

# **Generation Rising**

**A New Politics of Southeast  
Asian American Activism**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Refugee Resistance

*Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.<sup>1</sup>*

In the late 1990s, I directed a community organization that ran after-school programs for low-income Vietnamese American youth, grades 5 through 12, in Oakland, California. I noticed an insidious pattern of youths and their relatives entangled in the criminal justice system and then "disappearing." A lawyer on our board of directors represented one of these cases, and they informed me that Vietnamese and other refugees from Cambodia and Laos who did not have United States citizenship were being detained after they served their time. Based on the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, these youth were targeted for mandatory deportation, but they were being detained indefinitely since the United States did not have repatriation agreements with those countries.<sup>2</sup>

On March 22, 2002, the United States State Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.) with Cambodia's Ministry of Interior to allow for repatriations—a euphemistic term for deportations—and entered into similar negotiations with Viet Nam and Laos.<sup>3</sup> This agreement rendered over 10,000 Southeast Asians in the United States vulnerable to removal from the country that had offered them refuge in the aftermath of the American War in Southeast Asia, commonly referred to in the United States as the Viet Nam War.<sup>4</sup> The majority of people immediately impacted by the M.O.U. were refugees who had come to the United States as childhood arrivals, teenagers, or young children, and had been survivors of the American War in Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam between 1954 and 1973. For many Southeast Asian Americans who grew up in the United States, the fundamental claims to this country and refugee families' sacrifices in migration were at stake.

Then, in the summer of 2002, I represented an all-volunteer organization as one of twelve Southeast Asian American-based organizations nationwide at the offices of the Youth Leadership Project in the Bronx, New York.<sup>5</sup> The three-day retreat included: 1) Southeast Asian American (SEAA) activist youth groups that had begun in the late 1990s into the early 2000s; 2) Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) that were originally created for refugee resettlement in the 1970s and 1980s; and 3) grassroots leftist groups from the Asian American Movement (AAM) that emerged in the 1960s. One purpose of the gathering was to strategize about how to

educate our constituent communities and respond to the deportation of Southeast Asian refugees. We were familiar with the typical format of professional meetings and excited to share information and engage in political discussions.

On the first day, we started late after awaiting a new group called Providence Youth Student Movement, or PrYSM, to drive in from Providence, Rhode Island. We had spent the morning in intellectual discussions intended to give context to the strategic planning for the rest of the retreat. Around lunchtime, as we all gathered in a circle on the floor of the main room, five carloads of people arrived led by two men, PrYSM founders Sarath Suong and Kohei Ishihara. In walked twenty-five young, male, formerly incarcerated and former gang members—they completely shifted the room dynamics. The majority of activists present were college-educated and trained organizers. It dawned on me that despite all our “radical” thinking, the retreat’s esoteric language, format, and content was going to marginalize and silence the very people we claimed to be developing as leaders. When they sat down with us, I realized that in all the years I had been working in Oakland, this was what social justice really looked like: everyday people who had been directly impacted by systemic oppression developing their collective power to create social change. By the end of the retreat, with leadership from PrYSM, our organizations formed the Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN), a national coalition of Southeast Asian American youth-based groups that laid the groundwork for the first Southeast Asian American youth movement for social justice that began in 2002.

In this book, I demonstrate that regardless of the state’s liberal-minded attempts to resettle refugees, its contradictory policies of neglect and surveillance failed many of them, along with other communities of color. The critical intervention of PrYSM for refugee children and the children of refugees sharply contrasts those official governmental agencies responsible for refugee resettlement. While government agencies and local institutions served as social service providers or regulators of social control, PrYSM provided the socio-cultural needs of young people in ways that simultaneously gave them a sense of self, belonging, pride, and empowerment. In doing so, they centered the priorities of SEAA youth to build new generations of leaders for a social movement that emphasized on their lived experiences as well as their strengths and collective power.



*Figure 1.1. PrYSM Gang Truce BBQ, 2002 (Courtesy of PrYSM Archives).*

### Subverting Dominant Narratives of Southeast Asian Americans

Between the mid-1970s and 1980s, a dominant narrative emerged in the research on Southeast Asian refugees in the United States based on Cold War discourse.<sup>6</sup> The arrival of the first two cohorts of refugees after the American War in Southeast Asia incited a body of publications documenting their escape from perilous, traumatic experiences and ending with their arrival in the United States. Anthologies of testimonials pieced together migration narratives offering an archive rich with testimonials, but those collections were often spliced into a master narrative that situated refugee flight within a Cold War discourse of fleeing Communism. Consequently, refugee resettlement was analyzed only to the extent that their economic progress could be measured as a signifier of successful assimilation to justify the unpopular decision by the government to resettle the largest refugee population since WWII.<sup>7</sup>

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, social scientists shifted their focus from refugee resettlement to the assimilation process for 1.5- and second-generation adolescent youth. Yet widespread conflation of the cultural and social infrastructure of these ethnic groups created a binary in social science analysis between the refugee youth and other East Asians, where 1.5-generation adolescent youth, or youth who arrived in the United States as adolescents, struggled to assimilate compared to their second-generation, or American-born, counterparts. Scholars have attributed these differences in socioeconomic mobility among Asian Americans to the cultural environment of resettlement and lack of adherence to the positive cultural values based in Confucianism, which is a problematic fallacy that invokes the model minority myth.<sup>8</sup> This narrative continues to dominate social science research on SEAA youth, and directly influences policy and philanthropic approaches to the communities and organizations that target cultural preservation and individual behavioral change rather than systemic failures to meet the needs of these youth.

In the wake of the World Trade Center tower bombings on September 11, 2001, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) engaged in increased immigration sweeps but did not provide families, advocates, or even lawyers with basic information, such as the whereabouts of individual detainees, and the hearing dates or dates of deportation flights. Through the high concentration of information-gathering and information-sharing among families and loved ones in the physical space of PrYSM and other youth groups, moreover, community members gained invaluable knowledge of detention and deportation that would be the foundational research for a national campaign. Through the process of information sharing between families, these youth organizations simultaneously built the trust and leadership of community members who had too often been neglected by Mutual Aid Associations (MAAs) that provided social services to Southeast Asian refugees.

### The Evolution of Asian American Activism

These re-framings of Southeast Asian American communities and scholarship did more than challenge the inequities of power hierarchies. The stories revealed intersectional identities of race, class, and sexual orientation that occupied a new terrain in social movements. In doing so, PrYSM and other progressive Southeast Asian American youth groups have charted a unique path to develop new voices and leaders. They mark a new period in Asian Pacific American activism and in Southeast Asian American studies since the American War in Southeast Asia between 1954 and 1975, and subsequent refugee resettlement between 1975 and the mid-1990s.

The post-9/11, anti-immigrant climate also galvanized the first critical mass of Asian American activists for the Millennial generation on a national scale, and arguably a transformative shift in the dominant narrative of the Asian American Movement (AAM), which embeds its foundation within the period of the anti-Viet Nam War Movement, and for which it allied with Vietnamese calls for self-determination.<sup>9</sup> The Millennials and post-Millennials<sup>10</sup> involved in PrYSM has been central in the renaissance of progressive activism that is emblematic of the 1960s. They represented the unique perspectives of refugee children, both as childhood arrivals and the U.S.-born children of refugees fleeing Communism from Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam.

To be clear, this book does not aim to create a comparative analysis between the Asian American Movement of the 1960s through the 1970s to the contemporary movement. I also recognize the multiplicity of campaigns, movements, advocacy, and activism that has evolved and shaped Asian Pacific America since the early years of AAM. Through this book, I emphasize the unique relationship between the early years of AAM and today's SEAA activists through the historical lineage that both found life: the American War in SEAA and its aftermath, and how this history has been articulated as a historiography of radicalism that centered the war *without* the refugees that arrived on these shores with divergent politics than the dominant narrative of the war espoused by the Asian American Left as articulated in the canon of this literature. That lineage extends to this moment in the centering of a radical refugee positionality that holds both a critical politics of this early generation of activists and the reality of war, imprisonment, torture and starvation that inform the anti-communism of many in SEAA communities. This book does not try to ignore the decades of activism in between; rather, I point to the unique relationship between the early radicalism and this generation of leaders and the ways in which they carry on the lineage of the elders—including their ancestors—with whom they find inspiration in the movement. While carrying this lineage, I argue they also carry the burden that has been bestowed on them as a "gift" to be honored in their embodiment of both co-ethnic refugee and Asian American Movement elders.

When Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) formed to support refugee resettlement in the late 1970s and 1980s,<sup>11</sup> their priorities of refugee survival were often at the expense of many childhood arrivals living in what Tang (2015) refers to as the "hyperghetto," the cycles of government neglect and over-surveillance.<sup>12</sup> Some MAA leaders forsook those in the community who did not aspire to embody the model minority stereotype—they were ostensibly either poor reflections of the entire community or "too Americanized" because they had lost their roots and adopted negative

behaviors associated with American youth. Sometimes the neglect of newer refugees were remnants of class differences carried over from Southeast Asia. Regardless, this rejection of later cohorts ultimately ostracized many working-class youth whose families often arrived in later cohorts with fewer governmental safety nets.

Since 2000, MAAs have faced a crisis of relevance as the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and other funding sources have turned toward new refugee populations from South America, Africa, and other countries in Asia to support refugee resettlement and integration, thus diminishing the allocation of funds for MAAs involved with Southeast Asian refugee resettlement. These bureaucratic choices symbolize the arbitrary markers of timelines and compassion fatigue to determine when the Southeast Asian refugee should be integrated and no longer considered a refugee.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, MAAs had to search for new funding sources and justifications for their continued existence. As SEAFN began organizing against deportation, it offered an opportunity to sustain the viability and relevance of the MAAs through increased attention from private funders and media.

*Generation Rising* documents PrYSM's participation in national and local organizing coalitions such as SEAFN between 2002 and 2017. This project is in dialogue with other movements of young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)—spanning #BlackLivesMatter, Undocumented and Unafraid, and more—about the state of social movements in the United States with regard to generational shifts in leadership and the predicaments of social justice movements in relation to the non-profit industrial complex, the “entrenched set of relationships [between organizations, state, and private funders] that maintains relationships of power and fails to address issues of structural inequality.”<sup>14</sup>

The term “non-profit industrial complex” emerged in the early 2000s with the proliferation of nonprofit organizations in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> They were the private, institutionalized response to diminishing state service providers since the 1980s and professionalization of the social movements of the 1960s. The non-profit industrial complex consists of grant makers, including government agencies, large family and corporate foundations, independent small foundations, and individual donors, and non-profit organizations that function as subcontractors who implement smaller grants from these large donors, or groups that receive grants directly from these donors. These identities may overlap for any individual organization; for example, an organization may give out grants from money they received from a large foundation, and they may be direct recipients of other grants. These donors, foundations, and non-profits have constituted the majority of political, social service, and youth organizations in the United States

since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> This web of networks and individual power brokers control the resources of funding sources and the actors who serve as gatekeepers between funders and communities. The term non-profit industrial complex carries a negative connotation because of the increasing influence and control of funders in the daily operations, political activities, and long-term vision of the grantees. It has also been used to reference the co-optation of the more radical vision of past movements, such as AAM, to become career pathways and organizations that follow corporate models of management rather than the grassroots mission and working-class-centered leadership of the movements in which many of these organizations became rooted.<sup>17</sup> The power relations within the complex remain a contested site for the small grassroots organizations within SEAFN, including PrYSM, throughout *Generation Rising*.

PrYSM embodies the collective identity of contemporary SEAA youth activists through their organic expressions of political power; a development of a new cadre of movement leadership; and their contradictory relationship to older, more established organizations and funders. In *Generation Rising*, I illustrate how PrYSM engages with those three categories of organizations in its journey to find its identity and determine its positionality within the movement. This web of organizations in this book represents a microcosm of the non-profit industrial complex. Older Asian American groups have occupied two different positions within the non-profit industrial complex. MAAs, which were sustained through subcontracts of federal grants for refugee resettlement, became a product of a wave of philanthropy in the 1990s that promoted the hierachal, patron-client model for non-profits, whereby service providers, or patrons, offer specific kinds of assistance in short-term, transactional exchanges to alleviate a narrow problem for the client. Conversely, the client offers allegiance and validation of the patron's power and even identity. The client and patron model fluctuates continually throughout their relationship as an implicit negotiation of power, influence, and exchange of resources.<sup>18</sup> This model provides the groundwork to the relationships among the categories of groups discussed in this book.

Funders are organizations that provide financial and technical resources to non-profit organizations and often request deliverables to justify their financial investment. These may include enumerating outcomes of programs or activities, attendance, and outreach numbers, budgets of spending, success or impact measurements of campaigns, as well as meeting or adjusting to meet grantmakers' evolving funding priorities. Since these entities have the reputation of being staffed by college-educated, predominantly white, upper-middle-class professionals, grassroots, working-class non-profits have often characterized them as inaccessible or unapproachable.

Another category of organizations are the non-profits with deep roots in AAM as defined by earlier Asian American Movement scholars. These are groups that tend to have founders who were active in progressive organizations during the 1960s and 1970s as student or youth activists. Although the founders themselves may come from working-class backgrounds and have radical visions for social change, the organizations' evolution to professionalize their volunteer work into larger institutions as non-profits that provide services to broad swaths of people had the incidental consequence of narrowing the political mission of their services and staff. Consequently, they have created either corporate-like structures of management and operations, or attempted to maintain informal, volunteer-based management styles that were no longer realistic for the size of the organizations. Some of these organizations have also become subcontractors of grants, blurring their roles as both patrons and clients.

Recent transitions over the past fifteen years have led to increasing numbers of college-educated, middle-class Vietnamese Americans hired into established organizations and former staff moving into grantmaking organizations. As non-profit organizations formed by co-ethnic Southeast Asian refugees to assist with refugee resettlement since the 1970s, MAAs remain largely social service-oriented groups staffed by first- and 1.5-generation immigrants and refugees who tend to be bilingual and live within their co-ethnic communities. Although not many of these groups originally had grantwriting skills or social capital in the private grantmaking world, some have adapted by hiring staff who had received their college education in the United States or have subcontracted professional grantwriters who receive a percentage of each funded grant. The majority of SEAA MAAs nationally have been in a precarious state due to decreased government funding and lack of support from private funders.<sup>19</sup> PrYSM belongs to the category of new SEAA-based youth organizations that represent a merger between the social service and activist-oriented groups who are still developing their own characteristics and negotiating their relationships with these other three categories of influencers.

*Generation Rising* explores the impact of the pressures inherent in the non-profit structure manifested in PrYSM as they underwent changes in organizational culture, campaign priorities, and staff turnover after the group achieved 501(c)3 (non-profit) status.<sup>20</sup> In general, MAAs had been reticent to participate in any political activities and later viewed groups like PrYSM as radical outliers of the community. On the other hand, members of the earlier generations of activist groups had more diverse roles in the non-profit industrial complex. They occupied multiple positions within that web of relationships, spanning program officers for funders to social service providers within the non-profits. Through PrYSM, activist groups

that transitioned into non-profit organizations found themselves restricted by the existing power relations with funders and funder-driven agendas at the expense of social justice ideals. Kwon (2013) refers to this set of relationships as the "funder-fix," whereby "nonprofit youth organizations, charged with developing and improving the life chances of 'at-risk' youth of color, are imbricated to neoliberal policies and reconfigurations of civil society that aim to manage and regulate the production of moral economic actors who are receptive to opportunities for self-empowerment and community governance."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the funder-fix serves as a social control to structural change that would revolutionize existing power differentials. It leaves the work of social justice actors constrained to the parameters of reform that relieves, not upends, the institutional hierarchies in which the web of funders and organizations are complicit.<sup>22</sup>

### Political Indebtedness: From Refugee to Revolutionary

SEAA Millennials and post-Millennials like those in PrYSM have become entrenched in a discourse of political indebtedness. Mimi Thi Nguyen refers to the "gift of freedom" as a neoliberal relationship characterized by the debt of war and, by extension, freedom as "a revenant, a ruin, a reminder of what has been lost—but debt is also a politics of what is given in its place."<sup>23</sup> Nguyen refers to the contradictory role the United States played in both creating the circumstances of the refugee situation during war and its claim that it is the "savior" of those same refugees. That claim inevitably reconstructs the plight of refugees and their resettlement in the United States as one of indebtedness for refugees. The debt of war, like its memory, takes root in intergenerational transference sometimes too intricate to untangle. I interpret the notion of debt as a power relationship between the person with the power to give as a unidirectional act on its surface, while implicitly expecting reciprocity through loyalty, political alliance, or behavior that benefits the giver in reputation, legacy, or material outcomes. The generational burden of the immigrant experience, whereby the sacrifices of co-ethnic elders, manifested in the MAAs, embodies the role of refugee parents who sacrificed their own lives for the betterment of the family. In essence, the debt of war assumes the symbolic and discursive articulation of the patron-client dynamic that frames the relationships between SEAA youth groups, established Asian American groups, and funders.

In the context of social movement, 1.5-, 1.8- (who migrated as pre-adolescents), and second-generation Southeast Asian refugee children inherited that "gift of freedom" as a burden of political indebtedness to their Asian American mentors, who developed refugees' critical analysis of their social situation and taught them skills for organizing.<sup>24</sup> SEAA organizers

needed to navigate between competing ideologies of progressive Asian American activist groups and their co-ethnic elders in the MAAs. Older Asian American activists perpetuated the legacy of an anti-imperialist past and refugee narratives of anti-Communism in its narrative framing against deportation. MAAs used Communism in current Southeast Asian countries as the justification to not send their community members back to those authoritarian regimes. In turn, the SEAA youth constantly negotiated these dualistic loyalties toward activist elders and co-ethnic communities in trying to express their personal and political identities. The youth activists in *Generation Rising* found themselves resisting the burden to perform the role of the indebted refugee victim in order to be legible to some Asian American leaders and funders that would sustain the normative paternal relationship between funders and grantees.

Young SEAA progressives have chosen to shift the public narratives of their collective identity to construct their own political movement. The intra- and inter-ethnic tensions that manifested in PrYSM's story illuminate the generational, class, and ethnic clashes and collaborations that face this generation of activists. Their resistance symbolizes the interwoven legacy of past social movements with a concrete rejection of the established organizations' embeddedness in the non-profit industrial complex. This new iteration of the movement locates itself at crossroads of what Schlund-Vials describes in her analysis of Cambodian refugee youth culture as "a legible set of refugee coordinates that identifies distinct points of U.S. foreign policy, modern Cambodian history, and contemporary Cambodian American survivor memory."<sup>25</sup> Her astute theorization of Cambodian American experiences informs my map of that transitional moment in Asian American Movement history as it relates to Cambodian American youth and their collective identity formation. Southeast Asian American youth groups across the country like PrYSM see themselves as an extension of a collective refugee experience in the discourse of U.S. foreign policy and refugee resettlement.

I assert that this generation's refugee resistance marks a third space informed by pre-existing expectations about politically loaded identities mapped onto their bodies by the debts of the war and the debts of the patron-client relationships in the non-profit industrial complex. From the youth's perspectives, the refugee imaginary projected by their co-ethnic elders necessarily means that they transform from a refugee to a model minority in order to fulfill the state narrative of repaying their debt to the savior United States. Simultaneously, I argue that the relationship of many older Asian American groups to Southeast Asian American youth has mirrored the paternal relationship between the youth and the United States. The

youth feel obligated to perform the ideological discourse of radical activism from previous generations to garner approval of many of their movement elders, as well as benefit from resources from it. Their refugee resistance is thus not simply resistance to state policies that criminalize, incarcerate, and detain youth; it also occupies a resistance to a non-profit industrial complex that makes its own claims outside the narratives of both the model minority and the radical activist imposed onto the youth by both co-ethnic and pan-ethnic elders, mentors, and potential funding gatekeepers. Their resistance signifies a watershed moment of a generation rising because it marks a new opportunity for a syncretic subject-making that engages with the multiplicity of identities within their generation. The third space of refugee resistance simultaneously adopts and adapts the narratives of their elders and continually interjects their narratives with the intersectional priorities of contemporary generations' multiple identities as working-class, queer, and female SEAA youth. The new narrative frames represent a critique of the ways in which the previous generation's narratives have contradicted one another. Yet, even as they redefine themselves and their political selves, they struggle within the confines of the patron-client model that frames the landscape of the movement through the non-profit industrial complex.

As Sarah and Kohei tried to secure PrYSM's sustainability and organize for immigration reform, they relied on advice, networks, and other resources from allies and mentors from older progressives to become a non-profit organization, fund its campaigns, and engage in policy-making coalitions. However, the necessities of a funder-driven organization fundamentally change an organization's internal culture. PrYSM felt established groups and funders tried to confine and control their mobilizing activities, campaign messaging, and political positions on immigration reform. The organizations appreciated the youth's activism to the extent that it garnered funding and media attention. The ally organizations invited directly affected community members to share personal stories through testimonies. But for the first ten years—between 2002 and 2012—they never invited the youth groups to sit at the decision-making table or take control of shared resources. They encouraged and mentored the youth groups to the extent that youth participated within boundaries that maintained the status quo of the movement. While the youth perceived their allies as well-intentioned, the perception of well-educated, middle-class professionals masking their privilege and power behind reified images of a grateful refugee in order to leverage resources left many SEAA youth groups feeling disempowered and at times exploited. Consequently, the movement that has emerged has an uneven and contradictory relationship to the Asian American progressive

movement since it never addressed or rectified the power dynamics of the “gift of freedom” between the movement and the refugee communities in the context of community organizing and empowerment.

### Movement Transformations: From Solidarity to Indebtedness

The anti-war sentiment of the Asian American Left during the Viet Nam War era contextualized the war as part of a racist endeavor against Asians that travelled from the streets of America to those of the Asia Pacific region. Between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, AAM had reached a pinnacle of multi-faceted activism. This included historian and activist Yuji Ichioka’s coining of the term “Asian American”; the development of Serve the People programs—modeled after similar programs begun by the Black Panther Party—that provided basic needs to underserved communities, such as free food and educational programs for children and their families; and the student movement on college campuses for curricular transformation with the inclusion of ethnic studies by Third World Liberation Fronts.<sup>26</sup> That transformative period of Asian American history served as the backdrop against which the first cohort of Southeast Asian refugees arrived on American shores, setting the stage for the paradoxical ideologies of the movement against the very “imagined community,”<sup>27</sup> or reified notion of pan-Asian solidarity, that AAM had supported during the war.

Solidarity with the Vietnamese people was generally shared by the radical Left in the anti-war movement; a particular point of inter-racial solidarity connected the analysis of American intervention as an imperialist endeavor to control the Asia-Pacific and as a racist war toward a formerly colonized country.<sup>28</sup> The anti-war activists articulated their support for the Vietnamese people (as opposed to Southeast Asian) to the extent these Asiatic kin shared the goal to counter American imperialism and saw themselves as victims of capitalism.<sup>29</sup> The anti-war movement contributed to a conflicting set of emotional and political relations between AAM and future refugee cohorts who would be inserted into the demographic groups that AAM sought to organize.

By the 1990s, the evolution of Asian American grassroots activism into federally recognized, non-profit status, 501(c)3 social service organizations built an infrastructure that paid for organizers to become career staff. The transition to a non-profit patron-client model required more overhead, more robust funding sources, and the professionalization of staff to maintain the bureaucratic requirements of government awards, such as grant writing and reporting. The non-profit patron-client model rendered groups vulnerable to funders, including those in local, state, and federal governments. The professionalization of Serve the People programs and anti-

imperialist campaigns into service and reform activities that were legible to funders increasingly restricted much of the movement’s traditional rank-and-file activists into middle-class, educated, professionals and encouraged a paternal, patron-client relationship.<sup>30</sup> While the emphasis on electoral politics and policy-making within the non-profit framework drew college-educated, middle-class members to career leadership roles, by default, this bias excluded most first-generation, working-class immigrants, like newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees who lacked the educational training for non-profit positions or an understanding strategies and tactics to maneuver of the American political system.<sup>31</sup> In the end, refugees embodied the client in need of assistance, in need of saving, and in need of a voice, and only those who were legible to policy-makers could advocate in the name of these “worthy victims.”

From the 1980s into the 1990s, the strategies of reform and the emphasis on essentialized identity politics of Asian American representation (in other words, the emphasis on Asian American inclusion as the singular priority) blinded some activists to the daily struggles affecting Southeast Asian refugees, who were being resettled into urban housing projects and welfare system. The evolution of the Asian American Movement and the rise of Southeast Asian American political power developed in two disparate paths, grassroots, working-class activism and professionalized non-profit.<sup>32</sup> By 2000, Southeast Asian American youth still found themselves negotiating discrepancies between the political agenda and messaging of their ethnic communities and their mentors.

With the American war and subsequent failed socialist projects in their homelands as points of reference, PrYSM carved out a mission based on anti-imperialist positions, juxtaposed against the realities of the refugee experience under post-1975 Communist “re-education” initiatives in their countries of origin. Through our strategic framing of the detention and deportation issue, PrYSM tried to defy what Espiritu refers to as American rescue fantasies:

Constituted as existing on the other side of freedom, Vietnamese could only be incorporated into the modern subjecthood as the good refugee—that is, only when they reject the purported antidemocratic, anti-capitalist (and thus anti-free) communist Viet Nam and embrace the “free world.”<sup>33</sup>

PrYSM, and other SEAA youth groups, faced an impossible conundrum. They struggled with the expectation of performing the role of good refugees, as an inherited debt owed by their parents to the United States, the receiving nation, as they fled war. By challenging the dominant historical narrative of the anti-war stance of the anti-imperialist sentiments of radical Asian American activists that found solidarity with its own romanticized version of Vietnamese people, PrYSM simultaneously had to confront

demands for justice in ways that ran counter to the spirit of Asian American critique of American imperialism in Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup> These contending narratives extend the analogous relationship of indebtedness between the older refugee generation and the United States as well as the Millennial in this book inherited the burden of war from the 1960s, from both their parents as represented in the MAAs and from Asian American activists as their political mentors. Their ability to make claims on their own terms—especially to a socio-political identity that frees itself of those debts—would take yet another generation of activists, as witnessed in the last chapters of this book.<sup>35</sup>

### Crossing Borders: Intersectionality as Refugee Resistance

The years of major refugee resettlement, spanning 1975 to 1992, revealed the threshold of compassion fatigue by the U.S. government and society.<sup>36</sup> Southeast Asian refugees resisted federal attempts at fast-track assimilation—they refused to anchor themselves in locations where there were no available ethnic and cultural support structures. Rather, they engaged in secondary and tertiary migrations that created ethnic enclaves. These enclaves created the necessary institutions that have provided political, social, and economic opportunities not available in mainstream society, and are the bedrock of community leadership. The politics of refugee resettlement situated many of the enclaves alongside other marginalized BIPOC. The concentric circles of ethnic-based resources and racialized oppression molded youth's collective identity, as well as mobilizing activities and coalitional formations.

### Movement Forward

The Asian American Movement today primarily consists of an overlap of the Millennial generation who grew up in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and post-Millennial, who grew up in the 2000s. Post-Millennial SEAA youth in this book are the current youth members who are on the cusp of taking leadership roles in the movement. The challenge for SEAA organizers from these two generations is twofold. First, these leaders must devise a strategy of how to create sustainable collective resources within the community and with allied support that allows them to act freely apart from the inherently competitive nature and politics of the funding world. That strategy has the advantage of building community solidarity internally and externally, concretizing the foundational pillars for movement-building independent of a funding model that relies upon notions of debt and patronage, and

removes the pressure to professionalize youth organizing such that it depoliticizes their political campaigns.

Second, as PrYSM demonstrates, the movement's viability in working with co-ethnic communities and achieving solidarity externally with progressive groups required a balance of two highly contested ideologies. As part of the SEAFN coalition, these youth leaders created a localized map that allowed them to employ early movement organizing tools while creating a unique perspective that encompassed the memories of war and torture under Communist regimes in Southeast Asia. Rather than succumb to the dominant pro-U.S./anti-Communist rhetoric, SEAFN critiqued U.S. foreign policy, arguing that it should have been held accountable for refugee resettlement. Additionally, it also evoked a critique against deporting refugee childhood arrivals. The development of those critiques derived from a combination of knowledge PrYSM founders had gleaned in college courses in ethnic studies, critical studies of the Viet Nam War, and study groups in local progressive organizations.

Refugee youth organizers tend to view immigrants not as blank slates upon immigration, but as active agents of change who carry political and cultural values that are transmitted across generations. Those values are neither adopted wholesale by Southeast Asian youth from their parents nor from the hybrid urban landscapes in which they grow up. The youth's strategic choices allow them to make sense of disjointed spaces between Asian American radicals and their co-ethnic communities. Their ability to merge these two somewhat disparate worldviews have become a source of strength in which they find a new political direction for movement building. In carving out the "liberated zones" of social movement, these new leaders embrace what Kelley views as "the time to think like poets, to envision and make visible a new society, a peaceful, cooperative, loving world without poverty and oppression, limited only by our imaginations."<sup>38</sup> During the last fifteen years, PrYSM has continually attempted to prioritize love, generosity, inclusivity, and creative expression to build community and its collective identity. The re-branding of social activism characterized by love instead of anger represents a shift in the strategy and tactics from previous generations. By sculpting what social movement scholars call the "repertoire of contention"<sup>39</sup>—the strategies, frames, and tactics activists can draw from to achieve their immediate objectives and goals for social change—these youth form an oppositional consciousness embedded with syncretic values and politics that has the potential to shift an entire generation's worldview.

### Auto-Ethnography and the Myth of the Unbiased Researcher

Virtually nothing has been written about Southeast Asian American youth political engagement, or about the mobilization against Southeast Asian American detention and deportation beyond the legal studies field, which is the impetus for the activism for many PrYSM and SEAA working class youth.<sup>40</sup> From the rich data with “thick” descriptions in my field notes and interviews, I created identification numbers and aliases for all subjects. Some subjects have requested to not be identified, and I have respected this request. Other subjects and their respective organizations have requested that their names be used. Throughout the book, I do not designate which names are pseudonyms in order to further protect my subjects. At the beginning of each chapter, I provide short vignettes of my first-person experiences to introduce the chapter and situate myself within the narrative.

*Generation Rising* is an auto-ethnographic study that started with my participation as a student activist against SEAA detention and deportation. Ethnography involves the study of relational processes within a culture from the perspective and for the benefit of encouraging mutual understanding between those inside and outside of a culture. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, an auto-ethnographer must “consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders.”<sup>41</sup> In this book I offer my own self-reflective insertion as an actively engaged scholar committed to developing knowledge about the “hidden transcripts” of lived experience.<sup>42</sup>

I include an analysis of my personal involvement in my field research as a Southeast Asian refugee, community member, and former youth organizer concerned with Southeast Asian deportation without centering myself as a main character in the narrative. Personal field notes and journal entries from participant observations helped me reflect on my participation in the groups, gatherings, and events. These include numerous times I participated in SEAFN and PrYSM activities.<sup>43</sup> While the traditional ethnographic approach historically viewed a subject from the space and time of a racialized other and as inherently less civilized or developed, the postcolonial turn includes the researcher as a part of the research process. Auto-ethnographic research, especially one that incorporates a racial, LGBTQ+, and feminist critique, can potentially equalize the scholar-community power dynamic as well as generate a study that deepens our understanding of a topic by validating the perspectives of the subjects as critiques of dominant scholarship.<sup>44</sup> As a co-ethnic activist-scholar and generational peer of the early activists of this movement, I embody this

methodological shift in ethnography because my overall identity removed much of the power dynamics between myself as the researcher and the communities of inquiry. In short, I situate myself as a part of the movement such that I have long-term accountability to the communities about which I write.<sup>45</sup>

In the summer of 2017, Sarah asked me to join the board of directors of PrYSM after another board member stepped down. I did this on a temporary basis until they were able to recruit new board members. My choice to join the board was difficult because I was in the very last stage of preparing this book for review. Ultimately, my decision was influenced by my main purpose for writing this book: to support and document Asian American social movement history from the perspective of a small but influential grassroots organization located in a modest metropolitan area with limited resources. As a community-engaged scholar, I felt a responsibility to reciprocate to those with whom I conducted research, as a principle of conducting community-based research, by meeting the needs of the organization as it requested assistance rather than defining the terms of my reciprocity. Chapter Two includes an analysis of the reflection and strategic planning process that occurred while I participated on the board. I made sure to be careful not to participate in or influence this process as a board member and recused myself from this process. I also received permission to include the outcomes of the process and topical descriptions of the workshops in this book.

Throughout *Generation Rising*, I reflect on my own “insider/outsider” positionality within the SEAFN dynamics as a 1975 Vietnamese refugee woman who grew up in a well-respected but low-income (and later middle-income) refugee family. While I have this shared background of coming to this country with literally no material possessions but the clothes on our back, my positionality shifted as an adult and over the course of this study. During the timeframe of this project, I started as a graduate student and a peer of many of the activists, and then evolved into a position of a scholar at a public higher education institution, and thus had significantly more income, power, and privilege than the post-Millennial youth leaders. While the research is focused on a case study—PrYSM and the group’s role in coalition such as SEAFN—this book does not purport to represent the “activism” of an entire, multifaceted, multiethnic racialized group. Additionally, evident throughout the narrative are my own experiences as a founding member of SEAFN and a SEAA community member with shared generational experiences. I recognize that my own activism and the role I played in the early years as a member of SEAFN represents a biased political position. In exposing these biases, I assume the political position that aligns with what I understand to be the original mission of ethnic

studies: to challenge the dominant narratives of historically oppressed people through counter-hegemonic narratives that re-center those who have been marginalized with academic research.

Finally, I situate myself at the porous border between “insider” and “outsider,” in the recognition of my activist role as an historian documenting a movement in which I have been an invested member. This public recognition of my positionality marks the difference between an auto-ethnographic project and a more traditional ethnographic methodology. Sociologist Linda Vo recalled her decision to refrain from passing judgement or engaging in political debate that might distract from her own interviews and access to the Vietnamese American community as well as bias her observations and analysis of her ethnographic study.<sup>46</sup> I also attempt to offer a critical analysis and withhold bias or judgement, but I choose to do so by making transparent to the participants and my readers of the inherent subjectivity scholars embed in their studies.

I situate this project as an auto-ethnography rather than an ethnography because of my public and active participation in the campaign against deportation that originally became the impetus to use my research skills to the benefit of the movement of which I was an active participant. My contribution to the movement evolved from one of a co-coordinator of events, fundraisers, and strategic planning to a scholar-activist whose role was to document and critically analyze the movement. My original role gave me entrée as a trusted member of the community, both as a Southeast Asian refugee and as an activist with shared political position, which allowed me to more readily build rapport and trust with my subjects. While engaging in “thick description” in my ethnographic activities, I had to engage in ongoing reflexivity to acknowledge implicit biases that might lead me to overlook important critiques or observations during my field work. Similar to Milann Kang’s description of the challenges she faced with determining the boundaries of her role as a trusted accomplice to the Asian American women nail salon workers who viewed her as “one of their own,” I also had to manage and continually negotiate the boundaries of my study with my sense of obligation to the anti-deportation movement that gave me access in the first place.<sup>47</sup>

The subjectivity at the forefront of my research privileges me to delve more deeply into what Kelley calls the questions of the “how” rather than “why.” Early social movement scholars of the Civil Rights Movement fixated on the question of why people would join as the first stage of social movement theory, which seemed like a contradiction of social theories that suggested the conditions of socio-economic class privilege correlated with political participation. However, Kelley suggests that the perspective internal to social justice movements assumes the necessity of activism

as its instigating factor, and that the more interesting question for those within a movement is to better understand the internal dynamics and the campaigns themselves as lessons for future leaders.<sup>48</sup> The emerging generations of activists have expressed these same sentiments to me, and so these questions underlie the framing of the book: How do social movements operate, particularly in the context of the non-profit industrial complex? How do grassroots organizations deal with their internal struggles? How can intergenerational challenges be overcome within ethnic-based movements?

I followed grounded theory methods to develop themes from the data rather than rigidly pursue pre-set themes. Grounded theory approach allows for the data to guide the researcher to decide on the trajectories to pursue based on existing data, and then to develop themes based on what emerges organically from the data.<sup>49</sup> This approach allowed me to integrate scientific data collection methods and analysis while maintaining the integrity of community-based research, where the communities of inquiry involved the co-creation of knowledge by defining what is important to them.<sup>50</sup> By allowing the data to breathe, I am more honestly giving life and precedence to the communities of inquiry that are leading my research project. I created both axial and theoretical coding systems that helped me to develop main points for narrative development and academic analysis. Axial coding synthesizes large amounts of qualitative data to create broad frames under which more precise codes can be created. These frames often fall into the categories of: conditions, or circumstances, in which the study emerges; actions, which are the responses to the conditions or circumstances; and the consequences of those actions.<sup>51</sup> The process of combining these primary source materials in the context of secondary academic sources allowed me to engage in what grounded theorists identify as “reconstructing theory,”<sup>52</sup> which develops new theoretical understandings or models in relation to existing literature that derives from the data, rather than having theories grafted onto research subjects.

In addition to my participation in movement activities, I conducted formal semi-structured interviews with twelve staff from policy and legal organizations and with forty youth participants connected to SEAFN.<sup>53</sup> Of these forty, I conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen of the approximately thirty members of PrYSM multiple times between 2002 and 2006. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes to two hours per session, and twenty interviews were with new members and follow-ups with PrYSM leaders and ten leaders from ally organizations who worked in coalition with PrYSM, in addition to conducting participant and non-participant observations with PrYSM from 2002 to 2006 and 2011 to 2016. The depth of this book—an engaged case study where I focus on this one

main organization in the anti-deportation work over an extensive time period—offers me sound insight through which some contributions related to Asian American activism might be understood in the development of social movement theory.<sup>54</sup>

Auto-ethnographic research involves transparency, and reflexivity of one's involvement in the research topic. For this reason, I detail my methodology and begin every chapter with a vignette of my first-hand observations. Fieldwork was documented through journals, notes, and collecting archival materials of events, protests, and campaigns. I engaged in non-participant and participant observations with PrYSM and its ally groups between 2002 and 2006, including programming, workshops, social events, immigrant rights marches, court hearings, and meetings at the Returnee Assistance Project (RAP) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 2002 to 2004, and conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with ten Cambodian American deportees. Upon my return, I continued email, phone, and social media communications with individuals and with the organization, now known as Returnee Integration Support Center (RISC). Between 2002 and 2006, I attended immigration hearings for client-members of SEAFN organizations, testified as an expert witness in immigration court, and sat in on immigration court hearings once or twice a month. In addition to formal interviews, I maintained ongoing informal conversations, as well as email, text, and social media exchanges with my research subjects over the years, which directly inform my analysis. I was witness to SEAFN's resurgence at the Racial Justice Gathering in New Orleans, LA, in August 2013, and the Advancing Justice conference in Los Angeles in March 2016. Finally, I also used personal reflections and field notes of my involvement in SEAFN (including bimonthly to monthly conference calls and biannual gatherings) and PrYSM events, meeting notes, public presentations, protest/campaign materials, newsletters, and media productions.

### **Chapter Descriptions**

At the beginning of each chapter, I introduce a vignette of my auto-ethnographic experiences by presenting a first-person scenario that relates to the topic of the chapter. In Chapter Two, I introduce PrYSM's emergence in the historical, political, and geographical setting of Providence, Rhode Island through the oral histories of current and former PrYSM members. PrYSM's origin story offers insight to the dynamics and political contexts indicative of Southeast Asian refugee communities across the country that either do not constitute a majority-minority population or emerge from a long-history of Asian Pacific American activism. I argue that the collective

identity formation unique to PrYSM's intersectional social location situated them within the ethnic community without competition, while also pulling resources from various allies in different movements throughout the country. It allowed for an innovative structure and programs that were grounded in values and identity formation while retaining a critical social justice agenda. The post-9/11 crucible in which PrYSM began proved critical to their preparedness to address the anti-immigrant climate in the aftermath of the 2016 elections I discuss later in this book.

Chapter Three follows PrYSM's internal operations and growth as a leading Southeast Asian American youth group in the country. This chapter unpacks the process of the development of their political consciousness and leadership skills through their main programs for queer youth, young women, and campaign organizing. The culture of the organization and the make-up of the founding members modeled a space for intersectional identities along the lines of pan-ethnicity and mixed-race, gender, queer, and class identities. The chapter examines their process of developing an oppositional consciousness to mainstream society's stereotypical representations of these marginalized youth. Over the years, moreover, the challenges of intersectionality also manifested in the differential growth between queer youth and young women's programs, and in the inclusion of cis-female leadership as the face of the organization. The growth of young women's participation in the organization challenged the invisible norms of male privilege and opened the door to opportunities for increased public representation and leadership.

Chapter Four examines the campaigns and coalitional activism that PrYSM participated in locally and nationally. In this chapter, I highlight the complicated nuances of operationalizing intersectional collective identity and relationships in social movement coalitions. I focus on issues of marginalization of youth activists as serious political actors to their tokenization in testimonials without the power to actually negotiate policies that affect them. PrYSM leaders recall their role in the formation of SEAFN, the first national coalition of SEAA activist youth groups that formed in response to the deportations of Cambodian Americans, as they attracted external major funders and media attention through their national mobilization against detention and deportation. This chapter magnifies the local social terrain of relationships and power imbalances to the national stage. PrYSM helps us reframe the deportation narrative to privilege the voices of those directly affected by deportation through the intersections of class, ethnicity, and queer identity. With the retreat from funders toward more winnable causes that they could celebrate and use to demonstrate success to donors, and the internal challenges within SEAFN member organizations, the first iteration of SEAFN dissolved quickly, with

individual organizations disbanding or restructuring. PrYSM survived this period by refocusing on local organizing and recentering their base building activities.

The new generation of leaders began talks with multi-racial allies about the issues of police surveillance and formed a coalition of local organizations that created a bill to stop surveillance, hyper-policing, and immigration enforcement by local police, called the Community Safety Act. Through their coalitional campaigns, they began to build inter-racial alliances and organizing skills, while the revamped coalition, SEAFN 2.0, focused on their immigration histories and identities as Southeast Asian refugees growing up in the United States. These coalitional campaigns allowed the emergent post-Millennial activists—particularly female leaders—to articulate the third space of refugee resistance that they embraced from the original PrYSM members, and internally, these transitions centered on the role of women within the organization. Over the course of these campaigns, we see how these youth activists evolve in their roles as tangential partners to enacting their own agenda on their own terms. Coalitions thus vacillate from being advantageous for small groups or groups in isolated geographical locations to being sites that reproduce power imbalances amongst allies.

Chapter Five examines the attempts to build a transnational movement to demand a “right to return” for those who have been deported to Cambodia. This is a turning point for the movement in its efforts to transition from local and domestic policy to a framework driven by international law. In an attempt to have power over their own narratives, PrYSM leaders joined other SEAFN activists to travel to Southeast Asian American enclaves and to Cambodia to interview community members, deportees, and other stakeholders. They released the interviews on social media as part of the launch of their Right2Return transnational campaign. In analyzing their engagement with the human rights framework, I consider its effectiveness in building a mass base as well as the problematics of a juridical dependency to define these rights in the campaign against deportation. The call for human rights as the basis for demanding one’s rights is fraught with legal contradictions. It also forces two major shifts in PrYSM. First, as a small organization that could easily be dismissed as a localized campaign, PrYSM’s involvement in this transnational effort centered them on an international stage. It also challenged them to internally consider their strategic messaging, which at that point had become quite localized, and thus politicized their youth members to consider their world and politics beyond that which they had become accustomed. Finally, their testimonies to the U.N. and meetings with the Cambodian government offered opportunities for a new generation of leaders to rise as the voices and faces of this emergent campaign in Asian American social movement history.

Chapter Six discusses the ways in which the presidential election of Donald J. Trump impacted local politics and alliances, as well as the process by which post-Millennial youth leaders chose to respond to the differences and tensions that manifested during this period, with an emphasis on heightened hate violence and the racial politics of policing and safety. One major shift during this time was their positionality and choices in relation to funders. The non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), particularly funders, have shaped and impact the culture and activities of PrYSM. The organization’s transitions in membership, leadership, and campaign priorities over the years were directly linked to the availability of funding resources and funders’ agendas on a national level. They evolved from a grassroots volunteer group of college-age youth who organized high schoolers and gang members, to an organization with a budget of approximately \$500,000 with professionalized titles, roles, and responsibilities to funders. As youth funders shifted their attention and back again to youth organizing and deportation enforcement, PrYSM’s campaigns also flowed from national to local organizing campaigns. In this chapter I focus on three major funders that directly and indirectly impacted PrYSM’s campaigns and coalitions: the Four Freedoms Fund, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Coulter Foundation. As the group’s reputation became solidified and leadership became more adept in the philanthropy world, they made a conscious choice about identifying funders who aligned with their political vision and diversified their funding portfolio so that they would not be unduly influenced or dependent on one source.

PrYSM’s journey in the present historical juncture is a microcosm into the tensions and successes of the passing of activism across generations for both the Asian American Pacific Islander communities and other ethnic and racial groups. PrYSM must react to the increased discourse of racial hate after September 11, 2001 and after the 2016 presidential election in ways that align with their core values. The chapter reiterates how the path forward for AAM may shift with the intervention of the emerging landscape of power brokers with the intervention of SEAA youth at the helm. The campaigns and programmatic activities outlined in this book gave the youth a concrete grounding in how to lead campaigns and accumulate their own resources; as a result, they viewed themselves as agents of their own life choices and paths. Their communal and individual futures were something they could shape, as opposed to being pre-destined by the structural barriers surrounding them. As they developed their power, however, the realities of constraints within social movements were put in relief. Simultaneously, the debates within the immigrant rights movement about immigration policy have direct impact on the local work against criminalization of PrYSM youth, and the extent to which they are perpetually framed as the

"undeserving immigrants." Their achievements to gain recognition at the very least nominal public support from national Asian American policy groups represents a huge advancement in their ability to influence public discourse, but they continue to face significant obstacles in the anti-immigrant climate under the Trump administration that require innovative strategies and tactics of resistance. In *Generation Rising*, I provide the framework to analyze the spaces in which their collective identities create new paradigms for social change that meet the demands of the historical moment. This is a testament to the possibilities for the Millennial and post-Millennial generation forge a new paradigm for social change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Core Values: Peace, Love, Power

*But a new Asian America was being honed as the Asian American Movement was birthed, and new goals, perspectives, values, priorities, and even lifestyles began to change for many... Out of the chaos and criticism, a new breed of cultural artists and thinkers emerged<sup>55</sup>*

As a graduate student ethnographic researcher, I made my first visit to Providence, Rhode Island, in 2003 to meet members of Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM) and conduct observations of their activities. PrYSM co-founder, Sarath Suong, picked me up to take me to the house he shared with his partner, Ross, and one other PrYSM member. As we headed to their house, I noticed the gradual changes from modernist, late-twentieth-century architecture to small, one-story, locally owned markets and Victorian homes, some renovated and others barely standing.

Sarath and Ross rented the top floor in a Victorian house on a street with homes that were mostly densely packed, renter-occupied three-story homes in which each floor was a separate unit. Their roommate, CK, another member of PrYSM, was also gay and Khmer American. After climbing three narrow, circular staircases, I entered a bare, dark living room. Down the hallway past the kitchen, they showed me my bedroom, which was along the right wall between the other two bedrooms. My room was their storage space and had a semi-inflated airbed on the floor. The window looked straight into the next-door neighbor's, about three feet away. There was no air conditioning in the middle of the humid summer, and they shared only one fan. They carefully placed it in the kitchen so that it could reach all the rooms. And on my first night there, Sarath and Ross hurriedly concocted a special Khmer beef soup from scratch for the PrYSM "family."

As if on cue, as soon as Ross turned off the stove, people streamed into the apartment without knocking. For the rest of the evening, they came and left at will. Some sat down immediately at the round dining table, ate the home-cooked Khmer meal, and rushed off, while others sat at the table joking late into the night, talking about updates in their lives, and integrating PrYSM discussions into the conversation. Almost all of the 15 or so people who stopped by that evening lived within a five-block radius of the house, and despite the heat, they congregated for hours in Sarath's apartment. Most were Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA) under 27 years old, and all had some connection to PrYSM. Sarath later told me the visitors often had to figure out meals on their own at home, rather than share meals with their families, as is usually a family tradition in Southeast

to become the new generation of social justice leaders. Though they always embraced PrYSM's original values of love and social justice, the feminist intervention in integrating and valuing their young women leaders marked a turning point for the group. In 2018, the generations of PrYSM women had come full circle as Linda assumed the role of the new Soros Social Justice Fellow that Chanravy had once held. Chanravy went on to found her own multi-racial women's social justice group, Sista Fire, in Providence and mended ties with PrYSM through their support of one another's activities.

PrYSM's evolution as an organization had resulted in its bureaucratization as a non-profit organization. Its formalization of roles, responsibilities, behavioral consequences for paid employees, and dedication toward expansion symbolized this culmination into the non-profit bureaucratic model. PrYSM's SEAFN allies had simultaneously reached a point at which they were becoming non-profit organizations. Typically, the bureaucratization stage of a social movement delineates its stagnation or end.<sup>156</sup> It remains to be seen if this newly professionalized model, within the changing contexts of the philanthropic landscape, enhances the work and dynamics of the organization, or if it perpetuates power dynamics and creative disengagement from the youth, as occurs in other grassroots movements.<sup>157</sup> Throughout the healing process, the organization as a whole could finally come to terms with the reality that Sarath had been waiting for them to accept—the time for a transition of leadership was now. By the end of 2017, a new generation of social justice activists had begun to see itself as capable and willing to accept the role as the new SEAA movement generation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### We Will Not Be Moved: Between Having Voice and Having Power

*Struggle is part of the course when our dreams go into action. Unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation.*<sup>158</sup>

In April 2002, soon after Cambodia and the United States signed the Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.), I accompanied Thida, the sister of a detainee, to a national conference organized by the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Associations (CMAs) in Portland, Oregon. The majority of the organizational leaders were middle-aged and elderly men who were first-generation refugees. They represented leaders and representative voices for the Cambodian American community, nationally and locally. At the gathering, the staff from Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC), as a conference cosponsor and national representative of CMAA, and other gatekeepers of the Cambodian community espoused two main narratives. The first was a need to make Cambodians in the United States aware of the changes in policy and the potential for deportation. Second, they framed the sense of injustice about the deportation of refugees around the discourse of the Cold War because the Khmer Rouge regime's genocide in the name of Communism still dominates the collective memory of Khmer Americans. In particular, they compared deportation to Cambodia to a "death sentence to a Communist country."

Through my connections with staff at the local MAA in Oakland, California, the Cambodian Community Development, Inc. (CCDI), I was able to encourage them to invite Thida to speak publicly about her brother's detention and deportation case. She had asked me to accompany her to the event. As the only female speaker, and the only one younger than thirty years old, Thida did not feel confident speaking at the conference by herself. Thida shared her brother's story of receiving poor legal advice and being incarcerated as a teenager for stealing a laptop out of the open window of a home. She spoke of the multiple times he had been moved without notice across state lines to various detention centers, some extremely overcrowded and others with poor health conditions.

Thida shared stories of her brother's and family's depression and sense of injustice at what they saw as an overly harsh punishment. She laid bare their frustration that her brother, a refugee child arrival, could be forever punished with deportation to a country he had never known. By sharing

her family's story and centering her point of view as a young girl and little sister, Thida reframed the issue—it was not about making an anti-communist argument as much as it was about centering about the human experience of emotion and collective experience of refugee poverty and forced family separation.

At the end of her speech, Thida asserted that the United States became responsible for refugees when it brought them to its shores, and that it was the only country she and her siblings knew, regardless of their formal citizenship. She left the stage nervous, not knowing how she would be received. The next speaker, an older Khmer man who led another MAA, looked straight at Thida as he referenced Martin Luther King, Jr. and maintained that the American Dream included justice and equality through the legal system as well as all other aspects of life. It was his way of retaining his power as an elder while simultaneously showing agreement with Thida as a cross-generational expression of empathy and solidarity. The generational divide on the deportation issue had shifted, and SEARAC's educational and policy position papers that it shared with MAAs changed from their anti-communist framework to one focused on the accountability of the United States to its Southeast Asian refugees. In this moment, the "intergenerational discontinuity"<sup>159</sup> in resistance had potential to re-articulate SEAA relationship to the state that could be agreed upon across generations.

Unfortunately, the positions that MAA leaders took publicly at this stage did not translate immediately into collective action or a shift in direct services for those historically marginalized within SEAA communities. After exhausting social services and legal remedies, individuals and families engaged in other forms of political participation against their deportation orders, such as direct action with grassroots groups like PrYSM. Those groups drew national attention by conducting interviews with the media, addressing political representatives for assistance, and organizing rallies and forums on deportation. As the only national network of organizations confronting immigration enforcement in the post-9/11 climate, the organizations within the newly formed Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN) represented young people who had been silenced in public discourse.

The emergent leadership among those working-class youth was an opportunity to restart the relationship with MAA elder leaders, many of whom had been in power since SEA refugee resettlement of the 1970s. By legitimizing the decision-making voices of traditionally marginalized subpopulations, external allied organizations had the potential to ultimately shift power dynamics from the older generation of MAA staff to bicultural young leaders. At the same time, PrYSM and other SEAA youth

leaders experienced a sense of tokenization in the coalitional spaces that involved pan-ethnic Asian Pacific American communities, particularly in regard to policymaking. This chapter demonstrates the contested notion of who gets to "sit at the table" when stakes are high. In order to understand the dynamics of the coalitional spaces, I explore thick ethnographic descriptions of their development to give context to the specific moments of tension and hegemonic negotiations of power and representation.

### Between Having Voice and Having Power

The mobilization against detention and deportation in SEAA communities demonstrates the challenges for marginalized communities to truly gain power, and funders' efforts exacerbated the organic development of sustainable coalitions and power. The strategic storytelling and value systems that the youth in this book communicate through their identity expression play an instrumental role in their political choices as grassroots organizations.<sup>160</sup> Marshall Ganz describes storytelling as "how we learn to exercise agency to deal with new challenges, mindful of the past, yet conscious of alternative futures."<sup>161</sup> The shared stories built empathy and trust among the youth, and thus enabled a national, coordinated body consisting of PrYSM and other progressive Southeast Asian American (SEAA) youth groups with a powerful impact on youth's sense of collective identity and collective action, which then initiated funder interest.<sup>162</sup>

In this chapter I document PrYSM's involvement in the emergence of the Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN), a grassroots coalition that formed in response to the impending deportation of SEAA. The coalition's organic formation underscores a generational break from the MAAs and co-ethnic elders toward an alignment with the Asian American Left from the 1960s to the 1970s, from which many of these youth groups sought mentorship and inspiration. The valorization of leftist political development is juxtaposed with the marginalization of groups like PrYSM, or between those being nurtured as leaders within the organization and those at risk of deportation.

SEAFN's development illustrates the compounded tensions between the MAAs and the progressive grassroots youth organizations, as well as tensions within these movement spaces amongst organizers and those they claimed to represent. The philanthropic agenda only heightened tensions by forming coalitions while also creating competition for funding.<sup>163</sup> This example documents the beginning of a new generation's approach to garner resources and claim independence from the pressures to perform to the satisfaction of funders and elders alike, in what Karen Ishizuka refers to as "moments of personal awareness that are strengthened through the life-

pulse of collective ownership lead to political, social, and cultural activism and have resulted in new identities, agencies, and understandings.<sup>164</sup> PrYSM's participation in SEAFN laid the groundwork for a coordinated body of new leaders to claim authority and autonomy in the way they wanted to express their identity as SEAA as well as the claims they made to their migration histories and as Asian American Movement (AAM) leaders. Although they desired broad-based coalitions and support from AAM and MAA leaders, they saw SEAFN as an opportunity to release from the burden of intergenerational obligations.

### Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN) Formation

Soon after the CMAA conference, the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC) convened a series of conference calls for community leaders and legal advocates to discuss the new agreement between the United States and Cambodia. The goal of the calls was to inform participants of the new policy, how it would affect the community, who would be directly impacted, and what advocacy steps could be taken. The SEARAC calls occurred on a monthly basis over the course of four months. The first call had approximately twelve participants, most of whom were lawyers and policy advocates in Washington, D.C. After some discussion about community awareness and notification of the legal changes, some advocates volunteered to create fact sheets for public dissemination. The call focused on making sure everyone was educated and knowledgeable of the issue enough to share the information with local constituents. Although callers expressed concern and confusion about who was eligible for deportation and the lack of information directly from Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), they were not ready to react on a political level. Subsequent calls centered on policy and legal arguments as remedies for the impending deportations.

On the second conference call, SEARAC invited Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, or CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, a grassroots leftist organization out of New York City, to join in. Borann Hem, CAAAV's representative on the calls, shared with participants CAAAV's intention to focus their 2002 leadership training on strategizing against deportation and invited all organizations to send a representative to the training. With each subsequent call, the number of participants dwindled as the conversations moved from education to legal and policy advocacy, with the extensive attention to legal ramifications of the new M.O.U. The language and topics of these calls clearly privileged legal and policy experts. Despite the unintentional exclusivity, the calls served as a place for information-sharing and validating the importance of the issue to SEAA communities.

During the same period, SEARAC obtained statistics from INS (the federal immigration agency that later changed its name to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE) that estimated the number of people slated for deportation and how many others were at risk. The agency shared only that Viet Nam and Laos were in similar, closed-door negotiations with the State Department. The lack of information from ICE created a growing sense of urgency for action amongst families and advocates at the fear of how broadly the policy changes would impact the community. SEARAC's ability to access information from ICE gave community members some concrete answers, but ICE's inability or unwillingness to offer definitive numbers, timelines, and the criteria or scope of deportations created a generalized, palpable fear in SEAA community organizations across the country who served as liaisons to their constituents.

As part of its Youth Leadership Project (YLP) serving Vietnamese and Khmer youth in the Bronx, which later became the independent organization Mekong, CAAAV initiated a summer institute, called Freedom Training (FT). FT recruited SEAA under thirty years of age from progressive youth-based organizations across the country. Youth leaders learned about major issues in local SEAA neighborhoods, as well as organizing strategies and methodologies for systemic change. Through FT, they could share information about their communities and bond with one another as people connected through a common historical experience of war and forced migration. Most of the people who had been involved in previous organizing efforts were 1.5-, 1.8-, and second-generation refugees,<sup>165</sup> and Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, and Khmer from various class backgrounds.

The organizations in attendance at the 2002 FT included six Southeast Asian American youth-based organizations: YLP, in New York, Asian Freedom Project in Wisconsin, KGA in California, PrYSM in Rhode Island, Family Unity in Massachusetts; two MAAs: Greater Philadelphia Cambodian Assistance Association in Pennsylvania and Cambodian American Consortium in California; two grassroots progressive pan-Asian American groups: Asian Americans United in Pennsylvania, API ForCE in California; and SEARAC, representing the only policy-based organization, who sent one Cambodian American college intern. While most staff representing these groups were young SEAA who knew or were related to people at risk of deportation, KGA, Asian Freedom Project (later known as Freedom, Inc.), and PrYSM were the only ones who brought individuals with deportation orders, totaling about half of all FT participants.

The participants in the training were starkly different from those on the SEARAC calls. It was the first time that people directly affected by deportation participated in discussions, rather than just lawyers and policymakers. While the gender distribution of participants was almost

even, those with deportation orders were all male. Almost all of the organizational representatives were women, and as a group, they had more years of formal education and organizing experience than the men present. The outcome of the FT was the first national network of youth-based organizations to address immigration enforcement in the post-9/11 period: The Southeast Asian Freedom Network, or SEAFN.

The deportation issue was a natural extension of the local work that PrYSM did in regard to the gang database created by Providence police. They felt compelled to participate in the FT as some of their members were potentially deportable due to past criminal activity, or they had been criminalized through racial profiling tactics of the gang database by local police. Moreover, no one else they knew of in the New England region was working with that population as it intersected with race and ethnicity beyond Family Unity, which consisted of a handful of deportees, not political organizers. FT provided an opportunity to learn technical skills to organize, and as a sense of “home” for like-minded activists.

PrYSM members immediately felt the impact of their attendance on the building of local movements. One person with a deportation order recalled, “I thought we were just doing this thing in our neighborhoods, but for people to come from all over the country to talk about this, just to talk about us...” For Sarath, Kohei, and the other PrYSM founders, FT was also an opportunity to validate and gather support for their work as emerging leaders. Several members told me privately that personally, they felt like they did not know if they were making the best choices as PrYSM’s leaders. Ammala and Kohei shared that they would make decisions about the anti-deportation campaign based on their gut feelings and their own research—not from a guidebook, formal training, or mentorship—which carried the weight of individual lives and their ability to fight their deportation cases. As a result, they sought out this gathering as a means to be trained and supported as leaders just as much as to strategize and share information with other organizations. The coalitional space became the horizontal organizing structure where they could learn the tools and skills needed to become effective organizers without the vulnerability of having financial resources at risk to them if they had asked for technical assistance or training from funders.<sup>166</sup> They were able to develop their own culturally appropriate collective identity through storytelling, and it manifested in a virtual, symbolic, and political space that lay the foundation for a collective, rather than hierarchical, movement to prosper.<sup>167</sup>

## **Freedom Training 2002**

Freedom Training (FT) lasted three days and culminated with the formation of Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN). The first day offered a series of icebreakers and goal-centering activities. Most of the workshops were facilitated by CAAAV staff, but they used a Freirian participatory action approach, wherein groups engaged in creating a power analysis of the stakeholders in the deportation issue, participated in consensus-building processes to devise a national campaign against deportation of SEAA refugees, and determined ways of strategic storytelling that built collective identity with the community and reframed the deportation issue in the media. This combination—visual mapping, group decision-making, and storytelling that make up popular education techniques—balanced the knowledge and power dynamics between organizers and directly affected individuals. That methodology proved key to validating members’ lived experiences, while using the stories for the campaign. Through this process and these methods, the youth would develop a political awareness and analysis of their world.<sup>168</sup>

Each organization shared its best practices and the activities that it engaged in related to immigration issues, and the impact of those activities on the local community. The FT group also discussed how each organization was hoping to address common issues around deportation and detention, and what they needed to accomplish those goals. For several organizations, FT was the place for them to learn more about deportation to educate their local membership. The representatives decided that after they debriefed their members about the outcomes of FT, they would collectively decide whether or not to participate in anti-detention/deportation activities with the new coalition. They did agree on the long-term potential of consolidating local efforts into a more unified national vision, voice, and strategy for SEAA in general. By the end of the FT, all organizations voted to be members of SEAFN as a means of fulfilling the larger vision of a progressive platform in their communities that would lay the groundwork for broader movement-building goals.

The goals of SEAFN were multifold. They were dedicated to fighting detention and the deportation of Southeast Asian Americans, and in solidarity with other racialized immigrant groups who felt unjustly targeted by immigration practices and policies. In doing the work, SEAFN set out to create a safe space for individuals and families impacted by deportation. As grassroots activists, they prioritized the development of leadership and organizing skills of marginalized groups within SEAA communities, such as former gang members, queer, women, and youth subcultures. SEAFN was a site to build infrastructure for progressive organizations, with the objective

of coordinating future actions or mobilizations at the national level. The network offered an alternative channel for marginalized populations to partake in efforts to create or challenge legislation and policies that impacted them on a national scale, when they otherwise would feel isolated. Given these goals, directly affected community members had the chance to participate in calls, meetings, and decision-making. That decision-making process prioritized collective dialogue and consensus formation.

The second day of the FT focused on specific ways to organize against detention and deportation. We began by sharing our knowledge of the issue in terms of facts and analysis. At the request of the FT planning committee, Ly-Huong Nguyen and I, as representatives from California, co-authored an analysis of the detention/deportation issue that would be used over the course of the next few years by various organizations and individuals (Appendix D).

We identified these key themes as the foundation of our analysis:

- **Illegality of the memorandum of understanding:** We challenge the legality of the contract between the U.S. State Department and the Ministry of Interior, a Cambodian American repatriate whose position does not normally grant the authority to negotiate international agreements.
- **History of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia:** The historical events and processes of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia are directly linked to its *responsibility* to accept refugees from the war, and to the significance of refugee migration in the context of (inter)national immigration policies.
- **Attack on youth of color:** Deportation of a large portion of young people in Southeast Asian working-class communities is embedded in an ongoing state of structural violence against urban youth of color through marginalization from schools, racial profiling, inadequate-to-nonexistent basic social services, and culturally insensitive legal systems.
- **Attack on the poor and immigrants:** The attack on Southeast Asian refugee youth as youth of color occurs simultaneously with their class position and “perpetual foreigner” status as Asian Americans living in direct contradiction to the Model Minority Myth. The implicit message in this policy [M.O.U.] is that immigrants carry with them violence and an inherent lack of respect for the American “rule of law,” thereby justifying deportation as the antidote to crime in low-income immigrant communities. Moreover, the denial of

basic legal rights to immigrants creates a legal system privileging those wealthy enough to afford private attorneys.

- **INS as a despot:** Since 1996, the INS functions as the government arm that implements immigration enforcement without discretion, claiming its “lack of power” to make decisions. Although as an institution its role is only to implement the law, within those parameters there exist many individual choices and interpretations—in other words, power.
- **International and industrial perspective:** Intersectionality exists between labor demands by U.S. industries and the ebb and flow of immigration policies and arbitrary migrant flows, as well as the prison industrial system—criminal and immigration—as “safety-valves” for these policy decisions and enforcement practices.

Through consensus building, the group decided to adopt all of these points as their platform on the topic of detention and deportation. The unanimous adoption of that platform by SEAFN members illustrates the generational shift in SEAA activism.

Like the generation of Asian American activists before them,<sup>169</sup> they viewed the history of United States involvement in Southeast Asia as one of imperialism. Rather than embrace the Cold War discourse that justifies military coups, bombings, and forced migrations,<sup>170</sup> they re-appropriated the narrative to make claims for American accountability. Instead of viewing the acceptance of refugees into the United States as symbolic beacons of democracy to whom refugees owed the gift of freedom,<sup>171</sup> the Millennial generation of activists diverged from their elders to argue that the United States bore an ethical responsibility for its military interventions in their countries which included mandatory resettlement. To those emerging leaders, successful resettlement was not a gift but a moral imperative.<sup>172</sup>

In the next stage of the training, they created a power analysis of strengths, challenges, allies, and targets to set the foundation for a national campaign. In addition, we shared best practices from those who were working locally against detention/deportation in the San Francisco Bay Area. By that point, PrYSM had held their most successful event to date. Their anti-gang database in Providence had pulled together a critical mass of young community members ready to act when deportation became a reality in the Cambodian community. They convinced former and active gang members to call a truce in order to build an alliance against a potential unjust separation from their families. The truce was highlighted in an awareness-raising community barbecue organized by PrYSM at a local park that previously had been a site of inter-gang violence. More than 300 former and active gang members and their families came to the gathering.

No fights occurred, and eventually some of these members became core PrYSM organizers. To the rest of the member organizations at FT, PrYSM's work provided a model of and inspiration for what was possible in our local communities, as well as the importance of creating space and communication channels amongst themselves. Ironically, while PrYSM went to FT to learn and feel a part of something and find like-minded young people, they were the ones others saw as a model to emulate.

Following organizational presentations, individuals divided into breakout groups to discuss strategies and tactics. They learned that although they had common goals and objectives, our geographic and demographic conditions varied from city to city. Therefore, organizational tactics necessitated flexibility and could not be uniform. This realization of differences in local terrains represented a significant break from the way in which local progressive organizations and coalitions encouraged individual groups to conform to their messaging on immigration reform, which targeted either white or Latino audiences. We realized we had to create our own approach and messaging that resonated both with our ethnic communities and our political philosophies.

That evening, Monami Maulik, the co-founder of the New York Taxi Drivers Alliance, came to speak about her organization's campaign against post-9/11 detention and deportation. As the founder of another organization, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) (their acronym is in homage to DRUM of Detroit, a radical Black autoworkers' union in the 1970s), Monami talked about how in New York City, South Asian communities endured racial profiling, detention, and coerced "voluntary" deportations, whereby they were convinced by ICE officials to sign documents that they would voluntarily leave the country. She gave insight to their structure and campaign, and their successes and challenges. She emphasized the organization and the community's isolation in New York City and nationally since 9/11; the opacity of ICE; and the obstacles DRUM's campaign faced in finding an individual in ICE to whom they could target their protests in order to have a personification of the bureaucratic state agency.

Immigration policies redefined our communities, not by nationality or migration processes, but by the sweepingly generalized class of "noncitizen." After talking with Monami, many of the attendees realized the difficult task of confronting ICE had been multiplied by the circumstances of 9/11 that netted all noncitizens into the growing dragnet of "terrorists." The critical contribution of SEAFN's alliance with DRUM proved mutually beneficial. At a time when the majority of social justice groups hesitated to publicly support South Asian and Muslim groups, SEAFN stood out not just as an ally against hate crimes, but against the surveillance, racial profiling, and punitive immigration practices that directly led to increased removal of

Southeast Asian, Latino, Middle East and African immigrants and refugees. PrYSM and other SEAFN groups replicated the innovative, individualized storytelling campaigns developed by DRUM through their humanization campaigns of individuals with deportation orders. The inter-ethnic solidarity between DRUM and SEAFN provided the resources to embark on the first national campaign for the Network in the fall of 2002. They seized on the shared stigmatization the young people felt, built solidarity amongst their families, peers, and their multi-racial communities.<sup>173</sup> In doing so, they expanded their potential social networks and coalitional opportunities to create a critical mass against the barrage of anti-immigrant messages and policies in the aftermath of 9/11.<sup>174</sup>

The FT ended with the agreement that its participants signified the beginning of SEAFN, whose first priority of action was to fight detention and deportation at local and national levels. To do this, the groups would continue strategizing and sharing over conference calls, develop a possible collective national strategy and tactics, such as a National Day of Action (NDA), while allowing for local flexibility in how they framed the nuances of their messages and what activities they chose to plan. Although there were strained moments that are indicative of growing pains for any new formation overall, the participants reflected on the weekend as a success in moving toward their vision of building long-term bonds between organizations and communities. The question remained whether SEAFN would be able to sustain a national presence, and whether it would stay committed to its goal of leadership development through popular education and consensus building. SEAFN gathered three more times over the next two years in Providence, Rhode Island, in Long Beach, California, and as part of the SEARAC strategizing conference in Oakland, California. For various reasons, most members could not travel to other cities—gatherings served as a way for them to meet Southeast Asian American leaders from other parts of the country who travelled to their city.

The political camaraderie built during these convenings became critical in coalition building. Tony, a directly affected member who participated in the first FT, said, "We felt really touched that people cared about our situation. People who didn't have anything to do with this came from all over the country to spend their weekend trying to fight this thing with us."<sup>175</sup> The realization that the young people participated in something larger than their local, sometimes tedious, work validated their dedication, identity, and the commonality of their successes and challenges. Yang from Wisconsin felt a unique sense of solidarity:

*There are a lot of Southeast Asians, especially from Laos, where we are. But they either don't care about organizing or their work is really about social service. That's how they train the younger people, too. But here we saw people that understood life in America the same we do, and we got to share ideas about how to do things, not just follow what someone else tells us is "the way to do things." It makes more sense to us and to the young people we work with.<sup>176</sup>*

The meetings brought together staff, members, and directly affected individuals and their families as part of an “imagined community”<sup>177</sup> beyond their scripted racial, ethnic, or class identities. In that space, a new set of values in how to achieve their goals went beyond deportation itself to the process of empowerment and re-humanization.

Subsequent SEAFN meetings followed similar formats and consisted of one or two representatives from each organization. The gatherings led to separate trips for members within the network; one youth group would visit another one as part of their programming to have the members bond as well. Unfortunately, because of the irregularity of participants at the conference calls and convenings, SEAFN had to revisit previous discussions every time, wasting precious time they had to strategize. That irregularity led to a sense of frustration and some members began to question whether the long-term goals of SEAFN had outlived the short-term focus on deportation. The combination of a perceived divergence from priorities and continual impending personal crises for deportees made it increasingly challenging to build sustainable leadership within SEAFN.

SEAFN soon developed a loose structure encompassing its membership, decision-making process, tactics and strategies, and goals for a national deportation campaign. The Network’s membership criteria reflected the organizations that participated in the original FT. SEAFN’s work would consist only of Southeast Asian and youth-based organizations and individuals or family members directly affected by detention and deportation. The organizations that gravitated toward the Network tended to be progressive-minded groups with organizing as the central component of the youth programs. Individuals and family members were encouraged to have support from a local organization.

Within the first year, three organizations—Asian Americans United, Asian Freedom Project, and Cambodian American Consortium—discontinued their membership in SEAFN, due to internal restructuring that arose from their inability to sustain revenue and build leadership willing to continue participation. By the end of the year, an Oakland-based, multi-ethnic youth-based coalition, Asian American Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL), had joined SEAFN, and began a local, two-year

campaign for new immigration legislation. The shift in membership marked a new imbalance between the organizations within the network: from SEAA ethnic enclaves to coastal cities that traditionally had access to more external funding resources from major foundations and donors.<sup>178</sup> That move, ironically, also allowed for the potential for more interaction and rifts between groups and external allies in the competition for membership, resources, and funding.<sup>179</sup>

PrYSM felt that the national presence and inter-organizational bonding that occurred within the space of SEAFN was emotionally and politically important to both leaders and members. Despite little financial resources, they took great pains to participate in every call and meeting, and regularly interacted with the other SEAFN organizations. Gradually, PrYSM became the center of gravity for SEAFN, particularly as youth staff transitioned out of YLP due to family obligations, burn out, or the need to find employment elsewhere. Then, between 2006 and 2008, internal disagreements led to YLP’s break from CAAAV to form the group Mekong, leaving PrYSM to be the only stable SEAFN group on the East Coast.

It was critically important to PrYSM that the decision-making process in SEAFN was organic, allowing the new generation of leaders to pave their own way of learning to work together rather than forcing a predetermined process on them, developing a vision and goals, and defining the coalition on their own terms. The freedom of such a grassroots style of operation allowed for more radical messaging and actions than with the MAAs that had been involved earlier. That difference transcended the generational differences of the groups. I argue they were grounded in the lack of involvement by funders during that nascent period similar to how Kohl-Arenas characterized the farmworkers movement of the previous generation:

*[Privately funded] programs depended on resources from outside stakeholders. They also focused primarily on how farmworkers could help themselves improve their own behaviors and conditions, without challenging individual growers or the structure of agricultural industry. The revolutionary interpretation of mutual aid to foster self-determination and ownership, and the subsequent union approach, were both replaced by a more traditional charitable model.<sup>180</sup>*

In the SEA refugee resettlement context, MAAs had become the benefactors of government and private funding that became focused on individual self-help as a mode of economic survival and social assimilation. In its independence from funding restrictions, SEAFN could be the radical voice similar to the early farm workers movement that Kohl-Arenas describes.

## Organizing Tactics and Movement-Building Strategies

SEAA individuals who asked for support from the organizations in SEAFN often faced compounded problems that led them to the criminal justice system in the first place. Unlike PrYSM and other groups in SEAFN, many organizations, from legal to radical grassroots, advocated for the specific kinds of service support for clients. Legal representatives often only had the capacity to provide legal advice and representation. Social services usually could not assist with the legal research into one's case, nor did social work organizations generally create the space for political consciousness-raising activities or leadership development. Policy-based organizations did not require individualized, direct relationships with community members. At that time, none of these categories of organizations that constituted the community infrastructure developed a strategy to integrate these various needs of community members because they did not have it in their mission to develop holistic responses to the systematic disenfranchisement of this subpopulation. Moreover, the philanthropic infrastructure did not promote and support holistic approaches; rather, they preferred issue-based silos to more personal relationships in the community rather than with legal, social service (particularly with MAAs), or policy organizations, youth organizers often mentored and supported individual members through multiple aspects of their lives while trying to engage them in a political analysis to explain their circumstances. Although they were not always successful, their overall approach demonstrates the difference between their social justice-oriented approach in comparison to the service-specific responses of the AAPI agencies and MAAs.

Many individuals and families needed emotional validation as they faced emotional devastation of potential family separation, as some individuals became desperate, suicidal, or financially reckless. It was almost impossible to fight a legal case for a client who was experiencing extreme symptoms. Having the time to be personally engaged in their cases and improve their lives enough to stay out of cash-based economies meant supporting them in finding gainful employment. It meant helping them develop their job search and interviewing skills and supporting them as they filled out job applications. Reaching the goals and objectives of legal, policy, social service, and grassroots organizers alike depended on addressing members' compounded crises which no one group could tackle alone. SEAFN's tactics and strategies thus took on four components at the local level: trust-building through holistic support, humanization campaigns, National Days of Action, and building a local movement.

## Trust Building through Holistic Support

SEAFN was successful in identifying pro bono attorneys, in large part because of their willingness to do much of the leg work in preparing a case, such as obtaining the proper documents, prepping the client for trial, helping the client fill out forms, and helping families understand the legal process in accessible language. The families that reached out to SEAFN usually initially asked only for legal support and were connected to lawyers or legal organizations willing to offer a free consultation and possibly take the case pro bono on the phone. Many times, local organizers from SEAFN groups accompanied individuals to the meetings and assisted in collecting paperwork for their cases. They often became the linguistic brokers between the individual and the lawyer, translating and processing the legal jargon and the spectrum of options for the client. The willingness to walk through the process with the families was critical to building trust and community who had felt forgotten and isolated in their struggles.

Through this process, local organizers began to track the patterns that emerged in the cases. We observed and documented when someone was detained, the circumstances of their immigration arrest, the conditions of their detention and their deportation, and strategies employed by public defenders and pro-bono lawyers. The working relationships that developed between the organizers and community members allowed for organizers to gain from members' perspectives on how to move forward with their individual cases and deportation policy in general.

Drawing inspiration from the DRUM model that Monami Maulik described in the FT, SEAFN also shared information with multi-ethnic and multi-racial allies locally and nationally to build consistent messaging and evidence for legal campaigns concerning detention and deportation. While individual organizations focused on the needs and messaging that made sense in their own communities, they were also able to build broad, multi-racial resistance based on structural and systemic critiques. The holistic support of criminalized community members actually jumpstarted the process of political conscientization and campaign development. In providing critical emotional support for individuals affected by deportation, families also came to trust the community environment in these situations. The analysis of the unique accountability the government had to SEA refugees moved beyond immigrant desires for assimilation to situating ourselves within the course of racial and class-based social justice movements in American history.<sup>182</sup>

## Humanization Campaigns

SEAFN mirrored DRUM in building campaigns around individual cases that mobilized the community. The collection of cases helped them identify commonalities that would map possible ways to fight deportation, and the development of leadership of local community members was key to the successful long-term survival of the national network.<sup>183</sup> The goal for SEAFN was to build organizational skills among directly affected individuals through activities such as Congressional visits, public speaking, and independent media and cultural productions. It encouraged people to take control of their cases and create a democratic decision-making process that made sense to them. In essence, SEAFN's emphasis on process was their effort to materialize the vision they had for an equitable society within the campaign against deportation.

Local groups in SEAFN planned deportation outreach and education in community spaces and through organizational programming, such as community forums, immigration clinics, and workshops. Those forums educated community members on the basic concepts of the issue—who was at risk, what we knew of the process, the conditions of those deported, what people facing deportation or who were at risk could do, and what mobilization options were available. Usually, the forums had a lawyer present to answer more technical legal questions. Those events connected organizers to volunteers as well as families and individuals with immigration problems. They also helped people feel less isolated and had more clarity about the process and their options.

The strategic storytelling campaigns challenged the prevailing assumptions that the individuals facing deportation had been isolated from their communities and dehumanized by the singularity of their crimes.<sup>184</sup> The campaign employed stories of “self, us, and now,” to individualize and humanize targeted communities such that the relationship between the listener and the protagonist(s) in the stories have shared identities and emotions, eliciting a response to the current issue.<sup>185</sup> Visually and narratively situated, those targeted by deportation as part of SEAA families had already suffered the long-term trauma of war, even while giving agency through storytelling to the individuals and their relatives. The approach helped gain both media and philanthropic attention through the strategic use of directly affected members’ stories as parents, spouses, and children of genocide. In the context of immigration debates, the internalized images of the criminalized “alien” or the “deserving” refugee had to be contradicted with the first-person stories that humanized the targets of enforcement policies.

## National Days of Action

Between 2002 and 2006, SEAFN coordinated four National Days of Action (NDAs), whereby member organizations held concomitant events to conduct outreach and educate their respective communities on detention/deportation. The first NDA occurred on November 8, 2002. The events were planned over a series of conference calls within the network and decided upon by consensus. Although they were intended to be collaborations to express national solidarity and strong opposition to deportation policy, no single organization or set of criteria was enforced by all organizations. Each organization had the flexibility to promote its materials and hold events as deemed appropriate for its community. In short, the events’ national scope legitimized local organizations, but did not override or impose upon the particularities of local communities.

Developing sustainability in a social movement means building a base of community members and leveraging external and internal resources. SEAFN felt the urgent need to draw attention to the issue impacting their communities and collectively decided to kick off their local campaigns with marches and rallies in each of the eight member-cities. Because most SEAFN organizations already had a membership base and cross-sectional alliances with different movements, finding people to participate in a rally was not difficult and they were able to access additional resources for sound systems, city permits, police liaison, printing materials, and speakers from different communities who could speak to the shared oppression they faced with the police, prison, and immigration enforcement agencies.

On the day of that first NDA in 2002, ten cities participated: Providence, Bronx, Philadelphia, Lowell, Madison, Long Beach, Stockton, Oakland, Davis, and Washington, D.C. The event proved immensely successful in catapulting the issue of deportation into the national limelight, giving SEAFN a seat at the table as an important body for strategizing purposes both locally and nationally, and in giving families an opportunity to share their anger, pain, and frustration with the immigration and detention system. It also marked the first time a national action of progressive political organizing had taken place within SEAA communities across the country. In five locations, the organizations chose to integrate rallies, and all groups chose to have a public vigil, memorializing the sacrifices that refugees made to come to the country and loved ones lost along the journey. The imagery of multiple generations coming together peacefully—highlighting their losses and escape—played into the normative narrative in popular culture about refugee victims.<sup>186</sup> In contrast, the direct actions of the youth groups in major cities legitimized them with the progressive left circles who often thought of AAPI, and SEAA in particular, as complacent and unwilling to protest. In

each location, a major news outlet documented the event, garnering the attention of funders looking to respond to the Bush administration in the post-9/11 context.

The NDA also marked the anniversary of PrYSM's formation, inspiring its members to devote extra time and effort to ensure the NDA's success as it took on personal local significance for them. PrYSM went door-to-door with flyers to encourage people to march with them from East Providence to the ICE local headquarters, where they would hold a vigil for those who had been deported. Afterward, they marched to a nearby park beside the I-95 freeway to rally until 5pm, when they planned to block a major intersection leading to the highway during rush hour. Leaders also asked immigrant community groups, immigrant rights groups, legal organizations, and the local Cambodian MAA to participate in the march and rally.

The Providence social justice community, as well as immigrant families from various Latinx, Caribbean, African, and Southeast Asian nationalities, spent the day together in solidarity. Family Unity drove from Lowell, Massachusetts, to Providence with its own contingent, as PrYSM later did that week for the Family Unity rally in Lowell. Everyone placed a white flower in respect for those facing deportation in front of the doors of the ICE building, and social justice leaders and youth organizers spoke at the rally in the park. The event was highlighted by a Native American ceremony led by Indigenous intergenerational community members. The rally achieved a critical mass, and participants took over the thoroughfare by holding hands in peace, encircling the parameters of the main intersection. About 200 people attended the march and rally, and PrYSM headlined the local newspapers—not only in regard to the rally, but also in respect to their demands for a moratorium on deportations and the release of detainees. The rally solidified the group as the leading voice for the newly formed SEAFN coalition.<sup>187</sup>

Subsequent NDAs fell on the anniversary of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, March 22, 2002. After the explosion of news media interest over the next two years, SEAFN decided it needed to refocus on community outreach and base building in order to sustain the direct actions and public pressure for immigration reform. The NDAs thus became more targeted in predominantly SEAA communities with educational and outreach events, rather than large direct actions focused garnering media attention. Each organization held a barbecue or community event with educational materials on hand to continue ongoing awareness within the communities. Those events drew strong turnout and became individual groups' main base-building events as well as one of the main channels through which SEAFN stayed connected to member organizations despite having few resources.

Although SEAFN and its member organizations operated on shoestring budgets for most of the first decade of the network's existence they continued to be one of the few sources of support and healing for many SEAA youth locally and nationally. Their activism empowered a new generation to build a critical mass based on claims of rights and justice across the country, giving "the struggle much of its dynamic, bottom-up character."<sup>188</sup>

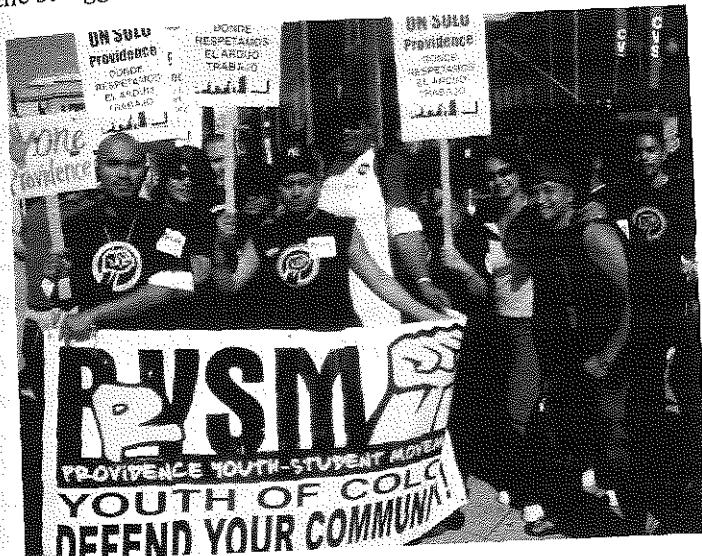


Figure 4.1. PrYSM Anti-Deportation Protest 2003 (Courtesy of PrYSM Archives).

### Demanding More than a Seat at the Table

In September 2004, SEARAC announced that they had received a small grant from the Four Freedoms Fund (FFF) to organize a strategizing conference to fight detention and deportation policies. FFF began in 2003 as a collaborative project between major funders to target geographic areas with growing immigrant populations. These funders included major philanthropic foundations for progressive causes such as Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Open Society Institute, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. They provided funding, technical assistance, and capacity building opportunities through meetings and trainings.<sup>189</sup> SEARAC designed the conference agenda and schedule and identified the location, host, and coordinators for each section with Cambodian Community Development, Inc. (CCDI), an MAA in Oakland, CA, where the conference would be held, before it invited SEAFN to the table.

SEARAC divided participants into working groups that would spend

most of Saturday in strategizing sessions about what the focus of the anti-deportation work should be. Each group was to then report back to the larger group at the end of the day. Sunday's agenda consisted of the entire group coming together to devise a cohesive national campaign to end the deportation of Southeast Asian refugees. Although SEAFN comprised two-thirds of the participants, no current or former SEAFN members were asked to take leadership roles in planning the conference. Ironically, SEARAC's agenda imitated the work that SEAFN had been engaged in for the previous two years, on media messaging, policy reform, and legal and family services. SEAFN members felt that they had been asked to attend and participate in a conference for the benefit of extracting more information and knowledge without having any real power in the process or resource sharing. SEAFN did not know that a FFF program officer was invited by SEARAC to be on site to decide whether to fund SEARAC to lead the anti-deportation campaign nationally for SEAA. SEAFN representatives did not know beforehand that their presence also had the performative role to demonstrate a "united front" between SEARAC and SEAFN.

### Tensions Break Out

On Saturday afternoon, after breakout sessions, the conference reconvened over lunch to watch a PSA. Porthira Chhim, representing CCDI, was scheduled to present a five-minute public service announcement (PSA) that he developed. No other media productions were screened even though SEAFN had created two other videos and had their own training materials on how to speak with media. Prior to the conference, the announcement had already been accepted and scheduled to air on local television, with possible national exposure. The ad depicted the life story of a young man whose face and real identity were used. It followed the same narrative that SEAFN had used in its educational video for workshops but failed to protect the individual's identity. The young man walks down the street as his mother tells the story of how he came to the United States in a voiceover. He walks into a citizenship class and acts as if he is speaking to the group. There is no sound of what he is actually saying or doing throughout the PSA, but the message at the top of the screen is that the viewer must choose to retain *deserving* immigrants in the United States.

The PSA immediately brought a storm of verbal protests in the room. Representatives from PrYSM asked why the funding Chhim had received had not been shared, and why the project had not been more collaborative when Chhim was well aware that SEAFN had been creating its own documentary and videos for more than a year. An AYPAL staffer wondered why a broader media strategy was not discussed with SEAFN in the context of the creating

the PSA. I posed the question of security for the person in the PSA because it had included complete disclosure of the subject's identity, home, and family, even though he was under immigration probation. A YLP representative expressed frustration that the PSA was being screened at the conference with the goal to use it in place of SEAFN videos for educational trainings. Several people raised concern that the message encouraged a division between "good" and "bad" immigrants, which SEAFN's campaign against deportation had clearly sought to deconstruct. The probable consequence of such a message allowed for legislation that would encourage the artificial and arbitrary delineation of what constituted acceptable behavior, thus "deserving" of immigration relief, on the basis of common values by the increasingly conservative immigration courts.

Chhim's responses to the criticism exacerbated the tensions. First, he pointed out that SEAFN never contacted CCDI when it made videos, without acknowledging that CCDI showed no interest in SEAFN's deportation work until FFF showed interest. When he told the staffer from AYPAL that SEAFN was too irresponsible to partner with, he used the example of their tardiness to the sessions that morning. In fact, SEAFN communicated the need for an emergency internal meeting early that morning to address sexual misconduct within one of its member organizations. Finally, Chhim argued that the term "deserving" did not imply good/bad dichotomies and would not be interpreted by audience as such. The question and answer period closed without public commitment on whether to use the PSA and encourage its broadcast on public television stations. The rift over this video resulted in broken trust between SEAFN, SEARAC, and CCDI and displayed itself in the presence of the program officer who later chose not to fund the movement. The movement risked dissolution as a result of the competition for resources, differences in political ideologies, and factionalism that had torn apart many social justice movements before them.

### Parting Ways

The conference peaked during Sunday's sessions in the CCDI office lobby, where an all-women volunteer crew of staffers and the board of directors' wives served lunch. The meeting that Sunday extended into the afternoon, but most participants had to leave earlier in the afternoon to make it back for work on Monday morning. As a result, the major decision-making for the group's future programming—the final stage of the conference agenda—would be left only to local representatives. After summarizing each group's conclusions from the breakout sessions, the final meeting was used to compile all of the ideas from the previous day and come to a consensus on the next steps. However, it became clear early on that decisions on how

to move toward a national campaign had been preconceived. In fact, none of the session summaries made conclusions about how to proceed with a national campaign. Rather, the SEARAC/CDDI proposal to advocate for an immigration policy that re-instated the 212(c) waiver, which narrowly allowed very minor criminal cases to be judicially reviewed, was the only proposal offered for the remaining participants to vote on.

The proposal did not come from any of the session discussions and instead seemed to be predetermined by SEARAC. The East Asian American legal scholar who devised the proposal openly pressured SEAFN to adopt his policy plan in the moment, condescendingly stating that he had been “waiting for years for the community to take action.” The SEAFN representatives reacted with silence. They had been put in a situation where they were asked to conform and vote immediately on a plan that they 1) had no part in developing, 2) had virtually no opportunity to discuss, and 3) did not even help the majority of their members who faced deportation for more serious crimes. They felt they could not present any challenge because they were in the presence of a funder who had the power to expand their work, and because the person pressuring them was a leading elder AAM activist to whom they had an intergenerational obligation.

With the FFF program officer bearing witness, SEAFN representatives said they would have to discuss the proposal with their members and could not decide immediately. If they agreed to the legal scholar’s policy proposal, they would jeopardize the process of community empowerment through consensus-building that defined their political project. Moreover, their members would most likely oppose the narrowness of the 212(c) waiver that would alleviate very few cases and uphold the good/bad immigrant binary. The legal scholar then framed their hesitancy to imply that SEAFN was the barrier against progress on the issue and they were acting like irresponsible youth. Like Chhim’s reaction to critique of his video, this scholar responded to the youth’s resistance by imposing stereotypes about urban youth of color on them. SEAFN ultimately declined to state a position at the end of the session but agreed to review his proposal with their members back home. The tense session ended the conference and was the last real collaboration between these groups for the next few years.

### Lessons Learned

The Four Freedoms-funded conference elicited two conclusions about SEAFN’s relationship on a national stage to existing power brokers of policy. SEAFN continued to struggle to navigate between the local culture of their constituents, their progressive allies in movement coalitions, and national policy strongholds. The upshot of the conference was that SEARAC revealed

their model for a national campaign against deportation: the appropriated structure and strategy from SEAFN that had been built over the course of the previous two years. The fact that SEARAC accepted SEAFN’s model validates the influence of SEAFN on immigrant rights organizing, not solely by groups like SEARAC, but by also prominent funding sources. In the end, unlike grassroots formations of a generation ago,<sup>190</sup> FFF played a significant role, both positive and inadvertently obstructive, in how honest and organic coalition building could develop its priorities, namely how it viewed positive collaborations and failed to support the development of the movement, such as not offering technical assistance on decision-making, coalition-building, and youth organizing. In other words, giving them the tools and guidelines to better facilitate the process and plan the conference could have changed the direction of the philanthropic approach to funding as well as the direction of the national work in the immigrant rights community.<sup>191</sup>

The conference marked the beginning of the end to any cohesive effort by this generation of SEAFN to launch a cohesive campaign among groups against detention and deportation. It also was the last time SEAFN convened nationally although individual groups would maintain relationships of varying degrees of intimacy. Each organization’s participation in immigration reform also changed. They shifted back to a strategy of building local campaigns that focused on preventative interventions to keep members out of the prison industrial complex. The return to its grassroots prerogatives gave new life to the work of SEAFN and allowed it a moment to regroup away from the national spotlight. Although the increased attention attracted funding opportunities and forced collaborations for which it may not have been ready, it also creating tensions that potentially would have negatively impacted the movement overall.<sup>192</sup> SEAFN struggled with funding for its national efforts, and no one organization had the capacity to sustain the network. By 2010, it had in effect become defunct.

### SEARAC’s New Leadership, New Directions

In an interview with Max Niedweicki, the former executive director of SEARAC, he shared his opinion of Southeast Asian American youth organizations and what he thought were the main obstacles in mobilizing for immigration reform. He responded, “It’s hard to advocate for policy changes at the national level [in D.C.] when at the local level the groups you’re supposed to represent are calling for the overthrow of the government....We can’t make allies with Congressional representatives when people are protesting their local offices.” Niedweicki was referring to local SEAFN campaigns that targeted regional ICE officials, calling on

them to re-interpret immigration laws. The only actions addressed to Congressional representatives by SEAFN organizations were to encourage its members to hold personal meetings with Congressional staff to educate them on the impact of deportation policies. The meetings were held inside Congressional offices without media present. No one demanded an overthrow of the government. The legislative visits were exactly the sort of activity that SEARAC summer institutes trained their participating organizations to do, and those trainings then inspired SEAFN's decision to include this in their repertoire of contention. But Niedwecki conflated the nuances of the various kinds of political participation and campaign strategies and tactics into a narrative that also fit into his biases about SEAA youth and about progressive social movements. The example of SEARAC's then Executive Director's response emphasizes the contradictory relationship with the MAAs that the youth organizations had to overcome when they entered inter-generational and inter-ethnic coalitions.

Toward the end of 2004, new leadership shifted SEARAC's direction and approach. A young Hmong American woman from Detroit, Michigan, Doua Thor, was hired to lead SEARAC in its efforts to be more responsive to its member organizations and to lead the organization into the new millennium. Thor soon held community gatherings of member MAAs and stakeholders in various cities throughout the country to hear from the membership what they needed from the umbrella organization mandated to represent them at the national level.

SEARAC adopted a clear stance against Southeast Asian deportation for the first time because of Thor's political orientation on the topic. It also made a dramatic shift in its public position by citing U.S. immigration law and practices as a critique of the deportation policy. It proactively educated its membership organizations by offering fact sheets and toolkits to discuss the topic through its partnership with the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) and with PBS/ITVS and the filmmakers of the documentary *Sentenced Home*. Thor made a commitment to support the work of SEAA youth groups by backing 1Love Movement, a group in Philadelphia. SEARAC funded the group's projects and operations, and heavily promoted 1Love Movement's anti-deportation efforts. By extension, 1Love Movement shared those resources with other groups that had formerly been part of SEAFN. The relationship between Thor and 1Love Movement helped SEAFN re-emerge and helped PrYSM sustain its ongoing anti-deportation support for families by funding a staff person.

As the political tension surrounding criminal deportations and enforcement increased under the Obama administration, policy and philanthropic organizations shifted toward more conservative agendas, including supporting the DREAM Act,<sup>193</sup> immigrant integration, and

citizenship/voter registration drives. Funders expressed concern that PrYSM and others in SEAFN did not create the successful and measurable outcomes that funders could tout to their donors. For PrYSM, the loss in funding resulted in the shift back to a local emphasis that meant refocusing on its women's group, SEAQuel, and organizing against school-to-prison pipelines in Rhode Island.

### Navigating Power

PrYSM found legitimacy through channels outside of the traditional SEAA leadership: directly affected community members, a network of like-minded Southeast Asian groups throughout the country, and East Asian American-based groups from within the AAM. They developed campaigns based on resource mobilization within the community, as well as outside the main pillars of community infrastructure. The mentors within AAM and the immigrant rights movement played critical roles in validating their anti-deportation work in ways that the MAAs were hesitant to do. That support allowed them the opportunity to spark the interest of potential national funders, and they helped set the stage for more progressive voices concerning detention and deportation in the post-9/11 period. As progressive funders became attentive to SEAFN, the movement involving immigrant rights, policy, and legal organizations also gained traction.

Regardless of the symbiotic relationships that were cultivated between the youth groups and the MAAs, the increased public attention for these groups did not equate to increased power in setting the agenda and garnering resources directly for the youth groups like PrYSM. Some MAAs and AAM leaders made assumptions about the behavioral characteristics of SEAA youth leaders that aligned with common stereotypes of urban youth of color as being irresponsible, uncooperative, and lazy. These narratives became their justification to exclude them in decision-making processes or be equal partners for major funding opportunities. While the choices by funders and by the MAA and AAM leaders may not have been ill-intentioned, the impact of their choices left SEAA youth groups like PrYSM marginalized. The intergenerational and class tensions persisted to the detriment of the family members who sought both immediate assistance and long-term policy solutions to their separation. SEARAC's transition in leadership to a 1.5-generation refugee Hmong woman shifted its relationship with SEAA youth groups and expressed a more amicable view toward advocacy and activism. In turn, its willingness to engage in a broader repertoire of tactics influenced local MAAs to do the same.

In this chapter, the particular evolution of the relationships at play devolved from a promising network of youth groups that could collaborate

with long-standing policy and MAA partners. However, the dissolution of the coalition with the MAAs and SEARAC, and of SEAFN itself, by no means ended the efforts to renew commitment to a long-term vision to better the lives of SEAA communities by PrYSM. Rather, it represents the renegotiation that is a necessary part of intergenerational transference of leadership and power. The Millennial leaders had come to realize their potential voice free from the intergenerational burdens thrust upon them. Now they needed to learn how to translate their new political voice into a movement of their own.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### #RefugeeResilience: The Turn toward Glocal Activism

*The longer I'm here, the more American I feel.<sup>194</sup>*

I visited the Returnee Assistance Project (RAP) just as it opened to receive newly exiled Khmer Americans in Phnom Penh. While staying at this “guest house turned transition home,” I met virtually all the first three cohorts of deportees. One day, Kimho Ma, perhaps the most well-known of the people exiled thus far for his role in the Supreme Court case that dissolved indefinite immigration detentions, accompanied me to the notorious Toul Sleng prison. Toul Sleng was a school that became the site of torture and murder of over 12,000 civilians during the Khmer Rouge in the aftermath of the American War in Southeast Asia. As we walked through the bare classrooms where only the tools of torture remained, Kimho reflected on his transgressions as a formerly affiliated gang member, sharing that his biggest regret was that the government no longer discerned between those who “deserved” to be deported like himself, and those who were involved in petty, non-violent crimes or crimes of poverty to survive. Somehow, there was a sense of responsibility—a sense of grief—of what he viewed to be a “loss of life” because of him. He showed remorse and accountability for the Khmer Americans who shared his fate. Simultaneously, he felt a sense of anger and rejection, of being the “stepchild” of America’s war, as a Khmer refugee, and as a refugee child that the country neglected, turned its back on, and then blamed for growing up the way he did.

The ironies of the moment surfaced the stark contradictions. He had left school after having a promising future as a University of California, Davis student who could neither remove himself from his past nor afford to move forward with his dreams. He revealed his sense of pain, frustrations, and guilt at a site that had once held promise only to be desecrated by state-instituted violence, of which the United States infamously chose not to intervene because of its “compassion fatigue” from the war. He stood alone amongst the ruins of war, with no sense of how to engage in a process of unraveling the internalized racist views the world had shaped in his mind, and no channels to right the wrongs of history and of his own story.



*Figure 5.1: Ferguson, MO, Solidarity Rally, 2014 (Courtesy of PrYSM Archives)*

### The Global and the Local: Progressions in Transnational and Diasporic Activism

The evolution of anti-deportation activism has integrated it into the Asian American Movement (AAM) while members of SEAFN positioned themselves as leaders and representatives for the SEAA community rather remaining on the margins. In the process, they have also deepened diasporic ties with the deportees in Cambodia, creating an historic global-local, or "glocal," campaign to end deportation. Embodied in PrYSM are a new generation of SEAA activists, ones who have crossed borders internally and externally to tell their stories on their own terms—even at the risk of public repudiation of their marginalized status in SEAA communities—as formerly incarcerated, as former gang-affiliated youth, as women, and as LGBTQ+. And rather than conform to a prescribed performance, these SEAA activists returned the gift of freedom to their ethnic and movement elders by demanding their democratic rights to self-determination to shape SEAA identity and agendas that were important to them. Their approach to transnational organizing attempted to achieve horizontal instead of hierachal social movement in both the way they coordinated with individuals in Cambodia and their fundraising choices.

The historic, transnational coordination between 1Love Cambodia and SEAFN catalyzed a new generation of activists in the SEAA community

beyond the anti-communist movements of the older generation of activists discussed in Chapter One.<sup>195</sup> The use of international law as the justification for the "right2return" were fraught with relations of power that were never unpacked during the course of the campaign by #Right2Return organizers. As Elora Chowdhury documented in her study on the Bangladeshi women's movement, the dynamic of those with U.S. citizenship making decisions and informing the public narratives of the victims of gendered violence in Bangladesh was ineffective at empowering anyone *but* those involved with the U.S. women's movement.<sup>196</sup> Consequently, the power relations between the movement actors in Bangladesh and the United States evolved into a co-dependent relationship whereby power dynamics magnified rather than shifted.<sup>197</sup> In contrast, SEAFN 2.0's concerted efforts to highlight the voices of directly affected individuals, as well as their commitment to educate exiled Khmer Americans at training workshops in Phnom Penh, gestured toward a consciousness of power relations. As they put it, it was a means to "give voice" to those rendered invisible in the immigration process. Unfortunately, while supportive of the campaign, in informal conversations with deportees in Cambodia and with network members in the United States, it became clear that many members outside the SEAFN 2.0's leadership lacked a firm grasp on the complex language, laws, and processes of the U.N. and international human rights.

Ultimately, the well-intentioned vision by the network leadership and its actualization begs the question whether the politics of power between classes, defined by income, education, or citizenship, had been moving a campaign forward without actually empowering the people it was supposedly "liberating." I asked how 1Love Cambodia felt about the SEAFN 2.0 organizers trying to work with them. According to Borom, the relationship was positive overall:

*At least we're at the point where something is being done, something is being talked about. I tell [SEAFN], the power struggle is not with White America, it's in our own community. Now you have a younger generation [of SEAA] who want to push for equality and we can see them coming up and more people understanding. Intrinsically, they have a lot more compassion [than the previous SEAA generation]; their hearts are in the right place. They're not willing to accept the status quo. They're willing to fight for it. And they are searching for their roots when they come here, so that shows they care. I don't get arrogance from them like a lot of the NGO people who come here.*

SEAFN 2.0 activists gave 1Love Cambodia the tools to organize, but they had the capacity to listen and be allies rather than situate themselves at the

center of the campaign. At the same time, Borom made it clear that many deportees had mixed feelings about returning to the United States: "Our goal is different from the people in the U.S. We want to stop the bleeding [of deportations], but we're also realistic about returning. I have kids here now, and I wouldn't want them to go through the judgement and racism that I did in the U.S. In Cambodia, they are loved." Borom recognized the simultaneity of transnational justice through his personal experience of deportation, but his political conscientization simultaneously made him critical of the American Dream and the reality of what it meant to be a racialized immigrant child in America.<sup>198</sup> In the end, the campaign did bring a new powerful dimension to the movement by organizing the diasporic SEAA in Cambodia who had been disenfranchised as refugees in the United States.

### A New Generation: SEAFN 2.0

In August 2013, Vietnamese American Youth of Louisiana, New Orleans, or VAYLA-NO, a youth group formed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the district of New Orleans East primarily for Vietnamese American youth, received funding from the Kellogg Foundation to convene progressive Asian American youth groups from across the country for a racial justice gathering in New Orleans. Core members of the original SEAFN were invited to the gathering, including KGA, PrYSM, Freedom, Inc., and Mekong Chanravy, on behalf of SEAFN, helped plan the event by working closely with VAYLA's Executive Director, Minh Nguyen, and a small group of people from California and New York.

In the meetings, Chanravy and Minh were the only individuals representing SEAA groups. Searching for social justice mentors, Minh sought out leadership in those East Asian-based groups. The groups have long histories of radical left positions and political campaign successes that they have passed on to a new generation of leaders within their own membership. Organizational leaders have positioned themselves as mentors and resources for emergent SEAA youth groups, thus filling the gap left by many MAAs. Chanravy expressed her frustration during the planning process, which she felt had been taken over by an East Asian-dominated agenda. She added that she had to fight for SEAFN groups and SEAA allies to even attend.

Over the course of the weekend, the Southeast Asian and South Asian American youth groups privately expressed that they felt increasingly estranged from the conference planning process and discourse. They felt that middle-class, college-educated, East Asian groups, mainly from the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City, were dominating the agenda, and the conference culture. To many of the youth leaders, the workshops

became intellectual, abstract musings on social justice that did not relate to their personal lives or current challenges they and their members were facing as real crises. The persistent discussions on the need to recognize intersectionality in the movement became convoluted as representatives from the Southeast Asian and South Asian American youth, many of whom also identified as LGBTQ+, felt that a queer intersectional identity was being used to rationalize and flatten the class and color privilege held by many of the people in the room. To PrYSM and other SEAA organizers, the claims to a marginalized identity based on intersectional identities of gender and sexuality allowed those with class and ethnic privilege to try to speak for all present, including SEAA youth, while ignoring the power dynamics of those in attendance.

While the SEAA leaders at the conference believed they benefitted from the legacy of the Asian American Movement (AAM) from the 1960s and '70s, they raised concern about harkening back to the East Asian-dominant period in AAM that perpetuated the narrative of the "gift" of social activism to refugees—the gift that came with the unavoidable strings of indebtedness. These early AAM activists bestowed their legacies to a younger professionalized generation of nonprofit-based activists.<sup>199</sup> Consequently, the Millennial and post-Millennial SEAA activists felt they could again reproduce the roles of benefactors of the gift of AAM that they could accept with terms but never fully own.

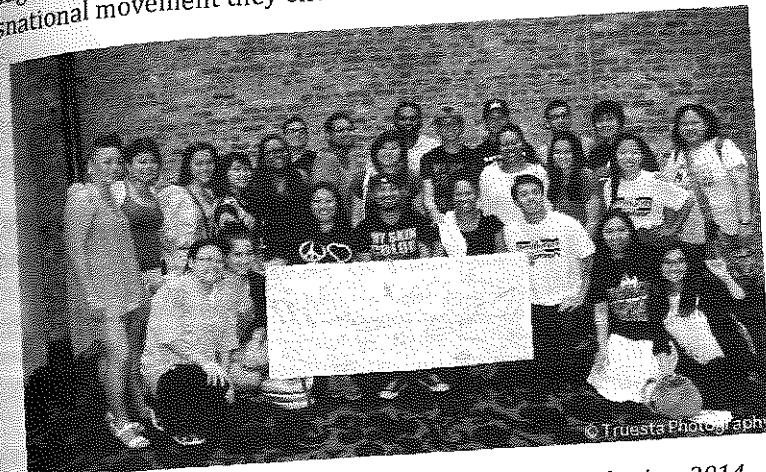
By the end of the weekend, though, the SEAA contingents felt disempowered by the dynamics of the conference and seemed to have little desire to continue working with the other organizations. A PrYSM youth organizer recounted, "We are always being used by Asian Americans to organize, but they never actually give us power even though it's about us." When meeting socially over meals and at their hotel, they decided to communicate their frustrations. They first visibly separated from the larger collective and began small group meetings. On the last day of the conference, participants were asked to divide into teams and write on butcher paper what they had gleaned from the weekend's events and their next steps or goals in organizing for a new Asian American Movement. The SEAA group purposefully formed one breakout group, with the exception of VALY-NO, who acted as the host organization and focused on implementing the logistics of the gathering. At the end of the session, instead of speaking, the SEAA groups stood together and raised a colorfully decorated sign to announce the re-formation of SEAFN. The banner featured a sun in one corner and a river running across the page. The organizers wrote messages of their past, their resilience as refugees, and accomplishments by famous SEAA along the river in addition to inspirational figures from American social movement history. For example, they drew a Sriracha hot sauce bottle

and a raised fist, and other iconic symbols of the Black Power, Chicano, and Asian American left movements from the 1960s. While the map did not include the intricate details of migration, it was clearly an homage to the SEA migration journeys, reminiscent of traditional Hmong quilts that narrate Hmong migration and cultural history. At the center of the sign were the words, "Southeast Asian Freedom Network 2.0" to signify a separation from the body of organizations at the conference. A new generation of SEA organizers was born.

The gathering ended with a tense subtext that while there were opportunities for solidarity, SEAFN 2.0 demanded any coalition be inclusive of SEA perspectives and on their terms, not simply in their names. They were confident that they had the means, skills, and determination to organize independently. After the conference, the groups in SEAFN made concerted efforts to support one another's fundraising events and used those events, among others, to have national meetings and periodic phone meetings. SEAFN 2.0, however, learned from the original SEAFN's mistakes with the Four Freedom Funds experience and took control of their campaigns from the beginning.

The groups who attended the Kellogg-funded meeting eventually formed a broad coalition of leftist AAPI organizations engaged in movement-building activities, called Grassroots Asians Rising (GAR), and SEAFN 2.0 groups overlapped with GAR. Yet, SEAFN 2.0 symbolized a severing from the burden of indebtedness that they had been carrying across generations, within and beyond the refugee experience, which had attached itself to the experiential sense of statelessness—essentially, of not belonging.<sup>200</sup> Rebellious intergenerational breaks are common to social movements as part of their growth cycles. Younger activists tend to take more radical positions than their elders based on the freedoms they gained from previous victories, and SEAFN 2.0's unwillingness to compromise their power unequivocally rejected the reified and sacrificial refugee victim. In short, they had to end the relationship with AAM that reproduced the patron-client power dynamic, as "both life necessity and legitimate reason to kill—that is, the refugee patriot both reconfigures race safely through asylum, through multicultural gesture, and through incorporation into an existing interior of freedom's empire [and simultaneously] a biological threat."<sup>201</sup> SEAFN 2.0 had become a viable threat to an antiquated mentality that could not see them as anything other than victims. Their resolute claims to their own authorship of social movement history in general, and Southeast Asian American history in particular, still respected the complicated political histories of conflicting perspectives. But more than that, they rejected the hierachal relations that they believed those in power took for granted. After a series of meetings with GAR leaders, SEAFN

2.0 negotiated for representatives from their staff assume leadership roles within GAR as a condition of their continued involvement. Their freedom to imagine, articulate, and lead their own future planted the seeds for the transnational movement they envisioned.



© Truesta Photography

Figure 5.2. SEAFN 2.0 Banner at Racial Justice Gathering, 2014  
(Courtesy of PrYSM Archives, Truesta Photography).

### SEAFN 2.0: Seeds of A Transnational Movement

SEAFN 2.0 members felt that they had previously been driven out of the policy discussions on immigration reform by MAAs and AAM policy groups and yet held the role of first responders to immigration crises locally. SEAFN 2.0 decided to regain control of the debate by developing their own multi-pronged campaign. By the time SEAFN 2.0 started, Quyen Dinh, the new SEARAC Executive Director who replaced Duoa Thor, had to develop trust with SEAFN 2.0, which had come to expect resources from SEARAC that Thor offered them during her tenure. Dinh was emotionally impacted as a student on the University of California, Berkeley campus during the height of SEAFN's original campaign between 2002 and 2004. While a strong advocate for the cause, she felt she had to curtail the funding to SEAFN 2.0 to align with the fiscal resources available to SEARAC when she assumed leadership. This led to initial tensions between SEARAC and SEAFN 2.0, but unlike the relationship with SEARAC two leaders before her, Dinh, Sarath, and other SEAFN leaders were able to reach an agreement on how to best collaborate in ways that gave resources to SEAFN 2.0 to continue. Under the leadership of both these SEA 1.5-, 1.8-, and second-generation women, SEARAC has actively campaigned against immigration enforcement and the deportation of refugees at the policy level and in individual cases. SEARAC

also assisted SEAFN with financial support for the new campaign, a central component of which included independent media productions that would air on social media video sites, challenging dominant frames of debate on immigration.

In 2015, SEAFN organizations and the filmmakers of *Cambodian Son*, a documentary about life after deportation for exiled Khmer American poet Kosal Khiev, offered community screenings of the film in cities across the country. The screenings rejuvenated audiences' energies, helping them to refocus their priorities on the school-prison-deportation pipeline. SEAFN 2.0 decided to update their media materials and create new productions using social media. Unlike the first SEAFN attempts to produce independent videos, SEAFN 2.0 members have become better-trained in media technology and creating media campaigns by non-SEAA ally organizations. The post-Millennial generation activists also have the advantage of their extensive experiences with and access to social media. While SEAFN 2.0 youth had been documenting their activism on Facebook and other sites, the footage of SEAFN leaders testifying and actively participating in the United Nations (U.N.) international conference in 2015 sparked the concept for a new digital social media strategy for the anti-deportation campaign.

While the new media strategy was originally conceptualized in tandem with the goal to humanize the deportation issue to international and domestic policymakers, its main achievement was the burgeoning social media following and common ground among SEAA young people. The use of social media gave SEAFN unprecedented power to articulate its own narrative and strategically frame the issue based on storytelling.<sup>202</sup> SEAFN 2.0 launched its social media video campaign in the fall of 2015, led by 1Love Movement in Philadelphia. SEAFN members traveled across the country to fifteen major cities in thirty days, and then to Cambodia with SEAA populations to interview everyday people and community organizers in the SEAA community focusing on one theme: the history of refugee migration and resettlement as a result of war as just cause to oppose deportation. The films employ first-person perspectives, and make known SEAA experiences with hip-hop beats and rhymes—originally written for each specific video—that represent their collective generational cultural identity.<sup>203</sup> Created with hand-held cameras and edited on home computers, the eight-minute, youth-made videos were released once a month from October 2015 to April 2016. The videos humanized the campaign to end deportation by creating the personal immigration and resettlement narratives of child refugees directly impacted by U.S. immigration policies. They represented the "street ethnography" that Schlund-Vials describes in Khmer American rapper PraCh Ly's work, as one who evokes "cultural

facts and cultural truths that correspondingly facilitate alternative routes to refugee reparation and Cambodian American rehabilitation."<sup>204</sup>

The videos offered a resurrection of the refugee youth who had hitherto been invisible except to be upheld as the potential of the American Dream personified. That resurrection was the production of Americana looking back at itself in its racial diversity, imperial residue, and the discursive power of democracy in action.<sup>205</sup> The activists used social media platforms to circulate the videos with the following demands: 1) ending the deportation of refugees from the American War in Southeast Asia; 2) allowing those already deported back into the United States; and 3) renegotiating the terms of the M.O.U. with Cambodia to replicate those established with Viet Nam, whereby only those who have entered the United States after 1996 are subject to removal. Through online platforms, they leveraged the sites where their own generation had found political education, identification, and avenues toward political action.<sup>206</sup> The new media campaign generated enough attention online in the United States and amongst the exiled Khmers in Cambodia that SEAFN 2.0 felt they could escalate their campaign. On the fortieth anniversary of SEA refugee migration to the United States, SEAFN 2.0 released a full statement with these campaign demands framed in the language of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

#### #RefugeeResilience, #EndDisplacement, #Right2Return: A Human Rights Campaign

After the newly formed United Nations put forth the Declaration of Human Rights in 1951, Black civil rights activists presented to this body's petition, "We Charge Genocide," to ask the international body to protect against the state-sanctioned human rights violations of Black in the United States.<sup>207</sup> Social movement activists have increasingly returned to the U.N. as an international platform for shaming the United States on its domestic policies, including incarceration and immigration enforcement. Allies in the immigrant rights movement, such as DRUM, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR), and others, have testified at U.N. gatherings on the state of U.S. treatment of racial minorities, immigrants, poor people, imprisoned people, and youth. Through these movement networks, three SEAFN 2.0 members—Chhaya Chhuom of Mekong Naroen Chhin of 1Love, and Chanravy Proeung, hired as SEAFN staff through funding from SEARAC from 2014 to 2015—were invited to meet with U.N. representatives and share the experiences of unjust detention and deportation of SEAA who came to the U.S. as refugees. As guests of the U.N., their testimonies and the documentation of their trip brought a gravity and legitimacy to SEAFN 2.0's campaign. The real-time recording

set a new standard in the use of media for political organizing within the SEAA community. The activists sustained public interest in their activities via video diaries, candid shots of each other speaking to the camera about their impressions, and the dissemination of the videos on YouTube and Facebook. The videos added humor, a sense of community and friendship, as well as fun to the frequently overlooked, mundane work of organizing. They went beyond humanization campaigns of the targets of deportation; they humanized and made relatable the stereotype of the "angry activist." What had seemed like stilted and obscure political activism now became legible and familiar to a new generation of young people.

In preparation for the trip to the U.N. annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, SEAFN 2.0 further developed a multi-pronged campaign based on the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (See Appendix E for full statement):

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26. Right to Education, & Article 7. Right to Equality Before the Law.** Most Southeast Asian refugees were resettled into inhumane conditions in impoverished neighborhoods, making us vulnerable to poverty, crime, violence, structural disadvantage, racism, discrimination and profiling. Many young people fell through the cracks in an under-resourced education system unfit to meet their needs, leaving only 65% of Cambodian-American youth graduating from high school. Many enter into a highly functional and highly funded School-to-Prison Pipeline. Law enforcement agencies in cities across the country began coding Cambodian communities as "gang infested" and we were surveilled and profiled for arrest and incarceration. Over-policing of our community led to racial profiling, police brutality, and high incarceration rates, higher than any other Asian ethnic group in relation to the size of our population.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 10. Right to Due Process, Article 16. Right to Family Unity, & Article 9. Right to Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, Exile.** In 1996, the US passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA)... Deportation for "aggravated felonies" also became permanent with no right to return, and was applied retroactively, leading to international human rights violations regarding proportionality of punishment, double jeopardy, and fairness under the law.

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21. Right to Democracy.** On March 22, 2002, the US signed a Repatriation Agreement with Cambodia and began deporting Cambodian-Americans. As such, the creation of such agreements must be done through transparent, open, and democratic processes that prioritize the will of the people and insight of directly impacted communities...

Based on these articles of the Declaration of Human Rights, SEAFN 2.0 set forth a list of campaign demands that allowed for a re-articulation of the M.O.U. between Cambodia and the United States. They argued any new M.O.U. agreements between Laos and the United States should resemble the pilot program with Viet Nam that only allows immigrants post-1995 to the United States from Viet Nam—not refugees—to be deported. It would also allow what SEAFN referred to as the "right to return."

The "right to return" (#Right2Return) campaign would allow anyone deported to Cambodia to petition for return based on the new M.O.U. SEAFN 2.0 argued for a family hardship protection in individual deportation cases that considered the contributions and hardships one's deportation had on family members. The group's leaders articulated their demands as follows:

#### REQUESTED ACTION

We call for immediate recourse to begin to rectify over five decades of U.S. human rights violations that have torn Cambodian families apart from Cambodia to the U.S., and back again:

1. We call for an immediate suspension of U.S. deportations to Cambodia.
2. We call for an open review process of the U.S.-Cambodia Repatriation Agreement, which includes and prioritizes democratic oversight and input of impacted communities in the US and Cambodia.
3. We call for amendments to the Repatriation Agreement that tailor its impacts to consider the individual and community experience of U.S. human rights violations and will protect those with these experiences from deportation.
4. We call for amendments to the Repatriation Agreement that ensure humane, just, and fair structures of support for impacted families and individuals in the U.S. and Cambodia, including economic stability, human and social services, employment infrastructure, visitation rights, and the right to return.<sup>208</sup>

SEAFN 2.0 used the attention it received on social media from the U.N. trip to build an audience for #Right2Return #EndDisplacement with these requested actions. With images, videos, and a solidarity letter for supporters to sign quickly spreading across the internet, SEAFN 2.0 members developed a fundraising approach that the previous generations of SEAA activists did not have access to—they extended their reach beyond the non-profit industrial complex. Each video, post, and letter offered the audience an opportunity to contribute to or volunteer for the campaign; the individual organizations, as well as SEAFN 2.0 as a network, and all were committed to shifting power relations with their funders. They actively sought funding from progressive funders committed to their organizing philosophies and strategies. The U.N. demands and the actions related to them outlined were posted on all SEAFN 2.0 webpages with a link to 1Love Movement's campaign page, SEAFN 2.0's public Facebook page, and later included in their video campaign.

As a bridge between the UN trip and its multi-city tour, SEAFN 2.0 released a statement in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the American War in Southeast Asia (See Appendix F for full statement):

*TODAY, marks 40 years since our country was taken over by the Khmer Rouge revolution. It was revolution that was rooted in political theory, but not liberatory action. Revolution built on communist ideology, but practiced through dictatorship and mass murder. Revolution that promised life, but led to the genocide of our people. Revolution that cherished our homeland, but led us to displacement.*

*TODAY, as SEAFN reflects on the deep resistance and resilience of our community, we also commit to recognizing the historic root causes of our experience. We know that French colonialism, and U.S. imperialism and militarism bear responsibility for creating the conditions that led our country into the Killing Fields. We experience this oppression through continuous cycles of violence from one side of the world to the other, from war to displacement to poverty to incarceration to deportation. We are the collateral damage and human cost of colonialism, imperialism, and militarism. And we know that we will continue to carry the weight of all of this systemic violence for generations to come, and that we must heal through determined resistance and resilience.*

*We must continue to break the cycle of isolated trauma, and ground ourselves in collective healing, and actions rooted in our historic*

*experience and our current conditions. And we have already begun. Our revolution has been our survival and our determination to re-build and re-center our lives, our families, and our people. Our revolution has been our resilient creation of new pathways for us to experience family, love, healing, and community. As we continue to struggle with the impact of intergenerational systemic oppression, we are building a new foundation that honors our humanity and dignity.*

*TODAY, our revolution honors our ancestors, our history, and our struggle. Our revolution is about action rooted in love.<sup>209</sup>*

There is a clear shift in these statements, compared to the time SEAFN started in 2002, to centralize the history and perspectives of Khmer refugees in the United States, even while half of the network is Lao, Hmong, and Vietnamese. What has not been clearly expressed when SEAFN members discuss their frustrations with their East Asian American counterparts, though, is whether those statements represent an underlying tension within SEAA in progressive coalitions, or whether the emphasis on the Khmer experience is a purely strategic position given their centrality in the anti-deportation campaign.

The campaign, however, diverged from being generally inclusive of the Southeast Asian refugee experience, as with the early MAAs, to centralizing the perspectives, needs, and leadership development of Laotian and Khmer communities. The campaign points to the needed discussion of the historic privileging of Vietnamese and Hmong Americans in refugee narratives and resettlement projects. Post-Millennial claims of the particular disparities for their co-ethnic communities demand attention. Their interpretation of intersectional identity thus allows them to navigate between simultaneously claiming a SEAA experience while recognizing the differences and contradictions within ethnic-specific positionalities. Over the next year, SEAFN 2.0 representatives continued to attend the U.N. conventions and traveled back to Cambodia. Through their own social networks, they were able to establish and build upon existing relationships with exiled Khmer Americans, eventually forming 1Love Cambodia, the sister organization to Philadelphia's 1Love Movement in Phnom Penh.

1Love Cambodia was founded and led by exiled Khmer Americans, including a relative of the Executive Director of 1Love Movement, Mia-Lia Kiernan. Their trips to Cambodia included popular education workshops with some of the deportees, where they shared their stories and developed a critical analysis of how their individual narratives fit into the larger analysis of the U.S. historical involvement in Southeast Asia. Borom, one of the 1Love Cambodia organizers, remembers:

*Mia-Lia and her friends narrowed down about seven or eight of us, and since she's related to one of the guys [through marriage of a relative], she had a lot of legitimacy with us. She gave us a lot of structure; we each had formal roles, like I was head of policy because I like to be behind the scenes. Wicked is the spokesperson, Sophea organizes the other deportees because she's good with people. [Mia-Lia] knew our traits and gave us our roles like that. She channeled our energies and gave all of us a lot of hope again.*

*For almost two years, the SEAFN 2.0 contingents traveled back and forth to Cambodia. On average, they recruited between twenty and thirty deportees to the meetings. Gradually, their communications extended to online interactions between the physical visits, and the diasporic relationships led to a transnational campaign that built consistent messaging and narratives and issued demands through the group's social media videos. The exiled Khmer Americans—physically in Cambodia and figuratively in the hyper-ghettos of the United States—forged a diasporic American refugee identity beyond borders.<sup>210</sup>*

As with many other efforts, the transnational campaign appealed to an international governing body to address the concerns of what it considered to be a basic human right of mobility. That strategy seems perfectly logical for historically marginalized people who feel they have no influence with their own governments and that those governments are in fact the perpetrators of violence. Scholars have also questioned the ways in which governments have been used historically and contemporarily to uphold colonial and neo-colonial domination.<sup>211</sup> Samera Esmeir uses what she calls "juridical humanity" to build on Hannah Arendt's concept of "juridical personhood"—rights conferred at birth to every human. Arendt suggests that to remove those given-by-birth rights is dehumanize the person such that it justifies the total domination of the individual as "non-human." Esmeir argues that juridical humanity is the product of that collapse of the human into the juridical person: "The overlap between the juridical person and the human, unlike Arendt, is not assumed here to be ontological but is articulated as a historical force, one that chained the human to the juridical and worked to foreclose other scenarios for the human."<sup>212</sup>

In essence, relying on a judicial system to define the inherent rights of humans is to rely on systems of hegemonic power to confer *human-ness*, and by the same token, also render a person more vulnerable to dehumanization by the very system ostensibly created to protect the embodiment of what constitutes humanity. Thus, Esmeir explains, "The inhuman emerges as

having been preserved in the human. The human, in turn, materializes as the excess that remains in the law, and is therefore produced by it, after the expulsion of exploitative practices that the law declared inhuman."<sup>213</sup> In employing the international body of law as a strategic rallying point for their campaign, SEAFN 2.0 subversively used the arm of state power against itself. In other words, they upended an international arm of U.S. hegemonic power by employing its very moral and conceptual universal rights. They condemned both American immigration policy in the contemporary moment as well as the root causes that uprooted migrants in the first place—in this case, American militarism and intrusion into their homelands. However important the theoretical debate of legality and its problematic role in defining humanity, SEAA youth used international law "for the practice oppositional politics [that] is squarely situated both in and against these relationships of power in [their] challenge to the duplicitous forms of domination and affirmation."<sup>214</sup> SEAFN 2.0 understood the stakes of their campaign on families at risk of deportation. They viewed U.S. immigration admissions and enforcement policies as an extension of historical imperialist tendencies that were masked as domestic policy. The youth organizers manipulated the international stage to assume a counter-hegemonic stance that at once aligned with the democratic values their co-ethnic elders held dearly as part of their new American identity, while publicly holding the United States accountable for its failed policies at the cost of human life as its movement elders had done during the Viet Nam war.

SEAFN 2.0's ability to transform its campaign against detention and deportation from local and domestic foci to a glocal one adds to the trend of social movement emphasis in immigrant rights as technology and resources help build the transnational ties, skills, and resources between deportees, their families, and immigrant rights activists. The transformation of the movement inevitably changed the narrative framing of their campaign as well as targets and allies within the campaign. The claims to a diasporic identity had to be coalesced with the claims for rights within the United States, and the human rights approach helped them do this. They then had to reconsider their power analysis of allies and targets of reform from the perspective of international politics, to which they clearly drew from the history of progressive AAM groups that viewed the United States as an empire rather than a benevolent savior with gifts.<sup>215</sup> Thus, the Cambodian government became an ally in this campaign to pressure the American government to end deportations of refugees.

### Inhuman Conditions of Deportation: 1Love Cambodia and DHS

Once 1Love Cambodia formed their own organizational structure, they participated in SEAFN 2.0 as leaders of the anti-deportation campaign. They met with Julie Chung, the U.S. Deputy Minister at the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, and she invited a representative from the U.S. Department of Homeland Services (DHS). The deportees explained how the conditions of deportation constituted human rights violations under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) because DHS did not send medical records or medicine were not sent back with the deportees, rendering roughly ten percent of those returning at high medical risk. Moreover, deportees reported that many of the medicines they needed were not even available for sale in Cambodia. The DHS representative claimed they no longer deported people with serious mental or physical ailments. Unfortunately, their advocacy did not go beyond this exchange of information with the DHS representative at the meeting in Cambodia since DHS was unwilling to admit to any wrongdoing, citing that they just implemented the laws set in Washington, D.C. The global-local—or glocal—diasporic campaign appealed to the Cambodian government to revisit the M.O.U. that allowed for Khmer refugee removals from the United States. Mia-Lia had an aunt who worked in the Cambodian government, and SEAFN 2.0 and 1Love Cambodia members used her aunt's access to encourage government officials to form a task force that would review the M.O.U. By summer, the SEAFN 2.0 delegation returned to Phnom Penh and secured a private, closed-door meeting with the task force, which, according to the delegation, consisted mostly of high-ranking military officers.

Prior to the meeting, SEAFN 2.0 taped a video diary submission in which members expressed their anxiety about it. The meeting was the pinnacle of what the network had been fighting for over the past fourteen years; internally, they did not envision talks moving past this point in the governmental hierarchy. According to Steven Dy, PrYSM's representative on the trip and organizing director, once inside the meeting, the Cambodian task force welcomed them, referring to the delegation as "blood" and "family." The task force spent most of the meeting quietly listening to the personal stories of deportation and the delegation's requests. Most of the meeting was conducted in Khmer, which allowed the exiled Khmer Americans in 1Love Cambodia to take a lead role as their language skills were far better than that of the network delegates.

Steven reflected, "It was so scary going into the meeting. All these military men with stripes and things all over their chests. I mean, I kept thinking they could kill us any minute if they wanted to and nothing would happen to them." His comments reverberated the common fears passed

on intergenerationally from SEA refugee elders about the possible risks of political participation based on their first-hand witness of war atrocities. After sharing their stories, the delegation framed their argument against the M.O.U. They described it as a human rights violation that 1) is part of a long-standing history of human rights violations by the U.S., and 2) has a negative impact on U.S.-based Khmer families, not only because of the moral issue of family separation that traumatizes the refugee family members who fled war, but also the U.S.-born children torn from their parent. They argued that it perpetuated the financial burden on U.S.-based families who had the obligation of sending remittances to help sustain the Exiled American while they struggled at the U.S. Federal Poverty Level at home.

Consequently, the delegation asked for the task force to encourage the Cambodian government to put a moratorium on deportation by refusing to issue travel documents to those awaiting removal in the United States, and to renegotiate the M.O.U. with the United States to resemble that of Viet Nam's, whereby no one who had arrived in the United States as a refugee from the Viet Nam War would be eligible for deportation. The video diary of the delegates released after the meeting revealed a relieved and ecstatic group. As Mekong delegate, Chhaya, approved, "It could not have gone better!" However, even though the task force was empathetic to the youth organizers' cause, it made no promises beyond a commitment to continue to review the details of the M.O.U. By the presidential elections of November 2016, the Cambodian government was publicly advocating for a renegotiation of the M.O.U. with the United States. By the time Donald Trump took office, the United States began to renew visa and trade pressures with Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia in order to force them to accept deportees. Yet all three countries have since succumbed to the political pressure and began to receive deportees.<sup>216</sup>

The transnational movement built from the organizers' social networks is a profound statement on the potential of social change by local communities who have been historically marginalized and viewed as victims and in need of paternalistic charity. SEAFN 2.0 and 1Love Cambodia's attempt to help families stay in the United States confirm Asian American activist Grace Lee Boggs's assertion: "Community self-reliance and an economy rooted in human solidarity rather than amoral competition has become especially prominent in some Asian and Latin American countries.... We are creating a revolutionary alternative to counterrevolutionary and inhumane policies of the U.S. government, but we are not subversive."<sup>217</sup> Their fight for families to stay in the United States was an ironic testament to the structural marginalization they experienced as refugees. The decision to target their transnational, or glocal, campaign from the U.S. government

to the Cambodian government represents their attempt to recognize and decenter the history of U.S. imperialism in Asia and its ongoing grasp to maintain global hegemony.

### **Expanding the Movement: #ReleaseMN8**

In the United States, PrYSM became involved in building a national campaign for a group of SEAA in Minnesota that expanded the geography across movements, nationally, and transnationally. Members consisted of directly affected individuals and their families who were released, incarcerated, and exiled to Cambodia. Members of the families also were members of unions, connecting them to the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) and the labor movement. Some identified as multi-racial, thus broadening the critical mass of the movement and the external resources, attention, and support network for SEAFN 2.0.

In October 2016, the United States issued deportation orders for thirty-four men and Cambodia issued travel documents for them to enter Cambodia while simultaneously requesting a U.S.-Cambodian commission to engage in bilateral talks with the U.S. to revise the M.O.U. by the end of the year. After those thirty-four cases, Cambodia declared a moratorium on issuing any further travel documents until the M.O.U. was amended. While negotiations about the U.S.-Cambodian M.O.U. were debated, two disparate situations emerged. Almost half of the deportees lived in Lowell, MA, which has the second largest Cambodian American population in the country behind Long Beach, CA. Some of the directly affected families in Lowell tried to garner support for the campaign against deportation by organizing informational town hall meetings at a local MAA, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA), along with a former attorney who worked with SEARAC. PrYSM leaders frequently traveled to Lowell to support their efforts but SEAFN's national involvement gradually dissipated to supporting only those families facing the deportation of a loved one, rather than organizing a collective response. The Lowell contingent did not have the needed infrastructural stability of staff and financial resources or the social networks within the community or from its leaders to build a campaign of any meaningful response to the deportations.

In contrast, the #ReleaseMN8, a local campaign in Minnesota, burst onto the national stage. Within the group of thirty-four people slated for deportation, eight of them were men from the Twin Cities in Minnesota. They had the support of the community in a way that the Lowell families had not, as they were active contributors and participants in both the SEAA communities and other intersectional spaces. Knowledge about their case became well known enough that they were called the Minnesota Eight,

or MN8. With union members amongst the families, and the support of experienced local SEAA organizers, these families built a successful online campaign, #ReleaseMN8. Even with the network of SEAFN 2.0 to advocate nationally and pool resources, the local infrastructure of progressive activists connected to broader movements in government, AAM, and the labor movement made a definitive difference in the #MN8 compared to Family Unity in Lowell.

In the end, five of the MN8 were deported over the first half of 2017, but with legal advocacy from the James Bringer Center for New Americans at the University of Minnesota and the National Lawyers Guild, two were released under supervision by August 2017. The remaining member, Chamroeun Phan, remained in detention much longer. Chamroeun was a young father, and, like many others facing deportation, was born in a refugee camp in Thailand in the 1980s. His only conviction in 2009 had been from an altercation—Chamroeun caused \$1000 worth of damage at a bar he frequented, leading to a one-year conviction. Chamroeun's case and the #MN8 movement exemplify the strategy that emerged from deportation cases since 2004, when juveniles were tried as adults and criminal cases were vacated to gain immigration relief. The immigration judge ruled he was eligible for a stay of deportation and the bar owner declined to press charges and testified on Chamroeun's behalf. Yet, his criminal record would always make him vulnerable based on the 1996 immigration rule of mandatory removal for any criminal conviction of 365 days or more. Chamroeun's sister, Montha, was active in bringing attention to her brother's case. She expressed her family's gratefulness that people all over the country and SEAFN 2.0 were able to support her brother as he stood silently with tears in his eyes: "I don't know how we could go through this without the families here to support each other, and SEAFN and lawyers to help us. Having him out and back with us is a gift from God. Now we just want to give back and help others." On more than one occasion, Chamroeun shared how he was "touched that so many people on the outside, people we didn't even know, fought for us, cared about us."

Additionally, Ched and Jenny have been central to the #MN8 campaign, including the advocacy for Chamroeun's release, by keeping the momentum of the local movement alive with their communication with families, connection to local activists, and willingness to garner national attention and support. In addition to the existing support from SEARAC and SEAFN 2.0, as active union members, they gained support from other local unions, the Twin Cities Latinx immigrant rights advocacy group Mijente, APALA, and the Asian Prisoners Support Network (APSN). After MN8 were slated for deportation, Jenny used her union organizing networks to start reaching out to different groups. The legal organizations Minnesota Immigrant

Rights and Action Committee (MIRAC) and James Bringer Center were the first to respond with legal advice for the families.

The families tried to submit stays of removal themselves, and when that failed, MIRAC asked them, "What do you want to do?" Jenny recalled, "We just looked at each other for a minute and agreed: 'Protest.'" They started to plan a series of protests in front of their senator's office, and in the process, they met other organizations that helped train them. Mijente, a Latinx group that formed out of the prison abolition group #NotOneMore, explained that they had to educate and train the politicians, many of whom were relatively new to politics and were unaware of Southeast Asian refugee history or even deportation. "If you don't say anything, they don't know," Mijente leaders cautioned. The families also learned that under the Obama Administration, there were ways to navigate the system through narrative framing and advocacy at the local ICE headquarters. Mijente and another local group, Navigate, sent field organizers to train families on creating campaigns and narratives about their families using social media.

The national civil rights organization #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) also was involved, training the families and SEAA community about how to organize a rally, and instructing them as to what their rights were as well as direct-action tactics of marches, rallies, and sit-ins. #BLM also provided security and liaisons to the police and DHS at rallies. Jenny recalled, "We never organized a rally before, and it was so empowering to see the #BLM organizers standing up to the police. They tried to tell us we had to stand here and we couldn't do that, and the #BLM people just walked up and said we have a right to be here." According to Ched and Jenny, SEAFN 2.0, including PrYSM, SEARAC, and the National Immigration Lawyers Guild built a national presence by heavily utilizing social media and connecting the families to local and national reporters. As a trainer from the group Media Alliance told them, "An action didn't happen if it's not in the media." For post-Millennial activists, social media attention was critical to a successful campaign, and they were much more astute with these resources to reframe the narrative than previous generations of activists. Jenny agreed: "With social media and with the media training, we feel we are the ones in control. We have power in our stories and we now know our rights with reporters—that we can schedule interviews on our own time, we can get their questions ahead of time, and we can review the stories before they go out."



Figure 5.3: Anti-deportation meeting flier, 2015 (Courtesy of PrYSM Archives)

### Counter Frames of ICE: Reclaiming Community Narratives of Detainment

Like PrYSM and SEAFN before them, SEAFN 2.0 and #ReleaseMN8 framed the stories by first mapping the narrative of ICE, and then creating counter frames to respond to ICE. For example, when DHS issued statements about undocumented immigrants being criminals, the activists reframed that narrative by posting stories and photos of the men with their families. Ched pointed out the importance of convincing his mother and her peers to join the campaign: "They felt helpless, and they're scared things would get worse if they speak up. It was heartwarming to come out [of detention] and see the families come together." Ched's sentiment reflects how the prison system isolates those incarcerated from their communities, and the effective response to that kind of oppression.

Social control through isolation in the institutions of mass incarceration has extended to the incarceration of immigrant detainees, who are often integrated into the general prison population. Tanya Golash-Boza defines immigration detention as an all-encompassing entity:

*Despite the centrality of due process and habeas corpus protections to legal frameworks in the US, the current system of immigration detention violates these procedural protections in three critical*

*ways: 1) Detainees bear the burden of proof; 2) the state can deny bond hearings; and 3) the judge and jailer are sometimes the same. DHS justifies the detention of noncitizens as a measure necessary to ensure they appear at immigration trials and leave the country when ordered to do so.*

*Under US law, immigration detention is not considered incarceration. Erving Goffman (1961) described prisons as ‘total institutions’ insofar as they have these four characteristics: 1) inmates are obliged to sleep, play, and work in one space and cannot leave; 2) inmates are required to live with other inmates, and they all have to do the same things; 3) the day’s activities are tightly scheduled according to specific rules; and 4) the various aspects of prison life are supposed to fill the official aims of the institution.<sup>218</sup>*

Golash-Boza's definition describes the detainment experiences of the MN8 as well as the majority of the 400,000 immigrants who pass through U.S. detention centers annually.<sup>219</sup> Members of the MN8—and many more, based on reports from many SEAA detainees and deportees over the years—witnessed a pervasive depression and helplessness that many claimed was the most grueling part of their incarceration. Detainment was a dehumanizing process. Overpopulation, being forced to sleep on cold, concrete floors, malnourishment, and being subjected to sexual abuse and racial slurs hurled by guards exacerbated detainees' feelings of despair.

Since 2002, PrYSM and other SEAFN groups tracked these conditions of detention with the coordination of the families of the incarcerated individuals. The “phone trees” amongst detainees to get messages to their families were critical to sharing information with loved ones. Family members then shared the messages with lawyers and advocates like PrYSM and MN8 in order to keep track of detainees and have information about their conditions. During their detention, the MN8 coordinated to send messages to their families based on whoever had access to a phone first. Knowing that families and communities were fighting for them on the outside, the eight men collectively decided to organize the other SEAA in their detention center. According to Ched, they did so in a variety of ways, from connecting the men to legal organizations, giving the men guidance on how to submit paperwork to prevent their deportation, and generally trying to keep everyone optimistic by talking through possible scenarios and staying in touch with their loved ones through phone trees.

As soon as Ched filed his stay of removal request, the MN8 were transported to another detention center six states away. ICE's automated locator system, in which a computer system interacts with the family rather

than an actual ICE representative, was the only way for families to find their loved ones. Additionally, the information to families and lawyers always lagged behind their actual status; the automated locator system updates only after individuals enter their new facility or have been removed from their current facility. The detainees would be moved or even deported by the time the system had updated. The MN8's families learned of their deportation when one of their family members happened to call the facility asking to deliver a bag of clothing, letters, and photographs—one suitcase is all that deportees are allowed to take with them—and was told the men had already been processed for removal and were in transit. The family member then used the phone tree to send this message sent throughout the MN8 men and their families, which allowed the person's family to track their whereabouts and travel to his detention facility to say good-bye and provide him with some belongings. Otherwise, ICE would not have even informed the families of their impending deportation, and they would have been deported with no belongings nor any communication with their families. This legal strategy dovetailed effectively with the political framework that connected the prison industrial complex with the immigration system and its violations against human rights.

The MN8's example above represents the psychological warfare that DHS imposes on those in its detention centers, as well as the delays and continual shifts in policy that result in confusion and constant changes to one's location and status. After his release from detention, Ched compared his sense of liminality to paralysis:

*I'm not healing, I can move on and manage my days but my body and spirit won't really heal. I want to write the last chapter. We're constantly in trauma & crisis mode because we are working with other families who have someone deported or still inside. In this political climate, is there a time to heal? At first, everyone seemed really happy that I got out, but I could tell they're still hurt that others didn't [get released from detention]. Our strategy now is to focus on local governments to write individuals to at least slow the process, but it just seems like people just don't care anymore. They think we're disposable, and we want to tell them we're not. But no media story about families is changing minds under [the Trump] administration. We don't want to do anything with DHS headquarters anymore because we don't want to flag our cases. There's nothing humane about waiting around to be deported by one judge with a flip of a file.*

The emotional turmoil individuals like Ched have experienced has been examined in the literature on undocumented communities. Cecilia

Menjívar referred to “legal liminality” as “grey areas’ between the dichotomies of legal categories” that undocumented immigrants endure.<sup>220</sup> This term characterizes how childhood arrivals, facing the uncertainty of the immigration system, “must navigate between systems of educational attainment, state surveillance, and family responsibilities or expectations upon entering adulthood.”<sup>221</sup> Liminality creates what Roberto Gonzales refers to as “arrested development” of one’s transition into adulthood, as some believed their assumed trajectory into adulthood would be stymied by their legal status, thus preventing them from the full rights of adulthood.<sup>222</sup>

In interviews with deportees, many reacted to living in prolonged liminality in self-destructive ways. There are no government safety nets in Cambodia. One of the deportees assessed: “Every person has a different way that they deal with deportation. Seventy-five percent are struggling because you’re on your own. Some people turn to the dark side; some people have kids back in the U.S. and are hurting.” The one organization set up to assist them, Returnee Integration Support Center (RISC), is funded by the U.S. State Department via a USAID grant and run by Cambodian officials using a MAA social service model. Like some MAAs during refugee resettlement in the United States, however, many of the deportees claim that RISC engages in favoritism and does not always serve those in the most need. Many deportees do not seek out social services, and some developed depression and suicidal tendencies. Others reacted by spending all their money and in engaging in risky behaviors, as if they were about to enter a lifelong prison term.<sup>223</sup>

Borom, one of the 1Love Cambodia members, felt that the women deportees, who now make up ten percent of the over 600 deportees, tend to have more issues with depression since they often have children back in the United States. They keep to themselves and rarely interact with the rest of the deportees. Ched and Jenny exhibited their frustration about the same fears as they communicate with the five men of the MN8 who have already been deported. Tears welled up in Ched’s eyes when he talked about having to contain his emotions to stay strong for his family, including his inability to protect and plan for his family. In comparison, they found the most comfort in organizing because it gave them a sense of control and had the potential to positively impact their future in that they felt more empowered.

The MN8 offer insight to the continued, systematic control of this generation’s interactions with state control and their resilience in the face of increased surveillance and discrimination. Their experiences are not new to marginalized and hyper-criminalized groups but rather part of the evolution of state hegemony, according to Gilmore:

*Prisons both depersonalize social control, so that it could be bureaucratically managed across time and space, and satisfied the demands of reformers who largely prevailed against boldly punishment, which nevertheless endures in the death penalty and many torturous conditions of confinement. Most of the modern history of prisons, those officially devoid of rights—indigenous and enslaved women and men, for example, or new immigrants, or married white women—rarely saw the inside of a cage, because their unfreedom was guaranteed by other means (Christianson 1998; E.B. Freedman 1996).<sup>224</sup>*

To the extent that refugee childhood arrivals rejected the American narrative of the “gift” of their emancipation, they became threats to the state in their counter-hegemonic resistance. As such, they no longer assimilated to the model minority image as reliable, self-controlled, docile subjects of the state. Rather, they integrated themselves within the intersectional sectors of society considered the ungovernable, and threats to the status quo that constitute social movements today.

In response to the Trump presidential administration’s refusal to reconvene talks to renegotiate the M.O.U., on August 10, 2017 the Cambodian government made an official statement that it would no longer issue travel documents to individuals the United States wanted to deport. The Trump administration immediately retaliated by including Cambodia on a list with three other countries—Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone—that it would no longer issue any kind of visa to enter the country. Many news media political pundits considered the administration’s move as an overly aggressive reaction that offered little diplomatic opportunity. Unlike the initial M.O.U. negotiations with the George W. Bush administration, moreover, the Cambodian government had been prepared to mitigate political pressure from the United States by growing its geopolitical alliances with China in terms of economics, trade, and socio-cultural relations. In short, Cambodia had returned to its historical relationships, and in the process, decentered Western influence.

## APPENDIX A-1: MOU-U.S. & CAMBODIA (2002)

### MEMORANDUM BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE UNITED STATES AND THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF A UNITED STATES - CAMBODIA JOINT COMMISSION ON REPATRIATION

The government of the United States of America (United States) and the Royal Government of Cambodia (Cambodia):

Recognizing their mutual international obligations to accept the return of their nationals in an orderly, prompt, and humane manner;

Desiring to establish and advance the development of normal immigration relations, in accordance with general recognized principles of international law

Desiring to put into effect the principles adopted by both states in the Joint Statement made in Phnom Penh on April 27, 2000, and subsequently endorsed by order of the Royal Government of Cambodia on June 21, 2000; and

Desiring to further enhance cooperative and friendly relations between the two states on the basis of respect for each State's sovereignty, and on the basis of equality and mutual interest;

Hereby establish the following Principles and Objectives which are intended to govern the establishment and operation of a joint Commission on Repatriation:

#### **Fundamental Principles**

Each repatriation request should be considered and decided individually, on a case-by-case basis, without preconditions.

The United States and Cambodia should act in a spirit of mutual cooperation in determining the nationality of an individual and in all other matters pertaining to repatriation.

The United States and Cambodia are committed to the primary objective of effecting the return of each other's nationals to their home State, taking into

account the humanitarian and compassionate aspects of each case and the principles of internationally recognized human rights.

Nothing in the document imposes, or should be construed to impose, any legal or financial obligations on either State.

#### **Composition of the Joint Commission and Scheduling of Meetings**

The Joint Commission on Repatriation (Commission) should be comprised of four (4) members from the United States and four (4) from Cambodia, representing the ministries of immigration, foreign affairs, and justice, or their equivalent, of such State.

The Commission should meet twice each year, or as mutually agreed, at times and locations to be mutually determined.

#### **Procedures/Modalities for Considering Repatriation Requests**

Each State should designate a Central Authority for the receipt and initial screening of repatriation requests and related matters.

The Commission should be the primary forum for the discussion and resolution of repatriation policy and individual repatriation requests refused by the Central Authority of the requested State.

Unless otherwise agreed, all repatriation requests shall be initially sent to the Central Authority of the requested State and should include a copy of the final order of removal issued by the competent authority of the requesting State; a copy of the individual's passport, if available, or other documentation evidencing the identity and the biographical history of the individual and his or her status as a national of the receiving State; a copy, if any, of any available record of the individual's criminal violations in the requesting State; two identical photographs of the individual and his or her fingerprints and medical history, if available; any additional information that the Central Authority of the requested State deems necessary.

4. Upon receiving and reviewing a repatriation request, the Central Authority of the requested State may request the assistance and resources of the Central Authority of the requesting State in conducting any additional interview of the individual and verifying any information contained in the request.
5. The Central Authority of the requested State should respond in writing

to the Central Authority of the requesting State not later than 30 days from the date of receipt of the request, unless otherwise agreed. In all cases of refusal, the Central Authority of the requested State should state its reasons in writing and should refer the request to the Commission for consideration. The Commission shall consider all referred requests as its next scheduled meeting.

6. When the Central Authority of the requested State accepts a repatriation request, it should simultaneously issue a travel document, valid for at least 60 days, to permit the individual's return. The requesting State should expeditiously make the appropriate arrangements for the return of the individual to the requested State, and should inform the Central Authority of the requested State at least seven (7) business days in advance of the return itinerary and any special considerations, such as medical, law enforcement, or escort matters.
7. Unless otherwise agreed, all costs of repatriation, including air transportation and escort services, should be borne exclusively by the requesting State.

Signed at Phnom Penh on March 22, 2002, in duplicate, in both the English and Khmer languages with identical value

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FOR THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA OF CAMBODIA

Kent M. Wiedemann  
Ambassador of the United States of America

Lt. Gen. Em Sam An Secretary of Ministry of Interior

## JOINT STATEMENT

On 26-27 April, 2000, officials of the Royal Government of Cambodia from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Interior, and Justice met with officials of the United States Department of State, U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, and agreed that the following general principles shall govern the repatriation of each other's nationals:

That, in accordance with applicable principles of international law, each state agrees that it shall accept its nationals who have not obtained another nationality;

That there should be an orderly, prompt, and transparent process for considering such returns; That each such case must be considered on its individual merits without preconditions;

That the requesting state shall bear all costs associated with the returns of Cambodian Nationals;

That the final decision whether to accept the repatriation of particular individuals shall rest with the requested state;

That such repatriations shall take into account the humanitarian and compassionate aspects of each case, and that any such repatriation shall be conducted in an orderly, dignified manner, with due respect for human rights and the personal dignity of the individual who is being returned;

That the two Governments commit to cooperate, through appropriate channels, and in a timely fashion, in the determination of the nationality of individuals who the requesting state believes are nationals of the requested state.

That the requesting state shall promptly accept back individuals who have been repatriated to the requested state whenever it is subsequently determined that the repatriated individual is not in fact a national of the requested state.

April 27, 2000 in Phnom Penh

## APPENDIX A-2: MOU-U.S. & VIET NAM (2008)

TREATIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTS SERIES 08-22

### REPATRIATION

Agreement Between

the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

and VIETNAM

Signed at Hanoi January 22, 2008 with Annexes

NOTE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Pursuant to Public Law 89—497, approved July 8, 1966

(80 Stat. 271; 1 U.S.C. 113)—

"...the Treaties and Other International Acts Series issued under the authority of the Secretary of State shall be competent evidence... of the treaties, international agreements other than treaties, and proclamations by the President of such treaties and international agreements other than treaties, as the case may be, therein contained, in all the courts of law and equity and of maritime jurisdiction, and in all the tribunals and public offices of the United States, and of the several States, without any further proof or authentication thereof.

VIETNAM Repatriation Agreement signed at Hanoi January 22, 2008; Entered into force March 22, 2008  
With annexes.

## AGREEMENT

BETWEEN  
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AND  
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
ON  
THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE RETURN OF VIETNAMESE CITIZENS

The Government of the United States of America  
(hereinafter called "the U.S. Government")  
and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
(hereinafter called "the Vietnamese Government"),

With a wish of developing friendly relations between the two countries, and to establish procedures for competent authorities of both countries on the prompt and orderly acceptance of Vietnamese citizens who have been ordered removed by the U.S. Government,

In order to establish common procedures for the relevant authorities based on the legal principles of each country and the international responsibility to accept the return of repatriated citizens; and to follow recognized principles of international law, to allow for a case-by-case determination of repatriation, and to recognize the right of the receiving country to determine nationality.

Have agreed to the following:

### Article 1 General Provisions

1. The U.S. Government will carry out the repatriation of Vietnamese citizens who violated U.S. law in accordance with U.S. and international law and the provisions of this Agreement. The repatriation should take into account the humanitarian aspect, family unity and circumstances of each person in each individual case.

2. The Vietnamese Government may consider the return of its citizens who violated U.S. law based on the consideration of legal procedures and the status

and circumstances of each individual case. The subject individuals and the acceptance procedure will be based on the terms of this Agreement.

3. Repatriation will be carried out in an orderly and safe way, and with respect for the individual human dignity of the person repatriated. The U.S. Government will allow Vietnamese citizens who have been ordered removed a reasonable time to arrange their personal affairs before returning them to Vietnam.

4. Persons repatriated under this Agreement have the right to transfer their legal money and personal property to Vietnam.

5. The U.S. Government will pay for the cost of returning to Vietnam persons repatriated under this Agreement, as provided in Article 5 and Annex The U.S. Government will also pay for the cost of returning to the United States any person who was mistakenly repatriated, in accordance with Article 3 of this Agreement.

## Article 2 Removable Persons and Conditions of Acceptance

1. The Vietnamese Government will accept the return of Vietnamese citizens in accordance with Article 1 and item 2 of Article 2 of this Agreement, if upon investigation the individual meets the following requirements:

(a) The individual is a citizen of Vietnam and is not a citizen of the United States or of any other country;

(b) The individual previously resided in Vietnam and has no current residence in a third country;

(c) The individual has violated U.S. laws and has been ordered by competent authority removed from the United States; and

(d) If the individual has been convicted of a criminal offense (including immigration violation), the person will have completed any imprisonment before removal, and any reduction in sentence will have been ordered by competent authority.

2. Vietnamese citizens are not subject to return to Vietnam under this Agreement if they arrived in the United States before July 12, 1995, the date on which diplomatic relations were re-established between the U.S. Government and the Vietnamese Government. The U.S. Government and the Vietnamese Government maintain their respective legal positions relative to Vietnamese citizens who departed Vietnam for the United States prior to that date.

3 In the case of a citizen of Vietnam who immigrated to the United States from a third country where that person had a permanent residence and who has been ordered removed from the United States, the U.S. Government will seek to return that person to the third country or consider allowing that person to stay in the United States, before requesting removal to Vietnam.

4. In any case where the Vietnamese Government obtains information relevant to the repatriation of an individual that was not previously considered by

the U.S. Government, the Vietnamese Government may request a humanitarian reconsideration based on the specific circumstances of the repatriated person in accordance with United States law.

## Article 3 Return of Persons Repatriated in Error

Upon notice by the Vietnamese Government that a person returned to Vietnam by the U.S. Government does not meet all criteria mentioned in Article 2 of this Agreement, the U.S. Government should promptly receive the return of that person to the United States without any special procedure.

## Article 4 Acceptance Procedures

1. When the U.S. Government believes that a removable person is a citizen of Vietnam and meets all criteria within Article 2 of this Agreement, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, on behalf of the U.S. Government, will request appropriate travel documents from the Vietnamese Government and will forward the appropriate files to that Government. Such files will include three sets of documents, the original and two copies. The original and one copy shall be forwarded to the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security (Immigration Department) by the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam, and the other copy will be sent to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Consular Department).

Each file will contain a diplomatic note which requests that the Vietnamese Government accept the returnee, the name of the person the U.S. Government believes should be repatriated to Vietnam, the appropriate forms completed by such person (an example of which is provided in Annex 2 of this Agreement), a copy of the order of removal, and other documents regarding the person's biography, citizenship, criminal history, sentence imposed, and decision of amnesty or reduction of criminal sentence. The order of removal will be translated into Vietnamese on the standard form, and the criminal history will include a National Crime Information Center (NCIC) record in English accompanied by a code key translated into Vietnamese. All documents and translations will be certified by the competent U.S. authorities.

2. Upon request by the Vietnamese Government, the U.S. Government will arrange and facilitate the interview of persons who fall within Article 2(1) of this Agreement by Vietnamese immigration officials to determine information regarding the Vietnamese citizenship, biographical data, and last place of residence of such persons. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security will arrange a venue for those interviews. The U.S. Government also will facilitate

interviews by U.S.-based consular officers of the Vietnamese Government of deportable persons whom the U.S. believes to be Vietnamese citizens.

3. The Vietnamese Government will provide a prompt response to the U.S. Government on cases referred under this Article after the Vietnamese verification is made. If it is determined that a person whose name and file has been provided to the Vietnamese Government in accordance with this Article meets the requirements of Article 2, the Ministry of Public Security of the Vietnamese Government will issue a travel document authorizing that person's return to Vietnam, and will provide written notification to the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam.

4. When the Vietnamese Government has issued a travel document under this Agreement, the U.S. Government will provide at least fifteen (15) days notice of the flight and travel arrangements by which the person will be returned to Vietnam. The U.S. Embassy in Vietnam will inform the Ministry of Public Security (Immigration Department) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Consular Department) of the date and number of the flight, the time of arrival, the port of entry (Noi Bai Airport in Hanoi or Tan Son Nhat Airport in Ho Chi Minh City), and the details regarding any U.S. officers escorting the person to be returned (such as names, dates of birth, passport numbers, estimated times of stay in Vietnam, etc.), and allow the Vietnamese side to confirm receipt of the returnees.

When a person under medical treatment is returned to Vietnam under this Agreement, the escorting U.S. officers will provide a copy of the person's health record to the receiving Vietnamese officials at the port of entry. The escorting and receiving officers will sign a joint report verifying the person's repatriation.

## **Article 5 Expenses**

1. The U.S. Government will pay for the cost of transporting Vietnamese citizens to Vietnam under this Agreement.

2. The U.S. Government will pay for the costs of receiving repatriated

persons including; verifying fee, the receipt at the airport and transportation of the persons from airport to the place of residences in accordance with the enclosed Annex 1.

3. The U.S. Government will pay for the cost of arranging interviews by relevant Vietnamese officials of persons whom the U.S. Government believes to be Vietnamese citizens and subject to repatriation under this Agreement.

4. The U.S. Government will pay for the cost of returning to the United States persons who were repatriated in error, as provided in Article 3 of this Agreement.

## **Article 6 Entry into Force and Duration**

1. This Agreement will enter into force sixty (60) days from the date of signature by both Governments.

2. Upon entry into force, this Agreement will be valid for five years. The Agreement will be extended automatically for terms of three years thereafter unless written notice not to extend is given by one Government to the other at least six months prior to the expiration date of the Agreement.

## **Article 7 Amendment and Supplementation**

This Agreement may be amended or supplemented by written agreement of the Vietnamese Government and the U.S. Government through appropriate diplomatic channel.

## **Article 8 Resolution of Disputes**

Any disputes regarding the interpretation and implementation of this Agreement will be resolved through appropriate diplomatic channels.

## **Article 9 Suspension or Termination**

This Agreement may be suspended or terminated by either Government. Such suspension or termination of this Agreement will come into effect after thirty days (30) from the date one Government receives the written notification from the other Government of its intention to suspend or terminate.

Done at Hanoi, on 22 January 2008 in duplicate in the English and Vietnamese languages, both texts being equally authentic.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

EXPENSES FOR REPATRIATION (*Annex I*)

Content	Expenses for Repatriation
1. Expenses for verification (including verification through the Vietnamese Embassy in the U.S.) and receipt at airports in Vietnam.	\$140/person
2. Transportation fee for the repatriated person from airport to the place of residence.	\$10/person
Total:	\$150/person

Appendix A-2: MOU-US &amp; Vietnam, 2008

## APPENDIX B: AAPA STATEMENT ON VIET NAM (1969)

AAPA October 1969 Volume No.1, Issue No. 6  
AAPA Position on Vietnam

*"The history of mankind is one of continuous development from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom." (Mao Tse-Tung)*

The Asian American Political Alliance supports all oppressed peoples and their struggles for liberation. A simple glance at the Viet Nam situation clearly defines our stand. The Vietnamese people have been oppressed for thousands of years--first by the Chinese, then the French, the Japanese, and finally by the United States. This oppression has progressed from merely paying tribute to being bombed daily. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty.

In 1945, the Vietminh forces, many who had given their lives working with the Allies through the Office of Special Services, made the mistake of believing U.S. rhetoric. As in 1919, when the U.S. promised China territorial integrity and preached self-determination for all peoples, so it was in Viet Nam in 1945. Viet Nam was officially split in the Geneva Agreement of 1954 to be unified before July 20, 1956. At that time, Ngo Dinh Diem, U.S. puppet and head of the South Vietnamese government, refused to hold the 1956 referendum on reunification. The Vietnamese and Chinese people have now learned to watch the man's hands and not his mouth.

The Vietnamese people not only watch but feel the "peace moves" of the U.S. Even though U.S. troops are slowly being withdrawn from Viet Nam proper, the tempo of the war is increasing. The Paris Peace talks are just a maneuver by the U.S. government to give the proper facade for its senseless war. Monthly U.S. bombings in Viet Nam have increased since Nixon took office. Nixon wants to "win" his war, even if through annihilation of the Vietnamese. Without people there can be no liberation struggle. One-third of the rural population of South Viet Nam has been driven to the cities and six percent of the land has been defoliated. The killing, bombing, starvation, and disease exceed that caused by the Germans in World War II.

The war is a struggle of survival for the Vietnamese. It is a necessity. America is conducting a war of technological genocide in Viet Nam. Any human being, who agrees to participate in this senseless, inhuman war to defend the "free world" (domino theory), deserves to bear the suffering of the Vietnamese people.

America must prove her superiority over Viet Nam; prove that a nuclear power can mobilize the kind of force required to contain guerilla warfare; prove her position as the protector of "certain inalienable rights," such as life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The Vietnamese people, struggling for independence; democracy, peace, and neutrality, are resolved to drive out any imperialist forces from Viet Nam. Theirs is a war of human bonds and enduring spirit. They see their comrades, men, women, and children of all ages, die; they see a senseless destruction of the land. In their struggle for survival, ideology and organization has become almost meaningless; human relationships deepen and become the source of strength for the people.

The Asian American Political Alliance supports the ten demands of the National Liberation Front and recognizes the Vietnamese as people.

## APPENDIX C: LY HUONG NGUYEN SPEECH FOR NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION (2002)

National Day of Action Speech - API ForCE  
Ly Huong Nguyen

The history of how SEAs came to this country as refugees, our struggle to survive and achieve freedom, justice and future for families, our journey to America is well-known. Yet there is another side to our story that is not being portrayed, our stories of the continuing struggle to survive and our present-day struggle to achieve freedom, justice and future for our families in this, our new country. We are here today to tell this story.

Southeast Asian communities are relatively new to this country. Like many third world communities in the US--Native Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Middle Eastern--our experience is one marked by extreme violence, the violence of war and the violence of poverty. SEA came here as refugees as a direct result of US military and political incursions during the VN war. The US government bears a direct responsibility for the social, economic and environmental devastation created by decades of secret military operations, weapons of mass destruction, counterinsurgency campaigns, war crimes, economic sanctions, the legacy of dioxin and land mines, and the plight of SEA refugees. We are here, because America was there. US involvement in Southeast Asia was not just a "mistake", it was immoral and criminal.

Our families came to this country, the beacon of democracy and freedom, to seek safety, freedom from violence and persecution. As with most immigrants, we were not welcomed. The US refused to take SEA refugees until forced to do so by international pressure. Families languished for years in inhumane conditions in refugee camps in the meanwhile. When our families finally were able to come to this country, our communities were randomly divided up. The immediate result was to continue the US's long-standing practice of breaking down community networks, separating families, placing immigrants and non-whites into urban poverty, poor neighborhoods and substandard housing without jobs or provision for negotiating the legal system, obtaining social services or resources for the many who lacked education & skills or had suffered severe trauma. 80% of Southeast Asians live in linguistic isolation and our community has the highest poverty rates of any race or ethnicity in the US. The US again refuses to take responsibility for our communities' welfare and created the conditions for our communities to be plunged into poverty.

### Criminalization of Immigrant Youth

Beginning in the 80s, the US mounted a campaign criminalizing Southeast Asian youth as the latest segment in its racist and xenophobic history of criminalizing non-whites and immigrants. Paranoid media depictions of gang violence led to public support for increased police harassment of and brutality against Southeast Asian youth. The spending on Prisons has increased exponentially at the same time that education and social services are being drastically reduced. Especially in this post-9/11 era, public opinion and the government willingly endorse the criminalization, policing and incarceration of all immigrants and non-white youth.

Most of the Cambodian refugees now being targeted for deportation came here as children. The US has been the only home that they know. Most do not have living relatives or material connection to Cambodia. They have already served their time and have the right to be reunited with their families. Deportation constitutes double jeopardy, denies due process, and violates human rights. Many of those slated for deportation are primary income earners in their families. Deportation will force thousands of families into poverty. Deportation punishes our families and hurts our communities.

The paranoid and xenophobic logic behind deportation assumes that by deporting criminals the US would be rid of internal threats and dangers. However, this is based on several arbitrary assumptions about crime and criminality. The concept of crime in the US is framed to directly punish and incarcerate immigrants and non-white youth. "Crime" serves as a tool to exert power, control and physical force over targeted populations especially poor communities. This fails to recognize state crimes and "white collar crimes."

Criminality is not imported by or inherent in refugees and immigrants; crime is brought about by the inhumane conditions in the US -- lack of resources, lack of family networks, the lack of basic human rights like food, water, shelter, education, and health care. As longs as these wretched conditions exist, citizens and non-citizens, all people, will do what they have to survive. The condition in which poor people in the US live is itself criminal and violates our human rights.

From the historical perspective, citizenship itself is an arbitrary, exclusivist and racialized category that the US has historically used as a tool to deny rights to non-whites, Native Americans, freed slaves, African, Asian, Pacific Islander and Latino immigrants whose labor built this country. Restrictive shifts in immigration, naturalization and citizenship policy and laws are deeply linked to racism and xenophobia but in particular to white supremacist ideology and scapegoating of immigrants. Deportation is the most recent form of this historical white supremacism and xenophobia. The central logic is that if you are not a citizen, if you are not white, you do not deserve basic human rights.

As with other immigrants and non-whites, Southeast Asian communities

in the US are being targeted simultaneously for poverty, criminalization, incarceration and deportation. The US never wanted Southeast Asians here and will do everything it can to get rid of us.

Like other communities in this country and peoples of the world, Southeast Asians are and have always been the collateral damage of US wars, the Vietnam war, the War on Drugs, the War on Poverty, and today the War on Terrorism.

What is happening to the SEA community is part of a longer history of anti-immigrant laws, racism and human rights abuses since the foundation of this country on slavery and the genocide of indigenous peoples. When slavery was finally brought to an end in this country, the US wanted to deport freed slaves to Africa. Those freed slaves had grown up in the US, had established families, lives, connections and roots. The black community struggled against this injustice and to obtain rights denied to them as human beings. Deportation was not a just solution then, and it is not a just solution now.

History teaches us that injustice can only be transformed by people coming together to struggle against it. Today third world communities across this country have come together to demand justice and human rights for our communities. Justice for all people!

## APPENDIX D: SEAFN STATEMENT ON DEPORTATION (2002)

Political Analysis: Cambodian Deportation Committee against Southeast Asian Deportation (SEA Dep) By Ly Huong Nguyen and Loan Dao

### Introduction

API Force believes that we are all living in an unbalanced power structure in this society with an unequal distribution of wealth where the minority of wealthy elite oppress the majority of people. This power structure supports white supremacy and protects the wealthy. The involuntary detention and deportation of Southeast Asians is a part of that agenda. The forcible deportation of Cambodian refugees is the intersection of the continuing attacks against immigrant communities and families, the criminalization of poor and immigrant youth, and US violations of our human and legal rights which created the refugee situation in the first place and continues with the "war on terrorism."

The current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Cambodian government and the United States government violates the legal and human rights of immigrant and refugee people, most of whom came to the U.S. as infants and children. This initiative sets the precedent for further anti-immigrant legislation, for similar negotiations with Viet Nam and Laos, and more power concentrated in the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the INS. Its impact on our communities will be devastating as families are torn apart, youth are disproportionately targeted, and deportees face cruel and unusual punishment.

API ForCE believes that the involuntary deportation of immigrants and refugees is an unjust violation of human rights! Deportation is a continuation of existing attacks on our communities, both here and in our homelands. Already Southeast Asia is being targeted as the "second front" of US terrorism in the world. People in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines are being rounded up by the US; US death squads terrorize people in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> Asian and Pacific Islander communities are all too familiar with the horrors of war and militarism and the devastating impact on our families and countries, where it is the innocent people who suffer most. Our communities are suffering because of US domestic and international policies and actions.

We oppose the deportation of immigrants and refugees, DOJ imposition of virtual martial law, INS police raids and indefinite detention; we oppose the criminalization of youth and the attacks against immigrants. We challenge the flawed logic behind involuntary deportation, the lack of due process and the violation of human rights for refugee and immigrants. We demand a moratorium on all deportations and that all deportees be granted the right to defend themselves.

There is a growing movement of community members and activists to stop US human rights violations and to demand social justice. We must continue to challenge the dominant view that deportation protects the US from internal threats and bad elements and challenge the state manipulation and traumatization of Cambodian refugees. We must also make connections to what is happening in our SEA community and what is happening to all immigrants and to all third world peoples and communities.

### Overview of Cambodian Deportation

Since the passage of the reactionary Immigration & Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (IRWA), all non-citizen immigrants in the US have been subject to mandatory deportation if ever convicted of an "aggravated felony" as loosely defined by the DOJ regardless if it was a non-violent crime or if they had already served time for the crime. This legislation is unconstitutionally retroactive in scope.<sup>3</sup> Because of the Cold War political climate, the US did not have diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian countries of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos for the last 25 years. With no "repatriation" agreements between the US and those nations, Southeast Asian refugees being affected by this legislation were being indefinitely detained by the INS in federal penitentiaries far from family and community. Many of those being deported now were falsely promised by the INS that they would never be deported if they signed voluntary deportation agreements in exchange for release from indefinite detention and return to their families. This coercion denies them due process.

Catalyzed by successful civil liberties lawsuits against indefinite detention and renewed patriotic backlash against immigrants, the US conducted secret negotiations and finally obtained an MOU with Cambodia in March 2002 allowing Cambodian refugees to be forcibly deported to Cambodia. There are reportedly at least 1400 Cambodians who have received notices of deportation; virtually all of them came to the US as small children.<sup>4</sup> The MOU has not been

<sup>1</sup> For API ForCE's political analysis of the "War on Terror" see <[www.apiforce.org/features/war.html](http://www.apiforce.org/features/war.html)>

<sup>2</sup> AP "Powell: Southeast Asia is 'second front'", 7/28/2002

<sup>3</sup> IRA text <<http://www.networkusa.org/fingerprint/page2/fp-104-208-immigration.html>>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.searac.org/cambrepbak6\\_02.html](http://www.searac.org/cambrepbak6_02.html)

finalized, however six Cambodian men who have lived in the US approximately 20 years have already been deported as of June, 2002.

The US is probably already engaged in the process of secret negotiations with Viet Nam and Laos to deport Viet and Lao refugees. There are 9,000 deportable Laotian and Viet in the US. It is only a matter of time before deportation will affect Hmong, Mien, Lao and Viet communities.

#### Historical context: Southeast Asians in the US

Southeast Asian refugees came to the US as a direct result of US military and political incursions in our homelands and the subsequent social, economic and environmental devastation wrought by decades of US secret military operations, counterinsurgency/anti-people campaigns, bombings, warfare and economic sanctions in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. An estimated three million Southeast Asians died during the Viet Nam war; many more continue to suffer from its after effects (such as death and dismemberment from land mines and birth defects as a result of Agent Orange). US secret bombings of Cambodia and military funding set up the conditions for the Khmer Rouges rise to power and for massive displacement and famine directly leading to three million Khmer deaths. Thus, US involvement/interference in Southeast Asia created the conditions for total social disruption, destruction of families, mass displacement, economic instability, famine and refugee exodus. The US did *not* succeed in winning the “hearts and minds” of Southeast Asians, but it *did* succeed in destroying the countries’ economies, destabilizing society and setting up the conditions for social breakdown after its withdrawal. US involvement in Southeast Asia was itself criminal.

The US initially refused to acknowledge any responsibility for the impact of its war on Southeast Asian people, ignored the subsequent dire humanitarian situation of what is called the “Killing Fields of Cambodia” and refused to accept Cambodian refugees in the late 70s early 80s. Because of its role as a primary instigator, the US was finally forced to take responsibility and accept Southeast Asian refugees by mounting international pressure.<sup>5</sup> The US still refuses to take any responsibility for abandoned American land mines throughout Southeast Asia and continues to deny the serious medical impact of Agent Orange. We would not be here as refugees if the US did not wage war in our homelands.

<sup>5</sup> W. Courtland Robinson. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus & the International Response*. Zed Books 1998. J. Hein. *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: a refugee experience in the United States*. Twayne Publishers 1995. Ngoan Le. “Policy for a community ‘at-risk,’ The state of Asian Pacific America: a public policy report. LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center 1993.

Most of the Cambodian refugees who came to the US were agrarian women, infants and children who survived the trauma of US bombings and landmines, famine, the “Killing Fields,” the dangerous escape, and the refugee camps. US resettlement policies haphazardly divided up the Cambodian (and other Southeast Asian) refugees all over the nation – primarily to small cities and towns – to facilitate the assimilation of refugees. The immediate result was to continue the US’s long-standing practice of splintering community networks and separating families and placed Southeast Asian refugees into urban poverty, impoverished neighborhoods and substandard housing without the guarantee of living wage jobs. Refugees were minimal government assistance for an ever decreasing amount time and there was no provision for concrete and long term assistance in acculturating to US society and language, negotiating the legal system or for other social services and resources for the many who lacked education & skills or had suffered trauma.<sup>6</sup> 80% of Southeast Asians live in linguistic isolation and have the highest poverty rates of any race or ethnicity in the US.<sup>7</sup> Once again, the US refuses to take any further responsibility for the welfare of Southeast Asian refugees and inserted our refugee communities into poverty.<sup>8</sup>

#### Criminalization of Immigrant Youth

Beginning in the 1980s, the US media mounted a campaign criminalizing Southeast Asian youth as the latest in its history of criminalizing people of color. Paranoid media depictions of alleged Vietnamese and Cambodian gang violence -- in addition to long-standing anti-immigrant and criminalization of “minority” youth backlash -- led to public support for increased police harassment of and brutality against Southeast Asian youth and other third world peoples. Just to take one example, the San Jose and Orange County PD are notorious for racial profiling, police harassment and brutality, and the outright framings of Southeast Asian youth. There have been a few successful legal challenges, but with the passage of Prop 21, Prop 187, Prop 209 in the last decade and especially in this post-9/11 era, public opinion and the government willingly endorse the

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> see SEARAC <<http://www.searac.org/statstab.html>>; Asian-Nation <http://www.asian-nation.org/issues8.html>; also, E. Tang, “Refugee reality: Clinton’s Vietnam Fiction,” Colorlines, 29 Nov 2000. <[http://www.arc.org/C\\_Lines/CLArchive/story\\_web00\\_06.html](http://www.arc.org/C_Lines/CLArchive/story_web00_06.html)>

<sup>8</sup> see also, the documentary “Eating Welfare” by CAAAV—Organizing Asian Communities. Bronx, NY 2001. <[www.caaav.org](http://www.caaav.org)>

criminalization, policing and incarceration of our youth.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, Southeast Asians have the highest rising rates of incarceration in the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the Cambodian refugees now being targeted for deportation came here before the age of 10. The US has been the only home that they know. Most do not have living relatives or material connection to Cambodia. Cambodian refugees are being excessively penalized: the injustice of US devastation of the homeland, the devastating living conditions in the US, is compounded by the injustice of incarceration and deportation from their home and their family in the US. Many of those slated for deportation are the primary income earners in their families. Deportation will force thousands of families into poverty. Deportation punishes our families and hurts our communities.

### **Deportation based on flawed logic**

The paranoid and xenophobic logic behind deportation assumes that by deporting criminals the US would be rid of internal threats and dangers. However, this is based on several incorrect and backwards assumptions about crime and criminality. The concept of crime in the US is framed to directly punish and incarcerate young people of color. "Crime" serves as a tool to exert power, control and physical force over targeted populations. Criminal is a code for young people of color from economically impoverished communities. This fails to recognize state crime and "white collar crime." Criminality is not imported by or inherent in refugees and immigrants; crime is brought about by the inhumane conditions in the US -- lack of resources, lack of family networks, the lack of basic human rights like food, water, shelter, education, and health care. Furthermore, the conditions of refugees and poor people in the US are criminal and violates our human rights. Deportation is a further injustice that the US is perpetrating on third world peoples.

Southeast Asian communities in the US are being targeted simultaneously for impoverishment, criminalization, incarceration and deportation. The US never wanted Southeast Asians here and will do anything in its power to get rid of us.

### **Attack on Immigrants and Refugees**

The INS has steadily been increasing its power since its inception in the early

9 These California propositions increased the criminalization of third world peoples by respectively trying youth as adults, denying immigrants basic human rights such as health care and education, and re-instituting white supremacist hiring & admissions policies. These reactionary and xenophobic propositions were a watershed for other states and for national policies.

10 Southeast Asian Student Coalition, UC Berkeley 2002.

1900s, adding substantial military powers to its range in the last few decades (e.g. the US-México border).<sup>11</sup> The IRA substantially increased the INS' ability to create and enforce punitive actions on immigrants. Following 9/11 the US public and legislative branches have given increasing international powers and autonomy to the INS.<sup>12</sup> The INS has its own military force, its own domestic and overseas intelligence agents, its own armed criminal enforcement (i.e. the policing of immigrants), incarceration system and ability to render indefinite/lifetime sentences, and the selective use of its legal powers ("prosecutorial discretion").<sup>13</sup> The centralization of powers in the INS sets a dangerous precedent for the erosion of immigrant rights and human rights and marks an era of intense political repression and a right-wing agenda.

### **INS is a despot**

As a federal agency with jurisdiction over immigration matters, the INS currently has discretion in determining involuntary detention and deportation without judicial review or any form of checks and balances in the enforcement, persecution and prosecution of immigrants and refugees. This autonomous power in conjunction with anti-immigrant backlash has led to a loose and arbitrary definition "aggravated felony" to include non-violent crimes – such as check fraud, marijuana possession shoplifting and other non-violent crimes – as grounds for mandatory deportation regardless if the person have served their sentence and are rehabilitated and productive members of society. This constitutes at the very least "double jeopardy" – that is, being punished twice for committing a single crime, serving one's sentence and then being deported – and violates international human rights as a cruel and unusual punishment.

Because the INS has such broad powers – discretionary and enforcement – no one caught in the INS snare is guaranteed Miranda Rights.<sup>14</sup> Not only is the INS enabled to detain and deport immigrants and refugees virtually at will, but indigent deportees do not have the right to a court appointed lawyer. For poor Southeast Asian refugees, this de facto denies them adequate legal counsel. Furthermore, deportees who are detained or are undergoing "removal proceedings" are jailed with the general prison population regardless of the nature

11 INS powers <<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/lawenfor/index.htm>> For more on INS militarization, National Border Patrol Strategy <<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/lawenfor/bpatrol/strategy.htm>>

12 Operation Global Reach <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/publicaffairs/factsheets/globalreach.htm>; <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/lawsregs/whatsnew.htm>

13 <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/lawenfor/index.htm>

14 Miranda Rights <<http://www.dui.com/duieducation/Miranda.html>>

of their past conviction. Since the INS does not have as yet its own detention facilities, it ships potential deportees to prisons all over the nation regardless of their place of residence. The INS deliberately isolates the deportee from their families and their community support networks and makes it more difficult for action to be taken against the deportation proceedings. The deportation issues has been one cloaked in legal abuses and human rights abuses.

### **International dimension**

The economic success of the US depends on the displacement and marginalization of the majority of the world and of the US population. Cheap or slave labor and cheap resources fuel US economic success. There has historically been an ever-growing struggle to concentrate more capital, resources, and power in the hands of a few countries, of the "First World", of a few corporations, and in the ruling class.

This effort has always been opposed by collective action of the people directly affected in the US and internationally. The power structure has tried to suppress this dissent through many forms, such as anti-immigrant legislation and policies and through deportation. The more wealth and power is concentrated into the hands of the few, the more people will oppose and join the disenfranchised majority in the movement for social justice. And thus the more force will be used throughout the world, and the more our constitutional rights and liberties and human rights as citizens and non-citizens living in the US will diminish.

Historically the US "opens" its borders for immigration of cheap labor to bolster its economic growth. The US pushes its surplus labor into the prison system and uses deportation as a "safety-valve".<sup>15</sup> The unemployment rate is rising while social services for the people are being cut. With the economic situation weakening, there is much potential for growing instability and discontent of people all over the world, including here in the US. The US ruling elite needs more than ever, ways to maintain its profit level for the rich while squashing dissent worldwide. The fear and paranoia of 9.11 allowed them to strengthen forces internationally as well as remove constitutional rights and civil liberties domestically. Over the last four decades, the prisons have expanded at an exponential rate into an industry to control poor and immigrant communities. Deportation is a false solution to perpetuate this agenda.

We believe that the US is once again trying to get away with human rights violations under the guise of national security. We oppose the deportation of immigrants and refugees, INS police raids and indefinite detention; we oppose

the criminalization of youth and the attacks against immigrants. We challenge the flawed logic behind involuntary deportation and the violation of human rights for refugee and immigrants. We demand that all deportees be granted a deferred action status and the right to defend themselves.

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15 See for example the Bracero program.

## APPENDIX E: SEAFN DEMANDS TO U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (2015)

### REFUGEES

MARCH 18, 2015 / ILOVEMOVEMENT

The Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America  
Second Cycle | Twenty-Second Session of the UPR | Human Rights Council  
Southeast Asian Freedom Network

2015 marks 40 years since Southeast Asian refugee communities were displaced by militarism and war, and began being resettled in the US. In recognition of our community's deep resilience and power in the face of struggle, we continue our fight for justice and declare the following systemic US human rights violations against the Cambodian community over the course of the last five decades:

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3. Right to Life, Liberty and Security*

Between 1965-1973 the US dropped 2,756,941 tons of bombs, in a secret and illegal military campaign, across the countryside of Cambodia, which was an internationally declared neutral country. The destruction of 8 years of bombing led Cambodia into the hands of the rising, and genocidal leadership of the Khmer Rouge.

April 17, 2015 will mark 40 years since the Khmer Rouge marched on Phnom Penh and vacated the city, forcibly leading families and children into the Killing Fields for the next 3 years, 8 months, and 20 days. During this time nearly 2 million people, approximately 21% of our population, lost their lives to genocide.

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25. Right to Food, Shelter and Health*

Beginning in the 1970s, there was a mass influx of Southeast Asians to the US due to war and political upheavals in their countries. A total of 1,146,650 Southeast Asians were resettled in the US from 1975-2002. Upon our arrival, the structures of support needed for our community to heal, survive, and grow, were not in place. Families were exploited for cheap labor, apartments and houses were falling apart, and as refugees we experienced deep trauma and mental health issues. A 2004 survey revealed that 70% of Cambodian-Americans exhibit signs of post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the loss of family members, experience of labor camps, and war.

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26. Right to Education, & Article 7. Right to Equality Before the Law*

Most Southeast Asian refugees were resettled into inhumane conditions in impoverished neighborhoods, making us vulnerable to poverty, crime, violence, structural disadvantage, racism, discrimination and profiling. Many young people fell through the cracks in an under-resourced education system unfit to meet their needs, leaving only 65% of Cambodian-American youth graduating from high school. Many enter into a highly functional and highly funded School-to-Prison Pipeline. Law enforcement agencies in cities across the country began coding Cambodian communities as "gang infested" and we were surveilled and profiled for arrest and incarceration. Over-policing of our community led to racial profiling, police brutality, and high incarceration rates, higher than any other Asian ethnic group in relation to the size of our population.

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 10. Right to Due Process, Article 16. Right to Family Unity, & Article 9. Right to Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, Exile*

In 1996, the US passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act

(AEDPA). These laws expanded "aggravated felony" to include offenses that are neither aggravated nor felonious under criminal justice law, but lead to deportation under immigration law. Judicial discretion and individualized deportation hearings were eliminated for those being deported for such "aggravated felonies," leaving individuals stripped of their right to due process. Deportation for "aggravated felonies" also became permanent with no right to return, and was applied retroactively, leading to international human rights violations regarding proportionality of punishment, double jeopardy, and fairness under the law.

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21. Right to Democracy*

On March 22, 2002 the US signed a Repatriation Agreement with Cambodia and began deporting Cambodian-Americans. This agreement was signed without transparency, insight, or accountability to the community impacted. It was signed swiftly and secretly.

Repatriation Agreements must be seen as human rights contracts, because they impact the livelihood and survival of individuals and families. These agreements

need to reflect the unique conditions and experiences of the diaspora they apply to, and participating countries must be accountable to the impact of deportation on the diaspora, as well as the history and conditions of their displacement. As such, the creation of such agreements must be done through transparent, open, and democratic processes that prioritize the will of the people and insight of directly impacted communities.

As a Cambodian-American refugee community, we have been rooted in an intergenerational struggle over the last five decades to keep our families together against unjust forces of US militarism, war, systemic poverty, education inequity, imprisonment, institutionalized racism, discrimination, and deportation. With over 500 Cambodian-American families broken apart since 2002, and over 4000 more awaiting the same fate, our human rights fight today, is deportation.

#### REQUESTED ACTION

We call for immediate recourse to begin to rectify over five decades of US human rights violations that have torn Cambodian families apart from Cambodia to the US, and back again:

1. We call for an immediate suspension of US deportations to Cambodia.
2. We call for an open review process of the US-Cambodia Repatriation Agreement, which includes and prioritizes democratic oversight and input of impacted communities in the US and Cambodia.
3. We call for amendments to the Repatriation Agreement that tailor its impacts to consider the individual and community experience of US human rights violations, and will protect those with these experiences from deportation.
4. We call for amendments to the Repatriation Agreement that ensure humane, just, and fair structures of support for impacted families and individuals in the US and Cambodia, including economic stability, human and social services, employment infrastructure, visitation rights, and the right to return.

#### QUESTIONS TO THE US GOVERNMENT

1. Will the United States commit to suspending US deportations to Cambodia until human rights issues can be rectified through amendments to the US-Cambodia Repatriation Agreement?

2. Will the United States commit to undergoing an open review process of the current Repatriation Agreement with Cambodia which includes and prioritizes democratic oversight and input of impacted communities in the US and Cambodia?

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The Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN) is a national collective of Southeast Asian grassroots organizing groups that works towards radical & transformational change led by those most impacted by systemic injustice.

SEAFN Member Groups: 1Love Movement, Freedom Inc., ManForward, Mekong NYC, Providence Youth Student Movement, SOY-Shades of Yellow, and VAYLA New Orleans.

## APPENDIX F: SEAFN 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT (2015)

SEAFN STATEMENT: April 17, 2015

TODAY, marks 40 years since our country was taken over by the Khmer Rouge revolution. It was revolution that was rooted in political theory, but not liberatory action. Revolution built on communist ideology, but practiced through dictatorship and mass murder. Revolution that promised life, but led to the genocide of our people. Revolution that cherished our homeland, but led us to displacement.

TODAY, as SEAFN reflects on the deep resistance and resilience of our community, we also commit to recognizing the historic root causes of our experience. We know that French colonialism, and US imperialism and militarism bear responsibility for creating the conditions that led our country into the Killing Fields. We experience this oppression through continuous cycles of violence from one side of the world to the other, from war to displacement to poverty to incarceration to deportation. We are the collateral damage and human cost of colonialism, imperialism, and militarism. And we know that we will continue to carry the weight of all of this systemic violence for generations to come, and that we must heal through determined resistance and resilience.

TODAY, we are called to reclaim the meaning of revolution for our communities. We must continue to break the cycle of isolated trauma, and ground ourselves in collective healing, and actions rooted in our historic experience and our current conditions. And we have already begun. Our revolution has been our survival and our determination to re-build and re-center our lives, our families, and our people. Our revolution has been our resilient creation of new pathways for us to experience family, love, healing, and community. As we continue to struggle with the impact of intergenerational systemic oppression, we are building a new foundation that honors our humanity and dignity.

TODAY, our revolution honors our ancestors, our history, and our struggle. Our revolution is about action rooted in love. It is about building vision through support for each other and our experiences. It is about taking back our dignity by reclaiming and redefining our art, our culture, our music, and our expression. It is about challenging the ways that we have internalized systemic imbalance and oppression, and taking accountability for the ways this has caused us to enact violence on each other. It is about doing the work of continuously acknowledging

our systemic privileges, and deepening our solidarity with other oppressed communities in a country founded on white supremacy, anti-blackness and indigenous genocide. It is about identifying our movement purpose through analysis of root causes and systemic responsibility. It is about fighting back against the separation of families from generation to generation.

TODAY, 40 years later, we are called to be revolutionary, and move together in the fight of our generation...the fight for our families, the fight for our communities. Today, that means ending deportation.

## Notes

### Chapter One Notes

- 1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 1963/1990), 206.
- 2 Loan Dao, "We Will Not Be Moved: The Mobilization Against Southeast Asian Detention and Deportation" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009).
- 3 For M.O.U.s, see Appendix A.
- 4 Loan Dao, "Refugee Representations: Youth, Hip Hop, and Southeast Asian Deportation," *Amerasia Journal* 40, no. 2 (2014): 88–110.
- 5 The Southeast Asian Youth Leadership Project (YLP) was a social justice youth program created by Communities Against Asian American Violence (CAAAV) in the northwest Bronx, New York, that organized Southeast Asian American youth and their families. YLP became independent from CAAAV in 2011 and is referred to as Mekong in later chapters.
- 6 Espiritu, *Body Counts*; Nguyen, "Refugee Memories and Asian American Critique"; Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?" *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): 157–75; Kieu-Linh Caroline Valverde, *Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture, and the Politics in the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).
- 7 Loan Dao, "What's Going On with the Oakland Museum's 'California & the Vietnam Era' Exhibit," *AmerAsia Journal: 30 Years AfterWARD: Vietnamese Americans & U.S. Empire* 30, no. 2 (2005): 88–108.
- 8 Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, and the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston, III, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adjust to Life in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998).

9 For more on AAM origins and history, see Diane C. Fujino, "Who Studies the Asian American Movement? A Historiographical Analysis," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 127–69; Kim Geron, "Serve the People: An Exploration of the Asian American Movement," in *Asian American Politics: Law, Participation, and Policy*, ed. Don Nakanishi and James Lai (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 163–79; Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism* (London: Lexington Books, 2008); Daryl Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Glenn Omatsu, "The Four Prisons and the Movements for Liberation," in *Asian American Politics: Law, Participation, and Policy*, ed. Don Nakanishi and James Lai (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 135–62.

10 I am using Pew Research Center's generational categorization (April 11, 2018), in which Millennials are those who were born between 1981 and 1996, and post-Millennials were born from 1997. <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2018/04/11/generationsdefined2017/>.

11 MAAs are organizations that began in the 1970s and 1980s by co-ethnic refugees to assist newer cohorts of arrivals with resettlement in the United States. They operated mainly through funding from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), private foundations, and donors. MAAs developed in response to the crisis of refugee resettlement when the U.S. government agencies and resettlement agencies, largely religious and formed out of the refugee influx from Europe post-WWII, were ill-equipped to support the unique needs of Southeast Asian refugees. These large, Euro-American agencies frequently received funding from the ORR and subcontracted a portion to MAAs, which subsisted on shoestring budgets. Many MAA leaders became the representational voices and gatekeepers of the refugee communities, and later played instrumental roles in forming national, ethnic-specific advocacy organizations. For more on the development of MAAs, see Chan, *Not Just Victims*; Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in The United States* (New York: Twayne Publications, 1995); and Tuyen Tran, "Behind the Smoke and Mirrors: The Vietnamese in California, 1975–1994" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

12 Eric Tang uses Wacquant's concept of the hyperghetto to describe the socio-economic conditions of the northwest Bronx in New York City, where Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees were resettled in the 1980s and suffered severe isolation, neglect, exploitation, and criminalization.

See Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

13 My emphasis that the refugee is "no longer a refugee" harkens to ongoing debates about the concept of the perpetual refugee (Fung 2010) in both refugee studies and Southeast Asian American studies whereby one is forever burdened and haunted by the label and the assumed responsibilities attached to it, literally and figuratively. In regard to MAAs, the retreat from funding by the state, particularly the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and private funders from Southeast Asian refugee organizations from the American War in Southeast Asia toward newer refugee populations, forces a reckoning with the material evidence of the end of an era for refugee resettlement from Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam.

14 Erica Kohl-Arenas, "Governing Poverty Amidst Plenty: Participatory Development and Private Philanthropy," *Geography Compass* 5, no. 11 (2011): 10. For more on the "non-profit industrial complex," see

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007); Tim Bartley, "How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and the Rise of Forest Certification," *Social Problems* 54, no. 3 (2007): 229–55; Susan Ostrander, "Legacy and Promise for Social Justice Funding: Charitable Foundations and Progressive Social Movements, Past and Present," in *Foundations for Social Change: Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements*, ed. D. Faber and D. McCarthy (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 33–59.

15 INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*; Andrea Del Moral, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," *LiP Magazine*, April 4, 2005, accessed September 11, 2020, [http://www.lipmagazine.org/articles/featdeltmoral\\_nonprofit\\_p.html](http://www.lipmagazine.org/articles/featdeltmoral_nonprofit_p.html).

16 Craig Jenkins and Abigail Halci, "Grassrooting the System?: The Development and Impact of Social Movement Philanthropy, 1953–1960," in *Philanthropic Foundations: New Scholarship, New Possibilities*, ed. E. C. Lagemann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

17 Dylan Rodriguez, "The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 21–40.

18 Cristina M. Balboa, "How Successful NGOs Set Themselves Up for Failure on the Ground," *World Development* 54 (2014): 273–87; Nicola Banks, David Hulmes, and Michael Edwards, "NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?" *World Development* 66 (2015): 707–18; Alnoor Ebrahim, "Making Sense of Accountability: Conceptual Perspectives for Northern and Southern Nonprofits," *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 14, no. 2 (2003): 191–212; Geoffrey Q. C. Robertson, *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*, 4th ed. (New York: The New Press, 2012); Adil Najam, "NGO Accountability: A Conceptual Framework," *Development Policy Review* 14, no. 4 (1996): 339–54; Stein (1984); Eric Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-client Relations," in *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–22.

19 Conversation with Doua Thor of SEARAC (May 2013).

20 501(c)3 status is a federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) designation for tax-exempt, charitable organizations, that operate for the public good and not for profit. This identification restricts political activity and legislative activities outlined by the IRS at <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501-c-3-tax-exempt-organizations>.

21 Soo Ah Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 58.

22 Paul Kivel, "Social Service or Social Change?" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Boston: South End Press, 2007), 129–50.

23 Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 183.

24 1.5-generation refers to refugees and immigrants who immigrated as minors (before the age of 18). I also interchangeably refer to this population with the legal term "childhood arrivals." 1.8-generation are childhood arrivals who migrated before they were of school age and spent their entire K-12 educational experience in the United States. Second-generation refers to children of immigrants and refugees who were born in the country of resettlement, but retain similar characters of 1.5-generation due to their family migration history. For more, see Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*.

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## Chapter Five Notes

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