's The Gangster We Are All Looking For. An investigation of how the literary form enhances the delivery of content that challenges U.S.-serving historical discourses and epistemologies of racial identity, this dissertation stands as an effort to expand not only the possibilities of response, but also the terrain of inquiry.
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