Family First? Constraints on Decision-Making for Women at the Commune Level in Cambodia

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Twenty years ago, the inability of Cambodian women to articulate their views in the political realm was blamed upon an adherence to past "traditions". Is the same true today? The international community has poured billions of dollars into the Cambodian gender and development sector, with many projects targeting decision-making and political participation. Using multi-sited ethnography between 2009 and 2011, this paper seeks to determine whether women at the commune level in Cambodia continue to feel that they do not have a right, or as great a right as their male counterparts, to voice their opinions; and if so, to identify these constraints in relation to women's position within the family.

Cambodian Diaspora Artists in the US

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My paper will examine the work of Cambodian diaspora artists with ties to Lowell, MA. Some of these artists maintain traditional Khmer art practices although they have lived in the US for much of their careers. These artists use art to preserve ties to a way of life that they no longer have access to. Other Khmer artists in Lowell use contemporary Western-style painting to examine life in Cambodia. They seek to break through barriers of pain, guilt and recrimination by making art in hopes of
achieving a more authentic life. These two approaches, I argue, are symbolic of two primary tensions in the lives of Cambodians in diaspora in the US—the need to remember life before Democratic Kampuchea and the need to find a meaningful life in contemporary society.

For example, Yary Livan was educated in traditional art production in Cambodia, at the Royal University of Fine Arts in the early 1970’s. Mr. Livan left Cambodia during the DK period and has worked in the US for much of his career, practicing traditional Khmer ceramics and painting. Chath Piersath also left Cambodia during DK, when he was twelve, and was educated in the US. He is self-taught as an artist, and uses a western-style of art practice to examine social conditions in Cambodia, where he now lives part of the year.

During my presentation, I will screen excerpts from a video I am making, documenting contemporary Cambodian art and artists.

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**Ornamentation and Space: Buddhism in Modern Khmer Architecture**

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The modern architecture resigned by Vann Molyvann during the brief 17 years of Cambodian independence from 1953 to 1970 reflects a climatic approach to design that fully acknowledged the benefits of local tradition and global modernity. Passive building systems incorporated in Vann Molyvann’s modern design drew its strength not exclusively from western notions of modern architecture, but more distinctly from the infrastructural systems of the Khmer Empire. This paper examines Vann Molyvann’s blending of traditional building systems with modernist aspirations to create a national architecture that was uniquely Cambodian. The result of this design sensibility is a modern architectural hybrid known today as, New Khmer Architecture.

Since Vann Molyvann’s structures take on details of European Modernism, it would be easy to argue that they are merely a continuation of the French colonial influence. However, examining the political ideas of the newly independent Cambodia and its unique modern structures allows scholars to identify how the architectural products of Vann Molyvann reflected the economic inclination, Buddhist virtues, and political goals of a new nation of a new nation determined to build a foundation separate from its once parent nation. The paper begins with a review of Khmer traditional architecture and then examines how Vann Molyvann employed the climatic approaches of ancient Khmer architecture in his architectural designs. The paper then identifies how the architectural designs created by Vann Molyvann paralleled the new Cambodian nation’s political approach to establishing a new national identity. It is here that I begin to examine how Buddhist virtues are reflected in the Cambodian government’s new national identity. The paper concludes by comparing the work of Vann Molyvann to other post-colonial approaches to modern architectural design. Through a review of modernity discourse that has traditionally been accepted and post-colonial comparisons, the conclusion intends to highlight the unique approach to Vann Molyvann’s work and defend the argument that it was a novel, modern architectural hybrid.
The Legal Designation of “Indigenous Peoples” and Communal Land Titling in Cambodia: Assessing the Implications over a Decade after the 2001 Land Law

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In 2001, a new Land Law was adopted in Cambodia. It was significant because—for the first time—it recognized a new legal category of people in Cambodia: “indigenous peoples” or chun cheat daoem pheak tech. Indigenous peoples are not, for example, mentioned in the 1996 constitution of Cambodia (or any previous Cambodian constitutions) or any other legislation pre-dating the 2001 Land Law. Cambodia’s 2003 Forestry Law also followed the trend by recognizing indigenous peoples. These laws have been both symbolically and materially significant, as they have provided official government-mandated legitimacy to indigenous identities and special land and forest rights, including communal land rights, and have been ontologically significant in dividing indigenous and non-indigenous peoples on legal grounds. Over a decade after the 2001 Land Law was promulgated, it is worth reflecting on its effect. I am generally supportive of empowering upland minorities in Cambodia with more rights over their lands and resources. However, when compared with the situation in Laos, one has to wonder about the implications of the adoption of indigenous identities and communal land rights in Cambodia. Have a small portion of the population benefited at the expense of the rest of the rural population in Cambodia, and is the concept of communal land really benefiting those classified as being indigenous people? In this paper I endeavor to consider these questions, and provide some preliminary answers.

Keep Trying: Women’s Narratives of Staying in School in Cambodia

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This life history study examines how Cambodian women born in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s negotiated their identities and made choices about their educations.

Research Design
One of the researchers interviewed 8 women from poor, rural backgrounds, who completed a tertiary degree. The interviewer was from the same demographic as the participants and thus was an “insider researcher”. She introduced the study to the participants by noting the small number of women from poor, rural backgrounds who complete their tertiary education. She then asked them to tell their life stories in terms of their own educational journeys. She returned for second and third interviews to clarify earlier statements and ask follow-up questions. The researchers used a form of narrative analysis drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. Understanding each person as authoring herself in an internal conversation with the “other”, we looked for “should”-inflected statements, which reflected social and ethical values of the “other”.

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Significance
This study contributes to our understanding of how young women negotiated their identities and made choices within the context of post-war Cambodia. The data were also developed into a narrative book and distributed to lower secondary school girls in rural areas to offer a counter-narrative to the ones that many girls hear from those around them. The narratives provide a more nuanced view of the persistence and strengths of young women negotiating their educational choices that can inform parents, communities, and institutions that influence young girls.

Imagining the Cambodian Iron Age: The View from an Analysis of Stone and Glass Beads

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The Iron Age and Early Historic period (approx. 500 BC- AD 500) of mainland Southeast Asia was a period of great change. Contact with South Asia brought new artifacts, technologies, and ideas that were adopted and adapted by Southeast Asian people. Among these new objects from South Asia were stone and glass beads, which were widely traded and are ubiquitous at Southeast Asian sites from this period. Beads are ideal objects for studying trade as they are small and easily portable, yet may carry characteristics of when and where they were manufactured.

In the past 20 years there have been several excavations at Iron Age and Early Historic period sites in Cambodia. In this paper, I present the results of a comprehensive examination of stone and glass beads from eight Iron Age and Early Historic sites across Cambodia. A compositional and stylistic analysis of beads from these sites highlights the multiple bead types in circulation, which are indicative of trade networks during this period. Distinct patterns in the distribution of certain types of beads highlight both long-distance exchange contacts and more localized interaction spheres. Although there is still much we do not know about the Iron Age period, this research hints at the diversity of the communities living in Cambodia during this important transitional period.

Montreal Life Stories: Bridging the Gap between Cambodian Generations through Storytelling, Artistic Performances and Community Forums

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The proposed paper explores inter-generational relationships in the Cambodian community in Montreal through storytelling, artistic performance and community engagement. In particular, it examines the transmission of memory in the aftermath of genocide and looks at ways in which communities can best engage young and older Cambodians in a discussion of these sensitive memories. The paper raises issues such as how and when the parents of young Cambodians in Montreal talk to their children about the past; which aspects of culture and lived experience are shared; the effects of cultural assumptions about Cambodian parent-child relationships on attempts at intergenerational dialogue; the function of the generational frame in understanding these issues.
Between 2006 and 2012, the Cambodian Working Group, a diverse body of university and community-based researchers, conducted 80 cross-generational life story interviews within Montreal's large Cambodian community. These multi-session interviews were conducted as part of the Montreal Life Stories project (www.histoiresdeviemontreal.ca), a five-year Community-University Research Alliance funded by Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

As the Cambodian Working Group prepares to open its own centre for Khmer history and culture, Centre Khémara, we have also been exploring how best to share the life stories we have recorded. As part of these discussions in this paper, we reflect on the role of artistic and other forms of community engagement, such as “Choup Choum” (a community workshop held in March, 2012 which explored intergenerational relationships) and “Voices of 1.5 Generation” (a four-month long participatory research project) in encouraging further intergenerational dialogue. The proposed paper analyses the intergenerational dialogue found in the recorded interviews and in the creative responses to those interviews. Through a “deep listening”, we hope to arrive at a better understanding of how memory is transmitted from one generation to the next. We aim to understand not only how these memories are shared inter-generationally, but also to work to develop appropriate ways to share them communally.

Performing Dhamma: Maha Ghosananda’s Model for Ethical Social Engagement

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In December 1978 Cambodia's nearly four years under the Khmer Rouge regime came to a close when the Vietnamese army invaded. Maha Ghosananda was among the few highly trained Khmer monks to survive the regime, only because he had been outside of Cambodia since 1953 in pursuit of various Buddhist educational training. The destruction and violence of Cambodia's civil war and resulting Khmer Rouge rule was the impetus for Maha Ghosananda's return to his home country and sparked his work for peace and reconciliation in Cambodia and internationally. Having been located outside of the physical space of Cambodia for the vast majority of the post-colonial era, Maha Ghosananda enjoyed an innocuous position as a locally unaligned authoritative figure. This granted him the opportunity to engage prominently in social action in Cambodia's fraught social and political climate in the early 1990s. In Maha Ghosananda's effort to reconcile the unstable and splintered reality of a post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, he presented a Buddhist model for conduct, behavior and thinking in a manner to resolve immediate problems. I argue that Maha Ghosananda presented his ethical model through the performative acts of social engagement and through his performance as a Buddhist social and spiritual leader. Through a reading of his acts and words this presentation will tease out the meaning behind Maha Ghosananda's self-presentation and articulate what I argue was his aim of teaching the ethics of social engagement for a Khmer audience who had survived and were suffering deep social, mental and bodily scars.
**Nuon Chea’s New Buddhism**

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This presentation reviews the highlights and key findings from an analysis of long-form interviews conducted by the author with Nuon Chea, the Khmer Rouge’s “Brother Number Two,” in 2005 at his home in Pailin, and with the abbot at the nearby temple where he occasionally attends Buddhist rituals. Nuon Chea is likely the individual most responsible for the Khmer Rouge torture prisons, and is currently being tried in an international tribunal. He gave a few recorded interviews prior to his arrest, one of them being the interview I conducted, primarily on the topics of Cambodian folktales and Buddhism.

Nuon Chea characterized key Buddhist concepts in a way that is consistent with some transnational ‘Buddhist modernist’ movements, especially as it regards the notion of multiple births, karma, and the understanding of spirits and rituals. This paper demonstrates the various ways in which these modernist reformulations of key Buddhist concepts are simultaneously distinct from traditional historical Cambodian imaginations of the same concepts, and serve to re-imagine Buddhist morality and modern Cambodian history in ways that are distinctly self-serving. His abbot disagrees with Nuon Chea’s innovative metaphysics, but sees the contemporary Nuon Chea as a man who made horrible ‘mistakes,’ but who is now a sincere Buddhist, an attitude I characterize as more traditional than modernist.

In concluding, this paper seeks to disturb dominant narratives about Buddhist modernism as simplistically adaptive or hyper-orthodox, and instead attend to the effects of the innovations of Buddhist modernism in particular case studies.

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**Academic Space and the Cambodian Genocide**

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On the surface, the idea of genocide prevention appears to be a simple task. In an ideal world, policymakers, international organizations, grassroots activists, the media, and the academic community would work in tandem to sound the alarm at the specter of this heinous crime to avert the tragic loss of life. The challenges to genocide prevention are not so straightforward. The mere invocation of the “g-word” can create a political battle over naming rights and labels. When talking about genocide, words matter. They matter whether we call current conflicts raging around the world genocide and they also matter in post-genocidal societies and how those societies come to terms with a genocidal past. Genocide education is a valuable tool in both genocide prevention and genocide reconciliation. But in our colleges and universities, particularly in the United States, what do we teach, that is, what cases do we include when we educate about genocide? With the number of cases of genocide rising, teaching a course on comparative genocide shouldn’t have to involve a trade-off between depth of knowledge and breadth of cases.

The Cambodian genocide is chronologically located between the Holocaust and Rwanda. Unlike the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide is rarely taught as a course in its own right; rather, it is taught in the context of a comparative genocide class. This paper examines how the Cambodian is taught in...
our colleges and universities and in what context. For example, is it taught as a stand-alone course as part of a comparative study. Is this genocide studies in the context of an Asian Studies program, which disciplines, and so on. We then compare our Western attempts to educate about this genocide with the current efforts in Cambodia to educate about the Khmer Rouge regime—work that is largely promoted by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DCCAM).

Commercial Sexual Contracts

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Cambodian sex workers have a role in history and culture, prior to the arrival of French colonizers, during the period of colonization, and since then, most notably during the UNTAC period and in activism in this new millennium. This paper will elucidate current legal situations and their history, including the criminalization of prostitution in 2008, with special attention to the role of outside influence on the legal status and services available to sex workers in Cambodia. In addition to legal and policy issues, global financial issues also affect sex workers in Cambodia. For example, as manufacturing became possible in places with lower costs, and garment factories in Cambodia closed, many of the young women who made the clothes that Cambodia exported moved into the only business available to them: various forms of sex work. Garment workers moved into karaoke parlors, bars and other sex work venues such as massage parlors. While the work they perform has changed dramatically, worker-organization relations in these venues is similar with regard to commercial contracts, exploitation, and the influence of policy from outside Cambodia. Interviews with sex workers from seven locations across Cambodia reveal the similarities in job recruitment and negotiating power of the young women in both sex work and garment industries in contemporary Cambodia, and the ways cultural practices are manipulated to exploit them.

Classical Cambodian Wedding Music and the Future of Tradition

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Like many of Cambodia’s artistic genres, classical wedding music faced near-extinction during the Khmer Rouge and the chaotic years following 1979. But, over the past decade, the genre has seen a remarkable comeback. Sok Duch, the surviving master and scholar, has taught his craft to many youth, including a few who seem poised to become new masters, and in a few places—Takeo, Siem Reap, and Phnom Penh—classical wedding music is regaining the prominence it once had. This new resurgence transforms the past from a tragedy into a tale of survival. In this story, the past is a wealth of culture that continues to inform the present.
Central to that culture, classical wedding music can provide insight as Cambodia continues to find its post-conflict identity. The melodies are emotionally evocative for many in Cambodia and throughout
the Diaspora, and the lyrics may be even more valuable. Through symbolism and metaphor, they articulate many long-held beliefs and customs, offering a unique window into Khmer culture. In this paper, I analyze a number of important wedding songs, providing the Khmer lyrics used by Sok Duch, my own English translations, and an analysis of their meanings. I also put them in context—in the oral tradition and the wedding ceremony—and detail how they can be used to inspire a re-imagining of Cambodia, one in which the arts lead toward a future defined by an intimate understanding of the nation’s traditions.

Who Killed Chea Vichea?

Richard Garella, Producer

WHO KILLED CHEA VICHEA? is a highly charged murder mystery, a political thriller, and a documentary like no other.

In 2004, Cambodian union president Chea Vichea was assassinated in broad daylight at a newsstand in Phnom Penh. As international pressure mounted, two men were swiftly arrested and convicted of the crime. Each was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Filmmaker Bradley Cox’s five-year investigation reveals an elaborate cover-up that reaches the highest echelons of Cambodian society. Winner of a 2011 Peabody Award among many other honors and banned by the Cambodian government, WHO KILLED CHEA VICHEA? uncovers the face of dictatorship behind the mask of democracy.

Filmed in Cambodia from 2003 to 2009, with additional filming in Belgium, France, Finland, Netherlands, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Festival release in 2010, US television release in May 2011. Total running time 56 minutes. A co-production of Loud Mouth Films and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Distributed for non-US broadcast by MercuryMedia.

A Portrait of Composer Chinary Ung

Adam Greene, PhD
Independent Scholar

Chinary Ung (born Takéo, 1942) has lived and worked in the United States since 1964 – a period in which he completed his musical studies (degrees from Manhattan School of Music and Columbia University) and spent his entire professional career as a composer and educator. While his numerous lauds and accomplishments would seem to suggest a familiar story of the high-achieving immigrant, it was Ung’s inability to safely return home that formed his particular path. Separation from his source culture forced Ung to construct an idiosyncratic, pan-Asian identity that looks eastward from a general aesthetic sense, but is dependent upon the techniques and traditions of western classical music. In order to understand Ung’s music, it is important to identify the multiple intersections of sources and aesthetic attitudes, and to address the spiritual motivation behind much of his creative output. For example, he has often invoked Buddhist concepts as important conceits
that form the basis of a piece of music; however, there is something decidedly non-dogmatic and unorthodox about his interpretations and descriptions of these ideas. This paper will address aspects of Ung’s musical identity (or, as he terms it, his “fingerprint”) in general terms that the non-specialist will be able to follow. In the course of this paper, I will describe how this identity evolved and what changed in Ung’s creative output after he began making regular visits to Cambodia in 2002.

Re-Constructing Local Knowledge: Revitalizing the Wooden House in Cambodia

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Many architects working in countries recovering from the devastation of civil war or international conflict are dedicated to revitalizing the built environment. Efforts in new construction, as well as historic preservation, attempt to provide communities with shelter and a sense of place that is connected to cultural identity, local knowledge, and historical memory. How this takes place is a valuable inquiry and the focus of this field report that describes the work of an architect in Cambodia, Hok Sokol, who is building and restoring Khmer wooden houses in the Siem Reap area. It explores how the ritual practices of an age-old column raising ceremony are integrated into current architectural design and construction, thereby reconstituting a worldview and cultural inheritance that were threatened severely during the brutal years (1975-1979) of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Friendship and Intimacy in Buddhist Monastic Spaces

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This paper examines two interconnected kinds of monastic spaces and how they are constructed and filled – painted spaces on vihāra walls and emotional spaces between people. Taking Buddhist visual culture as a site for ethical reflection that functions differently from scriptural texts as media for conveying complex ideas of identity, religious value and emotion – as in Jeffrey Samuels’ notion of the “aesthetics of emotion” – this paper argues for reading temple paintings and portraits of monks in the twentieth century as sources for understanding modern constructions of moral perception and personhood.

One of the central Buddhist visual narratives of the modern period, depicted in hundreds of paintings found in Cambodian temples since the early 20th century, is the story of the Buddha’s Mahāparinibbāṇa, his death and “enlightenment without remains.” Reading the motif of the Mahāparinibbāṇa in combination with photographic portraits and accounts of the lives of Buddhist monks written by their students and closest peers, I suggest ways in which the ethical notion of kalyāṇa-mittatā, “beautiful” or “intimate” friendship, inflects both monastery paintings and monastic portraits of love and attachment. Questions about love, attachment and intimacy provide a way of understanding how Buddhists in the modern period have understood themselves in relation to
others, one of the fundamental markers of modern “identity” as it has been imagined in Euro-American philosophical contexts (Giddens 1992). This focus on emotional intimacy allows us to see how Theravada Buddhists in Cambodia produced, represented, disseminated, and viewed key values and ideals of personhood in the early twentieth century. The paper also seeks to sketch out a new methodology in “visual ethics,” responding to recent work by anthropologist Kenneth George who queries - “will we see ethics differently if we look to pictures as the fulcrum of ethical relationships?” (George 2010, 145).

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**Professional Girlfriends and Transnational Partnerships in Cambodia**

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This focus of this paper is on the complex and multi-layered transnational sexual contracts that are formed between certain young women in Cambodia described as ‘professional girlfriends’ and their ‘western boyfriends’. While the majority are employed as bartenders or waitresses in tourist areas of Phnom Penh, outside observers tend to erroneously label the women as ‘prostitutes’ or ‘broken women’ because of the gift-based nature of the intimate exchanges. Ethnographic evidence demonstrates, however, that professional girlfriends make up a diverse group of individuals who engage in relationships more complex than simply ‘sex-for-cash’ exchanges, and often seek marriage, love and intimacy in addition to material comforts. The paper will not only reveal, but depathologize, the entrepreneurial ways these young women utilize interpersonal partnerships in order to improve their social status, secure their futures, and achieve a sense of enjoyment amidst a sea of social and gendered constraints. Though they do not view themselves as ‘prostitutes’, nor their interactions with ‘boyfriends’ as work, the distinction of the term ‘professional’ is used to emphasise that they engage in multiple, overlapping non-marital sexual contracts in order to support their livelihoods, whereby the professed feelings of love and dedication lie somewhere on a continuum between genuine and feigned, and where the term ‘love’ itself carries multiple meanings. The framework of 'professional girlfriends' and 'transactional sex' provides a less stigmatising vocabulary with which to critically analyse the entanglement of sex, love, intimacy and pragmatic materiality that pervades many transnational relationships in Cambodia, without reducing the actors to the stereotypical images of 'sex worker'/'client'. Such a move works to allow participants’ voices to disrupt global hegemonic truth-claims about their lives, and provide a more nuanced account of their everyday realities.

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**Cultural Genocide under the Khmer Rouge Regime**

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The legal scholar, Raphael Lemkin, coined the word genocide and spent his life trying to outlaw it as a crime. According to his original definition, genocide was not limited to physical mass murder. Instead, he had a much broader conception that included many forms of destruction. He argued that, if a
group’s culture was violently undermined, the group itself would disintegrate. Some of the victims would be absorbed into other groups, while others would succumb to a slow physical demise. Therefore, attacks on group culture were clearly genocidal. Following this original concept of genocide, this paper illustrates that the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia included not only mass killings and torture, but also forms of cultural genocide. It will show how the Khmer Rouge sought to control and change people’s thoughts, activities, beliefs, and ways of life. They considered Buddhism, Islam, and other religions to be “sick” and should have thus been destroyed. They attacked pagodas and statues of Buddha, defrocked monks, banned certain forms of art, such as song and dance performances, and most significantly separated children from their parents. In Cambodian society, as with all others, parents and families play an important role in spreading culture, socializing children through ways of living and interactions. Thus, children forcibly separated from their families by the Khmer Rouge were bereft of their cultural legacy, and were instead indoctrinated. All of this added up to mass social destruction, poverty, and violence, both during and after the regime.

(re)Constructing Modern Siamese Identity at Wat Rachathiwat

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In the first decade of the twentieth century, King Chulalongkorn of Siam’s Chakri Dynasty, oversaw large-scale renovations and reconstructions to Wat Rachathiwat, a royal temple located on the banks of Bangkok’s Chao Phraya River. Wat Rachathiwat had served as a locus of trans-regional Theravadin interaction throughout the nineteenth-century, and was the birthplace of the reformist Thammayut sect begun by Chulalongkorn’s father, King Mongkut. Mongkut’s renovations to the temple, begun in 1833, reflected his ties to a network of Theravadin literati who obsessed over the proper orthodox methods for the construction of ordination space (sīmā). Chulalongkorn’s early twentieth-century renovations, however, looked less to scriptural orthodoxy for the spatial and material specifics of the temple’s sīmā space. Instead, this renovation reconstructed the temple’s ordination hall and sīmā space in order to display an indigenous and civilizational historical narrative. This visual narrative was constructed through the utilization of an amalgam of Siamese symbols, Khmer architecture and spatial planning, and Italian renaissance-style murals.

Chulalongkorn’s renovations were enacted as colonial presence in the region dismantled trans-regional networks that had previously connected the Theravadin elite of South and Southeast Asia. As their world changed, it became necessary for the Siamese royalty to distance themselves from trans-regional sources of legitimacy and authority. Chulalongkorn’s renovations to Wat Rachathiwat show that with the solidification of Siam’s boundaries, the Siamese elite looked to the Khmer ruins that dotted their kingdom for indigenous symbols and systems of spatial planning, royal grandeur and civilizational pedigree. At the same time, these elite looked to global fashions and tastes as a means of displaying their authority to rule both domestically and in the face of the critical eye of colonial powers. Chulalongkorn’s renovations to Wat Rachathiwat encapsulate these trends and also reveal how the process of imagining an indigenous, traditional aesthetic in the early twentieth century was a means by which the Siamese elite created and articulated their modern image.
Debt Bondage in Cambodia’s Past and Present

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The king of Cambodia promulgated a law in the middle of the nineteenth century in order to protect those of his subjects who were enslaved. Strict guidelines detailed the punishment and compensatory arrangements should laws such as this be transgressed. Yet although the legal protections that these permitted were abolished by the French colonial administration, the practices themselves remained. This occurred because Europeans were unaware of the many different categories of people who were obligated to perform labor for others. Not all ‘slaves’ were condemned to a life of servitude; often, individuals or their families entered into contracts in which their labor was pledged for a set period. Daughters’ labor could most easily be given up by families seeking to borrow a lump sum from a wealthy patron. These girls would remain in the household of the lender and their labor would comprise the interest on the loan. When laws protecting such girls were removed, there was no longer any effective barrier preventing their temporary masters and mistresses from abusing them. Can this initial failure of European legislators in the colonial period to understand debt bondage as distinct from slavery explain the endurance of human trafficking and the proliferation of increasingly younger children in the sex sector in Cambodia today?

Angkor One Million – Archaeology, Heritage and Popular Culture in Contemporary Angkor

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The World Heritage site of Angkor in Cambodia is the focus of ongoing archaeological work for groups and individuals from around the world. Simultaneous to this academic attention is the ongoing popular culture fascination, building on long-standing historical representations of the region as a mysterious place populated by lost temples and impenetrable jungle. The two approaches coexist as separate conceptual places within the contemporary spaces of Angkor. While it is true that the two approaches do remain separate, they also influence and impact upon each other, often in unforeseen ways. The weight of popular culture is such that many tourists to Cambodia do not consider what Angkor is, believing they already know the answer despite having only accessed a limited view. The reality is much more complicated, making the overwhelming weight of assumption a factor in opposition to archaeological work. The proliferation of certain images through time is matched by the replication of ideas, statements and phrases that recur in the same way. There are numerous quotes purporting that Angkor at its height supported approximately one million people. It has become a number that is used as a catch phrase that seeks to identify the past through the extrapolation of a figure that present day people can use both for context and identification with the contemporary world. This paper looks at the interaction between popular and academic conceptual spaces at Angkor through examination of the recurring reference in popular culture to Angkor’s past population numbering one million.
The Road to Delcom: Imagining Human Rights in Two Kuy Villages

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Collective self-determination and rights to traditional lands, territories, and resources are widely recognized as the two most important human rights for indigenous peoples around the world, yet these are among the most difficult rights for peoples to achieve, in part because of states’ “lack of political will,” but also owing to the different capacities of people to exercise rights. Based on fieldwork and archival research carried out in 2010 and 2011, this paper examines self-determination and land rights as problems in two Kuy villages in southern Preah Vihear. While the villages are in close proximity to each other, strongly identify as Kuy and indigenous, they have strikingly different histories, one having been settled during the Pol Pot regime and the other tracing its roots back to the Angkorean or pre-Angkorean era. Yet today, the future of both villages, as well as the entire region, is threatened by massive “land grabbing” that is enabled by the state through various forms of “concessions,” including Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) and Mining Concessions (MCs), that are granted to national and transnational companies through a largely concealed process. ELCs and MCs have emerged in Cambodia as one of the main tools by which the state pursues its “rectangular strategy” of development. The focus in this paper will be on one of the more significant MCs in the region that granted to the Delcom Mining Company, and analyze the concrete and symbolic human rights impacts that the Delcom MC is having on the lives of Kuy people in these villages, and what are their likely scenarios in the near-future.

Entertaining Spirits, Strengthening Communities: Ritualized Performances of Khmer Literary Classics in Today’s Rural Cambodia

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In Kandal province, some villages host the performance of stage-adapted versions of episodes from versified novels (lpaen) or the Ramakerti epic, all dating back to the 16-18th centuries. Affiliated with specific pagodas, non-professional performers appropriate choreographic conventions of the lkhon khol (all-male) or the lkhon pol srey (all-women), miming the twists and turns of the story to the rhythm of a pinpeat orchestra alternating with the poetic unfolding of the plot sang by narrators. Ritualized, these performances conventionally took, and some still take, place at times of transition (New Year and Pchoum Ben) or at critical times (droughts or epidemics), thanks to the collective effort of the local population. The performance has thus been an offering to tutelary spirits from a close-knit network of villagers established over generations and living in one locality (spread over neighboring phum).

Today, however, in the two rural theatres considered here, both located south of Phnom Penh, performing groups have to deal with the loss of manuscripts and masters, the disinterest of the
youth, and the dilution of family-based community ties as the villages turn into “bedroom communities” for the capital.

How do the people who are tied to this theatrical practice for generations relate to the history and legacy of this theatre? What collective memory do they carry on? How are they adapting the artistic performance to accommodate contemporary realities and outsider audiences (in both ritualized and secular performances)? And how do these adaptations reflect and inform changes in the society?

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**Democratic Decentralization Reform in Post-Conflict Cambodia: Devolution of Power**

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No abstract.

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**The Illusion of Civil Society in Cambodia**

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This paper examines the degree of success of donors’ efforts in building civil society in the case of Cambodia. It closely examines the substance of the largely NGOs constituted civil society. The number of NGOs has grown rapidly from just one in 1992 to nearly 3,000 nowadays. These organizations as a whole are often referred to as civil society. The research scrutinizes certain fundamental aspects of these NGOs such as financial dependency and accountability, connection with the masses, popular representation, NGO identity and governance structure. The study suggests that NGOs are mostly dependent on foreign support, acting in most aspects like a proxy civil society, and are unlikely to survive when funds run dry. They seriously lack connection with the masses, inadequately represent the mass, and operate more accountably toward donors than the grassroots. NGOs commonly suffer from identity crisis because they are mostly staffed by urban elites and unable to explain their existence well in relation to the masses. Some NGOs suffer from deficiency of liberal democratic value. All these characteristics suggest that Cambodian NGOs do not make up a genuine civil society but the illusion of it.

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**Re-imagining Khmer Religious Landscape**

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1 This paper is carved from the author’s PhD dissertation, “Democracy in Action: Decentralization in post-conflict Cambodia,” School of Global Studies, Gothenburg, Sweden.
The construction of knowledge on Khmer religion has always come to the conclusion that the Khmer religious landscape has been shaped by three solid elements of belief: Animism, Brahmanism and Buddhism. Such portrayal of faith has long been much reified by the Indianized theory of religion and, of course, this has been tightly embraced not only by Khmerologists but also other Southeast Asianists. This paper aims to re-imagine the Khmer religious territory by including the popular Chinese ritual practice which has often been taken for granted.

This study draws on the ethnographic account on the worship of Land Lord and Mother Goddess in Cambodia which also has the significant linkages with the popular religions elsewhere. These sacred objects not only illuminate the perspective of ‘spiritual emplacement’ but also do accommodate the inter-ethnic dimension in Cambodia. This religious landscape therefore serves the model of how people think of themselves and the imagery of the other, guests or newcomers in Khmer society.

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**The Need for a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) Type Tool in Cambodia’s Development Strategy**

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Since the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, Cambodia has made significant progress in peace-building and postwar reconstruction in the aftermath of two decades of conflict, genocide and international isolation. While Cambodia’s future is viewed by many as bright, the threat of conflict as a result of reckless or poorly implemented development policies and practices poses a serious threat to Cambodia’s continued progress. Disputes over resources, particularly land, waterways and forests, are often at the center of these threats to Cambodia’s future progress.

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) is a project evaluation tool used by project stakeholders to minimize the risk of violent conflict and maximize the peace-building potential of a given development project, from building a country’s physical infrastructure to improving its systems of health and education, etc. This paper argues that the prospect for Cambodia’s continued progress will be enhanced greatly if PCIA is adopted as a genuine feature of Cambodia’s overall development strategy and specific project planning.

The paper will examine the extent to which the Cambodian government currently implements PCIA and the prospects for its more substantive implementation going forward. Along these lines, the paper will examine some of the reasons why progressive development policies, which include PCIA, and the passing of important laws regarding development have not been adequately implemented and enforced. The paper also examines the barriers to their implementation and enforcement, such as Cambodia’s culture of impunity and violence, resistance by traditional relations of power, and the influence of private enterprise and foreign investment, especially from China.

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**Classical Dances in Cambodia: Between Ritual Requirements and Social Contingencies**

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For over a thousand years, the Apsaras' propitiatory rituals has been codified to the extreme, producing a rigorous form of dance that has become a dance-drama that recounts Cambodia’s founding legends, constantly renewed by successive generations of artists. However, as time and practices distance us from the dance's sacred nature, changing aesthetic considerations increasingly condition its performance. The proclamation of the "Royal Ballet of Cambodia" as a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity kindled opposing expectations.

A historical overview will explain how dancers grapple with opposing currents of conservation and innovation. They bear the brunt of programs conceived by national and international cultural decision makers and navigate between the diverging desires of spectators who come to admire and consume their share of the heritage. Consequently, all is subject to debate and modification. These questions remind us of the need to adapt to modern Cambodia. Certain contemporary Apsaras are currently questioning their ancient mythified glory and exploring their society's recent violence and iniquity. A new generation of artists is thus helping to shape tomorrow.

Born Khmer in the early years of Cambodia's independence and educated in France, my academic approach is informed by my dual stance as a Western, contemporary dancer who has returned to Khmer classical dance and as an artist with a social conscious. The research engaged for this article is based on my collaborations with Cambodian cultural institutions.

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**Kambujadeśa/Khmer Country: A Case for the Pre-Modern Nation**

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What did Cambodia or Kambujadeśa mean to the Khmers of the Angkorian period (9th-15th centuries CE)? Cambodia, like other polities in early Southeast Asia, has been characterized as a cosmological empire or maṇḍala—a centered and vaguely defined royal space governed by a charismatic god-king and surrounded by vassal gods and men. But O. W. Wolters once noted that Cambodia was in at least one important aspect the “single exception” among these maṇḍala polities. Kambujadeśa (“the land of the descendants of Kambu”) was, to use the words of Steven Grosby, an extensive “territorial community of nativity,” or what I choose to call a “nation.” This paper will address the evidence in the inscriptions for early Cambodia’s unique political identity and present the case, increasingly made for polities as disparate as Hasmonean Judea, medieval France, and pre-Meiji Japan, for rehabilitating the nation as a perennial world-historical phenomenon before the advent of the global nation-state order.

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**Buth Savong and the New Proliferation of Relics in Cambodia**

John Marston
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One of the most important religious leaders in Cambodia at the present time is Buth Savong, a lay religious ascetic who since the 1990s has gained fame for dhamma talks on radio and advocacy of reform within Cambodian Buddhism. Throughout Cambodia there are increasing numbers of wats
and asrams affiliated with him and his movement, which stresses distinctive codes of discipline, rituals, and iconography. Temples affiliated with Buth Savong stress that to be fully consecrated sites certain elements should be present, including a set of the Tripitaka, a Boddhi tree, and a relic of the Buddha; this has meant regularly bringing relics from other countries, a practice about which Ministry of Religion authorities have shown ambivalence. The paper will discuss the importance of Buth Savong as a religious leader and, in particular, the implications of the new emphasis on relic stupas associated with him.

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**The New Face of Kampuchea: Publicity, Propaganda and the Look of Modern Cambodia, 1953 to 1979**

Michael Mascuch  
University of California, Berkeley, USA

“The New Face of Kampuchea” is the title of a 118-page photobook published in the USA in 1979 by the Liberator Press, an arm of the US Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which claimed in its subtitle to be “a photo record of the first American visit to Cambodia since the end of the war.” The book is one document of several resulting from the decision in 1978 of the revolutionary leadership to allow selected foreign visitors to tour Democratic Kampuchea and report to their respective countries on what they saw, the best-known of which is perhaps the 1978 Yugoslav film featuring an interview with Pol Pot. (DC Cam has produced a contemporary re-visitation of one such tour, entitled “Living Hell.”) The purpose of such documents was to project an image of the new nation-state after the 1975 revolution. It is one of many such documents produced or directed by leaders of Cambodia since its Independence in 1953, to address the urgent requirement of all “modern” nations to show a comprehensible self-image, “face,” or “look” to its citizens and the wider world in which it aspires to be known and regarded as an agent. My paper is historical and centered on photography and the (re)formation of visual culture in Cambodia after Independence. It will attempt to propose a coherent account of Cambodia’s struggle to define its self-image as a modern nation by means of photography, in works attributed to or initiated by Norodom Sihanouk, leaders of the Khmer Republic and Democratic Kampuchea. In presenting these texts my emphasis will be on continuity rather than change, with the goal of revising the trend that identifies the end of the Sangkum era as the beginning of a kind of oblivion of modern Cambodian culture that culminated in the horror of Democratic Kampuchea, a “devastation of vision,” as Boreth Ly has described the effect of that regime. The inspiration for my thinking has been the work of Ingrid Muan, in particularly her dissertation, which focuses more on “fine art” than photography. But photography is integral to the culture of public relations that characterized the second half of twentieth century globalization.

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**Surrealpolitik: the Experience of Chinese Experts in Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979**

Andrew Mertha  
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When discussing Chinese assistance to Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), the literature is often divided into two approaches. The first rests on the argument that the Chinese revolutionary state –
particularly the more radical phases such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution – provided both a blueprint and an inspiration for the Cambodian revolution. This approach suggests that Chinese experts in Democratic Kampuchea were akin to revolutionary comrades-in-arms who shared an ideological affinity as they worked alongside their Cambodian counterparts. The second focuses on a state-to-state level of analysis in which the human element is ignored altogether. In this article, by contrast, I argue that the Chinese experience in Democratic Kampuchea was structured and constrained by the contradiction of technical imperatives in a milieu of deadly political infighting as well as the many institutional shortcomings on both the Cambodian and the Chinese sides. I use the petroleum refinery project at Kampong Som (Sihanoukville) to illustrate my argument.

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32 Years after the Khmer Rouge: the Politics of Reconciliation in Cambodia

Chloé Pellegrini
TAPOL

This paper analyses the national and international politics of reconciliation in Cambodia between 2007 and July 2011. It shows how reconciliation in Cambodia is a political battlefield where conflicting discourses and policies seek to master the truth over the Democratic Kampuchea period (17 April 1975 - 7 January 1979), and analyses the impact of these policies on Cambodian society. It assesses the discrepancies between international programmes and Cambodian everyday strategies of reconciliation, and the outcomes of their encounter. It discusses the judicial approach to reconciliation and the relevance of the setting of transitional justice particular to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Finally, it compares national and international development agendas in Cambodia to reconciliation agendas, and shows how development agendas tend to foster the Cambodian societal fracture instead of helping to address it.

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Urban Youth in Contemporary Cambodia: Social Transformation and the Self

Chivoin Peou
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Compelled by the post-Cold War international and internal political dynamics, Cambodia in the early 1990s emerged from over two decades of violent cultural and institutional destruction, marked by a triple transition from war, authoritarian rule and command economy to peace, democracy and free

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2 I would like to thank David Chandler, Craig Etcheson, Steve Heder, Lorraine Paterson, Hanna Phan, Laura Summers, Sid Tarrow, Frederick Teiwes for their comments and/or assistance on earlier drafts of this research project; Emily Cheung for her excellent research assistance; Y Dari and the entire staff at the National Archives in Phnom Penh; and Penny Edwards for her generosity in suggesting that I contribute to this special issue of Crosscurrents. This draws from field research, including elite interviews and archival work in China and Cambodia from January 2010 through January 2012, funded by grants from the Cornell University Institute for Social Sciences (ISS), the Cornell University East Asia Program (EAP), and the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program (SEAP). I also thank the Documentation Center of Cambodia for allowing me to access file KNH 198/D 21680. Despite the generous assistance of so many, inevitably some errors remain, for which all responsibility is mine. This is part of a larger book project, tentatively titled Cadres, Guns, and Money: China’s Relations with Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979.
market. The reinvention of Cambodia on the ‘ashes of the past’ has relied on democratic reforms and market liberalization, which remain today far from complete. It is in this context that youth have to reinvent themselves and the new polity and economy of Cambodia without any certain and easy-to-follow cultural and institutional guideline. This paper reports from an ongoing research project which examines how young Cambodians shape and invent their future by contending with the fragmented institutional framework and personal resources. It will present first results from thirty-two qualitative interviews with young people in Phnom Penh in 2011. This paper focuses on two main paths for their life project: becoming the cheap labor supply for the informal and industrial economy, and preparing to ‘succeed’ in the increasing skilled and professional occupations demanded by Cambodia’s economic transformation, together with their different strategies for action. There appear to be three distinct patterns in the way these young people orient themselves toward their future: surrendering to fate, relying on traditional or normative certainty, and taking the future into their own hand to become an entrepreneurial subject. These different life paths and orientation patterns will be discussed in relation to the current institutional context and to the availability of different types of resources (economic, cultural and social) accessible to them.

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The Reclamation and Development of Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh

Alan Potkin
Northern Illinois University, USA

“No question that throughout monsoonal Asia, preservation of urban waterways is a very tough sell” was the leitmotif of our 2008 e-book Escaping Foreign Donor Nature Worship, which was focused on the termination of the Danish-sponsored Nong Chanh wetlands conservation and education project in Vientiane.

Boeung Kak was the largest urban wetland in Phnom Penh, and as recently as a decade ago was mostly still semi-pristine and a potential first-order urban amenity. Which was how the French colonial paysagistes urbains evidently envisioned it in the pre-WW2 city planning maps and the as-built water management infrastructure of that era, which involved a scenic canal, ca. 250 m. in length, in the center of a landscaped grand boulevard linking Boeung Kak to the Tonle Sap River just above the Mekong confluence.

While there was some considerable interest and activism amongst the NGOs in an environmental conservation scheme for Boeung Kak, the most recent (December, 2010) Google Earth image for the site shows it about 70% filled with hydraulic dredge spoils. In 2011, as many as 10,000 residents of the Boeung Kak lake area, were involuntarily relocated “to build luxury flats and high-end shops for the developing firm, Shukaku, owned by a senator from the ruling Cambodian People's party”* in partnership with Yunnan Southeast-Asia Economy and Technology Investment Industrial.** How were the actual planning decisions taken which led to the transformation of Boeung Kak; what was the degree of transparency in the giving-over of the site to Shukaku; were credible environmental and social impact assessments required/performe...
We Want (U) To Know – A Participatory Film Project

Ella Pugliese, Film Director

Realizing the limitations of existing education and information material about Cambodia’s transitional justice process, the Khmer Institute of Democracy, the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia and the International Centre for Conciliation in cooperation with the filmmaker Ella Pugliese implemented a participatory film project in 2008 and 2009. Providing an alternative to the centralization and 'one-way' flow of most media in the context of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, the project offered Khmer Rouge survivors and their descendants a chance to get deeply involved in the filming process, from conception to production. The project initiated a dynamic process of engagement and dialogue and culminated in the realization of the 90-minute documentary film WE WANT (U) TO KNOW in 2009 (Khmer language, English subtitles). WE WANT (U) TO KNOW explores the consequences of trauma and silence, perceptions on justice and reconciliation, including highly sensitive topics, like the relationship between survivors and ex-Khmer Rouge, and how difficult it is for the young generation to really understand and believe what happened during the time of the genocidal regime. The film further informs about the Khmer Rouge history in an easy to understand method by using archive material and a Khmer narrator. Featuring "re-enactment" scenes of Khmer Rouge crimes, the film allows the audience to identify with the actors, to share their own experiences and to work towards a collective memory of Cambodia’s violent past.

In 2011, the 54-minute short version of WE WANT (U) TO KNOW was produced with the intention of reaching an international audience (English narrator, English subtitles), providing a glimpse into other possible mechanisms available for obtaining justice, as defined by Cambodians:

WE WANT (U) TO KNOW
A FILM BY Ella Pugliese, Nou Va and the people of Thnol Lok
PHOTOGRAPHY, EDIT & ARTWORK, Jens Joester
Produced by Khmer Institute of Democracy, financed by GIZ
54 minutes-Khmer with English subtitles
Cambodia: Progress, Opportunities and Challenges of Education

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Since the signing of the Paris Accords on 23rd October 1991, the education sector in Cambodia has shown steady advancement and achieved a number of impressive accomplishments. The transformation of the basic educational system includes solid growth in the number of schools and universities, great strides towards universal primary education and gender parity, and strong participation in elementary, secondary and tertiary education. These strides should be commended. The basic need to develop human capital for both economic and social benefit has been crucial to the Royal Government’s strategy to promote new and sustainable sources of economic growth as well as improved living standards. Despite robust improvements more fundamental challenges remain such as equitable access to education, low quality of education and efficiency at all levels. Additional areas of concern are the learning environment, teacher education and training. Decentralization, good governance, gender issues, and advocating pro-poor education also factor into the challenges facing Cambodia’s education system. Moreover, the global economic slowdown starting in 2008 has caused an alarming number of marginalized children to forego starting school and more to drop out before completing primary education. There is an immediate need to better educate and train more people in order to promote more efficient and superior citizenry to build up a stronger nation with an economic self-sustainability. Critical and creative thinking is important to restore the identity of the Khmer people from one of victimhood to one of capacity, pride and honor, with the ability to compete both regionally and globally.

This paper will begin by identifying the almost total eradication of education in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge epoch as well as highlight the successes and failures up to the present day. This paper will then examine the challenges of the educational reforms to underline the anticipated benefits of such reforms and identify potential adverse effects. As this paper will show, the national strategy to promote long-term and sustainable sources of economic growth as well as improving living standards is based on developing quality human resources and building human capacity. This paper will describe these goals are dependent on improving the overall quality of education. Finally, this paper will explain the additional transformations in the educational sector that are necessary for Cambodia to tackle the challenges of the 21st century, including globalization and the achievement the Millennium Development Goals to provide universal nine-year basic education.

Traditional Khmer Folklore (Tales of the Hare3) in a Digital Media Era

3 The tales in our text were first published by P. Midan in the Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises in 1933 (BSEI, Nouvelle Série, VIII [1933].4: (ii) + 49-116. ). They are re-issued here by the kind permission of the Board of Directors of the Société des Études Indochinoises, to whom we express our gratitude. Midan’s collection is one of the few which present each as a separate tale, which is clearly more suited to classroom use. From the 27 stories of the tales, I have
Knowledge of Khmer language, culture and literature is rising to meet the requirement of foreign language education; however, there is still a lack of instructional materials that are accessible to all levels. I have created an exciting and approachable method that will reach a larger audience and enhance how students learn Khmer Language and culture. I propose to use selected stories from Tales of the Hare; develop these stories (utilizing multimedia technology) into user-friendly audio and video clips, and interactive task-activities; and deliver the materials via the World Wide Web. This presentation will focus on exhibiting the completed aspects of these instructional materials such as depicting each selected story in traditional, old Khmer painted illustrations; and the narrated recordings of each story in the traditional style of Khmer story-telling and regular text reading. By presenting each story in this style, with a consolidation of old and new, these materials highlight the importance of folklore in past Khmer culture bringing these traditions into the modern era. Secondly, I will stress the need to expand the cache of Khmer fonts and to make them laterally accessible in all available forms of media and software, outlining the difficulties of converting the text in digital media. Thirdly, I will show how I plan to incorporate the content, context and multimedia into a digital form to meet the needs of this technologically enriched age and how this approach will captive students’ interest while allowing them to have fun learning Khmer.

**Beyond Angkor Wat’s Sunset: Cambodia’s Contemporary Arts Scene**

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In an increasingly globally connected 21st century, lifestyles in the major cities are moving toward the fast pace of urbanity and, gradually, away from agrarian tradition. Aside from the regular increase in international tourism, today’s youth-oriented creative culture is shaped by the access to the world through the Internet.

If one wishes to understand a little bit of Cambodia, a reference to history is essential to understanding the complexity of the ancient Khmer civilization and the destructive causes of the contemporary era. Like many other Southeast Asian countries, Cambodia did not practice the art of painting before the 20th century; rather, it focused on sculpture, stone carving, ornamentation of pagoda murals (Wat), ceramics, lacquerware, and weaving.

During the past few years, Cambodian Modern Art emerged greatly and broke its bond with its past. Since the year 2000, artists have been more exposed to international art and are becoming more creative. It is still rare for Cambodian artists to achieve international success. However, as a result of economic and cultural development in Cambodia, such as foreign investment, Artists’ Exchange and selected 20 stories to be used for this project. This project is funded by USED, Title VI in 2010, however the development of this project is still in progress.
collaboration between international and local artists, Cambodia has attracted attention among the international community. When people refer to arts (selapak) in Cambodia, they generally mean performing arts. While the word drawing (komnu) is used to describe painting or any two dimensional images, this term can also be applied for wall paintings from pagodas, murals of the Royal Palace, or sign panels. The word “visual art” has yet to be recognized in Cambodian language; the translation of the term does not exist. To convey the distinction between old and new art forms, the adjectives “traditional” or “modern” are added to komnu. This designation was due to the import of the new practice of painting not on walls but on canvases.

Profile Analysis of Religious Figures in Rural Buddhist Temples: A Case Study in Kampong Thum Province

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Cambodian Buddhism experienced disruption and recovery in the last three decades of the 20th century. All of the monks in the country were forced to disrobe under the Pol Pot regime. Most religious practices were banned during the era. The recovery of Buddhist practices and traditions started the early 1980s under the socialist regime. Both the abolition of age restriction for ordination in 1989 and the improvement of security conditions after the national elections in 1993 contributed to the normalization of religious activities. Cambodian Buddhism showed constant development throughout the 1990s. However, since the beginning of new century, Cambodia seems to have entered into a different social stage under the direct influence of marketization and globalization. The decline of the number of monks/novices in the country in 2004-2005, reported by Ministry of Cults and Religion, might be evidence of this change. However, most of the researchers continue to use the stereotypical “traditional” explanation about the ordination of Cambodian males; that it is a rite of passage for males and so on. This signals the need for examination of the actual Buddhist practices of Cambodian people from an empirical perspective. In this paper, I would like to show the analysis of data regarding religious figures in rural temples in Kampong Thum. This data was obtained by me through joint research with Cambodian young researchers in 2009, 2010, and 2011. I believe that this type of data is critical for reconfiguring our basic understanding of contemporary Cambodian society and people.

“Chä” Varman VII, Grandfather of the Bunong: a “Minority” Perspective on Cambodian History

Catherine Scheer
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This paper is based on the singular account of Mbren, one of the few Cambodian highland minority peoples who are living abroad. Transferred to Sweden as a political refugee, Mbren is writing a
history of his people, the Bunongs. Influenced by his close contacts with “Montagnard” activists from Vietnam, who sought shelter in Mondolkiri in 2001 after fleeing the repression that followed their demonstrations to claim land rights, this Cambodian highlander has created his own militant narrative. His plea for an own country is largely based on national history and its strongly emphasized glorious past, only that the Khmers would in fact have been Bunongs. The autodidact thus traces back an ancestral line to “Grand-Father”, in Bunong “Chä”, Varman and the abandoned village (rengool) of Angkor to root his plaidoyer. His peculiar perspective will be employed here as a starting point to explore the role given to the country’s indigenous highlanders in ethno-nationalist constructions of “Khmer” history, where, -from colonial times to the People’s Republic of Kampuchea-, they alternately appear as “Phnong”, “Khmer Loeu” and “brothers and sisters of the national minorities”. This will finally allow us to reflect upon the room for imaginative manoeuvre that the now called “indigenous national minorities” dispose of in order to both define and defend their place on Cambodian ground.

Re-imagining Wat Suthat in the 3rd Reign: The Artistic Tradition that Established the Center of the Universe in Bangkok

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Steven Collins uses the term imaginaire to explain the world of Pali texts, which can be treated as a whole in that it conveys a “sense of a non-material, imaginative world constituted by texts, especially works of art and literature” (2010 4-5). Various communities use a repertoire of images and visual narratives to create sacred spaces. In this paper, I will explore the construction of a particular Buddhist imaginaire that is utilized in the creation of a Thai monastery and its monastic murals at Wat Suthat in Bangkok. Thus, when the Wat Suthat murals were produced at the end of the Third Reign (1824-1851), most of the visual and textual sources, via inscriptions, were for the first time made available for public consumption.

This paper will move from the gigantic to the miniature. I will first examine the two large, monastic buildings symbolically representing the center of the universe and the Chompuu continent and the monastery’s placement next to the enormous sao ching cha, the site of a Brahmin ritual. I will then

4 Ethno-linguistically mnong (for an ethnography of the Mmon Gar from the Vietnamese side of the Annamese mountains see Condominas, Georges: Nous avons mangé la forêt (Paris, Mercure de France, 2003 [1957], 495 p.), often referred to as “Phnong”, a pejorative generic for the Cambodian highland inhabitants.
7 The expression “chunchiet daem piekteich” was first used in the 2001 Land Law. The use of “daem” reflects the influence of international policies recognizing “indigenous peoples’ rights” advocated by the international organizations and NGOs involved in legal drafting. See Simbolon, Indira: Access to land of highland indigenous minorities: the case of plural property rights in Cambodia, Working Paper n°42 (Halle/Saale, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2002), 34 p.
focus on the “miniature,” by exploring scenes within the murals of both buildings and their connection to Thai royal maps of the period. When these scenes are viewed as a whole the mural becomes a map representing the stories of the Buddha. I then begin to explore the role of the artists that refurbished the monastic murals in the 1980s, and how the artists through the refurbishment process reinforce and simultaneously alter the mapped miniature universe of the Buddha. Ultimately, I conclude that this miniature universe at the center of Bangkok replicates the actual universe in that its content is in flux and the process of time shapes how the murals are experienced, understood, and revised.

**Contemporary Cambodian Dance**

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro  
Khmer Arts

A fast-changing, post-conflict society has presented new opportunities for Cambodian arts. Although *robam kbach boran* (classical dance) will continue to serve its traditional roles within ritual, entertainment and expressions of national identity, it now also has the possibility to participate in public conversations regarding contemporary social concerns within an emerging independent sector. In this presentation I share and discuss selections from two of my original dances: *Seasons of Migration*, a dance based on Kalvero Oberg’s four stages of culture shock, and *Stained*, a new interpretation of Neang Seda’s trial by fire from the Reamker. The first dance makes evident an internal struggle for identity while the second allows a heroine who has traditionally suffered in silent obedience to demand justice. In addition to presenting live and recorded selections from both dances, I’ll break down how I’ve attempted to make their themes and narratives evident through specific aesthetic and technical choices.

**Political History as Theater**

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In the fall of 2011 a troupe of actors and musicians from Battambang toured France with a production of *The Terrible But Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*. Performing in Khmer, they met receptive audiences and received wonderfully positive press. Behind the scenes, and in years of preparation for this European premiere, the young artists of Phare Ponleau Selpak (a non-profit arts organization in Battambang), had been engaged in learning the late-20th century political history of their country, and in interpreting a translation of a 1985 French play by Helene Cixous about the cast of characters who wrestled for power during those decades. This paper will focus on the experiences and reflections of two women in the theater troupe – one who plays Sihanouk and one who portrays Pol Pot – as they grew into their roles as actors while confronting individual power struggles in their everyday lives. It will explore their imagining of history through the play, and their understandings of future possibilities given their new-found insights into the historical workings of power and their contemporary circumstances. To do this, I will draw on my own observations made during rehearsals, when I served for a short while as substitute translator for
the visiting French directors. I’ll also analyze the translation and re-interpretation process of script development (during which the Cambodian actors improvised based on a translation from the French), bringing into play conversations with the actors in question as well as others involved in the production.

Decentralised Governance in Hybrid Polity: The Case of Cambodia 2002-2010

Sokbunthoeun So, Seiha Heng and Sedara Kim, Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Cambodia

This paper reviews the progress of the decentralisation and deconcentration (D&D) reform in Cambodia. It revisits the conflicting positive and negative views on the achievements of the reform in the literature. The goal of the reform is two-fold: promotion of local democracy and improvement of local service delivery. Both of these goals are theoretically related to the assumption that decentralisation brings about various social, economic and political benefits through the enhancement of local government’s accountability and responsiveness, people’s participation in local development planning and improved representation of marginalized people. The findings suggest that there has been some good progress in the reform; however, the achievements are far from being uniform and linear, as is theoretically assumed. Instead, possible changes and achievements have been localised in the Cambodian hybrid political context and the general environment within which decentralisation takes place.

Social Control and Fishing Lot Management in Cambodia

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All stakeholders on Cambodian development agree that Cambodian state capacity in general has been rather limited, though increasing over the last two decades. Its capacity to manage natural resources (and in this paper fisheries resources) is no exception. There are a number of factors which hinder its capacity to manage the resources to its full potential. One of the major factors is the fragmentation of social control – that is, the power to manage the resources is being held by powerful lot concessionaires and sub-leasees. Based on existing literature, primary documents and field interviews in two provinces around Tonle Sap and in Phnom Penh with Fisheries Administration officials, local authorities, relevant NGOs, researchers, communities fisheries

8 The notion of political hybridity depicts a transformation that takes place within a political situation characterised by Carothers (2002) as a “grey zone” in which countries transitioning from authoritarian rule fall between a “full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship”. It is a product of interaction between externally imposed liberal democratic values and local conditions including elites’ interests and local values.
committee members, lot concessionaires and fishers, this study investigates how the fragmentation of social control impacts the state capacity in fisheries resources management in the last two decades, how fisheries legislation and policies are implemented on the ground within lots, and how lot concessionaires were/are able to hold on to their power to dictate the implementation of fisheries resource management to their benefits and their terms. Probing the fishing lot system in Cambodia, this study in the main locates power of the lot concessionaires and its impact on state capacity into the post-communist-cum-post-conflict context of Cambodia. This study concludes that the considerable social control that the concessionaires hold has a major impact on Cambodian state capacity to properly manage the resources.

How Does Intangible Human Capital Impact Economic Growth in Less Developed Countries (LDCs): Cambodia as a Case Study

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This study is an attempt to further the understanding of how intangible human capital impacts development and economic growth in less developed countries (LDCs). Under the discipline of economics, a fundamental assumption is that resources (land, labor, and capital) are scarce. In neoclassical economics of growth accounting, the measure of human capital’s had contribution to economic growth through the presence of technological progress. In 1957, Solow introduced the growth model and others proceeded to measure US economic growth, attempting to measure Total Factor Productivity (TFP). Through the model of TFP, 1.1 percent out of an average 3.1 percent of GDP growth rate per year was still unexplained (Jones, p. 42). Recently, some economic scholars identified a positive correlation between human capital and social capital that significantly impacts development and economic growth. This sheds some light on and acknowledges that intangible human capital can contribute to economic growth. Psychology methods had been employed to measure “self-esteem and motivation” as well as political efficacy and trust as part of such intangible capital. This study hoped to further explain economic growth by helping to account for intangible human capital that contribution to development and economic growth in LDCs. Using the t-test as a method with the total sample of N=272 to compare the mean between control group, N=133, and treatment N=139, the result indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the control groups and the treatment groups (t= 4.1163, p=.0001). In other words, the result showed that the intervention groups statistically had a significantly high mean score on the intervention of self-esteem and motivation score with the mean of 4.899, while the control groups had mean of 4.487.

Glass Beads from Cambodian Archaeological Sites

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In Cambodia, research about glass from Iron Age sites from an archaeological perspective commenced in the 2000s; little information or publications have bonded this together, but few articles and books have been published. My study concerning sites in Cambodia will bring together 9 Iron Age sites originating in 3 different Cambodian geographical regions: in the northwest (Phum Snay, Phum Sophy, Phum Krosang Thmei, Phum ’Banana Farm’), in the south (Angkor Borei and Phnom Borei), and in the southeast (Phum Prohear, Phum Bit Meas and Krek 52/62). In Cambodia, monochrome glass beads or Indo-pacific beads have been found in every archaeological site dated between 400 BCE to the Funan period (3rd-6thC CE). Similar typologies of glass beads and glass ornaments such as earrings, rings, bracelets and pendants are noted as forming a relationship between these sites. This could suggest an inter-regional trading exchange or networks between locations. The chemical analyses were revealing in that the same types of glass were found in these Cambodian Iron Age sites. The results show that some of them relate to glass types in Iron Age sites in Southeast Asia, India and Sri Lanka as there are the same chemical compositions and typologies; therefore there is the possibility of external trading exchange networks between Cambodian and these countries in the wider sphere.

Changing Ethnic Identities among the Kuy in Cambodia: Assimilation, Reassertion, and the Making of Indigenous Identity

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The Kuy are one of the largest indigenous groups in Cambodia. They are extremely similar to the Khmer in terms of physical appearance and material culture, but a significant ethnic boundary exists between the two groups. Stigmatization of the Kuy identity has apparently led Kuy to perform the Khmer identity when possible, and assimilation of the Kuy has been a dominant trend for a considerable time. Though Kuy continue to assimilate, over the past decade some people have begun to assert their Kuy identity again, largely as part of their efforts to defend land and resources over which they are losing control. This has been driven by awareness of benefits of identifying as Kuy, use of Kuy identity as a focus for social mobilization, and a lessening of the stigmatization of the Kuy identity. The ability to speak the Kuy language is apparently considered to be necessary for identification as Kuy in some areas but not others. Following the introduction of the concept of indigenous peoples in Cambodia, “Indigenous” has become an umbrella ethnic identity that more and more Kuy are assuming. It is associated with a broader indigenous community inside and outside of Cambodia which is becoming more and more respected. Within the “Indigenous” identity the Kuy are becoming dominant, and the Kuy are rapidly becoming one of the best known of Cambodia’s indigenous peoples. The indigenous identity appears to provide a basis for agency in a way that Kuy identity has not been able to in the past.

Khmao Euy Khmao: Colorism Amongst Cambodian Americans

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**Khmao Euy Khmao**, a melodic song performed by Ros Sereysothea and Im Songsom in 1971 sends a message that dark is not beautiful. Throughout my life, I have been taught that light skin was right, and dark skin was ugly. This paper is an exploration of colorism as it exists in the Cambodian community of Tacoma, Washington. It explores how Cambodians view one another, and themselves, based on color. The interviews were conducted with both male and female participants ranging from 16 to 65 years old and of varying skin shades. The paper addresses pop-culture influences and personal histories of colorism, a topic widely unaddressed in Cambodian society. In the Cambodian tradition, colorism exists as something different from the American understanding. Historically, it meant class privilege, not race privilege. Today, colorism exists as a transnational phenomenon. By limiting my focus to the Cambodian diaspora of Tacoma, this paper serves to better educate the Cambodian community about the detrimental impact that skin color discrimination has on my community.

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**“Voices of the 1.5 Generation”; Reconciliation through Oral History Performance**

Paul Tom and Chantria Tram
Voices of the 1.5 Generation, Canada

Khmer-Canadian artists Chantria Tram (workshop facilitator/actor) and Paul Tom (filmmaker) will share their journeys leading six Khmer (Cambodian) youths into uncharted territory in an unprecedented artist in residency project sponsored by the Life Stories of Montrealeans Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations project* (Montreal Life Stories Project, [www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca](http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca)) based at Concordia University.

Through an organic and collaborative creative process rooted in shared authority, “Voices of the 1.5 Generation” explores the two-way transmission of stories and memories between a generation that has endured extreme human rights violations, and their children—young people who, while receiving these stories, are also in the midst of creating and redefining their own identities and narratives. What perspectives do these Khmer youths have to share, and what do these say about where we are in the process of transmitting stories? How will these new emerging stories shape the Khmer community and identity? What is the legend that youths wish to now create for themselves and for future generations?

Using oral history interviews from the Cambodian Working Group of the Montreal Life Stories Project as a launching point, participants have been meeting since January 2012 over an intensive four-month long journey to explore their personal and collective narratives. The project began with participatory research, moved into in-studio exploration through acting and storytelling workshops, and will culminate with a theatrical outcome on April 28, 2012, and a participatory website shortly after that, where the dialogue can continue. The work-in-progress has been presented as part of the Montreal Life Stories March 2012 “We Are Here” programme ([www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/recontres](http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/recontres)) — a month-long series of events that will include workshops, exhibitions, performances, screenings, and the international conference “Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence.”

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**Influence Foreign Culture to Cambodian Youths**
Cambodians socio-economy was changed from socialist to capitalist in the 1989. Everything has been changed and many people try to run their business to following luxury materials and fashionability. For youths, they need what things are fashionable to show off to their peers. Those things include foreign movies, music, advertise, cloths, cell phone and so on. As almost Cambodian people (96.9%) follow the Buddhist practice (Census 2008), but why Cambodian young people celebrate Valentine’s Day which is coming from Western culture recent years? A new Valentine’s Day phenomenon were explore related to love and sexual relationship among young couples in Phnom Penh aged 15-24 years old on Valentine’s Day 2008. The qualitative results showed that more than half of the interviewees in the study were happy to engage in sex on that day and at least a few of them lost their virginity. Although most reported using condoms, several instances of coercion were also reported. There seems to be a lack of parental understanding about their children’s sexual activity and a corresponding lack of open communication. (Soprach, 2009)

The quantitative descriptive study 458 young people were interviewed in a two week prior Valentine’s Day in Phnom Penh in 2009. The quantitative results showed that 12.4 percent of young people will be able to have sex upcoming Valentine’s Day. Alarmingly, 66 percent of males planned to have sex with their partners regardless of consent. (Soprach, 2010)

Interventions should be continued and targeted young people and their parents before and on Valentine’s Day.

Derailing the Bamboo Train: Colonialism, Development, and the Railroad in Battambang Province, Cambodia

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When the French colonized Indochina, they found that the natural environment greatly restricted trade infrastructure. With the Mekong River partially blocked, the French were forced to build extensive railroad networks in order to move goods and mobilize labor throughout the region. In the post-colonial years, and particularly during the Vietnam War, the symbolic meaning of the railways changed from passageways of commerce to dangerous routes of human networking. When the violence finally subsided, resourceful locals transformed the lines once again by finding creative ways to use the broken rails to their advantage, notably with the creation of the ‘norry’ - or bamboo train - a popular tourist attraction and rural shipping method that provides income for many in Battambang Province, Cambodia. In current times, the restoration of the railways is a key strategy for development, but also often uproots villages and cities dependent on local post-war re-imaginings of the rails. Foreign-led development plans threaten the norry, and will inadvertently cause significant economic decline for Battambang Province and its capital city, which have only minor significance for trade or tourism in Cambodia. Yet, ignoring the rails will only further their deterioration, forcing a choice between two equally disastrous outcomes. Through this negotiation, I seek to explore the
shifting historical meanings of the Cambodian railway during colonialism and conflict, and examine how the roads of steel and bamboo that once connected Cambodia have become symbols of developmental rhetoric endangering local economies and traditions.

Traditional or Contemporary?: Re-Envisioning Cambodia through Classical Dance

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Classical Dance performance in Cambodia is actively used to reconstruct a history that connects present day Cambodia to the glories of the Khmer past through a perceived link to Angkorean Civilization. French colonial discourse created an image of the classical dance form that connected it to their almost mythic understanding of Angkor to justify their presence in the country as saviors of a dying culture. This historical construction of the dance tradition was retained in post-colonial Cambodia and has been re-imagined as a component of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian identity. This paper will use ethnographic data collected from 19 months of field research at multiple arts organizations in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. It will explore how the classical dance form promotes an ideology of Khmer glory associated with Angkor through cultural tourism geared toward international and local audiences in Siem Reap at dinner dance performances and at the Cambodian Cultural Village. The paper also will investigate how the classical dance cannon and its immense movement vocabulary have become the inspiration for new and innovative choreography that explores modern themes such as migration and gender issues. How the movement vocabulary has become the root for a slowly growing contemporary dance movement dealing with issues of identity will also be discussed. Finally, the paper will explore how classical dance performance is helping Khmer people recover a sense of history that was deeply damaged during the long civil war and cope with current issues that are putting pressure on traditional cultural values.

The Memory and Postmemory of Genocide: Cham Oral History as Cultural Survival

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During Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge declared in their only official statement on the Cham, a Muslim ethnic minority in Cambodia, that the Vietnamese had already exterminated the Cham during the conquest of their kingdom of Champa. Rendering the Cham as already extinct excused the regime’s genocidal acts, including mass relocation, torture, starvation, forced labor, rape, murder, and attacks against Cham cultural distinctiveness during Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979). These days the Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal—the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)—has indicted three senior leaders for crimes of war, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The genocide charge rests upon evidence of ethnic Cham and Vietnamese repressions, as genocide law offers special protection to ethnic and religious minorities. Cham testimonies through ECCC’s Victims Participation Project aim to provide evidence of genocide. Some
testimonies came through Cham oral history projects in Cambodia, intergenerational interviews which strengthen not only the memory of the survivors but also the postmemory of their descendants. Like children of Holocaust survivors, the post-KR generation in Cambodia must navigate many interstices, since their country’s ghosts challenge full comprehension while demanding continual reckoning. So beyond juridical use, family memory projects might heal the community’s traumas more effectively than a sense of justice though verdicts and symbolic reparations. Ultimately Cham testimonies also affirm future generations and cultural survival by challenging the silence imposed by the totalitarian KR, who forbade Cham language, religion, and traditions at the threat of death, killing 36-80% of Cambodian Cham during Democratic Kampuchea.

Infixes /-m-/ and /-n-/ in Khmer language

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Infixes in the Khmer language have elicited broad interest among linguistic scholars of Cambodia. Previous research on Khmer infixes in general, and on the infixes /-m-/ and /-n-/ in particular, was carried out by Georges Maspero (1915), Judith M. Jacob (1963), Keng Vann Sak (1964), Y.A. Gorgoniyev (1966), Philip Norman Jenner (1969), Franklin E. Huffman (1970), Uraisi Varasarin (1984), Long Seam (1989), Eric Schiller (1992), Prum Maol (2003), John Haiman and Noeurng Ourn (2003), and Chan Samnoble (2010). There remains much research to be done on /-m-/ and /-n-/ infixes because they have many interesting characteristics. The infixes /-m-/ and /-n-/ are an important part of word process formation in Khmer, and they have not yet been studied as a subject of special interest. The purpose of this paper is to examine how one aspect of Khmer language, infixes /-m-/ and /-n-/ acts to create word formations across a variety of linguistic categories such as nominalization, attribution, causation, and adverbialization. Our analysis of these infixes based on the data with amount more than four hundred words from six dictionaries including both modern and old Khmer. Our approach is based on Theory of Interaction. The Interactionism was conceived by Professor Dr. Chan Somnoble since 1995 and it became the key to researchers who are interested in Cambodian linguistics. The Interactionism is the synthesis of Structuralism and Semantics to interpret the necessity of word formations such as Khmer derivation. In the Khmer derivation, this theory said that the word classes of each derivative are the result of the interaction between roots and infixes.

The Sruk and the Prai: Zones of Entanglement

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This paper explores two main subsistence strategies of the villagers of Sombak Dung, at the northwestern border of Kampong Chhnang province. Here, at the edge of the mountains, people subsist
primarily through rice farming and wood harvesting. The village was newly settled in the year 2000 with a social land concession issued by the government. The first post-DK residents came here in the early 1980s as soldiers, fighting back the Khmer Rouge and harvesting wood to fund the war effort. As the war waned, the government offered land for domestic settlement and economic expansion in this region, rice farming Cambodians came to the region to cut fields from the forest starting in early 2000, and companies engaged in large-scale agriculture started cutting cassava and pulp tree plantations in 2009. Today, the forest and the rice fields articulate zones of entanglement where the stories of the past mummify alongside the projects of the present. Here, the rich and the poor intertwine with the buffalo and the paddy crabs, with the government officials and the corporate managers, implicating one another in webs of significance and subsistence. This paper will attend to the physical ways that the rice fields and the forests coordinate the contemporary processes of food production and hierarchal social structures, and further, how long-standing imaginaries of the forest and the field are at once complicated and confirmed through those same processes, now, at the turn of the twenty-first century.

“I would like to announce that I am looking for… “: Cambodians in Search of Long Lost Relatives

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Since the 1970s, there were many instances in which Cambodians found themselves separated from family members. More than 30 years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodians around the world are still in search of missing loved ones. Today, one can open a newspaper, listen to the radio, or watch television and find advertisements seeking information. After noticing similar forms across advertisements, I propose to analyze these advertisements linguistically and culturally. Why do Cambodians start off with their name and present location? How do parallelism and footing changes play a role in conveying messages in Khmer? Why do Cambodians continue to search for answers? Do their beliefs regarding knowledge, death, and religion play a role in this? What events are highlighted and foregrounded in the advertisements since there is limited space? How is the past constructed in the advertisements? What type of future do Cambodians envision in putting out such advertisements? This paper is a work in progress as it will be the final paper for my linguistic anthropology course due at the end of this semester. With feedback and critique from my professors, I will modify the paper should I be accepted to the Cambodia Studies Conference in September.

Deported Khmer Americans and Their Stories

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In 2002, under pressure from the United States, the government of Cambodia reluctantly agreed to take in a limited number of individuals facing deportation from the U.S., the only home they ever had ever really known, back to their “homeland.” After escaping the horrors of the Khmer Rouge and beginning their new lives as refugees in America, they would in time come to live as Americans.
These new experiences did not prepare them for life in Cambodia. Some of those being deported to Cambodia had never even set foot in the country because they were born in refugee camps in Thailand; others were young children when they left Cambodia. Of those being deported, many have little if any connection to their “homeland” and possess limited knowledge and understanding of Khmer culture, including the language, local practices and general rules of behavior in Khmer society. After living marginalized lives in the United States, they now face re-marginalization in Cambodia and are not accepted as “real” Khmer by the society. In the summer of 2012, I conducted research, interviewing men and women who have been deported to Cambodia to examine how these events have affected their lives and shaped their cultural identities. This paper is a reflection of their stories.