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Framing Lament: Providing a Context for the Expression of Pain

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In this paper I suggest that the form critically identified laments of the Hebrew Bible can be understood via the performance concept of “framing.” In art, drama and literature the frame lifts the work or event to a heightened consciousness and provides a context for practitioners and audiences to interact. My interest is in the link between frame (form) and content. I argue that the lament form provides a literary framework for the expression of anguish by empowering those who are suffering to name their pain, despite the constraints of the form that generally culminate in a leaning towards hope. Comparison of Biblical laments emanating from the experience of exile with lament poetry written by exiled Burmese Karen refugees in the twenty-first Century will show that resonances exist between the disparate communities through their common framing of pain via lament.

[A] Bringing the Frame into View

The concept of “framing” is most familiar in the visual arts – where a painting or artwork is set in a frame or on a pedestal. It is probably true to say that for the most part the frame is ignored – it is merely the supporting or defining structure that allows the artwork to be viewed. Even when ornate frames are used in galleries or private collections, there is a tendency for the frame to become invisible, or paid little heed.

The frame, of course, is a historical artifact. The earliest artworks were images drawn onto cave walls with rough surfaces and no set boundaries. In a seminal article on the frame as a boundary to the artwork, Meyer Schapiro notes that not until the creation of pottery and architecture with regular angles

and smooth surfaces did the prepared field for art become normative.¹ Cultural evolution and societal norms mean that even the most primitive of children's drawings still take place on an artificial rectangular field and we frown upon graffiti or provide spaces in our public areas where such expression is sanctioned and controlled. By defining the parameters of the work, the frame has a *constraining* function on the artwork. In our modern world the frame is a given and in fact it is often taken for granted.

It has been argued, however, that the frame is the very thing that creates the space for the artwork to be viewed and interpreted. "Through the frame, the picture is never simply one thing to be seen among many: it becomes an object of contemplation."² The frame separates the artwork from its surrounding environment and lifts it to a heightened significance. Sallie McFague, commenting on a broad spectrum of the arts, states "paintings, poetry, novels, sculpture, dance, music help us look at colors, sounds, bodies, events, characters – whatever – with full attention. Something is lifted out of the world and put into a frame so that we can, perhaps for the first time, *see* it."³ In relation to art as dramatization, Richard Shusterman also notes that putting an event or story in the frame of a theatrical performance "sets the work apart from the ordinary stream of life and thus marks it as art."⁴ He speaks of dramatization as "the staging or framing of scenes" and recognizes the appropriateness of the French term *mis-en-scène*, often used as a synonym for framing or setting. This *heightening* aspect is a second important way the frame functions.

Shusterman's observation that dramatization provides a "greater vividness of experience and action"⁵ echoes Schapiro's earlier claim that the frame deepens the view of the object to be studied. Schapiro likens this phenomenon to that of a window frame through which a space may be seen beyond

¹ Schapiro, "On Some Problems," 9.

² Marin, "The Frame of Representation," 82. See also Duro, *The Rhetoric of the Frame*.

³ McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 29 (author's italics).

⁴ Shusterman, "Art as Dramatization," 367.

⁵ Shusterman, "Art as Dramatization," 368.

the glass. “The frame belongs then to the space of the observer rather than the illusory, three-dimensional world disclosed within and behind.”⁶ Thus, the frame not only encloses the artwork, it also shapes the way it is perceived. This *clarifying* function is a third aspect of the frame worth noting. It becomes evident when moving away from visual arts to a more inclusive analysis of framing as part of everyday communication and interaction. Erving Goffman claims framing is used to make meaning out of everyday experience as well as unusual events. Fantastical or ridiculous scenarios are accepted if we know that we are being told a joke or a fictional story. For the most part, according to Goffman, frameworks are intuitive. An individual “. . . is likely to be unaware of such organized features as the framework has and unable to describe the framework with any completeness if asked, yet these handicaps are no bar to his [sic] easily and fully applying it.”⁷

[A] The Importance of the Frame in Performance

In the area of performance studies, not a great deal of attention has been given to the frame. In many respects, it is taken for granted in the performing arts as well as the visual arts. The “proscenium arch” is the term given to the architecture of traditional theatre, where the audience is separated from the stage by the proscenium (“in front of the scenery” in Latin). The physical structure thus provides a frame for viewing and emphasizes the separation between performers and audience. But even where this traditional separation is breaking down, such as in the more audience-inclusive nature of Performance Art, little attention has been paid to the way in which shifts in the frame through which audiences view performance changes their perception of the content.⁸ Take the example of a woman posing as a model for a nude art class. During the drawing period the woman’s body is a tool, if not a work of art in itself. As the class breaks for refreshment or even merely a change of pose, the model’s nakedness is reframed through the change of context and she feels compelled to cover her nakedness

⁶ Shapiro, “On Some Problems,” 11.

⁷ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21.

⁸ See Spencer, “Disrupting the Boundaries.”

until the next pose is required. The art student, likewise, is implicated in the vulnerability implied by nakedness and would perhaps evidence responses ranging from embarrassment to lechery that would otherwise not be evident in the modeling session. Elizabeth Grosz speaks of spectators being “protected” from this vulnerability “when nakedness is contained within a frame.”⁹ Thus the clarifying function of the frame in performance is critical for audience perception.

Performance Art involves experimentation with the roles of performers and their audience. The breadth of experience can be seen from just a few examples. “Invisible Theater,” developed by Augusto Boal in Argentina as part of the Theater of the Oppressed, takes place in public spaces but aims to ensure the audience is ignorant of a theatrical event unfolding around them. Some artists have prepared installations or events where audience reaction is videotaped and placed on view as integral to the work. Experimental theatre characteristically draws audience members into the performance by asking them to participate in the action on stage or by being directly addressed by the performers. Each of these examples illustrates how the frame of the performance affects the way the work is perceived.

It is clear that both the composer of the artwork or theatrical experience and the audience member has a role in recognizing and interpreting the frame. A performer chooses the frame for presenting his or her work, and is constrained by the parameters of the form selected, but does have the freedom to manipulate the audience’s experience. An audience’s appreciation and understanding of the work will be enhanced by recognition of the frame in which it is presented.¹⁰

Shusterman’s essay alludes to all three functions of the frame that have been identified: its constraining function is seen in that it demarcates what is framed from the rest of life; its heightening function is seen in the way it highlights and intensifies reality; and its clarifying function is seen in the context it gives for viewing the work or experience. He says: “As Aristotle already adumbrated in his

⁹ Grosz, “Naked,” 216.

¹⁰ An audience may choose to view a work through a frame other than intended by the artist, however; a phenomenon shown clearly in the controversy over the Henson photographic works in Australia in early 2008. A promotional leaflet depicting a naked pre-pubescent female body was variously perceived as “art” or “obscenity” in the ensuing public debate.

theory of catharsis, art's frame permits us to feel even life's most disturbing passions more intensely, because we do so within a protected framework where the disruptive dangers of those passions can be contained and purged, so that neither the individual nor the society will suffer serious damage."¹¹

[A] Lament as a Frame

The preceding discussion of the concept of framing and its value in the arts suggests that it is worthwhile raising the frame to greater consciousness. The frame lifts an event or artwork from everyday life to allow it to be experienced in a heightened manner. When focusing on lament literature, an important by-product of this heightening aspect of framing is the empowerment of those who suffer by providing a structure to express what might otherwise remain inexpressible.

In defining lament as "frame," the work of Louis Marin provides a helpful analysis of the terminology used in three different languages to speak of "frames." The French word *cadre* refers to the border of wood or other material in which one places an artwork. The Italian *cornice* has architectural overtones as it also is used for the edge of a building. It implies protection or perhaps projection, nuances that are not seen in the French word. The English "frame" refers to the structural element of the artwork's construction as well as its final encasing – a canvas is stretched onto a frame in order to be prepared for the product. In relation to the latter, Marin states "rather than an edge or a border, rather than an edging ornament, [the frame] supports the substructure and the surface of representation."¹² The nuances inherent in the English word "frame" allows for the provision of an environment that supports and contains an artistic expression of anguish.

Form-critical studies of Biblical laments in a sense have identified the "frame" of the form by isolating a common structure and recognizing typical phrases across a variety of lament prayers.¹³

Typical laments include a direct address to Yahweh, a complaint, words that reassure the speaker,

¹¹ Shusterman, "Art as Dramatization," 370.

¹² Marin, "The Frame of Representation," 82.

¹³ The *qinah* rhythm, often cited as the characteristic poetic metre of lament, could also be viewed as a framing device (see Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 11).

motivation clauses for Yahweh to act, a petition for justice or vengeance and a vow of praise anticipating Yahweh's intervention.¹⁴ Such a frame is evident in the observation that of the many lament psalms, Psalm 88 is the only exception that does not end on a vow of praise or a note of hope. Although expressing the deep anguish of loss, sorrow, anger, pain and death, the laments nonetheless generally have a structure that leans towards trust and hope for newness.

The constraining function of the frame is most clearly evidenced in the alphabetic acrostic poetry that characterizes the lament literature of the book of Lamentations. Acrostic poetry is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Pss 9–10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Prov 31:10–31; Nah 1) but is striking in its concentration as the predominant form (with variations) that characterizes Lamentations. Of the five poems that make up Lamentations, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used as the foundation for each poem. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 are twenty-two verse stanzaic acrostics, chapter 3 is a fuller three-line sixty-six verse stanzaic acrostic and chapter 5 is a poem of twenty-two lines.¹⁵ Norman Gottwald argues convincingly that the predominant motivation guiding the aesthetic constraint of the use of alphabetic acrostics in the book of Lamentations was the metaphorical force of totality and completeness that it suggests: “Those who entertain this idea of completeness, therefore, instinctively feel that in naming the whole alphabet one comes as close as man may to a total development of any theme or the complete expression of any emotion or belief.”¹⁶

Gottwald is aware of the paradox of expressing deep emotion through a tightly controlled framework, evidence of the constraining function of framing, commenting that the “apparent contradiction between artificial literary form and spontaneity of emotion has attracted the attention of

¹⁴ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 64.

¹⁵ Note the inversion of the 'ayin-pe sequence in Lamentations 2, 3 and 4; an inversion that also occurs in the lament Ps 10 and the LXX of Prov 31:10–31 suggesting it is not a scribal error but, according to Will Soll, “of adherence to different ordering conventions.” See Soll, “Acrostic,” 59.

¹⁶ Gottwald, *Studies*, 29.

successive generations of commentators on Lamentations.”¹⁷ In his view, the function of the acrostic was “to encourage completeness in the expression of grief, the confession of sin and the instilling of hope.”¹⁸ Gottwald’s analysis suggests that there is a congruency between form and intention such that the constraint of the form made room for the possibility of new horizons: “The acrostic may have hampered an unfettered emotionalism but it has greatly enhanced the expression of controlled feeling . . . reflection has already begun to bring calm into the midst of wild and irrational grief.”¹⁹

[A] Framing Pain in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts

Before moving too quickly to this resolution that follows the exposure of grief, I think it is helpful to dwell a little longer on the use of the form to allow expression of overwhelming emotion.

Lamentations, while making extensive use of the lament form, also adapts it by minimizing positive features and expanding the complaints. Along with Gottwald,²⁰ Kathleen O’Connor recognizes that the third poem contains words of hope. But she also observes that the following two poems that return to the theme of despair and doubt reflect the “complex and uneven processes of coping with trauma in which hope flares up and fades.”²¹ Furthermore, since the voice of Yahweh is not one of the “multitude” of voices from many different perspectives, “the book honors voices of pain.”²² Cries of suffering and hopelessness are not denied.

O’Connor, along with others, stresses the importance of lament as a form of empowerment of the sufferer. Because lament is spoken into a pre-existing relationship between a believer and their God, it is a valid and necessary expression of faith when experience results in loss or pain. As O’Connor states: “The point of lamenting is not to confess sin . . . but to name injustice, hurt, and anger . . . Laments empower sufferers to speak for themselves . . . Naming suffering before God reclaims

¹⁷ Gottwald, *Studies*, 24.

¹⁸ Gottwald, *Studies*, 28.

¹⁹ Gottwald, *Studies*, 32.

²⁰ Gottwald, *Studies*, 30.

²¹ O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 14.

²² O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 15.

human dignity and power that has been trampled and violated . . . Laments are the beginning of action, a rejection of passivity, and so they can invert despair.”²³

In contemporary situations of crisis and pain this expression of lament provides a framework for those who are powerless to express their pain and in so doing to ensure that their plight is neither ignored nor minimized. Nancy Lee and Carleen Mandolfo have edited a book of essays entitled *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* in which established scholars of the Biblical lament literature engage in what Walter Brueggemann describes as the “critical” work of “connecting *ancient texts to contemporary crises*.”²⁴ These essays recognize the commonality of the lament genre across cultural contexts both ancient and modern as a means to express pain and suffering. Some authors in this volume make specific links between biblical laments and contemporary expressions of lament, and the remainder of this paper continues in a similar manner, connecting several “lament poems” written by young Karen refugees in a Thai-Burmese border camp in 2006 to their counterparts in the lament literature of the Hebrew Bible.

[A] Framing the pain of refugees

In 2006 I was privileged to spend a fortnight in the Mae La Refugee Camp on the Thai-Burmese border together with three other members of my church congregation, teaching an intensive program to a group of tertiary age students in the Bible School run by Rev Dr Saw Simon of the Karen (Kawthoolei) Baptist Church. The Karen made up a portion of the 50,000 Burmese refugees housed in the camp, one of several camps that nestle between the mountain range separating Thailand and Burma and Route 105 running north/south along the Western border of Thailand. Refugees housed in the camps have no passports and therefore are unable to travel beyond the camps. Many await visa applications to a third country such as Australia or Canada. The Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School was brought to the

²³ O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 128–29.

²⁴ Brueggemann, “Lament as Wake-up Call,” 236, author’s italics.

Refugee Camp along with Dr Simon in 1990 and is described by him as a “displaced Bible School.” Classes are taught in Karen, Burmese and English languages, depending on the origin of volunteer teaching staff. The Bible School functions partly to occupy these young people following the basic education they receive in UN schools in the camp since they are restricted from the usual opportunities open to young people. But there is also an intention to train these young Christians for mission and evangelism amongst their own and other people groups. Dr Simon was awarded the Baptist World Alliance Human Rights award in 2000 for his work amongst refugees, but was unable to travel to the World Congress in Melbourne as, like others in the camp, his own refugee status means he holds no citizenship and no passport.

While diligent and cooperative, I found the Karen students to be extremely shy and emotionally reserved, exemplified in discomfort with physical displays of affection and a lack of desire to linger over a meal, even on a special occasion. Despite connections with freedom-fighters and a daily hymn that exhorted “troops” and “leaders of troops” to revere God, the overall demeanor seemed more accepting than rebellious. Although most had left their homes in traumatic circumstances, citing burning villages, flight from Burmese soldiers and refuge in the forest before crossing the mountains to Thailand, their stories and experiences were told dispassionately. They cherished a hope that they would return to their country but waited with seeming unlimited patience for the more likely eventuality that they would be accepted as refugees in another nation.

Towards the end of the fortnight my Old Testament History class addressed the period of the Israelite exile. In an earlier sermon I had preached at one of the camp’s Baptist churches I had suggested that the story of the Exodus community at the end of the book of Deuteronomy resonated with the experience of the Karen, poised on the edge of the land they believed they had been given as an inheritance, but not able to cross over and reap its benefits. There were also obvious connections

with the exilic community at the other end of the Hebrew Bible: a community driven out of their land and forced to live as aliens in another land, yet holding onto their traditions and hopes for restoration.

As we studied the literature from the exilic period I gave the students an opportunity to make this connection for themselves. I asked them to write a lament poem, using their own experience as a basis. This was the last exercise of the class and it wasn't until after I had left the refugee camp that I read through their poems. As I did, I was staggered at the level of emotional outpouring that the poems evidenced. These quiet, reserved Karen students had been given a vehicle for expressing the pain of their experience and loss, and it was not until that moment that I had realized the depth of their passion and pain and their longing as displaced persons to return to their own place.

[A] Lamenting Loss – Resonances and Contrasts

Seven lament poems are reproduced in an appendix to this paper. Although varied and individual, the most common theme addressed is the loss of the Kawthoolei traditional land and the fervent hope for a return home to this land. The first two poems speak directly to a personified land, evoking the “city-lament” genre that seems to form the foundation of the book of Lamentations.²⁵ The students had been members of small rural communities rather than a large capital city, but the descriptions of the destruction of their land and resulting devastation of communities and starvation are stronger images than the suffering of individual illness or sense of abandonment.

Nancy Lee speaks of common oral traditional elements in lament poetry across wide cultural and time spans, including personification of the land and the use of natural vegetation as a metaphor for human suffering.²⁶ It is striking to notice these elements in the Karen laments: the first two poems speak to Kawthoolei as if to a suffering parent and Poem 6 refers to the land as a fragile flower. Like the ancient Israelites and the communities involved in the Balkan conflicts discussed by Lee, the Karen people live close to the land, so natural imagery is understandably reflected in the poems.

²⁵ See Hillers, *Lamentations*, and Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep O Daughter of Zion*.

²⁶ Lee, “The Singers of Lamentations,” 37.

Tod Linafelt, along with several other authors in the book edited by Lee and Mandolfo, speaks of laments as “survivor literature,” a characteristic of which is metaphoric and symbolic descriptions of suffering rather than precise reports of events: “. . . the book of Lamentations itself may be taken as an ancient example of survivor literature, a literature that is more about the *expression* of suffering than the meaning behind it, more about the contingencies of *survival* than the abstractions of sin and guilt, and more about *protest* as a religious posture than capitulation or confession.”²⁷

The Karen poems, too, are highly symbolic and provide a metaphoric rather than factual account. Writing this way heightens the emotional nature of the poems. This is an important observation in itself, given the habitual reticence of the Karen students in face-to-face encounters. As composers of survival literature they are freer to bring their pain to expression. According to O’Connor, the voice itself is a metaphor for action. Because pain leads to silence, “to acquire a voice means to gain identity, to come into the truth of one’s history, and to become a moral agent . . . voices are acts of survival.”²⁸ In the case of the Karen students, of course, it was the written voice that brought their pain to expression. In expressing their feelings, a greater sense of Karen identity is portrayed. The Karen poems are written as individual voices, but when read together provide a cohesive canvas of suffering and hope, not unlike the literature of Lamentations in which multiple voices are heard.²⁹ My home country of Australia has experienced protesting asylum seekers gathered on the roof of a detention facility pleading to be heard via large banners. Such desperate action underscores the fact that refugee voices are seldom publicly heard on their own terms. Those who successfully navigate our “systems” of immigration are usually expected to speak a language that is different to their own, both literally and figuratively, as they prepare application forms that may require creation of non-existent

²⁷ Linafelt, “Surviving Lamentations,” 62, author’s italics.

²⁸ O’Connor, “Voices Arguing About Meaning,” 28.

²⁹ See Boase, *The Fulfilment of Doom* for a discussion of the dialogic nature of Lamentations.

identity papers and so forth. In these laments the exiled voices of refugees are allowed to speak for themselves, although it must be ironically acknowledged that these poems were written in English.³⁰

Although the Mae La students were familiar with the Hebrew Bible traditions and had studied some lament psalms in class, only Poem 7 obviously borrowed from those traditions with its echoes of Psalm 137. The striking imagery of a bird trapped in a cage (Poem 2) might have been influenced by a lecture describing Sennacherib's attempted invasion of Judah, but I am more inclined to view it as coincidence. Yet despite the historical and geographical separation of the Israelite and Karen communities, there is a familiarity between the Karen poems and the laments of the Hebrew Bible arising from similar experiences of oppression and abuse. Three poems ask the typical "why?" questions of lament literature (see the second stanza in Poem 2, the last stanza in Poem 3 and the last part of Poem 7). Poem 7 ends with the words "How long?" – a phrase that is common in lament psalms.³¹ The Karen poems are mostly written in the first person voice, but their subject matter is communal rather than individual loss: the individual voice represents the pain of the entire displaced community.

Some end on a note of faith, like the majority of lament psalms (see Poems 3 and 5 especially). But the overriding impression one is left with when reading them is an unresolved longing to return to the homeland. Tod Linafelt speaks of the open-endedness of the book of Lamentations with its final unanswered questions (Lam 5:20–22), and, in contrast to many lament psalms, its "refusal to move to praise."³² A similar lack of resolution in the Karen poems reflects the seemingly irresolvable fate of the country of Burma that from time to time emerges in the consciousness of the Western media and

³⁰ Another irony that should be noted is that, despite their habitual reticence, the Karen people have a great love of singing and performance. While at Mae La I observed a sung rendition of Psalm 137, with words modified to fit their own context and sung in their own language, and found it also to be a performance full of pathos. Perhaps music is another frame that allows a fuller emotional expression. We have been reminded in other essays in this volume that laments across a variety of cultures are frequently sung or chanted.

³¹ See Pss 6:3, 13:1, 35:17, 74:10, 79:5, 80:4, 82:2, 89:46, 94:3, 118:84. Note also the lament flavour of the opening poem in the book of Habakkuk (1:2–4).

³² Linafelt, "Surviving Lamentations," 58.

conscience, but for the most part sinks back to oblivion as the world community throws up its hands and wonders if change will ever come.

Significant differences are also noticed when the Karen poems are contrasted with Hebrew Bible laments. They were written in the context of a “History of Israel” course in a Bible School, yet only one student included an invocation to God (Poem 7) and there was little complaining or accusations against God. In addition, the enemy that brought about destruction of their communities is largely absent from the poems – “the army” in Poem 4 and “SPDC”³³ in Poem 7 are the only references to a foe. One only gains a general sense of a land destroyed by war, suffering, poverty, hunger and persecution. Nor is there any real appeal to justice or retribution; or any sense of sin or penitence, but only a strong sense of wanting to return to what once was. A strong impression of innocent suffering is given in the poems. But one is not left with the sense that these Karen students are part of a “victim culture” resulting in powerlessness. Rather, their expression of pain and longing is a form of empowerment that affirms the value of their Kawthoolei land and culture, as well as their own self-worth, seen especially in the metaphor of a flower to be protected in Poem 6. Like many laments, Poems 4 and 5 portray an expectation that any future justice will include drawing on God’s power.

[A] Conclusion: The Connection between Ancient Texts and Contemporary Crises

This paper has discussed the importance of the lament as a frame for the expression of suffering by Karen refugee students. Of the three aspects of framing that were identified: constraining, heightening and clarifying; it is the heightening aspect that is most at work in these Karen laments. The opportunity to create a personal lament within the context of a Christian Bible School subject allowed latent emotions to be lifted into consciousness and set apart as worthy of expression. The heightening function is further seen in the empowerment of students to give voice, albeit in written form, to the pain

³³ SPDC is a reference to the State Peace and Development Council, a somewhat euphemistic name for the military regime of Burma which seized power in 1988.

of their loss and their longing for a future restoration. The poems evoke the ancient city-lament form employed by the book of Lamentations by highlighting a personified land that has been ravished and left bereft of her children. The contemporary crisis of an unjust military rule in Burma that has resulted in large refugee populations fearful of oppression in their home country can find some echoes in the lament literature of the Judeo-Christian faith. One only hopes that these connections do not remain purely academic exercises but contribute to the ongoing protest against political injustice and its resultant suffering and in the re-creation of hope for a better future.

[A] Appendix: Karen Lament Poems³⁴

[B] Poem 1. “My Beautiful Land”

Every night, in my dream I see you

Oh my beautiful land of Kaw Thoo lei

Wherever I go, wherever I live

I never forget you

Oh my beautiful land of Kaw Thoo lei

My tears shed for you every night

My heart aches for you every day

A land of war, a land of suffering

The woe of my people haunted me

³⁴ Where possible, the original authors of these poems have been contacted and permission has been gained to use the poems in this essay. All have now left Mae La Refugee camp and have been accepted as refugees in a variety of locations including Australia, USA, Canada, and Norway.

And the poverty appalled me
My tears can never run dry as long as you are
Without hope to a new life.

Though I am in foreign land
You are always in my heart and mind
Without you I am a wretch, and without you
I am a slave in foreign lands.

Oh my beautiful Kaw Thoo lei
How I miss you so much
And how I long to be in your bosom again
Oh my land of glory and my land of riches
I'll never forget you, and never forsake you
The land I love and ready to sacrifice my life,
A land called Kaw Thoo lei, a land of Karen people,
A land for the freedom fighter.

– Daughter of Kaw Thoo lei –

(Naw Tamla N'Ka Thwe Tun, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 2. “Back to you again”

From my youngest age I knew

I was with you, enjoyed my life in you

I love your beauty and your dignity

I thought you are the best of all

Never want to stay far from you.

Later I saw the flowing tears on your face

As a result of forced labors and intimidation

I said why, but no answer from you

Step by step you led me far from you

I thought and felt that you forsook me

But you express your love and hope to my future life.

You did not tell me what you suffer

And how you felt

I couldn't see you with my own eyes, so I followed what you appointed

But later I realized what is in you

And I can read your mind.

Sometimes the heart can see what is invisible to the eyes

Now I know how great is your love

So I decide to return to you

And stay with you till the end of my age

But you will keep me temporarily in Siam

As an asylum seeker in it
As a little bird in Siam cage
I long for you and receive your love again
When can I return to you oh my mother land!
Every week in my dream I tell you
Back to you again, back to you again.

(Saw Jonathan, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 3. “I search for peace”

How wealthy on my eyes
Once a very famous time
Now the poorest in the world
Now full of fighting and the curse

I search for peace where I went
Can no one answer me?
Yes, some people had answers
which does not really fulfill what I need.

Justice, peace, love and kindness
Should be in everyone’s mind
The most important way to build peace

Is the time when we really forgive!

Most people wandered all over the world

For this generation to survive

But some stay on this 'Land'

Persecution to be their friend.

And the question still goes on

Why have we been born to this fate!

Not by human strength could I answer

For only in God comes the PEACE to all life's questions.

(Khu Pwo, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 4. "I miss my home land"

I was born in a beauty land

Full of dignity and happiness

I wish to stay in our home forever

And I want to depart never.

The army entered my village

On a silent day.

Our fields were destroyed

And burnt the rice barn.

I was hungry

But no food to eat

I left my home land

Settled in another land.

I miss you every minute

Tears fall down on my feet

But still have hope

God will lead me home.

I miss my home land

Forever and never end.

I want to go back

To beautify our land again.

(Naw Htee Lah Hay Ku, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 5. “We are hungry”

We are like the orphans

Without the nature parents

No home, no food, and naked

We always feel hungry.

Since 1949 we seized peace

We struggled for our freedom

Like a river the blood-shed

For 57 years revolution.

Into four parts we're separated

Kawthoolei and Refugees

Some in Burma and to foreign countries.

The Karen's blood always reveals.

But we are sure that one day

Our stomach will be fulfilled

With the strength of sovereignty Lord

Because we based our hope on him.

(Winber, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 6. "My flower"

I'm holding a flower

The flower that I love

Hold it tightly in my hand

And will never let it fall.

If others take my flower
I will try to get it back
If others throw it away
Even tumble and wither
I will be picking it up
And put it into heart.

(Anonymous, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

[B] Poem 7. “A Smile with an Aching Heart”

Unlike an Israel girl in Babylon
I could raise my voice in Thailand
I sing with a smile.

Though I sang
My heart never reach gladness
‘Cause I smile without a heart
sang with an absent mind

I weep for her inside Karen State “Kaw Thoo Lei”
“She ran, ate, slept like animal
give birth to a baby boy in the jungle

a distance
not far away from home
the only thing that make her warm
was a 25 years old dirty blue blanket”

Kneeling down before Almighty

I cried,

“Why is it happen to her?

Why no enough clothes

and why SPDC chase her...

when she is innocent

without weapon

why no food nor milk

why not her home is hers...”

At last

“Why I couldn’t visit her?”

We are now in Mae La Temporary Shelter

“Temporary” means 16 years

I lift my eyes to you, O Lord

How long will I smile with an aching heart!

(Naw Hsar K’Nyaw Htoo, Mae La Camp, September 2006)

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