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:
Aoozubillah – himinashaitan – neera jeem – bismallah hirahman –neeraheem
Aoozubillah – himinashaitan – neera jeem – bismallah hirahman –neeraheem
Aoozubillah – 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
teeded 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.

***

**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*
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

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
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 lied/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

cut 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, misconstructed 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,
suckle 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*
(performing 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 bowels of rice
cowtum 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