

# Voices of Those Exiled from Their Homes: Documentaries for Reconsidering the World

Kumaoka Michiya

(International Politics / Refugee Examination Counselor, Ministry of Justice)

In September 2006, the Thailand army coup d'état that people said would never again happen was staged by an army faction pledging allegiance to king and country against the administration of Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai Prime Minister with a strong following among the country's poor. Director Nontawat Numbenchapol felt a strong sense of unease standing among a large crowd gathering on New Year's Eve 2010 to welcome in the new year at the very same place that many supporters of the new pro-Thaksin faction (the Red Shirts) had been massacred earlier that year. In April of the next year, during the traditional Thai New Year holidays, he traveled to the home town of a former soldier named Ord, who while being a Thaksin supporter was also ordered to help suppress the pro-Thaksin rally. After accompanying Ord to Sisaket Province in the North-East of Thailand, he interviewed the former soldier to try to shed some light on the Thai political divide. North-East Thailand is a region which has accepted large numbers of Cambodian refugees from conflicts across the border since the end of the 1970's. However, this has created further problems with a domino effect of the poorest local farmers being displaced from precious cultivable farmland with the influx of refugees. The poor Thai farmers have been forced to move to larger cities or overseas in search of alternative employment. In the south of the region, sporadic fighting with the Cambodian army continues even now over territorial ownership of Preah Vihear Temple, which lies on a disputed border between the two countries. *Boundary* records the voices of despair of the people torn from their homes and communities on both sides of the border. "We must escape in order to live"

*The Will — If Only There Were No Nuclear Plants* (Directors Toyoda Naomi and Noda Masaya) follows the lives of people from the areas affected by the nuclear accident in Fukushima in 2011. One of those areas is the village of Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture. In 1980, the village, led by a women's group, donated a mobile X-ray medical bus to Thailand to assist the large number of Cambodian refugees living in dire circumstances after fleeing over the border. This act of kindness created bonds between the two groups which were further strengthened in the mid-1980's

when Iitate provided a location for a summer camp for the children of Cambodian refugees living in Japan. The warm-hearted nature of the people of Iitate and its beautiful countryside scenery are hard to forget. However, in the nuclear disaster the entire town was exposed to radiation from the Fukushima Daiichi plant. The houses, fields and forests in the area were not damaged at all, and the people as well as the livestock have not suffered any negative health impacts, however a total evacuation from the town was necessary. Now, two and a half years on from the disaster the decontamination process is still very limited and a return to the town for its residents seems very far away. At present, Iitate's children camp can still only held in a different location.

Director of *A World Not Ours*, Mahdi Fleifel, attempts to focus on the core of the Palestinian refugee problem through a long-term project filming the Ain El-Heweh refugee camp in Southern Lebanon and the present residents of the camp, a place the director himself previously lived in. The camp's conditions could be well expressed in the nihilistic and self-punishing state of mind of the director's friend, the young man Abu Iyad, who declares "We are eating, but we are not living."

Today, three or four generations have passed since the "Nakba," or Catastrophe of the Palestinian people, with their displacement following the founding of Israel. Since the cold war era, the refugee problem has grown in scale. It is now a truly global problem with root causes in politics, economics and devastation wrought by military conflict, and has resulted in a major refugee population in many countries, migrant workers and a Palestinian diaspora across all corners of the world. Reconsidering the despairing world which Abu Iyad describes as having "No education, no jobs, no hope" from the viewpoint of refugees or those moved forcefully from their homes; careful analysis of the causes and search for the solutions of this problem as political and policy issues; and while acknowledging the importance of money, opening a window and observing the sense of values that overrides money — these are what the film, and those who watch it, must face.

(Translated by Joel Woodbury)

## ■ Screenings

*Boundary* [IC] ..... 10/11 12:45- [A6] | 10/13 10:00- [CL]

*The Will — If Only There Were No Nuclear Plants* [CU] ..... 10/11 15:00- [M1]

*A World Not Ours* [IC] ..... 10/11 10:00- [CL] | 10/15 12:30- [A6]