



**On The Cusp of Phoenix Rising**  
(A Multimedia Performance Poetry Set)

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Act 3: The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006

**Poems in this set include:**

**What's in A Name**

**Living Memory/Living Absence (excerpt)**

**Brother / My Brother**

**The Day After**

**Haram! Haram! Haram!**

**Who's Got Us?**

**Excuse Me, AmeriKa**

**In Time of War**

## What's in a Name?

My name is

2,000 years of history present in 1 body

3 decades of civil unrest awake in 3 syllables

5 letters dense of Birth Blood Islam Peace Khmer Story

2 letters away from "Refugee"

1 letter short of "Home"

My name knows my mother labored

screaming for hours

only to mourn a year later

as she buried her sorrow.

A baby boy

empty of breastmilk

born into famine *instead* of family.

(2 letters and war separate the difference)

My mother buried the pains from her first labor

along with her grief, knowing

her son had learned the word for hunger

before he was able to call her "mother" or speak her name.

She labored a second time and my name was born.

My name unexpectedly inherited first child honors.

My name echoes the same *shahadah*\* whispered to early newborns

carves legacy into intricate ancient mountains

and escaped from a land kissed by American bombs

When you say my name

it is a prayer a mantra a call

when you say my name

when you whisper it

when you cry it

when you desire it

I respond.

Before countries bounded themselves into borders  
before cities became governments  
even before the nations of hip hop  
it is the original call and response that all people claim.

I take issue with *your* inarticulate mangling of my name  
she refuses to disintegrate into a colonized tongue.

My name survived racism before she knew what it was called.

A small child sinks deeper into her seat  
into her shame  
into her difference  
into *their* laughter  
into *their* stares  
into *their* sneers  
into a classroom of white kids  
with white teachers  
with white tongues  
with perfectly pronounceable white American names  
like Katy, Courtney, Jennifer,  
Michael, Bobby, Doug,  
Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Nelson  
Mr. How-do-you-say-your-weird-name again?  
Miss I'm-sorry-I-just-can't-seem-to-say-it-right!

Every mispronunciation is like a mouth shooting bullets  
the spit of syllables building from a gullet turn barrel  
triggering *precise* memories attached to *precise* feelings  
like shame inflected in my parents' broken English  
and the guilt of witnessing daily sacrifices by my mother and father  
their dreams and youth slaughtered for money, food, *my* perfect English.  
*Every* misplaced tongue targets *my* foreignness, *my* un-belonging, *my* vulnerabilities.  
So when I get angry or curse you for your mispronunciation  
Please don't tell me I can't do that  
Don't tell me to take it easy

Don't scold me afterwards for making a point of it in public  
Don't downplay my childhood wounds  
Don't shrink me down any further  
*Please just listen.*

Allow me to own this one thing:  
The rights to my name.  
to say her correctly  
to have her said correctly  
to come when she calls me  
to come to her defense  
to live up to her  
to honor her legacy.

She is my only refuge when I am stripped naked.  
She is my bloodline to mothers who have labored before me.  
She is My Name. The echo of Home I long to remember.

My name is Anida  
daughter of Surayya  
who is the daughter of Abidah  
who is the daughter of Fatimah  
who is the daughter of a woman whose name I do not know  
who are all daughters of Hawwa  
daughters of life  
sisters of survival  
women of resistance  
daughters of the earth  
water  
breath  
fire  
dreams.

\*shahadah – A Muslim's declaration of faith

## Living Memory/Living Absence (an excerpt)

(performed with video/audio tracks)

Arabic invocation:

Aoozhubillah – himinashaitan – neera jeem – bismallah hirahman –neeraheem

Aoozhubillah – himinashaitan – neera jeem – bismallah hirahman –neeraheem

Aoozhubillah – himinashaitan – neera jeem – bismallah hirahman –neeraheem

This is for Cambodia

An ancient land of dreamers and builders

Sorrow and strength

This is for those who keep our culture alive

For the hidden *Apsara* in all of us

Beauty beneath brown flesh

For the fingers arched towards god

This is for all the children of Cambodia

For those who left

And those who never chose the leaving

This is for those who are still hunting for Home

And those who made new Homes in far away places

This is for everything that we are

And everything that we are becoming

We are the ones who will keep our culture alive.

We arrived at the camps

with nothing but the clothes on our backs

I remember my 5-year-old fingers

gripping the back of my father's neck

arms locked like strands of rope

a noose at times tightening and loosening

to the noises in the jungle

my legs wrapped around his back bending

and branching like fresh jungle twigs

he told me it was a game  
and at times we'd have to run  
sometimes running so fast  
my legs swung loosely  
knees beating against his back

how he sweated the miles away  
shirt soaked in trembling heartbeat  
even the thick foliage couldn't guard us  
from the scent of fear that loitered around us  
couldn't shield us from the torch in the sky  
that followed us everywhere until  
the moon swallowed us into the night.

we couldn't silence the way the darkness  
teased us with the imagined limbs of lost children  
the illusions cracking as we stepped on brittle branches  
there was no time for hesitations  
only slivers of moments when we waited  
for the night to slip faster into the day

how my father's feet screamed a silent din  
which never quite rose above that jungle canopy.  
his legs like iron pegs burning at the stump with each step  
walking. running. always running.

and how he heaved me on his back all those miles  
make believing it was just another father daughter game.

a piggyback ride, he told me.  
a long piggyback ride, he whispered.  
the last piggyback ride, he said.

And when it was over he promised me  
we'd never have to run again.

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**Body Speak To Me (audio lyrics)**

*body speak to me.*

*speak my name.*

*tell me of my truths.*

*of how my body frames me in her own borders  
holding the universe under a thin stretch of skin.*

*body remember me.*

*remember my name.*

*tell me of my truths.*

*collapsing time into memory  
into flesh.*

*body speak to me.*

*speak my name.*

*tell me of my truths.*

*of how my body frames me in her own borders*

*remembering ancestors*

*memory into flesh*

*earth into flesh*

*fire into flesh*

*breath into flesh*

*water into flesh*

*dreams into flesh*

*history into flesh*

GIVEN: The Khmer Rouge regime lasted 3 years 8 months 20 days

GIVEN: nearly every single family in Cambodia suffered losses during the time of the Khmer Rouge

GIVEN: individuals who return home are not the same people they were when they left

PROVE: Absence is what the body aches to remember

PROVE: survivors must learn to live with the absence of 2 million

PROVE: the journey never ends for the refugee

PROVE: My father says that there is nothing to go back to. Nothing

I will return to a country I have never known  
that burns a hole inside my heart the size of home  
when I arrive, will I recognize Loss  
if she came to greet me at the airport  
will she help me with my bags  
usher me through customs  
will she take me to my birth village  
point me to the graves of ancestors  
will she share her silence with me  
will she embrace me  
will I ask these same questions  
or will I be asked to prove my belonging

do I begin by pulling out the remnants of my broken tongue  
hunt for similarities in a sea of strangers  
spot the same cheekbones on a little girl as she smiles selling trinkets  
find a boy with that thick unmanageable wave of hair that kinks near his ears  
close in on an old man with a nose broadened brown and rounded soft  
catch a familiar scowl from an ashy haired woman who sees me first  
will I need to look even deeper  
scan for eyes gouged with the same obsidian tint of regret as mine  
consider textures on dry flesh that easily flinches in a forest of touch



watch for veins beneath wrists that have stared down the teeth of razors  
trace cracked lines on open callous palms  
do I stitch a patchwork of borrowed resemblances to justify my birthright

will I be at a loss for words?

I wonder, once I have visited Loss,  
will she stamp my exit visa?

I often think about our leaving and all we left behind  
imagined our lives without this exodus  
dreamt of days when I could speak to Loss  
to tell her we didn't choose to leave  
the leaving chose us.

Absence is my father's face wounded open.  
Absence is a gut wrenching bellow for Home.  
Absence is my name left behind in a scurry.  
Absence is 20 million people with no place to call home  
Absence is my face wounded open.  
Absence is what the body aches to remember.  
It is this absence that propels the living to remember.

[Arabic prayer for the dead]

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

As I enter Tuol Sleng,  
Outside a school turn prison turn torture chamber turn museum

17,000 dead / 7 survivors / S-21

There is no exact body count

Loss drags my body along checkered floors

Silence lingers like stretched shadows without owners

ATROCITIES is not a big enough word

To describe this kind of loss

Nor is HOLOCAUST,

or GENOCIDE,

or POGROM,

or MURDER, or DEATH

Nothing describes the loss of your own by your own

Nothing describes the loss

LOSS, a 4-lettered word

Like BLUE and WIND and WALK and FIND and BURY

and LIVE and LIFE and BODY and REST

4 lettered words

NONE big enough to describe this kind of destruction

This kind of loss

Glass under glass and they still look right through you.

Silence lingers like stretched shadows without owners

[Arabic Prayer for the dead]

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun.

This is for those who were birthed in silence

and those who came kicking and screaming

This is for our borrowed tomorrows

and the futures our children will carve

This is for the children of Cambodia

Eyes wide with passion and innocence

[Arabic closing prayer]

Sadha khallah hul azeem. Ameen.

## Brother / My Brother

brother/my brother  
my wounded/my brother

i watch for you  
like i watch the moon  
for the luminous faces  
and the lesser known ones  
hidden in the shadows  
i've seen you burst and cringe  
wear songs as magical blankets  
to protect you from this twisted lunacy

you chase yr best self  
through the halls of scribbled ink  
sprawled as your father's paper legacy  
hunt for belonging to a tribe  
made of our peoples psalms and hymns  
stroke parched pages with ink paths  
traveling in between heartbeats & couplets  
pieces of yourself splattered across worlds  
ripples in waters you've never seen

my brother  
i have seen you  
engaged in secret conversations  
and i've seen  
people listen when you whisper  
as if waiting for a prophecy

i watch you keep the universe  
under a thin stretch of skin  
i have seen you scale walls  
only to hide from closure

you are an earthbound angel  
your chest, an open home  
a refuge for the half-forgotten  
you love so hard  
there's no room to breathe  
so your lungs collapse into yr chest  
this is the sacred place  
where your lovers crawl into  
searching for a glimpse of yr best self  
where your friends never  
want you to be lonely  
and where your family stands guard

i listen for you  
the way i listen for the stories  
under my mother's breath  
anxiously awaiting the promise of truths  
you swallow hope as a curious pill  
and tuck fear away in the dark  
where the nightmares hide  
and the unborn children grow  
in the light– you tease shadows  
in the dark– you chase its stillness  
you grow sleepless and weary in the night  
use words as wings  
to slingshot around the moon

my brother  
you make me believe  
your light is a living poem  
ripped from divine flesh  
you make me believe angels wait to steal secrets for you

brother/my brother  
my wounded/my brother  
you are the wind resiliently blowing  
i am the tree firmly rooted.  
i stand disguised as a buried wound  
you uncover scars in naked truths.  
i worry the secret sorrows drown you daily  
and i pray we both find salvation  
in our open chests.

## The Day After

*(A Cento based on Hate Crimes filed shortly after 9/11)*

**1942** – Executive Order 9066 authorized the U.S military to incarcerate 112,000 Japanese Americans in ten internment camps, many of whom were second and third generation American citizens.

**1967** – *“Those of us who struggle against racial injustice must come to see that the basic tension is not between races... The tension is at bottom between justice and injustices... We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may happen to be unjust.”* – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Awoke to signs,  
“Terrorists” sprayed in red paint across their family’s driveway,  
“Terrorist on board” written on their white car.

Awoke to find,  
freeway sign says, “Kill all Arabs”  
elevator sign says, “Kill all towel heads”

A Pakistani Muslim living in L.A.  
awoke to find his car scratched across  
the right side with the words “Nuke ‘em!”

Awoke to find  
300 march on a mosque in Bridgeview, IL.  
300 American flags shout “USA! USA!”  
Mosque awoke to find a 19-year-old shouting  
“I’m proud to be American, I hate Arabs and I always have.”

Firebomb tossed,  
Taxi driver pulled out and beaten,  
Vandals in Collingswood, N.J. attacked two Indian-owned businesses.  
Vandals spray-painted "leave town."

Awoke to find  
a South Asian American,  
Sikh, chased by a group of four men yelling "terrorist."  
Sikh mistaken as a Muslim American.

Back up.  
Sikh man, 69, shot.  
Body found in a canal  
He had a turban on.  
Turban mistaken as a Muslim American.

A vehicle of white males,  
followed and harassed a 21 yr old female.  
Attackers yelled, "Go back to your own country!"  
The attackers' car pinned her against another vehicle.  
Then they backed up and ran over her again.  
Kimberly– a 21 year old  
Back up. A 21 year old full blood Creek  
Back up. Full blood Creek Native American  
Mistaken as a Muslim American

Awoke to find,  
a Pakistani native beaten by three men.

Back up. Egyptian American, 48, killed point-blank  
Back up. Sikh man, 49 shot.  
Shooter shouted, "I stand for America all the way."

Back up.

A man pushing a baby stroller walked by a mosque

He stopped and started yelling,

“You Islamic mosquitoes should be killed.”

Mosquitoes mistaken as Muslim Americans.

Awoke to find two women speaking Spanish in a doctor’s office.

A Caucasian woman yells, “You foreigners caused all this trouble,”

and begins to beat one of the women.

Spanish mistaken as Muslim.

Back up.

She asks the woman if she is Arab,

And then punches her in the eye.

Awoke to be mistaken.

A woman wearing Muslim clothing was shopping.

A Caucasian woman began attacking her and yelled,

“America is only for white people.”

Back up. America mistaken for white people.

Armed man sets fire to a Seattle mosque.

300 march on mosque in Bridgeview, IL.

Mosques in Carrollton, Denton and Irving, Texas, attacked.

Muslim student at Arizona State University attacked.

Afghan restaurant in Fremont attacked with bottles and rocks.

Two suspects wrote “die” on a Persian Club booth.

A gasoline bomb is thrown

through the window of a Sikh family’s home,

hitting a 3-year-old on the head.

Two women at a bagel store, attacked

for wearing a Quranic charm around her neck.



Attacker lunges,  
Yells, "Look what you people have done to my people"  
No one in the store tried to help.  
The owner apologized to the attackers for any inconvenience.

300 march on two women  
No one tried to help.

Two women awoke to find  
an explosion from a cherry bomb  
outside the Islamic Center of San Diego.  
*San Diego mistaken for Muslim Americans*  
"Look what you people have done to my people."

300 march on mosque in Bridgeview, IL  
No one tried to help.

Sign says, "Kill all Arabs."

Sign says, "Kill all towel heads."

*Towels mistaken for Muslim Americans*

No one tried to help.

Vandals attack.

No one tried to help.

He had a turban on.

No one tried to help.

Sign says, "Look what you people have done"

Flags wave in an Afghan restaurant.

300 march against Spanish spoken at a doctor's office

*Spanish mistaken for Muslim Americans*

300 march on two women at a bagel store

*Bagels mistaken for Muslim Americans*

300 wave cherry bombs.

Bombs march on 300 Sikhs,  
hitting a 3-year-old on the head.

Look what you people have done!

## **Haram! Haram! Haram!**

(for Abidah Ali)

She is known by many names across many continents, but we simply knew her as *Mey*. My grandmother – the great spoiler of American assimilation – the premier customer of Halal meats – the champion of daily prayers – the keeper of the ways of the properly performed *wudu* – the reciter of random stories and even more random Quranic passages. She *is* the circle of elders – a circle of One. She is the supreme storyteller of terrifying parables about the apocalyptic Day of Judgment – the ultimate converter of the curious infidels – the defender of pre-marital virginity – the advocate of the *hijab* – the preserver of long sleeves and even longer hemlines – the barber of first born babies. She is the gatekeeper of wholesome traditional values for Muslim families stuck in a hedonist consumer culture.

My grandmother was indeed no ordinary immigrant woman. She was the grand mama of us all! Mey was the matriarch who choked our childhood into a dichotomy of Haram or Halal, the forbidden and the permissible. Allah never sent a messenger more frightening and disciplined than my grandmother, a stout Thai woman who stood at 4' 11" with silver streaked hair. She was an aging woman with a noticeably short torso and breasts sunken down to her waist. Grandma was plump with stories, while her grandchildren were ripe with fears. She would always scare us into being "better" Muslims. 10 years old, and grandma convinced me that if I didn't eat all the rice on my plate, each uneaten white grain would rise on the Day of Judgment to testify against me. Their testimonies numbering in the thousands would send me straight to hell and even my own mother wouldn't be able to save me. After all, it was Haram to throw away food.

No one ever wanted to disappoint Mey. None of us ever wanted to do anything wrong according to her *shariah*. Every summer we learned to read the Quran. She taught us Arabic and threatened us with Hellfires if we did anything sinful. 1 hour a day for 5 days a week, sometimes longer if we didn't get the lesson exactly right. And if we did, she wasn't afraid to hit us – either with her knuckles or with the long metal part of a fly swatter. Mey wanted us to learn our lessons, both in Arabic and in life. According to grandma, life was very simple. Things, people, places, actions were either Haram or Halal!

She'd tell us, "Pork – Haram! Shorts, miniskirts, sleeveless shirts, tight jeans – all Haram! Hair dye – Haram! Perms – very Haram! (But henna was okay because it was natural.) Swimsuits – Haram! 2 piece bikinis – super Haram! Grandma expected us to be fully clothed in loose lint attracting fabrics at

public pools and beaches. She believed there was nothing shameful in going to the beach on a sweaty summer day fully clothed. After all, the other half-naked Americans were all Haram! If we didn't pray – Haram! Watching too much T.V.– Haram! Dancing – Haram! MTV – Haram! Cindy Lauper – Haram! Madonna – very Haram! Rock & Roll music – the gateway to Haram-ness! Smoking – Haram! Drugs – Haram! Boys – Haram! Dating boys – Haram! Kissing boys – Haram! Sex before marriage – Haram. Kinky sex even when married – Haram! HARAM! HARAM! HARAM!”

We felt suffocated. We couldn't do anything growing up. Having fun seemed like it would be Haram! Mey sternly drew her lines between the Haram and the Halal very clearly. For example, beef hotdogs sold by Muslim butchers – Halal! A Mcdonald's garden salad without the bacon bits – also Halal! Good pious Muslim VIRGIN girls who pray five times a day who marry good Muslim VIRGIN boys who have memorized the entire Quran – VERY HALAL!

## Who's Got Us?

who's got us when we fall?  
who will be there to catch us  
when the sky becomes too heavy to hold up  
when we slip away as obscure phantoms  
souls too thickly burdened to stand up tall  
who will break our fall?

what of my sisters – the shadow walkers?  
the women who resist beneath cotton cloaks  
black slits designed to fit a woman's eyes  
but with holes too small to see the sky.  
When the *chador* is no longer a choice,  
their is no modesty in fear.  
and so the women lock fists in a secret circle  
with Allah trapped in their throats.  
they rely on a rotating council of resistance  
if one sister stumbles the others will catch her.

generals command soldiers,  
"wars are won when the hearts of women crumble!"  
they fear women nations  
who sew our seeds for 7 legacies  
like our mothers  
secretly stashing their dreams in the hope chest of history  
knowing that space and time will unfold them  
my mouth is the cosmos opened up for interpretation  
swallowing me into a nocturnal hole  
and i struggle to climb out  
to see my mother and the women before me.  
i see the sisters who speak with silent mother tongues  
and mothers whose tongues tied/twisted in silence  
as we unlearn the wrongs  
and rites of passages not our own.

we are "too much woman" they tell us  
compared to models, emaciated paper ghosts  
fragmented scares and stares – pasted glossy clippings.

our sistergirls – painted living dolls behind pupil casings  
lips sewn shut like dusty raggedy anns.

we share ducts of salty sea foam tears  
and fears plucked from hysteria  
we give birth to dicks who prick with privilege  
spit from lips that drip with love  
and *still* allow strangers  
to steal our kisses at random moments.

we are the women whose  
hearts are strung on fishline poles  
esteems kicked to the curb  
as street lamps dim and flicker like distant memories.

so who's got us?  
who will catch us when we fall?  
sometimes, i see myself  
diving off the edge of my own heart.  
tall grasses sway in the field  
like a million open arms waiting to catch me.  
sometimes i dream me drowning –  
a current sucks me through a cave of my cracked open chest  
the she within stares back at me –  
the darker thin skinned woman whispers,  
“you must learn to survive yourself”

when i awake –            i            am            left            alone.

so who's got us?  
when Allah and angels and ancestors all turn their backs  
when we are each other's worst rivals  
what becomes of the everyday mothers and sisters  
with deadpan faces that bind our living histories?

i have seen our women survive each other  
cradling cups of tears in a circle of fears  
mature salty puddles fused into fuel  
forging salvation in arm linked huddles

chanting, “fuck the bullshit and fuck the suffering”  
and waiting for the rest of the world to catch us.

i have watched our women catch each other.  
we are the neo feminists with borrowed souls  
constantly evolving ourselves past  
the post modern trap holes.  
we streak our strands resilient shades  
and wear lipstick on occasions when  
a shade of rouge makes life a little more vibrant.  
we revoke the laws that feed the frenzy  
to bind our feet  
and defy scriptures – fanatic excuses  
for a religious patriarchy.  
fundamentals can be foundations  
God is not a man!  
we snatch back our ovaries  
keep our children close  
we remember to mouth our names even in silence  
and dare to define ourselves beyond our own imagination.

sister /woman –  
spread your wings across the horizon  
take flight past the heavens  
and we will catch each other when we fall.

## Excuse Me, AmeriKa

excuse me, Amerika I'm confused?  
you tell me to lighten up  
but what you really mean is whiten up  
you wish to wash me out,  
melt me in your cauldron  
excuse me, if I tip your melting pot  
spill the shades onto your streets  
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE MY COLOR.

you wonder why I get so angry  
and don't trust me when I claim it's your fault  
excuse me, Amerika,  
you pushed for my paper permanency,  
shipped us as cargo for suburban missionaries:  
*"refugees aboard, handle with care,  
please provide help for the godless children seeking refuge"*  
from a land fighting for your creed  
a country in distress armed by your congress  
rampaged and pillaged  
and suddenly my skin stretches on silver screens  
the killing fields for your hollywood hype  
excuse me, Amerika.  
I have tried it here and made this my home.  
BUT YOU NEVER WANTED ME HERE.

9 digits to divvy up my new found freedom  
a hyphenated identity, misconstructured name  
a divided soul – asian american  
a hybrid woman  
SLASHED, DASHED, CAPPED, AND LOWER CASED IN LABELS  
contaminated by diction –  
pricked by vultures of bastard tongues  
you mispronounce my pain,  
the sting heard on roll call days  
daily friction – names slip off teachers' tongues  
sounding like slaughtered soldiers  
caught in battalion battlefields

excuse me, for getting so angry but  
YOU CAN'T EVEN SAY MY FUCKING NAME!

still you shuffle my anger aside  
want me to bite my lips and watch my words,  
yet you cut me with your thoughts.  
your stories frame me in fiction  
recreated for ideal themes  
squeezed my mind for the minor myth  
that molds me into your major model  
gave me seductive sex appeal to steal your virgin soldiers  
and drew me dragon claws to kill your unlucky sons  
excuse me if I get too angry.  
YOU SPREAD LIES MEANT TO SPREAD MY LEGS.

excuse me, if I have learned to master your language,  
sharpen my tongue, own my own words  
and call my pain, ANGER!

excuse me, if I get angry  
watching my parents wither in work day cycles  
while you steam roll over their dreams  
THEY drown in blood and sweat  
for 15 minute breaks and overtime meals  
the factory whistle blows an awful stink  
that stains my father's blue collared shirt  
steel toe shoes cover callous feet  
that stand proud to be the backbones of this America  
for jobs 'real Americans' never wanted  
my father's skin sweats stories  
my mother's hands hold up hope  
I AM ANGRY FOR THEIR SACRIFICE.  
I AM ANGRY FOR THEIR PAIN  
I AM ANGRY for the lost stories and forgotten faces  
drowning in this land of immigrant pool  
I AM ANGRY for the violence that bleeds onto your streets.

excuse you, Amerika  
while I scratch your name with 3Ks,



mark X for your xenophobic tendencies,  
scrape the violence off your scalp,  
and ask you why?  
Why are you so angry, Amerika?  
you whip out wise cracks – attack the defenseless  
    flashing the superior color of your badge  
you beat us down – blameless as victims remain nameless  
    bashing the heads of all our vincent chins  
you serve violence – a beating for culture's sake  
    fistfights to finish a Denny's meal  
you dig graves for forgotten faces  
steal lives for petty skin crimes  
bury our dead with bullet wounds  
slay the living with foreign stares  
WHY DON'T YOU STOP HATING ME.  
WHY DON'T YOU STOP KILLING ME!

## **In Time of War\***

(performed with video/audio tracks)

*“The Role of the artist is to create a picture of war that is so absurd, so ridiculous, so abominable, so truthful that it leaves no other alternative, no other reality possible but that of peace.” – Arundhati Roy*

Land of a million smiles  
evening rain, tall glasses of Singha beer  
3 weeks / 15 artists strong / 2 facilitators / 6 countries  
thousands of miles apart  
home packed neatly into suitcases  
1 river / 4 days on a slow boat / 21 hours on a plane  
the same blue dress  
21 days of learning how to pronounce names  
10 bottles of Beer Lao / 2 flasks of whiskey  
handmade leather puppets  
1 lime colored safari-like truck with no power steering  
one moment of fear  
over 50 bowls of rice  
cowtun every morning  
1 large sized ballerina and thousands of wafer-like mall girls  
whitening cream  
magenta flowers / roses and thorns / white blossoms  
foreign tongues / personal walls / international size egos  
secret buddies  
the morning chorus of singing frogs, crickets and roosters  
one full moon  
4 hotels  
12 hours in the back of an open roof truck to a remote village  
dinner by candlelight  
songs sung in small circles  
one handwritten note left on a windshield  
tuk tuks for hire and red trucks for buses  
20 pairs of sunglasses  
rows and rows of shoes left before entering  
one drunken flower  
10 bowls of tomyum  
1 chinese man learning to pronounce SSSHEEE-CAH-GO!

1 puppet master's smile – all teeth, everyday  
the hello group, N.G.O, the lazy group  
1 *Pipa* – a chinese guitar  
1 *Piba* – a crazy chinese painter  
Red tents / 2 monks / a fortress of golden buddhas  
raindrops exploding on vinyl tents  
advice for the suffering  
2 days on the beach  
an endless trail of stars  
many dances later  
zero days left  
an infinite sky of limited memories  
one sky, several headlines.  
    one sky, several headlines.

*one sky, several headlines.*

**“The Americans have started to bomb Iraq”**

from his lips to my ears  
from my chest to my knees  
hope finds herself stuck  
in the crevices of kneecaps  
pulling me down in search of prayers  
from my palms to the sky  
the heavens hold contradictions  
the world is not quite balanced  
right now the ceiling caps our view  
our sky is a grid of fluorescent lights  
and a sea of dilating pupils

to the west of the Mekong, the sky weeps of bombs  
and lullabies are half sung to children whose waking sleep is a reality

burning yellow rain / a place of worship / steel tanks / a marketplace / billions  
spent on bombs / a home / cruise missiles / a schoolyard / stealth bombers / a  
place of worship / bullets / a marketplace / depleted uranium / a home / rubbles  
/ a schoolyard / gunfire / a place of worship / death showers / a marketplace /  
gas masks / a home / billions spent on bombs / a schoolyard / 250,000  
American soldiers / somebody's child / civilian casualties / somebody's child /  
refugees / somebody's child / collateral damage/ somebody's child / 250, 000

American soldiers /

1 cowboy president / 1 dictator / millions in resistance.

to the west of the Mekong, the sky weeps of bombs

and lullabies are half sung to children whose waking sleep is a reality

3 weeks / 15 artists strong / 2 facilitators / 6 countries

thousands of miles apart

home packed neatly into suitcases

millions in resistance.

\*written in Laos during The Mekong Project Artist Residency (March 2003) after hearing news that Bush was starting to bomb Iraq