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Lotuses Rising: Fostering Southeast Asian Community Cultural Wealth Through Arts Based Culturally Specific Programming

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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
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MASTERS OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project had been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Monisha Bajaj	May 10, 2016
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

I identify as Khmai[1] American, and I was the first person in my family to be born in the United States. I am a child of Cambodian refugee parents who came to this country in the early 1980s and finally resettled in Oakland, California. As a result of my family coming during this tumultuous time, I witnessed family members join gangs to find community and protection in neighborhoods that already had issues with street violence, saw that educational attainment was low in my community, and experienced a widening cultural and language gap with the older generation. As a preteen, I was frustrated with my family, our community, and the experiences I had growing up. I needed an outlet, and above all, I needed to understand what lead to these adversities in the first place.

After French Indochina, comprised of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, came to an end in 1954 through the Geneva Accords, the United States (U.S.) engaged in conflict with Vietnam in what we know as the Vietnam War. During that war, Cambodia wanted to be a neutral country. While the U.S. claimed it was putting a halt to the spread of communism in geographic Southeast Asia, it secretly bombed parts of the Cambodian countryside. By 1971, the U.S. had dropped 800,000 tons of explosives on Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Zinn, 2005). By 1973, the U.S. would have dropped 257,465 tons of explosives just on Cambodia's countryside, more than all the bombs dropped on Japan during World War II (Bartrop & Jacobs, 2014; Becker, 1998). The Khmai Rouge, a

[1] This is commonly spelled "Khmer" in English. My choice to spell it "Khmai" comes with the understanding that transliteration of the original script to Romanized letters alters the correct pronunciation of this ethnicity.

communist group in Cambodia that was led by Pol Pot, was gaining support, especially in light of U.S. intervention in a country that wanted to stay out of the U.S.-Vietnam conflict.

The Khmai Rouge controlled Cambodia from 1975-1979. Under Pol Pot's regime, the country experienced genocide and many people were killed or starved or tortured to death (Zinn, 2005). This was not a systematic killing based on race or religion towards an ethnic cleansing, however. This was a systematic killing of one's own race, an auto-genocide (Vittal, 2001). What, to some, looked like an uprising against capitalism quickly became a nightmare.

I have often heard stories from my mother of what she went through during this time. They were horrific and full of loss and despair. She told me that because Pol Pot saw the disparities between rich and poor, his revolution meant starting over and killing anyone that represented anything other than rural, agrarian workers. Anyone who was educated—including teachers, lawyers, government officials, and doctors—were murdered. Even eyeglasses denoted someone who had been educated and was targeted. People in the military, actors, and musicians were also victims. The idea was to wipe the slate clean of any indications of globalization or cash wealth to start over by returning to a romanticized idea of what made Cambodia a great country.

In April of 1975, the Khmai Rouge evacuated all citizens from the cities and moved them out to the countryside and forced them into labor camps. The Khmai Rouge era is sometimes called the Killing Fields, a haunting nickname for the atrocities that took place in Cambodia over four years. The laborers were underfed, overworked, and witnessed traumatic treatment of human beings on a daily basis. Over the course of this

time, it is estimated that about a third of the country's population, about two million people, perished (Takaki, 1998).

Although the experiences during the Killing Fields did not affect me directly, the stories were a lot for me to process as a young person. Although I was born and raised in Oakland, I did not grow up in the enclave neighborhoods of other refugee families. Not many people I knew growing up had parents with similar experiences. I remember feeling alone and frustrated with my situation.

I found my safe haven as a teenager. I discovered that my understanding of my identity and learning to heal began in the community organizations that I was a part of. In finding a safe place for me to explore and make sense of my history, culture, and identity, I learned that my experience and what I was going through was not an isolated occurrence. I was fortunate to find a place that allowed me to talk openly about my experiences as a way to analyze my situation, politicize myself, and begin to transform the pain into artistic outlets. For me, performance art, whether it was dance, theatre, or spoken word, allowed me to really learn about myself and articulate it in a way that I felt most comfortable.

It helped to have a safe and brave space to be as a young person. It also helped to be able to use a medium that I connected with to be able to share my story. These experiences were where I came to learn how valuable community spaces are and how powerful and healing the arts can be.

The intergenerational trauma that the Southeast Asian community face is often left unspoken and therefore is neither explored nor healed. There are other young Southeast Asian people who are going through what I went through at their age and need

support making sense of the situations they are in and getting a better understanding of their identity. There is a need for these processes to take place. In order for that to happen, there is a need for recognizing the beauty and value in culturally relevant programming and an understanding of how it can aid in young peoples' healing and understanding of intergenerational trauma, transnational migration, and issues of racism in the U.S.

Purpose of the Project

This project shows how one organization creates intergenerational spaces to cultivate community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) by using the arts in their culturally specific programming. A specific type of attention needs to be given to the Southeast Asian community, as the history, culture, and identity differs from other Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) narratives. I will be focusing on one program from Banteay Srei, an organization in Oakland, California that works with young Southeast Asian women who have been or are at risk of sex work and sex trafficking.

The name Banteay Srei means "citadel of women" in Khmai, the official language of Cambodia. It is actually the modern name of an ancient Cambodian temple that was built in dedication to a Hindu god, Shiva. While the temple was built for this deity, the fame and modern name comes from the numerous women angels carved into the walls of the ruins.

I am currently working at Banteay Srei in Oakland as the Community Health Specialist. My role is to coordinate the programs for the young women of the organization and work directly with them, facilitating program sessions and providing counseling and support services as needed. While I am on staff, I wanted to gain insight

from previous program coordinators and alumni of the program, people who have been with the organization longer than I have been. Their testimonies were and will continue to be audio recorded through this ongoing project.

The other and main part of this project was a documentation of guests in one of the Banteay Srei programs. I focused on SAUCE, which stands for Southeast Asian Unity through Cultural Exploration. This is an intergenerational cooking and storytelling program. For SAUCE sessions, a matriarch figure is invited to lead the young women through a cooking demonstration. They cook together, eat together, and our guest cook then shares her story of refuge or resettlement.

As I continue to develop this field project, I decided to make the documentation of this sharing in the form of a cookbook. This cookbook will be printed at the end of each school year so that there are hard copies for the organization and so the participants can have a piece of history for themselves. It features the guest, their recipe, and their story. There is value in learning about lived experiences from those who came before us as well as having a space that is intergenerational for that to transpire. For the young women of Banteay Srei, this program is an opportunity to connect with their roots and find pride in their culture as well as build empowerment in their shared identities. This project has allowed me to collect recipes that are special to Southeast Asian families for a variety of reasons and have our elders practice the art of storytelling, a method used to teach and share information in many cultures around the world for many generations. Even though storytelling is central to our culture, many people who lived through the genocide have not wanted to share their painful stories; this project also seeks to develop

a process of collective healing through the sharing of migration stories, recipes, and memories of one's homeland.

This cookbook is intended for student participants in Banteay Srei. This is a documentation of their elders' stories. It also compiles different cultural dishes, some traditional and some more modern, that they are able to recreate. While this is intended for the young women of Banteay Srei, it will be accessible for any Southeast Asian American person, regardless of age. Because it will be in English, anyone with access to the language can read the stories or make the dishes for themselves.

The purpose of this project has been to highlight the cultural wealth of the Southeast Asian American community. The focus on Banteay Srei's SAUCE program is to show how art-based culturally specific spaces can do that. This project and writing about the program is not an invitation to replicate a similar program, as Banteay Srei's community and participants are participating in a space they created that works for them. The beauty and value in the Southeast Asian community exists and can be cultivated through teaching and learning from both elder and young person, and the arts can be used to help facilitate that.

Theoretical Framework

Community cultural wealth is the theoretical framework for this project. Community cultural wealth is a counter-narrative to a deficit-model way of talking about People of Color (Yosso, 2005). Often times, when we hear about People of Color, it is as if People of Color do not have something valuable to contribute. There is a constant deficit or inferiority element in the narrative.

Community cultural wealth gives us tools to tell a counter-story, a narrative that is often unheard and usually undervalued, as previously discussed. Ladson-Billings (2013) says, "The primary point here is that the chronicle or counter-story is about racial justice principles, not personal affront" (p. 43). The counter-narrative is complimentary to giving visibility and value to namely, People of Color, as opposed to being a platform for venting or aimless critique. It is political, in that counter-narratives provide agency and a reaffirming of the storyteller's experiences. Community cultural wealth allows us to see the value in Communities of Color. The six ways that Yosso (2005) describes capital is as follows:

1. Aspirational capital: This refers to the hope and dreams that continue to occur in the face of adversity. It is the ability to still have desires for something better, whether it is for yourself or for your children.
2. Linguistic capital: This refers to the ability to understand more than one language. This is not necessarily a spoken language. It is also the recognition and interpretation of sayings, gestures, visual and performance art, and music.
3. Familial capital: This refers to the cultural knowledge fostered by family and family-like relationships.
4. Social capital: This refers to the networks and community resources that are found within these networks. Social capital allows for community members to support one another in sharing what they know.
5. Navigational capital: This refers to the skills learned in going through social institutions.

6. Resistance capital: This refers to the set of knowledge that allows People of Color to resist dominant ideology. Challenging the status quo fosters this type of capital. (p. 77)

This project seeks to include stories within the Southeast Asian American community that allude to the types of capital Yosso outlines. These stories serve as first hand accounts of the history of Southeast Asian Americans that the young people can begin to own.

Significance of the Project

This study shines a light on the disparities that young Southeast Asian people often face but are not addressed on a larger scale. This study highlights one group that has been working with this population and participants will offer their input for what it takes to tackle the issues that this population faces and what is needed from an educator in order to do that. I had been a young person who was involved in many community organizations and can attest to the power that community spaces have for transformation. Anyone working with young people needs to understand whom these young people are and what they are dealing with. This project gives young Southeast Asian Americans a piece of history and culture to help inform and develop their own identities.

The more obvious population of Southeast Asians affected by trauma are the first generation, and often times the 1.5 generation, those who were born in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, or refugee camps. They are very important in the healing process, as they provide the sharing of knowledge, history, and culture. They can also benefit from culturally relevant programming that is intergenerational, as they, too, need healing.

There is a concept that comes from the Akan people of what is today Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire known as Sankofa. It translates to "go back and get it" in Twi (Moore, 2015). Sankofa is often referenced in restorative justice. The term means that learning from and recognizing the past helps to shape a better future. It alludes to understanding and seeing the whole person. The process of me being comfortable and confident in who I am and where I am rooted stems from beginning to explore what my people had to endure and how that is relevant for me. Looking back allows me to see that it was not a choice for my mother to come to this country, that she, like so many others, experienced and live with trauma, and how that impacted my upbringing.

My interpretation of the term is not to take away from this concept's significance in restorative justice practices. The concept of Sankofa is a personal reminder for me to look back and understanding that knowing that history helps shape the person I am and can be. There is value in knowing what came before me, and there is power in using that knowledge to inform my future.

I grew up in an area of Oakland were there were very few Cambodian Americans. There were few AAPIs at all in my neighborhood. As I got older and started to develop my identity and sense of self, it did help to talk to my mother more and learn from her experiences to see how it all fits with mine. I can remember feeling a sense of loneliness, from not having people who looked like me around and knowing so few people at the time that comes from a refugee experience, either directly or indirectly. It would have helped to see myself in the things I studied or the books I read. This project is for the young women of Banteay Srei and other Southeast Asian youth to have something they

can refer to for a piece of their histories and as part of their developing Southeast Asian American cultures and identities.

Definition of Terms

1.5 generation American: The children of the first generation that also migrated with their parents from their homelands. They were born abroad, but grew up in the resettling country and sometimes have no memory of their life before resettlement.

Bong srei: Khmai for "older sister".

First generation American: The generation that initially came and resettled in the United States after the wars in Southeast Asia.

SEA: Acronym for Southeast Asian or Southeast Asian American. This is a political identity for the diaspora of people that came from what are now Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam as refugees. The Vietnam War gives the context for why and when these groups came to the United States.

Sex work: delivering sexual services for money or goods.

Srei: Khmai for "woman" or "girl".

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

There is a common misconception about Asian American success in education. Southeast Asian Americans complicate the idea of the model minority. As a refugee population from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, the majority came to the United States at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, continuing through the 1980s. At a national Southeast Asian Youth Summit held in 2000 at the University of California-Berkeley, one of the reoccurring barriers for many students is that they have received little to no information on education after high school (Um, 2003). That trend is continuing with the second and third generation, as their parents or grandparents do not have a grasp of the English language or a good understanding of the American educational system. Not only do SEA students feel ill prepared for education beyond high school, they lack access to support from home, since the family has low educational attainment (Um, 2003). Community organizations, while not a typical space for education to happen, can negotiate the need for what is missing from traditional schooling and home life for Southeast Asian students.

In this chapter, I will define the Southeast Asian American identity then complicate the model minority myth. I will talk about the effectiveness of community organizations as well as arts-based education and the need for culturally specific programming. Finally, I will introduce oral histories as well as how community organizations can draw on the wealth that the Southeast Asian community brings and which will be referenced throughout the project.

Southeast Asian American Identity and Community

This project focuses on the Southeast Asian American community. However, not everyone knows or agrees on the definition of Southeast Asian American. There needs to be a distinction between geographic Southeast Asia and the Southeast Asian American identity. The latter is informed by experiences that stem from the context of the Vietnam War. It has a direct connection to the formally French colonized countries of Cambodia, which includes ethnic Khmai and Cham; Laos, which includes ethnic Lao, Hmong, Mien, and Khmu; and Vietnam, which includes ethnic Vietnamese, Khmai Krom (Southern Khmai), and Cham (Ngo, 2006). While there are many more ethnic groups within Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, for this project, I will be focusing on the four major ethnic groups that have migrated from these countries: Khmai, Lao, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

Experiences during the war in Vietnam, the Secret War in Laos[2], and the Khmai Rouge auto-genocide in Cambodia led to waves of refugees coming to the U.S. from all three countries and began to form the Southeast Asian American narrative and identity. There have been three major waves of migration from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Takaki, 1989; Ngo & Lee, 2007). The first was from 1975-1979. People who came during these years were generally very educated, professionals such as doctors or government officials, or were working with the U.S. military in some capacity. The second wave of Southeast Asian migration occurred between 1979-1982 and tended to be family members of the first wave and had some education. The last major wave of

[2] This is a reference to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) recruitment and training of Hmong soldiers in Laos who fought for the U.S. during the Vietnam War. They did not receive the same recognition and benefits for their contributions.

refugees came after 1982. These refugees had been living in Thai border camps for some time before finally resettling in the U.S.

Second generation Southeast Asians are the children of refugees who were born and raised in the resettlement country, which in this case, is the United States. One of the results of migrating to a new country and having young children grow up in that environment is a generational gap. There is a divide in culture as well as language barriers between the generations (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Ong, 2003; Takaki, 1998, Um, 2003). The 1.5 generation and especially the second generation of Southeast Asians are feeling disconnected to the cultures and languages that their parents and grandparents are familiar with. Because the younger generation grew up in the U.S. and are communicating mostly, if not all, in English on a daily basis, the general sentiment amongst elders is that they feel as though the there is a loss of culture.

Ong's (2003) ethnographic study of the Cambodian American community in the San Francisco Bay Area discussed the youth experience of families living in Oakland and San Francisco. What she found in her research echoes the same findings that other researchers have found. Young people identified racism as part of their relationship with school and upbringing. Discrimination against Southeast Asian Americans ranged from school bullying to police profiling (Bic & Ngo, 2007; Ong, 2003, Um, 2003). Bic & Ngo reported that almost all Vietnamese students in one study in San Diego experienced name-calling such as "Chinese" or Chink" (p. 427). Sometimes the discrimination happens from other AAPI people, as well. Um (2003) interviewed one Laotian student who experienced this:

> Other kids harass me because I'm Laotian. They say that Laotians eat dogs and cats…the Vietnamese and white students would say this to me. It makes me mad and I want to fight them. I can't do my work when this happens. (p. 13)

Um (2003) also reported of a college-aged Southeast Asian youth who "with no criminal record, reported having been stopped on three separate occasions, physically yanked from the driver's seat, and having his person and his vehicle illegally searched, over the course of two weeks" (p. 12-13). Whether the discrimination that young Southeast Asian American faced was interpersonal or structural, there was a general consensus that these sentiments carried over from mainstream American attitudes towards Southeast Asians.

One way of combatting the discrimination they faced as well as respond to poverty they experienced was to align themselves in gangs with others who were experiencing the same thing. Ong (2003) says "the police definition of a gang is a group of three or more persons that has one of its primary activities the commission of criminal activities" (p. 234). She maintains that this definition is too focused on crimes and offers the definition of a gang as "a common term for a variety of same-sex groups and loose networks that, while connected to criminal activities, also includes social groups engaged in entrepreneurial and cultural activities" (p. 234). As with other communities, while gang involvement in the Southeast Asian community exists, it should not be assumed that this is the prevailing theme for this group of people. What can be drawn from this is the additional trauma this lifestyle can bring to those involved.

In addition to the trauma that their parents or the generation before them faced in their native countries, young Southeast Asians are faced with adversities such as poverty,

gang violence, racism in the U.S., in addition to navigating their parents' trauma, all of which perpetuates a type of intergenerational trauma (Coyle, 2014). Young Southeast Asian people are faced with challenges that arise in their neighborhoods as well as what has been passed onto them. This is also a part of the Southeast Asian American narrative. Southeast Asian American is a political identity and encompasses the understanding of the history of what used to be Indochina, the Vietnam War, and the effects of the war on refugee families once they have resettled.

Model Minority Myth

There is a common misconception and stereotype that Asian Americans generally perform very well in school and are well off, financially. The rate of educational attainment amongst AAPIs is misleading. While Asian Americans look like they are achieving high educational success, the same cannot be said when this population is disaggregated. The problem most prevalent when talking about Southeast Asian Americans and education is that while Asian Americans seem to have higher educational attainment, SEA youth are not doing as well. This can be attributed to a lack of education from the refugee parents' homelands. Survivors of the wars in Southeast Asia came to the United States with already low educational attainment and are not able to easily navigate the English language or the American educational school system to support their children (Uy, 2015). Because Southeast Asian young people lack cultural capital as it relates to education and higher education, it is difficult to make it through these systems successfully.

This complicates the idea of the model minority, as high school graduation rates amongst SEAs are significantly lower than other racial groups including other Asians

(Ngo, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Uy, 2015). Based on the 2000 U.S. Census, 52% of Cambodian Americans, 59% of Hmong Americans, 49% of Lao Americans, and 38% of Vietnamese Americans aged 25 and over did not graduate high school (Ngo, 2006, Ngo & Lee, 2007). These numbers are compared to a national average of 19.6% of the U.S. population that have not graduated high school (Ngo & Lee, 2007). This issue can also be attributed to education that is not relevant for SEA youth (Ngo, 2006; Teranishi & Bordoloi Pazich, 2013). In dealing with their parents' post-traumatic stress disorders and social challenges that include poverty and gang violence, SEA youth do not find that the schooling they receive is relevant to them. Growing up in the U.S. and an increasing language and cultural barrier make it hard to connect with the generation before them, adding to the lack of support Southeast Asian students feel they get.

Furthermore, it is misleading to assume that, in general, AAPIs are doing well financially. Based on the 2000 census, the average per capita, or per person, income for the overall U.S. population is $21,000 (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The average per capita for White Americans is $23,635; the average per capita for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders is $14,773; the average per capita for Latino/a Americans is $12,111; and the average per capita for African Americans is $14,222 (Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 421). Ngo & Lee's table further shows that there is a huge disparity for Cambodian American, Hmong American, and Lao American per capita income when compared to all other groups. They were amongst the lowest paid, with $10,215, $6,613, and $11,454 average annual income, respectively (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Ngo and Lee's research goes on to show that while Vietnamese Americans average a higher per-capita income of $15,385, it is still lower than the overall U.S. population's and especially lower than White Americans.

What their research did not show is the average of other AAPI groups. However, the evidence provided supports the notion that AAPIs cannot be generalized to say that they are financially better off than everyone else.

The model minority myth is dangerous, as many voices are lost and many issues are ignored when people buy into them. Not only is the stereotype grossly misleading, it also creates divide amongst People of Color. Bic and Ngo (2007) say the model minority myth "asserts that Asian Americans are able to make it on their own without special assistance. Asian Americans are positioned as the model for other minorities to follow (p. 415).

It is important to understand the disparities within the Asian American community in order to be able to address it. Grouping all AAPI groups together without really looking at what issues affect some people more than others leads to the invisibility of some deep rooted problems. The model minority myth reinforces an idea that AAPIs are doing well and are not victims of inequities.

Community Organizations

When we talk about education, we tend to think about it in a more traditional setting and refer to schooling in classrooms. Schools, however, are not the only site that education takes place. Community organizations are one place that can begin to engage young SEA people in their education by fostering an intergenerational community for all around support (Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001; Suyemoto, 2015; Uy, 2015). There are a number of programs that have arisen to address the need for intergenerational relationships to support SEA youth education. In one New England state, the Southeast Asian Summer Academy provides a space for SEA students to engage in academic

enrichment. Not only are the students participating in traditional school work, their parents get involved by being invited to "provide background information and hands-on instruction in the arts" as well as cultural demonstrations such as food preparation (Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001, p.39). Summer Academy participation continues to grow, indicating an increasing interest base amongst SEA youth. Not only are these spaces needed to complement conventional schooling and education, it is wanted.

Community organizations provide a space to address what is often left out in schools. These sites are not bound to providing education in the same way as is mandated in the classroom by law. Community organizations can be more culturally oriented, provide more history and identity exploration, and challenge dominant narratives often heard in school settings. There is more freedom to teach and learn from one another and more flexibility to cater curriculum and talking points to the people these organizations serve. In this sense, there is power in these spaces.

Art Based Education

Growing up, education was more meaningful for me, because I had the performing arts to complement my learning. Many scholars agree that art is education and is an important part of learning and development. In Australia, one program seeks to reengage young people who have left traditional schooling by offering digital music production training (Brader & Luke, 2013). In this case, the young people gained cultural capital along with explorations of self, community, and culture as well as new skills to utilize after their participation program (Brader & Luke, 2013).

In classrooms, teachers are bringing poetry to the students because it can be a powerful tool for reflecting on culture, identities, and experiences (Flint & Laman, 2014;

Jocson & Cooks, 2011). Poetry for the People, for example, facilitates poetry courses where the student's perspective is treated as central, empowering, and valid. Using art to educate gives students the opportunity to be the teacher.

In addition to being able to articulate experiences in a way that is comfortable for them, the arts become a vehicle for self-reflection and transformation. Former participant of Banteay Srei, Veasina Thang, finds art-based education to be healing. She says:

> To be able to just let your creativity just flow, it's very, very self-healing. Going back to the trauma, and the pain, and suffering… being able to let all of your emotions unleash onto whatever you're creating, whether it's cooking or creating vagina puppets or drawing a mural, it's healing in so many ways. (V. Thang, personal communication, April 6, 2016)

Whether the form of art is performance or visual, students' voice and freedom to create contributes to education that is culturally relevant for them. Not only is it relevant, it is an opportunity for participants to be able to see their true selves in the work they create. For Banteay Srei, arts-based teaching and learning is value as expression of experiential knowledge and foundational to the work.

Also, because students have all different ways of learning, using the arts in education and as education helps keep young people engaged. Not only does it provide information in a different way for students to grasp, it allows for creativity and expression. The act of creating allows for young people to be advocates for themselves in choosing what they want to share and how they want to present it.

Culturally Relevant Programming

One of the ways in which education can be more fulfilling and effective is to work with a culturally relevant pedagogy. The term, coined by Ladson-Billings (1995), came about in her research on teacher education and how they can better work with African American students. She makes the argument that in order for teaching and learning to be more meaningful, students need to be able to relate to the material being talked about.

The idea is not to bring to students what facilitators think is relevant for students that will make culture, in a way, voyeuristic. It is actually creating space and facilitating a process for students to engage meaningfully. It is about "reclaiming and restoring their cultures" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 83).

Thang also says:

> I feel like [culturally specific programs] teaches a lot about your own history and it teaches you how to love it, embrace it. I know our adults don't tend to open up easily. Sometimes they do share certain stories but they don't open up easily about a lot of what they had experienced. A lot of the youth lose that part of themselves." (V. Thang, personal communication, April 6, 2016)

Intentional programming in community spaces offers learning opportunities that would otherwise be lost in a traditional learning setting. Culturally relevant programming engages participants in a way that is meaningful, because they can relate to it, and it is familiar.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory, or CRT, is a theory used to examine, critique, and practice to make People of Color more central to an issue. It began as legal scholarship that

examined how a "colorblind" approach to law perpetuates systems of inequity (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002; Su, 2007). It has since been use to talk about education as well and provides a framework for how we can talk about People of Color, and in this case, Southeast Asian Americans in education. Jones Brayboy (2013) describes CRT as having "emerged from Scholars of Color and [is] often rooted in community knowledge and the experiences of people and Communities of Color" (p. 91). Because scholars who are familiar with and are from the communities they talk about use CRT, it is antithetical to the dominant narrative. CRT scholar Daniel Solórzano (1998) offers five themes for the framework that makes up this theory. Many CRT scholars agree on the definitions laid out in the tenets that follow.

1. *Centrality of race and racism*. All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, including intersections with other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and citizenship.
2. *Challenging the dominant perspective*. CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives and re-center marginalized perspectives.
3. *Commitment to social justice*. CRT research must always be motivated by a social justice agenda.
4. *Valuing experiential knowledge*. CRT builds on the oral traditions of many indigenous Communities of Color around the world. CRT research centers the narratives of People of Color when attempting to understand social inequality.
5. *Holds interdisciplinary perspectives*. CRT scholars believe that the world is multidimensional, and similarly research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives. (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 25-27)

CRT, then, gives us tools to tell a counter-story, a narrative that is often unheard and usually undervalued, as previously discussed. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2013) says, "The primary point here is that the chronicle or counter-story is about racial justice principles, not personal affront" (p. 43). The counter-narrative is complementary to giving visibility and value to namely, People of Color, as opposed to being a platform for venting or aimless critique.

As mentioned, CRT has its roots in critical legal studies (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Legal scholar and one of the founding figures of CRT, Derrick Bell, introduced the idea of interest convergence. Interest convergence occurs when the interests of People of Color are accommodated only because it is also in the interest and benefit of whites to do so (Brown & Jackson, 2013, Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

Teranishi & Bordoloi Pazich (2013) used CRT to talk about how AAPIs are positioned in the discourse on higher education. According to them, labeling AAPIs as the model minority is an example of interest convergence. They say, "AAPIs were positioned against Blacks as a 'deserving' minority, not to celebrate their accomplishments, but to reinforce negative stereotypes against Blacks" (p. 207). CRT and understanding interest convergences makes more clearly the situations where People of Color are being pitted against one another.

Teranishi and Bordoloi Pazich's study also names intersectionality and social justice for AAPIs as two other tenets that are important in talking about the AAPI community. The argument for coming from an intersectional approach stems from the understanding that experiences across groups differ due to many factors and groups cannot be compared equally (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Teranishi

& Bordoloi Pazich, 2013). These different experiences mean that social justice for AAPIs are also specific to this group. Teranishi and Bordoloi Pazich content that "social justice for AAPIs commands a deeper understanding of not only how they experience the discrimination, but also how data is collected on the population and represented in studies" (p. 212). Disaggregating data can provide a truer picture of the state of AAPIs in this country and show where there needs to be more work and attention.

Storytelling, Counter-narratives, and Oral Histories

As mentioned previously, valuing experiential knowledge is key in CRT. Storytelling has been a part of many cultures for centuries as a way of passing along information, history, values, and knowledge. This is a way that cultures in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have learned about and inherited their histories. Storytelling, as part of these efforts to bridge the intergenerational gap, can be incorporated into the programming in community spaces. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that counter-narratives can build community "among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice" (p. 36). Stories of SEA people are often unheard or is overshadowed by other narratives of AAPI people, and this is one way that young people can begin to connect with their elders and have a better understanding of their own identities. Oral histories put the storyteller's experience at the forefront. It gives her or him the opportunity to make what they went through central and validates their experience as true and important.

The Southeast Asian refugee population relies largely on storytelling and oral history to pass on their stories to future generations, since much of the second and third generation young people grow up speaking mostly English. Often times, they can

understand the older generation's native tongue but do not speak it well (Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001). Although there is somewhat of a language barrier between generations, there is an understanding in the way information is relayed and experiences are not completely lost.

Because Southeast Asian Americans are one group that does not often get talked about even when discussing AAPI issues, it is important to make them and the issues that affect this population central to the conversation. CRT gives us a framework for how to build agency for the Southeast Asian American community and storytelling gives us a tool to do the work and document the important histories within the community.

Summary

Southeast Asians are a distinct identity in the United States. The term stems from its colonial roots and war-torn recent history. It is further defined by the refugee stories and experiences after resettlement. Part of the narrative for SEAs is the Model Minority Myth that maintains that AAPIs are successful and have this high level of academic achievement, when in reality, the numbers show something very different for Southeast Asians. There is a major disparity when compared to other AAPI populations and with the rest of the country. Although there are many ethnicities and languages that are found within this identity, to be SEA is to recognize the circumstances that brought families here right before, during, and after the Vietnam War and understanding how there is a unifying history amongst the people of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

If schools teach about what SEA students' parents and grandparents went through in the mid to late 1900s, the information is usually limited and one-sided. Community spaces can supplement the education and attention that these students want and need but

are not getting. Likewise, education can happen in a more intentional manner with the material being culturally relevant. If the material presented is relevant for young people, there is more of an investment in their learning. Community spaces allow for flexibility in how things are taught, like making the arts foundational to programming as Banteay Srei has done. There are many pieces to consider in creating a space for community cultural wealth within the Southeast Asian American community to flourish. However, a space that is culturally relevant and incorporates the arts is a good foundation to cultivate the community cultural wealth that exists.

CHAPTER III

THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Banteay Srei

In order to examine cultural wealth in the Southeast Asian American community, I focused on Banteay Srei, a community organization in Oakland, California for this project. Banteay Srei is a program of Asian Health Services, which provides culturally appropriate and culturally specific healthcare to the Asian Pacific Islander community in Alameda County. Like La Clínica de la Raza, anyone is welcome, but both organizations were born with the intention and need for a health space in Oakland that addressed their respective communities in ways not offered at other clinics and mainstream hospitals (N.I. Yang, personal communication, November 2, 2015). The culture at Asian Health Services serves the AAPI community in a way that is more welcoming, from their bedside manner, to providing translators and forms in languages that are most comfortable for patients, to having healthcare providers who look like their patients.

Health educators and practitioners at Asian Health Services noticed a trend with the young Southeast Asian women who came to their clinic for reproductive services. Many of them had questions about friends who were engaged in sex work, which suggested that it might have been the girls themselves. This hypothesis turned out to be true for the young women who came into the clinic. The new information lead to the formation of a group to address trafficking and provide a safe place for learning about reproductive health and services available to young people, all while incorporating the importance of understanding history, culture, and identity as young Southeast Asian women. In 2004, Banteay Srei was born.

Banteay Srei serves young Southeast Asian women, aged 13-18, who have been or are at risk of being victims of sex trafficking. As of 2016, participants are either second or third generation American, meaning that their parents were either born in the United States or came as refugees at a young age and grew up in the U.S. These young women come from all over Oakland and attend different middle and high schools.

Banteay Srei programs take place in Oakland's Chinatown, at a youth center known as The Spot, which shares its space with another Asian Health Services program and one other AAPI organization. Teaching and learning through art is foundational in Banteay Srei's pedagogy. The organization believes that art taps into parts of the brain in different ways and allows students to practice critical thinking and thinking in different ways (Davis, 2008; Donahue & Stuart, 2010). Art allows another avenue for young women in the program to be able to express themselves if they feel like they are not as articulate otherwise. The art medium itself varies depending on youth interest and facilitator preference. They can range from writing to sewing or drawing and includes non-traditional art forms such as storytelling and cooking.

Banteay Srei meets twice a week and has three main programs for young women. The first is a youth leadership program called Bong Srei, which is Khmai for "older sister". The youth leaders are paid interns who help facilitate programs and plan for future program sessions. The second program is SREI, which stands for Self Reliant Empowered Individuals. SREI is the main drop-in program and provides reproductive health education in addition to a focus on Southeast Asian history, culture, and identity.

The final program is SAUCE, an acronym for Southeast Asian Unity through Cultural Exploration. SAUCE is an intergenerational cooking and storytelling program.

In this program, a community Bong Srei or elder maternal figure is invited to teach the young women how to make a cultural dish, and over a meal together, she is asked to share her migration or resettlement story. Both the cooking and storytelling is meant to help bridge the language and cultural gap that exists between the generations. By learning and understanding how the young women's families came to the U.S., the hope and intention is for the young women to both take pride in being Southeast Asian and start to make sense of the challenges that their community face. SAUCE meets once a month in place of a SREI session.

Program Manager Nkauj Iab Yang says:

> The reason why SAUCE was started was because the young women really wanted to continue to have that family relationship but that it doesn't really exist for them, you know, for several reasons. Like whether their parents are too busy or everybody's just kinda doing their own thing, so that whole family dinner doesn't really exist for them. They wanted something like that but they also wanted to have a place where they could build with the older generation in their community. (N.I. Yang, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

Not only is SAUCE a site of comfort, it is also a site for young women to step up and take participate in other ways other than just coming into the space as a spectator. Former SAUCE Coordinator Saengthip Keosaeng says:

> The SAUCE space helps people to open up. Sometimes the youth would bring in their mom or their aunt, having no idea how things will turn out during the program. It was nice to see the young people gain a lot of wisdom through the

stories and the food that they cooked. (S. Keosaeng, personal communication, April 6, 2016)

The young women of Banteay Srei recognize that there is a generational gap that exists that they do not want to ignore. SAUCE gives them the opportunity to bring in people they know and want to know more about. In fact, it is often the case that the young woman who brought in the elder or Bong Srei is most impacted since they are learning something new about someone they have known all their life. SAUCE is familiar, comforting, and courageous, all at once.

Banteay Srei provides a space for young Southeast Asian women to empower and develop agency for themselves. While the challenges in this community are very real, there is beauty and value in these experiences. The dialogue and arts allow for the young women to validate their own stories. Opening up their space to have an elder teach and share a meal with them also allows for cultural exchange, cultural preservation, and celebration. The community cultural wealth that is found in Banteay Srei should be made more visible, as these stories can aid the young women in their growth and development.

Description of the Project

This project focuses on Banteay Srei's SAUCE program. SAUCE is special in that it is an intergenerational space that teaches through non-traditional art forms such as storytelling and cooking. There is a common sentiment amongst the elders in the community where they feel disconnected to their young people. It may be difficult for a young person to imagine what it is like to uproot your life and family to resettle in a new country and rebuild. Likewise, it may be difficult for older generations to imagine the social issues young people face and trying to understand a new Southeast Asian

American identity that has emerged. SAUCE leaves room for both young people and adults to teach and learn from one another. Yang says:

> A lot of times you tend to think, if you're gonna have a guest facilitator, it must be someone with all sorts of credentials and they're an expert in a certain field, but for us we do it differently. We want folks who have credentials in living and life experience because their stories are really important for our communities to hear. (N.I. Yang, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

The guest cooks' stories are reaffirmed by being able to talk about and share their experiences through a meaningful exchange. Young people are free to ask questions about what their parents or grandparents may have gone through. At SAUCE, valuable stories and experiences are shared and the generational gap, no matter how wide, becomes much smaller.

For this project, I began the creation of a cookbook based on the guest cooks' dish and migration or resettlement story. There are three parts to each entry. The first is the recipe. As with other cookbooks, I provide a list of ingredients and the directions on how to make the dish. While Southeast Asian recipes are not often written down, the guest cook does their best to provide measurements of all ingredients in their dish. I also have taken note of what and how much of it is being used. I chose to phonetically spell the name of the dish if it was described in another language.

The second part of an entry is a name, photo, and description of the guest cook. The description includes their birthplace and when they migrated, if that info was provided. Because this project asks that guest cooks share personal information such as a

photo and requires the guest cook to use their name, only those who are willing to disclose this information were and will be included in the cookbook.

Often times, when we learn about history, culture, and identity in school, the material is very one-sided and People of Color are not often accurately reflected in these teachings. The final part of the entry is the guest cook's story. Through both recorded SAUCE sessions and interview, I capture their migration or resettlement story or a combination of both. The oral history (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) gathered in these moments serves as a source of Southeast Asian American history. Guest cooks are encouraged to share what they are comfortable with, so as to not reharm the storyteller. They are also encouraged to tell their story in the language that they feel most comfortable speaking, so that their stories are not hindered by access to a language they may not know. The use of the guest cook's primary language and listening to a language that the young women may have grown up with in spaces where not everyone speaks the same language during these sessions demonstrate the linguistic, familial, and resistance capital that these women and young women have.

Development of the Project

For this project, a qualitative study is most appropriate since I am gathering and documenting different women's personal stories and experiences. While the cookbook only includes stories from our guest cooks, responses from current and past program staff and youth have been taken into consideration for what information should be asked of the guest cooks.

Before each SAUCE session, I create an agenda and leave room on the document for notes. I also have a notebook to write down any additional notes for myself. I

organize and keep a record from every session that our group meets. This helps me find better ways to talk with the young women and evaluate what I need to do differently in addition to keeping track of the different topics that we talk about throughout the year. Most notes are typed up and I attach a copy of any handouts distributed that day. Hard copy notes are kept in one place in a binder. These field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) include my thoughts and observations on what happened during the session, questions, and things to keep in mind or revisit for future sessions.

While I have my notes as a resource, the bulk of my data came from the interviews with past and current staff and a youth who is now an alumnus of the program. I wanted to get their input on the cultural wealth within Banteay Srei and how SAUCE provides space for the cultural wealth to be visible and celebrated. Interviews with people who have already worked in these spaces and young women who have already gone through the program are useful for me, as they are firsthand accounts of what they know to be true about working in this space and with the young women. I spoke with two people who have worked at Banteay Srei and one alumnus of the program.

I hope to continue to capture oral histories of our guest cooks through recording storytelling sessions and the interviewing process. As mentioned, oral histories provide an alternative narrative or another voice to speak on issues and tell stories not often heard. Not only is it powerful to hear stories directly from the person who experienced it, it is meaningful for the storyteller to have their experience be a part of something that may help the younger members of their community. To reiterate, to empower guest cooks to share their story, they are encouraged to share their story in their primary language and may bring someone with them to help with translation. This helps Banteay Srei guests be

more comfortable so feeling like they need to share in English would not be a distraction. The transcription process translates stories into English for this project. Translated stories will be denoted in the cookbook.

This method of data collection, oral history, is also in alignment with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2013), in which People of Color become central to the conversation on education in order to create necessary change. The recorded sessions and interviews focus on the Southeast Asian refugee. The educators and youth are Southeast Asian American themselves. Storytelling both draws on their experiential knowledge as well as challenges dominant perspectives on education. Their stories all include an interdisciplinary perspective, as they are not only People of Color, they are also women, and they all can speak to the SEA narrative. All of these common identity markers contribute to their experience and reiterate a commonality with the young people the guest cooks are in conversation with.

The SAUCE storytelling portion of the day has also been audio recorded and transcribed. If there is a follow up question or clarification needed with the guest cook on their story, I follow up with an interview. Each interview is on a one-on-one basis, with the preference that it is also be an in-person meeting. One-on-one interviews are most helpful, because some of the topics being discussed may be of a more sensitive nature and it is better to be in the same space as it arises. These interviews are audiotaped and transcribed. They are translated, if necessary. Aside from any demographic or logistical questions, I have prepared 3-5 questions per interview in addition to any probing questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) to enhance the conversation. These interviews last up

to a maximum of one hour at a time in order to maximize the quality of the conversation that I have with each guest cook. Interviewees will all be 18 and over in age.

The preference for collecting stories is to transcribe what was shared in the moment during a SAUCE session. However, there are past guest cooks who have made a unique dish or have a compelling story that was not captured or documented. I have and will continue to reach out to these elders for their participation in this project.

There are a couple of things to consider in executing this project. My primary concern is for the participants' wellbeing. Banteay Srei makes it a point to let guest cooks know that they should feel comfortable sharing their stories and that they could share as much as they are comfortable with. Due to the nature of the stories and the possibility of any unresolved trauma, I tried to avoid triggers that will inhibit a contributing elder from sharing their experience with the program and for this project.

Also, while there are several youth leaders currently, their voices are not included in the project since they are new to their roles in the organization, and are just beginning their leadership training. They are still in high school and underage, and information gathered from talking to them are not be as useful for my data due to their lack of experience with the work. Overall, careful attention is paid to be sure that the questions asked are intentional and mindful of any situations that might be triggering.

By using community cultural wealth to frame this project, I find that the migration and resettlement stories will support making SEA voices and SEA issues central to the conversation on supporting SEA youth. While we often hear about how well the AAPI community is doing in education, financially, and economically, CRT challenge those notions and community cultural wealth does not change the way we see challenges in the

community, but transforms the way we talk about the community. Community cultural wealth moves the conversation from a deficit model of thinking (Yosso, 2005) to seeing the value in a community and makes them central to the conversation as opposed to the dominant narrative.

This project highlights the real challenges that the Southeast Asian community face. It comes out in the stories that are told and the conversations that are had during cooking sessions. This study challenges the model minority myth. Hopefully, there will be more of an effort to disaggregate data to show what other AAPI groups exist in this country. By making the Southeast Asian American community visible, issues facing Southeast Asian Americans also become visible.

What we find from this study gives us ideas for how we can better support Southeast Asian young people. What is important to recognize is that there is not enough support for young Southeast Asian people. While it would be great that our students get what they need from school, that is not always the case and we should be able to supplement those needs in other spaces. To be able to do that, we need to be clear on what efforts have already been made and how well they have worked or what needs to be reevaluated. Hearing from women who have made the journey to the U.S. and what they dealt with in the resettlement process provides a better understanding of the support Southeast Asian students need to strive. The trauma is intergenerational. Even though their experiences do not look the same through age, ethnicity, culture or language, the history of the Southeast Asian community stem from the same place and we need to understand that history in order to know how to move forward.

I am thankful for the opportunity to find an organization that was open to my needs as a young person to make sense of the experiences I faced. I am thankful for the space to explore my identity, reclaim it, and develop a passion to highlight the needs of the community that I now understand and am a part of. Community spaces can be powerful sites of resistance and offer something to young people that schooling cannot. I do think this information and type of development should be available in schools, but I also know that it is not happening. If our young people can start to see their own experiences as valid and important with adult allies who see their own experiences as valid and important, they can grow to be conscious change-makers. Educators and community spaces can help lead the way in this process.

The Project

The field project can be found in Appendix A. The cookbook in this study is not complete. This is an ongoing project. While there are two examples for this field project currently, a hard copy cookbook will be available at the end of the next school year. These two examples will also be a part of it. Going forward, a new cookbook will be printed at the end of every school year for the young women and the community members that are interested.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Often times when we talk about the Southeast Asian community we hear a deficit narrative. The story that is often told is that there are many issues in the community. These issues are sometimes very real, but a reframing of how we talk about the SEA community can offer insight to a deeper understanding of some of the experiences that persist. We do not talk about what is beautiful and valuable about their experiences. By using community cultural wealth to frame this project I am helping to provide a counter narrative to the dominant voice.

The purpose of this project is to show an example of how we can recognize and celebrate the community cultural wealth of a group that is often overlooked. This project shows how using culturally specific programing and the arts to create an intergenerational space benefits and engages our young people. Culturally specific programming gives room for cultural capital to be recognized as something of value to the community.

This cookbook serves as a physical documentation of one piece of the young women's culture and history. Not only will the young women in the program have recipes that they can recreate, they will inherit histories that do not often, if ever, get taught in their schools.

Community cultural wealth is all about reframing how we look at ourselves. While I have always enjoyed and valued hearing stories from my elders about their experiences through the years, Yang's quote about elders having experiential knowledge

and credentials in life experience really underscored the idea of reframing the way we talk about our communities to uplift them.

Recommendations

This project and the SAUCE program are not meant for others to replicate. Each group of youth is different and so their needs and interests are also different. What is important to consider when working with Southeast Asian youth is the inclusion of culturally specific programing and the arts in a intergenerational space. My recommendation for those working with Southeast Asian young people is to see what their interests are and what artistic medium they prefer to engage. That is the best way to keep them involved. There may be some mediums, whether it is visual, performance, or digital, that is more appropriate and fitting than others depending on the group you are working with.

What comes up in many elders' stories is the idea of loss. Any elder from any ethnicity from Cambodia, Laos, or Vietnam can speak to the loss they have seen and felt. Related to loss is the idea of absence. The information young SEA people get in spaces like Banteay Srei is not available or uniform in compulsory education. My second recommendation is for organizations that work with SEA youth. I would recommend some type of documentation of the oral histories and stories that come out their spaces. This can look several ways depending on the group of youth and the organizational capacity.

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APPENDIX A

Banteay Srei presents

SAUCE 2015-2016

Southeast Asian Unity Through Cultural Exploration

Rhummanee Hang

For the young women
of Banteay Srei…

First off, thank you for welcoming me into your space. The 2015-2016 school year has been so much fun! I'm so thankful to have a job that I can honestly say I love. I believe that when it comes to learning, the roles of student and teacher or educator should be blurred. I never claim to know all of the answers, and you can bet that I have learned so much from you all.

This project has been so rewarding to put together. I hope this is the first of many annual cookbooks that comes out of our space. Though you may not realize it now, you'll look back and see how valuable these recipes and experiences that were shared with us are. It is so important to see us reflected in the world. Know that you are not just a learner, but a teacher as well. Your stories are important. You should feel empowered to share it if you so choose. Your histories, cultures, and identities should be celebrated.

Here's to many more SAUCE sessions!

With love,
Rhummanee

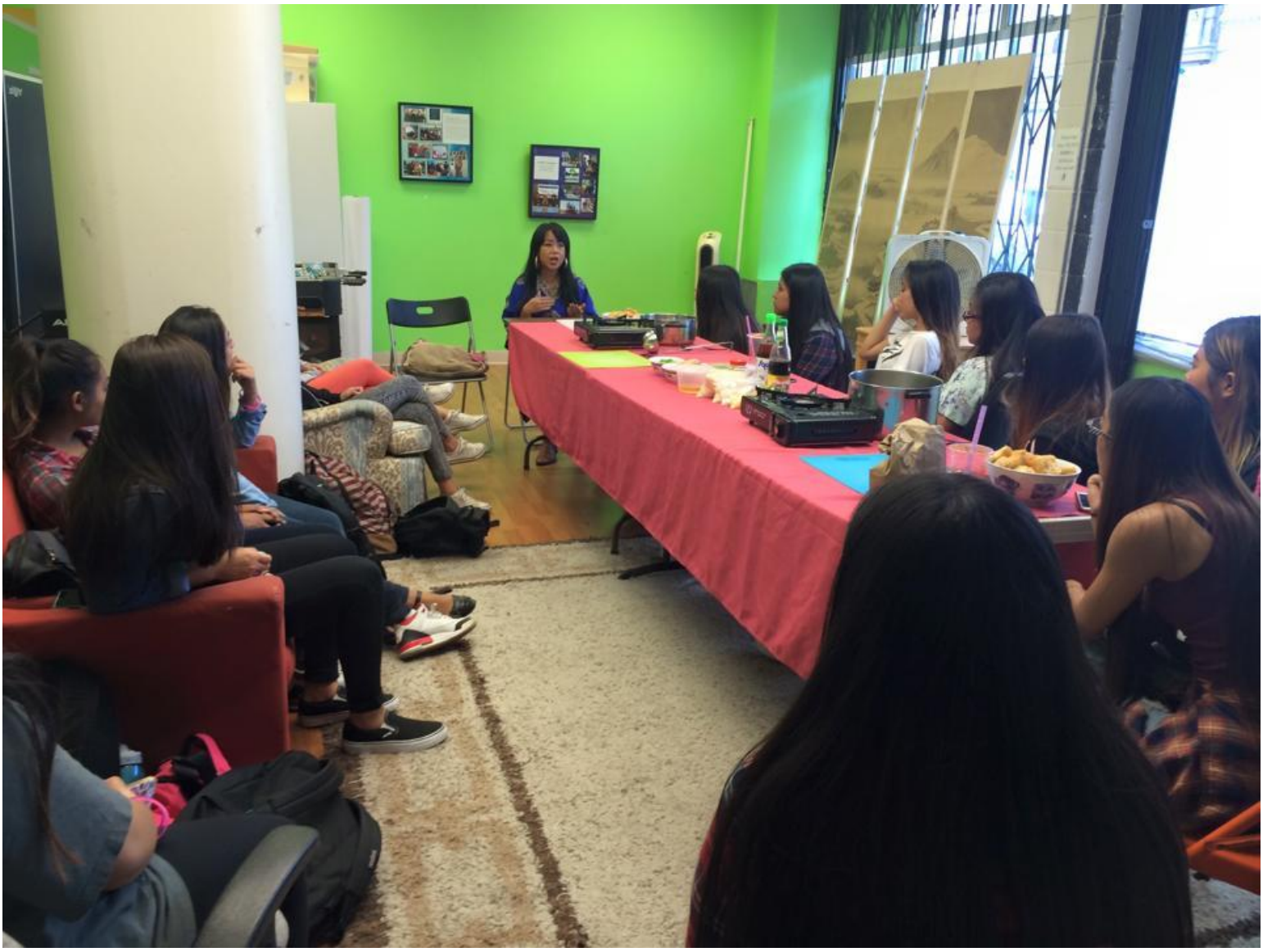


Table of Contents

Baw Baw Sach Moan

By Elizabeth Chan

ingredients:

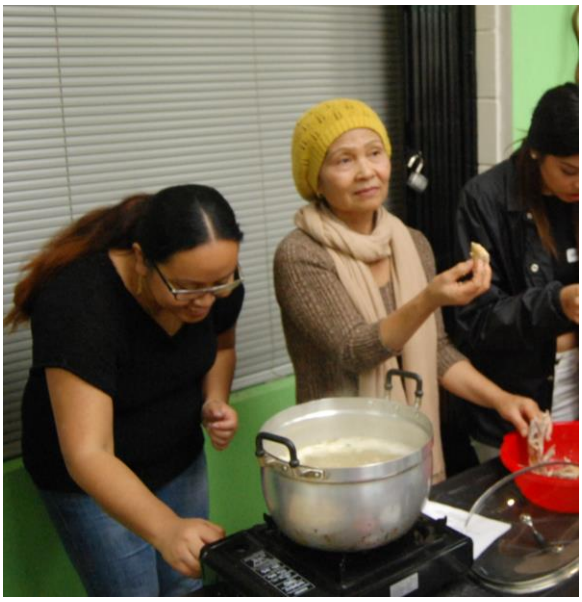
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 10 chicken broth or water
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 chicken breast
- 4 tbs chopped salted radish
- salt to taste

Garnishes and Toppings

- cilantro, chopped
- green onions, chopped
- fried garlic
- garlic chili
- salted soybeans
- black pepper
- lime
- beansprouts

directions:

- Wash and drain uncooked rice. Add the rice, broth or water, chopped onions, and chicken into a pot to boil over high heat.
- When chicken is cooked, strain it out and let cool. When it is cool enough, shred the meat. Add the meat back to the pot.
- When the rice kernels have bloomed, add the salted radish and salt. Let boil for another 5 minutes and turn off the heat.
- Ladle into a bowl. Add green onions, cilantro, and fried garlic to garnish. Add the rest of the condiments to your liking.



Elizabeth Chan

birth name: Nham Sokhoeun (family name first)

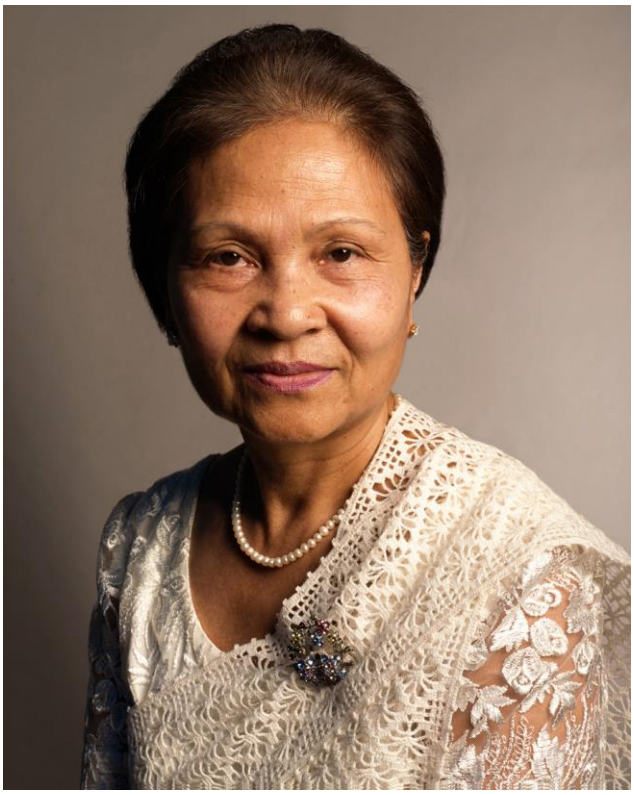
birthplace: Prey Nheat Commune, Kong Pesei District, Kompong Speu Province, Cambodia

birth year: 1952

migration to the U.S.: 1981

ethnic identity: Khmai

languages spoken: Khmai, English



her story*

The Killing Fields ended when the Vietnamese came into Cambodia in 1979. I was in Battambang at the time and made the journey with my two sons to the Thai border. The first camp I resettled in was known as the Old Camp. This was before there was any real organization to the camps. It wasn't very safe, and there wasn't any order to the place. The Old Camp had a lot of land, and so you can set up where you like.

There was a clearing where an old hut used to be. I could tell, because I saw four posts from the previous home there. There was a road that lead out of the forest and the hut was basically constructed on top of that road. Before I did anything, I lit some incense asking whatever spirit could be there for permission to come into their space peacefully and set up my living space.

A woman who had already been living in the Old Camp warned me about setting up my house there. She said, "Don't stay there. You won't be at peace. The last woman who stayed there screamed every night. Her hair had all fallen out."

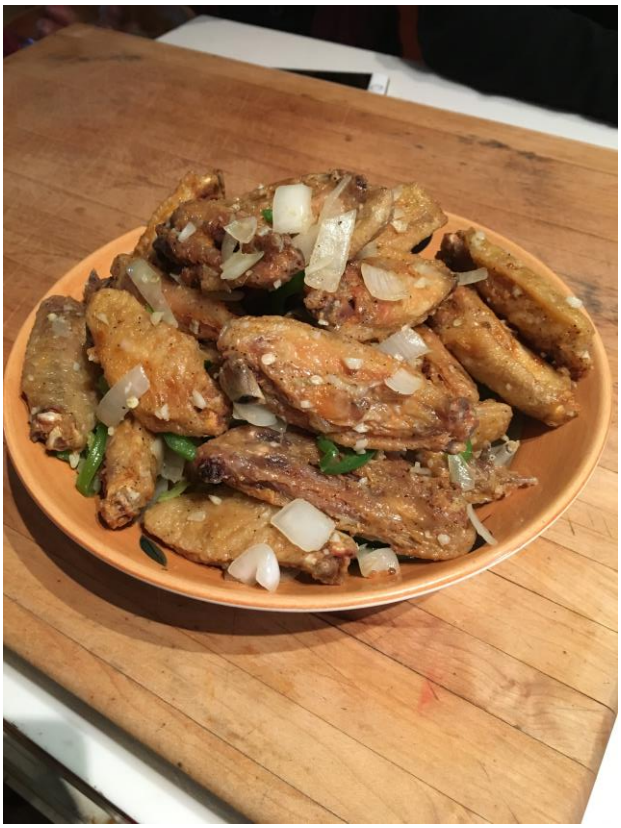
I didn't think anything of what she said. I decided to construct my house there anyway. I also decided to move the posts back from the road about a yard to get out of the way.

After some nights at the camp, there was a full moon. I wanted to sleep outside, so took a *konthale*, a woven mat, to lie outside of the hut on the road. That night, my sons and I slept under the stars. We talked about the stars and the moon until they were both asleep.

I was dozing off, too. Suddenly, I saw three men walking on the road towards me. They were clad in military uniforms. What looked like the leader stopped at the edge of mat, pointed at me, and barked, "Why are you sleeping here?! Move! We patrol this road every night!"

Then they disappeared. I was so scared; I grabbed my youngest son, first, to put in the house, and came back for my other child.

They were spirits. And that was what scared the woman every night. That night was the only time I slept outside the house at that camp. I was fine after that.



Spicy Chicken Wings

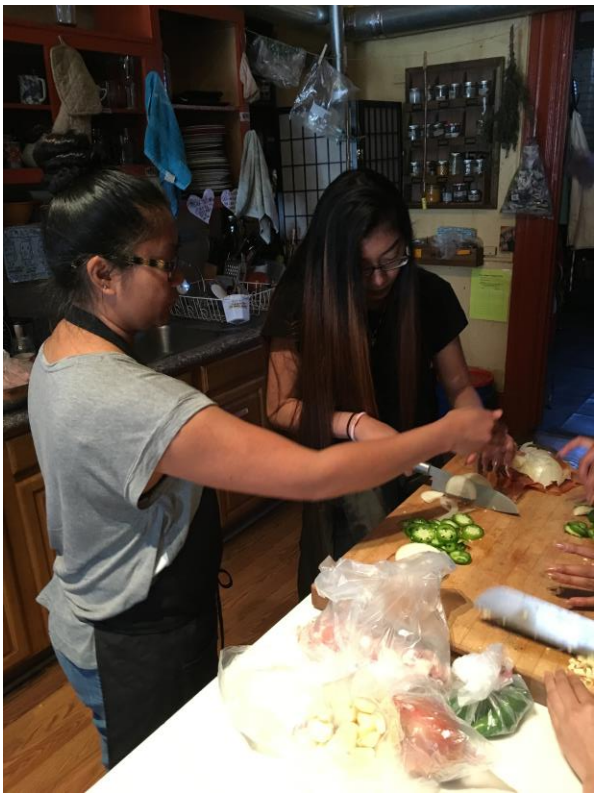
By Somphat Phaisan

ingredients:

- about 20 pieces chicken wings
- oil for frying plus 2 tbs oil, divided
- 2 cloves of garlic
- ¼ to ½ small onion, chopped
- 2 jalapeños, sliced
- ¼ cup fish sauce
- 2 tsps sugar
- salt and pepper to taste

directions:

- Wash and dry chicken wings.
- Heat up the oil for frying. While waiting, season the chicken with salt and pepper. Fry the wings and use a napkin-lined strainer or dish to drain off access oil when cooked.
- In a separate frying pan, heat the oil on high heat. Toss the garlic until golden brown. Add the onions and jalapeños. Stir occasionally.
- When onions turn clear, add in the fried chicken wings and mix well. Turn off the heat.
- Add fish sauce and sugar and toss evenly. Add more to your liking and as needed.
- Serve with steamed rice for a meal or as an appetizer.



Somphat Phaisan

birthplace: Thai refugee camp

migration to the U.S.: 3 years old

ethnic identity: Khorat, Thai, Khmai

languages spoken: Thai, Khmai, English

her story

Funny story behind my name. It means, "interview" in Thai. So, Somphat means "interview". Before you came to the US, you had to get sponsorship. There were rounds of interviews you had to do in order to get your family here. They failed a few times. I don't know what the interview questions were. We didn't make it here until I was about three years old. That's when they passed the interview and we got sponsored.

Apparently, I didn't have a name growing up in the village in Thailand. I guess, you know, they called me "little one" or "Pov", something like that. I never had a real name until we got here. My parents were like, "You know, we passed our interview process. We'll just call her 'Somphat.'" That's how my name came about.

The story goes… From what my parents told me, my family had a nice, big farm. We had land. We had things we were growing. We had crops. Back then, you had anywhere to go. The land was almost basically free. Where you want to establish your home, it was okay to do so. Then there was the war, and unfortunately, they couldn't stay. They had to leave everything behind that they were establishing for their family.

I almost lost my dad. I guess he was in the military. Whoever the Khmai Rouge knew was in the military, the Khmai Rouge would try to kill them. And if you didn't join them, they would kill you. He didn't wan to join them. My dad parted ways with my two grandmothers, my mother… At the time, I had four sisters who were born in Cambodia. He parted ways with them, and I don't know how they eventually found each other again in Thailand.

I'm not certain, but I think they all found each other in Sun Arang. "Sun" means camp in Thai. Arang is the villiage they were in. They were there for about three years or so before my fifth sister was conceived. There were three born in Thailand. I was the youngest coming here; I was number seven. We all made it to the United States safely, with my two grandmothers and both parents, thank goodness.

I'm very thankful and fortunate now that everyone made it here safely. It was hard. I don't remember anything, but I remember stories about them running and hiding in chicken coops and somewhere with thorns. They'd run in there, and they were so afraid they were going to get caught by the Khmai Rouge that you don't think about where you're hiding. All you wanna do is save your own life and the life of others, you just hid in there. There's stories like that. It's just heartbreaking. I was one of the more lucky people to have my grandmothers and both parents here and all of my siblings.