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# Notes from a Firefly.

*The reality of Isarn woman in the cross-cultural space.*

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An extended essay presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the post-graduate degree of Master of Fine Arts

At Massey University, Wellington, Aotearoa.

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Nara-Ratch Poa Boontoum

To my dearest

Universe, Families, Teachers and Friends.

This journey can never come so far without your guidance and support.

Thank you so much for never giving up on me,  
for always believing and have faith in me.

I am just a tiny point of light.

The web that we weave together have made my world so bright.

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*My Name is Poa Boontoum*

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*Kwan Aye Kwan Ma.....*

*Kwan Yu Sai Nor Yark Si Hai Por Yai Mae Yai Tarm Tid Gun Mar...*

*Mar Peng Kwan Peng Jai Hai Koi Nae Der.....*

*Aye.....*

An elder called across the open room of my grandmother's house, where his voice filled the interior. Also inside and spilling out into the courtyards that were village elders, families and friends who had gathered for the Su Kwan ceremony. Following the call, prayer began where their collective voices become one aural vibration. For me, in that moment, I became aware of the spaces as more than physical, but that also the presence of a non-physical dynamic. The Su Kwan ritual was deeply moving, for the sense of shared spirit and belonging and the feeling that the blessing will remain within me where ever I go in the world.

This transformatory experience occurred for me in 2013, when I returned to my family homelands in Sisaket, a town in the Northeast province of Thailand. This gave me a sense of grounding, of community and also the surety of my identity as an immigrant and photographer in an international context.

## สวัสดิ์ค่ะ, สะบายดี

ฉันชื่อ นางสาว นารารัตต์ บุญท้วม (ปอ)

ฉันเป็นคนไทย เชื้อสายอีสาน

ด้าน เป็นแผ่นดินเกิดของแม่ฉัน

แม่ห้ามูล เป็นแม่ห้าของฉัน

แม่ใหญ่ จัน เชื้อคำ เป็นบรรพบุรุษของฉัน

บ้านด้านคือหมู่บ้านของบรรพบุรุษของฉัน

พ่อของฉัน นาย สุรินทร์ บุญท้วม เป็นคน ไทยเชื้อสายมอญ-จีน มาจากจังหวัด ราชบุรี

แม่ของฉัน นาง ปราณี เชื้อคำ เป็นคนไทยเชื้อสายลาว-อีสาน มาจากจังหวัด ศรีสะเกษ

ฉันมีภูมิใจที่ได้รู้จักบรรพบุรุษของตัวเอง ฉันภูมิใจที่เกิดเป็นลูกอีสาน ลูกมอญ ลูกครึ่งจีน เพราะสิ่งเหล่านี้

ทำให้ฉันรู้ที่มาของตัวเองว่าฉันเป็นใคร.

*My name is Nara-Ratch Poa Boontoum*

*I come from Thailand.*

*My Land is Darn*

*My river is Mun.*

*My ancestor is Yai Jun Cheuakhum*

*My tribes are Darn.*

*My father 'Surin Boontoum' comes from Ratchaburi Provinces.*

*My mother 'Pranee Boontoum' comes from Sisaket Provinces.*

*I am proud to celebrate the being of who I am.*

This is my 'mihi', reflecting a Maori protocol to acknowledge my ancestors, my land and my people, to introduce who I am, where I come from. Like the mihi, this paper marks, my journey that uncovers a sense of my own identity and knowledge that is informed from re-appraising my work, created within a mainstream academic context as I draw from aspects of an Indigenous worldview and methodological framework. This mihi leads my research project as an Indigenous Thai-Isarn immigrant, who has settled in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the medium of photography an exploration of one's own identity as what it means to be an immigrant and an indigenous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century influenced by multi ethnic cultures that inform one's own sense of hybrid identity. This research project is a personal relational-based experience that is located within a post-colonial context. The body of this essay will reveal the theme of indigenous being, identity and gender. Nineteenth century historical references and contemporary context of colonial and postcolonial theoretical discourse and the work of key artists will interweave through the writing.