

# **LIVE TRUE LIFE OR DIE TRYING**

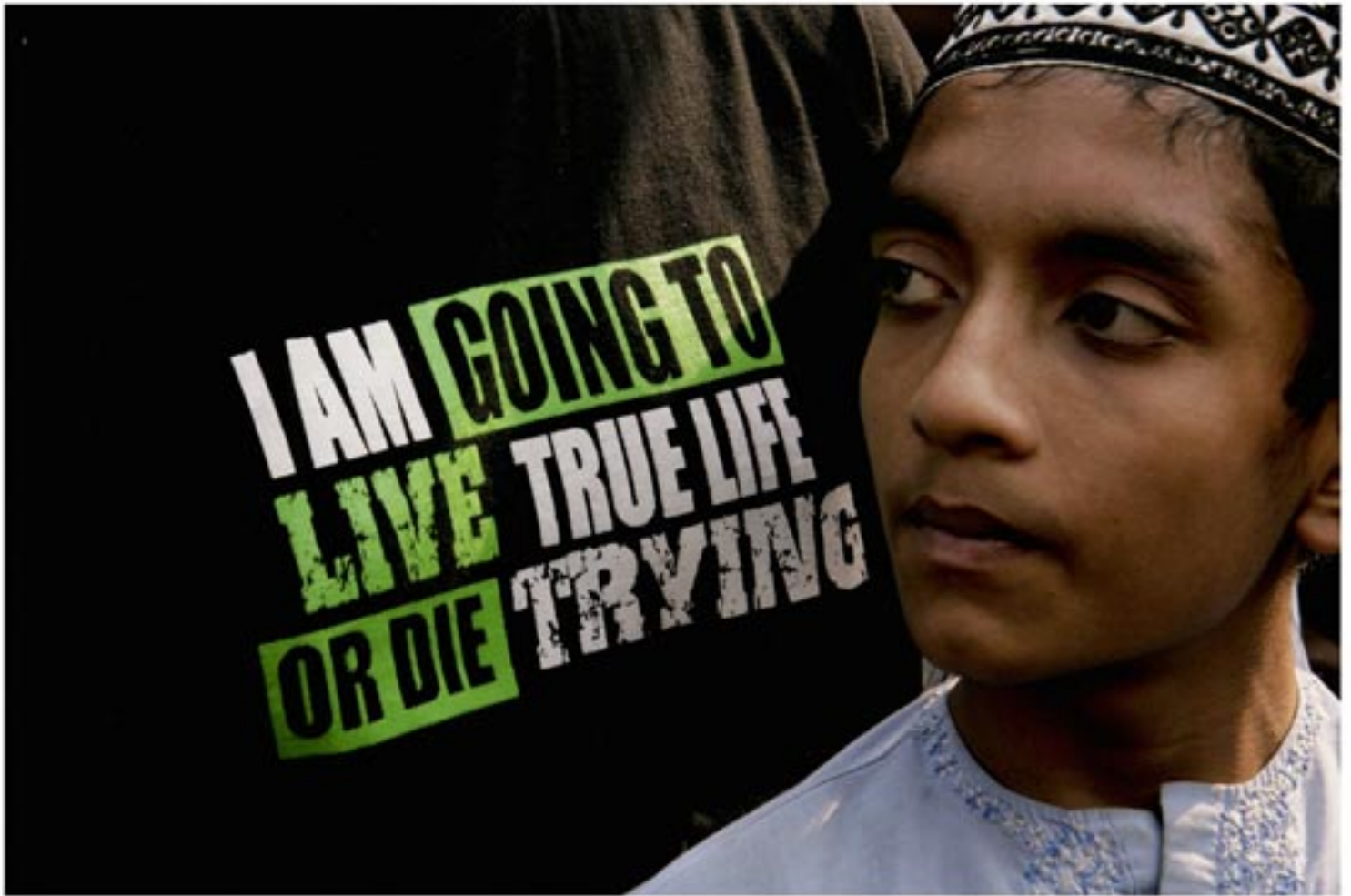
**Naeem Mohaiemen**

**Cue Art Foundation, New York  
Sep 10, 2009 - Oct 31, 2009**

**Laboral, Gijon  
Oct 22, 2009 - Apr 5, 2010**

**Shedhalle, Zurich  
Nov 6, 2009 - Jan 31, 2010**

**Experimenter, Kolkata  
Nov 18, 2009 - Jan 16, 2010**



**I send the uncropped image to Annu. She replies, sharp and quick, “Sometimes I feel you’re just selling stereotypes.”**

**The prayer cap is the sum of fears, nothing else pushes through. Somewhere, Fareed Zakaria is already composing the next Newsweek cover: “Why they still hate us”**

**I crop the head, now the memory is clean.**

**Later, the catalog designer writes, the proportions are wrong for their template. The t-shirt text keeps getting cropped. I go for a walk. When I come back, I mime resignation and send them the original image.**

**The cap stays in the picture.**



**I have filmed these “Islamist” rallies so many times before. But always from nearby rooftops: muffled, grainy, blurred. A cliché that the “ferocious mob” had to be captured from a distance.**

**This time, I went close, and the crowds parted. “Let photographer bhai through.” This felt like enthusiasm.**

**Without the shutter click, the performance has no audience. The BBC cameraman brusquely moved the mike away from a speaker’s mouth to get a much better shot.**

**Not a murmur.**

**My love, everything I do, I do for you.**





**On this day, I film the first rally while standing very still. Sharp attention, but no affection.**

**The second rally gets my gentle, moving, soft focus caress. A lover tries again, flower in hand.**

**Still, my camera stays tight. If I go wide, the tableaux will fray. Just outside the edges are other people: walking, talking, ignoring the rally, deaf to chants. No time for earnest causes.**

**Friday is for prayer, Friday is for shopping.**



**January 9th 2009, early afternoon**

**“Islamist”/Islamist**



**1:40pm The agency photographers arrived long before me. The best action shots are already in their can. I'm cursing myself for not bringing a spare battery. The sun is overhead. While I slowly screw around with aperture, the moments pass me by.**



**1:50pm Science fiction is not always future, it can be that which almost did happen, if not for our intervention. Somebody has spread the rumor that Bangladesh will lead a UN peacekeeping mission in Iraq. The rally now has a focus, our army can't be part of a "slave mission." Whether it's true or not is beside the point.**





**2:00pm A dreamy or layered day for the tailor. 50 cent, on tile mosaic, on Daud star. The omnivore is always starving inside, and no one knows why.**

**A girl flirtatiously says, “I’m looking for a handsome boy to be with. But it seems every boy is prettier than me. That won’t work.” Candyshop.**



**2:15pm A small scuffle breaks out. One of the photographers is pushed. I get irritated, but I don't quite understand why. I yell at someone, "Don't push, without us you're nothing." He turns and stares me down, and then says, "I don't know who sent you, but we're not here for dirty politics."**

**I'm intimidated into silence. I want him to be a fake, but he's not. Why not?**



**2:30pm A sort of senior police officer asks which newspaper I'm with. When I tell him, I'm with no one, in fact I am no one, he relaxes.**

**"Why are you here then?" and without waiting for my answer, he continues, "Tell me what government wants us to do? Do they expect us to beat them?"**





**2:35pm A few months back, during a hot discussion of Diploma's milk ad (withdrawn after protests over the milky, licking mouth), we heard the phrase "coyf porn." Now, as I select images, I keep recalling that word.**

**The other photo in this series (the one I won't show you), with this boy in full war cry, is a coyf shot for journalists.**

**The other photo in this series, where this boy is in full war cry, is a coyf shot for journalists.**



**2:38pm I'm wondering who I betrayed to come to this moment. I'm out of my body again. A large flat book is tamping down the edges of a print. A few hours of this and it will be ready for the framer.**

**The collector first pinned butterflies, and then people. One was practice.**





**2:40pm I definitely got here a little too late. The burning ritual is over, and I'm snapping residue from the fire.**

**Nothing to see here, nothing significant now. Everyone is leaving. And nobody has, I feel sure about this, rescued a book and hidden it under their coat.**



**2:50pm They call me over, stand in a line, and ask me to shoot. The tallest boy writes his address on a piece of paper and hands it over.**

**I have done this so many times, but I know I will never mail the pictures. There's a breakdown in my intention. I still owe a flag seller photos from last December. I met him on Independence Day.**

**January 9th 2009, late afternoon**

**“Leftist”/Leftist**





**4:30pm University campus. The second rally of the day. Now familiar faces, back in my zone. I want to tell them, that the Islamist rally was so much bigger. The mullahs have us on the run, neither history nor crowds are on our side.**

**But there's no time for analysis, there never is. We start to march, and my hand shakes a little. Just at the beginning.**



**4:40pm While we shout into megaphones, the Djuice ad's rock boy sings into his mike, taunting us. A billboard designed by Bitopi, whose director always jokes with me "what pinko-commie event did you attend today?" He moved here from West Bengal. Like all former residents of communist states, he has a gene coding to be critical about utopia.**

**Did something similar happen to Chris Marker? Love curdled into sad regret. Perhaps we all need a cat named Guillaume to keep us sane.**





**4:55pm The chants get sharper with each repetition. My land, my mother. Won't let it be Somalia. My land, my mother. Won't let it be Iraq. My land, my mother. Won't let it be Liberia. The list goes on, and then someone throws in Rwanda.**

**Rwanda? It itches at me for the rest of the afternoon.**



**4:58pm Some people are falling behind. The procession is starting to sag.**

**Oh, you're on the phone, got a clear line at last? I'm doing this and I'm doing that and I'm trying to make some girl and she says baby come back next week can't you see we're on a losing streak.**



**5:10pm A few months later, former allies will clash. Chavez has spoken on Iran, the left is in instant confusion. We shadow box each other on facebook— pasting in yet another article, the tyranny of references. I will flood you out.**

**Still, in the 1970s, these arguments would lead to factions, turf war, maybe murder. Now, it's only words. When the argument gets hot, he says this is why the British were able to stay “extra hundred years” in India. Because of you traitors. Mir Jafars. I think he means me.**





**5:25pm Something totally unexpected. What's whitey doing in my shot? The fourth wall is broken.**

**Later I find out he is a visiting Nordic journalist. Of course he is. The Euro left's penchant for third world action. You people, your history, your food...**



**5:20pm These days, the Islamists have the brightest graphics: an eagle grabbing the map, slow red bleeding across plains and rivers. The wings with Gandhi's wheel on the left, stars and stripes on the right.**

**And here we have... a widowmaker effigy in boring, dour brown**





**5:30pm The words on the effigy have not changed much in four decades. There are still warmongers, still imperialism.**

**Someone miscalculated how flammable this hay was. The fire shoots out of control immediately. Organizers push everyone back, if that thing falls on someone, game over. But the photographers are a nuisance, creeping forward to fire a final round.**



**5:40pm The flames flicker and lick, slowly things settle down. We pack up, remove barricades and let traffic back into the campus. Shoppers look relieved, lovers made good use of the delay. Soon the roads are back to the usual chaos flux.**

**No lives were saved today, but maybe a butterfly wing flapped. I want to go home and scan the photos. Freeze some tears. But first, we should get a bite to eat. I'm hungry, are you?**



[Video Wall]



**The old man:**

**You think just because you won the vote, you can give  
any gas bloc you like to America?**

**If you think this is land of do as you please, the people  
will show you again, how we do as we please.**

**The young man:**

**Go back Moriarty/Go back Washington**

**Go back Tullow/Go back Ireland**

**And Leela sings:**

**What do you call love, and what is our history**

**The stink of bullets, or fragrance of flowers**

**A river of blood, protests or stormy weather**

**The undertaker carries names of the newly dead**

**Behind and ahead a curtain of white**

**You rip through its heart, lost hero of history**

**Light breaks the limit of its own nature**

**And chokes at last at your feet**

**Which hand grasps flower, which a weapon**

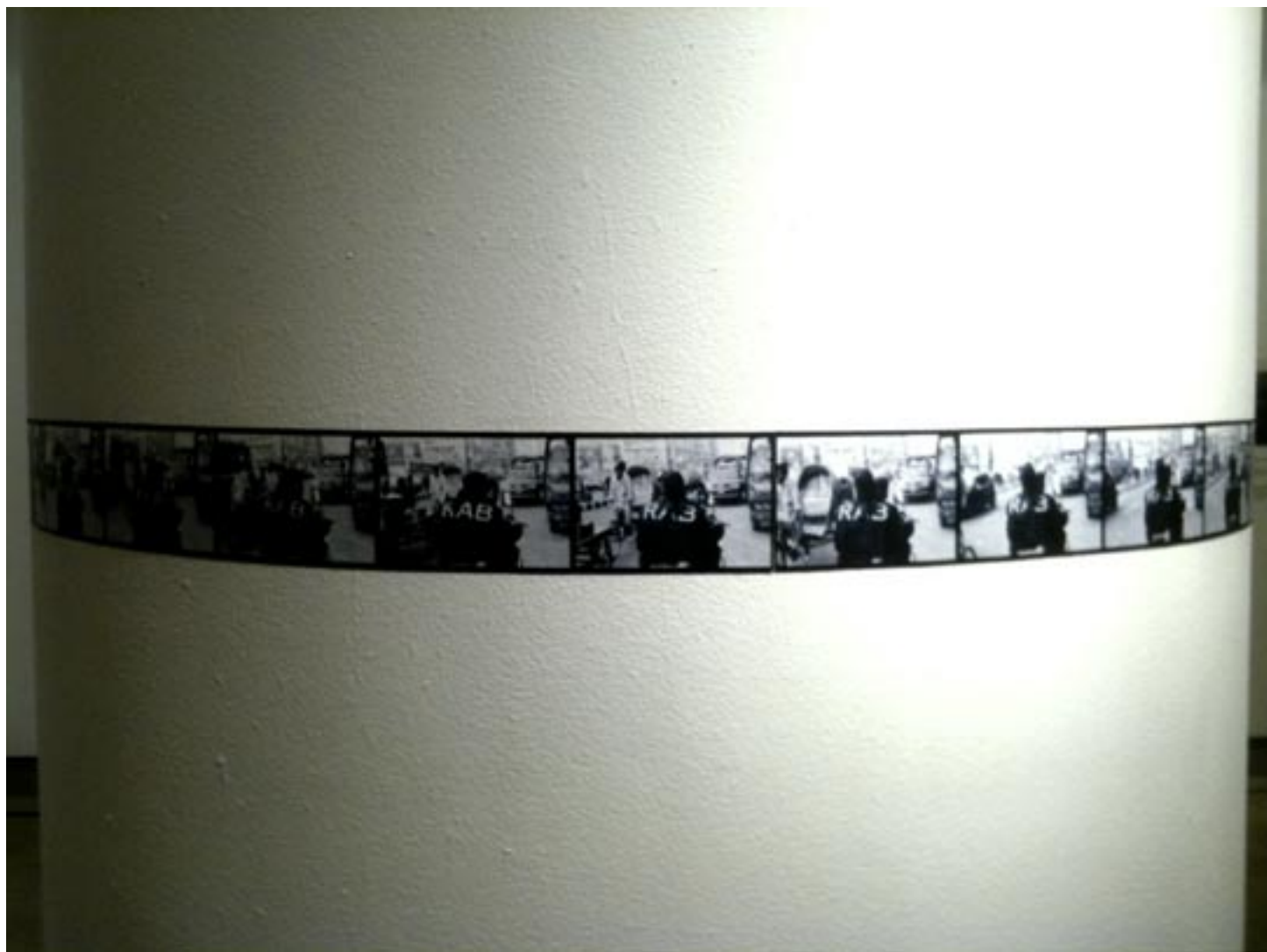
**Hero, look ahead, a dust storm descends**

**I want that impulse, the dance of light**

**I have sown, now I reap a harvest in war**

**Rising tide of life for all our tomorrows**

**After a bitter festival we find beauty at last**





**in the first nine months of 2009, 28 people were killed by elite force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), another 41 by Police, and 21 in RAB-Police joint ops. Army, Ansar, Jail Police and Forest Guard together were responsible for only 7 deaths. Another 20 died in “safe custody”.**

**So then, heavy police presence at the first rally, a mark of respect, protection, honor, or complicity. How should dusk rally feel? Insulted, neglected, spurned.**

**I feel relieved.**



