

Cambodian Son

85 minutes // English // 16:9 // Color HD // Cambodia/USA/France/London

Filmed, Directed, & Edited by Masahiro Sugano

Produced by Anida Yoeu Ali

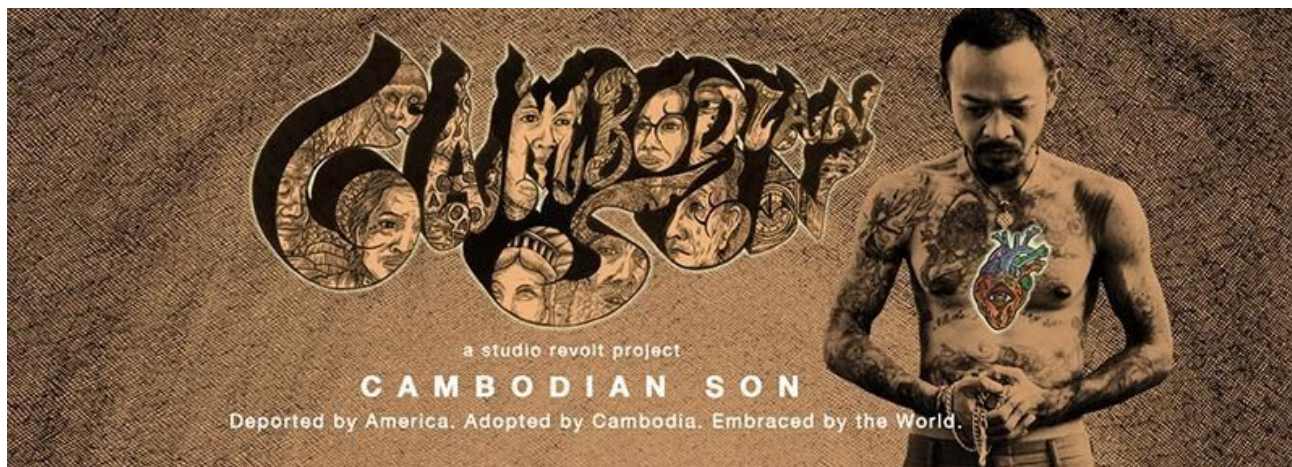
Features the story and poetry of Kosal Khiev

Teaching & Film Discussion Guide written by Anida Yoeu Ali and Maria Tucker

Film Trailer: <http://cambodianson.com/watch/trailer/>

Watch the Film Here: <http://cambodianson.com/watch/>

Bonus Material from the Film Here: <http://cambodianson.com/watch/bonus/>



“All I hope now is that you watch this film and walk away feeling something you never felt before about some people you never thought you would come to know. It is only through your tears and inspiration that we can begin to make an impact in this world that is cruel but always generous to those who persevere.”

— *Masahiro Sugano, filmmaker*

Film Awards for Cambodian Son

- Top Documentary Award, San Francisco CAAMFEST 2014
- Special Jury Prize for Best Documentary, Cultural Resistance Film Festival of Lebanon 2014
- Audience Choice Award, Bali International Film Festival 2015
- Golden Hanoman Best Asian Film Award, Jogja-Netpac Asian Film Festival 2015
- Film 4 Change Award, Albuquerque Film Festival 2015
- National Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) Award, 2016

Cambodian Son documents the life of deported poet, Kosal Khiev, after receiving the most important performance invitation of his career—to represent the Kingdom of Cambodia at the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Kosal would travel to London having taken only two prior flights: first, as a 1-year-old refugee whose family fled Cambodia and then, as a 32-year-old criminal “alien” forcibly exiled to Cambodia in 2011. The film follows a volatile yet charming and talented young man who struggles to find his footing amongst a new freedom that was granted only through deportation. Kosal’s London representation is a triumphant moment for many people in his life, both in America and Cambodia. The film traces the impact and significance of this moment for Kosal, his friends, family, mentors and a growing international fan base. Armed only with memorized verses, he must face the challenges of being a deportee while navigating his new fame as Phnom Penh’s premiere poet. After the performances end and the London stage becomes a faint memory, Kosal is once again left alone to answer the central question in his life: “How do you survive when you belong nowhere?”

Issues Addressed in “CAMBODIAN SON”:

Kosal Khiev’s story brings to light multiple, intersecting issues including immigration and deportation, incarceration, human rights, intergenerational trauma, juvenile justice, art as integral to healing and full human development, and so much more. The film “CAMBODIAN SON” arrives at a time when Americans are in the midst of a fierce battle for humane immigration reform, and this documentary can be a vehicle to have deeper discussions, build consciousness about the experiences of immigrants from Asian America, and make connections between these experiences with other immigrant and refugee communities in the US.

About Studio Revolt:

Studio Revolt is a collaborative media lab that produces films, videos, installations and performance projects by artist **Anida Yoeu Ali** and filmmaker **Masahiro Sugano**. Ali is a Muslim Khmer woman born in Cambodia and raised in America who utilizes video, installation, sound and performance to investigate the artistic, spiritual and political collisions of hybrid transnational identities. In the 1990s Sugano arrived in the US from Japan to make movies, often reconsidering the cultural and political norms to create imaginative films. Together, their works have exhibited in biennales, screened in notable festivals and won numerous awards including LinkTV’s grand prize for the film *1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim* (2010), Center for Asian American Media’s Innovation Fund for the deportee web series *Verses in Exile* (2014), 2015 Sovereign Asian Art Prize and 2017 Art Matters Grant. From *The Buddhist Bug* series to video works on deportations, their interest with marginalized voices and displacement informs much of their work. Based in Cambodia from 2011-2015 they became a prominent presence in the contemporary arts scene showcasing their works in screenings, exhibitions, and public art projects all over Asia. Ali and Sugano left the U.S. in 2011 shortly after producing the award-winning film “1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim” a work which highlighted the historical links between the Japanese internment of the 1940’s with the rise of Islamophobia post-9/11. In 2014, they released their award-winning feature documentary *CAMBODIAN SON* about a deportee who transforms his life through poetry. In 2015, Ali and Sugano returned to an America steeped in racial division and watched as Donald Trump campaigned on fear, misogyny and lies. In 2016, the day after the U.S. elected Trump as the 45th president of the United States, Ali and Sugano took, *The Red Chador*, a performance work confronting Islamophobia, onto the streets of Seattle as their only means to resist and protest the new administration. For both artists, Studio Revolt is a transnomic studio that exists wherever critical issues emerge and they are not afraid to question and provoke. Currently based in Tacoma, Washington, they serve as Artists-in-Residence at the University of Washington Bothell where they teach performance and filmmaking in an effort to influence a new generation of creative thinkers and agitators.

About the Teaching & Film Discussion Guide:

We are offering this teaching and film discussion guide as a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in *Cambodian Son*, a film that follows Kosal Khiev, a volatile yet charming and talented young man, as he struggles to find his footing amongst a new freedom that was granted only through his deportation to Cambodia. Kosal’s story brings to light multiple, intersecting issues including immigration and deportation, incarceration, human rights, intergenerational trauma, juvenile justice, art as integral to healing and full human development, and so much more. The guide provides important context, and offers thought provoking questions to encourage viewers to think more critically. We also provide resources and updates to the community activism work around the issues in the hopes that others will find a way to take action.

Sensitive: This resource contains material that may be sensitive for some students. Please exercise discretion in evaluating whether this resource is suitable for your classroom and/or community discussions.

Other Important Videos on Deportations by Studio Revolt – Youtube Channel

Verses in Exile (4 Episodes commissioned for CAAM, distributed on PBS.org)

The series was conceived as a prequel to CAMBODIAN SON

“Verses in Exile” Trailer here: <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365429278/>

Episode 1: Lonely Child (6:31min) <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365433254/>

Episode 2: Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child (7:27min) <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365445648/>

Episode 3: Children with Guns (8:22min) <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365445657/>

Episode 4: Blank Canvas (10:01min) <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365445668/>

My Asian Americana (3min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQxtfCz4B1o>

Return to Sender (8min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Bc9oWFvUQs>

Exile Stories #1: Tyna & Zar (5min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18bN4Okprnl>

Unite Us (5min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ljQLpKmppw>

Why I Write (7min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YstoXrrz1Gs>

Discussion Questions

Here are some questions to consider for a class discussion:

- 1.) “[My Asian Americana](#)” is a Studio Revolt video PSA project and short film about deportation without ever saying the word. What surprised you about the film? What do you think is powerful about this video?
- 2.) “My Asian Americana” won the popular vote in the White House’s “What’s Your Story Video Challenge” contest but was dismissed from the winner’s circle. What led to this dismissal? Why do you think the White House opted out?
- 3.) Why are US deportation laws severely impacting the Cambodian American community?
- 4.) Should immigration laws include special consideration for refugees - for Cambodians and other refugees who fled genocide? Why or why not? How about those who fled from American military bombings? (Review the [UN’s definition of refugee](#))
- 5.) What is hopeful about Kosal’s story? Through his personal story, what can we learn about intersecting issues including immigration and deportation, incarceration, juvenile justice, and art as integral to healing and full human development?
- 6.) Given that Kosal committed a crime and was not a US citizen, should he have been deported after already serving a 14-year sentence? Does the punishment fit the crime? Does someone like Kosal or any deportees (DPs) deserve a second chance? What can we learn about the US Justice System and the US Immigration System from the cases of Khmer Exiled Americans?

Supplemental Reading Materials & Other Educational Links

Get to Know the Issues:

1. Please read the "[Issues page](#)" on the **Cambodian Son website** for an overview on the issues featured in our documentary regarding the deportation of Cambodian 'Americans'. Another resource about organizing around 2016-2020 deportations is here:

<https://www.searac.org/immigration/community-alert-national-asian-american-and-southeast-asian-american-organizations-denounce-trump-administrations-move-to-increase-deportations-to-laos/>

2. **The Southeast Asian Freedom Network** was created in response to critical grassroots issues like deportation and incarceration that affect Southeast Asian American communities.

SEAFN released a series of videos as part of their community awareness campaign. The videos on this page are excellent educational tools. They provide an overview of key international and domestic policies that gave rise to the deportation crisis in the Cambodian American and Southeast Asian community. If you don't have time to watch all of the videos, please watch Video#1: Campaign Launch

<https://1lovemovement.wordpress.com/seafn-campaign-videos/>

3. Check out the **Wikipedia** link - [Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996](#) – the law that created the current deportation crisis

4. McGann, Chris. "Tearful Goodbyes Before Deportation to Cambodia," June 14, 2002, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporter*. An article about one of the earliest deportations:

<https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Tearful-goodbyes-before-deportation-to-Cambodia-1089446.php>

5. **"Kicked Back to Cambodia" - March 15, 2016**

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/story/kicked-back-cambodia>

An Australian video news report about the deportation of Cambodians from Australia and the US

6. This is an oldie but goodie – report from the Leitner Center / Report 2012 – ["Removing Refugees"](#)

7. **"America by the Numbers Episode 6: Pass or Fail in Cambodia Town"**

<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/86a77285-7b6c-4748-9db8-54c136054e02/pass-or-fail-in-cambodia-town-america-by-the-numbers-episode-6/>

In this episode, PBS features a story on the dangerous "model minority" myth through the educational crisis facing the Cambodian American community in Long Beach.

8. Here's a great series of reports published in 2014 on deportations:

[3-part series in Northwest Asian Weekly](#)

9. If you do not know about the controversy surrounding our work as Studio Revolt, please take a look at these articles on the White House controversy surrounding our short film "My Asian Americana (2012)"

Articles on the MY ASIAN AMERICANA video contest controversy:

Colorlines (04/11/12) "Deportation Video Wins White House Contest, But Disappears"

LA Times (04/23/12) "Filmmakers 'appalled' by process in White House video contest"

Studio Revolt's response to the contest dismissal includes the following:

Director's [Initial Statement](#) About the Video

Our [Response Statement](#) to the Dismissal

[“Champions of Change, too” - Response](#) through a performance
Please note: “Return to Sender” is also our video response to the dismissal

10. **“Deported”** Presented by NBC Asian American in 2017, this 5-part documentary series by Sahra Nguyen focuses on Cambodian American deportations and the community activism that mobilized in response. Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdoFtGErRHg>

2018-2020 News Updates:

During the Trump Administration, the deportations to Cambodia skyrocketed. And although Vietnamese refugees are protected from deportation based on the Repatriation Agreement between the US and Vietnam, many Vietnam refugees have been deported by the Administration, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Wong, Ashley. "The First Cambodian Deportee to Return to the US Just Became a Citizen in Sacramento," July 3, 2020.
<https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article243828472.html>
2. "Decades After Resettlement Cambodian Refugees Vulnerable to Prison to Deportation Pipeline," April 27, 2020, *NBC News*.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/decades-after-resettlement-cambodian-refugees-vulnerable-prison-deportation-pipeline-n1193581>
3. Dunst, Charles "Cambodian Deportees Return to a 'Home' They've Never Known," January 16, 2019. *The Atlantic*.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/01/america-deports-cambodian-refugees/580393/>
4. Rosen, Jonathan W. "Deported to Their Parents' Homeland Cambodian Americans Start Anew," August 14, 2019. *Foreign Policy*.
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/14/deported-to-their-parents-homeland-cambodian-americans-start-anew/>
5. Boyle, David. "Cambodians Fight Back As Deportations Escalate", December 18, 2018
<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/cambodians-fight-back-deportations-escalate>
6. Southeast Asian Resource Action Center news article list:
<https://www.searac.org/programming/national-state-policy-advocacy/immigration/>
7. Dunst, Charles. "Dozens More Cambodian Immigrants to Be Deported From US Officials Say", November 12, 2018. *New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/12/world/asia/trump-deport-cambodians.html>
8. Chan Thul, Prak. "US Deports 37 Cambodian Refugees After Criminal Convictions" July 4, 2019, *Reuters*.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cambodia-deportees/us-deports-37-cambodian-refugees-after-criminal-convictions-idUSKCN1TZOWF>

Right2Reunite News:

As of September 2020, four deported persons have won the right to return to their families in the US. This transformative change was the result of over 15 years of organizing, advocating and building a Southeast Asian anti-deportation movement. Since the beginning of deportations of refugees to Cambodia in 2002, most deported persons felt hopeless about ever stepping foot back in the US. But the returns of 4 people thus far, has renewed their hope. Read about the returnees here:

1. Constante, Agnes, "Second Cambodian Deportee to Return to U.S., Giving Hope to Others Seeking Return" February 27, 2019, *NBC News*.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/second-cambodian-deportee-return-u-s-giving-hope-others-seeking-n976511>
2. Lei, Cecilia. "Wrongly Targeted for Deportation US Citizen Reunites with Family Five Years Later" February 6, 2020. *KQED*.
Later"<https://www.kqed.org/news/11800255/mistakenly-targeted-for-deportation-u-s-citizen-reunites-with-family-five-years-later>
3. Marcelo, Philip. "Cambodian Refugee Deported 2 Years Ago Returns to US" February 26, 2020, *WCVB*.
<https://www.wcvb.com/article/cambodian-refugee-deported-2-years-ago-set-to-return-to-us/31112092#>
4. Dunst, Charles. "He was deported for a crime he committed at 19. Now a 30-year-old Cambodian refugee is back home in California" March 6, 2019
<https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-cambodia-us-deportations-20190306-story.html>
5. Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Asian Law Caucus. 1st and 2nd returnees arrive in the US
"https://www.advancingjustice-alc.org/news_and_media/the-defender-coming-back-home/

Activism Stops Deportations:

1. Hing, Julianne. "How a Group of Immigration Attorneys Stopped a Deportation Flight to Cambodia," December 19, 2017, *The Nation*.
<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-a-group-of-immigration-attorneys-stopped-a-deportation-flight-to-cambodia/>
2. Under threat of visa sanctions by the US, the Cambodian government agrees to receive deported persons.
Boyle, David and Kann, Vichelka. "US and Cambodia Agree on Deportations," February 10, 2018, *VOA News*. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/us-cambodia-agree-deportations>
3. Prak Chan, Thul. "US Urges Cambodia to Take Back Deportees," February 9, 2018, *Reuters*.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa/u-s-urges-cambodia-to-take-back-deportees-idUSKBN1FT15S>
4. Kay, Kira. "Deported from the US, Cambodians Fight Immigration Policy," May 7, 2017, *NewsHour*.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/deported-u-s-cambodians-fight-immigration-policy>